

THE RAKE

by

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Sergeant Mark Pulaski glided his police cruiser to the edge of the crime scene. A large crowd had already gathered, and it was only a matter of time before the Lieutenant showed up. He put his patrol car in park and stepped out into the crime scene. There were already two other Seattle Police Department cars there, as well as an ambulance.

Greek Row, in Seattle's University District, was frequently known as a hotbed of crime, and for the last ten years that Sergeant Pulaski had been working the area, he had noticed a sharp spike in crime. Sexual assaults were the ones that concerned him the most. He hated what it did to the victims.

Scores of students had assembled on just the other side of the yellow tape. Sergeant Pulaski lifted the crime scene tape up, and ducked underneath it, making his way to the two officers standing next to a yellow tarp on the ground.

"Evening Pulaski," said one of the officers. "Welcome to the horror show."

"What have we got?" asked Pulaski.

"An attempted rape, right here on the sidewalk." Pulaski cringed. They were getting bolder. He could not help but feel that the Seattle Police Department was letting the people down.

"Attempted?" he asked. "What happened?"

"Well," said the officer, "Apparently, someone tried to rape a UW student, but he was fought off."

"She fought him off?" asked Pulaski. "She have a weapon or something?"

The two officers stared at each other. Finally, one of them spoke: "That's just it, Sergeant. She didn't fight the attacker off. Someone came and saved her."

"Good," said Pulaski.

"Well, yes and no," said one of the officers.

Pulaski was mentally counting the time until Lieutenant Brown arrived. He hated Lieutenant Brown. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Take a look under the tarp," said the officer, "That's our attacker."

Sergeant Pulaski knelt down to his ankles and pulled back the tarp. "Jesus," he said.

“Right,” said the officer.

The attacker, perhaps a young man in his early thirties, was scarcely recognizable as human being. He had been torn to pieces, in several large cuts, all over his body. Organs had been torn out, and his intestines draped down his leg.

“No way that girl did this,” said Pulaski.

“No shit, Sergeant,” said the other officer.

“Where is she now?”

“Over there, in the back of the ambulance.”

Another patrol car arrived. Officer Berg, with Kaleb the German Shepherd, stepped out of the car. He and his canine made their way to the assembled police. “We need a search or anything?” he asked.

“No,” said one of the officers. “The attacker is very, very dead.”

Sergeant Pulaski made his way to the ambulance. “How is she?” he asked one of the EMTs.

“She's pretty rough. She's not hurt that bad physically, but mentally she's pretty messed up,” said the EMT.

“Okay,” said Pulaski, as he approached the back of the ambulance. He could see that the young girl, college age, was stunned. She showed a blank expression, a thousand yard stare.

“Good evening, Miss,” said Sergeant Pulaski. “I'm Mark. How are you feeling?”

The young girl said nothing.

“Her name's Veronica,” whispered an EMT.

“Veronica,” said Pulaski, “can you tell me what happened tonight?”

Veronica said nothing, her face awash with numb confusion.

“Can you tell me about who saved you?” asked Pulaski.

Veronica slowly turned to Pulaski. She stared at him with eyes that had witnessed hell unleashed. “The monster,” she said.

“The monster? Did he have a knife?”

“He was all knives.”

“Hey Sergeant,” yelled one of the officers. “Lieutenant Brown is here.”

Damn, though Pulaski. His crime scene now.

Sergeant Mark Pulaski had patrolled the University District for a very long time. He loved its character, its bohemian charm, and its edge of danger. Sadly, however, with the increase in methamphetamines in recent years, he had seen the neighborhood begin to decline. Crime was more common. He was, at times, a very busy man.

He was eating his Jack in the Box, up on 50th Street, when he noticed something on the back wall of the Safeway. The wall had been the neighborhood spot where taggers practiced their craft; some were skilled artists, most simply scribbled illegible stains that meant something to somebody. In fresh orange paint, in the middle of the wall, was a new tag, this one quite legible. It simply said: I am The Rake.

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed Grub, a local street kid, sitting on the sidewalk with his cardboard sign, begging for money. Grub held a joint to his mouth; he was clearly smoking pot. Though marijuana was legal in Washington State, it was not legal to smoke it in public. Sergeant Pulaski put away his burger, and exited his patrol car.

“Hey Grub,” he said, walking up to him.

Grub quickly extinguished the joint. “Aw, shit, Pulaski, you're not gonna bust me for smoking in public again, are you?”

“No, don't worry about that,” said Pulaski. “Look at the graffiti wall, Grub.” Grub craned his neck back.

“What about it?” asked Grub.

“Do you know anything about who this Rake is?” asked Pulaski.

