

# **Creative Writing Honors Thesis**

Macie Elizabeth Krumenacker

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**Case File D-4471789**  
Macie Elizabeth Krumenacker

**Content Warning:**

*Please be advised this story contains violence, gore, child death, and potentially disturbing imagery.*

**CASE FILE D-4471789**

**WARNING!**

This document has level 4 security clearance. Should you view this document without the necessary documents, you will be subject to immediate disposal as per the contents of your contract.

Please enter your security key to continue.

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Please enter your agent identification number:

>12395696

Processing request. . .

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Welcome, AGENT 12395696.

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# POLICE REPORT

Case No: 030040

Date: 08/03/20XX

Reporting Officer: Officer Jim Barthes

Prepared By: Jim Barthes

**Incident:** Our forensics team found new, possibly incriminating evidence of Ms. Mary Magdalene in the ongoing murder investigation of Anne and Jack Wilson. Magdalene is located at REMOVED . Forensics lifted latent fingerprints matching Magdalene's on the door handle of the victims' residence at REMOVED on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 20XX. I was dispatched to question her at approx. 13:07 PM, 08/03.

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## **Detail of Event:**

*Ms. Mary Magdalene answered the door quickly. Upon entering the house, I noticed nothing unusual. She was pleasant and calm. I asked her if there was anything she left out from our original conversation the afternoon after the crime. No police report was filed at the time of initial questioning. She replied confidently that there was nothing she had left out. I asked her—are you sure? She was affirmative in her response. I told her that they found her prints on the door of the Wilson's house. She started to cry after I told her. She told me that, as the neighborhood's babysitter, The Wilsons were a recent hire of hers. She claimed they asked her to babysit their children—Anne and Jack—the Saturday the incident took place. She said that she went over there that morning to babysit them. She said the door was locked and she couldn't enter their residence as she normally did on babysitting days. She left the residence shortly after texting and calling the Wilsons and returned to her home.*

## **Actions Taken:**

*Because Ms. Magdalene had initially left out that detail in my original questioning of her, I let her know we may have to take her in to custody as lying to the police is a punishable offense. She told me she was riddled with guilt after finding out about the childrens' deaths. She said she couldn't bear to think that if she had called the police when things seemed amiss, they could've been saved. I told her I believed her story, and, as Sheriff, I hoped she felt she could trust us with whatever information she had regarding the case.*

## **Summary:**

*Ms. Magdalene is an upstanding member of the community and has never caused a problem. Her character has frequently been vouched for by her neighbors and by the people she babysits for. I believe that no further action is necessary regarding Mary Magdalene. While investigation into the person who is responsible for the murder of Anne and Jack Wilson is ongoing, it is of my professional opinion that Ms. Magdalene does not fit into the profile of the killer.*

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BACK.

**Town of** REMOVED  
**Department of Public Safety**  
14 TAC Lane / P.O. Box 500 REMOVED

**Victim / Witness Statement Form**

Case Number: 030040

Date: 08/03/20

My name is Mary Magdalene

and I live at 7064 Meadowview Lane REMOVED WY REMOVED  
(Street) (Town) (State) (Zip)


My Phone Number is: (Home) (Cell) (Other) (307) 957-3009

I am making the following statement concerning the death of Anne and Jack Wilson which occurred  
at 7098 Meadowview Lane on Saturday,  
07/31/20 at 4 **AM**/PM. I am making this statement voluntary, without reward, promise of reward,  
threat or force, to Jim Barthes, a  
police officer(s) of the REMOVED Police Department.

My name is Mary Magdalene. I live at REMOVED in REMOVED, Wyoming. The purpose of this statement is to describe
the events I witnessed on the morning of Saturday, July 31st. The victims--Anne and Jack Wilson--were kids I babysat in my free time.
They were truly great kids. They were always smiling and laughing. They also made me things to take home with me. Their parents--
Sarah and Jackie--seemed very average. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary to me as I babysat them. They always paid me on time
and were polite and respectful. That morning, I took my usual route to their house. I live close, so I just walked there. Upon reaching the
door, I attempted to open and enter the Wilson's home. The door was locked. This was strange because as we all know, everyone is
very safe here. It's normal to keep cars and homes unlocked. I then attempted to call and text the Wilsons to determine if I was meant
to babysit on Saturday as I thought I was supposed to. I received no response. There were lights on inside their home, which I could
see from my spot on the porch. After calling again, they still didn't answer. So I left their house and proceeded back home.
I texted them once more to indicate I needed a head's up per my cancellation policy. I never heard back.

**Continue on back if necessary.**

Under penalties of Unsworn Falsification (RSA 641:3), I declare that I have read the foregoing statement and that the facts stated in it are true.

  
Mary Magdalene  
Signature of Victim / Witness

  
JIM BARTHES  
Signature of Officer / ID Number

Please click NEXT to continue or click BACK to return to search.  
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**AUDIO TRANSCRIPT 1**

**SPEAKER 1:** Alright, let's get on with this, shall we, you two?

[Clears throat.]

