

IN MEMORIAM

.....

For this piece, I sought to take obituaries or articles discussing suicides, homicides, and murders to fabricate my own versions of them, in the hopes of preserving the victims' memories and, consequently, shining their perpetrators in a new light. The scenes portrayed are as graphic and gruesome as they are depicted in the articles I have collected, perhaps even more so due to the dramatic nature of fiction. My intent is to put the reader in the moment of the crime, so that they might witness the gradual, inevitable downfall of man as he tries to cope with reality.

I do not use the real names of the individuals involved, nor do I pretend to know the victims or offenders personally. This is purely fiction, inspired by truly horrific events.

.....

DITCHED

The city streams past my window in a blur, its multi-colored lights swirling into a cocktail. Past the trees, far beyond, it looks beautiful. But inside lies monsters, demons. They twist and snake their way around street corners, claws shining with fresh blood. They sniff you out at night if you're caught walkin' in their turf. With eyes like cats, they will purr and croon. You won't know them from Jesus, 'til you start to inch away. The fear helps to revive them, to bring out the evil that courses through their veins. The beasts back you into alley corners, debate amongst themselves. Which one will do the honors? Maybe all of them will. And you are just stuck there, petrified, wishin' you were livin' in any other city but this one.

Tears start to flow down my cheeks, which I rub away with my shirtsleeve. I can't help it. My fire has been distinguished; I'm all used up. I'm a shell of a woman, especially now that I no longer harbor this child.

I look over to the seat next to me, where the dark babe lies. The girl is as crumpled as a paper sack. She's ballin', too. I can't stand it. We don't need two cry-babies up in here. I shush her with my mouth, laying a hand upon her ruddy blanket. The stench of the car and the baby runs me up the wall. It's God-awful.

She goes on and on with her cryin', her face half submerged by water. I grit my teeth, ripping away my comforting hand and placing it instead upon my own belly. It feels deflated like an old balloon. The breath of life has gone out of me, leaving me hollow as a rotted tree. Behind me on the seat there's muck and blood. The remains of my body, of her sustenance. The sharp cut of gore creates a thick shroud that I cannot escape, even with the windows open. The goddamn wind makes baby cry even more. I shut 'em.

She squeals, and she squeals. Like a roasted pig. She hasn't stopped since she came into the world. Agitated, I run my palm up and down my pock-marked face. The car swerves as I rummage through my purse to find a solitary cigarette next to its friend, the lighter. My shaky hands are somehow able to light the thing between my lips. I take a slow, deliberate breath. The toxin fills every crease of me. I savor the nicotine, but only for an instant. My nerves arouse again as the baby coughs in the haze.

"Goddamnit!" I scream, smacking the lighter against the steering wheel in anger. Does nothing. I stare, blinded by tears, at the thing in my hands. The paper burns and burns, relentless. It seems to be whispering. Or maybe that's the wind.

I look over at baby girl, so ugly in her nakedness; so hideous. Her nose is all big and gummy, her head oval-shaped. She looks like the monsters that created her. But she squeals like me. My insides squirm uncomfortably.

I jerk the car to the side of the road as passersby honk and toot. Breathing heavily, I place my head in my hands, trying, trying to get myself straight. But there's only one thing to do. I know it. She knows it.

I unstrap the seatbelt wordlessly and lunge out of the car, flicking the cig. In the trunk is a solitary gas can. It's almost empty, but it'll do. I take it and go to the passenger-side door, peering in. The girl is still at it, eyes all puckered into red mounds. I catch a brief glimpse of myself in the glass. It's a woman who looks drawn and tired lookin' back at me. My lips form a hard line.

I wrench the door open and snatch up the babe in my free hand, holding her by the blanket. I do not sit and think. I do not. I just take her and pour what's left of that gasoline on the child, rendering her more and more afraid. Poor girl don't know it ain't her fault.

Setting the bundle on the ground carefully, I take up the lighter from my pocket, feeling its weight. The plastic is slick, but maybe that's my hands.

I reach down and close my eyes.

I reach down and flip the switch.

I feel warmth on my fingers. I feel it catch.

A breath of relief.

"Hey!"

The voice startles me so much I drop the lighter on the ground, near the pile, which is now strangely silent. She must want this to happen, too.

