

Dancing In The Moonlight

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Brian swung one leg out of the police car, his boot stamping into the mud of the road. He clambered out of the passenger-side door into the cool night air. The heavy rain instantly drenched him, his uniform cap doing little to protect him. Brian gazed off into the swampy woods that lined either side of the road. Off in the distance, he could see the dim orange lights of surrounding houses and the vague silhouettes of naked trees, their bare branches stretching up into the cloudy night sky. The air was heavy with the fetid smell of the swamp and the earthy smell of the rain. The sound of the rain impacting the bountiful vegetation, the roof of the police car, and the mud of the road created a cacophony of pattering. The headlights of the car created a feeble zone of illumination that stretched into the night for a few meters before being swallowed by the night.

The house stood just inside the cone of light. It was a squat, ugly, wooden affair that was once a pale white color, but had been worn and muddied into a dull beige hue. Leafy ivy and vines clung to the side of the house so thickly that the wall almost seemed to be made of them. Several dusty glass windows were set into the walls, with dim, flickering lights visible behind them. The sound of music and loud, indistinct voices talking, occasionally punctured by the sound of a baby crying, emanated from the house. A small porch ran along the front of the house, constructed out of wood that was somehow in even worse condition than the rest of the house. A dim porchlight was situated above the door to the house. A small cloud of flies swarmed around the light, their buzzing almost audible from where Brian stood. The flies were always bad at this time of year.

John climbed out of the driver's-side door of the car, the impact of his boots splattering mud across his pants. He grimaced at the heavy rain before tromping towards Brian, his fingers playing with the hunting knife that was affixed to his belt.

“You know, just because these backroads don't technically have a speed limit, that doesn't mean you should go 70,” Brian said, not looking away from the house.

“Maybe I drive better when you shut the hell up. Besides, we made it here safe, and the big guy had enough time to get a nap in.” John rapped on the back window of the police car. A quiet groan sounded from inside the car and John stepped back quickly as the door swung open. Andrew, a portly, older man, climbed out of the back seat, hurriedly clapping his uniform cap over his head before the rain could soak his nearly-hairless head. Andrew walked around to the front of the car, entering the cone of illumination, and Brian followed closely behind him. John motioned for the two of them to wait as he went around to the trunk of the police car. He popped it open and rummaged around for several seconds before returning to where Brian and Andrew stood, a shotgun clutched in his hand.

“Hey, no. This is just a 415. We don’t need that,” Brian said quickly.

John grinned. “Think about it. I flash this thing, and those backwoods fucks will quiet down real quick. The noise complaint will be solved and we all get to go home.”

“Do you have any idea how many codes that violates?” Brian said frantically, glancing towards Andrew for any support. Andrew just shrugged casually. Brian sighed in irritation before starting to make his way towards the door of the house. Andrew followed closely behind him, with John bringing up the rear.

The three men stepped onto the porch, the brittle wood creaking under their weight. Brian raised his hand and knocked on the door.

“Louisiana police! Open up!” Brian called, doing his best to sound authoritative.

“You guys wanna get dinner after this?” Andrew grumbled. Brian glanced towards him. Andrew was an older, more experienced officer than Brian or John. His right cheek bore a large scar, a trophy from some long-past escapade. Brian heard the house’s door creak open and began to turn towards it, his eyes still on the faded trench that had been carved into Andrew’s face.

And then Andrew’s head exploded. The entire world slowed to a crawl. Brian stumbled back, losing his foot on the slick wood of the porch and tumbling back into the mud. Andrew fell backwards, already limp. John shouted something, his voice sounding strangely quiet to Brian. Brian forced his eyes towards the door, spotting a middle-aged man in a flannel shirt. In the man’s hand was a revolver, the

black metal glinting beneath the porch light. Brian scrambled to draw his pistol, but John was quicker. The man's chest erupted in a field of red blossoms as the shotgun's report rang out. The man flew back, landing on his back inside the house. Brian glanced at Andrew and immediately wished he hadn't. A black puddle of blood had already formed beneath Andrew's head, and rivulets of blood ran down from the entry wound. Brian turned away from the sight and spewed what was left of lunch into the mud. John rushed towards Andrew before recoiling.

"Shit," John whispered quietly.

"The guy... is he dead?" Brian choked out gesturing towards the man's body, still fighting the bile in his throat. John approached the spot where the man had fallen, keeping the shotgun trained on him. Brian shakily climbed to his feet before walking towards John. John stood stock-still, just staring at the man's body. Brian opened his mouth to question him, only to stop when he observed the man's corpse.

