

# Jeff The Killer

Every town has its story, right? Centralia Pennsylvania is nothing but a smoking crater since the coal fire. Skidmore Missouri had a whole set of disturbing mysteries that surrounded the place. What makes stories of haunted towns so much fun is that you are so far removed from the fear, you had no place and were no player in the confusion. But that isn't how it works for Rhyolite New York, not for me anyway. Anyone else hearing this story will likely interpret it exactly as the rest of them, something scary to be said around a campfire, forgotten as the smoke wisps away. But I am telling you this in no attempt to scare you, I am telling you this because I have to. I am telling you this because if I don't, I will end up like him.

## Part One: Fingers

2007

“Come oooooonnnnnn.” Tommy said, watching me stare mindlessly into my new phone’s screen, tapping buttons feverishly.

“I can't right now,” I said, keeping my eyes focused on the small glowing screen in front of me, paying no mind to my younger brother pacing in front of him, “I can help with the treehouse next saturday.”

“You've been on that thing all day,” Tommy continued complaining, “your eyes are gonna melt, I can't hold all the boards by myself!”

“This is important right now, plus I hurt my hand last time we did this .” I replied, raising my left hand dramatically, my speech masking my real thoughts on the project. *That thing will never be more than a platform on a branch, begging to fall from a gust of wind.*

“It's not stopping you from talking to *Ella*,” Tommy emphasized the girls name, being only ten, he still was firm in his belief that girls were the most disgusting thing in the entire world. “she probably wants a damn break anyway.”

“Hey, you're not supposed to say that, remember what mom said?”

“Who cares? I'm 10, you were swearing at my age.”

“Fine, if you're so grown up, just go build the thing yourself?”

“FINE THEN!” Tommy said, further annoyed at my seeming inability to see sense. Tommy walked downstairs, grabbed his red coat, put on his shoes and stepped outside into the cold and humid air, heading for the woods beginning in his backyard.

Tommy trudged through the fallen leaves, smelling the fresh scent of autumn and looking around at the trees, growing more barren by the day as winter's chill set in on the woods behind

his house. The walk gave him time to think of how he could build on his own. *How the hell am I supposed to get all this up here by myself?!* He thought to himself as he arrived at the tree house's rope ladder, leading up about twenty feet onto a 8x8 platform with walls surrounding it. All he had to do was start adding the roof, but he needed someone to help bring up the lumber he had brought in his bag. After a moment of consideration, Tommy decided to try and climb up himself, using his bag to transport the heavy wood up the ladder. Taking his first steps onto the wooden rungs, caused the ropes to swing forward, almost knocking him off the ladder. As he continued up each step, his bag seemed to grow heavier and heavier until he realized he wouldn't make it to the top in time, unable to climb down safely or shed the bag in time, Tommy lost his footing and fell from the ladder, taking an eight foot fall and landing on his bag.

The fall was fast and painful, the wood slamming into his back, briefly knocking the wind out of him, and filling his eyes with tears. His vision blurred and his lungs contracted as Tommy took off the bag, gasping and trying to get fresh air back into his body. A few seconds passed and breath returned to him, allowing him to assess himself more easily. The pain in his back came in waves matching his heartbeat, he blinked the tears away, still staring up toward the opening in the treehouse wall. When Tommy's vision cleared, he looked up with more clarity at the treehouse and found a shape in the doorway.

"Holy shit!" He yelled, kicking back from the door momentarily, as he tried to figure out what he was really looking at. Tommy found himself staring into a pair of black, bordered eyes, plain white skin surrounding them, reaching a line of black hair.

"Hello!" The man said, in a high pitched, almost sing-song voice, as if he was a host of some children's tv show, talking to an infant audience. Tommy focused hard on what he could see, the edge of the treehouse floor masking the person's lower face, starting at their nose. *But what nose?* Tommy thought as the person stared back.

"Uh- hello, what are you doing up there?" Tommy replied, his voice shaking.

"Me??" He said, tilting his head a bit to the side. "Where??" He continued and slowly slid backward, hidden now by the wooden panel.

"Wait, what?" Tommy asked, the pain in his back being muted by his confusion, wondering if what he saw was even real. "Hello?" Tommy said, trying to once again get a look at the face he'd seen. *He has to still be up there* Tommy thought to himself, *there's no way he just disappeared.* Tommy stood from the ground and walked hesitantly toward the ladder and began his climb up each wrung, much easier now than it was with the bag. He got closer to the door, listening for any possible human sound, the fear he would normally have of the climb's height being masked by his curiosity of what was inside. Finally, Tommy placed both his hands on the edge of the floor panel. There was a sudden *thwap!* sound from inside the treehouse, causing a wave of shock to roll over Tommy's body. Tommy yanked his left hand back, finding the 4 gripping fingers missing, leaving him with nothing but a hand of stumps. As he looked in horror at the blood pouring down his wrist when the man's face slid forward, looking over the edge and revealing his face completely. The blank flesh was not what Tommy feared, it was rather the

horrifying, rictus grin in a dark crimson color that made up the man's mouth, his lips upturned into a long, thin smile, drool dripping from his bottom lip, pouring onto the floor in front of him.

The pain had yet to reach his brain, but the fearful scream he released seemed to resume time as an explosion of stinging fear overtook Tommy in an instant, a cold bolt raced through his heart as he leaned back, trying to free himself from the man's gaze. His sudden jump back sent him falling from the tree house's highest point, halted by his flailing limbs catching the ladder just a few feet from the dirt. His momentum stopped, but he fell again and hit the ground, his adrenaline carrying him back to his feet quickly. Tommy began to run, but turned as he did, finding the man almost slithering down the ladder and reaching the ground fast. Arms pumping and chest burning, Tommy raced through the trees, trying to put as much distance as possible between him and the monster he had discovered. Tommy could hear footsteps behind him, growing heavier and faster with each passing second, his fear increased as a horribly pale hand grasped his shoulder, gripping him painfully. As Tommy saw the hand, a second slammed into his other shoulder, a small, cruel, serrated knife being held tight among equally grotesque fingers.

“GOTCHAAAAA!!” The man screamed as an evil laugh rose from his throat, filling Tommy’s ears with its horrific sound. The man dropped the hand that held his knife and drove it deep into Tommy’s left leg, terrible pain shooting deep into his body and causing him to pitch forward, rolling onto the ground. Tommy tried to stand as his momentum stopped his roll, but the pain in his leg kept him on the ground. He turned to his back and began pushing himself away from the man as he started to walk toward him, swinging his arms animatedly.

“No... no, please.” Tommy said as the man closed in on him and waved the knife in his fingers, taunting Tommy and kneeling down, bringing the knife's edge to his eye level. Tommy tried with all his energy to struggle away, but the man was unrelenting and placed the knife's edge on the left side of his forehead, and began slowly dragging it across, slicing his flesh and causing a downpour of blood to fall from the cut. The sharp, screaming pain caused a guttural scream to escape Tommy’s mouth, his last vision as the blood poured over his eyes, was of the man laughing wildly, still carving into his head.

