The boy hung around in the alley at the backside of a restaurant, waiting for some crumbs to be thrown at him. They never arrived. Tired and famished, he walked towards the dumpster at the far corner. If he was lucky he might get something decent to eat. He opened the lid and got the shock of his life!

A decaying body lay amidst the garbage, in the worst state than even its surroundings. It was beyond recognition, all red and black patches with no sign of the skin. It looked as if the person was skinned alive and left to rot in there. A pungent malodour hung in the air. The boy was rooted in his spot, both fascinated and terrified at his discovery. The body kept decomposing even as he looked. The boy raced towards the backdoor of the restaurant.

The hotel owner ran to the dumpster, the urchin tagging along with him. He peeked into the container and said calmly, “You played me, didn’t you?” and smacked the boy hard on his face. Reeling under the impact, the boy looked inside. The body was gone.

Detective Carrow banged his desk in frustration. His cases had never been this hard. A few murders, gang hits and money embezzlement cases were all he had handled. This case baffled him. First the few missing personnel, their bodies never found. Then reports of some dead bodies by wild-eyed witnesses who claimed to have seen the murders happening but the team of OCME (office of chief medical examiner) never found a thread of evidence at the crime scene. The latest murder report came a few hours ago. As usual the team found nothing. Carrow got up. He needed to see this place. So many people cannot lie. There has to be some link.

Carrow drove to the crime scene. This too like previous cases was an alleyway. No cameras in this neighborhood. It meant no footage of the act. He interviewed the old lady who had raised the alarm.

“I opened the backdoor to take out the trash. And I saw a man disappear round the corner. Then I saw the body lying in the dirt. It was melting before my eyes!” the lady shuddered.

“Can you describe the man you saw run away, ma’am?” Carrow asked politely.
“Not really. No... it was dark. I am sure of one thing though. The man had trouble walking. And his right hand was a stump.”

Puzzled by the onslaught of strange events, Carrow got into his car. On reaching his precinct he bumped into Dr. Archer, the local medical examiner.

“Hello doctor! Anything new about our vanishing cases?”

“No evidence as usual, no DNA, no fingerprints. Guy’s a pro. But I have one interesting thing though.”

“What is it?”

“Do you know anything about necrotizing fasciitis?”

“Flesh-eating disease? What’s that got to do with this?”

“Everything, I think. The body melts because of that. Plus, I got traces of the flesh-eating bacteria from the crime scene. But it doesn’t explain how the whole body disappears. The bacteria releases toxin that destroy skin fat and muscle tissue. Not bones.”

Dr. Archer continued to throw medical jargon at him. Carrow shook his head. He had seen a few vic/415 ms of flesh eating disease. A painful and fatal disease. Most die because they realize too late. Those who survive lose their body parts by amputa/g415 on. Wait! The old woman said that the alleged murderer’s right hand was a stump. This is at least a clue. He downloaded all the vic/g415 ms’ informa/g415 on. All were employees of a specific facility. A hospital named New York City Community Hospital. There were five of them — two doctors, three nurses. Carrow got up. His next stop would be where these people had worked.

At the hospital he talked with the Chief Surgeon, Dr. Kane who was worried about the situ/a/g415 4n. “You say you got reports but never found the bodies!” the doctor asked, incredulous.

Carrow said, “With all due respect, doctor, we are doing what we can but we need more informa/g415 on. Can you suggest how these people had anything in common?”

“I have no idea, detectiv/a/g415 4. You are on your own. Now you must excuse me, I have sick people to worry about.”

Cursing under his breath, he walked to the lobby and asked the receptionist the same question. Surprisingly, he got a different answer.

“I can recall that long ago, there was a situation at the hospital, a kind of infection that a few patients contracted while under recovery. It was hushed up. The chief would kill me if he finds out that I told you.” The receptionist said timidly.

Carrow said, “I would do a lot more if you don’t. Interference with homicide investigation is a crime, you know.”

“Okay okay, so one of the patients was a man named Dr. Maximus Bone. Strange guy. And his wife. They had an accident and were admitted here. The wife contracted the infection first and could not be saved. Bone was next and his hand and a leg had to be amputated. He threatened all of us and before leaving, he promised that he would have his revenge on the ones directly responsible. But that was more than a decade ago.”

“Good Lord! Was the infection by any case the flesh-eating disease?”

“Yeah. Now that you asked. I remember.”

Carrow rushed to the precinct. He said to his partner, “Robbie, give me all you’ve got on a Dr. Maximus Bone. He is our man.”

The address listed on the database was in a remote area just outside of the city, an old warehouse and a dilapidated mansion. Carrow knocked on the door. “NYPD! Open up!” He shouted. There was no answer. His partner, Robbie, kicked the door. It gave away. A dark empty hallway loomed in front of them. It was covered with littered newspapers, magazines and books. Carrow stepped forward and felt some shuffling behind him. Before he could take out his gun, he got a sharp pain in his head and everything went black.

