All the Pieces Coming Together

The branches whip in the wind as the sky bruises and bleeds into night. A lone bird chirps, desperately seeking a mate, but the only call back is the rustle of pine needles that cling to their branches. There is not a human soul for miles.

It’s the perfect place to hide a body. The trouble is, there isn’t anybody to hide.

I’m a serial killer — or at least, I would be if there were anyone around to kill. I picked an amazing spot to begin my life of murderous solitude. I soon realized it was a little too solitary, though, so my career has largely been dicking around online (when I can get a connection) and watching movies.

I’ve had some practice, of course. I began where we almost all begin: helpless animals. They were easy to start with because many people didn’t think twice about them. “Oh, don’t mind him, he’s just a boy — boys sometimes hurt animals.” Normal boys sometimes squash bugs or kick the family pet. A normal boy doesn’t dismember dogs and bury each piece in a different part of the woods that, if unearthed, would spell their name in binary code.

It’s a good thing I started with animals, because that’s all I’ve got out here. I even tried to get as creative as I would with a person. Unfortunately, the deer just can’t pick up on the patterns. I worked really hard to shape their limbs into that peace sign, and what did they do? Nothing. Ungrateful bastards.

Further, there are too many deer for their absence to make much difference. People are limited, which makes their disposal all the more rewarding. Their disappearance leads to a crisis, which leads to a puzzle, one that I’ve created and know they’ll never solve. People are limited. People are missed.

I miss them.

I want to be near them again. We all want closeness and companionship. Some of us just gain that by burying people in the floorboards. The floorboards of my lonely cabin, in these lonely woods, where no one can find them — and where I can’t find anyone.

I need to get out of the woods and find some people.

First, I need to find a place to go.

Fortunately, my Internet is working, perhaps suggesting that tonight is my night. I look at what’s around here. Not much of anything, naturally. There are schools further
out, but it’s late and most students will have walked home alone by now. There are churches, but I don’t trust anyone in church on a Tuesday.

Ah, here we go – a bar, called The Best Shot. Fitting, as it’s my best chance at finding someone tonight. It’s about an hour away, though I could probably speed most of the way without fail. There aren’t any cops out here either.

I quickly make myself presentable. I shave the scant beard I’ve grown and run a comb through my short brown hair. Before moving here, I was a man who’d charmed quite a few panties into my palm. I was ready to turn that charm back on, albeit for a much different purpose.

I hop in my piece-of-shit car and drive down the highway. It’s a pretty night — lots of stars, a cool breeze. It is insanely dark. It’s the kind that can almost make you feel enclosed by its opacity. My first couple nights sleeping out here, I almost had panic attacks. I couldn’t see my own hands in front of my face. What if I could never see again? What if darkness was all I had left? At least in death, you’re unaware of the darkness surrounding you. It’s a courtesy I hope to extend to others.

The road drags on endlessly, even as I speed. Fortunately no deer are slowing me down. Maybe my artwork is working well enough to deter them from running in front of my car.

Slowly the darkness opens into streetlamps and a Wal-Mart. It’s always the first sign of civilization when you leave the middle of nowhere. The lone Wal-Mart gives way to occasional gas stations, ones so isolated that I’m sure you could see Jason Voorhees pumping gas and not think twice. The gas stations become strip malls and the strip malls become chain restaurants.

Finally, tucked between some pine trees just past a Lowes, I see it — The Best Shot. I’m relieved to see some cars parked out front. I’d worried slightly that even if there were people around, they’d be choosing to smoke meth in the privacy of their own garden sheds instead of getting drunk in a bar.

I walk inside, and it looks like every stereotype of a podunk bar you’d come to expect: one of the nation’s last surviving jukeboxes, an assortment of old men and hard women, and a bartender who probably got a few of her tats in prison. The scent of vodka and beer hangs in the air, and it looks like the kind of place that would’ve smelled of cigarettes if it weren’t against the law to smoke inside. This is one law I’m thankful for. An asthma attack is the last thing I need when scouting potential victims.

I move towards the bar, some money in my pocket. I came prepared for a couple of beers — enough to seem loose (and loosen up) while staying sober enough to drive someone back to the middle of nowhere. I’m not going to be driven home by someone and then kill them in their own house. I’m perfectly able to host a murder, thank you.

I take a seat, and the bartender comes over with a look on her face that tells me she’d rather be anywhere than here. “What’ll it be, hon,” she says as a statement, not a question. Age and – from the sound of it – smoking since kindergarten have not been kind to her.

“Just a Bud, please.” Do people still drink Bud? I keep reading about craft beer online. I doubt this place even knows what craft beer is.

She wordlessly pours my Bud, one of two tap handles (confirming my craft beer suspicions), and places it in front of me.

“Keeping it simple, huh?”

