



Vile Press
Presents

**HORRENDOUS
TALES**

Volume II

Edited by Kevin Cathy

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ONE DAY

by Kevin Cathy



(Image retrieved from the T.V. series entitled The Shop. Pilot Episode: "One Day". Screenplay by Kevin Cathy)

Outside, the sun had risen.

Inside my home, I awoke.

Inside my head, I was truly awake.

I finally had an answer to the nagging questions I persisted on asking myself.

The world is rotten.

The questions: "Why do I hate music on the radio? Why do I despise the homeless? Why do I not care about the poor, the needy, the starving kids in Africa...? Am I a horrible and selfish human being? Why are all politicians liars? Why do people spend thousands of dollars on brand name clothes just to fit in with assholes that were unrighteous for judging

them for what they wore in the first place? Why do people kill other people for money as if that pocket change would make them free or able to live happier? Why can't I walk down the street without getting harassed by immature and nasty men? Why is this world so doomed?"

Answer: *The world is simply rotten.*

Conclusion: *Don't give a shit?*

I couldn't bear to truly accept my conclusion. I am *not* that selfish.

The real conclusion, the one I did not want to face was: *Do something about it.*

And I don't mean plant a stupid tree or join the Peace Corps.

I need to change the world... *truly* change the world.

I thought for hours, pacing my apartment back and forth while chain smoking a whole pack of Marlboro Reds.

Then it struck me.

Purge the world of the invalids one by one.

It sounded so gruesome and so exciting. So *simple*.

If what's wrong with the world is the majority of *people* who ruin it, why not just simply cure the world by *eliminating* those people? When someone has the flu, they take antibiotics to kill the virus. So if the world is being slowly destroyed by ignorant and harmful people, why not kill them? Those people, like viruses, only produce more plagued individuals by the litter, spreading the plague to all parts of the world.

I decided I'd start today with just one individual. I usually get ahead of myself when I have a task on hand. But with this, being as it is so important, I think I will proceed with the necessary tasks in a methodical manner.

Who to begin with?

Who would be the easiest victim? And when I say *victim*, I mean perpetrator.

A stranger.

There are so many people causing havoc to this world just right outside my doorstep.

I grabbed my sweater and departed my comfort zone.

Outside, the Sacramento summer sun shone brightly into my eyes which made it almost impossible to keep them open. It was then that I realized how long it had been since I had last left my apartment. Ever since the slaughtering of my parents I had not left the building, surviving solely on my inheritance and Chinese food delivery.

A man bumped into me as I attempted to force my eyes to stay open.

"Watch it asshole!" I yelled to him.

He was already a block away and didn't hear me.

I ran past him, turned around, and stopped him in his tracks.

"I said 'Watch it, asshole!'" I shouted to him.

Before I could see his reaction, I briskly walked past him, making sure to bump into his shoulder with *force*.

I proceeded across the street to the city park.
I could see the happy smiles and faces of
children playing in the grass.

If only they knew.

If only their stupid parents hadn't raped their
future.

Don't worry, kids. I'll take care of this.

I spotted someone in the distance. A woman.
She was talking on her cell phone smoking a
cigarette.

*Thanks a lot, bitch. There's only about a
hundred kids here to breathe in your second hand
smoke!*

I decided she would be the perfect person to
begin the cleansing.

As I walked closer to her, I could hear her
voice.

"Oh my God, I was so drunk last night," I
heard her say.

Great way to live, bitch.

She began to walk away, tossing her
cigarette to the ground.

*Thanks for the non-biodegradable filter
we're all going to live with for the next two hundred
years! God, I hate her!*

I followed her more closely.

She continued to talk into her cell phone,
something she probably did a lot of if she wasn't
texting or wasting what few brain cells she had left
by browsing the internet to read about Kim
Kardashian's fake life.

She crossed the street without looking. A car had to stop in the middle of the road so as to not hit her.

She didn't even notice.

The guy yelled out his car door "Move it!"