“LEVI,” my mom called as I continued wasting the day away, texting Ella to what seemed like some avail. “HAVE YOU SEEN YOUR BROTHER!?” I slid my new phone into my pocket carefully, finally looking up at the room around me and walking down the stairs to find my mother.

“Yeah, he was going to build that treehouse in the woods.”

“And you didn't go with him?” she asked, a surprised look on her face.

“I was...busy.” I replied, realizing my charismatic endeavors wouldn't be a worthy excuse for my mom.

“Oh my god, this girl can wait!” she said, rolling her eyes, “I know this is important to you, especially at this age, but you have to watch out for Tommy.”

“Ok, I'm sorry, what do you want me to do now?”

“Go out and look for him,” she replied, “he can't be far from the treehouse, and bring him home.”

“Fine.” I found my shoes and a jacket and started toward the treeline in my backyard, already bothered by my early departure from my conversation with Ella, though I think she understood, she seemed to get me like that. The trees had thickened enough now that I could see the treehouse in the distance but I didn't see Tommy moving up or down the rope ladder, all it did was swing absently back and forth in the slight breeze. *No matter*. I assumed he's *probably up there anyway*. As I drew nearer to the treehouse, I did not hear nor see any indication that Tommy was inside, what I found instead was his backpack full of the lumber we were supposed to use.

“I knew he wouldn't be able to bring it up there.” I said to myself as I looked around for any other evidence of his presence, finding nothing until about one hundred feet away, the bright red of Tommy's jacket caught my eye. I ran quickly to it and found no person, but instead just his jacket leaning against a pile of wood. I picked up the jacket and examined it, only finding the tag on the bag with emergency return information, but something was different about the tag. It read not what it usually would, instead it displayed seven words, written in some dark red ink.

“IF FOUND PLEASE RETURN TO: *THE TREEHOUSE*” This vexed me completely, dozens of thoughts ran through my mind, *Why would Tommy write this? Is he in his treehouse? How didn't I check that earlier? Why is it written like this?* I headed briskly back to the treehouse, holding his jacket but leaving it as I arrived at the rope ladder and began my ascent. I placed my left hand on the final rung and lifted my other to grab the edge of the floor but my grip was faltered by some cylindrical shapes. I assumed at first that some dowels had been left behind since we had last constructed the walls, but as I drew my hand back and what I grabbed fell from the edge, collided with my face, I froze and sat in horror's purest form. The cold, blood soaked, severed fingers of my brother's hand fell from the treehouse and my hand was slick with blood, I screamed and climbed down the ladder landing on the ground and beginning to roll back and forth as if it would rid me of the terror and sadness that racked my muscles. I stood up, shaking the leaves from my suddenly shivering body and sprinted home, my chest burning as the cold air pumped in and out of my lungs. I arrived at my house in under a minute, at first unable to speak and in fact vomiting from the exertion and visuals of the last few minutes. My mother came running into the front hall with a panicked expression.

“WHAT!? What's going on?!” I began to cry as I tried to articulate that Tommy was dead, or at least missing his fingers and taken god knows where, but how do you even begin to put that into words?

“It's Tommy, he's dead, or he's gone! I don't know!”

“WHAT!? What are you talking about? Levi, what did you find?!” I could hardly choke out the words, opting at first just to show her my reddened hands.

“His fingers.” My mother screamed and ran to grab the phone, dialing 911 and beginning to cry herself. I remember everything after that for a while feeling almost like a dream, one where every move you made was as if you were underwater, and every decision or thought was

hazy and confusing. I couldn't remember anything I did for the next hour it took my father to arrive home. The drive to the police station was long for us, which left me sitting on my bed just staring at the floor, unsure of what to make of anything. When my father finally came home, he quickly ran to my room and confirmed what had happened. I had barely been able to say it the first time, but I struggled through the explanation and watched his expression turn from desolate to fearful understanding.

“Dad? What is it?”

“This hasn't happened in..., oh my god I know who did it.”

“Wait, what? How?”

“Look, before I was chief I was a detective, I worked on catching him the first time he went mad, that was seven years ago.

“Only seven years ago?” I questioned, “I would have remembered if-”

“No one told you, we couldn't help an eight year old understand this,” he said, thinking harder, “the point is, he got away, We searched every single inch of Rhyolite and never found a trace.”

“OK, dad, what actually happened?” I said, desperate to get an insight on who this person actually was.

“His name is Jeffrey Vitale, and I can tell you his story, but god it is graphic.”

“Whatever,” I said shortly, “I need to know who this is.”

## **Part Two: Genesis**

**2000**

“Jeff!” His mother said as she entered his room and threw the curtains open, allowing light to flood into the room, “It's the day!”

“The day of what?” Jeff said, his black hair blocking his eyes, stretching down just far enough to reach his chin.

“It's your first day of school! Well, real school anyway.” Jeff had been homeschooled for all his life, his mother thought that real school was too expensive and taught the same things at different paces, but she had eventually lightened up and as September arrived, so did Jeff's first day of real highschool. Thus Jeff's mother continued her badgering until he rose from his bed and grabbed the first pair of pants and shirt that lay in his drawer. He pulled his shirt on and looked in the mirror at a face that it seemed only his mother loved. When Jeff was very young, he went to work with his father at his job in which he was a blacksmith. While his father was working with the furnace, an unknown internal problem caused it to explode, sending molten metal and fire in every direction. Jeff's father took most of the blow, being right in front of the machine, but Jeff's face was still burned horrifically, causing weeks in the hospital and skin grafts that drained his flesh of color and removed the nose from his face. Since his father had

died from his wounds, Jeff lived with just his mother and grew accustomed to the feeling of his jet black hair brushing against the leathery, smooth texture of his face. This sensation returned as he pulled a dark hoodie over his shirt, and left his room for the front door where his mother waited for him.

“You look great!” She said with a smile.

“Liar.” Jeff said in a low voice.

“Look, I know you're nervous about the burns, but anyone who could hate you for that isn't worth bothering with!”

“Yeah.”

“Do you think you're going to make any new friends?”

“Maybe.” Jeff replied, his face completely still.

“Well, that's the spirit.” Jeff's mother said as they walked to the car and Jeff slid into the passenger seat. The drive to the highschool went quickly and Jeff watched as they made a right turn and the school's logo came into view, a massive bird with its wingspread flew over the team's name: SKYLARKS.

“Ok! Here we are!” Jeff's mother said as they parked in front of the school's front entrance. Jeff watched as scores of kids his age and older walked into the school building, their speech filling the space between him and the building with an heir of isolation.

