D E A T H ' S D E L A Y

Craven Blood

DarkScribe Storytellers

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About the Author: Craven Blood
One Last Thing...

A FREE GIFT AWAITS YOU

Dear Valued Reader,

Thank you for choosing to journey into the chilling depths of horror with us. Your support means the world to us, and we hope this book sends shivers down your spine and left you with haunting memories.

As a token of our appreciation, we have a special gift just for you—a FREE novella titled "*Trial by Nightmare*," also authored by Craven Blood. This gripping tale is waiting for you, and all you need to do to claim it is sign up to our email list.



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Sign up for our email list so you'll be among the first to know about new releases, exclusive content, and more terrifying stories from Craven Blood.

We hope you enjoy this additional journey into darkness, and we can't wait to continue sharing spine-tingling tales with you in the future.

Thank you once again for your support and for choosing to accompany us on our terrifying adventures. Happy reading!

With our deepest appreciation,

DarkScribe Storytellers

1. ECHOES OF TORMENT

"I'll take your questions," Chief Chambers's voice sliced through the tense silence. The press had waited for what felt like an eternity, their collective breath held in anticipation. As his words hung in the air, a flashbulb storm erupted, blinding bursts of light accompanying their insistent demands for attention.

Amidst the chaos, a single sentence pierced through—the words "Haley Chambers" punctuated the fervor. His gaze honed in on the source of that sentence, a surge of urgency propelling him to react. With a pointed finger, he gestured towards the origin and barked, "What was that?"

"Is the apprehended suspect also responsible for the brutalization of Haley Chambers?" The reporter's voice cut through the fray, the question hanging like a blade in the air.

A flash of frustration coursed through him. The audacity of this reporter to pry into the deepest crevices of his heart, to dredge up memories that clawed at his sanity. He recognized the type—an overconfident, self-righteous journalist, flaunting her courage like a badge of honor, eager to expose the rawest nerves of those in power.

"It's a possibility," the Chief's response was measured, his voice a facade of calm over roiling emotions. "We don't know for certain." He wrenched his mind away from the haunting image of Haley, the memory of her innocence clashing violently against the gruesome display etched in his consciousness.

"Don't the methods look strikingly similar?" The reporter's words were a relentless barrage, a relentless reminder of the horrors he desperately tried to compartmentalize. His daughter's image, once so radiant and full of life, now tied to an oak tree, skin stripped away, a tortured echo begging for

release. The pain gripped him, threatened to tear the carefully constructed facade asunder.

He clenched his teeth, eyelids sealing tight as if to hold back the flood of anguish. His lips pressed into a thin line, a last defense against the encroaching tide of grief threatening to consume him. He forced his voice into a controlled cadence, "We're reviewing the evidence in both cases. At this point, no conclusive connection has been found. Next question, please."

As he spoke, he wrestled with the demons that clawed at the edges of his consciousness. The shadow of doubt loomed, the echoes of past horrors intertwined with the uncertainty of the present. Chief Chambers stood before the probing eyes of the press, a fortress of strength outwardly maintained, even as the tempest of his own emotions raged within.

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"Dear God, help me!" Raymond's anguished scream clawed its way through the air. His words were distorted, a garbled symphony intertwined with the relentless torrent of blood pouring from his mouth.

In a surreal tableau of horror, Justine found herself unable to tear her gaze from the gruesome scene before her. A mere two feet away, she was confronted with a nightmarish sight that eclipsed anything she'd encountered in her tenure as a paramedic. Her eyes were ensnared by the disfigurement that marred Raymond's once-human face, the jagged wounds a chilling testament to the depths of his suffering. A pang of regret, born from the depths of her being, whispered that she should never have chosen this profession, that she should have walked a more ordinary road. She knew now that this sight would forever haunt her dreams, etching its visage onto the canvas of her mind.

Yet, even as her own revulsion and despair threatened to consume her, she pressed on, her hand hesitatingly hovering over his blood-soaked shoulder. Beneath her mask, her lips contorted in a grimace of empathy, every fiber of her being engaged in a battle between her empathy and the primal urge to recoil. She willed the hospital to materialize just beyond the horizon, a sanctuary where this grotesque dance of agony would finally find its end.

As the ambulance ground to a temporary halt, she mustered the strength to release the restraints that confined Raymond's stretcher. The respite was short-lived, the screech of tires heralding the resumption of their macabre journey. They were ensnared at a red light, suspended in a moment that felt like an eternity. The weight of her duty, her obligation to ease his suffering, bore down upon her shoulders.

