

THREE POUNDS OF FLESH

Written by

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INT. THE DYING MACHINE

Ancient machinery churns within the bowels of a long forgotten structure. The roar of twisting metal and liquid flesh fills this chamber, all but drowning out the murmurs of the long dead.

Across the debris strewn ground runs an array of tubes, expanding and contracting as their contents pass through. Some spill out blackish bile where they lie disconnected.

One of these tube snakes to an hulking form slumped in the corner of a metal platform, its end attached to a strange mask covering the AWAKENING MARTYR's head. The corpulent form takes slow, shallow breaths between being force fed by a machine. Greying meat shifts as liquid is pumped into its stomach. It remains alive, but only just.

Two ragged stumps protrude from beneath its bloated belly, useless and withered. From its back extends a network of wires leading to machinery embedded in the walls.

After a time, a skeletal arm twitches and the spider-like fingers spasm into life. The Awakening Martyr reaches for the tube attached to its face, the movement lethargic, the sagging arm straining against inertia. It takes hold and pulls, the length of tube emerging from the mask's funnel with a wet suctioning sound.

Black liquid spews forth as the long length of tube eventually pulls free.

A deep intake of breath. The tube hits the ground with a clang, a stream of black fluid splattering the metal and then slowing to a trickle. The nearby feeder machine slows and powers down.

Reaching back with both arms, the figure tears the wires from its flesh one by one, each leaving holes that weakly bleed a watery grey.

The effect of this action is almost instant. The surrounding machines sputter and then shut down. The lights flicker, their power reducing. The crunch of pistons slows, steam no longer blasting into the air.

The Martyr takes a moment to gather from its final reserves of strength, its breathing now only strained wheezes as the world shuts down around it. It lifts its arms one last time to grip the mask. The decayed metal funnel comes away to reveal a distorted face. Empty eye sockets surrounded by puckered flesh. A mouth that yawns boneless and wide, barren of teeth.

This loose knot of scarred pale flesh stands out in stark contrast to the darkening stone and steel behind it. This is the last vision before the lights give out.

BLACK

EXT. THE CLIFFS OF AFAALOM

A bell tolls, its deep reverberation shaking the darkness apart. Beneath the black is a silhouette of a spire standing out against a bruised coloured sky. It rises from an island that floats above churning black waters. An ANCIENT VOICE booms, the words seismic and immense.

ANCIENT VOICE
Qhō Enk Tarus.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD

Wheezing.

A fluorescent light sputters to life.

Rough fabric darkens with a spreading stain of red.

A figure with a bandaged head sits up from a bare mattress, chest constricting with harsh coughs. THE FACELESS figure takes a moment to register reality. They shake their head, at first to escape sleep and the darkness it brings, but then realising that is not why they are unable to see the room about them. They are unable to see anything. They are blind.

The buzzing fluorescence from above barely illuminates an extensive hospital ward, one that has been decimated by time and grotesque use. Rows of rusted steel bedframes with bare mouldering mattresses surround the Faceless figure and extend off into the darkness. Some are separated from the rest of the room by torn curtains that shift in the slight wind, others are toppled on their side, but all of them are covered in a thick layer of filth and old muck.

Tiles cover the walls and floor, a patchwork of gaps revealing the damp, almost flesh-like surface beneath. All of this is coated in layers of water stains and grime.

A creak from nearby catches the Faceless figure's attention. Though scarred and twisted, their ears evidently still work. They remain still as they listen, the only sound that of wood expanding deeper in the building.

The noise again; something soft shifting across rough metal.

Recognising the sound as movement in the room, the Faceless figure crawls backward until hitting the bedframe.

Something changes position at the edge of a nearby light. Hidden mostly in shadow, another figure is perched on the end of a bedframe, filthy toes gripping the rusted metal. This figure's head is also bandaged, with the only exception being their eyes, which are nothing more than bloodshot spheres that bulge from lidless hollows.

THE WATCHFUL stares at the Faceless figure, never looking away as it crawls from bedframe to bedframe. Though its movements are strange and disjointed, the Watchful is able to move with minimal noise.

Unable to hear what is happening, the Faceless searches about them, feeling the tiles and the mattress, but they freeze when the bed shifts slightly.

The Watchful is perched at the foot of the bed. It regards the Faceless in silence for a moment before reaching out with a thin arm covered in old scars. The hand moves slow, the long fingers unfurling and extending toward the bandages covering the Faceless figure's head. Something is off about them. Each finger ends at the last knuckle, the scarred flesh pulled around the sharp tips of screws, the rusted metal embedded into their bones.

All that can be heard is the Faceless figure's ragged breaths as they strain to hear what is happening. Rusted screws gently grip the fabric on their face and the Watchful pulls down a section of bandage. Beneath are eye sockets made of flesh that has twisted shut in a spiral. These open like apertures to reveal bloody holes that yawn wider into silent screams.

The Faceless bats away the extended arm and scrambles from the bed, their weakened legs giving out as they try to stand. They crash into the bed next to them, which slides into another with a loud clang.