**SPEAKER 1:** My name is Director Ridge Barrett of the Department of [REDACTED]. Today I am conducting a disciplinary hearing on Special Agents Wolfe Sculder and James Witherton for their actions last week regarding Case D-4471789.

[Sighs.]

**BARRETT:** The Subject of Case D-4471789 is Mary Magdalene, age twenty-three. Residence: [REDACTED], Wyoming. Blood type: O-positive. Status: unknown. Magdalene was last seen alive by-

**SCULDER:** Hey, I thought this was a hearing, Director. Why're you reading off a script, eh? We already know what happened.

**BARRETT:** I need to have on the record that you two brought back nothing from your...unauthorized escapade to Wyoming.

**SCULDER:** Well, geez. What happened to innocent until proven guilty?

**BARRETT:** We don't really do that here, Sculder.

[Silence.]

**BARRETT:** And I've already checked your field reports. There's absolutely nothing inside of either of them. You were supposed to be gathering intel, but so far...

[Sigh.]

**BARRETT:** We've got two dead kids and no solid leads. The one subject we *had* is now missing.

**SCULDER:** Well-.

**BARRETT:** Let me finish, Agent. Based on the information we do have, HQ seems to think this was just a homicide case. And from what I've seen, the two of you brought back nothing to challenge that. If *that's* true, then...

[Silence.]

**BARRETT:** Don't look at me like that. I've been doing my best for the two of you while you were gone. I hope you know that. I just...I can't keep doing that. After your infamous television case, I...well, my superiors are keeping a closer eye on the two of you. There's nothing I can do about it. This case is under intense scrutiny. I have to be thorough.

[Clears throat.]

**WITHERTON:** Sir, may I?

**BARRETT:** Go ahead.

**WITHERTON:** We had reason to believe the information included inside the police reports you gave us were somewhat falsified.

[Pause.]

**BARRETT:** And on what grounds are you making these claims, Agent?

**WITHERTON:** Based on mine and Sculder's extensive education and in-field experience.

**BARRETT:** So...you based your current actions on past anecdotal evidence.

**WITHERTON:** Yes, sir.

**BARRETT:** I'm sorry Agent Witherton, but this does not help sell your appeal at all. I couldn't possibly have authorized an investigation that relied on invalid evidence—the thought that *maybe* something was incorrect. You both know that.

**WITHERTON:** You must be mistaken then, sir. We—.

**SCULDER:** *I*, actually—it was me. I did some research. I contacted the local police department and asked for autopsy reports, crime scene photos, the works. I actually have them right here—.

**BARRETT:** So...you illegally posed as an officer of the law...to illegally receive confidential information.

**SCULDER:** No, Director. I just asked them nicely...of course I did! What, you think they would've listened if I told them the truth?

[Sighs.]

**BARRETT:** Listen, Sculder. This isn't about "the truth," okay? This is about following protocol. They don't need to know the truth, whatever that might be. In fact, all they need to know is that this was a tragedy. Whoever or whatever was behind this, all we know for sure is that it resulted in two dead kids. It was your job to figure out *what* or *who* killed them. That's all you were supposed to do. That's literally it. So please tell me...what happened to the subject?

[Silence.]

**BARRETT:** Mary Magdalene? Ring any bells?

[Silence.]

**BARRETT:** Seriously? Nothing? I'm...I'm so disappointed with the two of you. You're just running around waving your badges like the Feds at this point. What the hell did you even do there?

**SCULDER:** With all due respect, Director...we did what we thought was right.

**BARRETT:** And where has that gotten you, Sculder?

**SCULDER:** Well, right now...

**BARRETT:** No, that wasn't a question. It's just getting you *punished*, Agent. We're obviously not getting anywhere with this. I'll need both of your badges right now.

**SCULDER:** W-wait, Director. You haven't even-.

**BARRETT:** Until further notice, you both will be on disciplinary leave.

**SCULDER:** Wait a second. You haven't even given us a chance to talk.

[Silence.]

**BARRETT:** Do I need to? Considering what you've-.

**WITHERTON:** I think it's part of protocol.

**SCULDER:** I think so, too.

[Pause.]

**BARRETT:** Alright. Fine. But you don't have very long to convince me.

**SCULDER:** Hah, that's alright. In fact, that works out fine. Because we have...

[Light shuffling.]

**SCULDER:** ...this!

**BARRETT:** A cassette tape?

**SCULDER:** It's not *just* a cassette tape, Director. It's all the information we gathered on the Magdalene case. You know, all that stuff you were telling us we *didn't* have.

**BARRETT:** Why didn't you just give this to the intel team when you returned?

**SCULDER:** We couldn't.

[Sigh.]

**BARRETT:** Of course you couldn't. Because I guess doing what you're supposed to do goes against everything you believe in.

**SCULDER:** It's so nice to see you finally understand me.

**BARRETT:** Alright, that's it. Badges. Now. Get out of here.

**SCULDER:** Hey hey hey, at least let us be here with you while you listen to it!

**BARRETT:** You've lost that privilege.

**SCULDER:** C'mon Director, it's important.

**BARRETT:** Then it needed to be treated like that when you got it.

**SCULDER:** Oh, come on, don't be like that. You know there are some things that can't get out. Isn't that our job?

**BARRETT:** Our job is to make sure that the public remains ignorant to the existence of any entities. You put that mission in jeopardy. Now leave.

