

The Hunter

Are people getting shittier, or have they always been this way? I just don't know anymore. The crime scenes have all started blending together in my head, each heinous act, each horrific mental image melding with the rest into a cruel painting of human suffering that claws at my dwindling faith in our species. Like if Francis Bacon binged peyote.

But damn it, I'm good at my job, and it's much too late for a career change. Too late for a lot of things I guess. Figure I have about fifteen years left at the rate I'm going. Fifteen years before my liver fails, I go off my rocker, or one of the suspects I'm hounding puts a few rounds in me. Hell, I might just get it over with and do that myself.

I've been thinking about this for a long time, in case that wasn't obvious from the unwarranted introspection. But this most recent case has had me thinking a lot about my ... questionable career choice a little more than usual.

It had been an ongoing investigation for a while, probably close to three years. Contrary to what Hollywood would have you believe, serial killers are like unicorns - rare and difficult to find, since the motive is usually not immediately obvious to mentally stable people. Maybe that's why I'm a good detective.

In any case, it all started going down when Janice and I arrived at the most recent crime scene. We'd gotten the call during our lunch break. It was a pretty standard scenario, someone didn't see their neighbor for a few days, then put the pieces together and called us after the whole floor started to smell like roadkill. We hit the road.

On our way into the building, Janice insisted on discussing the importance of "sympathizing with the criminal mind" with me. I was straight with her. I told her that in all

honesty, I really don't care how they feel unless it helps me catch them faster. I get paid to be a cop, not a therapist. But if she wanted to get clinical, the criminal mind usually has something to do with them having a fucked up brain or a fucked up childhood. She just laughed, told me she enjoys our little talks. She's a good kid, with a good laugh, which was snuffed out as we walked into that room.

I've seen a lot of terrible things in my day, but this was up there. Janice, who normally wasted no time in jotting every detail in her little frayed notebook, covered her mouth with her hand and disappeared out the way we came. I took a long swig from my flask. I recognised the handiwork. The perp thought he was slick, kept changing his M.O. But I could always tell from the brutality of the executions he set up that it was him.

It's best to distance yourself from the victim, it's the professional thing to do at the very least. It's a hell of a lot easier to examine a slab of meat, to figure out how it was butchered and what implements the butcher used, than it is to examine what was once a living person. The key is to avoid looking at the face too much, it makes dehumanization a little easier. But with this victim, that was impossible. The killer had made her into his hellish exhibit.

Her face was contorted in frozen agony, blood from dozens of lacerations covered her and pooled underneath her suspended body. The killer had strung her up by her feet like a farm animal, dying her auburn hair a deep crimson. I found myself reaching towards those fine autumn strands. Memories of Lisa danced in my head, her contagious laughter as she cavorted in the leaves of the maple tree behind our old house. She had inherited her mother's smile and her wildfire hair -

My thoughts were interrupted by a polite cough behind me. I drew my hand back quickly, my bare fingers mere inches from the victim. What the hell was I doing? The coroner stood in the doorway of the victim's apartment.

“You need gloves before you do that, Detective.”

He smiled at me humorlessly. He always weirded me out a little, I guess you have to be a little strange when you examine corpses for a living.

“...I'm gonna take a breather, check on J. You can continue where I left off.”

I brushed shoulders with him as I passed, heard him expel air from his nostrils in mild annoyance. I reached into my coat and downed the last drops from my flask. It was too early to be thinking about her.

Janice leaned on the rim of the trashcan, trying her best to get the disgusting acidic taste out of her mouth and the butchered body of Irma Levitsky out of her head. She needed to get her head in order, this was ridiculous. There was no way she could hope to become a detective being this squeamish. She had also noticed a momentary change in Detective Grimshaw, something she had never seen before. His tough guy facade had cracked, and even though it was just for a split second, she had seen the traces of an old wound. It worried her.

A familiar hand came to rest on her shoulder, the calloused skin like shoe leather.

“You better pay me back if you're gonna waste that ham and swiss I bought you like that.”

Janice rolled her eyes. “You don't have to worry. After seeing that, I won't be eating anything for a while.” She exhaled shakily.

Grimshaw furrowed his bushy salt and pepper brows in concern.

“You wanna call it a day? McAuley’s handling the examination. I’ve got a few other cases to work on anyway. They can’t be any worse than ... that.”

Janice wasn’t ready to accept defeat. “Are you sure? I mean, we’re already here, and I don’t want to delay your investigation-”

Grimshaw sighed. “J, it’s fine. Besides, you know how McAuley is when he’s examining a body. An ant could walk across the crime scene and he’d get pissy about it being too loud. Come on, let’s go.”

The detective and his protege retreated from the crime scene, both haunted by the incredible display of human cruelty enacted on Irma Levitsky, successful corporate lawyer, staunch feminist, and the would-be godmother of her dying sister’s identical twins.

You have the room to yourself. Aside from the yellow tape and various items left behind by the police, the room is just like it was four nights ago. You feel a grin creep involuntarily across your face as you breathe in, taking in that unmistakable smell: the scent of blood and flesh just starting to go bad. It stirs something primal inside you. This is what your ancestors must have felt like after a hunt, that satisfying feeling of overcoming prey using one’s wits. More than that though, you feel your heart pump faster, the adrenaline rushing in your veins, making your normally rock steady surgeon’s hands shake ever so slightly. What you did was so wrong, so vile, so inhuman. But that is precisely what was so good about it. The looks of disgust people would give you if they ever found out ... the shame. Oddly delicious. No, don’t think about that right now. Enjoy the moment.

You revel in your victory. With the ever-evolving technological advancements in forensic technology, you have to be ever so careful and as a result, get to experience this ecstasy so rarely. You let out a sigh as you wander the woman's apartment.

Really, you were born in the wrong era. Had you been born even one hundred years earlier, you would be able to pursue your passions much more freely, unhindered by DNA evidence or surveillance footage. The information age was really the fall of man, not the rise of it. We act as though we've bettered ourselves, and that we've somehow progressed as a species just because we've become interconnected. In actuality, we've just lost our individuality, and made it harder for ourselves to lean into what truly makes us human: our savagery. Thanks to the technological revolution, it's nearly impossible to get away with anything. But then again, killing probably wouldn't be nearly as fun without the challenge modern innovation provides. Besides, you crave an audience to witness and examine your works, to try to pin your motives. It isn't just attention, it's a type of worship. Part of you wants them to figure you out, part of you wants to be caught. Of course, this would never actually happen, you are much too clever for that. But enough of that, you must dismiss these thoughts. You only have so much time to relive your latest exploit.

You approach the body of the broken woman, admiring the surgical precision of your cuts, each over a large nerve cluster. You are particularly pleased with the results of this hunt. You had had your eye on this one for a while, learning her routine by heart. Of course, she didn't know that. To her, you were a charming gentleman she had met four nights ago after an unsuccessful business meeting. You had charmed and reassured her, made her laugh more than she had in months. As the night went on, she had gotten quite drunk, and did not turn down your offer to chauffeur her back home. You had accompanied her to her room, arm around her

shoulders, closed the door behind you, and as she leaned in for a kiss, you cut her vocal cords with a scalpel.

You smile at her and gently pinch her cheek with a latex gloved hand before brandishing a voice recorder from your lab coat pocket. You had better get to work on the examination before that sad excuse for a detective comes back.

“Victim appears to have been tortured by killer, starting with an incision across the plica vocali to stop the victim from calling for help. Head trauma indicates the killer bludgeoned the victim and restrained her, as indicated by the marks on her wrists...”