

Under New Management

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The foreman stood outside the makeshift office. Richard avoided looking in his direction. Didn't want the reporter sensing something was wrong.

"Why build Ashfield Apartments here?"

"This is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city. It has deteriorated in the last fifty years. Ashfield Apartments is just one of many projects to help revitalize an area that has been neglected for so long."

"From some of the concept drawings you've shown me it seems like you're going for something a little more old fashioned."

"We're trying to blend old and new. We want to acknowledge the history here."

"This particular piece of land has some interesting history. Care to fill our listeners in."

"Of course. The city's first jailhouse was built here. It was added on to over the years until it became the county prison. One day a tornado ripped through and tore it apart. After that the site was left abandoned.

"After ten years a center for single mothers was built. Unfortunately a massive fire broke out engulfing most of the building, taking several lives. Once again the site was left abandoned. Until a few weeks ago you could see the charred remains of the old building. But we've cleared most of that away."

"For years the building was a hot spot for high school and college students. Stories of ghosts luring them in. Are you using the supernatural reputation of the site at all in marketing for the new apartments?"

"Absolutely not. We want our tenants to feel safe and comfortable. We don't want this place to turn into a ghost attraction."

"There have been rumors of several fatal accidents during the renovations."

“Just rumors. We haven’t had any deaths during construction. The site has a ghostly reputation. I’ve invested in a lot of projects over the years and I can tell you these kinds of rumors always pop up when we’re building on haunted land. But there’s never anything to them.”

Richard looked through the window at the foreman and then his watch.

“I’m afraid I have a meeting.”

The reporter stood up and shook Richard’s hand.

“Richard, thank you for your time. We look forward to the new energy Ashfield Apartments will bring to this community.”

As the reporter exited the office the foreman hurried in past him. Richard sat back down. He pinched the edge of his nose.

“Don’t tell me.”

“Another accident.”

“Where?”

“The basement.”

“Good. The reporter won’t see any of it.”

The foreman frowned. Richard felt judged. Accidents happen. People die. Nothing to get too worked up about.

“Say it had something to do with dehydration”

The foreman left the office without saying anything. It was hard for the man. These men were like family to each other. But it wasn’t Richard’s job to shed to tears for the dead, it was his job to keep the project moving forward. The apartments needed to be finished on time. The apartments needed people.

The sound of feuding cats startled Richard awake. He was lying in a corner in the office. A small blanket covered him. Richard rubbed his forehead trying to figure out what was going on. Why was he on the floor?

It had been a long day. First the interview. Then the accident. He needed some rest. He had decided to take a short nap. But he slept for hours. It was dark outside and none of the lights were on in the building. The only light was the soft light of the street lamps outside.

Richard stood up and turned on the desk lamp. He checked his phone. No messages. He should go home. But why? What for? To a woman who left him. To a boy who no longer talked to him. No. He could stay here. He should stay here. There's always work to be done. He started to dial home.

The answering machine.

"It's me. I won't be home tonight."

He hung up. Why did he do that? They weren't expecting him. He didn't have a home anymore. He just had this and the hotel room. Why did he ever think about going back? There was no place for him there.

Looking out the window he saw some moving lights in the building. Stupid trespassers. If they came for a fight he would give them one. Richard grabbed his coat and a flashlight.

Richard wandered the half built hallways, trying his best to stay quiet. He walked into a couple of the units. There were no doors or window panes installed. This incomplete creature felt more like home than that place he had spent the last decade in.

He heard voices. Down the hall he heard the young couple. The thrill. The dirty talk. He inched towards the unit they had disappeared into. He peaked in.

They were wearing jerseys from the local community college. The man had the woman pressed against the wall. One hand groping under her jersey and the other down her pants.

Richard remembered that passion. He had it once. Then it happened. That disgusting boy came out his wife. He wanted to have it ripped from her. His life went downhill after that. Money. Passion. Happiness. It all vanished. Worthless child.

The woman against the wall unzipped her pants and dropped them to the floor. The man followed suit. He pressed himself against her and slid inside of her. He lifted her jersey revealing her breasts. They swayed as the man found his rhythm. Her body was slim and hard.

His wife used to have a body like that. But then it came and she became fat and old. He couldn't rip it from her but he could still rip it from the world. But would he ever want to fuck her again. Probably not. But she deserved mercy. What did it feel like to be a fat and worthless husk? He would make sure to be merciful to her.

The man tensed up and stopped thrusting as he came. He pulled his cock out of the woman. Richard saw the cum glisten on the woman's legs. A shadow began to grow in the unit. Richard blinked and then the couple was on the floor. They had been disemboweled. Their faces looked like they had been raked over with barbed wire. Lust and death danced together. Richard breathed deeply. He turned and there was the shadow of a man walking down the hallway. Hanging from his wrist was a pocket watch. Richard heard the ticking hands. He needed to clean up. Visitors were coming.

