

FROM “WAKE THE DEAD”

The men entered the space and set up flashlights around the room. Though they could see more of the room, it was still dark. Jackie unloaded his arms of the tools he carried and went to close the door. He stopped short.

“It’s starting to rain,” he said. The wind ruffled his brown hair as he squinted into the night.

They all looked toward the door, to the lightning, to the weeping willows blowing hard in the wind, to the rain coming down harder and harder.

“Close the door, Jackie,” Dean said.

Jackie did and joined the rest of the men in the center of the room. They looked at the walls.

“Who are these people?” Billy asked. But before anyone could speak, Morton asked a question that he’d not thought of before this moment.

“Is he buried here? Is the old man buried in this crypt?”

Dean turned and gave him the strangest look. As if to say, *Where else would he be?*

“What’s his name?”

Dean turned from Morton and went to a wall. He searched the names up close, and around them the wind now howled as if they were snowbound in a cabin.

“Here,” Dean said. He ran his fingers over the engraving.

“Pretorius?”

Dean looked over his shoulder to Billy. Dean’s face was calm, his eyes smiling. “Can you pull this open? I want to start with him.”

Billy shrugged, not knowing why Dean didn’t pull the latch to open the drawer himself. He stepped forward and pulled at the black ring. The drawer did not budge, and Billy shook his head.

“I don’t think this is a drawer.”

“It has to be,” Dean said. He went to another ring and pulled it. Nothing. Another ring. Nothing. A third. Nothing.

Ray turned to the wall behind him and went to a ring. He pulled it. Nothing. A second. Nothing. He turned and looked at Dean strangely.

“I don’t think there’s anything here.”

At that moment, the gates outside slammed shut and they all jumped. They looked at each other through the darkness with fear in their eyes. They heard the gate being chained.

Ray ran over to the doors to open them. He jumped back as if electrified. He turned to the men. His eyes were wide and filled with fright. “It’s locked. The doors are locked.”

Billy frowned. “What are you talking about?”

“The fucking doors are locked!”

Billy pushed past Ray and tried to pull open the metal doors. He grunted, but the doors would not budge.

“What the fuck!” he screamed, and his voice boomed throughout the room.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Ray said. “How could the door be locked. And who the fuck chained the gate outside? Dean, didn’t you have the chain?”

Dean was across the room, partially hidden in the darkness. “I gave it to Billy.”

Ray turned to Billy. The howling outside increased. The rain beat mercilessly against the mausoleum.

“I...I put it on the ground to bring in the equipment—”

“Fuck!” Ray yelled. Then he turned to Jackie. “This is you, isn’t it? This is your idea of a fucking joke, isn’t it?”

Jackie backed up against a wall. “Ray, it wasn’t me. I didn’t do this.”

Ray punched Jackie hard across the jaw, then lunged at him. Billy and Morton pulled the two men apart, each screaming at the other.

“This is you! I know it’s you!”

“I didn’t fucking do this!”

“Stop it!” Billy screamed. “Stop it now!”

There was a sudden noise that silenced Billy, Morton, Ray and Jackie. Dean was at the far end of the room. He had pulled a black ring, and now as they stood in astonishment, a false wall opened. He was pushing it open, like a door.

“What the…” Jackie said.

“Dean…” Billy muttered.

Dean turn to them. “There’s something here. There are steps here. There’s a basement in this crypt.”

“What are you talking about?” Ray said, disbelievingly.

Dean pointed to the doorway and Ray shook his head, backing up to the metal doors behind him.

“We have to go down,” Dean said.

“Have you lost your mind? I’m not going—we just got locked in here!”

“There’s a light down there,” Dean said.

“Oh, fuck no,” Morton said. “What is this, Dean? What the fuck is this shit? You said there was no one here, and obviously there’s someone here. What the fuck is going on?”

Dean shook his head.

“All right, you know what? I’m getting out of here,” Morton said, looking around the crypt and then at Billy. “Where are the rifles?”

Jackie and Ray looked at Billy. He was distraught.