“Bye mom.” He said, departing from the car and heading into school for the first time. As Jeff walked into the building's entrance he turned toward the door that seemed to be making the most noise. He discovered a room with very tall ceilings and many circular tables with pathways between them. To his right he could see a series of glass guards with steam rising from trays and many loud teenagers stood talking in lines to reach a small keypad. *This must be the cafeteria.* Jeff thought simply as he walked slowly into the room and his eyes lingered around and looked for an empty table, thankfully finding one to his far left. He watched the expressions of every person who saw him on the way there turn from joyful to horrified, some even releasing choked screams as his eyes met theirs. He silently made his way to the table and sat facing the rest of the cafeteria, no one paying him any mind until a shrill sound echoed through the room and everyone stood up in unison. Jeff approached the first person he saw holding still, typing on her phone.

“Excuse me.” He said quietly. She turned and her eyes widened at the sight of Jeff's features but she quickly composed herself and responded.

“Yes? What can I help you with?”

“I don't know where I'm going.”

“Alright, what's your name? I can bring you to your first class.”

“Jeffrey Vitale.”

“Ok, every freshman's first class is the welcome assembly, it's in the auditorium, they give you a schedule there. Follow me.” Jeff absentmindedly followed the girl through winding hallways with forest green lockers facing out from his left all the way. He eventually arrived at a

pair of wooden double doors that were propped open into a massive room with a stage. On the stage stood a blonde woman in a black dress and the rowed seats were filled with kids Jeff's age.

"That's the principal, Mrs. Mantha, she's gonna give a quick speech about school pride or whatever, oh, my name is Mia by the way."

"Thank you for showing me." Jeff said simply and walked slowly into the auditorium and took a seat in the far right section. Jeff watched quietly as the auditorium filled with more kids, and the woman on stage tapped her microphone and began speaking.

"Hello everybody, welcome to Rhyolite highschool!" There were some minor cheers before it seems everyone's friends made fun of them for their excitement at the same time.

"I'm sure you're all very excited to start your first day and get to your first classes, so we'll pass out your schedules now and we'll keep this quick." A group of a few teachers started passing out slips of paper and the teacher seemed to shudder when he handed Jeff his slip. Jeff began reading his schedule as the principal's speech began. Jeff quickly tuned out the microphone's words, only staring down at his paper, trying to memorize where to go. The speech came to a close rather quickly and Jeff stood up, leaving the auditorium and following the signs on the wall to his next class.

The day passed quickly for Jeff, bouncing from class to class thinking little of each of them, just trying to understand how the school day's process worked. It was when fourth period came that things changed for him. This was his lunch period. Jeff came back to the cafeteria and found it about as full as it was that morning, this time with more people eating the food he saw earlier. Jeff slipped into one of the lines and a woman behind a counter slid some of the food onto a white paper tray and Jeff continued down the line until he punched in a code he found on his paper and took the food back to a table. Jeff looked down at the food with no desire to eat it, instead looking around the cafeteria, making brief eye contact with faces who quickly turned away. The only person who didn't avert their gaze in fear or disgust had been Mia, who waved to Jeff and caused him for the first time that day, to smile.

"What the fuck are you looking at?" A voice said behind him. Jeff turned in his seat and found three people standing behind him, each with short, brown hair and tan skin with jerseys on their chests.

"Who are you?" Jeff said naively.

"I'm, Joseph, that's KC and Dylan, and that right there," he said, pointing toward Mia, "is my girlfriend, and you're gonna be real careful who you're looking at like that."

"I wasn't looking at anything, she's my friend."

"Oh ok, well for some reason I don't believe you."

"Keep doubting." Jeff shot back

"Who the fuck do you think you are?" Joseph said and pushed Jeff from his seat. Jeff fell but stood up quickly, opting to leave out the door nearest to him rather than continue to argue. He continued down the hallway and took a left into the mens restroom, hoping the trio he'd just met failed to follow. His hopes were shattered as they all walked in, laughing at him for trying to run.

"Just leave me alone." he said.

“No, I think someone needs to-” Jeff stepped forward and widened his eyes, cutting Joseph off and making him step back in startled surprise. KC and Dylan slightly laughed at his fear, and Jeff smiled again, bringing a rageful expression to Joseph's face. Joseph walked forward and wrapped an arm around Jeff's neck, positioning his body behind Jeff. He then reached the other hand down and pulled out a large pocket knife, releasing the blade from its handle and holding to Jeff's mouth.

“Not so fucking funny now is it? Where's your smile now?”

“Joseph! Holy shit.” KC said, a shocked expression on his face.

“I swear to god, you mess with me again, and I'll carve you a new-” Jeff felt a sudden pressure on his spine, shoving him forward. Joseph released the arm around Jeff's neck, but did not drop his knife, sending Jeff's face straight into it, and the edge cut both corners of his mouth. Jeff kept falling forward, though Joseph had noticed what happened and he pulled the knife back, still slicing into his face and his head hit the tiled floor. It seemed Jeff's brain had protected him from the immense stinging pain of the cut, and in his confusion after his head's collision he could hear slurred words come from above him.

“My fucking god, you killed him!”

“He's not dead, just hurt.”

“Well eventually he'll die! And then were fucked!”

“Not quite.” Jeff could feel Joseph's hand slide into his pocket and drop the now closed knife into it, he then leaned down and spoke to him.

“This was all you, you hear me? You say a word and it's over for you.” Jeff could now hear the sink running, presumably to wash the blood from their hands, as more pooled at their feet. The footsteps hurried out and Jeff's vision tunneled, leaving him in a state of limbo until he heard a scream that sent dozens running into the bathroom. Jeff was moved to an ambulance and placed on a sedative, sending him into warm, confused darkness.

As days passed in the hospital, Jeff had little more to do than stare at the blank white ceiling and sleep, differing layers and textures of bandages wrapped his face across his time there. As the doctors entered the room he could hear them whispering words of removing his bandages for the final time and this is exactly what they went on to do. The bandages moved from his face and cold air hit the newly tender flesh of his lower face, Jeff could feel the placement of the stitches as he opened his mouth to any degree.

“Ok Jeff,” his mother said, standing at the end of his bed, “how do you feel?”

“Let me see my face.” He replied simply, in a very scratchy and high voice, “why do I-” but Jeff needed not ask how his voice had been destroyed.

“It seems that during the attack, you screamed at such volume and in such amounts that you have developed some form of Spasmodic dysphonia, it's a condition that causes your voice to change.” The doctor explained as Jeff stared blankly up.

“Let me see my face.” Jeff repeated

“Jeff, are you sure you want to-”



“Let me see my face.” He said with mild force. The doctors went to the side of the room and picked up a hand held mirror from the white desk and brought it over to him. The handle slid into his hand and Jeff turned the mirror down to see his face, and in that moment, everything went silent. His mouth seemed to find no end on his face, reaching almost the base of his ears on both sides, the ragged cuts from the knife made it seem as if it tried to stop multiple times, but it pushed on to form a long, crescent moon of crimson. He could see the stitches in uniform vertical spaces, providing slight lines of pain in each movement. Jeff’s thoughts turned to that of static, his mind seemed to turn to white noise as he stared into his own lifeless eyes. Jeff had always thought that the real reason his mother had kept him from school and the world at large was because of his face, he thought she was ashamed of him.

