

EXCERPT FROM "PHANTOM LIMB"

By

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Maeve took a deep breath, taking a break from the screaming frenzy. Once her throat stopped aching, she sat back in her folding chair. No more signs of any animated limbs.

"Let's start with what we know," Maeve rubbed her throat, "Everyone thinks this house is haunted. Newspaper companies keep running stories about this house. You only stayed here for one night and you found a severed hand."

"A moving severed hand," Paxton coughed, still resting after his own bout of hysteria.

"You ran out at 6AM, woke my entire apartment up, then asked me to come here," Maeve continued, "You made dinner, then I found the hand. Then we screamed like cheerleaders."

Paxton grabbed his Chicken Vindaloo and ate a grain of rice, "So where's that leave us?"

"With a whole bunch of creepy limbs who don't want us here," Maeve scooted her chair closer to the table and stuck her fork in a piece of chicken.

"They don't?" Paxton chewed, now having moved up to putting an entire clump of rice into his mouth.

"You saw that hand flip me off? It doesn't like me." Maeve gave her esophagus another rub, "And you don't put hands in houses as a housewarming present." Paxton popped a piece of chicken into his mouth and gave it a thorough chewing. This next

question had to be asked in just the right way.

"But you don't think it's haunted. Do you?"

Maeve shook her head, "Of course not! I think one of those papers snuck it into your house for a good story. Why? Do you?"

Paxton nearly coughed on his rice again "No! No! Not haunted! Just what you said. The newspapers." Maeve looked around for the walking hand, and sighed when she remembered it walked off.

"If we are going to confront the press about this, we'll need physical evidence." Maeve took one last bite of dinner before pushing in her chair and walking back to the bathroom, "They want us to freak out about severed hands and run around like loonies. That's what sells their papers."

"Did a bang-up job, too!" Paxton followed Maeve, still holding his instant meal. Every other step he'd toss another bite of chicken into his mouth, glancing around to make sure none of the curry sauce fell on the floorboards.

"Where'd you say you found that hand again?" Maeve turned the crystal knob leading into the bathroom.

"Not that hand," Paxton chewed, "Mine had nail polish. And it was in the bedroom. Don't ask." Maeve wasn't planning on "asking," and now she was pretty certain she would never want to. Once inside the bathroom, she opened the closet and grabbed a bucket from the bottom. Gingerly, she took out each of the items left in the closet. Spackle, paint stirrers, scrunchies, all of them were surrounding the outside of the door. Paxton stared as she worked.

Once the closet was completely empty, Paxton decided he stood around like a

bump on a log for long enough. He sucked the excess sauce off his finger and placed his dinner on top of the toilet. His hands relatively clean, he opened the medicine closet and glanced through the shelves. There was the offending hand, resting next to an unopened bottle of cough syrup. Paxton jumped, Maeve's head shot up, then he flailed out his arm to grab the foreign hand. It jumped into the sink, clawing its way out. As soon as she was up straight, Maeve snatched the hand and threw it into the bucket. Paxton just stared as feebly used its fingers to climb up the sides of the plastic bucket. Maeve grabbed the bucket's handle and marched to the master bedroom.

"One down, more to go," she muttered. Paxton trailed behind until he felt a jolt of pain at his ankle. He fell to one knee, hissing through his teeth and gripping his ankles with his hands, when he saw the foot. It was bare, with gray hair just above its own ankle and blue wrinkly veins above its toes. Its nails were gnarled, not disgustingly so, but the foot did not belong to a believer in the healing power of pedicures. It tapped all its toes on the floor, waiting to see what Pax would do.

"Yooooou little biiiiitch!" he whined through his teeth. He made a grab for wrinkled foot, but it jumped down the steps before he could catch it. The pain in his leg finally died down, so he stood up and started running for the foot. That's when he felt a hand push him down the stairs.

The master bedroom could fit at least one king sized bed and a widescreen television, but just seeing the sleeping bag and the iPhone charger made it look as big as a house. Rather than gawk, Maeve started shaking the sleeping bag. Out tumbled both a left leg cut below the knee and a left arm cut below the elbow. Once the arm landed, it rolled

back to the crumpled sleeping back, lifted its wrist into the air, and curling her index finger at Maeve. It seemed to have a come-hither look to it; as much as just an arm could have anyway. The leg walked back towards the sleeping bag.

Maeve tossed both the lone limbs into the bucket. The male hand flipped the bird. The flirtatious female hand slapped it across the knuckle. Just then, Maeve heard Paxton crying alongside a series of loud wooden bumps. Bucket in hand, she ran down the stairs, jumping over three at a time, and saw the realtor lying on his face at the bottom of the stairwell.

"Pax! What happened?" Pax lifted up his head. Dark blood dribbled down his broken nose.

"I am goi'g do gill dem," he said, "I am goi'g do gill dem before dey gill us. Eben ib dey are areddy dead." Maeve hoisted her partner up to his feet.

"Stop falling down stairs, you big baby." She muttered, showing him the bucket full of limbs, "These look familiar?"

"Dad's de hand." He wiped his nose on one of his arms, rolling up the sleeve. "Food's new dough. S'nod de food dad gigcked me. Or de hand dad shubbed me down de sdairs."

"You mean there's more of these things?" Maeve shook her head, then gave the bucket to Paxton, "Hold this. I wasn't kidding when I said those hands didn't want us, but I didn't figure they were going to start setting up accidents, too." Paxton sat by the bottom step, placing the bucket by his feet. All the past accidents in the house happened while he was standing, and there was no way he was going to let himself get tripped or pushed again. The hand that flipped Maeve off started crawling up one of

the legs, but Paxton grabbed it and chucked it back to the bottom of the bucket. Maeve came over with a right arm.

"Dad's de one," Paxton sniffed. Maeve dropped it in the bucket and dusted off her hands. But the right arm righted itself, stood up on its fingers, and walked out of the bucket.

"Maebé..." Paxton drawled, pointing to the bucket. Maeve walked back towards the collected of limbs, shaking her head at the runaway arm. The rest of the limbs stopped their wriggling, paused as if in contemplation, then left the bucket by phasing straight through it.

"Did you..."

"Yeah." Before they could chase down the renegade bodily parts, a crash resounded through the house. Paxton gulped, Maeve clenched her fists, and the two made their way back to the dining room.

A tangle of brass and broken crystal lay on the dining room floor. From the mess stuck a triumphant leg, a woman's leg from toe to buttock. The geriatric foot stood next to the mess and tapped its big toe in disgust.

"Thad was an andique birvday cagge sdyle wib sigsdeen candles," Paxton cried, "SIGSDEEN CANDLES!"