A callous, unbidden thought emerged, raw and unfiltered in its honesty. Raymond Ramirez, a once-vibrant individual, now reduced to a grotesque sight. His face, a shattered mosaic of bone, tissue, and void where an eyeball should reside, revealed the extent of his torment. A sickening realization washed over her—an understanding that the fragments of flesh dangling from his gums were all that remained of his lips, forever silenced. Gauze shrouded the horror, a futile attempt to staunch the bleeding that betrayed the severity of his injuries.

Whispers of the truth had reached her ears—vague and unsettling tales of a lawnmower, of a malevolence so twisted that it defied comprehension. This was not an accident of circumstance; it was a calculated act of sadism. And as she bore witness to the ruin of a human being before her, the question danced across her mind like a phantom: Who could descend into such depths of cruelty?

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"Is this boy a lone perpetrator or is he part of a group, like a cult?" The inquiry, laced with a palpable sense of unease, hung in the air like a toxic cloud, demanding answers that Chief Chambers was reluctant to provide.

With a steadier resolve, Chambers met this question head-on. "So far, we believe he acted alone," his response was firm, an attempt to quell the persistent urge to evade the probing gazes of those who sought more than just facts.

A reporter, the one who had earlier prodded into the depths of his vulnerability, made a move to speak again. His instinct for self-preservation

kicked in, a reflex to evade the questions he feared the most, those that could chip away at his tenuous facade.

As if choreographed, he shifted his gaze, avoiding the eyes of the intrepid journalist like a skilled dance partner maneuvering around a trap. The risk of delving into the abyss of Haley's name, of the memories that gnawed at him from the inside out, was a chasm he dared not traverse.

"His methods seem to vary," yet another reported entered the fray, a ripple in the sea of inquiries. “Does he want his victims to die or does he want them to suffer till they beg for death?”

The words struck a chord within Chambers, resonating with a truth he had yet to acknowledge. The veil of his thoughts lifted, revealing a tantalizing possibility he had overlooked—a possibility that unfurled like a sinister blossom in his mind.

The victims, some dead, others left to writhe in agony, all beseeching for the mercy of death. Haley's image interwove with the morbid tableau—the pain she endured etched into his memory, an unspeakable agony that now demanded his attention.

A shard of self-preservation seized him, reminding him of the uncertainty of his hypothesis. This unspoken connection, this thread that wove through the crimes, was not yet substantiated, a fragile theory balanced on a precipice. Panic, he understood, could set the community ablaze, a wildfire of fear and suspicion.

"I don't know," his voice emerged, a shield of caution that concealed the inkling of insight lurking beneath. It was a measured response, a cautious approach that both acknowledged and concealed the truth simmering beneath the surface. In the tense stillness that followed, Chambers grappled with the chaos within him, an internal struggle that mirrored the chilling mystery he was tasked with unravelling.

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Finally, the ambulance has arrived at Palmira General Hospital's emergency room entrance. Justine wasted no time getting up to release the stretcher from its restraints. The screams and moans from Raymond had become unbearable. While the images and sounds would never leave her mind, they'd leave her presence in a moment.

"Pleath… k-kill me…" Raymond struggled to say. Justine continued working even ask his pleas grew louder. The back doors of the ambulance opened and the ER workers slid out the stretcher. But before it could be taken out fully, Justine fell forward, almost onto Raymond, as the result of a loose thread from her scrubs being caught on the corner of the stretcher.

The workers and she worked hard and fast to free her from it. Her scrubs tightened up around her back and it felt like it would rip right off her with a clean tear from Raymond's weight. But the small thread tore first.

Once she was freed, so was the stretcher, and it launched from the ambulance like a torpedo, taking off down the inclined driveway. The workers gave chase to it, as Raymond, still restrained in it, continued to scream. Whether it was from the agony of his injuries, or the lack of control he had of his movement, was unknown. His stretcher began to roll into the busy street adjacent to Palmyra General.

From his stretcher, the only thing he could see was the sky above him. No stars, as the streetlights kept them out of sight. He heard the breezing by of cars and the roars of horns. But there was nothing he could do. Ever since that lawn mower ripped away his face, from the split-second the blade was right about to hammer onto and into his head, he had been wishing for death. And a public transportation bus granted it as it rammed right into his stretcher, flipping it over, sandwiching him with the rough pavement of the street. It then pushed it along, scrapping him against the road, increasing the jolts of pain to his nervous system. The burning sensations he felt as a result were like those from rope burn but amplified and all over the front of his body. He scraped along roughly like an onion against a cheese grater, until there was no longer enough blood in the body to sustain function and the central nervous system shut down.

Despite the unbearable pain he had suffered, this was not a welcome way to die.

“Who is God’s name did this?” said Justine.

2. WHISPER OF SHADOWS

36 HOURS EARLIER

"Let me tell you about what happened today," Haley Chambers's voice flowed through the latest iPhone with an air of teenage nonchalance.

The device was a symbol of modern opulence, a fitting present for her 15th birthday. Its allure, however, was twofold—not only for the technology it embodied but also for the unspoken wonder of how a public servant like her father could afford such extravagance.

A car was slated for the next year, a looming question mark on their modest income. How Police Chief Lenn Chambers would manage, that remained a puzzle awaiting its solution—likely through financing.

"You know that loser, Ethan?"

"Ethan?" Hannah's voice resonated from the other end, a familiar anchor in the tumult of adolescence.

"Yeah, the Reyes kid."

"Oh yeah. Same old pair of pants, that musty shirt he always wears."

"I caught him staring at me today during lunch."

"No way!"

"Oh, absolutely. I can't wait to get home and shower off this feeling. It's like he was undressing me with his eyes. So gross!"

Haley's tirade continued as she embarked on her journey home from school. It was a routine route, down Monument Road, a path flanked by privacy fences, and a sparsely used road.

As Haley's steps took her past Razor's Ravine, an air of desolation descended, shrouding the wooded area with an unspoken history. Unbeknownst to her, this was where Henry the hermit once resided. His tale was etched in whispers, the scraggly-bearded veteran who found himself the target of derision and torment.

For years, he lived amid squalor, an emblem of societal neglect until a clash with local delinquents led to his arrest. The ravine retained its tainted legacy, its true name obscured by the moniker that had emerged from the echoes of the past.

Haley's thoughts remained fixated on her own world, an insular realm where her father's responsibilities held no sway. Her resentment towards her stepmother, Raven, was a constant refrain, a thread that wove its way into her interactions with her confiEthan, Hannah.

Raven's alluring presence heightened Haley's animosity; it was almost as if her stepmother's attractiveness added a layer of justification to Haley's own disdain. It was Raven who found fault with Haley's makeup choices, her drawn-on eyebrows the battleground of their often-spoken conflict.

Even as she walked on, absorbed in her musings, unbeknownst to her, the shadows concealed a watchful presence. Ethan Reyes, lurking behind the trees, kept pace with her progress. His movements were calculated, each footstep deliberately avoiding the telltale crunch of leaves, a whispering promise of his proximity.

As Haley's conversation continued, Ethan's fascination deepened, his ears attuned to her words. A pause in their dialogue beckoned him, a window of opportunity to act without interruption. He waited, biding his time, his face adorned with a macabre grin as he moved in synchrony with her pace, a predator tracking his prey.

And then, the connection severed. The red symbol on the touch screen marked the end of the conversation. A silence fell, punctuated only by the echo of her words, lingering in the air like a requiem.

BAM!!!!

The world shattered, Haley's reality imploding in an instant of chaos and violence.

Ethan's cruel force propelled Haley downwards, an unstoppable descent that robbed her of control. She tumbled, a pawn of fate, her body careening like dice down a wicked staircase. Each roll was a violent collision with the unforgiving earth, dirt and debris shattering against her face, a cruel curtain that blinded her.

Finally, she collided with the ravine's bottom, the impact jarring her senses as she landed heavily on her left knee. Agony shot through her, a symphony of pain that forced its way into every fiber of her being.

Rubbing her eyes to dispel the dirt, her efforts only seemed to embed it further, transforming her world into a disorienting haze. Struggling to stand, her trembling legs betrayed her, sending her crashing down once more. The throbbing in her knee made the simple act of balance an impossible feat, akin to balancing a fishbowl atop a precarious pencil.

Amidst the disorienting chaos, the rustle of leaves marked his approach. She turned and saw her attacker as a tremor of terror coursing through her as her gaze locked onto his painted visage.

His features were a twisted mosaic of black and white, a grotesque mask more akin to war paint than playful mime attire. In his hand, he clutched a baseball bat, the sight of which sent a shiver of dread racing down her spine.

"Go away!" Her voice trembled, desperation dripping from her words. "Please, go away."

But her pleas evaporated like mist before the wind, met only with his relentless advance. Panic churned within her, desperation fueling her

attempts to flee. Her hands slapped at the earth, a frantic search for purchase to propel her further from the advancing nightmare. Her nails caked with soil, the acryl snapped, a trivial detail that under any other circumstance might have consumed her thoughts.

He closed in, his steps methodical, his intention clear. A terror-fueled energy propelled her, a crawl of survival, her breath ragged and fast. She heard the crackle of leaves beneath his feet, her heart pounding in synchrony with the ominous rhythm.

