

Normally, Dwayne Lombach, warden of the Florida State Prison, would be at home, in bed. But tonight, on All Hollow's Eve, Dwayne was at work. For some reason, the Governor of the great state of Florida moved the execution of convicted serial murderer and cannibal, Anton Ramirez, up by three hours, to 03:05 am and Warden Lombach wanted to personally oversee the execution. In the main control center, he made a note to himself to get third shift supervision that actually gave a shit. If the circumstances were any different, tonight, he'd be cracking skulls.

"Look, I know that it's either very late or very early for some of you. We'll be through this soon and then we can go about our lives." Corrections Officer Guthrie was the leader of this parade tonight. Try as they might, they had no explanation as to why the Governor had moved up Ramirez's execution to three in the morning on Halloween.

"If any of you are feeling faint, ill, nervous, or if you feel as if you cannot do this, now is the time to say it. If you fuck up his last walk, I will immediately proceed to take a giant dump on you." He immediately turned his gaze to the priest standing to his left.

"I'm sorry about swearing, Father."

The priest nodded his forgiveness.

C.O. Guthrie continued their briefing. "I do not care how you feel about him personally. If you cannot conduct yourself with professionalism and decorum, now is the time to say so."

The other corrections officers remained silent.

They stood to either side of his cell door as he finished his last meal: A meatball parmesan sub, bacon cheese waffle fries, six buffalo wings (drummies only, no flats) with celery sticks and bleu cheese dip, a diet root beer; and for dessert, a Hostess chocolate cupcake. All in all, this guy's last day on the planet was not too bad. The last meal of what was probably his favorite foods and a conjugal visit earlier in the evening with that smoking hot trailer trash girl who has been visiting him like clockwork for the past three years worked out to make a good day, considering the circumstances.

It was the darndest thing. During every one of their visits, whenever a guard would glance in at random times to make sure she wasn't giving him a weapon, she was bare assed and sitting on his face. Guthrie figured that was how Ramirez got his kicks. It takes all sorts, after all . . .

Ramirez's voice broke the silence. "Excuse me . . . Mr. See Oh . . ." Guthrie hated the way Ramirez said that. He was mocking him. "I'm done eating. I think I'd like to go for a walk now."

The news crews from virtually every outlet had been camped around the prison since midnight. The church groups and thrill-seekers arrived not soon after. Home-made signs declared both pleas for mercy from the Governor and condemnations of Ramirez.

"Capital Punishment is Still Murder."

"You Reap What You Sow!"

“Only God Can Judge.”

“Anton Ramirez Burns In Hell.”

As the procession walked down the dark hallway from the Death Watch towards the chamber of execution, the only sound was that of the priest delivering the last rites.

“ . . . may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up . . . ”

That was when Guthrie heard the snap. It wasn't so much a snap that it was a shatter. Glass shatters, but the sound wasn't light and resonating like broken glass. The sound reminded him of a long-ago high school experiment involving liquid nitrogen and a metal bar.

Voices of alarm and confusion rose up behind him followed by a scream of pain.

“Oh, shit,” was Guthrie's first thought. “Ramirez slipped his cuffs.” He spun, freeing his weapon from its holster, bringing it to bear.

The last thing Guthrie saw in his life were the hands of Anton Ramirez, extending towards his face, handcuffs still about his wrists with the remnants of chain dangling from them.

Ramirez hadn't slipped his cuffs. He snapped them.

Guthrie didn't have time for another thought as Ramirez crushed his skull in both hands.

Rather than the flickering of lights that was rumored to happen at prisons when the condemned were electrocuted, an alarm went up. Minutes later the news crews were greeted by a jeep from the prison as guards were ordering all present to immediately leave the premises as Florida State had experienced a containment breach.

Warden Lombach immediately wanted to know why an alarm had gone up. He turned to Nelson, demanding an explanation.

Nelson, who had been monitoring the main control panel, looked up at Lombach, already on the verge of panic.

“Someone opened all doors and gates on every level.”

Lombach’s face went from pale to deep red in less than a second.

Prescient, Nelson answered him before he could ask. “I just tried closing them. Somebody’s overridden them.”

At that moment, Lombach remembered Ramirez. How could he forget him? That degenerate was the reason why he was here in the middle of the night.

Looking at the security monitors revealed inmates moving into the prison from their cells. Some of them fought against the corrections officers in either a bid for escape or just for the sake of indulging their violent urges. Others approached the officers, asking for an explanation as to why they’d been released.

Please let Ramirez be dead, was Lombach's silent plea. He glanced from monitor to monitor, starting with Death Watch and following the projected path of the last walk.

There, in a hallway, surrounded by unmoving bodies, was Ramirez. He was sitting cross-legged with one of the bodies sprawled before him, a bloody mess.

Ramirez was chewing on what may have been a human liver. He looked up at the camera as the lens spun, zooming in on him, and waved. Lombach and Nelson watched as Ramirez then lifted Guthrie's pistol, aimed, and the feed from that camera went static.

The priest cowered against the wall of the tunnel, terrified at having watched Ramirez slaughter seven correction officers in a matter of moments before indulging his unholy appetite; but otherwise, he was unharmed.

Ramirez dropped what was left of C.O. Kinecki's liver and rose, standing over the priest.

The priest began to recite the Lord's Prayer.

Ramirez sighed heavily. "Look, Padre . . . I'm not mad at you. You were just here, trying to get me right with God. So, rather than kill you, I want to make a trade."

Father Murphy, taken aback by Ramirez's words, looked to him.

Ramirez continued now that he had his attention. "You look to be about my size and I am not a fan of the new underwear they gave me earlier. It's . . . heavy and digs in at the thigh. You see what I'm getting at?"

Father Murphy nodded.

“I’ll trade you. My jumper and these plastic briefs for your clothes. After that, consider me in your debt and expect me to never call on you.”

Father Murphy was undressing before Ramirez finished speaking.

Dawn was close. Anton waded through the swamp towards the place where he would meet Sophia. She promised him that come morning, they would never be apart again.

There she was, just as she had promised him. As they kissed, she ran her hands about his face. The pain of what she was doing had been quite noticeable. But it was tempered by the feeling of her body against his.

Soon, their consummation had been completed in the brackish water of the swamp. The alligators hissed and roared but never ventured close to them. Sophia and Anton got dressed. Sophia wore what she had on previously, while Anton dressed in new clothes that she had brought him.

As they walked towards her Jeep, neither of them noticed that a man, Baron Samedi, had been sitting on a large stump, watching them.