[Scoff.]

**SCULDER:** Fine then. Let's go, Witherton.

[Shuffling.]

**SCULDER:** Don't look so disappointed. We-

[Door closes.]

**BARRETT:** God, what a mess.

[Pause.]

**BARRETT:** Is this really all they got?

[Pause.]

[Distant telephone hum.]

[Static.]

**BARRETT:** Director Ridge Barrett speaking. Yes, I need assistance. Can you put me over to the decontamination team? An agent just brought in a potential hazard. Thanks.

[Pause.]

**BARRETT:** Actually, you know what? Never mind. I'll send it over to one of the specialists. Yes, I'm sure. I'll warn him beforehand. Thank you. Bye-bye.

[Click.]

END OF AUDIO TRANSCRIPT 1.

PROCEED TO NEXT PAGE?  
>YES.  
CANCEL.

LOADING...

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FILE DOWNLOADED.

**URGENT! Action Required: Department of Security.**

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN;

The audio transcript I received from Director Ridge Barrett of mere hours ago MUST be immediately disposed of following standard protocol. It is of my professional opinion that the actual MP3 file is NEVER LISTENED TO no matter what benefit the original recording may have for research purposes.

To complicate my point: I was tasked with transcribing its contents as accurately as possible given the hasty circumstances of its arrival. Once the file was in my possession, I was advised by the Director himself that the file contained a potential active hostile entity. He told me it was "just a hunch". I continued as advised, but...just hearing the beginning of the recording made me violently ill. Continuing through the recording as I was encouraged to by the Director subjected me to visual and auditory hallucinations, amongst other things. My symptoms are too complex to list in this letter and they have only worsened.

I worry that I will eventually lack the coherency to make a formal submission to the Department, so this informal request is the best I can do given my circumstances.

In the hopes that none will meet my same fate when attempting to expunge data from such a document, I have made twelve different copies following standard decontamination protocol to lessen the chances of something...undesirable occurring, but even then...there's no guarantee of any safety.

Despite my caution, I think it best you all read the transcript for yourselves. I have attached it below. The contents are...despicable. I recommend swift and professional action be taken against Director Ridge Barrett for his negligent handling of such contaminated materials and irresponsible authority regarding the two missing Agents.

Please keep me informed about any actions you take. I am surely willing to testify. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,  
Brendon Palmer  
Auditory Specialist  
ID: 49938877

**Incident Report #3778**

**OPERATOR:** "Operation desk helpline, what is your emergency?"

**CALLER:** "Yes—uhh, hello?"

**OPERATOR:** "Hello sir, who am I speaking with?"

**CALLER:** "That's not important right now. What's important is that I found a body."

**OPERATOR:** "A body?"

**CALLER:** "Yes, a body. It's—" [retching] "oh, God."

**OPERATOR:** "Sir, can you tell me where you are located?"

**CALLER:** "Floor 5 of Department I. I...I had a meeting with the Director, and suddenly..."

**OPERATOR:** "Don't worry. Help is on the way. You'll be met with a decontamination team, OK? It is in your best interest to follow their instructions."

**CALLER:** "Please hurry. There—"

[Pause.]

[Dull thump.]

**CALLER:** "Oh no."

**OPERATOR:** "Sir? Is there someone with you?"

**CALLER:** "I have to go now, miss."

[Static.]

**OPERATOR:** "Sir? Sir? Ahh, shit."

[Beep.]

**OPERATOR:** "Decon team—please be advised. Potential active hostile in vicinity—I repeat. Potential active hostile. Proceed with extreme caution. Repeat. Proceed with extreme caution."

**UPDATED INCIDENT STATUS: ACTIVE.**

END AUDIO TRANSCRIPT 2. PLAY AUDIO TRANSCRIPT 3?  
>YES.  
CANCEL.

LOADING...

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WARNING! FILE CORRUPTION DETECTED. PLAY ANYWAY?

>YES.  
CANCEL.

### AUDIO TRANSCRIPT 3

**SCULDER:** Do you know who we are?

**SPEAKER 1:** Umm...you're police officers, aren't you?

**SCULDER:** Yes, exactly. Jim Barthes sent us here to get another statement.

**SPEAKER 1:** Oh, really? I just gave him a statement a few days ago—was...was there something wrong with that one?

**SCULDER:** I'm not sure, ma'am. You'd have to ask him.

[Laughs.]

**SPEAKER 1:** Okay, well, I'm not sure what to do.

**SCULDER:** Don't worry. We'll figure it out. Can we have your name for the record, please?

**SPEAKER 1:** My name? It's Mary Magdalene.

**SCULDER:** Excellent. Now, can you please tell us about the incident, Mary?

**MARY:** Well, do I have to? I've already talked about it so much. You have to understand—things like these are just...hard to talk about.

**WITHERTON:** That's very understandable ma'am—but my partner and I are simply following protocol.

[Sigh.]

**MARY:** Alright, well. I guess I can explain again—.

**SCULDER:** Oh, one thing before we start ma'am. Please be sure not to leave anything out this time. It's imperative for our investigation that you're as honest as humanly possible.

[Silence.]

**MARY:** Okay, sure I guess. I'll do my best to not forget anything.

[Pause.]

**MARY:** Umm, I work as a babysitter. You guys—you know what a babysitter is, right?

[Laughs.]

**MARY:** Well...umm, anyway, the Wilsons were a recent hire. Their kids Jack and Annie were always the sweetest. Truly. They made me bracelets and stuff. They're nice. Well, were nice, I suppose. I guess—am I doing okay?

**SCULDER:** You're doing fine.

**MARY:** Should I...should I talk about their parents? Or something...I mean, you're still looking for the killer, right?

**SCULDER:** The investigation is still ongoing, yes.

**MARY:** Okay, that's good. I hope they get what they deserve. Those poor kids...

[Silence.]

[Sighs.]

**MARY:** Well I guess I'll talk about the Wilsons. The-their parents, I mean. They're suspects, aren't they?

**SCULDER:** At the moment, yes.

**MARY:** Ahh. I see. How sad.

[Pause.]

**MARY:** Well, a couple weeks ago, one of our neighbors found out they were a lesbian couple.

[Pause.]

**MARY:** And-you know-everyone here had a whole lot to say about that. I mean, you've had to drive through town. You know how it is. Little mom-and-pop shops all around. Tiny gas station. Nothin' much to do, really. I guess nothing much to do but gossip about the people here. So...so in the weeks before they died, they were the talk of the town, you could say. And once everything happened, well...

**SCULDER:** Were you involved in the gossip?

**MARY:** Me? Oh, no. No, not at all. I stay out of that kinda stuff.

**SCULDER:** Uhh-huh.

[Pause.]

**MARY:** I mean, even though the Wilsons weren't very popular with the neighbors, I was. I'm a pretty good babysitter-and pretty cheap considering my record. This is a small town and so people like me aren't too common. Most people appreciate my-

**SCULDER:** Ma'am, I think this is all very interesting, but me and my partner here don't see how this relates to the crime.

[Silence.]

**MARY:** I'm sorry. I don't mean to ramble.

**SCULDER:** It's understandable given your circumstances.

**MARY:** Yes, I...I think so, too.

**SCULDER:** You can continue when you're ready, then.

[Pause.]

**MARY:** I guess I just feel bad.

**SCULDER:** You...you feel bad? Why?

**MARY:** Well...I mean, I haven't really been here for too long. I moved here the summer after I finished my last semester of college. Of course my parents weren't too happy, but at least I was. I guess I'm fortunate that the people here took a liking to me pretty quickly. I'm happy that I was welcomed. It's just...you know. It sucks that the Wilsons didn't have that. I wish they did.

[Pause.]

**SCULDER:** Tell me, Mary—what's a young thing like you doing in a little old town like this?

**MARY:** I just needed a change of scenery, that's all.

**SCULDER:** Work must be difficult, then.

**MARY:** Sometimes, I guess.

**SCULDER:** So...your relocation didn't have anything to do with any of your past hires?

**MARY:** What?

**SCULDER:** You said you had an extensive babysitting record.

**MARY:** Yes, I do.

**SCULDER:** Was there anything particularly notable about it?

**MARY:** No, I wouldn't say so.

[Pause.]

**MARY:** Why are you asking?

**SCULDER:** I just figured I would ask. This doesn't exactly seem like a place a young lady would want to spend her time in.

[Silence.]

**MARY:** You're right. It wasn't always that great.

**SCULDER:** Must be lonely being the only young one in a town of old farts, eh?

[Laughs.]

**MARY:** Hah, well, that's why I liked the Wilsons so much. At least they were somewhat close to my age. And...

[Pauses.]

**MARY:** Well, you know how their story ends.

**SCULDER:** How does it end?

**MARY:** They died, of course. It's so sad.

[Silence.]

**SCULDER:** Do you know how they died?

**MARY:** No, no. Well...maybe.

**SCULDER:** Maybe?

**MARY:** It's just a rumor I heard.

**SCULDER:** How does the rumor go?

**MARY:** One of the ladies who lived next door said she heard a commotion around the time of the killing.

**SCULDER:** What kind of commotion?

**MARY:** I'm getting there, don't worry.

[Pause.]

**MARY:** I know you want me to be thorough, Mr. Sculder, so I'll do my best.

**SCULDER:** I appreciate that. Err-we appreciate that.

[Sigh.]

**MARY:** Well, anyway. The neighbor said she heard some strange noises-like scraping, I guess?-in the early hours of the morning. I mean, at first she thought that the kids were getting ready for school because they were being pretty loud. But then she remembered that it was a Saturday and the Wilson kids didn't go to Saturday classes. She thought it was strange. But, anyway. She told me she didn't go to check or anything, especially not when she saw me show up at the door for babysitting. She had thought everything was fine.

**SCULDER:** So...what about her story makes you think the parents were dead?

**MARY:** Oh...just the noises, I guess. I thought it was weird.

**SCULDER:** I thought you said she was the one to hear them.

**MARY:** She was, I just mean, like, it was weird. You know?

[Silence.]

