

PAINED

Written by

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FADE IN:

**EXT. LONDON ALLEYWAY - NIGHT**

Dark and dingy, like they always are.

ARTEMIS DINGLEHALL (60s) tiptoes over moldy cobblestone.

Dressed in a turtleneck and khakis, he carries an oversized briefcase - and looks very, very out of place.

A reedlike figure trails behind him, unseen.

As Artemis turns the corner...

A crab-like hand seizes his shoulder. Artemis JUMPS! The stalker swings him around.

To face a pale, scabby face. Meth-head FRANK.

ARTEMIS

Sir, please don't hurt me. I have  
no cash!

He pulls a pocket out to demonstrate. Only lint. Frank scowls.

FRANK

Call me Frankie, dumb ass. I told  
you that on the phone.

ARTEMIS

Oh. You're the gentleman I spoke to  
the other evening? You... looked  
quite distinct in my mind's eye.

FRANK

You gots a problem with my face?

ARTEMIS

Not in the slightest, good sir!

FRANK

Then - it's my clothes?

ARTEMIS

Goodness, no. You look superb!

(beat)

That artifact we negotiated for. I  
presume you have that on you now?

The meth-head yes the old man head to toe.

FRANK

Who cares? You just said you ain't got no dough.

ARTEMIS

(laughs)

Oh, no worries. That was merely a fib.

FRANK

Speak English, asshole. You lied?

ARTEMIS

A... a ruse. And only because I thought you might be a mugger.

FRANK

Again with the insults? I don't got time for this. We're done.

He turns to go.

Flustered, the old man grabs his arm. Frank scowls and Artemis lets go. He extracts an ENVELOPE from his jacket.

ARTEMIS

Here's what you asked for. Just - don't leave!

The offering's chock full of greenbacks. Rifling through Benjamins, Frank grins ear to ear.

FRANK

No joke - shit just got real!

ARTEMIS

As real as the artifact, I hope? Please, I must see it now.

Digging under his shirt, Frank whips out a TEST TUBE.

FRANK

Don't take this wrong, but when I heard what you wuz lookin' for, I kinda wondered if meeting you alone was wise. I mean, what sorta psycho pays one grand for *this*...

Artemis grabs the test-tube. Using his cell as a flashlight, he holds it up, and smiles.

At the mummified FINGER inside!

ARTEMIS  
Ah yes. The aging looks...  
positively perfect.

FRANK  
(mutters)  
I'm guessin', the Norman Bates  
kind. So, are we done here?

ARTEMIS  
Only if you can answer this tiny  
detail: who exactly did you acquire  
this specialty item from?

FRANK  
Do you really hafta know?  
Confidentially matters 'round these  
parts.

ARTEMIS  
The last name - that's all I need!

FRANK  
Some Southern type, named Cobbett.

ARTEMIS  
Splendid. All my hopes, confirmed!  
Well, it's been an pleasure  
conducting business. But it grows  
late, so I shall go...

FRANK  
Dude, if you're *that* into fingers,  
I got a pinky - or two - to spare!

Artemis trots off, cradling his purchase.

ARTEMIS  
Duly noted, and quite kind. But not  
just any digit will do!

With that, he's gone. Frank stares after Artemis, repelled.

FRANK  
Damn. Guys like that are gross.

#### **ANOTHER STREET**

Artemis waves down a TAXI. Hops inside.

#### **INT. TAXI**

Driver MANNY beams at Artemis through the rearview mirror.

MANNY

Where to?

ARTEMIS

58882 Old Heath Road.

MANNY

You got it, chief! Let's rock and roll.

The taxi makes a turn, merges into a sea of cars.

In the back: a prim and proper Artemis lays his briefcase across his lap. Using the top flap as a shield to block Manny's view, he eyes the test-tube - in love.

MANNY

Soon, my precious, you will not be alone...

Manny stops at a red light. Swings around. Startled, Artemis jumps.

MANNY

Man, you look better than usual.

ARTEMIS

Excuse me? I've never met you, Sir!

MANNY

Sure, not personally. I mean, guys in the part of the hood where I picked you up aren't... uh, let's say as "stand out" as you. I hate even drivin' at this hour. Who knows who or what I'll run across?  
(chuckles)  
Run across. Not over, of course. What were you there for, at this hour?

Artemis freezes. Thinks quick.

ARTEMIS

A clandestine rendezvous. That's all you need to know.

MANNY

(chuckles)  
Ah, I gotcha. A romantic interlude! Lissen, we all gots our secrets...

Artemis' eyes grow hard and cold.

ARTEMIS

The light's green. It's better that you drive.

Manny shrugs, swings back the wheel.

MANNY

(mutters)

Damn, the crazies are clockin' in tonight!

The two drive on in silence. Happy to be left alone, Artemis ogles his new... uh, toy.