The shotgun had torn through the cloth of the man's shirt and a wild pattern of tiny holes leaked crimson blood into the fabric. However, tiny lumps slowly slid beneath the man's skin. As Brian and John watched, one of the lumps wormed its way towards one of the shotgun wounds on the man's chest before squirming through the wound, revealing itself to be a larva of some kind, no more than an inch long. More of the larva began to surface, tunneling through the shotgun wounds or bursting through the skin along the man's arms and neck. One of the man's eyes bulged grotesquely before a larva squeezed itself through the jelly-like surface of the eye. Brian expelled what little remained of lunch onto the porch. John just stared in horror.

"We're both seeing that, right?" John asked, his voice sounding abnormally high.

"Uh...yeah..." Brian said, hating how scared his voice sounded.

"Hey! Anyone else in there?" John called into the dimly-lit interior of the house. For a few seconds, his only answer was the quiet music playing from somewhere inside the house. Then a woman's voice spoke.

"Yep! We're just in the sitting room!" The voice called cheerfully. John turned towards Brian, his eyes wide. Brian looked back, his eyes equally wide. John started to enter the house, stepping over the

man's body and crushing several of the larva as he went. Brian drew his pistol and followed close behind him.

The interior walls of the house were covered in a dull yellow wallpaper. Flies clung to the walls and ceiling, with the occasional light fixture being swarmed by the insects. Tiny white specks covered the ugly caramel-colored carpet of the house. Brian stooped to touch them before realizing that they were fly's eggs. He quickly stood up, frantically brushing his hands on his pants. The two men slowly rounded a corner, revealing the sitting room.

The sitting room was a small room that was filled with people of all types. Men in flannels, a woman in a sundress, an old man bent over a walker, even an infant who sat on the floor. An old-fashioned record player sat near the back of the room, and quiet melodic music spilled from it. All of the furniture had been pushed into one corner of the room and messily piled atop each other. As John and Brian rounded the corner, every person in the room turned to look at them. Both men froze.

“John...” Brian whispered warningly.

The woman in the sundress took a step towards the men and John quickly shifted the shotgun in her direction. The woman stopped moving and smiled, just a little too happily. Brian saw something shift along the woman's hairline. A large lump slowly squeezed down the side of the woman's face, working its way along her cheek, past her too-wide smile and too-empty eyes. Brian took a step back, observing the other people in the room. All of them bore the same lumps, distended bulges that wormed their way beneath their skin. The woman in the sundress took several quick steps forward, raising her arms as she charged at John. The shotgun's report was deafening in the confines of the house. The woman's body fell backwards, the majority of her face sheared away by the blast.

Every person in the room surged forward towards the two men. Brian turned and ran, desperately charging away from the sitting room and deeper into the house. John stood his ground, and Brian heard several more reports from the shotgun before he heard John shout as he was forced to the ground. Brian risked a glance back, looking just long enough to see a man in a raincoat, his face bulging with larval lumps lean towards John's throat and bite into it, tearing out a chunk of flesh and silencing John's

shouting. Brian gagged heavily, but found his stomach had nothing else to expel. He kept running, continuing his desperate charge away from the carnage.

Brian slammed the door to the basement behind him, breathing heavily. He didn't remember how long he'd been running for, but it seemed as though he had finally found a safe place. He just needed a few moments to collect his thoughts. Brian slid slowly to the concrete floor of the basement, trying to slow his frantic breathing. The basement was cool and dark, but was small enough that Brian wouldn't have been able to lay down. Brian scooted along the floor until he was facing the door. He clutched his pistol tightly, however useless he thought it would be. John's shotgun had taken care of a few of those freaks, but the handgun was not nearly as powerful and they'd overwhelm Brian eventually. He'd end up just like John. Brian forced those thoughts from his mind. He just had to focus on...

A loud slam resounded from the basement door. Brian scrambled backward, his pistol flying from his grasp as he pushed himself against the wall of the basement. A second slam reverberated through the room and the door was thrown open. And there was John, standing silhouetted against the half-light of the hallway behind him. John's throat wound slowly bled down the front of his uniform and his left forearm seemed to be entirely missing. Regardless, John smiled happily and looked towards Brian with too-wide eyes.

"Hey, Brian!" John called cheerfully.

Brian lunged for his pistol, screaming as he moved, but John stepped forward quicker, swinging his remaining arm into Brian and pushing him back. Up close, Brian could see the wriggling lumps beneath John's skin and the tiny white specks of fly eggs that were clustered inside the crimson sinew of his throat wound. The impact of John's fist threw Brian against the concrete wall of the basement. It wasn't enough to knock him out. As John scrambled to reorient himself, he saw John draw his hunting knife. Brian wished John had knocked him out, because then he wouldn't have to witness what John did to him next.