Richard sat in the tub as the water poured over him. He watched as flakes of dried dirt peeled off his skin. He couldn't wait to move into his new home. But his new home required sustenance and sacrifice.

He realized after last night, his new home had been feeding this entire time. It showed him an intimate moment. Richard would make sure his new home got everything it needed.

His cell phone rang. Richard got out of the tub and walked out into the room. The caller ID said it was the foreman.

“Hello.”

“Inspector just left. She said everything looked okay.”

“Good.”

“Are you going to be around the site today?”

“No. I’m going to take a few days. Family troubles.”

“Take whatever time you need. Those kinds of things can be rough.”

“Make sure we stay on schedule.”

Richard hung up. He couldn’t keep his old family if he was going to get a new one. He went back into the bathroom and turned off the water. The ticking of a watch echoed in his ears. Richard turned and looked at himself in the mirror. But the man looking back wasn’t Richard. It was a sad man. A crying man. A man longing for the woman who held him every night. A man missing his son. A man who wanted his family back. Richard didn’t know that man but he knew how to help him.

Mercy was easier than Richard thought. He tilted the mirror on his desk so he could get a better look at himself. Shaggy hair, bags under the eyes. He knew what they would think but he had never felt better. It had been a few weeks since he had cleaned up the young couple.

The foreman entered the office.

“You look like shit. You don’t need to be here. Personal stuff comes first.”

“I need to make sure it’s looked after. My investment.”

“Don’t worry. We’ll make it.”

“They’re bringing in concrete tomorrow?”

“Yeah we’re going to start pouring the parking lots tomorrow.”

Richard got up from his desk.

“I’ll take your advice. I need a few more days.”

Richard stalked the hallways of his old home. The lights no longer came on. The walls and floorboards creaked under his steps. Things smelled different. He entered its room. It was still lying there. Its lifeless arms dangling over the side of the bed. The pillow Richard had used still sat over its face. Richard saw the insects had begun their work.

Richard grabbed the body and slid it into a large duffle bag. The body was small enough. He wasn't careful and got some of the slime on himself. He went to the bathroom to try and wipe it off.

Her body was still in the bathtub. The remains of her head tilted back against the wall. Pieces of the toilet cover scattered around her body. She looked better than when she was alive. There was no point in getting the slime off. He still had to deal with her.

He walked out into the garage and grabbed an axe. When he returned to the bathroom he started swinging the axe into her. He kept swinging until her body was nothing but pieces of meat.

The ticking of the hands echoed in Richard's ears as he dug the hole for it and her. He threw the duffle bag and trash bags into the hole. As Richard covered the bodies a symphony played to his tribute. The chatter of drunks. The sound of chains. The beating of men. The screams of mothers. The wailing of their children. He felt a heat buildup around him, like he was on fire.

Richard collapsed from exhaustion. The man with the watch stood nearby. Richard tried to get a closer look at the man but he never saw anything more than the edges of shadow.

The day of birth was coming closer. Richard led the young woman to his hotel room. They were both a little tipsy. It took him a couple of tries to get the key card in.

"I hope you have better aim when we get inside."

He smiled back at her. He watched her sway in front of him as she attempted to kick her heels off.

“Bend over.”

“You don’t waste any time.”

The woman bent over the side of the bed. He slipped his fingers under her skirt and played with her. She burped. Richard unzipped his pants and began rubbing himself against her. He thought of the woman in the bathtub. When he was hard he rammed himself into the woman. Over and over. He let out a loud sigh as he came. Richard never felt this before. A primal passion. This was the passion of his new family.

He laid down next to the woman. He let himself have one last moment. The warmth he had known once. Nothing to be done now but go to his new family.

Richard grabbed the woman’s hair, placed his hand over her face and twisted quickly. He let go of the hair as the body slumped back onto the bed.

Richard got off the bed and grabbed its hair and dragged it into the bathroom. He had kept the axe. She would be happier now.

One more offering to be made. Richard ran his hand along the ribbon tied in front of the entrance. Starting tomorrow so many would be entering this beautiful creature. Feeding it with their fears and insecurities. Their passions and guilt. Richard was so happy he was a part of its birth. It was time.

Richard took out his keys and unlocked the doors. The man with the watch was waiting for him. Still only shadow. The man walked down one of the halls. Richard followed. He was lead to a unit. Richard had brought some rope and a stool with him.

Using the stool he swung the rope around a light fixture and tied it tight. He fashioned himself a noose. He had never been good with knots but the man with the watch guided him. Richard made sure the noose was snug against his neck. He stood on the stool and waited. As the sun began to rise the man with the watch let him know it

was time. Time to join his new family. Richard kicked the stool out from under himself. There wasn't enough of a drop. He struggled for air. His final moments were to the ticking of the watch.