She didn't move it. *Did she even hear him?!*

She continued to slowly stroll across the street with the cell phone close to her ear, not looking.

She had almost killed herself while simultaneously almost making a man regret his decision to drive that day for the rest of his life... and she didn't even *know* it!

She was the perfect victim.

Luckily, she turned onto the street that barely anyone walks down.

It was then that I strangled her neck from behind and made her pass out.

She awoke with her left hand and both her ankles tied up. I wasn't concerned that her right hand was not tied as well. I was right there. She wasn't going anywhere. I wasn't going anywhere.

She was scared.

"What are you doing!?" I asked myself.

I smiled and answered her with my knife by stabbing her in the stomach. It felt quite exhilarating.

She screamed out loud as I'm sure it must have hurt more than anything her spoiled ass ever had to endure before.

I laughed, knowing I was finally doing something about this messed up world instead of just complaining about it like everyone else.

I stabbed her again. And again. And again. My stomach was like a thick pillow, somewhat hard to puncture but once it was in, it went in easily.

Finally, my blood-filled mouth said, “I’m free.”

I looked down at my stomach, sitting in the chair, holding the knife in my right hand.

I had tied myself to the chair.

Could I get out?

No, not now. My stomach was too injured from my stabs.

I was alone in my apartment, as I always had been.

My ears began to lose their ability to hear. My eyes were suddenly too heavy to keep open.

I realized I was one of those people causing this world to be a terrible place. I did nothing but drink and smoke since my parents were murdered. I was a lowlife. A Nothing. I didn’t care about anyone else’s woes. I was a person who decided with my own manipulated and flawed reasoning that other people needed to perish to make this world a better place.

I did the world a favor. I chose to take someone out of this world who was making it unbearable to live in.

I had chosen myself.

NED PEARSON AND THE BANSHEE

by Khaleev di Palermo

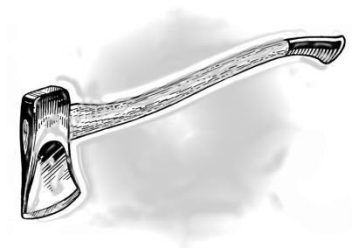


Ned Pearson was an Irish grave-digger
Who glowed with wicked ghoulish pride,
For he always visited his next customer
One day before the person died.
Father Dominic said it was all superstition
So the myth, he simply denied,
Until Ned Pearson went for confession
And one day later, Father died.
Those Irishmen tried to stop Ned Pearson
But no matter how they tried,
They couldn't stop the messenger of Death
And so they died and died.
Now, the Banshee, Ireland's spirit of Death,

Whose wail sent men to the other side
Was keenly watching from the netherworld
As Ned Pearson ensured that folks died;
Now, the Banshee, Ireland's goddess of Death,
Got bitter so she cried:
"How dare a mortal take my place –
Somebody must die!" she cried.
So when the Banshee angrily came to
Town, even Ned Pearson couldn't hide,
For the day that Banshee shrilly screamed
Was the day Ned Pearson died.

FINAL EXAM

by John Capizzano IV



In a usually quiet neighborhood in the Sacramento valley, a murderer is terrorizing everyone. Not just any murderer, an ax murderer. He claims his victims one by one, using only his ax to torture and kill them. No one is safe.

A young girl wakes up alone in a room she has never seen. She does not remember how she got there. She lays there for a minute. She hears nothing. She gets up and opens the door. She sees a man in a room next to the one she is coming out of. She sees an ax by the closet where he is standing.

Scared, she decides to make a run for the front door. He hears her. He grabs his ax and takes off down the hall chasing after her. She can sense him behind her. In fear, she trips. All she can do is scream. The man begins swinging his ax over and over. All he says to her is “Shut up bitch!” He cuts into her leg, ripping through her jeans and into her

flesh. She cries out in horror as he continues to bury his ax into her stomach. Eventually, she stops screaming. All that is left is the sound of his ax repeatedly sinking into her unmoving body.

