

Beyond a Shadow of a Moth

It was wet out. That was an understatement. Laughter. The roads looked like the surface of a lake. Under the right conditions, one could fully believe the illusion. It was late. The roads were empty. Keeping the wipers on full blast didn't do much. In the split second of passing the blade over the glass, it would fill again with water. If only she'd used that trick he taught her. Wax the windshield. The water would run off as if it were afraid. It didn't matter. Her tears kept her vision to a minimum. If it weren't for the rain, she'd still be driving mostly blind. The radio was stuck on a talk show; political in nature. She wasn't really listening to it, but perked up when the weather portion came on. The storm should pass within the half hour. That was perfect. She'd arrive by that time.

It was a messy breakup. They used to fight a lot. There was passion though. They did have a chance together. She called him earlier this evening. He sounded so happy on the phone. They were going to reconcile. Even so, she cried. Mainly hers were tears of joy. Some were tears of sorrow; when thinking of some of the more difficult times. She changed the channel. Some endearing country song was on. It was mainly greeting card verse, though it was a little uplifting. Her mood rising, she sang along. Road hypnosis was diminishing. Singing helped. No longer sleepy from the constant stream of bright white stripes on the road she looked at them a little closer. White black white black white black. If she wasn't careful, the hypnosis would come back.

"Ahhh!" She screamed a little. A large black moth landed on the windshield right in her line of sight. It seemed to stare at her for a second. Then it was gone. It either got bored and left, or the wind took it. She wondered why it didn't become a nasty blotch on the windshield.

Shortly after the moth incident, the rain stopped. The timing was perfect. Her exit was coming up; or his really. She giggled at that. She was near his neighborhood. He'd be expecting her. Just like she remembered all those past trips to his house, it was a right, another right, go down a mile on the frontage road, left, and finally a right. It almost felt as if the break-up never happened. She was in a cheerful mood now. The tears were left behind on the highway. They can play with the rain on the pavement. That is now in the past. She was making her mile down the frontage road. Almost giddy now, she smiled bigger. She made the left. The neighborhood was still familiar. It was hard to see much of the place in the dark. Her memory filled in the missing details. There is the house on the north east corner of the four way stop. With her imagination, she could see it in its full vivid detail. Though now wasn't the time to dwell on the neighborhood. She would be in his arms again very soon. She made the final right. The living room and porch lights were both on. He was waiting for her.

As she pulled in, she noticed a shadow move. It stood up and moved across the room toward the front door. He was coming to greet her. The door opened as she climbed the three porch steps. He remained behind the screen door.

"What are you doing here? I thought you said you'd be here in the morning?" He wondered.

"I decided to come tonight. I couldn't wait!" She smiled at him. He watched her through the screen door. She really did look beautiful. She was wearing her dark green rain slicker. It was unbuttoned. Her hair was untouched from the rain. It must've stopped before she arrived. She had that grin she always wore when she wanted to pry something out of him.

'No' he thought. That was in the past. Why would she show up tonight? It's too late to pick up her things. She had to be attempting to have a physical reunion with him. This is the only reason she'd be here so late.

"Look about that call today." He started.

"I know. I know" she interrupted waving her hand.

"You really shouldn't be contacting me. You know I have a restraining order on you."

"I know but..."

"Weren't you supposed to send a family member for your things?" He asked as he opened the screen door. He looked around the porch. The street was empty. It wasn't unusual as it was half past midnight. Most everyone was asleep to prepare for the work day. He noticed the house across the way and down the block a bit was still lit up. They were night owls. A quiet family lived there, but they really did stay up very late. It wasn't uncommon for them to have the lights out by 3 or 4 AM. He stepped down onto the porch. He stood in front of her. After he was done taking in the details of his block, he looked down at her. That smile was bigger than ever.

"I'm not here for that." She said.

"I know. It's late. You really have to leave." He insisted.

"Oh you!" She fell into him. Her left arm circled around his waist. She was still talking. He couldn't make out what she was saying as her face was buried in his chest. He wasn't sure if it was reflex or old feelings but his arm went around her shoulder. He really had to get her out of here. Send her back home. Have someone pick up her belongings.

She stood on her tip toes for a kiss.

He obliged.

They held that pose for a small eternity.

Pop. They stared at each other. His eyes wide. Her eyes smiling.

Pop. They broke their kiss. He stood there, still with his wide eyes. She stood there, still with hers smiling. Pop.

She caught him as he slid down to his knees. She kissed his forehead then allowed him to fall over.

Her smile faded. A trace of it still remained. Her face was a jumble of mixed emotion. Her cheeks and mouth made her appear pensive or angry. The smile left her mouth but remained in her eyes.