But now with his new horrendous features he knew with certainty, *It won't just be her that's ashamed of me.* Jeff thought harder about what it was the world actually wanted from him, it couldn't have been complete shelter, some people would never have been civil with him on the one day of school he'd gone to. It also couldn't be complete candor, when he tried to fight his way out, his face had been defiled and with it, his only semblance of a good life. It seemed the world wanted nothing but for him to be horrifying, and as his mind slipped further away from him, it seemed to Jeff that that is exactly what he would be.

“Excellent work doctor, I’m feeling better already.” he said in his new, high pitched voice as his lips spread into a real smile, stretching the stitches at his mouth painfully.

“Well, I- I'm glad to hear it!” The doctor stuttered out, surprised by Jeff’s response, “You will be cleared from the hospital in just a few hours, a lot of paperworks gotta get done, you know?”

“Sure.” Jeff said, slowly placing the mirror on his chest and looking back up at the ceiling. The next few hours passed like no time at all for Jeff, his mind being placated by how he would bring retribution to the people who hurt him. These thoughts danced back and forth in his mind until he felt his mothers hand on his shoulder and he rose from the hospital bed, retrieving his clothes from the front in a clear plastic bag and walking into the clouded light of the tenth day since his injury.

“Are you excited to go home Jeff?” His mother asked, a twinge of fear in her tone.

“Like you wouldn't believe.”

“That's great! Also, since we didn't expect you to go to school anymore-”

“I want to go,” Jeff said quickly, “let me go.”

“Um, I can contact the principal and work something out.”

“Thank you.” The drive home was slow and traffic filled, Jeff spent his time just staring out his window, watching the world around him, seeing it in a whole different light, one he finally liked. When he arrived home, Jeff did little more than walk through the hallway to his room and sit up on his bed, staring at the wall. To an onlooker he may be looking at nothing, just the blank white wall that sat to the left of his bed, but Jeff saw things no one could imagine, things that he couldn't wait to show to the people who deserved it.

When the sun of the next day rose, Jeff awoke and stood from his bed with no fatigue in his system, he quickly walked to his dresser and pulled on a pair of black pants and the black hoodie he had brought home from the hospital. He slid his hands into the pockets and a feeling of delight crossed over him, he could still feel the knife's cool handle inside. He walked downstairs and found his mother slinging her bag over her shoulder and preparing to wake him up.

“Oh Jeff! You're up already.”

“Can we go?”

“Yes, come on out to the car.” The drive to school passed just as the first did, the same scenery and school logo, even the same weather fell over the building. But Jeff's emotions were anything but the same, elation filled his veins as his mother pulled up next to the front, where he got out and walked out the door before she could even say goodbye. Jeff had arrived a bit earlier that day and found that a larger amount of tables than normal were devoid of students. Jeff sat at the table in the dead middle of the room, just where Joseph, KC and Dylan sat each morning. As more and more students filtered in through the double doors, Jeff's excitement grew and it seemed to explode as Joseph, KC and Dylan finally walked through the doors and saw him hunched over, sitting silently at their table.

“Hey dude, move out of the-” Joseph cut himself off at his shock that Jeff had come back, “wow, hey Jeff.” He continued, a disgusting smile spreading across his face. Jeff looked up at him, squinting and smiling, shock and hesitation flickered across the faces of KC and Dylan.

“Hello Joseph!” Jeff said in an almost sing-song tone of voice.

“Good god, you're worse than before.” he said laughing.

“Whose fault is that?” Jeff asked, his eyes and smile unwavering.

“Doesn't matter now, does it?” Joseph said as he grabbed the back of Jeff's chair and slid it around to a different table where he violently shoved him into it.

“Fuck off our table, and keep your eyes off Mia, or you won't come back.” He kicked the chair a final time and sat back down with KC and Dylan. Jeff laughed quietly to himself, looking briefly over his shoulder at the trio as the cafeteria began to fill up more. He leaned his head back down, and waited until the bell rang. He jetted off to the exit closest to the turf field down about a hundred yards. He watched a few different gym classes go out and play soccer games until fifth period came and no classes were outside. It seemed this was where the trio went on the first day, to play soccer and smoke weed outside the school's view.

Jeff leaned against a wall and watched the trio playing soccer a distance onto the turf field, some shirtless to differentiate teams. The bell screamed behind him and he slid behind the doorframes edge as they got closer to their ditched bags. As they arrived at their bags, Jeff could see KC wearing nothing but an open black jacket, the teeth of the zipper on both sides dark against his bare flesh. Jeff began hearing their conversation as they walked past him, and he began to silently follow after 50 feet was between them.

“You have the lighter don't you?”

“Yeah, it's the torch I got the other day.”

“Dude, if you get caught with that you're gonna get suspended.”

“Oh ok, so when did you become a bitch?” Dylan said and the whole group laughed, sending echoes around the walls. They seemed to arrive at a point and dropped their bags again, pulling out small brown rolls of paper and a small black cylinder from the pocket of KC. Jeff reached into his pocket and found the grip of the knife, some amount of pain ran through the stitches on his face. He walked closer and heard the torch being flicked on and off a few times and he gripped the knife harder.

“Recognize this?” He said and as Dylan turned first, Jeff raised his arm and brought the knife's blade to Dylan's shoulder, stabbing it almost halfway down the blade. He ripped it out quickly as Dylan screamed and swung an open hand for Jeff's face, but Jeff twirled the knife in his hand and faced the point for Dylan's palm, allowing the two to connect and sending the newly bloodied silver of the knife straight out the back of his hand. As blood poured from the wound, Joseph and KC seemed to collect themselves and rush toward Jeff.

Dylan fell to the ground, trying to wrap his shirt around the wound to no avail, as he did, Jeff ripped the knife out again and kicked Joseph back hard, knocking him entirely off his feet. KC wrapped his fingers around the torch to strengthen the punches he threw, but each one missed as Jeff swung the knife and put a thin slice in his arm. KC shrieked and dropped the lighter, his other hand shooting to the wound to compress it. Jeff bent over and picked up the lighter, his finger found the button to ignite the flame and he drove the knife into KC's leg, bringing him to the ground. Jeff pressed the button on the lighter and a tall blue flame sprang from its end. Jeff bent down and began slowly running the flame across the open zipper of KC's jacket laughing as he did, welding the metal to his skin and causing horrible screams to fill the air. Jeff continued slicing at his arms as he reached the bottom of the jacket and he dropped the lighter, standing and lowering down at Joseph, frozen from shock at what he had seen.