**SCULDER:** But...you're sure the Wilson parents are dead?

**MARY:** Absolutely.

**SCULDER:** Is there something you're not telling us?

**MARY:** W-what do you mean?

**SCULDER:** It's just...your story. It seems like a bit of a stretch. How could you know they were dead based off of a...a story from the neighbor?

**MARY:** Well, I trust my neighbor.

**SCULDER:** Your official statement didn't say anything about this.

**MARY:** Of course it didn't!

**SCULDER:** Why not?

**MARY:** Because...

**SCULDER:** Because you're not supposed to know that they're dead-is that it?

[Silence.]

**SCULDER:** You only talked about the case to begin with because we told you they were suspects. But you're now saying you knew that they were dead.

[Silence.]

**SCULDER:** That information hasn't been publicly released, Mary. Sheriff Barthes doesn't want to cause an uproar. I guess he's just like you, huh-thinks that there's nothing wrong with being gay in a little old town just like this one.

**MARY:** I...it was just a rumor, honestly. I don't know if they're dead or not.

**SCULDER:** If I remember correctly, you said you weren't involved in gossip.

**MARY:** I-.

**WITHERTON:** And she also said she was sure that they were dead.

**SCULDER:** Ahh, that's right.

[Pause.]

**SCULDER:** Well, Mary?

**MARY:** You...you won't believe me.

**SCULDER:** To tell you the truth, Mary, you're already looking very suspicious. I could probably take you in to custody right now for suspicion of murder.

**MARY:** But...but it wasn't me!

**SCULDER:** Really now?

**MARY:** Yes, I-I swear!

**SCULDER:** Then why are you lying? You said you're not involved in rumors, that you feel bad for the kids who died, but then this...? You said you were hoping that they would get justice, didn't you? You said that they were kind and thoughtful kids.

[Pause.]

**SCULDER:** But you were happy to lead us around by our noses. You haven't told us the truth yet-or if you have, it's only been half-truths. Surely you should've learned from the first time. Lying to officers is a punishable offense.

**MARY:** I swear, it wasn't me.

**SCULDER:** You haven't given us any reason to believe you.

**MARY:** Well, fine. If it'll help clear my name I'll tell you.

[Pause.]

**MARY:** I just went over to the Wilson's house like I was supposed to on the morning that it happened. And I tried the door but it was locked. Which was weird, of course, cause this is a small town and we don't do that here. But anyway, I tried calling and texting them and there wasn't a response. So I figured they canceled without telling me and I went home. Then I found out later that next day that they had been killed by some psycho Satanist or whatever-all these weird symbols around their bodies. And I was really upset because I thought their parents were good people, but apparently the kids had been murdered shortly after I had left the house. So I felt really awful inside that I hadn't done anything to help them. If only I had, like, called the cops or something, I could've saved them.

[Pause.]

**MARY:** That's the story that you both know, right?

**SCULDER:** Yes.

**MARY:** Well, most of it is true.

**SCULDER:** Most?

**MARY:** The cops came later that day asking where I was the morning of the murder and I had just said I was home the whole time cause I felt so, so awful.

[Pause.]

**MARY:** But, in reality, I didn't tell them the truth because I was able to go inside.

**SCULDER:** The door was unlocked?

**MARY:** Yes.

**SCULDER:** So you didn't want to seem suspicious by telling them that you really *had* entered.

**MARY:** That's right.

**SCULDER:** That part makes sense, but...how did you know the parents were dead?

[Sniffling.]

**MARY:** That's the part that you won't believe.

**SCULDER:** I think it's up to a jury to decide what's believable or not.

**MARY:** W-wait...a trial? I can't go to trial!

**SCULDER:** You *did* say you were well-liked by everyone in the town, so maybe you'll get a lighter sentence.

**MARY:** No, please don't arrest me.

**SCULDER:** If you're not going to tell the truth, then you can once you have a lawyer present in your jail cell.

**MARY:** I don't need one! I'll tell you, just...please. Don't arrest me.

**SCULDER:** You need to tell us your story first.

**MARY:** Okay, okay. Look, it wasn't a neighbor who heard that weird scraping. It was me.

[Sighs.]

**MARY:** It happened after...after I had gotten to the house. At first, I checked through the window, and there wasn't anybody there. After that I tried the door. I think I just panicked, you know? I wanted to figure out what I had heard. The door wasn't locked, which I had lied about before. But something in me...somehow I knew there was something wrong. When I walked into the living room, the TV was on, all staticy, but there wasn't any sound coming out of it. It was so unsettling, and I was too scared to call out for the kids. Cause what if-you know. What if there was some kind of crazy person in the house? If they *had* a gun, they'd for sure turn it on me. And let me tell you, I loved those kids, but I didn't exactly want to die for them.

[Pause.]