I stop mid-sip and look in the direction of the voice. I see a woman I hadn’t noticed previously. She’s
suspiciously hot in these surroundings. Auburn hair in a ponytail, rimless glasses, tits peeking out over a pink bustier. She’s drinking what looks like a whiskey sour, dunking the maraschino cherry up and down in the ice. The effect causes a ripple in her breasts, one I try very hard not to stare at.

“Simple?” I ask. Well, stammer. I am a cool and collected killer, but I am also a warm-blooded man, one who hasn’t even seen a woman in a very long time.

“Just a Bud, please.” Her imitation man voice makes her sound even sexier. Jesus, I hadn’t accounted for being turned on. “You’re just going to ask for that? You’re not going to see what else they have to offer?”

I sip my beer to try and quell my ever-growing boner, and say calmly, coolly, “Well, forgive me for assuming that this place doesn’t have much creativity to offer.”

She has a small and wispy laugh that disappears like a puff of smoke. Her eyes reconnect with mine, and she says, “Sometimes all you have to do is ask.” Her eyes don’t leave mine as she slowly bites one of the cherries and sucks it off the stem.

That’s it. Killing is 50/50, but I’m definitely fucking tonight.

I scooch one barstool over so that I’m next to her. She doesn’t move, much to my delight, and we start the small talk that precludes fucking. I tell her my name, that I work in lumber and live out near the woods. It’s lonely, but it pays the bills. I’m hopeful that sympathy works in my sexual favor — as does buying the next round, which I do at this point.

Her name is Candace, and she’s a nurse. She’s off tonight, and she figured she’d stop in for a drink or two, have a little fun, maybe find a little trouble. Our knees have moved toward each other at this point, so she has no problem dropping her finger on my wrist when she says this.

I stare at her finger with its perfect pink tip. I imagine it disconnected from her bangled wrist, floating over my own. Each piece of her starts to detach from itself, floating in various places in my mind. The human body is nothing but fragments, held together by sinew and bone; and I can take it apart, piece-by-piece. I can reassemble as I wish, or scatter the pieces to points of no return. It’s a control I crave, one that, combined with the sexual longing an average person would be feeling right now, begins to consume me. I can feel my dick stiffening against my pants, my pulse raising rapidly.

It’s the pulse that Candace notices first. She places more fingers on my wrist, turning it over. I let her. Giving her some control now will make it easier to completely master her later. I already imagine her hands on my face, her legs on my bed, her breasts on my mantle. I can’t wait any longer.

“All I have to do is ask, right?”

She returns her gaze to me, and gives me a sly smile. “Depends on the question.”

I take a final gulp of beer. “Do you want to get out of here?”

Everything is going according to plan. Well, it will once we stop making out.

We haven’t even left the parking lot of The Best Shot. One minute I’m all set to drive her to the cabin, and then she brushed my hair before I could open the passenger-side door, and I couldn’t help myself and we started kissing against the car. No, kissing’s too demure a way to describe it. The only
thing keeping us from getting arrested is the fact that we have our clothes on.

I’m not one of those killers who’s afraid of sex or women, or can only do it on top of a corpse or in a bathtub full of someone’s blood or something. I love sex. Another disadvantage of my chosen locale. I really didn’t think that one through. And now, I risk letting my hormones get the better of me and precluding Candace from reaching her final destination.

“We’ve gotta get to my place,” I manage to croak out. She continues kissing my neck while I speak, and I can feel her breasts brushing against my shoulder.

“Okay,” is all she manages to say. I’ve moved to her shoulder, and we move back to each other’s mouths. I run my hands up and down her sides and she grabs my ass, grinding against me. Surely she can feel my erection. I contemplate just doing it on the hood of the car.

“The sooner we get home,” I say, pulling myself away again, “the sooner we can do this right.”

This stops us both. She turns back to face the car, and I open the door before I have a chance to change my mind and start taking her from behind. She’s barely in before I slam the door shut, rush to the driver’s side, and peel out of the parking lot, heading home for an evening of sex and murder. My heart — not to mention my prick — can barely stand it.

The road is even emptier than when I made my way out here earlier. Candace rolls down the window and lets her fingers float in the breeze, arching her back ever-so-slightly against the seat and letting out a delicate moan of pleasure. She’s pleasing herself, playing with me, or maybe a little of both. I try to keep my eyes ahead of me. The last thing I want is a car wreck to rob me of this kill.

“You really do live far away,” she says after we’ve been driving for some time, when the strip malls have become the lone Wal-Mart but have not yet become trees again.

“I kind of like it,” she replies. “Seems peaceful.”

I sigh, thinking of how long it’s been since I’ve had sex, and of all of the dead deer. “Sometimes it’s too peaceful.”

I feel her hand slink down onto my leg, and hear her seatbelt unbuckle. She moves closer to me, and I pray she isn’t contemplating road head — it would be amazing, but I really need to be able to drive.

Her head stays above my pants, though, and rests on my shoulder. She whispers, “It won’t be tonight.” And then she bites my ear.

I speed up substantially. We have to get home.

In my chosen line of work, it helps to be handsome. Drawing people in is part of the battle. People have to trust you if you’re going to successfully kill them. A great way to get people to trust you is to get them to want to fuck you. And a great way to get them to want to fuck you is to be handsome. Which, fortunately, I am. At least that’s what I tell myself. Otherwise, the fact that my potential victim has gone from straddling a barstool to straddling my lap in roughly three hours just seems a little too easy.

We’ve made it to the house — well, to my driveway. We have yet to get out of the car. As soon as I put the car in park, we started making out again. Candace’s jacket is in the backseat, but otherwise, we stay
clothed. This hasn’t stopped me from rubbing her through her panties, or her from grinding on my cock.

“Let’s go inside,” she finally breathes. I almost don’t hear her, as I’m focused entirely on her body. Seduction was a tactic I had in mind, but this is bordering on madness. I cannot stop touching her, nor her me. I try to cool myself off by thinking of the after party, of carving her up and spreading the pieces, but this only makes it worse. It gives me a secret, one she’ll never know until it’s too late. And here she is, giving herself to me. It’s too delicious to bear.

And giving herself she is — in full. We make it into the house, finally, but only to the couch. She drops her giant purse on the floor, a loud thwack echoing across the floorboards as she quickly sheds pieces of clothing: glasses, jewelry, skirt. My shirt and belt follow suit, until I’m down to my briefs and she’s annoyingly clad in her underwear and bustier.

I grab at her top and she takes my hands, showing the first sign of resistance all night. She pushes my hands away, holding them firmly on the couch.

“What are you …” I start to say, praying she isn’t stopping things here. I also start to contemplate a much sooner death for her than I anticipated.

But she interrupts me, placing one hand over my lips. I forget my frustration and start biting her thumb. She takes it back and slowly unfastens her bustier from the back. It’s the slowest thing she’s done all night, and it’s worth it.

The moment her breasts spill into view, things become an immediate blur. I’m aware of launching myself into them, kissing and biting with abandon while she holds my head close and groans with pleasure. Soon we’re standing up, because a couch is a fine place for fucking, but not nearly as good as a bed. Hell, it’s not even as good as a kitchen table, where we make a pit stop so I can pull down her panties and start eating her out.

I am aware, as we stand back up and continue on to the bedroom, that my plans have gone somewhat off course. I’d forgotten how hard it is to stay focused when a hot naked woman is present. But for the time being, as we roll around over my old comforter, I don’t care. Her time will come. For now I’ll happily kiss and bite various places on her skin, groan while she scratches my back, and thrust my cock inside of her from various positions.

I could fuck her all night and probably most of the next, but I’m only able to come so much. I lay next to her, regrettably spent, as she is still able to cuddle on me and nibble my earlobe. Women will never know how lucky they are to be able to keep going after they come. Hell, at least with Candace, coming seems to make her want more.

She slows when she sees that, for me at least, the fucking is finished. “Where’s your bathroom?” she asks. I merely point, still out of breath. I pray this is the only indication I might have given her of how long it’s been since I’ve had sex. I watch her as she walks, naked, to the living room to grab her purse and then shuts herself in the bathroom. I hear her loudly pee.

Okay, maybe now I can begin to focus. What next? I recall my various hiding places for assorted weapons and drugs. None of them are immediately under the bed. I could go looking for them while she’s in the bathroom. Then I hear her flush, and abandon that idea. The door stays closed, and I hear her rummaging through her purse, brushing her hair. Time is slipping away.

*Stay the night — she’ll probably stay the night.* I did drive her here, after all. I’m her ride home. In
more ways than one. I smile, and feel myself stiffen again. She’ll fall asleep, breathing lightly next to me, and then ...

I’m broken from my glimpse in the future by the sound of the bathroom door opening. I look forward and she’s back — hair brushed, fresh coat of lipstick, still naked. Her purse is in her hand. Her eyes fall on my newly-awakened cock and she smiles. “Not completely spent, huh?” she says, moving towards me.

I don’t want to make her promises I can’t keep, but it’s hard to speak as she drops her purse on the bedside table and straddles over me. “I - I guess not …” I manage to say, before I’m silenced by her mouth.

Okay, no falling asleep yet. I’ll deal. I run my hands over her ass, kissing her, keeping it slow. She grinds on top of me while her hands run all over my body. Well, her hand. Where’s her other hand?

She pulls away, and I realize three things — both my legs and one arm are pinned under her surprisingly-strong legs, one hand is pinning my free arm down, and her other hand is pressing a rag into my face. It smells off. Oh fuck, oh fuck, OH FU -

Thankfully I wake up. I’m still naked and still in bed. Now I’m tightly secured to the bedposts by my wrists and ankles. The room gradually comes into focus. I don’t see Candace. Where did she go?

I can’t believe this. I knew it was too easy. I never should have let her take control like that. God, letting her get on top? Yes, hindsight is 20/20. But you need to be more aware. Victims don’t fall into your lap, and Candace isn’t a victim, not by a long shot.

Candace isn’t even here. Where the fuck is she? Did she just decide to tie me up and peace out? Maybe she took the car. Well, I won’t exactly miss it. But these binds are pretty strong — they’ll take hours to get out of if I’m here alone.

I hear her footsteps, dashing that theory aside. Then what? I don’t suppose she’s secretly into BDSM and this is just a precursor to more sex.

My vision is almost completely focused, and restores itself just in time to see her walk into the room. She’s no longer naked, but wearing purple nursing scrubs, just unfastened enough to show her cleavage. Where did she get those from? I notice her purse in her gloved hands. It’s huge — probably big enough for the scrubs. And the rag. What else?

“Oh good,” she says, stopping next to the bed. She rubs her hand through my hair. What had been a major turn-on now sends a sickening chill down my neck. My toes curl and my heart rate quickens. “You’re awake.”

“What the fuck is going on?” I ask. She gets on top of me again. It’s amazing how that suddenly feels old and unwelcome. “What the fuck did you do to me?”

“Just put you to sleep for a little bit,” she replies, tracing her fingers over my chest.

“Put me to sleep?” I snort in disgust. “You knocked me out, you fucking bitch. Why did you tie me up?” I give her a coy look, one final bit of hope. “If you were into this, you could’ve just asked.”

She laughs. It’s a little sexy, but mostly ugly. I do the worst thing any potential serial killer could do: I get scared. I don’t like the way she’s touching me, especially as her fingers near my throat. I start panicking, thinking she must know who I am, what I am, and plans to stop it. To stop me.
“Look,” I say, just wanting my own freedom at this point. “Whatever you think, it’s ... Just let me go. I’ll drive you back, and we can go our separate ways. I won’t hurt you, I promise, I —”

A flash of genuine confusion crosses her face before it disappears and settles into smug control. “Hurt me?” She leers. “You can’t.” “And I won’t,” I continue. “I don’t know what you thought, why you wanted to tie me up, what you know or think or figured out ...” Her face stays stoic, though I can see her thoughts racing. “But whatever it is, I won’t do it. Not now.” “Do what?” she asks.

I mentally kick myself for panicking. I sigh, resigning myself to just telling the truth. “I won’t ... you know, kill you.”

She stares at me blankly for a few long moments. Then she cocks her head, keeping eye contact with me as she straightens her posture. Her hands leave my chest. “I didn’t tie you up because I thought you were going to kill me,” she says at last. I quietly sigh, and simultaneously feel my heart sink.

I notice that one hand is reaching into her purse. My pulse races as she withdraws a single, sharp scalpel. “I tied you up,” she says, looking me dead in the eyes, “because I’m going to kill you.”

You’ve got to be shitting me.

I stare at her. I’m not even scared. I’m fucking pissed. “You’re fucking kidding me, right?”

I can tell she was expecting a different reaction. She can’t hide the flicker of disappointment that runs across her eyes. “No,” she says, trying to scare me — and failing. “I’m not kidding. I’m going to kill you.”

I roll my eyes so far back that she almost won’t need to bother gouging them out if she wants to. I finally leave this fucking cabin, finally go scouting for victims, finally find one, and it turns out that she was also scouting. Just fucking great. I knew it was too easy.

“Un-fucking-believable.” I laugh, which I’m sure only confuses her more. “So this whole time, you were luring me?”

“Yes.” She stays still, but her stoic expression is wavering.

“And you picked me out, and came home with me, and intended to kill me this entire time?”

“Yes.”

“So the talking, the flirting, the sex ... that was all one big orchestration to kill me?”

“The first two, yes.” She’s lowered the scalpel by now, but it still rests in her hand and against my hip. “I didn’t originally plan the sex, but —”

“You didn’t?” I jerk back up, careful not to jar the scalpel too much. I feel it just barely poke into my hip, and still wince. Christ it’s sharp. “You decided to kill me, then changed your mind and decided to fuck me first?” The irony of my anger is not lost on me, but I’m too furious and, frankly, too embarrassed to care.

“Well, why not? It’s been awhile since I’ve gotten laid, and well ...” She shrugs and smiles a bit. “I wanted to fuck you. You’re pretty hot.”
See, what did I tell you? It pays to be handsome. Well, except for right now.

Her voice brings me back into focus. “You said you wouldn’t kill me now.” She presses her hand closer to my hip, and I wince involuntarily, despite the blade not pushing further. “What did you mean by that?”

I’m too focused on the scalpel to answer her right away. It’s also too humiliating. I not only have to admit I had almost the exact same reasoning as she did — even down to taking a side trip to have sex first — but I in turn have to admit that I failed at it. She’s won, I’ve lost. And I’ve lost because of my own stupidity. I deserve to die.

“What did you mean by that?” she asks again, pointing the blade against my side.

I bring my thoughts back to her – well, her scalpel. I’m going to die, but I don’t want to sooner than I have to.

“I meant what you probably think,” I say, looking her cold in the face. I’m doomed. I’m already tied up. I have nothing left, and nothing to hide. I set my jaw, lift my head up a bit. “I brought you here to kill you.”

She doesn’t change her expression, and I continue. “Yes, you picked me before I picked you. I picked you after I saw you. I picked you because you were coming onto me, because I wanted you and figured I could get some action before killing you. And yeah, I put it off because I wanted to get laid. I think you’re hot too.

“So yes, Candace, I had every intention of murdering you tonight. I mean, Jesus, look around you.” I wave my head around the span of the cabin. “Why the fuck do you think I live out here in this godforsaken cabin? It makes it easier to hide people when they’re dead!”

“Yeah, I noticed that,” she says, interrupting me. “I couldn’t believe my luck when you said you lived out in the woods. This place looked like a dream come true when you pulled into the driveway. It’s the perfect place to hide you afterward.”

See? It’s the perfect place to hide the bodies. I’m so good at planning murders, I perfectly planned my own.

“So I know why you’re here, and what you’re doing,” I continue. “Because it’s what I was going to do to you. We’re exactly the same.”

“No exactly,” she says, coldness entering her voice once more. She delicately runs the scalpel over my chest. “We were both going to fuck the other one over. But the difference?”

A sudden rush of nausea runs over me, as I guess what’s going to happen next: she’s going to try and be clever. I swear to God, if she says she came first …

She leans next to my ear. “I came first.”

I should’ve killed her sooner.

“Why?”

She ceases making a long, shallow cut up my chest – the third such cut she’s made – and looks up at me, glaring. Her expression matches the cuts she’s already made over my skin. Just my luck that I not
only pick up a killer, but one who likes to draw out the pain.


“No,” I say, breathing deeply and trying to not notice the growing pool of blood on the sheets. She’ll have a hell of a time cleaning them up. I hope pieces of me get all over her. Good luck covering your tracks, you cunt. “Why killing?”

She laughs. “My motive? You want me to go all James Bond villain on you?”

“Come on, I’m about to die. If you’re not going to kill me straight up, at least talk to me.” I shift to bring some feeling back into my ass. One cut has stopped bleeding, but the other three still trickle over my waist. “Why killing? What made you want to do this?”

She looks at me, contemplating whether or not she wants to answer. Despite the circumstances, I can tell that she kind of likes me. It’s a liking that I’m sure confuses her. This has been the basis for a lot of my friendships.

“My entire life,” she finally says, “involves saving people through very controlled, precise rules.”

I raise my eyebrows at her, and she continues, “I really am a nurse. I didn’t lie about that. Hell, where do you think I got all this stuff?” She holds up her purse, the source of the rag, the scrubs, the scalpel, and I hope to God nothing else. “It’s a profession that found me. All day I’m surrounded by the threat of death, and it’s my job to stop it. I always have to stop it. Even when there’s no hope.”

She sighs, losing her coldness. “It wears on you. I’m supposed to make dying people better. All day I’m covered in blood, in shit and vomit and disease. I have people yell and scream at me, even though I’m trying to help them live. Sometimes in the chaos, I find myself thinking, what if I did the exact opposite of what I’m supposed to do?”

A small smile seeps across her face. “At first I’d simply imagine mistakes here and there. A slipped scalpel. A fatal medication dose. It’s so easy to kill someone in a place that’s meant to help people. It’s really fascinating, if you think about it. Almost thrilling.”

Her eyes are looking away from me now, and I can see her imagining every patient she’s treated dying a horrible death. I recognize that look, the one of macabre possibility that only killers possess. I get that look every time I imagine taking someone apart. “You seem like a wonderful nurse,” I murmur.

“Actually, no,” she says, chuckling. “Congratulations — you’re my first victim.”
Of course I am. “Great. I feel so special.”

“You should.” She runs her hand over my cut, tracing blood over my skin. “You’re leaving a mark on me, just like I’m leaving them on you. I’ll never forget you.”

“Awesome. I’m so fucking flattered.” I’d love nothing more than to snap off her hand and shove it up her ass right now.

“I just can’t believe I bested you in so many ways on my first try. I got to you before you got to me.” Her leer turns into a grin. “And, I got to make my first kill before you.”

Little does she know.

The term “serial killer” implies multiple killings and patterned murders. In this sense, I am not a serial killer. I’d hoped to be, but I didn’t meet that criteria.

This is not to say, though, that I am not a killer. That only requires one murder.

My life has always been pretty unremarkable. Well-off parents, reasonably adjusted childhood. I sometimes wonder if my killer instincts subconsciously came from wanting to break up the monotony. All I know is that, at a pretty young age, I stopped seeing people and started seeing their parts.

I still remember the first time this happened. I’d watch my teacher in school, and entertain myself by imagining her head floating off her body, her hands suspended in the air still writing on the chalkboard, and her feet tapping silently under the desk. Then one day I imagined taking those pieces apart myself — ripping them off, and placing them one-by-one around the classroom. I quickly squelched that fantasy. It was wrong to think that.

I never hurt anyone when I was young. I still listened to adults, people on TV who sent criminals to jail for hurting people. They said that hurting people was wrong. But seeing them in pieces never really went away. It came and went in flickers. I’d do it with strangers, with actors in movies. Kept it at a distance.

I toyed with having those thoughts about my friends. If the thoughts arose, I quickly banished them. Strangers only. No one close. But they kept popping up, and after a while, I let myself have them, if only to make myself feel the horror that came with them. It shocked me to think of my friend’s head lying on a carving block. It frightened me to imagine my girlfriend’s pussy dissolving over my hand while I fingered her.

I grew concerned when those thoughts stopped being repulsive. I became a little more concerned when I started thinking them intentionally.

Soon, though, they became an escape. Things around me could spin chaotically — my friend could die of cancer, my girlfriend could leave me, people could come and go and school could wear on me and jobs could suck, but I could take it all apart in my mind. It was the only place I could do that, and sometimes, it was the only place I could feel content.

Those fantasies were comforting because they gave me some illusion of control. I could decide if someone lived or died. I could prove to their bodies that I could control their fate. Bodies were too taken with themselves. They could disappear just as easily as they could stand, walk, or talk. I could take them
apart, or I could leave them alone. What would it be?

I never fully withdrew, but it did become harder and harder to not imagine the people I spoke to lying in pieces. I shouldn’t hurt them. I wouldn’t hurt them.

But oh, how I wanted to.

My parents both died suddenly. They were in a car accident. When I heard the news, I didn’t even cry. I imagined their car tearing through their bodies. One minute whole, the next in pieces. I only saw their pieces, as they were cremated as soon as I identified them. I never touched them, never took them myself. Something else taken away from me.

One night, a few weeks after they’d died, I went out driving. I drove past the strip malls, the gas stations, the lone Wal-Mart. I wondered how far I could go before I left people behind forever, and how much further I could go before finding them again.

Almost in answer, my eyes chanced upon someone walking ahead on the road. They were walking away from me, strolling casually on the side of the road, as if they did this every day. I only saw them because their white shoes and vinyl jacket shimmered in my headlights. They were alone. Their back was turned to me. They walked as if nothing could hurt them — as if they were in complete control.

I’d show them.

I sped up and jerked the steering wheel to the left. I don’t even know if they knew I was coming. They never turned around, not until I’d already hit them. And even then, they didn’t turn around so much as land on the hood of my car.

They — or he, as I then saw — ricocheted to the side, and I slammed on the brakes. I turned around, saw him lying on the road.

I ran over him again.

I did it once more for good measure.

I put the car in park. He lay on the road, not moving. I’d killed someone. I’d finally done it.

I looked in my rearview mirror, and saw him staying still. He had to be dead. No one would survive being run over three times.

But I had to make sure. I had to control this.

I got out of the car, scooped up his broken body, and placed him in my trunk, his arms crumpling under his torso. As luck would have it, I had some plastic garbage bags back there. It’d make clean-up easier. But where could I take him?

I continued driving forward, figuring these woods would do me well. These woods. They seemed pretty familiar. I drove by a sign with a couple town names. Meadow Rush and Thatcher’s Hill. Nature names that probably described some pretty places, but nowhere anyone would actually live. But Meadow Rush rang a bell.

_We’ll see you next week, son. We’re going to the cabin out in Meadow Rush._

The cabin. Mom and Dad had a cabin in the middle of nowhere. I’d gone with them for a month one summer and hated every day of it, but they adored it. It had been their private getaway, a place where they’d go to escape people for a while. Mom would go out there alone and write. Dad would go there and hunt. And as far as I knew, it still stood, unaware that its beloved patrons were reduced to ash and buried closer to civilization.
Fortunately, I now remembered where it was. I turned down a couple of side streets and drove deeper into the woods, until the trees suddenly cleared and there it was.

I got out of the car and looked around. There wasn’t a soul for miles. It really was the middle of nowhere. I was amazed there was even electricity. Trees stretched in every direction beyond the clearing, carved only by the road connecting the driveway to the main road. A lone vein to the heart of humanity. Could I sever that too?

I checked to see if the spare keys were in the same place. Sure enough, there they were, under the fake log by the porch. I pocketed them, and opened the trunk. My victim was still motionless, still breathless. I picked him up, his arm hanging limply over mine as I carried him to the cabin.

Inside, it was musty and quiet. I flicked on the light, and saw everything that had made the place a home away from home for my parents. Furniture, an ancient computer, lamps. The bedroom door was open, and I saw a fully-made bed with a linen cabinet next to it. I laid the body on the floor and walked around, finding signs of my parents but no one else. The only sounds around me were crickets, toads, and the occasional bird. There wasn’t a soul for miles. I was alone.

Well, not completely alone.

I looked back at the body. It lay in a heap of plastic. He was dead, and I needed to make sure he’d never be found. There were the floorboards. I could just leave him in the cabin, maybe burn this place to the ground or something.

As I thought, my eyes continued scanning the cabin and found the kitchen. They stopped upon a full knife set. I paused, then walked over to it. Despite a light layer of dust, they were in pristine condition.

I returned to the living room with a meat cleaver. He lay on the floor, dead. Was he dead? I was sure he was dead. I had to make sure he was dead.

I could make sure he was dead.

I could control this.

I imagined taking him apart, piece by piece. I imagined burying the parts in precise locations. I could make a pattern, one that spelled out the make of my car or some other clue.

I imagined him broken and buried. And I didn’t even try to blink it away. I didn’t remind myself that this was wrong. Because here, it wasn’t. Here, there was no one for it to be wrong to. There was nobody here — and as such, I could hide anybody in any way that I wanted.

I smiled.

“Why are you smiling?”

I’m staring at the ceiling. I bring myself back to Candace, to the present. I look down and see I’m still bleeding.

“No reason,” I say. I won’t give her the satisfaction of my own background. “Just remembering things.”

I had decided that night that the cabin would be my home, and that killing would be my new normal. It was the only normal I could keep.

But even that hadn’t worked out. I never wanted to leave the cabin, since it was the perfect place to
hide. I never saw anything in the news about a missing man. I hid anyway, just in case. I made small trips at night to clear out some essential stuff from my apartment, but otherwise, I abandoned what I had before so I could fully become what I’d always been.

The initial thrill, however, wore off when I realized victims wouldn’t just fall in my lap. I had to find them. But I didn’t want to. Until I did.

And now I’m here.

I still remember how I felt after that first kill. Years of confusion, suppression, and chaos had been set in order at last. I finally had the control that I craved, that I longed to demonstrate, that I was eager to show others. But I couldn’t do that when there was no one around.

And that was the ultimate problem. I couldn’t control bodies that weren’t there. I had to go to them. And even when I went to them, I couldn’t necessarily control what they did to me. Tonight is clear evidence of that.

Maybe tonight is that man’s retribution. Maybe I’m learning a cruel lesson about life by losing my own. Maybe it’s happening because it’s happening and there’s absolutely nothing I can do about it. Whatever the reason, I know one thing for sure: I lost.

“Hey!” Candace smacks my leg. Zoning out has become less voluntary. Maybe the blood loss is finally catching up with me. I blink and make eye contact with her, show her I’m still alive — even if not for much longer.

“What?” I manage. “Why do you even want me conscious right now?” Couldn’t she just kill me?

“I only want you unconscious,” she says, “when I make the right cut.”

“So make it,” I say, closing my eyes. “I’ve got nothing to say to you.”

I feel her grab my hair and lift up my head. I open my eyes, and she’s glaring at me. “I’ll make it when I’m ready,” she says. “I make the rules.”

“No, you don’t.” I gain enough of a second wind to furrow my brow and speak through clenched teeth. “You think you do, but you don’t.”

“What are you talking about?” She keeps her grip on my hair.

I know I’m talking to myself more than her, but I don’t care. “The rules. You think you’ve made them, or broken them, or made them by breaking them. You haven’t. You got me, but because I came to you. You’ll kill me, and leave me here, and feel like a success. You can see it all ahead of you, one kill after the other to counter your stupid job. But you don’t know what will happen next. You don’t know if the cops will find me or find you. You don’t know if the person you find next will do the exact same thing to you. You don’t know the rules, because in the end, there aren’t any. You don’t know anything!”

I use my ever-dwindling strength to spit at her. It lands on her face, and she barely flinches. She calmly wipes her face, keeping eye contact with me.

“You’re right,” she says. Not what I was expecting. It’s a running theme this evening. “I don’t know what will happen after this. Everyone thinks they know what will happen, that if they do X and Y, that Z will happen. But that’s bullshit.”

We’re so much alike. Maybe in another life, we could’ve worked together.

“I watch people die every day, people who did X and Y and expected Z, but got something else entirely.” She twirls the scalpel against her finger. “They expect me to give them Z. And I have to try my
She leans towards me. “But not here. Not now. Here and now, I can give whatever answer I want. Here and now, I not only know the answer ...” The scalpel leaves her finger, floats to my arm. “... I determine it.”

She smiles. “And it feels great.”

She makes a sudden slash. I look over and see a long, cascading cut crawling up my entire arm. Blood starts pouring out immediately. As the sight sinks in, she turns and does the same to my other arm. Both cuts long and vertical. Both slashing their respective veins. Both marking the end.

I cry in pain, but that’s about the only amount of panic I can muster. I lie helpless, watching my arms drain. Watch her watching me, still smiling. She gets off of me, and stands by my side. She runs a palm through my hair, keeps it on my head. Strokes me. “Shh,” she says. “It’ll be over soon.”

I look ahead. I don’t want her to see inside me as I die.

I remember the first time I fell asleep in this cabin, during that month from hell with my parents. My heart had raced when the lights went out. I’d never been surrounded by that much darkness. It was suffocating. I’d held my hand in front of me, and couldn’t even see it. I knew what blindness felt like. I felt trapped under a blanket, one I could claw and tear at, but never rip away.

Now though, I don’t panic. I see that blanket as a comfort. The bleeding, Candace’s stare, her cuts, the pieces, the loneliness — it’ll all be over soon. It’ll all be shut out by this darkness, one I now fully embrace.

I close my eyes.

He’s gone.

I keep my eyes on him as I grab some rubbing alcohol, pouring it over the scalpel to clean it. He doesn’t move, he doesn’t breathe. He’s no longer here. He’s gone — and I took him away.

I smile. All in a night’s work.

I leave him tied up. I use his shower. Air-dry instead of using a towel. I’ve left enough evidence of my presence without adding more. I debate doing a complete scrub-down of the place, but part of me wants to leave clues. More of me also knows no one will ever come looking for him.

I put my bar clothes back on, walking through the various places where I shed them. He was one of the best fucks I’ve ever had. A shame I’d already decided on his fate. Maybe in another life, we could’ve lived out here, fucking and killing together. It wouldn’t be the worst life. But it wasn’t in the cards. Not this time.

My medical supplies are back in my purse. The scrubs I’m not sure what to do with. They’re covered in his blood. Laundry will only do so much.

I consider his fireplace, then feel the floor wiggle beneath me as I move towards it. Of course — the floorboards. A classic hiding place, and one without the presence of smoke to draw attention. I’ll leave them there. No one will find them. No one else has been here.

I lift up the board, and see that I’m mistaken.

Lying underneath of the board is a single, decomposing arm. It still has much of its skin, the fingers
gnarled with death. A bit of cloth from a shirt remains. Enclosed by the bit of cloth is an open wound, which is crawling with maggots.

I’m smacked by both the sight and the stench of it, and slam the board back into place. I press the board down further with my foot, hoping that’s enough to keep the bugs, smell, and as silly as it is, the arm from resurfacing.

He hadn’t died victimless — he’d gotten someone. Maybe he got multiple someones.

He could’ve gotten me.

My heartbeat begins to climb. Part of me thought he was just bullshitting when he said he was going to kill me — that he was just scared, or trying to scare me. But his words, the isolated cabin, and most of all the severed arm confirm he wasn’t bluffing.

I think about all the times I could’ve died tonight. The minute we left in his car and drove far away, where no one would see who we were or what we did. As soon as we walked into the cabin, me letting him put his hands wherever he wanted on my body. I remember catching a glimpse at his kitchen while he was going down on me, and seeing that collection of knives. I didn’t think for one second he’d use them for anything except meal preparation. I didn’t think he’d do anything on his bed except sleep and fuck.

I look in the direction of the bed and jump at the sight of him.

Dead. He’s still dead. Of course he’s dead. I’ve killed him.

I shudder, thinking he could just as easily killed me, and keep telling myself that he didn’t. I killed him. I dismantled his paint-by-numbers night, injected my own chaos. I won.

Did I?

I can’t dwell on it now. I straighten my shoulders, getting myself together. I stuff my scrubs in a plastic bag lying near the kitchen. I’ll burn them at home. I do a quick glance through the cabin, looking for any remaining things. I take one final look at him. Still tied up, still covered in blood. Still dead. I hope he’ll stay that way.

I grab his car keys from the shelf by the door and make a swift exit. The car will also need to be disposed of, but I’ll take care of that later.

I climb in the car and rev the engine, trying not to peel away too quickly. The last thing I want to do is wreck the car before I even get on the highway. I take one final glimpse of the place that almost held me forever, the final resting place of the man who almost got me. The perfect place to leave the body.
This story is one of four which will appear in *The Crow’s Gift and Other Tales*. The collection will be published on September 5, 2017. Visit [fb.me/thecrowsgift](http://fb.me/thecrowsgift) for more information and regular updates.

For more information on this story and other pieces from Sonora Taylor, visit the author’s website at [sonorawrites.com](http://sonorawrites.com), or follow the author on Twitter: [@sonorawrites](https://twitter.com/sonorawrites).

**About the Author**

Sonora Taylor has been writing for over twenty years, alternating between chilling short stories and lighter, humorous novels. Her first short story collection, *The Crow’s Gift and Other Tales*, will be released in September 2017. When she’s not writing fiction, she drinks beer and blogs about it at [stoutsandstilettos.com](http://stoutsandstilettos.com), a women’s beer blog. She lives in Arlington, Virginia, with her husband.