She took a quick look around the street. Nobody heard the shots.

That was wasn't so strange. They were fairly muffled. Her pistol

was buried into his gut, pointing upward. She was very close almost pressed against the pistol and his body but not fully. The slide on the automatic caught her shirt at least once. It tore a small oval channel down it. Underneath was a long scratch drawing a little blood. She was too close to the slide top. It injured her a bit.

That's ok. She felt she should bear some wound if nothing else but a

symbolic sharing of the ones she'd just given him. Her right hand still held the small hold-out pistol. It was a purse-sized automatic. She thumbed the safety, gently lowered the hammer, and put it back into her purse. On the way back to the car, something buzzed past her face. She brushed it away and got in.

She drove on. Oh this wasn't a murder on a whim. No. It was calculated. She was entering the next phase of her murder; the systematic disposal of the murder weapon. She's read books. She's researched online. It may be possible to get rid of this pistol in such a way that a forensics team would be lost. Only the most high profile and highly funded investigation would be able to pin this on her. She wasn't stupid. She had the restraining order. They broke up. She would be an immediate suspect. But she would remain free if they were unable to tie her to this weapon. And that is all that really mattered.

During the drive, she began the systematic disassembly of the pistol. On the straight parts of the highway, she drove with her knees. The magazine was removed. The round in the chamber was ejected. The holding pin was pushed out. The upper receiver was removed. As she removed parts, she placed them in a plastic bin in the passenger seat. The parts she really wants to hide will be the barrel and the firing pin. They would be able to tie her to the rounds that tore through his body. She wasn't worried about the serial number. That was filed away ahead of time. She stole the pistol so there would be no record of a purchase.

She had to pull the car over. Most of the larger parts were disassembled. She had practiced this before and remembered there

were over thirty parts to the assembly. The rest would require both hands. That and the fact she didn't want to loose any parts under the seat made her pull over. She couldn't afford a single piece to be found in her car. Sure, they'd probably check for powder residue on her. They'd probably check her tire tracks in some of the areas she would drive to. She had all of that covered. Including a nice little story to cover the scratch the slide made on her abdomen. She just had to tell it to herself over and over. It had to become a fact to her. Once it was a fact, it would be easy to lie about it. She'd get away with this. Of that, there was no doubt. She just had to complete the disposal of the weapon; especially the key components. Those items will go to the spring.

She thought about all of this as she completed the disassembly. She thought about the solution required to remove the powder residue. She wasn't stupid. She'd probably fail to get rid of all of it. The spring will solve that as well. Focusing on the final pieces, she completed the disassembly. All of the parts were in the bin. It only took her about seven minutes to finish. She guessed that was pretty good, and wondered how fast it could be if she were a cop or a service member.

Another short drive took her to the woods. As a kid it was always "The Woods". In reality, it was one of the county's multiple areas of wilderness. It didn't have a name. That's why the children named it. Sure it could've been better, but what the hell. It was familiar. Her car was parked about a hundred yards in. The canopy over the trail covered it from sight. She'd brush away the tire tracks for the entire length using a tree branch with leaves. That

will be a lot of brushing. The hundred yards was worth it. She couldn't afford to be interrupted by a passerby.

She walked down the trail. It was dark, but she knew this area. There was enough moonlight through the canopy to help light the way. Her plastic bin was tucked under her arm. The lid fixed in place. She thought about her ex as she traveled. She remembered going on dates with him in a place similar to this. It would be silly of her to dispose of the weapon in the same woods were they used to walk. The canopy opened up some. The trees were more spaced out in this part. She could see the rise in the landscape ahead. These were semi mountainous parts of the woods. Technically, these were considered a mountain region, but she never understood why. There weren't towering sections of earth and rock you could see an hour's drive away. No, this was a large expanse of trees and greenery that rolled across the area. There were severe variations in elevation from time to time but it never felt like the mountains out west. Complacent in her current position on the trail, she began throwing the smaller pieces as far as she could to the left and the right. These were just retaining pins, small guides, and two springs. The rest would have to wait.

She climbed the trail up past the tree line. The trail ended. The official trail ended. Hers did not. She knew the rocky trail that would get her up the rest of the way. It wasn't an extremely tall rise, but was a mere 100 feet or so above the trees. Arriving at the landing on top, she systematically started flinging parts in all directions. It may be years before one single part would be found. Hunters don't even go here anymore. All the game worth

hunting left years ago. Nobody could figure out why. The local conservation department had their theories, but they weren't sharing. Something brushed her face. She swatted at it. Looking at her hand, she was a little bit startled. A large black moth rested on the back of it. She barely felt it. It was so light and velvety. It seemed to stare in all directions with those bulbous eyes. It was beginning to creep her out. She shook her hand until it flew away. Must be moth mating season, she guessed. She finished throwing all the parts away save for the few that would really tie her to the murder. 'No, mercy killing' she thought.