As streetlights streak by, he muses:

ARTEMIS (V.O.)

As you can tell, I'm a collector. For those who respect and seek to learn from the past, there is a fad called "living history". What I personally collect may no longer qualify as "living". But, once it made it's mark on the world. And in the end, that's all that counts.

#### **EXT. DECAYING HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

More suburban than the alleyway. But the shit-hole vibe stays the same.

The taxi glides to the curb and parks.

Stuffing the test-tube in a pants pocket, Artemis scoots out of the car - and knocks on Manny's window hard.

ARTEMIS

Stay here. I shan't be long.

MANNY

(laughs)

You signin' me up as a getaway driver? I get bonuses for gigs a' that sort!

ARTEMIS

No! I swear on my dead mother's grave; the business I conduct tonight is legal, on the up-and-up. But it shall require several stops. So keep the meter running at all times.

MANNY

Yeah. Manny don't work pro bono.

ARTEMIS

"Manny", I promise you. Tonight shall be more than worth your while.

Manny watches Artemis beeline to the porch. Rolling his eyes, he cranks the radio, plays HIP HOP tunes.

MANNY

Nevah question customers. Guys like that are best left alone.

### **INT. DECAYING HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER**

A hoarder's vision of paradise.

Artemis hands a fat cash envelope to a RAT-FACED WOMAN.

She scurries to a cupboard. Artemis watches her nervously fumble with the keys.

ARTEMIS (V.O.)

To be successful, collectors must specialize. Back when collecting was little more than a hobby, I fancied my niche to be in stamps. Ultimately, they proved to be too mundane. And dolls? Rag or china: too creepy, by far. It was by delving into *actual* human history where I found my passion. In the flesh, as it were.

CLICK. The rat-face woman opens the cabinet and pulls out:

A mummified FEMUR!! Wrapped in moldy circa 1700 rags.

She passes the leg reverently to Artemis. The two cheek kiss. Tucking the limb under one armpit, he bows to her. Heads out.

### **EXT. DECAYING HOUSE**

On the porch, Artemis lingers.

Rocking to tunes in his taxi, Manny hasn't noticed him - or his new, bulky "package" yet.

Thinking quick, Artemis wraps his jacket around the leg as camouflage. Striding confidentially to the car, he jumps in.

**INT. TAXI**

Manny sits up and squints at Artemis through the rear view mirror. Eyes the old man's acquisition, too.

MANNY

That was quick. Whatcha got there?  
It looks... big.

ARTEMIS

Pish-Tosh! Just a bauble. Nothing  
one need know about.

MANNY

Fine. Where to next, Mr. Mysterio?

ARTEMIS

(consults his phone)  
Washington Park.

**LATER**

Dark streets slip by outside the car window.

Distracted, Artemis fondles the femur through his jacket.

Manny shoots an occasional look Artemis' way. Lucrative or no, this passenger weirds him out!

Artemis muses to himself again:

ARTEMIS (V.O.)

Those who have no sense of culture  
might condemn me as a common grave  
robber. But my task is not  
desecrating corpses. Oh my, no!  
Rather: reclaiming vital human  
artifacts for the world!

(chuckles)

In the process of my mission, I've  
encountered many a "dead end", of  
course. When I first set out to  
make my mark, there was that  
duplicitous Frenchman who sold me a  
lock of "Marie Antoinette's" hair.  
Alas, DNA testing later proved it  
was not human. Instead, it was  
Airedale fur!

(beat)

Though perhaps the most daring was  
that contact in Dubai. He swore  
himself in possession of Amelia  
Earhart's ribcage! That one, I was  
too savvy and seasoned to fall for.



Nonetheless, an entertaining back and forth.

(sighs)

But successes do make all the grief and deceit worthwhile. I'll never forget that wondrous day I obtained a vial of lipase from the famed Sara Baartman. The Hottentot Venus herself! Flipping houses, Ebay and Craigslist is for rubes. I obtained that gem for a mere \$500 from a yard sale hobbyist. And resold it for \$10K on the dark web! An almost *supernatural* profit. Money pulled from thin air. That last win was truly my turning point. More than just a career, collecting human trophies became my life's work.

(beat)

But I knew it would be too restricting to specialize in only female parts. That would be too rarified. And perverse, too.

#### **EXT. WASHINGTON PARK - MOMENTS LATER**

Dark and dismal. Though foliage makes it picturesque.

The Uber glides to the curb, near a BUS STOP.

A Bespectacled GENTLEMAN waits nervously on a bench, checks his watch.

Artemis pops out the back door, and nods to Manny.

ARTEMIS

Wait here. Be discrete, don't look.

#### **MOMENTS LATER**

Artemis slips an envelope of money to the Gentleman. The Dapper Dan hands him a ZIPLOCK BAG and scuttles off.

ARTEMIS

Perhaps it was fate that tonight I hit the mother load. Or father load, to be precise.