As he pulls it out of her stomach for the final time, blood sprays onto his face.

He giggles in pure delight.

He leans down into her ear and yells, “Now look what you did!”

He giggles again at the sight of her motionless body.

“You silly little bitch. You better get up and clean up this mess!”

He stands up, takes his ax, and quietly walks back to his room.

The town will wake up this morning to a new headline:

Leslie Williams, a local resident in her mid-twenties, was found dead in a back alley this morning. She was covered in ax wounds making her the fifth victim claimed by the serial ax murderer. Police are searching day and night. If you have any information, you are urged to contact your local authorities right away.

Families are bracing themselves and keeping close watch on their loved ones.

Officer Jones is an undercover cop who has been following a suspicious man from the local market. He has followed the man to his home and has been watching him from his car.

There is something that strikes him, something he sees on the wall by the door. A large spray of blood... fresh blood. Officer Jones gets out of his car to get a closer look. He draws his gun as he gets closer to the house.

He enters the backyard and creeps up to a window to look inside. He was not prepared for what met his eyes.

Two rotting corpses lay torn open, dried blood soaked into the carpet and staining the walls. Both are torn up so badly that they are unrecognizable. The smell....the smell of rotting flesh is so strong (even through the slightly opened window) that Officer Jones has to swallow back his vomit. He knows now who he has been following.

The fate of this town is in his hands. Officer Jones catches a glimpse of what looks like a young man hanging from a meat hook. The man appears to still be alive, but it is too dark to know for sure. Jones positions himself to break in through the window just as he sees a man with an ax raised high run into the room and aiming towards the victim.

Without hesitation, Officer Jones breaks the window with his elbow, raises his weapon, and shoots the man with the ax right between the eyes.

The ax man falls lifeless to the floor.

“Young man!” Officer Jones yells through the broken window, “Are you alright?!”

The young man is unresponsive.

“I’ll be right there. You’re safe now!”

Officer Jones hops in through the broken window and rushes past the rotting corpses laying on

the floor.

Jones is able to lift the young man off of the meat hook.

Officer Jones knew now that he had his man.

This is the end of this town's terror.
For now.

One year later.

The town has fully recovered and is back to business as usual. Everyone has picked up the pieces and moved on, but they have never forgotten the most horrific murderer nor the lives he claimed.

Ashley and Emily are two college girls belonging to a paranormal group at school. They both begin reminiscing about the ax man. Emily has heard the home of the murderer may be opened up soon to paranormal investigators to do research.

“Hey Ashley,” says Emily. “Come here and watch this news report.”

Ashley comes over and sits on the couch to watch the video on the computer with Emily.

Emily hears the reporter and exclaims, “A one month wait!? Ashley, if we wait that long we will fail the class.”

Ashley looks at Emily and says, “There's got to be a way we can get the credits quicker. I can't be kicked out of the research team. I am not waiting a month. Just get the group together.....I have an idea.”

Emily shakes her head yes and reaches for her phone to call the team together.

Later that night, the team decides to pack their equipment and head over to the ax murderer's house. Ashley did come up with a plan; however, she never mentioned it until they arrived at the house. As they pull up to the house, they all sit in the car for a moment.

"All right, let's go guys. Unpack and get in quickly" says Ashley.

Everyone gets out and grabs their stuff. Emily asks Ashley, "So how exactly are we getting inside?"

"Too late," Andy whispers, laughing, as he stands next to the open front door.

Emily looks at Andy and shakes her head, "Really Andy? We're breaking in now?"

Andy and Josh laugh as they head inside. Once they get in through the front door, they all head in and begin to unpack their gear.

Ashley sets up her camera in hopes to catch something on tape.

Andy and Josh begin walking around with recorders hoping to catch any electronic voice phenomena.

Meanwhile Emily unpacks the spirit board and lights candles. After about thirty minutes, the team joins Emily at the board.

Emily begins provoking the spirit of the ax murderer.

