

Baby Face

I freaking killed him.

I pushed my exhausted body to gather shreds of strength, and nudged his dead weight off of my chest. My rib cage was free enough to gasp for air, searing my throat with every meager lungful. My fingers were slick with red. I shakily inspected the digits. Eight fingers and two thumbs. Each one as slick with ruby as red as a viscous dawn. My eyes had no choice but to scan down the entirety my body. The clothes I had been wearing were ripped open down to my tan bra that no longer covered B-cup breasts. The buttons to my favorite embroidered green vest, now around my shoulders, were scattered along the strip of back alley lit by a fading sunset. Hot, steaming blood pooled at my collarbone, drizzling down to meet the blank stare of the man.

A blue knife crafted to resemble a rearing dragon stuck out from his jaw. He didn't expect such a small woman to carry a knife, unaware that there was always a weapon in my pocket for situations like these. The sculpted scales of the dragon were now outlined in red. The man's head, crowned with dark, curling locks, rested as if asleep on my exposed stomach. I almost lost the contents of the dinner I consumed only two hours before. A queer keening rattled in my throat, and with a final twist, I thrust the man off of me. His limp body hit the pavement with a dull thump. Still as beautiful as Lucifer himself.

What do I do? What do I do?

I tried to clear the stray hairs from my face only to smear more blood like some macabre war paint. No one would just *happen* to saunter into this alley. The area was a place meant to be a stage for nefarious deeds, and most people tended to swerve away from anything that would be a danger to their health. I was on my own. There would be no help.

*I can call the police. I'll tell them that he approached me before dinner. He was so handsome and charming. He talked about Chaucer and Perceval and Tristan y Isolde. We cheerfully argued about whether Tristan and Isolde were actually in love. I said they were once the potion wore off. He never answered. I wanted him to because his voice was as smooth as a polished violin, and I could listen to his music all night. His stature was confident like a prideful tiger. I liked confidence. **His** confidence. It was something I lacked. I was flattered that a man like that would want talk to someone like me.*

I blinked back the stinging tears threatening to cut a path down my dirty face. I had to be smart and go over what I just thought. Yes, I possessed a pretty good education. I had a bachelor's and masters in English but failed to employ those degrees. I could only land a job at the local Hallmark store forcing fake smiles and apologies ripped from the air between my ribs. I was surrounded by last minute Mother's Day gifts and reproduced words of sympathy. This man Gabriel (of course, his name had to be Gabriel) created his own company from the pennies he saved as a child. He smithed his silver words with painstaking accuracy and created an unblemished repertoire with his fellow businessmen.

A classic situation of my word against his.

What was that case a few years back? Ethan...Ethan Tanner. He raped a girl who passed out behind a dumpster. She couldn't give consent because she was intoxicated. Instead of getting his full six years, Ethan served just three months. The judge didn't want to ruin the boy's up and coming charmed life. All the woman could do was write a note that Ethan probably ignored.

Gabriel now lay at my side. His jaw, once so attractive with its delicate, almost female curves, now gruesome even without the blue knife jutting out from his soft throat. Gabriel's wit and cunning, along with his clever full lips and curved stature, were gone. Just. Gone. He would never speak in that alluring British accent again. There would be no other women charmed out of a

restaurant, out of their mundane existence, out of their failed aspirations, and into an alley to be forcefully groped and touched and...and...strangled by hands bequeathed with three sparkling class rings. Two sapphire and one amethyst. Gabriel's black suit was still crisp and perfect. His long, lithe body still warm. *I* was the one who licked my fingers and snuffed out the wick of his candle.

What if they think I did this on purpose? What if a prosecutor presented to a jury that I could have just jabbed out Gabriel's emerald eyes. Popped them like tapioca. Instead, I just so happened to have a knife that I just so happened to know where to sink into his skin and muscle. Maybe I was the one who lured him here?

Despite my situation, a chilling chuckle escaped my chapped lips. I attempted to wrap the green vest around my body and zip up my jeans. I could still feel his presence there. Raw and unforgiving. I almost vomited again.

*How could I lure anyone out with this body? I've only had sex once and then he broke up with me. It's been all about steamy romance books since that, and I have nothing on those heroines. Even now I still am offered kid's menus. Still...there's still the chance I'd be a scapegoat. I can see the articles on Facebook; **Illinois Woman Kills Successful Businessman Gabriel Irons**. [Click here for more information on how this small town woman turned murderer](#). How many likes would that get?*

I attempted to conjure cases that I passed by on my phone or when chatting with my coworkers. There was that one shooting. A girl rejected a boy and then he killed her and his classmates. The poor girl was blamed by the press as a catalyst to the boy's rage. There was a coworker of mine, too. He was attacked in his very home by his next door neighbor. He was always a kind and gentle man, and yet when he pressed charges, no one believed him. No one believed him because his attacker was a fifty-year-old woman. In the world of crimes, men did the

murder and rape. Women didn't. They were supposed to nurture and shake their heads sadly when their sons grew into stereotypes.

I paused.

Perhaps I could make this all go away? I was a woman. A small, weak woman with a forgettable face. There was no way anyone could connect me to Gabriel's demise. It was getting dark now. I could take my knife and spilled buttons and run. Sure, there were people in the restaurant that saw us leave together, but who would think that I could have possibly killed anyone? My record was so clean, I never even had a parking ticket let alone a high school detention. I arrived early to work every day, paid my bills ahead of time, and spent my freedom reading books and putting together sparkly puzzles. And for once, this cursed baby face of mine would be in my favor. The very face that to this day kept me from being taken seriously.

