

Phantom Pain

by
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INT. THE ORANGE LANTERN BAR - NIGHT

A live band belts out a rock anthem. Thirty-somethings and buzzed locals dance and bob their heads.

SAM WRIGHT (early 30s), the carelessly sexy front man, grabs the microphone and lets his golden voice soar. The crowd cheers him on.

AT THE BAR - LATER

Sam drinks with BRENDAN (20s), the guitarist, toned, youthful, and jumpy. CHERRY (late 30s), long hair and short top, hangs on Sam's arm and smiles at him.

SAM

Auto-tune ruined the industry. Now these no-talent chicks can sound like Christina Aguilera.

BRENDAN

They're famous, though. That counts for something.

CHERRY

Sam's still mad at Milli Vanilli for lip-synching.

SAM

If you can't sing, don't. For me, it's about music. My whole life is music. These kids just want to be famous, do drugs, have sex.

BRENDAN

Amen, brother. Sign me up.

SAM

No way. I'm done chasing that.

Brendan shrugs and clinks Sam's bottle. Cherry touches Sam's face and turns him towards her.

CHERRY

Are you really happy here?

SAM

What? Scraping together a living singing cover tunes in bars? You couldn't drag me away from this.

Cherry throws her arms around his neck and loses him in a kiss.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Sam sits across from his DOCTOR, stunned.

DOCTOR

I know it sounds bleak. But with this surgery, your outlook is extremely good.

SAM

I don't even smoke.

DOCTOR

We don't understand a lot about why cancer strikes. But at this stage, we have a good chance of getting it all, and you will have a long, healthy life ahead of you.

SAM

How is this gonna affect my voice?

The doctor takes a small breath. His eyes flicker to his desk. Sam puts his face in his hands.

INT. APARTMENT

Cherry sits next to Brendan. She strokes his knee.

CHERRY

Do they have to operate?

SAM

I'm gonna do it. I want to live.

CHERRY

Please tell me what you're feeling.

SAM

I don't have anything to say.

They sit in miserable silence.

INT. OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Sam looks up into the faces of masked doctors. Steely. An oxygen mask comes down over his face.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sam stares into the mirror. A bandage over his throat.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Sam stares out the window. Brendan and Cherry hover nearby.

Sam writes with a marker on a small whiteboard: GO.

Cherry sobs. Brendan puts an arm around her, and they leave.

INT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

Sam carries a breakfast tray out of the cafeteria.

He accidentally bumps into RAYMOND (50s), who spills a folder full of paperwork onto the ground.

RAYMOND

Whoops. My bad. I got it. Sorry.

Both of Raymond's arms end in steel hooks. Despite this, he deftly scoops the papers into the folder.

Raymond starts to walk away, then points a hook at Sam.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

I know you. I got your CD.

Sam shakes his head: *not likely*.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Yeah. I saw you at the Orange Lantern. Your band's Hightower. You guys were old school, so I bought your album. No originals, but good covers. Right?

Sam shrugs.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, obviously you ain't up for talking. Guess you had surgery? Your voice recovering?

Sam glares at the floor.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Oh. Oh, I'm sorry man. That sucks.

Silence.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

You mind if I show you something?

INT. PROSTHETICS WING - MORNING

Raymond leads Sam into a room marked OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY. A NURSE and THERAPIST stop chatting to smile and wave at him.

RAYMOND

Hello, ladies. I got a guest for therapy.

He pulls a harness off his back, removing the hooks from his arms, freeing the bare stumps.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Right after my accident, I got real bad phantom pains. Felt like my hands were on fire. I didn't even have hands no more. It was in my mind. We tried a whole lot of things before we found something that worked.

The therapist brings Raymond a stringless guitar. She hangs the strap around his neck.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Let's do some Elvis today, Gladys.

(to Sam)

I used to really wail on this one.

The therapist puts a CD in a player and pushes PLAY. "You Ain't Nothing But A Hound Dog" plays. She cranks the volume.

Raymond closes his eyes and begins to strum the imaginary strings with imaginary hands, in time to the song.

Sam watches, horrified. Then he turns and flees the room.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Hey man!

But Sam is gone.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Sam stares at his ceiling. He shuts his eyes tight.

He starts to mutter to himself, without sound.

He tries to talk. No sound. He starts to yell. A hoarse whisper, at best. He screams, silently.

Finally, he weeps.

INT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - MORNING

Sam trudges towards the door, backpack in hand. He looks out of the door into the world. Hesitates.

He looks down the hall. Raymond greets several friends, hugging, laughing. Every friend is missing arms.

INT. PROSTHETICS WING - DAY

Sam slinks down the hallway. The therapy room door is open.

A band is set up: drums, bass, keyboards. The players stare at Sam. None of them have the arms to use the instruments.

RAYMOND

Come on in, Sam. Glad you came.

Sam walks over to him. Raymond hands him a CD. The band is The Hightower; Sam's image adorns the front.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

Your name was in the insert. Give that to Gladys.

Sam does, sullenly. She puts the CD in the player. Raymond touches Sam's chest with his stump.

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

You feel music in your heart, in your guts, in your whole body.
(points to Sam's throat)
All that was in here was technique.

Raymond nods. The therapist hits play.

The music begins. The musicians leap to life, smiling, absorbed in the music, playing with imaginary hands.

Sam sits and listens to his own voice.

He starts to mouth the words, half-heartedly at first. Then he closes his eyes, and his knees begin to bounce.

He opens his eyes and sees the nurse and therapist watching on, a clapping, smiling audience. Tears spring to Sam's eyes. He is suddenly singing, heart and soul, voice supplied by the CD.

He sings, rocking his head, tears streaming from his eyes, lost in the music.

FADE TO BLACK.