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A WOMAN SCORNED

By Diana Corbitt

Lifeless.

Bloody.

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

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

In the living room, two policemen stand against the wall, talking quietly about last night's football game. On the sofa, a detective interviews Andrew. Tears trickle onto my husband's bloodstained shirt as he tells the detective how much he loved me. He blubbers it while sitting on the sofa he raped me on, absently squeezing the same round throw pillow that set him off the night I lost the baby, the pillow with the coffee stain I forgot to wash out.

In the bedroom, technicians rummage around for evidence and photograph my bloody nakedness from all angles. Like the policemen, everyone's wearing latex gloves and paper booties. What a bizarre costume party. Held in my honor, it's the most male attention I've had in

years. At least the kind that doesn't leave bruises.

My blood soaks deep into the mattress. It browns the sheets stuck to my skin by the constellation of puncture wounds they attribute to the Buck knife I bought at the yard sale last week. Nine wounds. One for every year we've been married. Isn't that fun? I'm glad I've kept my sense of humor.

"She's the love of my life," Andrew tells the detective, a fortyish fellow with dark wavy hair.

Why didn't I marry somebody like him? Someone dedicated to protecting the helpless. A stupid notion. Look how well that worked out with Andrew, and he's a doctor.

Detective Pullman bags Andrew's cell phone and directs one of the policemen to locate mine. Pullman doesn't know it yet, but Andrew's been very helpful. He'll realize it when he checks our text messages. Funny how things work out. It started last Halloween when we were watching *The Night of the Living Dead*, an old sixties movie about zombies. One of the characters said, "He's coming to get you, Barbara." and that was it.

Andrew used that line ever since, or his version of it. He even used it the night he came home drunk and got me pregnant. I know because we rarely had sex, a good thing since it was always more rape than romance. The complete opposite of me, he'd never shown any interest in starting a family. It was just something he did once in a while, like paying the bills and exercising.

Reeking of scotch, he followed me through the house, zombie shuffling, hands reaching out in front of him, saying, "I'm coming to get you, Jessica." Relentless as any zombie, he cornered me in the living room. Took me on the sofa while dinner burned on the stove.

Mostly, he says it when I've screwed up, which is pretty much all the time. The bed's not

made right, there's a crumb on the kitchen floor. I've failed him again, and it's time to punish me.

You're probably wondering why I stayed with him. I mean, who likes wearing long sleeved shirts to pool parties or 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.

Angry and feeling like total loser, I'd confronted him, asked for a divorce. Bad timing, since he had just noticed the coffee-stained throw pillow. Before I could get away, he punched me in the stomach, told me he'd rather see me dead than divorce me. I believe him. Andrew's good at a lot of things, but sharing has never been one of them.

I miscarried that night. My only pregnancy in nine years of marriage, and I lost it. When I wouldn't stop bleeding he took me to the hospital. "Fell down the stairs," was the story we used in the emergency room. Clumsy me.

Devastated, I sat in the dark guest room for two straight days, and Andrew didn't even come to check on me once. That's okay because he's going to get his.

The detective sits next to Andrew, a small notepad balanced on his knee. "I hear you're a doctor." He smiles up at my husband, obviously expecting confirmation.

"Not just a doctor." Andrew's chin rises. "A plastic surgeon. I've won the Arthur C. Barrett Award two years running, also the—"

"Congratulations." Pullman's dark eyes narrow. "So, tell me, Dr. Roman...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 especially inept waiter. “We barely had time to say our goodbyes!” He flaps his hands at the blood ruining his new Armani shirt. “Jessica died in my arms!”

What a laugh.

Pullman nods and jots down a few words, his expression bland as oatmeal. “Tell me about your relationship.”

“My relationship?” Andrew flinches as if the detective had pinched his bottom. “Oh... you mean with Jessica.”

Smooth. Thanks, honey.

“Yeah,” says Pullman. “Any arguments? Money problems?”

“No, everything was great.”

“What about the hours leading to your wife’s death. You say you left the office at seven?”

“Let me see...” Andrew puffs out his cheeks, thoughtfully. “Since I’d spent the whole day in surgery, I was pretty wound up, 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’ll be at the hotel until Sunday.”

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

Pullman bends over his notepad. “So, when you ran into your friend, did you call Mrs. Roman to let her know you’d be late?”

“I was going to...but I forgot.” His teeth flash. “You know how it is. You 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.

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

“No, and I’ll regret it for the rest of my life.” Andrew wipes his tears on the pillow, his right forefinger working its way into the seam. “I texted her,” he whimpers. “Right before I left the hotel I told her I was heading home. Check it.”

“Oh, we will.” Pullman looks up from his pad. “Did she reply?”