"Hey, whacha doin' there?"

I face a man, white as ash. His car is pulled up behind him. SUV, with a woman in it. Her eyes are wide with curiosity, door half open.

"Nothin'," I say, wiping my wet hands on my jeans. My brain is ticking so hard, I think he can hear it.

"What is that?" the man asks, coming closer, pointing to—

"Nothin'," I repeat. "My dog just shit in my car, that's all. I'm burnin' it."

He looks skeptical, glancing into the car, 'til the thing starts to shriek. This time, it is worse. It is a howling, not like anything a human could make. The thing is a devil after all, just like its father, whoever that was.

“Rick,” the woman cries, clambering out of the car, “Rick, that’s a *baby*. Look, the *cord*.”

Sure enough, the umbilical trails from the thing like a tail. It makes me feel weak, knowing it came out of me. I look up at the two of them, who stand horrified and sickened. Their eyes blame me. I won’t have that.

I turn and dash down the side of the road, as fast as my feet can take me. My body resists the abrupt physical activity, but I push and push. I have to get away from the guilt. I have to get away from the eyes.

They think it was me.

Suddenly, a huge force pushes against my back and I pitch forward, face slamming into cement. Strong, swift hands gnaw at my arms and pin them down to my sides. He’s sitting *on me*.

“No!” I shout, voice breaking. The tears come back with vengeance, running through my eyes down my dusty, tortured face. I kick and revolt but there is no give. The man is crying too. I can feel him shaking.

I twist my head around. The woman is anxiously batting at the flames with her coat, mumbling and sobbing. I watch the inferno rise and fall over the babe and feel something much different than guilt or shame.

I feel released.

Finally.

ROOKIE

Linda never liked snow.

The night is a shade, a blanket on the whole town. Outside, the whiteness of the slush provides some respite from the darkness. I stare at the swing set as it moves back and forth in the icy wind, casting shadows over that smooth surface.

My cup of bourbon is empty between my hands. Its effects are muted by the sufficient excitement and fear I feel throbbing in my chest. My heart muscles contract and detract in a frenzied symphony. The music of the living. It has led me through many hard times, many rough battles, and it has brought me here to my ultimate sacrifice. My city needed me once; so did my family. But I suppose, as it goes in life, your worth diminishes with every day that passes by.

I am a spent man, so easily left behind.

I place the glass delicately inside the sink and walk out of the kitchen I knew so well. The back door remains unlocked. Turning corners, I enter my office. It's a dinky thing in the back of the house, more of a storage space than a work space. I kept all of my treasured belongings here. Comics, movies, trophies, medals. I used to hang my service pistol beside the door. My hook has long since been empty. Most of the stuff, as I look around, is boxed up haphazardly and stacked like building blocks. I twist my mouth in disgust.

She touched my things.

I go over to an old vintage desk and tug on one of the drawers, revealing a .40-caliber Glock. It feels so virginal in my hands. The clip is full, as it should be in case of emergency. Its weight throws me a little off balance, but I'm not expecting much resistance.

Tick-tick-tick...

The clock in the hallway marches on through the night. I can feel my heart thudding to its beat. It's almost time.

You would think I was a rookie, set loose on his first call. I chuckle a little at my own anxiety, closing the door tight to the office. I move very silently down the hall, just like I was trained to do, checking corners unnecessarily. My feet make absolutely no noise on the soft carpet, though every step I take sounds like an avalanche to my sensitive ears. Taking a nice, deep breath, I continue further into the house.

In the complete darkness, my feet bump into the long table sitting in the middle of the room. I forget myself and laugh at my uneasiness. This is my home. I shouldn't be so afraid. As I push it back into place, a frame topples forward onto the wood, causing more ruckus. I curse inwardly, listening for any collateral.

Quietly, I snatch the frame and put it upright, noticing my wife's face beaming back at me. The picture was taken a couple months after we had gotten married. I had just passed certification to join the police force, to be an NYPD officer. In the excitement of those first months, we had decided to move closer to New York City, just a couple of young kids in love. Here, Linda was sitting on the porch of our new home, wearing dirty overalls and a naïve smile. Her face is practically breaking the glass with joy.