I would go back to my job to hand in my resignation. I'd finally quit. I'd sell my house and at last travel the world. Japan or Ireland or Greece. I wouldn't care. I'd write to my heart's content like I always dreamed, like I thought I would be able to. I would join the ranks of those who lived in the time of German Romanticism where one was not yet a writer until he or she made a pilgrimage through a world brimming with nature and mystery. In my stories, there would be real love. Tristan and Isolde wouldn't be doubted. For once, I would make an impact on humanity that they couldn't ignore. I exist. I am me.

Okay. I'll leave. No one has to know. I'll just go.

I shakily grasped the hilt of my knife. The dragon knife that hid in my pocket for five years waiting for the chance to taste the flesh of an offender. No one knew of this knife. Only me and my fingers. I yanked at the knife, and Gabriel followed. I pulled again and again until I set a palm against his cooled chin to keep him in place and at last slid the weapon out. More thick blood oozed from the wet wound.

Check for evidence. Think CSI Miami. You're Horacio Cain and you have to crack bad jokes. Actually, no jokes right now. Think! Any hairs?

I took out my purple phone and tapped a button for the flashlight. There were a few brown hairs tangled on his shoulders. I picked them off.

Look under his finger nails. He scratched me when he...

I gulped, but my throat was parched. Hastily, I procured my nail clippers and dug at Gabriel's fingernails with the metal. I scraped at his nails until they were jagged. Then I scoured the pavement littered with trash and scuttling cockroaches for the pearlescent green buttons to my vest. I found all five. After two attempts at getting onto my feet, I at last succeeded. I grasped at the alley wall, feeling the familiar pain of a lost child needing her mother and father to hug the bad away.

Actually, I would stay at my job for a while. There'd be less suspicion thrown my way if I didn't suddenly up and vacate my position as Assistant Manager. No. I could take a vacation, though. I had been saving up the hours so I could visit my brother and niece in Florida. Now was a good time to cash in on those promised minutes of precious freedom. In Florida, I could chuck my blue dragon knife into the Everglades to hide with the gators and their matching crusted scales. Before that, I'd wash. I'd used my scrub gloves to cleave from my skin his lips and hips and bare chest. I'd bury these clothes, my vest and jeans, the necklace from grandma, and my wristwatch, so deep in a patch of forest three hours east that only the devil will know of their location.

I can do it. No one has to know. No one has to wonder.

I scanned the empty streets for witnesses. No one was coming, and yet my feet refused to take me to the purple Chevy spark waiting for me five parking lots over. I thought of the fuss this would cause. The news coverage. How the case would eventually go cold. A scene played out before me. Strategic. Created to gain an audience's sympathy or curses.

*Melissa Andrews was an ordinary twenty eight-year-old woman, **the narrator says in a pleasant British** keen, but who knows what was lurking in the back of her mind. **A woman appears on screen. She is nothing like the real Melissa Andrews. Tall. Mature. Long brown hair that gleams with an inner warmth. Eyes as dazzling as stardust. Plump lips that make the peach lipstick she wears delectable. Everything the real Melissa is not.** When Melissa killed Gabriel Irons, she did not stop there. Not satisfied with initially getting away with murder, she could not escape that moment of thrill. That instance of jubilation when she forcefully took Gabriel's life just as brutally as he took hers. **The Melissa on the screen is red with blood. Bathed in the substance. Glaring at the camera.** Retired FBI profiler, Julie Owens, explains Melissa's motivations.*

*'Melissa was frustrated with feeling weak all of her life,' says **the aging profiler with piercing blue eyes,** 'Her true feelings were never taken into consideration. She was a living ghost. That was why when she first tasted blood, she simply could not stop herself. We can see the pattern from man to man, and even one woman, where Melissa lured these people out, killed them by stabbing her victims, and then used her child like appearance as a shield. Let me tell you, there is nothing child like about Melissa Andrews. This woman stabbed her victims. She wanted to be up close and personal. She needed to see the light leave her victim's eyes. Melissa is a dangerous, deadly woman.'*

I started and blinked. I could smell the moldering garbage in the corners of the alley.

Did I really *like* killing Gabriel? I thought back. When Gabriel was done and had begun squeezing my throat, instead of flinging my hands out and using my digits to poke out his lovely green eyes like I was taught, I grabbed my knife. The knife I put into my pocket every day.

Waiting. Waiting for that chance. *My* chance to use it. And I twisted just so, angling my arm, and slamming the metal blade up and into the middle of his jaw. He gurgled. His spit flecked my face, and I caught the scent of his vanilla cologne.

“What. Are. You. Doing?” He choked out. Surprisingly, there was no hint of his British accent now. He let go of my throat, his hands were on my shoulders. His body was pressed to mine so intimately that maybe this could have all been a mistake. Perhaps we could have been lovers.

But we weren't. We fucking weren't.

“Did Tristan and Isolde really love each other, or was it the potion?” I said. My voice was calm. I had no clue why I asked him that. “Tell me,” I sobbed. “You need to tell me now, you damn bastard!” I leaned close, watching as the veins in his corneas twitched and writhed.

“Fuck. You.” He answered. As if there wasn't a knife jabbed into his jaw.

And then she twisted the knife, efficiently cutting off any other attempts at conversation. She saw in his eyes the knowledge that he would die, and he would die by the hand of a woman he thought weak and unattractive. She showed him wrong. She showed the whole world wrong.

I knew what I had to do.

I always knew what I had to do.

Deliberately, I brought my phone up to my face. The screen glowed a dull blue as I searched. Some tears finally came, but I couldn't care less.

I typed in a familiar number and pressed the green call icon. There was only one toll of the telephone line until someone picked up.

“Hello, this is—” The recipient answered in an accent.

I cut the person off and spoke.

“This is Melissa Andrews.”