**MARY:** That's when...that's when I heard a scream coming from upstairs. I guess you can say I had a change of heart right then. I didn't care if there was somebody in the house any more. I was yelling for the kids all the way up the stairs, and I immediately ran for their room. But it wasn't them who screamed. The kids weren't even there, but their beds were perfectly made and everything, which totally freaked me out, cause these kids were *messy*. So I leave their room to go and figure out who's screaming, and it's coming from down the hall-Sarah and Jackie Wilson's room. So I bust into their rooms and...they're there all right, in bed. I remember looking at them and feeling so...

unsettled. It felt like I was seeing something I shouldn't be seeing. They were both naked and holding onto each other. Not in any intimate way, though. I yelled at them to knock it off, with all the screaming and just tell me where the kids are.

[Pause.]

**MARY:** I'm sorry, I just...

**SCULDER:** I get it.

[Sniffles.]

**MARY:** It...Jackie...she was holding Sarah's head against her chest, and then she looked up at me with these dead eyes. I swear, it was like she couldn't even see me. She just whispered that they're gone, over and over again. I asked her what she meant, but she just looked down at Sarah and started to cry. Sarah finally said that "they" told her to give the kids up. I didn't understand what they were saying or what they were even talking about. They just kept crying and telling me not to be mad at them—that they had no choice. Sarah was just...babbling her head off between her sobs. And there was her snot everywhere—and all over Jackie's body, too. And Sarah just kept up her stupid rambling, saying things about this thing that had taken them, that the noise was too loud. I kept asking, *What're you talking about?* But she ignored me. I was so angry, and I'm not a normally violent person, but I felt like if she said another word, I was gonna punch her. So I turned around and I went to—to punch the wall, you see, but it was all cracked. That space, the—the corners of the room? They were falling apart. There was a bunch of dusty white stuff on the floor cause for some reason, the Wilsons had covered up their room with plaster. But they didn't do a very good job, because it was falling apart.

[Sighs.]

**MARY:** So...so I turn back to the two of them, with their *pathetic* snot-covered faces and I say something awful.

[Sobs.]

**MARY:** I-I say that they deserve to go to hell for their stupid games, and their kids would just be better off without them. I know how that sounds, but I didn't mean it, I swear! I was just angry at how stupid they looked, how pathetic they were to blame their kid's disappearance on something that wasn't even there.

But I remember...I remember how their faces looked as soon as I said it. Both their mouths dropped open and they looked absolutely terrified. Sarah went to scream again, but...both of their heads simply *popped*.

[Sniffling.]

**MARY:** I literally saw two people burst right in front of me. Their heads popped open like two little grapes being squished between my fingers. It was the most awful thing I ever saw in my entire life. I was so scared, so, so scared. And of course I figured nobody would believe me. How would I say that their heads exploded? How could I explain that? They'd just think that I did it—that I killed them. But how would I have made them explode like that? But in the end...

[Pause.]

**MARY:** Everyone just thought I did it anyway, so I should've just stayed at the scene. I should've called the police or whatever. But I didn't, alright? I was scared. I was so scared. I ran all the way back home, locked my door, and threw up so often thinking about what happened that my throat was so raw I couldn't talk, let alone go to the police. When they finally showed up, I just told them what I thought they would believe. That's all. And that's the truth. I guess I didn't get there in time to save them from the ritual, but I'm glad I had seen with my own two eyes what happened to the people who gave them up.

[Long silence.]

[Thump.]

**SCULDER:** Take a look inside the file, Mary.

**MARY:** Why? You're...you're not going to say anything else?

**SCULDER:** Take a look.

**MARY:** I just told you my story and you don't even answer me?

**SCULDER:** Just open it.

[Light shuffling.]

**MARY:** W-what is this?

**SCULDER:** These are your past hires.

**MARY:** I know, I'm...I just don't know why you're showing these to me.

**SCULDER:** Mary Magdalene, age twenty-three. Over the course of the past five years you've lived in five different towns, all

for approximately the same amount of time. You take on a multitude of clients of various ages, but...always, no matter what, one of the clients you take die.

**MARY:** So...these are...?

**SCULDER:** Yes. These are the kids who've died under your care.

**MARY:** I...I had no idea.

**SCULDER:** Hah...man. You sure had us fooled, Mary. Here I was thinking you were actually innocent, maybe a victim yourself. But you're despicable.

**MARY:** What's with you? I tell you about myself, I tell you the truth about what I saw, about how I *feel*, and you treat me like this?

**SCULDER:** Don't.

[Pause.]

**SCULDER:** Just...don't. I saw the bodies of those kids, Mary. They were *mutilated*. Each and every one, in the same ritualistic fashion. Isn't that how you said the Wilson kids died? That it was some "Satanic ritual"? Mary, you piece of shit. *How could you have known that if it wasn't you?*

**MARY:** No...no! You don't understand! I swear, I swear. It wasn't me! I...look. I need you to believe me. I need your help. Please, it wasn't me. I...I found something, okay? I found something I wasn't supposed to and...and something came through it. Something *awful*.

**SCULDER:** You're seriously trying to trick us again?

**MARY:** No, I-.

**SCULDER:** We know how these sorts of things work. You offered it something in exchange for something *else*. You were the one to bring this onto yourself. It was *you* who killed those kids, maybe not with your own hands, but because of you, they died.

[Dull thump.]

**SCULDER:** I want you to see for yourself what your selfishness caused.

[Scream.]