The plan here was to ask him about his victims to see if they could find out why the maniac did what he did.

All eyes are closed and each of them are

focused on the ax murderer.

Without warning, Andy starts yelling. Everyone has opened their eyes and jumped to their feet.

“Andy, what are you doing?” asks Josh.

“Awww, Joshy. Andy isn't here right now. But *I* am! You called me... and I'm ready to play! Do you like games?”

Out of nowhere an ax appears on the floor. Andy bends down and grabs the ax.

Ashley begins screaming. “Oh my God, he has an ax!!!”

Emily and Ashley run down the hall to the bedrooms.

Josh lunges for the ax in Andy's hand. Andy takes a swing, landing the ax into Josh's leg.

Josh collapses and Andy begins swinging the ax over and over as Josh screams.

The ax cuts into Josh's face, his back, and soon Andy has successfully amputated Josh's right leg. Josh tries to pull himself away not realizing how badly hurt he actually was before Andy lands the final blow into the back of Josh's head.

All fell silent. Andy is covered in blood standing over his best friend's body. Andy quickly remembers he has two other people in the house with him... *now where could they be?*

Andy takes off down the hall calling for Ashley.

“Oh Ashleeeey! Where are you, baby? Don't you want to play with me? I love these types of games.”

Andy walks into the room where Ashley is hiding. He begins knocking on the closet.

“Come out Ashley, it's me. It's Andy. I'm not going to hurt you.”

Ashley slowly opens the closet door and to her horror she sees Andy covered in blood holding the ax. Ashley slams the closet door into him to try to make a run for it.

Andy was too fast for her.

He hits her in her back with the ax to slow her down.

Ashley screams and falls to the floor.

“Please Andy, don't do this... Oh my God, Emily... Emily... help me!”

Andy buries the ax deep into Ashley's back a second time, killing her instantly.

Again the house falls silent. Andy leans down to make sure she isn't breathing. He is so lost inside what has taken over him. He tries to open the door of the second bedroom. To his surprise, it is locked.

Andy begins calling out, “Emily! Come on, Emily. Baby, open the door for me.”

When she does not open up, Andy becomes crazy, repeatedly hitting the door with the ax.

Once the door is busted, he goes inside.

Emily is hiding in the closet, crying and begging for her life.

“Andy, please! You don't have to do this! Please just wake up... Andy please.”

He tears open the closet door and Emily bolts. She runs as fast as she can to the front door.

Just as her hand touches the knob, she feels a stinging feeling in her stomach. She looks down and sees her shirt covered in blood. Emily begins to cry, and turns around to face Andy. Just as she turns, Andy swings the ax into her face. Emily collapses.

Andy also collapses.

A few minutes have passed and all is silent in the house.

Andy wakes up confused and covered in blood. He looks around the room in horror at the blood bath before him. He has no idea what is happening when out of nowhere appears a man with a single bullet hole in his forehead.

He is holding the ax.

He walks up to Andy and says, "Thank you for doing my job."

Andy jumps to his feet, shaking, scared, and says, "What are you talking about? I didn't do this."

The ax man replies, "Oh, yes you did. Well, actually I did it through you. You should be more careful when you call someone back from the dead... it just might mean your head! Speaking of which..."

Before Andy can ask any questions, the man swings his ax.

Andy's head hits the floor and rolls to a stop. The ax man begins to cackle as he licks the blood from his ax.

"What a mess," he says.

CUPCAKE CAMMY

by Brian Riley



He pushed open the thick hotel curtains an inch and a rush of light flooded the narrow split. It poured like thin syrup into the dim room, creating a hazy beam against the wall. He pulled his head back. He could hear a car rumbling slowly into the parking lot. Holding the curtains tight, he maneuvered his eye back to the opening and risked another look. It was a pickup truck; a faded red Ford of unknown provenance. *Not her*. She had said she would be in a Mazda, a white Mazda. He ignored the Ford and scanned the rest of the visible area. Nothing else had changed since he'd last looked outside. The likely prostitute still sat on a lawn chair next to the open door of the room directly across from his own. She had been chain smoking almost constantly since he had arrived the day before. As he watched, she took

another cigarette from a pack on her lap and used the cherry of her dying butt to light the fresh stick. The process seemed subconscious, almost involuntary. The only other person he could see was a young man aimlessly staring at the vending machine. The evening sky was dark, and the lights of the city carved up the burly clouds that dotted her smoggy plaid dome. With a patient sigh, he let go of the curtains and walked back to the bed.