As the Faceless steadies themselves against the wall, black mould begins to grow outward from the point of contact, a network of fibres making rapid progress across the tiles. They try to stand up straight, but trip again as the room starts to rumble and move.

The Watchful steps off the bedframe and backs away from the expanding patch of mould.

A horn blast rings out from some distant place. More felt than heard, the reverberations pass through the surrounding surfaces like waves that distort the physical structure of the hospital ward.

Panicking further at the sight of these changes, the Watchful jumps and grabs one of the pipes running along the ceiling. They lift themselves up and disappear into the darkness beyond.

Mould continues to spread out even as the tiles float away from the now pulsating walls, threads of it becoming black veins in the fleshiness beneath.

Gripping a nearby bed and pulling themselves upright, the Faceless staggers and covers their ears. They blindly make their way between the beds, constantly on the brink of falling.

The horn blast finally fades, and in the ringing absence beneath is the sound of moving flesh of the walls and the chitter of mould snaking its way across every surface it touches.

The overall distortion slows as the horn dies out, but tiles from the walls still hover outward in the air, some remaining attached by tendrils of hanging black mould.

Tentative at first, the Faceless figure removes their hands from their ears and begins to search their surroundings. Arms outstretched, they feel their way through a sea of hospital beds.

As the Faceless passes one of the beds, the tiles beneath lift up like a rug, its edge gripped by sharp fingers of exposed bone. Another arm snakes out from the open chasm and a figure drags itself into the room. They have a bandaged head as well, but when they turn toward the Faceless an uncovered mouth is revealed. Long, grey teeth and dead gums are left exposed by melted lips, the surrounding blackened flesh mostly covered by charred bandages.

The Mouth figure crawls free, the tiles falling back into place behind them and becoming a solid floor again. Remaining crouched, the Mouth crawls toward the Faceless and grabs them by the leg, pulling them off balance.

Crashing into a curtain, they sprawl across the ground and the tangle of fabric falls around them.

The Mouth stands upright and looks down upon the struggling figure. As their jaw drops open, a series of muffled screams buried in static echo from within. The Mouth then lunges, teeth gnashing as it moves to bite anything and everything.

Behind them, the wall with the black mould remains visible. Everything beneath the invasive substance is melting, the structure itself dissolving into a liquid darkness.

The Mouth bites down on a section of curtain, tearing it away to uncover one of the Faceless figure's arms. They bite again and blood sprays across the torn fabric.

Grunting in pain, The Faceless figure rolls and smashes a hand into the side of the Mouth's head, knocking them to the side and giving themselves a chance to scramble free. They start to move away, still draped in the curtain.

Springing into a crouch, The Mouth shoots out an arm and grabs the trailing fabric, pulling themselves toward the Faceless. It tears as the Faceless spins and pulls loose, one hand clamping to their bleeding shoulder, the other outstretched and searching.

The Mouth begins to chatter and a stream of liquid static spews forth between their teeth, the sound of drowned screams accompanying the expulsion.

The liquid spatters the pillar near the Faceless with a hissing noise, the stone contracting and crumbling into dust.

On hearing the screams, the Faceless grabs a nearby bed and pushes it in the Mouth's direction. It hits into another bedframe, pushing both into the Mouth and hitting them hard in the chest.

The chattering again, but this time sounding like distant wails of pain as the figure jumps back onto another bed.

With what little time they have bought, the Faceless runs towards a wall, hits it, bounces off and begins to trace their way along it, feeling for a door. Instead they find themselves at the edge of where a section of the floor has been eaten away by the mould, the space beyond now only darkness. They try to stop themselves, swaying a moment and swinging their arms to keep balance, but they topple over into the chasm.

BLACK

INT. IN-BETWEEN

The sound of falling.

Darkness broken here and there by glimpses of the Faceless visible through gaps in a black membrane.

A snap as they hit something and pass through it. Followed by another. And another.

The Faceless is tumbled back and forth as they hit tendrils of blackness, their descent slowing with each impact against the mesh of mould. It begins to grip them and they are soon smothered by it, sinking from sight.

INT. BURNT CORRIDOR

A black stain spreads across a concrete ceiling, slow at first, but gaining speed as its surface bulges inward. The bulge extends down, sections of it pulling back to reveal the Faceless cradled within. The remaining tendrils deposits them on the ground and retract back into the ceiling.

The hole closes and the stain shrinks until only concrete remains, as though nothing had happened.

Injured by the fall, The Faceless takes a moment before rolling onto their stomach. They slowly lift themselves off the ground.

They are in a rundown service corridor, the concrete walls covered in a series of pipes and vents. Broken and forgotten building materials are strewn about the floor, most of it having been pushed out of the way into mounds. The corridor shows clear signs of a fire, with the surfaces at one end becoming increasingly charred as they get closer to a door. Above the steel door is an old clock with no hands. Most of the illumination for this corridor is from small emergency lights that bathe everything in red.

The Faceless stands, their joints cracking with each slow movement, their eye sockets twisted shut in what seems like an expression of pain. Head hung, they sway, dazed after everything that has happened. They then seem to notice something and stop, turning to face the far end of the corridor.