“I…I…”

“Please don’t tell me that you left them in the Jeep. Please don’t tell me that,” Morton yelled.

Billy whispered. “I’m sorry. I was getting the equipment—”

“Damn it!” Morton yelled.

“Guys! Guys!” Jackie said, pointing and backing toward the metal doors. His face was stricken with fright. “Dean’s gone.”

“Where the hell is he?” Ray asked, looking around the crypt.

Morton threw his head back and covered his face with his hands.

“Dean!” Billy yelled. There was no answer. No sound but the rain and howling of the wind.

Ray shook his head. “You know what? This shit here…”

Jackie turned to Morton. “Somebody has to go after him.”

“Why don’t you go?” Morton snapped.

Jackie pointed to Ray. “Let him take a bite of the shit sandwich! I’m not doing that!”

They all looked at each other with desperation.

“Fuck, I’ll do it!” Billy barked. He grabbed one of the flashlights.

“We should all go,” Morton said suddenly. “Stick together.”

“You’re all going to die down there,” Jackie said quietly, sober.

Billy turned from them and walked through the doorway angrily. He flashed the light inside. It looked like a cave. The dirt steps wound in a circle to a lower level, where he could see a glowing yellow light. It flickered like a torch. He looked back to the men all huddled together, then he started down the steps. The walls became dimmer as he descended with his flashlight to the lower level and out of sight.

“We’re not going to stay here, are we?” Ray whispered. The room was nearly all black, even with the two remaining flashlights lit.

“We should go too,” Morton agreed.

“No,” Jackie said, rubbing his hands together. Suddenly, they were cold.

“We’re sticking together,” Morton said.

“No!” Jackie snapped. He backed against a wall. “I’m scared. Okay? I said it. I’m scared. I don’t know what the fuck is going on.”

Ray looked at Jackie with a scowl, but then he saw Jackie’s hands trembling uncontrollably. He looked into Jackie’s eyes, and Jackie stuffed his hands into his jeans. His eyes were glassy, and he suddenly looked like a little boy.

“Stay here,” Ray said. He turned to Morton. “C’mon.”

Morton snatched up a flashlight and headed to the doorway. Ray followed. Before they descended, Ray turned back to Jackie. He saw him kneeling over the last remaining flashlight. Their eyes stayed with each other a moment. Ray pointed to him and he struggled for words.

“If we don’t come back...you find a way out of here. And if somebody comes through that door...you kick their ass and you run like hell. You hear me?”

Jackie nodded.

Ray tapped Morton on the back and they descended to the lower level, the light going with them. Jackie sat still in the darkness a moment, until he jumped.

“Guys!” he called, but no one answered.

Jackie stood and fished into his back pocket. He pulled out his cell phone.

“No...” he said hopelessly. He had no signal. Inside these thick four walls in the middle of nowhere, he had no fucking signal. He screamed. “Damn it!”

Then something worse happened.

The light got dimmer in the room. He turned to the flashlight. Its battery was running out. The light fading. The room getting darker and darker, until there was nothing but total blackness.

“No, no, no!”

The wind howled outside. The rain fell. Jackie had a thought, brief and frightening. What if it were only raining right here, right now, in this spot. That it was raining nowhere else, just here. Storming just enough to keep them trapped here in fright. Imprisoned.

Jackie heard his breath, raspy, desperate, quick. And then he heard something else. He held his breath, and beneath the wind and the rain, there were footsteps. Dragging, as if with a lazy foot. The dragging was in the room with him. Had to have come from behind the false wall. He spun around, stepped back, and fell over the pile of the equipment they’d brought with them.

He screamed in pain. Dropped his phone. Closer to the ground, he heard it more clearly. The dragging. It was coming toward him. But the echo in the crypt was confusing. The dragging sounded like it was all around, inching closer. And now...now he could hear breathing. But not his own. Deep, guttural, hungry. Jackie kicked at the floor, backed up, then turned over. He ran his hands over the floor, searching for his phone.

“Guys!” he yelled desperately.

He heard the dragging getting closer, the breathing nearer.