When he opened his eyes, he saw that he was tied up in a chair. He looked around and saw his partner tied in a chair beside him. They were held captive in a room filled with apparatuses, microscopes, petri dishes and many other things Carrow didn’t know about. It was a laboratory. At the far end of the room he saw someone shuffling through the shelves busily. Bone. Carrow tried to free himself from the chair.

“Not a chance.” Robbie murmured beside him. He was awake too.

Bone turned around and walked towards them slowly. The man had a limp and his right hand was a stump. This was their murderer, all right. As the man came near, Carrow saw that Bones’ flesh-eating disease affected his face too. He looked terrible with his gaunt face carved into a gaping grimace. His lips were drawn back, showing the sharp teeth.
Learned from nature. The flesh-eating bacteria, mainly Group

He said, “May be. I don’t care anymore. I am a genius. I have
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stump.”

“A beauty aren’t I?” Maximus Bone laughed. “What brings you here, Detective?”

Carrow answered, “I am investigating the recent murders of the doctors of the New York City Community Hospital. And I have reason to believe that you are the culprit. The police will be here in a few minutes. Why the hell are you doing this?”

Bone looked at him and said, “You know what happened, Detective. Those people killed my wife and destroyed my career and my life! I am avenging the pain I have gone through! Why will they get a chance to live their life while I can’t? I can’t let them.”

“But your job is done. Your revenge is complete. All of them are dead.” Said Robbie all of a sudden. Good job Carrow thought, keep him talking.

“NO! What I have done is just the start. The murders are ingenious. There’s not a thread of evidence you can pin against me. I have worked hard all these years trying to find a way to make people disappear. And I have succeeded. As soon as my revenge is complete I will sell my formula to the highest bidder. There’s a demand for this sort of thing in bio-medical warfare. Lots of money to be earned, Detectives. I will live the rest of my life in peace and luxury. I deserve to!”

“You are sick!” said Robbie, disgusted. But Bone laughed. He said, “May be. I don’t care anymore. I am a genius. I have learned from nature. The flesh-eating bacteria, mainly Group

A Streptococcus, disintegrate the skin fat and muscle tissues by releasing toxins. They are found in plenty of places. As a microbiologist I know where to get them. I altered the DNA and cultured them to destroy even the bones and all organic products. I have spent fourteen years to get it right. And my hard work has paid. A fellow scientist would have understood all these but you won’t unless you see the demonstration. Let me show you how I do it.”

“Noo!” Carrow shouted trying to loosen the ropes tying his hands. Bone took out a syringe filled with a greenish fluid. And then he stabbed the needle into Robbie’s arm. Robbie cried out in pain and looked at Carrow with resignation.

“Now watch!” said Bone eagerly.

Within seconds Robbie’s body began to disintegrate. As Carrow watched his friend with horror, Bone only laughed. His laughter combined with Robbie’s cries of agony made Carrow mad with anger. He looked at his dying friend’s eyes, the eyes were filled with pain, trying to tell him something. And then the eyes went blank. The skin peeled off, revealing the flesh which vanished revealing the bones which disappeared soon after. The chair was empty save the gun Robbie used to carry.

“Gone in 30 seconds!” Bones clapped with glee.

Carrow looked at the chair for some time and then something just snapped inside his head. With superhuman strength he tore the ropes binding his hands and flung the chair at the disfigured man. Bone fell on the ground, the syringe rolled away from his hand. Carrow picked it up.

“Don’t kill me Detective! Please! I promise I wont hurt you, just let me go...” Carrow didn’t hear his pleadings. He was blind with rage. He could only see Robbie’s pleading eyes all over again. He yanked Bone up and growled, “Where are your journals?” Bone pointed with shaking fingers.

Without losing time Carrow injected the fluid in Bone’s arm and threw him on the ground. “Now watch yourself die!” he said. Then he ran to the table where Bone had pointed and took out the journals and accompanying papers. Bone was a madman. He had become deranged after his wife died. Revenge was not enough for him. The scientist had also planned to sell his invention to the warmongers outside. Carrow couldn’t let that happen. It was a painful way to kill a human being. No one should be tortured that way! Not on his watch! Robbie would have wanted that. Carrow would have wanted that. Carrow couldn’t let him die for nothing. Just remembering his partner brought tears to his eyes.

Carrow lighted a match and threw it on the papers and the journals. Both Bone’s body and his notes crumbled before his eyes and finally there was nothing left. Carrow collected Robbie’s gun and rushed out of the place as fast as he could.

The next week Carrow quit his job. He couldn’t work homicide anymore. Murders disgusted him. He couldn’t forget Robbie’s dying seconds. The case was closed as there was no evidence. His closest colleagues guessed what had happened but never mentioned a word to Carrow and he was thankful for that. Carrow didn’t have family and he spent his money and the rest of his life creating awareness among people about Necrotizing Fasciitis, the flesh-eating disease and helped the victims overcome the trauma and cope with their lives so that they don’t end up like Dr. Maximus Bone.