Standing near the door just within the light is the Watchful, their eyes unblinking as they regard the Faceless. Sensing that they are not alone, the Faceless tries to move without drawing the attention that is already solely upon them.

Noticing what is happening, the Watchful moves toward the Faceless. Even with their strange, jerky gait, they are quick and reach The Faceless well before they have a chance to prepare.

The Watchful brings down one of their screw tipped hands and slashes The Faceless across the back.

Blood sprays across bandage and concrete, the Faceless stumbling back and tripping on a pile of debris.

As the Faceless falls, the Watchful dips down and picks up a length of pipe without slowing. The Watchful swings down but only hits concrete, chipping it away in a spray of sparks, The Faceless having kicked themselves back just in time.

The Watchful moves to strike again, the pipe clanging against something on the way up.

Reacting to the sound, The Faceless kicks the Watchful in the stomach, doubling them over with the impact. The pipe clatters to the ground as the Watchful falls onto the Faceless.

They wrestle, The Faceless choking the Watchful, The Watchful slashing at the other's head. Some of the bandages fall away bloody, but the Faceless figure's mouth remains covered.

As they roll over again, the Faceless gets the upper hand and punches the Watchful, whose head snaps back and hits the concrete, blood spattering the ground.

In moving, they bump the pipe and it rolls across the ground, drawing the Faceless figure's attention. They remove a hand from the Watchful's throat to grab the pipe and lift it above their head.

Eyes protruding further from their sockets, the Watchful tries to shield their face. Their arm is smashed out of the way with three hard blows, bone audibly cracking with the final strike.

The ting of steel repeats with each new hit against the Watchful's head. Soon this is accompanied by the sounds of crushed bone and pulped flesh.

Swinging down over and over, blood trails the pipe and sprays the walls.

One eye bursts in a pinkish stream and the other is pushed deeper into the mess of skull and brain matter, the body writhing beneath the Faceless. The movement slows to twitches and then to nothing. The Watchful is dead.

The bloody pipe clangs against the floor and rolls away.

Heavy breathing.

A gore drenched Faceless pushes themselves off of the still body and moves to rise, but is doubled over again. Letting out a muffled cry of pain, they reach for their eye sockets, the closed apertures now twitching. Their body shivers for a few moments before the movement dies down again.

Hands fall away to uncover the sight of eyes pushing their way out from deep within the Faceless figure's skull. They come to rest at the edge of the sockets and the Faceless glances about, clearly able to see now. They finally stand.

A blast of distant static echoes up the corridor and the Faceless turns.

Crawling along the ceiling pipes with frightening speed, The Mouth moves at the edge of the light, nearby globes smashing as they pass. At times when the light dies, only their teeth remain visible, gnashing as they rush forward.

On seeing this, The Faceless turns and flees, making their way to the steel door at the end of the corridor. They get there, but the long handle is stuck. The Mouth can be seen growing closer behind them.

Glancing around, the Faceless notices a length of rebar and takes it.

Rusted metal jams in-between the door frame and the handle. Metal groans, bends and then tears, a few screws from the handle falling to the ground.

The Faceless swings the door wide and steps into the darkness beyond, the sight of the approaching Mouth cut off as the door shuts once more.

BLACK

INT. THE DYING MACHINE

Wind howls through empty pipes and over sand covered steel, and beneath it all are the incessant whispers of the unsettled dead.

The echoing crunch of footsteps grows closer.

Eyes adjusting to the dim interior, the Faceless comes into view, a speck amongst the vast and dormant machinery.

They glance about them, eyes unblinking as they survey the immensity of it all.

A machine casing rattles as something close by scurries off, briefly distracting the Faceless.

Winding their way between frozen pistons and gears, they eventually enter a familiar clearing.

The wind is loudest here, with the sound of whipping fabric audible above the howl.

As they approach the steel platform, the Faceless figure stops and looks up into the darkness above.

Something is there, but nothing distinct in the dim light.

They stare as the wind picks up further.

A vision flashes that at once illuminates this reality and the reality beneath, followed by a horn blast that once again distorts everything in its path.

FLASH: The Spire floating just beyond a cliff, silhouetted against the churning, alien sky.

ANCIENT VOICE

Une Eos.

The vision fades, but enough light remains to see the figure above.

Filling the corner of this vast space is a being that is at once an immense floating idol of machinery, cables and pistons draped in an extensive tattered cloak, and a tower of churning translucent flesh. Eyes open endlessly upon its surface, flowing across the twisting form before they are consumed by the surrounding flesh once more.

The Faceless stares up at this being, their body quaking in awe as the vision slowly fades.

They fall to their knees, arms outstretched.

The last of their bandages fall away to reveal a mouth that hangs open without bones nor teeth. Their eyes liquify, the pale fluid running down their cheeks like tears, the droplets being torn away by the wind.

Wires snake from the wall nearby and shoot toward the Faceless martyr, each one piercing their back and lifting them up toward the platform where the mask awaits them. A cable snaps out nearby and severs their legs just above their knees, the useless flesh plummeting back down to earth, blood trailing behind them. As the Faceless Martyr is lifted onto the platform the mask is held up for them by wires.

BLACK

The sounds of distant machines coming to life.

END