**MARY:** W-What is that?

**SCULDER:** These are the crime scene photos for each of the kids you'd babysit. The little boy on top is Thomas. Then there's the twins, Genevieve and Juliet. And Ella and Paige and Xavier. All died under the same mysterious circumstances. All found in ritualistic fashion. All eight years old or younger.

[Sobs.]

**MARY:** You're sick...you-you had that just waiting for me, didn't you? You just wanted to see how I'd react to such-

[Retches.]

**MARY:** -to such an *awful* thing. But...but if you had all that ready, then you must've suspected me from the start, didn't you?

[Silence.]

**MARY:** Tell me, you son of a bitch. You've made me relive hell.

[Slam.]

**SCULDER:** You really think we would've gone this far with you had we known from the start that you were guilty?

[Silence.]

**SCULDER:** We first thought maybe you'd been cursed by something to have known so many victims who died with the same causes. But now...hah, it's so *obvious*. You said it yourself-you brought something here. And now it's killing people because you've let it.

**MARY:** I didn't want this to happen, I promise. If I had known this was going to happen, I never would have agreed to bring it here.

**SCULDER:** You think it'll just *stop* killing after you get what you wish for? Hell, what did you even *ask* for?

**MARY:** Just...just to be loved. To be liked by everyone. I figured...I figured that was why nobody pressed me too hard after the kids died. But you...you two are different. It doesn't matter what I say-you don't believe me.

**SCULDER:** Tsk. How many...how many do you think have died because of you, Mary? How many more will suffer because of what you've done?

**MARY:** I-it said it would be done by now. That after these kids were killed, they'd go away.

[Chuckles.]

**SCULDER:** And you really believed it?

**MARY:** W-what? What are you...

**SCULDER:** Entities don't just give up. They won't just go away. If it's followed you all the way here, it'll probably kill

everybody in this town before making another deal with you so that it spares your life. You'll be its slave, constantly aware of the blood on your hands until eventually it kills you, too.

[Sobs.]

**MARY:** Oh, God. So this is-

**SCULDER:** There is one way to stop what's going to happen.

**MARY:** Tell me, please.

**SCULDER:** I don't think you'd like it very much.

**MARY:** I'll do anything.

**SCULDER:** We need the entity's name.

[Pause.]

**MARY:** It told me...never to give its name to anyone.

**SCULDER:** Or what?

**MARY:** Or it'll kill me, too.

**SCULDER:** Hah! Guess you have something in common with it. It lied to you. It can't do that. You're its gate into this world. If it killed you, it wouldn't be able to be here any more.

**MARY:** So I can tell you and I'll be fine?

**SCULDER:** Safe from it, sure.

**MARY:** And you promise you can stop it?

**SCULDER:** Of course.

**MARY:** Alright. Its name is [something that cannot be translated it is simply how to pronounce the sound of the mutilated children as they died]

[Giggling.]

**SCULDER:** Ahh, finally. I'm glad this can end now. Thank you, Mary.

[Chairs squeaking.]

**MARY:** What are you doing? Hey, don't come any closer with that. Get away from me, I swear I'll scream, you-!

[Dull thump.]

**SCULDER:** Alright, help me with her, will you? Steady...steady. Stop. Let her down slowly...

[Sighs.]

**SCULDER:** What's wrong?

**WITHERTON:** It's nothing.

**SCULDER:** I know you better than that, James.

[Sound of tearing flesh.]

**WITHERTON:** I just...I don't see why you had to keep it going for so long, Sculder, if you already had the incriminating evidence from the start.

**SCULDER:** Oh, c'mon Witherton. I know you enjoy it.

[Sighs.]

**SCULDER:** It's more satisfying this way.

**WITHERTON:** It's nice to knock these kinds of people down, sure, but—

**SCULDER:** What is it?

[Cracking.]

**WITHERTON:** Sometimes I just question our methods, you know? She didn't seem like she really knew any better. Do we really have to sacrifice her?

[Pause.]

**WITHERTON:** And last time—what about that man? He was a really bad guy. And we just let him go.

**SCULDER:** I told you, James. I have a plan. You have to trust me.

[Wet plopping.]

**SCULDER:** I know it seemed wrong, but you have to trust me. If we let Mary go, this whole town would've been dead. You know that.

**WITHERTON:** I know that.

[Squishing.]

[Sighs.]

**WITHERTON:** But I just hate this part.

**SCULDER:** Well, it's like I always say—can't have anything without sacrifice, am I right? If we want to get rid of all the evil in the world, this is how it goes. Sometimes the sacrifice just happens to be human. It's no big deal.

**WITHERTON:** Yeah, you're right, I guess.

**SCULDER:** Alright, then. Help me with this part, will you?

[Buzzing.]

**SCULDER:** Just open her chest cavity, alright?

**WITHERTON:** Okay.

**SCULDER:** And James?

[Wet thump.]

**WITHERTON:** Yeah?

**SCULDER:** Everything works out as it should. What's meant to be will be. Remember that when you have doubt. These people are getting what they deserve—and we're getting what we need for the future. That's what's important.

[Pause.]