I grit my teeth and place the frame facedown again.

Dumb bitch.

I carry on the path to destruction, insistent on completing my duty. Fresh adrenaline pumps through my veins, urging me onward in the form of rage. I try to play it off, to think

about something other than the woman in the picture, but in the end it only makes sense to remember.

That bitch did this to us.

To me.

And now she'll regret it.

Creeping slowly, I near the bedroom at the furthest end of the hall. With a flick, the safety is switched off. I twist my hand around the knob and push gently on the wood door, hoping that it will not creak. Inside are my girls, each in their own beds. One is curled up tight into a ball, almost as if she's cold. The other lie spread-eagle over the mattress without a care in the world, saliva trailing her chin. I gaze at them for a little while, taking in their loveliness. Standing at the side of Lauren's bed, I push back a lock of brown hair from her brow. She doesn't feel it. I hope she doesn't feel this either.

BANG.

The sound rips through the air and I can't help but jump. The element of surprise is over. Lindsay springs up in her bed, uncurling herself from the tight ball she had succumbed to moments before. In her lungs builds an alarming scream, I feel it. Taking careful aim, I shoot again.

BANG.

She falls backward onto the bed, just where she was before. Behind her is a mess of gore splattered against the wallpaper, which I can't stand to look at directly. My girls are now gone.

My girls...

An invisible force suddenly crushes me from the inside, tugging on my lungs. I can't breathe. Their twisted forms swim in my mottled vision, and I stumble in dizziness. But a singular thought struggles through the grief and washes over me.

I cannot falter now.

I place the rest of Lindsay's body inside her covers, situating her like a sleeping doll. Around her head a red halo forms. My fingers bring her eyelids down very skillfully, as I have done numerous times before. But this time is different. I am saying goodbye to a daughter.

Time ticks on.

I retreat back to the door, taking one last glance at my kin, who look almost at peace again. My lips spread into a contented smile, knowing they will never again be without their father.

"I'll see you soon," I whisper, closing the door shut. My mind is going haywire with nerves, but I take a second to steady my breathing. *In, out. In, out.* This will only happen if I am calm and collected.

I head into my bedroom, no longer needing to be quiet. The smell of Linda is everywhere, evaporated into the duvet, the carpet, the walls. Her perfume suffocates me from every angle. I shake my head violently to rid myself of the stench, *dumb bitch dumb bitch*, and seat myself at a small desk in the corner. Linda insisted on keeping a computer in here, probably to cheat on me. Like I wouldn't see it. I boot up the laptop and tap my finger impatiently on the glossy wood surface of the table. A bright flash, and the computer is humming. I set to work.

By the time I am finished with my letter, it is 3 a.m. The page is short, sweet, and altogether simple. Just for my wife. I hit print and watch the words come to life, line by line, in an orderly fashion. Meanwhile, I handle the Glock in agitation, wanting more than anything to get the hell out of that room.

Signed and folded, I take the note with me, shutting the door as I attempt to keep Linda's scent securely sealed. I don't want to think of her now. I just want to keep my eye on the prize.

By now, tears are flowing helplessly down my cheeks and pooling into my irregular beard hair. I don't remember crying, and it only irritates me further. I do not show weakness, as a rule. Nothing gets done when you are acting like a woman. Yet as I realize my own sorrow, I feel my chest start to contract more heavily. The hands that had been so firm tremble with the weight of their deeds.

No, it's her deed. She killed this family herself.

Crying out, I barrage through the house towards the garage door, keeping with me the imperative letter and the gun. Her eyes, like serpents, follow me everywhere from room to room, egging me on with their hate. I can't escape her mocking stare, the curves of her fangs when she smiles.

"You don't think I'll do it?" I shout at her, banging my fist on the wall and rattling the frames in their places. "You just wait, you just wait and see, you little bitch."

I tear into the garage but cannot see. The film of liquid around my eyes incapacitates me, so I go no further. The letter drops to the ground and I raise the cold, metallic barrel to my

temple, like I had seen others do. I am shaking, but I know it won't affect my accuracy. There is only one way to make this right.

"Lindsay... Lauren. Daddy's coming. I promise. I won't ever leave you again."

BANG.