KC rose from the ground and against all odds, squared up to fight Jeff. Jeff turned in surprise as KC's bloodied arms continued swinging punches until Jeff lunged forward and grabbed his jacket with both hands, keeping the knife pinned between his fingers. KC's eyes widened as Jeff yanked his arms backward violently, ripping the melded metal from KC's flesh and tearing the skin from his chest. The gory sight that was his body sprayed blood onto Jeff's face as KC collapsed. Jeff turned back to Joseph but found no one there, for he had taken off running down the grass, about twenty feet away from him and moving fast. Jeff began sprinting after him and gained ground on him quickly, he came up on Joseph's left side and brought the knife up to neck level. He slashed it to the left, making contact with his neck and sending a spurt of maroon into the air. Joseph fell to the ground rolling, clutching his neck as blood leaked from between his fingers. Jeff slowed down and walked over to him, kneeling down to look him in the eye. Jeff dropped the knife and slowly reached his hands up to his mouth, his thumbs curled at the edges of his mouth and he began pulling through each stitch on his mouth, oozing blood from each tear. He finally reached the ends of the original carving and he began laughing at Joseph as he recoiled in terror and disgust.

“What did you- What are you?” Joseph forced out as he choked and gargled on the blood in his mouth.

“I’ve been asking myself that same question.” Jeff said through each laughing breath. He picked the knife back up and held it in both hands, raising it above his head and bringing it down over and over into the chest of Joseph until finally, he screamed no more. Jeff rose from the ground and looked with joy at the corpses of KC and Joseph, his eyes scanned the grass for Dylan and found him dragging himself uselessly across the green, leaving a small trail of blood behind him. Jeff walked simply after him, as Dylan turned his head he screamed in fear and began to pull harder and faster giving Jeff a small laugh at how hard he was trying. Jeff arrived at Dylan and kneeled down, his knee on his back. Dylan cried one final time before Jeff grabbed his hair and pulled back, aiming his face to point at the sky. Jeff brought the knife down into his eyes and mouth repeatedly until the rhythmic breaths Jeff could feel on his knee faded completely.

“Finally.” Jeff said, wiping each side of the blade on the cuff of his hoodie's left sleeve. Jeff slid the knife back into his pocket and walked past each body, grinning at the gore. He continued on, knowing they would be found soon, maybe an hour before the sirens would wail and the cameras would be combed over. Jeff slid his hands into his pockets as the blood soaked into his hoodie. He kept on walking until he arrived at the edge of the forest about two miles from the school. As the screams of sirens sang some distance away from him, Jeff turned away and walked into the trees.

## **Part Three: Slashings**

**2013**

A long time had passed since my father told me Jeff’s story, since then it had been something of a curse in my mind. I had done a fair bit of digging ever since I had gotten a job at the police station a little over 2 years ago, since my father was the chief, he’d been able to get me a job running the call center in the station. Now whenever someone called for an emergency, I would pick up the phone and guide them through it, sending whatever first responder they needed. My new connections with the police force gave me access to all they had about Jeff that they could legally show me. This included his original file, sketches and even some of the photos of the original Rhyolite murders. In spite of all my efforts however, I never did find him, nor did he kill again in the time I've spent looking for him. The only people who knew of my ambition were the closest people in my life. This was only my mother, father, some of his colleagues and Ella.

I had continued talking to her since Tommy’s murder, and it seems this made us grow closer, to the point where we had been dating for nearly four years. She’d helped me a great deal over my time searching for Jeff or any trace of him, so much so that she tried to help me figure

out where he had been to the extent of searching the treehouse with me. She meant a lot to me, and I knew she would see this through to the end as long as I kept going.

The stress of the job and all I had poured into finding Jeff was definitely getting to me by now. *It will all be worth it, as long as I can find that monster.* Each call seemed to be more intense than the last. One from a girl whose mother had tried to kill her, one from a younger man, having just been attacked in the street. I always helped as much as I could, staying on the phone until a car arrived, making sure they didn't just sit in waiting and suffering. But my mind was plagued by Jeff, those cold, evil eyes I could only make contact with through sketches. I was suddenly ripped from my thoughts and propelled back into reality as a phone calls ring pierced the air. I quickly reached for it and put the phone to my ear, hearing heavy breathing.

“Rhyolite police, what's your emergency?” I robotically asked.

“HELP!” the voice of a young boy rang out, “I'm- I'm hurt!”

“OK, what happened?” I responded.

“I don't- where they are, but,” the voice paused, “oh god I can't find them! I lost them!”

“Ok, take a deep breath,” I said, trying to reason with them, “if you are bleeding, it's important to stop it fast, do you have anything to tie a tourniquet with? A shoelace might work.”

“All I have near me is a rope ladder, would that be fine?”

“Oh, ok, that should be fine.” I said, perplexed by the caller's response. “What did you lose? Can you remember?”

“I remember but- I'm just afraid that,” they said, dancing around the conclusion, “I think they're in- my treehouse.” the voice said with sudden clarity. I sat bolt upright. Sudden flashes of memories rose in my mind, making me pause in my speech.

“I, uh- ok sorry, are you by the treehouse now?”

“Well. I was scared, I tried to run, but it didn't work.” the voice said, no longer shaking at all. I was filled with an intense dread rising in my stomach, a putrid taste filled my mouth as horrible silence came over the phone. I continued speaking, no longer with the tone of concern, but with one of anticipation.

“What did you lose?”

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“My fingers.”

A small, high pitched snicker could be heard over the phone as it was painfully confirmed in my mind who I was really speaking to. My eyes flicked down to the phone and my wrist slid across the desk, my middle finger landing on the button used to track calls, generally for victims who couldn't disclose their location, or couldn't stay on the phone. But now the button took on a whole new purpose, finally bringing me closer to my brother's killer, and I desperately needed to keep him on the phone.

“I've been waiting 6 years for you, you hid for so long.”

“But you stopped seeking, you're not very good at this game, Tommy was better.” A strain came over my throat as more sorrow filled my voice.

“What have you- where have you been?” I stuttered.

“I was on a playdate with Tommy, we were playing so many games, but we’re playing a new one, it's called tag.” Jeff’s voice paused as my eyes blurred with tears, “and guess what? You're it, **LEVI**.”

*Click*

I didn't cry very often. I just rarely reached that level of emotion in so much time that had passed. But as Jeff hung up that phone, tears of fear and sadness rained from my eyes. I dropped the phone in my hand and slowly reached for my own cell phone, dialing Ella’s number and hearing ring after ring until she finally picked up.

“Hey Levi, what's up?”

“Ella- Ella, I.” I began choking on the words.

“Oh my god, are you alright?” she said, worry overcoming her tone.

“I’m ok, but *he* called me, he knows my name, he knows my number, he found me.”