#### **INT. TAXI - MOMENTS LATER**

Artemis slides back inside. Manny pins him with an evil-eye.

MANNY

Where to next, 007?

ARTEMIS

4599 Pheasant Lane. That will be  
our last stop. Home.

Propping his briefcase up as a shield once more, Artemis  
stares at the baggie adoringly.

Inside: HALF A SKULL!!

ARTEMIS (V.O.)

What a thing of beauty! The finger,  
leg and skull of Thomas Paine  
himself!

Manny drives. Artemis pets the skull, like it's a dog.

ARTEMIS (V.O.)

Oh amazing spectacle. Here, lying  
within my grasp: the most  
rebellious of the Founding Fathers.  
A man great in life, but  
ignominiously ill treated in death.  
Disinterred by the journalist  
William Cobbett - yes, the great,  
great, great, great grandfather of  
the contact I encountered earlier  
tonight - Thomas Paine's remains  
were quickly.. Shall we say,  
misplaced? Scattered by fated winds  
to all four corners of the globe.  
But things of value are rarely lost  
to history *forever*. A man such as  
this deserves to rest in peace.

(laughs)

Or at least in pieces, purchased by  
those who know their worth.  
According to my buyers, they shall  
earn me half a million. Enough to  
let ME rest... in retirement. A  
kingly sum!

#### **EXT. ARTEMIS' HOME**

4599 Pheasant Lane. They arrived.

Manny parks, and swivels towards the back seat.

MANNY

Congratulations, buddy. Hope you've  
enjoyed the ride!

Scrambling to hide his gruesome purchase, Artemis shoves the zip locked skull into the briefcase.

ARTEMIS

Yes. It was quite - adequate. About where we've been these last few hours...

MANNY

I hear ya. I was never here.

ARTEMIS

And you shan't see me again.

MANNY

Conflicting narrative. But - whatevs. I get the drift.

Holding out a palm, Manny lingers... expectant. Artemis shakes his hand, confused.

ARTEMIS

A pleasure. Now, you may go.

MANNY

Uh, gratuities are always welcome?

Artemis eyes his now envelope-depleted briefcase. Sniffs.

ARTEMIS

You were already handsomely recompensed.

MANNY

The company was. But extra for your driver's pretty standard - given the custom attention you've received.

Artemis raises an indignant eyebrow.

ARTEMIS

Good night. Our business is done!

Grabbing the wrapped femur and his briefcase, Artemis darts from the car.

A soft THUD behind him. So subtle, neither man hears. Manny salutes Artemis sarcastically.

MANNY

Hope we never meet again, ass wipe.

Annoyed, he revs the engine - zooms off.

**INT. ARTEMIS' HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

As stuffy as its resident. Lovingly preserved relics adorn every wall. Antique GOLD COINS glimmer on a counter.

Dimly lit and pretentious, it's a private museum in here.

Artemis scuttles around and lights candles.

ARTEMIS

Artemis, old boy - you may be  
alone... but one must celebrate  
such momentous occasions right!

He drapes a velvet blanket across a table.

Unwrapping the femur, Artemis lays it reverently down.  
Positions it repeatedly, almost to the point of OCD.

ARTEMIS

Ah, Thomas - you've placed one foot  
in present day. Now to get your  
head through the door!

The old man slips Paine's skull out of its zip-locked  
"shroud." Lays it on the blanket, next.

In just the right anatomical position, compared to the leg.  
Though, given the dimensions of the table....

ARTEMIS

(Chuckles)

Too short. But no matter. "Pull  
yourself together", Paine old pal!  
At least until I sell you off to  
the highest bidders. Now, for my  
piece de resistance...

Artemis digs in his pocket for the test tube. Feels nothing.

ARTEMIS

Oh. *His* left, not mine.

He pats his left pocket. That's empty, too.

ARTEMIS

No. It can't be gone!

Tossing his briefcase to the table, Artemis rummages through  
that, too.

And accidentally BUMPS the skull against the femur.

An odd, blue aura rises from where body parts touch.

Thanks to lighting and Artemis' panic - he doesn't notice the distortion in the air...

ARTEMIS

Think quick, Artemis! Where did you see it last?

**INT. TAXI - CONTINUOUS**

Bobbing to rap, Manny scans the street for fares. His weary eyes slide towards a clock on the dash.

MANNY

Midnight? Time to wrap. You've shoveled enough shit for one night.

He turns off the radio. Stops at a light.

BUMP. Something clunks in the backseat.

Manny glances back in the mirror. Nothing at eye level.

Curious, he taps the gas - then brakes. A second BUMP.

MANNY

What the ever loving fuck?

The light's still red. Timing the change, Manny jumps from the wheel, into the road.

Opening the back door, he spots *something* under the seat.

Squatting, he fishes around for it. First his hand. Then his whole arm.