Then, it happened. His weapon of choice descended with a horrifying thud, a sickening crunch resonating through her body. A lance of agony followed, her spine's protest against the brutal impact leaving her paralyzed. Her back arched involuntarily, her breath stolen, every sensation intensifying into a symphony of pain.

Ethan's grip on reality twisted further, his intention exposed. He seized her hair, each tug stretching the limits of her agony as he dragged her towards an imposing oak tree. The world blurred, her vision swimming in pain and terror.

At the tree's rough embrace, her hair was released, but her reprieve was fleeting. The bark's coolness met her back, a temporary reprieve from the turmoil. But Ethan's intentions were far from benign. He forced her against the gnarled trunk, a puppeteer to her captive agony.

A baseball bat hovered menacingly above her throat, its threat looming like a guillotine's blade. Their eyes locked, a chilling confrontation of predator and prey. His words dripped with cruel mockery, a twisted echo of her earlier conversation.

“How’s this for undressing you?”

An icy realization descended upon her—an epiphany drenched in horror. He knew, he had heard everything.

With sinister determination, he unwound a roll of wire, each loop binding her limbs in cruel submission. Her knees, her elbows, her throat—all

ensnared in a web of cold metal. She lay, a captive of his malevolence, her world reduced to pain and fear.

As a final seal of her suffering, he silenced her with duct tape, the chilling adhesive sealing her cries within. In this moment, bound to the oak's embrace, she was a helpless muse to his malevolent artistry, a canvas of suffering upon which he painted his sadistic desires.

Ethan then proceeded to tear off her shirt, stretching the collar out to her shoulders and ripping it down the center, exposing her chest and bra.

“Feeling undressed enough?”

From his coat's left pocket, Ethan retrieved a bottle of syrup—an innocuous vessel that held the promise of horror. In the midst of her distress, Haley's mind raced through a series of macabre possibilities, each more sinister than the last.

Would he drench her, a perverse fetish akin to some twisted rape fantasy? Or perhaps, an unimaginable act of cannibalism, a gruesome feast amplified by the sticky sweetness? The scenarios spun through her mind, too absurd to fully grasp, yet the mounting dread was undeniable.

As the bottle tipped and its contents cascaded, her torment began. The syrup began its descent, tracing a path from her hairline down her face, a grotesque parody of tears. The viscous substance dripped down her neck, slithering onto her shoulders, and leaving a treacle trail down her chest. Haley remained immobilized, her body now ensnared in an ungodly mixture of syrup and earth.

Eyes clenched shut, her face contorted in an attempt to shield herself from the impending torment, both real and imagined. The syrup's steady flow ceased, replaced by the unsettling quiet of anticipation. Trembling, she peeled her eyes open, gazing at the empty bottle now discarded behind him. The glistening residue clung to her skin, like a sinister mask heralding a sinister masquerade.

Ethan's right pocket yielded another sinister surprise, a handful of tiny bird seeds, each a harbinger of the unknown. As the seeds tumbled between his

fingers, a sinister intention unfurled. The moment his fingers unclenched, the seeds cascaded like malevolent raindrops, adhering to her syrup-drenched flesh.

Her face became a canvas for his deranged artistry, her skin adorned with a macabre mosaic of sugary morsels.

The dance of terror continued, each handful launched with calculated precision, until every syrup-drenched crevice was coated in the crunching embrace of bird seeds. An embodiment of her nightmares, a grotesque merging of the ordinary and the monstrous.

Haley's mind raced, her thoughts a maelstrom of horror as she desperately searched for some semblance of an explanation. Why? What was his intention? The spectrum of possibilities swirled, her mind imprisoned in a suffocating whirlwind of dread.

Yet, in a moment that defied all odds, the tide of horror began to recede. Ethan turned away, retrieving the baseball bat that had stood as both an instrument of terror and a twisted emblem of his power. With deliberate steps, he climbed the ravine's slope, leaving her behind, battered and bound.

Haley's chest heaved, her gasps muffled by the oppressive duct tape. She strained against her binds, her first attempt met with a searing pain as the wire sliced into her flesh. Resignation replaced her futile struggles as she lay, abandoned and immobile.

Amidst her isolation, the sky seemed to beckon. A large crow swooped by, an eerie reminder of her vulnerability. More joined, perching on branches and casting dark shadows over her captivity. Their presence was a disturbing echo, a haunting reminder of a memory that surged from the depths of her past.

In the midst of her suffering, the memory surfaced—a scene of innocence and warmth, shared with her birth mother in a moment forever etched in her heart. The memory painted the branches of her tormentor's chosen tree, a vivid reminder of a time when the world had held promise and kindness.

In that moment she was reminded of a moment she had spent with her birth mother, before a car accident took her away. In this moment she was 7 years old, watching The Wizard of Oz with her mother. It was the scene where Dorothy first meets the Scarecrow and a crow flies onto his shoulder. He tries to shew it away but all to no avail and tells Dorothy, “See, I can’t even scare a crow.”

It was in this moment, her mother pointed something out to her. “You see how Dorothy made everyone around her better?” referring to how she helped the other characters find what they were yearning for. “That’s how you’ll be. People will be better just for knowing you.”

But the crow's presence also mirrored her isolation, each one a representation of her struggles with connection, love, and trust. The branches teemed with crows, an assembly of dark avatars that reinforced her stark solitude.

As they multiplied, so did her introspection. Her relationships, her friendships, each one was laid bare under the weight of her contemplation. Her father, her stepmother, her friends—each bond strained, each connection touched by shadows of doubt and resentment. Even within her own heart, her motives and actions were dissected, revealing a disconcerting truth.

More and more crows descended, blanketing the ground in a sea of black feathers. The world around her seemed to meld with her torment, as if the ravine itself were an extension of her despair. Crows perched, wings folded, their obsidian eyes reflecting the shadows that danced within her mind.

In the midst of her contemplation, an epiphany blossomed—the realization that the darkness within her was not confined to the world around her. It was a mirror reflecting her insecurities, her judgments, and her own struggle for meaning and connection.

And as the crows multiplied, the cacophony of their presence consumed her senses. She was cocooned in their chilling symphony, a captive audience to her own introspection, her own darkness. The world around her faded,

replaced by the relentless gaze of the crows, a reminder of the solitude that haunted her every step.

One of the crows landed upon her shoulder, a sinister sentinel perched in her realm of suffering. Haley recoiled, her instincts primed by fear. The bird's presence was an eerie testament to her vulnerability, a tangible reminder that even the natural world had become complicit in her torment. But then, with an unsettling boldness, the crow leaped from her shoulder onto her head, drawn by the sickly allure of the bird seed clinging to her forehead.

Its beak descended, striking her flesh with an excruciating precision. Each peck was a torturous symphony of pain, a relentless assault that felt like needles piercing her skin. As the bird's beak tore at the surface, her skin became an unwilling canvas for its appetite. And as if sensing the banquet, more crows descended, drawn by the call of their companion. CAW! CAW!

The frenzy erupted, a vortex of wings and beaks, talons and feathers. Haley was enshrouded by a maelstrom of agony, each peck and swipe akin to the relentless lash of a tormenting whip. Their claws raked across her flesh, and their beaks ripped at her like serrated blades.

Amidst the frenzied assault, a cruel fate unfolded. A stray seed found its way into her left eye, a spark that ignited a new crescendo of torment. The crows, relentless in their pursuit, zeroed in on this newfound bounty. Despite her efforts to shield her eye, their pecks grew fiercer, their intent undeniable. The excruciating pain escalated, her eye socket a battlefield of agony.

In a horrifying climax, a crow's beak pierced her pupil, the world tilting into a nightmare of darkness. The creature's merciless yank stole her eye, the connective tissues that held it in place severed in a brutal frenzy. The crow departed, leaving Haley in a realm of searing pain and unfathomable horror.

Time blurred, the cacophony of agony an unending symphony. And as the world faded, her body ravaged and her mind fractured, a single wish lingered—a prayer for the mercy of death.

10 YEARS LATER

“Despite how it would seem,” said Dr. Darrow, “What Ethan did to Haley had nothing to do with revenge.” He was recounting the story of Haley’s brutalization by Ethan to the detective interviewing him. He wondered why the Palmyra Police would be interested in a closed case 13 years old. More specifically, he wondered why this one lady detective, of all people, was here to interview him about it.

A decade later, a clinical room provided the backdrop for a conversation that sought to unravel the enigma of that fateful day. Dr. Darrow spoke, his voice a vessel for a tale that defied understanding. Detective Raven Heart, no longer bound by her previous name, listened with a mixture of curiosity and unease, her connection to the narrative hidden behind layers of history.

The truth was a jagged puzzle, pieces drawn from the darkness that gripped Ethan's mind, entwined with the love that defied comprehension. And as the conversation delved deeper into the psyche of the tormentor, the room seemed to shiver with the weight of untold secrets, bound by the haunting echoes of the past.

“You see, Detective Chambers, what drove h-“

“It’s not Chambers anymore.”

“I’m sorry, what is it?”

“Heart.”

“Well, Detective Heart, he was driven by love.”