“Holy shit, ok, stay at the police station, I'm coming.” The next twenty minutes were some of the longest I’d ever felt. I did nothing but place my head in my arms and leaned on the desk, crying and thinking of how I could ever find a safe future in Rhyolite. Finally, I heard Ella’s voice out front and I stood up and walked out to the desk.

“Thank god, ok, tell me what happened again.” she said.

“He called me, he said my name, he pretended to be Tommy.”

“Alright, hold on, this isn't actually a terrible thing.”

“What? What the hell are you talking about?” I questioned, shocked.

“If he could reach this police station, he has to still be here, now we know he's in Rhyolite, and even though he said your name, that means he's close.”

“Yeah,” I said mildly angry, “close because we cant fucking see him.”

“You’re right, we have to find something new, something they haven't shown us.” Ella and I spent a few minutes thinking, until something finally occurred to me.

“Is anyone from his life still alive? Maybe a friend of his stayed in Rhyolite.”

“That's true, someone must have, you've got his file still, right?”

“Yeah, I saved some pictures on my phone.” I began to sift through photo after photo until I finally arrived at the file of Jeffrey Vitale and the flash of his face gave me brief pause as I zoomed in on each row of words.

CONTACT: VANESSA VITALE FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION. I slid my finger along the category and found her phone number, showing it to Ella. She keyed it into her phone and held it to her ear, and someone picked up almost immediately.

“Hello?” Ella said, though I was unable to hear the other caller beside the garbled speech of her phone's speaker.

“Hi, yes my name is Ella Steele, me and...” she trailed off, looking at me with wide eyes, looking for a story to tell, “my partner, are journalists and we’d like to speak to you about your

son, Jeff.” I was in complete surprise at how well she had crafted an excuse from nothing and her expression showed it seemed to be working.

“Yes, we’d be happy to pay, thank you, and tomorrow works for us too. Alright, thank you so much, take care.”

“Hell yeah, we got her, what time tomorrow?”

“Three.”

“Ok, sounds perfect.” We parted ways at that point and the rest of my day passed slowly, that evil face appearing behind my eyelids and delivering a skull splitting headache to me which remained until the next morning. By 2 PM I had taken some medicine and grabbed a clipboard to appear more like a journalist who knew what the hell they were doing. I met with Ella and followed my car's GPS to a house about fifteen minutes from the police station. We arrived outside a bit early but we doubted it would matter. I got out of the car and Ella followed quickly, cutting ahead of me to knock on the door and pray for a response.

“Hello? Mrs. Vitale?” Ella said, swinging the door knocker into the wood, “we're the journalists, and we'd like to speak to you.” After thirty seconds of waiting, the door cracked open, kept at just that much by a chain lock that stretched between the door and wall.

“You're not the first.” she said simply.

“Thank you for answering, we're here to talk to you about-”

“Jeff, yeah, I know. Every single one of you is here to talk about my fucking kid, lets get this over with.” I was startled by how bitter her tone was. I suppose in retrospect, that all these people coming to speak to a woman about her psychotic son must be damaging. Ella and I walked through the door after it shut and we heard the chain lock slide across its track and the door swung back open. We entered the house and found it in a state of filth. Dust floated visibly in the air and coated every flat surface. The floor had a disgustingly slick texture as we found our way to the living room and handed Jeff’s mother her payment. We sat down on two leather chairs facing her, where she sat with a package of cigarettes on the small table next to her.

“What are your questions?”

“First, we'd like to ask how Jeff was when he was younger. Did he show any signs of committing the acts he committed?”

“No, he was always quiet, he never really liked people, but it wasn't his fault. At least not at first.”

“What changed?”

“He killed three people.” she spat back scornfully.

“Well yes, but was there ever a clear moment?”

“Maybe when he saw his face after he got attacked, but I can't be sure.” It was around this time I began writing scribbles in the small pad I brought, faking writing notes at first until she said something I didn't know.

“Can you think of any reason Jeff had to choose who he killed? Especially since he has been confirmed to kill again in recent years.”

“Oh bullshit it's been confirmed, this town will latch onto anything,” she said, “but whatever, he picked them because they mutilated him, they were the ones who cut his face on his first day of school.” Jeff’s mother reached over and grabbed a cigarette from the table, flicking a lighter that lay next to it.

“Could his method of murder be predicted? Did he ever show interest in knives beforehand?”

“No, and besides, who gives a shit? Their dead just the same.” Ella continued rattling off questions until finally, I lost patience to ask the one it seemed she expected the most.

“Why did he do it? Why did he jump from victim to killer?” A long, powerful pause overcame the room, Ella looked at me in shock at how frank I had been and Jeff’s mother looked down at first to think and then to avert my eyes.

“You guys are all the same.” She said finally. “Every one of you who comes and asks these questions.”

“I'm sorry to-”

“Why are you always looking for an answer? As if knowing why he did it would make it any better. I don't want an answer, I know I'm meant to carry this for the rest of my life, and I can't stand to look into it any longer, now leave me alone.” I sat for one moment longer to think of how tragic her words really were, these weren't the words of just an exhausted human. These were the words of a mother who couldn't save her child, and had to watch the world demonize him. I stood up and Ella swiftly followed, thanking Jeff’s mother for her time and we exited the house.

“Ok, I have to go home, but take all the notes and please let me know what happens or if you need help.”

“Of course, thank you so much.” I replied, taking all the notes Ella had. As the sun set over Rhyolite's horizon, I obsessively looked over everything I had and everything I remembered, trying to make a new connection. But I came up dry, even as the moon rose in the sky and darkness set around my seemingly pointless notes. I couldn't stay in that house any longer, I had to move, I had to go somewhere, my emotions of anger and sadness were too strong to contain with lack of footsteps. I slid a pocket knife into the inner pocket of my jacket as I always did when leaving my home. I walked through the still darkening sky until I eventually arrived at the highschool, abandoned by Rhyolite.

It had been left to rot since the population had grown much larger than the original school could support, a larger union highschool was to be merged with the building, but the project never took off and the school sat in filth and the memory it housed of Jeff. I walked through the quiet hallways until I reached the auditorium, filled with dirt and spray painted symbols along the walls. I stood atop the stage, screaming from its center.

“WHY DID YOU CHOOSE HIM!?!” I yelled, tears overcoming my speech, choking my angered cries into silence. The following seconds were torture, waiting for a response I knew wouldn't come, but against all odds, a horrible, scratchy, high pitched voice echoed through the auditorium.



“Because you weren't there.”

“What?” I said, looking around for the source of the sound, discovering the speakers echoing my tragedy.

“Imagine how much faster he could have run, if you took his hand.” The voice continued. “Imagine how much longer he might have lived, if you just walked along”

“That wasn't my fault.” I said, trying to push away the vomit I felt rising in my chest.

“Maybe not, but you better hurry home, Ella misses you.” The voice of Jeff tantalized as maniacal, screeching laughter filled the auditorium and I ran from the building.