In the center of this rise, is the spring. The walls of the hill rose up around it. It was as if this was a miniature volcano. Except at the center, was a very pleasant hot spring. She'd bath in it to remove the residue. She'd drop the firing pin, barrel, and remaining parts into the spring. They would drop down into the 'mountain'. They would never be found.

She made her way down the internal path. It spiraled into the inner face of the bowl. She made it to the landing below. It was covered in light vegetation. She swam here before. It was a favorite spot. Nobody really knew about it. It was as if she owned this private paradise. Now it would serve her where she needs it most. The swim, laundry, detailing of the car, disposing of the parts, brushing the trail were all covered. She didn't have an alibi. It didn't matter. It would've helped but it didn't matter. There would be no way to pin this on her beyond a shadow of a doubt.

She entered the water. It felt very warm against her skin. It wasn't too hot, but it was very warm. It was almost the perfect hot-

tub temperature. The rocks rolled under her wriggling toes. It was so relaxing. It was a near orgasmic experience. She laughed out loud thinking of that. It was a private joke to her. The laugh remained for awhile as it bounced around the great stone bowl.

She made it out to the middle. It didn't take long. The spring was only about thirty feet in diameter. She could stand up in most of it. It dipped down to about abdomen height. The center, well it was off center really, was the source of the spring. It was a few feet across. She stood near the edge. The bowl and her clothes were on the landing. The remaining parts were in her hand. One by one, she dropped the parts into the source.

'Ker-plop' The barrel dropped fast into the source. She thought it might take some time; that it might sway back and forth as it sank. Nope. It dropped right in. The firing pin was next. It made a smaller 'plink' sound as it entered. Another moth landed on her arm. She didn't mind it. It was velvety. It was as if the moth were a co conspirator.

"Welcome to my parlor, little guy." She laughed. It was a spontaneous greeting she gave the moth but it made her think of the phrase 'welcome to my parlor said the spider to the fly'. It was a poem she thought. Couldn't quite remember where she'd heard it. Several more small parts left and the pistol would be 'gone'.

'ker-plink' part of the trigger assembly went under. Another moth joined the first. This just made her more giddy. Laughing, she dropped in the rest one after another. Each time, another moth joined in. There were five on her arm. They seemed to be enjoying

the private display. They watched. A couple of them rubbed their legs to clean themselves.

She noticed blood on her arm. She'd forgotten about all the blood. All of the details. All of the planning. She had missed the blood. Her car, her clothes, the trail, They are probably dotted with blood. There is probably a nice trail leading people to this very spot.

The moths seemed to be eating it. That made her nauseous. She flicked them off her arm. Then she rubbed at the blood spot. She'd wash his blood off in the spring. It didn't come off. Well it didn't stay gone. Fresh blood welled up to replace that washed away. She felt fleshy ridges on her arm. She was wounded? It didn't hurt. Those nasty moths were eating the blood. The five reconverged on her other arm. They brought more. She was bleeding there as well. They were causing the wounds. But she couldn't feel them. She brushed them away and turned to run. There must be more of these blood eating moths. Horrified, she couldn't move. It was as if she was in one of those dreams where she tried to run but couldn't. She read somewhere, that was your body locking up to keep you safe as you slept. She wondered if that was true. These particular moths must be kin to a tick. They probably emitted a chemical to keep her from feeling the bite. She thought about the 'Spider to the Fly' poem again and was in a complete terrified state. They also paralyzed her so they could feed.

She was feeling woozy from the blood loss. More and more moths joined in. She never remembered them living here before. She's never even seen one! Why now? Where are they coming from. She

watched helpless as they unmade her. Stripped to the bone, parts of her hand fell into the water.

'plink' Nobody would find that anytime soon.

The rest of her hand followed. 'ker-plop'. Oh the moths would get away with this. Nothing would link them to this event.

The moths fed. She was systematically disassembled, and the remains hidden away in the spring.

The morning was chaos on the street. Neighbors were unable to provide witness to the crime. Investigators scoured the area while patrolmen took down information. One child from the crowd pushed forward to see. He was partially restrained by a parent. He could see the body on the porch. On it was a single black moth. To the boy, it seemed the moth was caressing the dead man's forehead. It reminded him of mommy as she sings to him at night.