The digital alarm clock on the dresser, an ancient model whose digits blazed red, read “9:36.” He sat down on the stiff bed. His attention drifted strategically across the room. On arrival, he had quickly unpacked his working kit. Since childhood, brisk and surgical efficiency had been a point of great pride for him. He had quickly staged the gear in the room. It left time to run the plan over many times. The counting of steps had to be memorized, committed carefully to memory. Every corner had been cataloged until he could sprint from the tiny bathroom to the bed, to the door and back to the bathroom with his eyes shut. The process took hours, well into the underbelly of the night. This perfectionist need, this compulsion, this passion to understand every detail of his environment had earned him the nickname “Captain Anal” in high school. The name hadn’t really stuck even though the two female classmates who thought it up tried for years to sear it into the vernacular of his classmates. Eventually they just called him “retard”, and that stuck better. They had both since died. Neither had reached the age of twenty-two.

He stood up and stretched. Surveying the room again, he backed up to the front door. No piece of the kit could be visible. He knew none of it was; he was too good to make such an elementary mistake. Everything was invisible and perfectly placed. Any needed instrument available within a half second; that was the rule. Cheap motel rooms like this one almost seemed designed with his needs in mind. He walked to the shabby nightstand on the far side of the double bed. Kneeling down, he repositioned the roll of two inch duct tape. He had already cut a number of six inch strips and reapplied them to the cylinder. In the moment, there was no time to rip or cut. Success meant being ready. Time was precious; prepare or fail.

Next to the bed, just in front of the nightstand was a plain blue backpack. It was a simple pack meant to carry the books of your average college student. It appeared zipped and closed. It was not. The bag held his favorite instrument, a long length of quarter inch marine quality nylon rope. The garrote was a wonderful companion these days. He had not, however, always been a strangler. His first two victims had met their demise at the hand of an exquisite seven and a half inch Bowie knife. Neither of them had reached the age of twenty-two.

These days, the knife just didn't give him the same rush as the rope. He had such magnificent control when he played the rope around the neck of his girls. He first quickly cut off the air supply, crushing the esophagus like an empty soda can, and

then released slightly to allow the tiniest glint of false hope. Repeat until dead. It was a symphony of endorphins and quixotic rage, a song of vindication and renewal. Mostly it was plain old fashioned fun. There was the gun as well, but he had only used it once. The gun was only for emergencies. That victim had almost gotten away from him. She had left a scar on his shoulder that he would always treasure. He had tucked the gun under the sink in the bathroom, loaded, handle out. The only light in the room came from the dresser. He had turned on the silver lamp and tilted the shade so that the illumination only exposed the back half of the small space. He stood again and took a long deep breath. It was silent and he let the quiet run through him. Eyes shut, he meditated as he moved back to the bed.

There has been a tremendous amount of effort and expense to reach this point. This job was his masterwork, perhaps even his version of Wyeth's fine Christina's World. He considered what he did a Job. Unfortunately, the industry of serial killing had very few standardized terms. So "Job" was the vocabulary he used to define the planning and execution of each kill. This particular Job had cost him just over 15,000 dollars. Serious money for a man of his modest means, and worth every honey dripped penny. As soon as he found Sarah on Funcams.net, he knew it would be pricey. Maybe he hadn't realized the full cost, but he had known it would be expensive. Cam girls didn't survive on clever banter and funny emoticons. They worked on a cash basis. Capitalism at its finest.