“No idea, copper.”

Pulaski sighed. He thought it might mean something, some new kid in the neighborhood. He knew most of them, and he wanted to meet The Rake.

Later that night, Pulaski got a call that a robbery had taken place on the corner of 11th and 42nd. He gunned his patrol car into life, and sped towards the scene.

He found a man, an older Asian fellow, sitting on the sidewalk, holding his head, near the bus stop. “Are you alright?” Pulaski asked him. “Do you require medical attention?”

The old man's English was not very good. Evidently, someone had tried to rob him, and had struck him in the head with a blunt object. As the old man lay on the ground, as near as he could communicate to Pulaski, someone had carried off the attacker.

“Carried off? I don't understand,” said Pulaski.

“Man in costume. Man in costume,” said the old timer.

As Sergeant Pulaski was contemplating this, his radio crackled into life. It was officer Berg.

“Hey Sarge,” said Berg. “I think Kaleb found our mugger. You'd better get down here. I'm at a dumpster in the alleyway of 41st.”

That's walking distance, thought Pulaski.

“Stay here,” he said to the old man. “I'll call an ambulance. Your head took a pretty big blow.”

“I wait,” said the old man.

Before he ran off, Pulaski, after calling for a paramedic, confirmed with the old man what the vigilante, the man who had carried off the mugger, looked like.

“Like dressed in costume.”

“In costume.”

“Yes. He says his name is The Rake.”

Fuck me, thought Pulaski. He turned and ran across 42nd, into the alleyway where officer Berg was.

He found officer Berg and Kaleb standing beside a dumpster. “Our perps in there?” asked Pulaski. “You cuff him and leave him in the trash?”

“No Mark,” said Berg. “He's dead.” Kaleb whined, as if something was nearby.

“Dead?” said Pulaski. “What the hell happened?” Officer Berg looked especially pale.

“Take a look,” the officer said.

Pulaski opened the lid of the dumpster. He nearly retched. Inside was the body of a man, or what used to be a body. All four limbs had been torn off, and the head was missing. Not missing, per se. The man's pants had been removed, and his head was partially inserted into his torn and bloodied rectum.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” said Pulaski.

“Sergeant,” said Berg. “What the fuck is going on around here?”

Pulaski did not like being called into the Captain's office. He entered the room, shut the door behind him, and took a seat.

“Pulaski,” said the Captain. “I was hoping you could tell me what the fuck is happening in the U-District.”

“Forgive me, sir,” said Pulaski, “But isn't that Lieutenant Brown's territory?”

“Shit, Mark,” said the Captain, leaning back in his chair, “You've been in that neighborhood twice as long as he's been in charge of it. The Seattle Times, that bastion of responsible journalism, has been on our ass over this one. Brown ain't doing shit. We've got a situation on our hands.”

“It seems that way, sir. In all of my years in the District, I've never seen anything like this.”

“The press are calling it The Rake. You know anything about that?”

“No sir, I don't.”

The Captain sighed, and took a swig of his coffee that Pulaski knew was spiked. “Mark,” the Captain said, “You're this close to Lieutenant. But right now I need you to track down this fucking madman we've got in the District.”

“I'll do my best, sir.”

Later that afternoon, Lieutenant Brown cornered Pulaski in the station foyer. He did not look happy.

“Listen, Pulaski,” he started, “You can find The Rake, but that son of a bitch is mine.”

“I think we both want the same thing, Lieutenant,” said Pulaski.

“That's fucking correct,” hissed Brown. “But you listen to me. You corner The Rake, you get him up a tree, I want me to be the first person you fucking call, got it?”

“Lieutenant, I can't guarantee that-”

“Fuck you, Sergeant. This collar is mine. You find The Rake, I shoot him. Got it?”

“Yes, sir.”

Pulaski was angry. He found Grub behind the Jack in the Box on 50th, smoking a glass pipe. As soon as Grub saw Pulaski's approaching police car, he stashed the pipe, but thought against running. He knew it was too late.

“Grub,” said Pulaski, getting out of the car, “The Rake. Tell me everything you know about him.”

“Shit, Pulaski, I don't know nothin' about any Rake or anything like that-”

Pulaski grabbed Grub, turned him around, and slammed him against the wall of the Jack in the Box. He delved into his pocket, and pulled out the glass pipe and the small bag of speed.

“Aw, c'mon, Pulaski, I thought we were good,” said Grub.

Pulaski barked at his informant: “You want these back? Tell me everything you know about the fucking Rake.”

“I told you, I don't know nothin'!”

“Alright then,” said Pulaski. “Looks like we're going downtown.”