I ran faster in that moment than I ever had before or since. I slammed through the heavy metal door, still sprinting. I arrived at my car door in seconds, putting the key in the ignition and whipping it out of the parking lot. My tires screeched against the cement as I raced through the streets to Ella's house. I grabbed my phone from my pocket and dialed Ella's number, not expecting a response but just to quell my anxiety. To my complete shock, after just a few rings somebody answered.

“ELLA?!” I yelled, still speeding down the road, only a mile from her house. “ELLA SAY SOMETHING!!” Instead of her voice however, a shrill, cackling laughter came ringing through the speaker, sending cold anger and fear through my body.

“FUCK YOU!” I screamed and threw my phone hard against my dashboard, sending cracks through the phone's screen. Ella's house came into view and I was still driving at over forty miles an hour when I slammed to a stop, getting out of the car and tearing toward her front door which I found ajar.

“ELLA PLEASE!” I kept on, “WHERE ARE YOU?!” I raced up the stairs to where I remembered her room being and crashed through the door.

To this day I wish I hadn't gone to her house. Obviously I did, really how couldn't I? But what I found of my girlfriend was something which humanity was not supposed to see, because I still can't understand it. When I opened the door, I found Ella pinned to the wall opposite the entrance, kitchen knives were stabbed through her hands and into the wall, hanging her about a foot off the ground. Her back faced me, but I at first didn't even see the damage to her body because I was taken aback by the mass amount of blood spread across the wall around her. Handprints, smiley faces and even my name were etched into the wall in a sickly, childish writing. The fingerpainted gore had begun to dry and brown on the wall, emitting an abhorrent smell. My eyes danced across the violence until they finally landed on Ella's back. Her shirt had been removed, exposing the bare flesh of her back and the message Jeff had carved into it.

“*Love, Tommy.*” I began to choke and cry harder than before, I reached for my phone to call the police before I realized no one would answer, that was supposed to be me. I was supposed to help the people who were afraid, who needed help, but now who would they look to if I faltered in my resolve to find him? I walked back out to my car slowly, thoughts racing in my mind of what to do next. I found my phone on the floor of my car, I clicked the home button and opened my father's contact to call him.

“Dad?” I said, my voice hoarse from the screams.

“Levi? Are you ok, what's going on?”

“Jeff found Ella, he’s back, he’s really back now.”

“What the fuck? Are you safe?”

“Yes, but I know where he is, at least right now, and I can't let this go.”

“Levi, we can't just go out and kill-”

“Why not?” I said, tearing up again, “who's gonna stop me from finally killing him?”

“It's not about-”

“DAD.” I cut him off again, “I can't stand to live another day knowing he lives among us, so many people say nothing happens in this town, and now we have to make that dream come true. I'll find him with, or without you.” My dad seemed to think hard about the decision he eventually came to, I could hear him walk through the front door as it slammed shut behind him, the slight wind muffling his final words over the phone.

“You’re right, this town needs to heal, we're gonna find him.” I could hear him slam the door of his police cruiser and the air around him went silent.

I texted my father where to meet me and I drove back to the highschool, and by the time I arrived, there were two police cars parked with lights still flickering, two cops not including my father stood in waiting. I pulled up next to them and exited the car, walking toward them.

“This is it? I said, surprised by the low number of cops.

“More are on the way, I just got everyone at the station.”

“Fine then, he has to be inside,” I said, “someone would have seen him if he left again, he’s inside, and we cant let him get away again.”

“Were just gonna go in there and shoot him?” One of the officers piped up.

“Yes, we sure are.” I replied.

“Ok, sounds good, I guess.”

“He’s gonna die tonight, but he must know we’re here by now,” I explained, “he is fast, he is strong and he is smart, so stay vigilant, even when we take him, on his way out, he’s going to smash the gates of hell wide open.” Everyone seemed to understand and we all began walking to the door I had left from earlier, propping it open and each sliding silently inside. I walked quietly with the rest of the police and the two other officers signaled my father and they walked down to the left, heading for the library with their guns drawn.

My father and I continued on straight, heading for the gymnasium. When we arrived, we found nothing but a large, dirty and echoing room. We walked through it to take a shortcut to the auditorium and performing arts wing of the school, but as we reached the center, an enormous crash could be heard from where we came, despite its distance. Me and my father immediately turned and sprinted back through the hallway, finding our way to the library by following the screams that echoed from the room. We discovered the source underneath a bookshelf, just as we heard a new set of cops run in through the front door, heading the other direction, for the arts side. Me and my father crouched and found blood spilling out from underneath the massive bookshelf, one arm and hand still visible, twitching and scratching around for anything to grab, finding instead the cold, smooth ground. We could spend no more than two minutes there,

attempting to lift the shelf from the officers before penetrating gunshots echoed through the hallway, as well as screaming and laughing on the other side of the school. It occurred to me then that Jeff could have been here for years, and must know every shortcut to reach any position.

“Levi, go, find Jeff, I'll try to help these guys out and call more officers.”

“Dad, I can't just leave-”

“Go, trust me, you're gonna get him.” I took a final look at my father and turned, running toward the chaos with no clear plan. I arrived at the room with the tortured screams just as Jeff was finishing the officer off. I burst through the door and found Jeff holding the officer's head in a paper trimmer, slamming the blade down over and over, spraying a red mist all around him. The air around me seemed to silence completely, despite the screams and impacts as I finally came face to face with my brother's killer and Rhyolites demon. He turned to look at me, and I finally met the eyes of Jeffrey Vitale, the man who took and ruined so many lives, and now it had to be his turn.

“JEFF!” I yelled, and began running past the desks. Jeff pointed and laughed, quickly turning and running through another door and to a staircase. He slammed the door behind him, giving him an additional few seconds of escape as I threw it open and skipped stairs in 3's to reach him. When I reached the top of the stairs, I faced a long hallway where at the end was another staircase that I saw my father running up. I heard another cop running up the stairs behind me, I suppose having entered the school some time ago. I walked slowly, looking in all directions, for Jeff had disappeared.

“I think he's in here!” My father said, opening a door on the other side of the hall.

“NO! Dad, he couldn't have-” I yelled as my dad ripped the door open and a swinging rope came flying from the doorway, my father raising his hand to protect his face, dropping his gun and falling to the ground. I knew Jeff was close, he had to be just ten steps away, but I couldn't leave my father to bleed, even if it's what he would have wanted. I ran from my position as the cop behind me got to the last flight of stairs. I slid to my knees as I arrived at my father on the ground, finding him pressurizing the large cut on his wrist.

“Dad! How the hell did-” I cut myself off after looking over at the door, seeing a large knife hanging from a still swinging bungee cord, Jeff had set traps.

“I'm fine, but I gotta go out to my car and get my first aid kit, do your best without me, godspeed Levi.” I watched my dad stand up on shaking legs and make his way down the stairs. I turned back to find the other cop looking around the space near him, calling out to me soon after.