And the time, the investment there had been monumental. Almost eight months of pretending to be Ted, the mild mannered and shy accountant had moved from San Francisco to Sacramento to escape the frantic pace of the Bay Area. Ted had been easy enough to pull off and some lucky investments back in the dot com boom had left him with a healthy savings so spending like a lonely high income earner had been effortless. His persona was clever, shy, introverted, and sweet. Traits he had pulled back in layers like dead skin, slowly.

He recalled the first time he had seen her. It was about a week after he had the idea of making an online chat girl his next job. The idea had just seemed natural, an untapped market if you would. Dozens of websites, hundreds of chats with girls of every conceivable combination of color, makeup, tattoos, demeanor and saline enhancement. Some saccharine sweet, others bothered and unpleasant. He had been patient. Fact was, he had almost given up after being unable to connect with anyone he'd targeted. Then, finally, he found his shimmering digital goddess. Her name turned out to be Sarah, or Cupcake Cammy as the late night denizens of the internet knew her.

Arriving at Funcams had been the result of accidentally clicking on a bright banner ad at the bottom of a TGP site. He expected a nonstop onslaught of malware. Instead a colorful website had unfurled, promising sexy and entertaining hostesses, for free no less. There had been a page of images of women, mostly young, mostly naked. He'd looked

with bored detachment for a long time, expecting nothing before his eyes landed on Cupcake Cammy. Her picture was different. She was fully clothed for one thing. And she was smiling. Not a fake smile either. It was a basic, kind smile; the kind of look that in the real world would send a pleasant shiver down to the base of your spine. Her hair was strawberry blond and shoulder length. That was all he could really determine from the small picture. He clicked on her room and dove down the rabbit hole.

Her room had not been busy. His first visit had found him in a chat with twelve other members, most of them quiet lurkers. That first night she had been wearing a denim skirt and sheer top with a bikini underneath. The apartment that served as her office was dimly lit in red and blue but apportioned with enough posters and baubles to make it clear Cammy was a pop culture geek. He had needed to adjust to her geek references. The cute and bubbly parts of culture had never been his specialty.

He talked with her that night as any infatuated stranger would, telling her that she was “delightful” and “adorable” and “pretty”. All of these things had been true, of course. She was the type that would be lusted after by the comic con crowd but ignored by the douchebag sect that incorrectly believed they were out of her league. Funcams operated on a tipping system and from what he learned the top girls made really good money. Really, really good money. He tipped conservatively the first night. A few dollars an hour, and around fifty bucks by the end of the chat. The

target must never realize that the game even exists. Turn the crank slowly, monitor acceleration.

Over the course of the next few weeks, Cupcake Cammy had been online approximately every other night and he made sure to catch each session. He progressively raised the amount he would tip and on the tenth night he dropped what he referred to as a “god” tip in the amount of one thousand dollars. For a cam girl that averaged less than twenty regular customers, this was a huge deal. After that fun evening, he forged headlong into a relationship with his new lady friend.

Two months of chatting followed in which their talks progressed to hour long private chats. They would talk about life and aspirations and dreams and such manner of things. Then the next milestone had been notched. At the end of a particularly long private session, Cammy had stopped talking for a full minute, just staring off to the side of the room. She had hesitated nervously. A darling wide smile adorned her face.

“I want to give you something,” she had typed. Normally she spoke to him using her mic while he typed back responses in the private chat box

“Really? What is it?” He had typed back.

The next thing she typed had brought a long and lasting satisfaction. It was her email address and her real name, Sarah.

“I can get your email from your account,” she continued typing. “And I am breaking the rules

giving you mine, but I want you to have it so you can talk to me whenever you want.”

“I can’t even express how much this means to me.” He returned, absolutely meaning every word.

He had been thinking about Sarah, letting his thoughts drift when he heard another car. The alarm clock bleated “9:51” in the outdated neon way it did. He rose and slid back to the window. Not her. A taxi was exiting the lot, and the chain smoking prostitute’s door was closed. He walked into the restroom and urinated.

They had emailed back and forth dozens of times for the next few weeks. He told her stories about his childhood (all expertly invented on the fly) and vented about his fabricated job and nonexistent boss. In turn, she opened up about her life and frustrations and on more than one occasion told him how happy she was that he had found her. She felt a connection to him, a strong attraction. He was sure that much of this was to keep the tips coming but he knew that some part was real. She liked him. She was on the hook but still in the water.

He kept going to the chats and he kept tipping like his wealthy single character should. She began to treat him like a rock star, paying noticeably more attention to him than the other regulars. The others noticed and made jokes about the relationship. He knew that was a risk. Too many jokes and she may wise up to the ruse and back away. She didn’t. In the fifth month, Funcams added the ability to buy the girls gifts. Most of the gifts they made available were silly: teddy bears, flowers, gift cards. However,

they offered one gift that he assumed was there as an inside joke. It was a diamond ring. It was a relatively nice three stone ring that rang up at a tidy \$4000. Without hesitation, he bought the ring which would be discretely shipped.

Three days after he bought the ring he received an email from her; it was simply three letters: “OMG.” She wore the ring every time they chatted after that day and he knew she would be wearing it tonight.

The topic of meeting in real life came up for the first time just after six months had passed. He broached the topic carefully and with a carefully crafted flippancy. He tossed it out into a private conversation as part of a larger joke. He gauged the response. It was exactly as he expected which told him that things were going to take more time. She was nervous. The internet was full of horror stories about meeting “internet friends” and this scared her. Her reaction was not a surprise.

Sarah lived in Los Angeles and not in a nice part. She complained to him often about her neighbors and the drug dealers that dotted the sidewalks in her neighborhood. She had grown up in the area and was sad that it had degraded so much since she was a child. So in month seven, he did some research and found what he needed: a catalyst.

The California CPA Council was an organization he knew nothing about and he had no idea what those on the council might do. This didn't matter. What mattered was they were having a conference in Los Angeles. Even more important

was that the CCC conference was just a few miles from where Sarah lived. He booked his room at the terrible little motel he currently occupied before he even mentioned the convention to her. He also spent hours studying the session guide and learning a little bit about what a CPA actually does. She had never asked him about his job, but he wanted the character to be complete nonetheless.

Sarah was excited when he told her about his upcoming trip. He had explained that he booked his room late and could only find a spot at the Garden View Motel. She knew of the place and agreed that it was “pretty shitty” but assured him that it wasn’t as bad as the Yelp reviews led him to believe. This time when he threw out the idea of meet up, she didn’t balk. It made sense now. He was coming to her; it was fate.

The last three weeks were spent chatting and tipping. As he had expected, she wanted to know about the conference, about the types of thing a CPA council did at an annual conference. He got by with some buzzwords and lamenting the boredom that he assumed came along with that career. She bought every line and every day he felt his destiny closing in on hers. The last chat was the prior night, after he had checked in to the Garden View and gotten dinner at the El Pollo Loco down the street. She seemed thrilled, amped, and her regulars commented on her giddiness. They had no idea about the meeting. Both of them had been careful not to mention it anywhere but in email. They spoke only once on the phone briefly to shore up the details.

Now it was Friday night and she was to arrive at ten, which was two minutes ago. He double checked himself in the mirror. He was wearing a solid blue button up with a cardigan, and black jeans. He had bought a pair of slip-on loafers to finish the look. He didn't really know what a CPA was supposed to look like, but he figured he was close enough to maintain the illusion. After making sure that his kit was in order one last time, he clicked on the television. It had been off all day. He didn't particularly like to watch but she would expect it to blather away. The diorama had to be perfect.

A car outside.

He looked quickly out of the narrow opening in the curtains. A white Mazda was pulling up to his room. Sarah had her hands on the wheel and was looking for his room as she drove slowly forward. He saw her long strawberry blond hair, a bright blue ribbon tied neatly into it.

He backed away and sat on the bed to wait. He went through the plan once last time in his head. He would greet her and invite her in. He had a gift to give her that was wrapped on the bed. It was a diamond tennis bracelet. She wouldn't need it for very long. After the gift he would suggest that they go to dinner. At this point he would wait to see if he got his opportunity to leap. If not, they would go to dinner and he would finish his business as soon as they entered the room again. The job itself was easy: tape the mouth, overpower, rope around the neck. He didn't rape; that was not part of his world. He wasn't healthy but he had to draw a line somewhere.

Once she was dead he would move into the next phase: sanitizing the scene and disappearing. He had signed in with a fake name and a stolen credit card. All of his activities with her on the internet had been anonymized and he had left no digital fingerprint. All tips and gifts were paid for with drug store Visa cards purchased over time all over the state at mostly less than reputable establishments that conveniently did not ask for ID, only cash.

Then he heard the hollow smack of a car door shutting outside.

He stood and brushed his jeans. Inside, he felt the happiness; the rush was starting. It would last all night. It would renew again when he saw news of the grizzly scene. A beautiful and bright young girl, barely twenty-four, strangled in the night at a fleabag motel. They would quickly find out about her online activities. They would find out about him as well. Of course, they would never find him. They would give up after a few months and the world would forget about him. On to the next job.

There was a light tapping on the door. This was a brave and very naïve young lady.

He unlocked the deadbolt and clutched the doorknob. He inhaled deeply, drinking in the adrenalin, and slid into character. He swung open the door to begin the show.

The man standing in front of him across the threshold had a sour, dead look in his eyes. He wore a black leather jacket and a printed tee. The man bared his teeth like a junkyard dog as he lunged softly but forcefully forward.

The knife slid into his upper chest with a morbid pop. The sensation of something so foreign entering the body was nearly indescribable. It was cold and electrical. His flesh parted easily to let it pass. He was going numb. The world was flashing, storming, turning red, fading away. He fell forward like a dead tree, weakly wrapping his arms around the calm leather clad killer. His chin landed on the shoulder of the man. He resisted the urge to shut his eyes. The pain was flowing from the hole in his chest out to the rest of his body. It was excruciating but he was unable to articulate or make any sound. He could see the parking lot. His assailant was still holding him up in the doorway, apparently in no rush to drag him inside.

Sarah was still sitting in the driver's seat of the white Mazda. She looked on with a tilt to her head, no discernable expression on her face. There was no pity in her eyes. She was simply observing events. He kept his gaze on her as he was lifted and carried back into the room.

The intruder dropped him on to the bed and, unable to move his neck any longer, he could only wonder what was happening. He knew he was being robbed. Any sense of pain was long gone. He felt like every inch of his body had been wrapped tightly in gauze. He could see the television and he could see the door of the room, now shut.

"Jokes on them," he thought, "I am untraceable." They would get a couple of grand from that tennis bracelet. It was a really nice piece of jewelry. They would never figure out who he was,

and they would never gain access to his bank accounts. Still, a noble effort on the part of the young hunters. He had been caught; he could only blame himself for that.

The world was wasting, dissolving into ribbons of fine mist. His attempts to breathe had no apparent effect. He felt his thoughts slowing to a stop. He heard the motel room door shut. He struggled for a final heroic ounce of strength and thought he managed some semblance of a crooked smile.

“We are all hunters out here, we... hunt,” he thought as his last useful synapse went dark, and the world slipped on towards tomorrow.

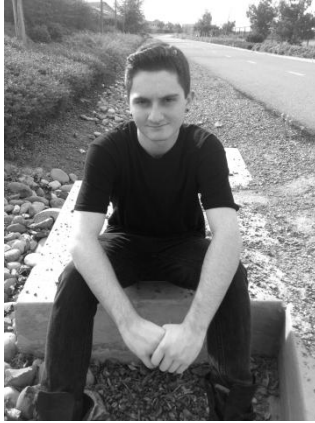
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