“Alright alright alright!” said Grub. “I'll tell you what I know!”

“That's better,” said Pulaski, letting Grub go and returning his drugs.

“See, it all started about a month ago. A few of the rougher folks, you remember them, Crazy Mike and Rocko, disappeared. Then, the car prowlers started getting cut up real bad.”

“Who's doing it?” asked Pulaski.

“That's the thing, only a few people have seen him,” said Grub.

“Well, what's he look like?”

Grub swallowed hard. “Like he ain't human.”

“What?”

Pulaski's radio barked into life. Someone had activated the assault app on their smartphone. According to dispatch, it was in the alley behind Brooklyn on 51st. Just a block away.

“Stay in touch, Grub,” said Pulaski, as he turned to run toward the scene of the crime.

Pulaski heard the screams of a young woman as he cornered into the alley. He drew out his pistol. Against the wall, facing it, was a young woman. A man had pinned her there, and was pulling up her dress as he undid his pants. He did not notice the policeman.

Sergeant Pulaski withdrew his pistol, and aimed it squarely at the rapist's head. “Stop!” he yelled, “Step away from the woman and place your hands in the air!”

The rapist turned to run.

There are times when a person's sanity can be so assaulted, so beleaguered, that one wonders if they will ever recover from the shock. Sergeant Pulaski suddenly found himself in one of those moments.

From absolutely nowhere, a large figure tackled the rapist. It wrestled him to the ground, standing over him.

Sergeant Pulaski reached to call for backup, but stopped when he saw what happened next.

The figure that tackled the racist pulled the man's windpipe from his neck with one easy motion. The figure stood up, holding the bloody esophagus in its hand.

Sergeant Pulaski questioned his sanity.

The thing before him was easily eight feet tall, with an elongated head with large, jet-black eyes. Its arms were long and thin, adorned with claws that touched the ground. Its skin was leather, like that of an alligator. Pulaski had no idea what he was looking at.

“Don't you fucking move!” Pulaski shouted, his gun trained on whatever this was.

The creature opened its mouth, exposing a set of huge, jagged yellow teeth, as sharp as razors. It was smiling. “Fuck.... You...,” it said. “I... am... The Rake.”

Pulaski fired a shot at the creature's torso.

Nothing happened. Pulaski saw the bullet enter the thing's body, but the creature showed no reaction, physically or otherwise.

In a flash, The Rake jumped onto a dumpster, leaped onto an opposite wall, and, using it for momentum, leaped onto the roof of the adjacent building. It was gone.

Pulaski just stood there, pistol out, in a state of shock.

The Captain was not happy with Pulaski's report. Pulaski sat at the Captain's desk, trying to form the story in his head.

“Okay, so it says here that you came across a vigilante who was attacking the man who was raping this woman, correct?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And that this man, this vigilante, sliced the man's throat open, exposing his jugular. Correct?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Pulaski, what kind of knife tears open a man's throat and leaves his guts ten feet away?”

“Not sure, sir. REI hunting knife?”

“Don't fuck with me, Pulaski. Was this our Rake, or not?”

Pulaski sighed heavily. “I believe so, sir, yes.”

“You describe this 'Rake' as a large man in some sort of costume. Are you fucking kidding me, Pulaski?”

“That's what I saw, sir,” came the reply.

The Captain grumbled under his breath as he looked over the report. “It says here you fired a shot at the vigilante, but missed.”

“Yes, sir,” said Pulaski, “That's correct.”

“You aced every marksmanship course we have, Mark. How is that possible?”

“Bad luck, sir.”

“Bad luck. I see. And how is it that the bullet that missed has not been found, when we've had people all over that crime scene?”

“I'm not sure, sir.”

The Captain sighed, and leaned back in his chair. He twirled his pen as he thought for a moment. Finally, he spoke. “Well, at least we've seen this Rake fucker; now we just need to catch him.”

“That's right, sir,” said Pulaski.

“You might not be a part of that, Pulaski,” said the Captain.

“Sir?”

“Lieutenant Johnson, at the downtown precinct, is taking on a Captain's position down in Tacoma. Downtown is going to need a new Lieutenant. You interested?”

“No, sir.”

“Excuse me?”

“If it's all the same, sir, I'd like to remain in the U-District, at least until we catch this Rake.”

The Captain stared at Pulaski for what seemed an eternity. “You know,” he said, “opportunities like this don't happen very often.”

“I know sir,” said Pulaski. “I'd just like to stay in a neighborhood that I know.”

“Well, your call,” said the Captain.

Pulaski knew that the University District was soon going to be a very interesting place. He did not want to miss what happened next.