“Have you seen him? I think he's-” Before he could finish, Jeff sprang out from a door on the left and grabbed the cops legs, pulling them up and sending him over the stairs banister, a sickening crashing crunch could be heard below. Jeff looked over the banister and laughed, the shrill and painful sound echoing into my ears as he turned and began dead sprinting toward me. I was without a weapon and he was closing in fast. I stood and ran down the stairs next to me, jumping down nearly entire flights until I reached the bottom and landed painfully on my foot. My momentum kept me rolling down the hallway, away from the exit in the other direction. I

heard Jeff coming and stood up fast, only able to run another thirty feet before he found the bottom of the stairs and started to slow.

I stood in strong, solitary fear as Jeff began to stalk toward me, snickering and smiling as he twirled the knife he had finally drawn in his hand. Just as I began to come back to my senses, the microphone from a police car pierced the silence that surrounded us.

“Hey Jeff.” the voice rang out. Jeff stopped walking and his hand froze, his wide eyes flicked to his right, in the direction of the voice.

“It's been kind of impressive, you know, all the ones you got over the years, but I might be the only one who thinks so.” He continued. “Levi was talking to your mom just the other day, she was let down by you, let me tell ya.” Jeff stopped looking at me entirely and dropped his hand, he turned to the voice and stood still.

“God, the laughs they must have had about you, I feel like I missed out, you would know a whole lot about that, now wouldn't you?” Jeff began to pant and scream, some kind of primordial fury filling his veins as he began tearing towards the exit door closest to finding that voice. I raced down the hallway after him, though he reached the door first by about 10 seconds and as I exited the building, I found him just entering the parking lot, stabbing at the windows of each empty police car and then running to the open concrete, whipping his head wildly around, looking for the car that spoke. I ran closer and now stood on the edge of the parking lot where I began looking for my dad's car. Behind Jeff, headlights exploded from the darkness, casting a strong shadow onto the ground in front of Jeff as he turned his head to see the lights. The engine roared to life and the car sped straight at Jeff, colliding with his body and throwing it over the hood. He continued driving and slammed on the breaks with force, the momentum sending him flying onto the cement, rolling far and painfully. I watched in amazement as my dad spun the car around and drove a bit ahead, past Jeff who was already standing back up. I had a strike of memory and reached into my jacket's inner pocket, my fingers wrapping around the switchblade and I slid the switch along its track, shooting the blade out. It was at that moment that I knew that one of us was going to die, by one hand or another, and I knew it wasn't going to be me. I started running at him just as my dad got out of his car and fired a final bullet at Jeff, hitting him in the shin and sending him back to the ground.

The gun had run completely out of bullets. My father clicked the trigger uselessly a few more times before grabbing its end in his right hand. Jeff reached forward with his knife in hand, swinging for my dad's throat. My dad, anticipating the strike, jumped back and threw the gun hard at Jeff's head. The chunk of metal struck him just above the eye, the weight causing him to stagger slightly, as a small trail of blood trickled from the impact point. I made it to Jeff just before he would have sprinted at my father and I tackled him to the side as my father ran back to his car. I pushed off of Jeff before he could stab me and he stood up, we began to slowly circle each other and Jeff began to smile.

“Well done Levi!” He said, lunging forth and swinging his knife at my chest, giving me just a second to slide back. “You have it all figured out, don't you? Ella sure seemed to.” He began to laugh but I took this moment of pause and leapt forward, bringing the tip of my knife

into his chest. Jeff screamed and jumped back, a liquid stain growing out from the wound. Jeff looked down and began to laugh again, spinning the knife in his hand, putting it in a stabbing position. He ran at me and brought the blade above his head, just as he got to me, I ducked and swung my knife into his side, putting another gash in him. Jeff turned to face me and screamed horribly, straight in my face.

“WHAT ARE YOU NOW?!” I yelled, out of the corner of my eye, I could see my father running back, holding a bright yellow taser. “I WAITED SIX YEARS YOU, YOU SON OF A BITCH! BUT YOUR JUST A CHILD!!” Jeff started again with his horrible, animalistic laughter but he was cut short as my father arrived and positioned the taser.

“LEVI, STEP BACK!” He said. Jeff’s eyes went wide and he turned his head to my father, just as he released the electric chains into Jeff’s torso, causing him to seize and collapse. My dad quickly jumped forward and put a knee on his chest, only able to grab his arms in front of his body to put him in handcuffs, causing him to flail and begin screaming as he was dragged toward the police car.

“DAD!” I said, getting him to turn as he started standing, “why don't you just kill him?”

“I can't do that, it's too easy for him.” My father said, I had a sudden burst of pride and respect for my dad as he refused to bring the man out of this world, rather letting him suffer for all the lives he ruined. My pride was quickly complimented by triumph as finally, my father literally threw Jeff into the car and slammed the door, finally caging Rhyolite’s evil. I could hear violent slamming and thrashing within the car's backseat, a consistent *beat beat beat*.

“So what do we do now?” I asked as my dad returned from the car.

“He’ll end up on trial, but he’ll take the insanity plea for sure,” my dad said as we turned briefly away from the car, lest the increasingly piercing screams remind us anymore of what we've lost.

“What's important is that he's finally done, he can't-" my fathers sentence was cut off as we both noticed a sudden lack of screaming or laughing coming from inside the police car, we both turned back to see nothing noticeably wrong, from the angle we were at, the car looked completely normal. As we got closer, we discovered the back door of the car ajar, Jeff having silently slipped away.

“DAD WHAT THE FUCK?!” I screamed as I looked through the window and saw the handcuffs wrapped around the seat's headrest. They looked different, something was wrong with them, and when my dad unlocked the door and I ripped it open, I saw what it was. Hanging from the handcuffs was the flesh of Jeff’s hands. The slamming I had heard was his process of degloving and ripping his hands from the cuffs to escape the car, there was so much blood.

“What? What's wrong with the-” my father was stunned into silence once again, stillness fell over the parking lot, there was no one we could speak to but each other, matter it not if we had anything to say.

“If he was degloved, theres no chance he can survive that, it will get all infected and his nerves are fucked, theres no way he could live through it.” I considered what my dad said and looked through a logical lens. Maybe it was unlikely that Jeff would live, but he'd survived the

burns on his face, he'd survived the smile carving and now what's to say he couldn't survive this? It wasn't likely, but even if he didn't live in the end, Jeff still won. It occurred to me at that moment that this is always what he wanted, he wanted to give me a lifetime of guilt and sadness, only coming back to finish me when I went looking for him. But as I stood staring at the viscera that remained of my life's goal, it hurt me even more that Jeff could never finish his plan, but rather leaving me a lifetime of uncertainty. My failure to end his life would be my legacy, and as some form of joy in that knowledge would overtake him until he finally did die, sorrow would fill my tomb when the reaper came for me.

“Yeah.” I finally said. “He couldn't have lived.”