“No.” Like a diligent worm, his finger widens the hole.

Is Pullman seeing this?

“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 wave my arms.

Does he see me?

“I pulled into the garage around midnight,” he tells the detective, oblivious of my antics. “Everything was dark, so I went into the bedroom. That’s where I found her...lying there. 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, Dr. Roman?” The detective’s words are friendly, like a host asking his guest if he’d like a glass of water.

Andrew's gasp is dramatic, feminine, even. "Of course not!" He sniffles. "She was the—"

"Love of your life." Pullman notices a stain on his lapel and uses his thumb to scratch at it. OCD in his fussiness, Andrew's disgust is pasted across his face like a giant circus poster.

Keep it up, you pompous prick. Make Pullman hate you.

As the detective studies Andrew's red puffy eyes, one of the CSI guys steps into the living room holding a plastic bag with the bloody knife inside. "Here's the murder weapon."

Pullman dangles it in front of Andrew's nose. "Any chance we'll find your prints on this?"

"Maybe..." Andrew blinks hard. "I—Jessica—she bought it for me a few days ago."

"Why? Was it your birthday? You into hunting?"

Andrew shakes his head.

"So, out of the blue, your wife buys you a Buck knife with a six inch blade, and not even a week later you find her murdered with it?" Pullman passes the knife back to the CSI guy, then makes another note in his pad. Before he can finish, 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.

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, Jessica?"

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

“When what? When you’re ready to pound her? I wouldn’t want to look at my wife’s body either, especially if I’d just beaten and stabbed her to death.”

Andrew opens his mouth, but nothing comes out. He reminds me of a sad fish.

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.” He looks at the other policemen. “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 gestures at the bloodstains on his shirt. “This? This isn’t—I found her that way! I told you, she died in my arms!

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

They’re coming to get you, Andrew.

With all the evidence against him, there’s no way he won’t get the electric chair. His DNA and fingerprints are all over the knife. I made sure of it last Saturday when I gave it to him.

“What the hell is this?” he’d asked.

I grinned, hands behind my back. “It’s a Buck knife.”

“Okay...” He gripped the smooth black handle and smiled at his reflection in the long stainless steel blade. “But why are you giving it to me?”

“You always said you needed a hobby. I thought maybe you could start a knife collection.” He thought I was crazy, but I didn’t care. I had what I wanted.

But that was the easy part.

According to the emails, Andrew ran into David at a medical convention about two weeks ago. It must have been some weekend, because the day after Andrew got back, David sent

him an email suggesting Andrew divorce me. A great suggestion, Andrew had replied. He'd love to ditch his cow of a wife. It was the divorce part that stuck in his craw. Greedy as ever, the notion of splitting his assets with me was—how did he put it? Repugnant. So, he begged David to give him time. He would find a way.

So, what was I supposed to do, wait until he figured out the perfect plan?

The emails told me Andrew was planning to stop off at the hotel. What I didn't know was when he'd leave. Since the last thing I wanted was for David to give Andrew an alibi, I planned to wait until after he was home in bed. But the text surprised me. Not only did he tell me what time he'd be home, but he'd added that damned movie line, an extra nail for the prosecuting attorney to hammer into Andrew's coffin.

It was a gift I couldn't waste.

By the time he got home I was hanging by a thread. Since Andrew is left handed the right side of my face was bruised and swollen. I cracked my ribs with a hard swing of his nine iron, a fresh layer of bruises on top of the old yellow ones.

Stabbing yourself once is extremely difficult. Repeating the process takes incredible determination. Before he took away my baby I would never have considered it. But now...

Revenge is a wonderful motivator.

Like I said, nine cuts for nine years. Hands, torso, arms. Some deeper than others, but all absolutely necessary, especially the two gashes on my right arm. Without them, Detective Pullman might realize I did it all myself. I started with the hands. Defensive wounds. I learned about those from the O.J. trial.

I managed two holes in my chest, but only one in my stomach. Having researched it, I saved that for last, knowing it would be the most painful. It took me three shoves to get the blade

all the way in. Exhausted and bathed in sweat, I blacked out and woke to Andrew screaming my name.

It's funny, but I don't mind being dead. Better to go out by my 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 satisfied with how things have worked out. Andrew married me because he was too weak to come out to his bullying parents, and I suffered for it. But soon they'll learn he's both gay *and* a murderer. I wonder which will hurt them more. Knowing them, probably the gay part.

The street outside is a circus of flashing lights and ogling neighbors. We part ways on the driveway. The policeman tucks Andrew into one of the cruisers. My gurney heads toward the ambulance. Goodbye, Andrew. After all these years, I'm finally leaving you. But that's okay. You're in good hands.