The light changes. Cars behind him BEEP.

MANNY

Hold your frigging horses!

It's the test tube. Manny pulls it free. Holds it up.

Headlights from the other cars illuminate the FINGER inside.

MANNY

Ever loving fuck times thirteen!!!  
Heeeeeelllllll no. I knew that CPA wannabe had a psycho vibe. I ain't gonna take a murder rap for that cheap skate...

Holding the test tube like a bug, Manny hops behind the wheel. Serenaded by honking PO'ed drivers, he zooms off.

**INT. ARTEMIS' HOME - LIVING ROOM**

In a tizzy, Artemis rips the briefcase to shreds. The test tube isn't there.

Desperate, he yanks off his khakis - reveals boxers underneath.

He shakes his pants upside down. A few pennies tumble out. One tic-tac. Keys. More lint.

But no mummy finger.

Eyeing the skull, Artemis' thoughts race:

FLASHBACK - Artemis removes the zip locked skull from his briefcase.

ARTEMIS

Perhaps it fell on the floor?

He drops to his knees, and gropes across floor boards.

Overhead, something HISSES. Artemis jumps. Smacks his head on the table's underside.

ARTEMIS

Ow!

Dizzy, he staggers back. Through unfocused eyes he sees:

A glowing SPECTER dressed in 1700's garb. Underneath the white powdered wig, half its face is GONE.

But it's prominent nose remains intact...

ARTEMIS

(gasps)

Thomas Paine?!?

The specter moans and approaches. Artemis scuttles back.

ARTEMIS

I must be hallucinating. There's more gravy than grave about you, spirit. No wait, that's the wrong period. Wrong reason, too. I mean, I'm just concussed. And confused...

SPECTER

Trust thy senses, Artemis. It is I!

The ghost floats closer. Revealing... its right leg is missing, too.

Artemis trips, falls on his butt. Scoots backward, terrified.

ARTEMIS

Ghosts aren't possible. It doesn't  
stand to reason!

Reaching out, the ghost seizes the mummified femur. For a moment, the severed limb floats before Artemis' shocked eyes.

SPECTER

Never renounce the use of reason.  
To argue with a man such as that...  
is like administering to the dead!

With those words, the ghost SNAPS its leg into place. An ethereal sigh escapes blue lips.

SPECTER

Ah, that is much refreshing.

It reaches for the skull fragment next.

ARTEMIS

(blurts)

I paid for that. It's mine!

Fire blazes from the apparition's eye sockets.  
Illuminating... worms.

SPECTER

No. Mine, by natural right. As I  
once did proclaim, give me liberty.  
Or you... death.

ARTEMIS

Wasn't that Patrick Henry?

Groaning, the specter fits the skull in place. CLICK.

The last piece to its facial puzzle. Yes - this is Thomas Paine!

The ghost floats THROUGH the table towards a mirror. Marveling at its reflection, it touches a hand to its cheek.

And notices the missing finger.

Paine swings towards Artemis in supernatural fury.

SPECTER

Where is the rest of me?!?

ARTEMIS

That's just it. I've no earthly idea!

SPECTER

(snarls)

In my time, I survived the worst of British and French aristocracies. Find it now, you parasite. Or shalt I overcome you, as well?!?

Artemis grovels. Makes the sign of the cross. Paine ROARS and pounces, mouth supernaturally wide.

SPECTER

Pay your price, merchant. And learn thy lesson. One good schoolmaster is of more use than 100 priests!!

#### INT. TAXI

Outside Artemis' abode, Manny coasts to a stop at the curb.

Shuddering, he stares at the test tube finger rolling around on the passenger seat.

MANNY

Ok, Manny boy - here's the deal. You knock on that SOB's door. And use that... *thing* as leverage for a better tip!

A high pitched SCREAM pierces the night.

Artemis rockets out the door. Still in boxers, he races past the taxi. A shocked Manny turns to look.

MANNY

Wow. Look-it that bugger go. Did one of Dahmer's victims bite him back?

Suddenly: a blue light shimmers in the back seat.

And coalesces into... Thomas Paine! Manny gawks.

MANNY

You gotta be fuckin' kiddin' me. Uh, I ain't takin' no more passengers. This shift is over.  
(gulps)  
Maybe for the rest of my life?!?



The ghost of Thomas Paine smiles - ghastly but strangely warm. And holds out a handful of Artemis' GOLD COINS.

SPECTER

My common sense tells me you  
possess what I seek.

MANNY

Possession? That's what I'm afraid  
of, pal...

A few coins trickle out of the gap where Paine's missing  
finger USED to be.

Manny eyes the ghost. Then the test tube on his seat.

MANNY

Ah - I get it!!

He picks up the tube and grins.

MANNY

Dunno where you came from. But  
buddy, consider this an historic  
deal!

FINAL FADE OUT: