

A WOMAN SCORNED

Lifeless.

Bloody.

I'm dead, and it's my fault.

I thought I could change him. For nine years, I clung to that idiotic concept. Lots of women are slow that way. A useless comfort now.

As if pulled by an invisible rope, I'm drawn to leave this place, but I fight the urge and hover unseen against the bedroom ceiling as a stocky Hispanic man photographs my bloody nakedness. The attractive black woman who's been rooting around in my nightstand discovers my diary. In total, Six Crime Scene Investigators are poking about the room, four men and two women. All wearing latex gloves and paper booties. It's a bizarre costume party in my honor, and the most male attention I've had in years. At least the kind that doesn't leave bruises.

My blood saturates the mattress. A constellation of puncture wounds paste the sheets to my skin. Nine wounds for nine years of marriage. Isn't that fun? Nice to know I haven't lost my sense of humor.

After a bit, so many prying eyes make me uncomfortable. I pass through the bedroom wall and down the hall to the living room where two policemen chat about football near the front door. On the sofa, a detective interviews the man who better be their chief suspect, my husband, Andrew. Huge crocodile tears trickle down his cheeks and onto his bloodstained shirt. He's telling the detective how much he loves me. He blubbers it while sitting on the exact spot he raped me and clutching the throw pillow he beat me for spilling coffee on.

"She's the love of my life," Andrew insists.

Detective Pullman, a fortyish fellow with dark thinning hair, bags Andrew's cell phone and directs one of the policemen to locate mine. Pullman will get a big kick out of our text messages. Funny how things work out. And all because last Halloween, he made me watch an old sixties movie called *Night of the Living Dead*.

The movie starts with a young man watching his sister place flowers on their parents' grave. In the distance, the brother spots what he thinks is a drunk lumbering among the tombstones. Unaware that the figure staggering toward them is really a brain-eating zombie, the brother grins and teases his sister by saying, "He's coming to get you, Barbara."

Guess what my name is.

After changing the *he* to *I*, Andrew has repeated that line to me ever since, the most memorable time being the night he got me pregnant.

That night, like most, Andrew came home late and stinking of scotch. Zombie hands reaching, he shambled through the house behind me. "I'm coming to get you," he called, sneering when he saw the effect his gurgling undead voice had on me. But slow-walking zombies are easily outmaneuvered, and he soon tired of the game. After stunning me with a sudden backhand, he threw me onto the sofa and raped me while dinner burned.

Mostly, he uses the line when I've screwed up. The bed's not made right, there's a crumb on the floor. I've failed him again, and I must be punished.

You're probably wondering why I stayed with him. I mean, who likes wearing long sleeves to pool parties and keeping secrets from friends and family? Love, love, love. Even the song says it's supposed to hurt.

I gave up thinking I could change him last week when I figured out his email password. Some eye-opener that was. At least twenty messages between Andrew and his old "college buddy" David.

Furious, I demanded a divorce. My parents live in Canada, so I told him I'd be joining them in Montreal as soon as I could get a ticket. Hands shaking, I picked up my wine glass and spilled a few drops on one of the throw pillows, a gift from his darling mother. Before I knew it, I received a breathtaking punch to the stomach. "No divorce," he snapped. "You know I was raised catholic."

I miscarried that night. My only pregnancy in nine years, and I lost it. When I wouldn't stop bleeding, Andrew took me to the emergency room. "Fell down the stairs," he told them. Clumsy me. Devastated, I locked myself in the guest room for two days. I should have known joint custody wouldn't appeal to Andrew. He's never been one for sharing.

Tissue box in hand, Andrew calms down a bit and once he agrees to be interviewed the detective pulls a small notepad from his coat pocket and flips it open, ready to write. "So, you're a doctor, huh?"

"Not just a doctor, a plastic surgeon." Always pompous, Andrew points out the plaque on the wall behind them. "That's the Arthur C. Barrett Award. I won it last year for—"

"How about we get back to the matter at hand." Pullman's dark eyes gleam. "What

lifesaving methods did you employ when you realized Mrs. Roman was still breathing?”

“Lifesaving methods?” Andrew looks at Pullman like he’s addressing an exceptionally inept waiter. “We barely had time to say goodbye!” He gestures at the blood ruining his new Armani shirt. “Barbara died in my arms!”

Here it comes, Andrew’s favorite song, “Poor Me”.

Pullman jots a few words, his expression bland as oatmeal. “And your relationship?”

“My relationship?” Startled, Andrew drops his wad of tissues. “Oh...with Barbara.”

Smooth. Thanks, honey.

“Yeah. You two get along?”

“Of course. We were in love.”

“Sure.” Pullman jots a few words. “You say you left your office at seven?”

“Let me see...” Andrew puffs his cheeks and stares in the distance as if deep in thought.

“I was pretty wound up after a full day of surgery, so I decided to stop at the Hotel Belvedere for a drink before heading home. To my surprise, I ran into an old college friend at the bar...David Freeman. He’s in town for a pharmaceutical convention.” He shoots Pullman a challenging glare. “Ask him. He leaves Sunday.”

An old friend. Check his emails, detective. You’ll see how close they are. They’ve been planning their future together and, surprise, I’m not included.

Pullman scribbles. “Did you call Mrs. Roman to let her know you’d be late?”

“I was going to...” His teeth flash. “You know how it is. You have a couple of drinks, start talking about the old days...all of a sudden...”

“Four hours have gone by.”

“Uh, yeah...” Andrew shrugs. “David insisted on buying me dinner.”

Good old David. I bet you haven't punched *him* in the stomach. Yet.

Again, Pullman scribbles. "So, you and Mrs. Roman never spoke between seven PM and the time you discovered her body?"

"No." Andrew's voice begins to crack. "I texted her. Right before I left the hotel. I told her I was heading home. Check it."

"Oh, we will." Pullman looks up from his pad.

"Tell me about when you got home."

Andrew rests his head on the back of the sofa and stares up at the ceiling, right where I'm floating.

I hold out both hands, shooting him an enthusiastic Double Bird.

"Just after midnight..." he begins, oblivious to my antics. "I pulled into the garage. Everything was dark, so I went into the bedroom. That's where I found her. She was still breathing." Again, he wipes his eyes. "She died..."

"In your arms, yes."

Who are you crying for, Andrew? Certainly not me.

"Did you kill your wife?" says the detective in the same tone he might employ if he were asking to use the bathroom.

Andrew's response is a dramatic gasp. "Of course not!" He sniffles indignantly. "She was the—"

"Love of your life?" As the detective studies Andrew's puffy red eyes, one of the CSI guys steps into the living room holding two plastic bags. One contains my diary, the other, the knife I used to stab myself.

Pullman dangles the possible murder weapon in front of Andrew's nose. "Any chance

we'll find your prints on this?"

"Maybe..." Andrew blinks hard. "Barbara bought it for me a few days ago."

"Why? Was it your birthday?"

"No."

"You hunt?"

"No, I—"

"So, out of the blue, your wife buys you a Buck knife with a six-inch blade, and not a week later she's murdered with it?" Pullman passes the evidence back to the CSI guy, then makes another note. As he's writing, another technician passes through the room carrying Andrew's computer, followed by a shiny chrome gurney carrying a blanket covered lump. Me.

"Want one last look?" Pullman asks my newly widowed husband.

As Andrew shakes his head, the policeman tasked to find my cell phone returns carrying my purse. With gloved hands he reaches inside and passes the detective my Samsung.

After a few clicks, Pullman looks up at Andrew. "I'm coming to get you, Barbara?"

Andrew's head snaps back. "Hold on. That was just a joke. A line I use when..."

"When you're threatening to kill people? I wouldn't want to look at my wife's body either...if I'd just beaten and stabbed her to death."

Andrew's mouth opens, but nothing comes out.

I love it.

"Your wife's body is covered with bruises, Doctor, and not just from tonight." The detective stands and passes the phone back. "Good job, officer. You can bag that as evidence too." He looks at the other policeman. "Officer Vega, you can arrest Dr. Roman now."

"What? No!" Andrew leaps to his feet. "That text message was a joke! I didn't kill my

wife!” He presses his hands to his bloodstained shirt. “You think I got this from—no! I told you I found her that way!”

Officer Vega detaches the handcuffs from his belt and steps around the sofa.

Check it out, Andrew. They’re coming to get *you* this time.

With so much evidence against him, there’s no way he won’t get the electric chair. His DNA and fingerprints are all over the knife.

I can’t wait for Pullman to read through Andrew’s email correspondence with his old friend, David. They started coming two weeks back after rekindling their “friendship” at a medical convention. That must have been some weekend, because the day after Andrew got back, David sent him an email begging Andrew to divorce me. A great suggestion, Andrew replied. He’d love to ditch his cow of a wife, but selfish as ever, the notion of splitting his assets with me was—how did he put it? Repugnant. So, he pleaded for David to give him time, that he would find a solution.

What was I supposed to do, wait until he found one? Still flaming over my lost baby, I got to work. The first thing I did was buy myself a diary. Every day, I logged my retroactive memories while Andrew was at work. Some mundane. Others terrifying. But all true. Of course, I backdated my entries and alternated pens to make it look like I’d written them over time.

I also gave Andrew a present.

He gripped the smooth black handle and smiled at his reflection in the long stainless-steel blade. “Nice, but why a knife?”

“You always said you needed a hobby. I thought maybe you could start a collection.”

“Of knives?” Andrew thought I was crazy, but I didn’t care. I had what I wanted.

From Andrew’s emails, I knew he planned to visit David at his hotel today after work.

What I didn't know was what time Andrew would get home. Since the last thing I wanted was for David to give him an alibi, I would hold off on doing anything until Andrew was home in bed. But around ten, a text arrived. Not only did he tell me what time he'd be home, but he'd added that damned movie line, giving me one more nail to hammer into his coffin.

It was a gift I couldn't waste.

Andrew is left handed, so I battered the right side of my face with one of his barbells, leaving it bruised and swollen. A few hard swings from his nine iron left a fresh layer of bruises on top of my old yellow ones.

Then came the hard part.

Like I said, nine cuts for nine years. Some deeper than others, but all necessary. Like the bruises, the cuts couldn't appear self-inflicted or I was sunk. The police would find out I'm right handed, so cuts on both arms were crucial. I even slashed both hands—but shallow. On *Law and Order*, they call those defensive wounds.

Cutting your arm takes courage. Stabbing yourself in the belly takes incredible determination. Before Andrew took away my baby I was nowhere near capable. But now...

Revenge is a wonderful motivator.

My plan was for Andrew to find me battered, bleeding, but still alive. He dials 911, the ambulance guys patch me up, and I blow everyone's mind by claiming the attacker was my very own hubby. Why not? My word is just as good as his. Throw in a diary detailing years of abuse (which I didn't even have to make up) plus the fact that his fingerprints are still on the knife, and a conviction should be a slam-dunk.

All right, so things didn't work out quite that way.

After Googling quite a few websites, I decided I was least likely to die if I drove the knife

into my small intestine. Not wanting to smudge Andrew's fingerprints, I positioned the knife, gripping the handle lightly between thumb and index finger. With the other hand, I used a hardback to hammer in the blade. It took three hits. Bathed in sweat, exhausted, and leaking a ton more blood than I expected, I blacked out and barely heard Andrew scream my name before I died.

Okay, so it turns out surviving a self-inflicted stab wound is a lot harder than it looks. Oh, well. Better to go out on my own terms than wait for Andrew to bury me in some field and claim I ran off with the pool boy.

All in all, I'm okay with how things worked out. Andrew married me because he was too weak to come out to his bullying parents, and I suffered for it. But soon Mom and Dad will find out he's not only gay, but a murderer too. I wonder which will hurt them more. Knowing them, it's the gay part.

Outside, Andrew and I part ways in the driveway, center stage in a rock concert of flashing lights, media trucks, and ogling neighbors. Andrew gets tucked into the back of one of the police cruisers. My gurney heads toward the ambulance. Goodbye, Andrew. After all these years, I'm finally leaving you. But don't worry. You're in good hands.