**WITHERTON:** Yeah, I think you're right.

**SCULDER:** Alright then. Let's begin.

[Silence.]

[Distant chanting.]

**SCULDER:**

[the words I cannot type for you because I do not understand.]

**WITHERTON:**

[I wish they would stop talking in this way]

**SCULDER:**

[they keep going, back and forth, and then]

[Scream.]

**MARY:** WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME? PLEASE I

[Gurgling.]

**WARNING! CORRUPTION DETECTED. INITIATING FORCE QUIT...**

.

.

.

ERROR. POPUP DETECTED. OPEN?

>YES.

NO.



### **Incident Report #3779**

On this day, AUGUST 28<sup>TH</sup> 20XX, the Department of Security and Confidentiality has taken RIDGE BARRETT into custody for CRIMINAL NEGLIGENCE regarding CASE FILE D-4471789.

The DECONTAMINATION TEAM encountered an ACTIVE HOSTILE ENTITY in its route to arrest RIDGE BARRETT. Upon termination of the host, it was identified as former employee SAMANTHA JONES, an intern under the supervision of BRENDON PALMER. BRENDON PALMER denies any involvement in the circumstances surrounding her unfortunate and untimely passing. An investigation is currently ongoing.

Autopsy reports indicated extensive soft tissue damage in all of the host's major organs. There was significant brain hemorrhaging and fluid loss. No entry wound detected. No entity found inside corpse. No evidence of suicide. No conclusive evidence found towards cause of possession.

RIDGE BARRETT will be charged as outlined in section VI of his employment contract. Defendant denies all claims against him.

Manhunt ensues for missing agents WOLFE SCULDER and JAMES WITHERTON. Charges against them include murder of a subject of interest, criminal misconduct leading to the death of approximately 9,769 individuals of [REDACTED], Wyoming, posing as federal investigators, forging of evidence and lying under oath, summoning of a hostile entity, and seventeen (17) other offenses of the employee code of conduct.

Any and all evidence that may help in the ensuing investigation into the actions of the aforementioned individuals must be turned over immediately to the Department of Security.

Subjects should be considered armed and dangerous. A kill-on-sight order is in effect.

Please contact the security department with any questions.

APPROVED BY  
Head of Security  
K.L. Bradley  
ID: 09090897

*That was the end.*

He removes his headphones, rubbing the backs of his ears with clammy fingertips in trepidation. He can only muster a breath before...it feels like he's going to break down any second. So many deaths—and for what purpose? He doesn't understand. He stands up, pushing his chair with the backs of his knees until it makes an unholy screech against the wood. He is at a loss.

What exactly had happened after he left Wyoming? As an investigator, he had just gone to see the corpses, burned their mangled bodies into his brain.

*“Jesus, I—you know, after those kids got killed or...somethin’...some of us country folk thought we should go up ‘n move somewhere safe. Up to a place where there were more of them hospitals nearby, more of them scho-ols. And you know me—sures always been more of a skeptical lad myself. Never thought I needed nothin’ but an AK and some good neighbors by myself. But after this?” He gestured to Mary’s body on the floor and to her organs on the walls. “I’s be thinkin’ I’m gettin’ a bit too old for somethin’ as unsettling as this.”*

Jim Barthes had offered him a smile back then. They both had pretended not to notice the cops upheaving the contents of their stomachs in Mary’s petunias on the lawn, or the growing crowd complaining of the smell.

*I understand, Officer,* was what he had said at the time. *Thank you for sharing this case with me.*

Barthes didn't quite buy it. *“Don’t throw your life away, son. Some things are best left to God.”*

So he had. He had given up on following them. Now Jim and everyone else in town was...

*It's their fault.* The thought echoes in his head over and over until he feels dizzy. *They did this.*

He promised he wouldn't get involved.

*Manhunt ensues for missing agents.*

But an entire town was gone; thousands were presumably dead, yet he couldn't find even the smallest record that the little town he was in only a few days before had existed at all—and for what purpose? Why go so far to cover it all up? Why kill Mary if it ended up killing everyone anyway?

Then...what was it that the two of them were really looking for? What was their goal?

Deep inside of him, something opened its eyes. He did not know what it was. It did not give him answers. It only gave him one goal: find them—and strike them down.

Some people deserve it.

# **Television Killed My Marriage**

Macie Elizabeth Krumenacker

*Dedicated to my grandmother and victims  
of abusive relationships;  
I promise that I see you. You are heard.  
May you find peace.*

Content Warning:

*Please be advised this story contains mature themes, explicit references to violence, and potentially disturbing images.*

He doesn't remember it as clearly as he did when it had happened, but he's urged to speak, and so he starts from the beginning. Like most tragedies, his began with neglect. Perhaps he should specify that he didn't try to—it just sort of happened. An "*I'll do it later*" here, a "*Can we talk about this tomorrow?*" there, and suddenly, both his kids were eight and his wife would barely look at him, let alone sleep with him. That part made him angry. He'd consider himself a pretty good guy. A little flabbier than he used to be—maybe a little less of a looker—but still. He was a good guy. A guy who made mistakes, yeah, sure, but who doesn't make mistakes?

He realizes he's getting off track. He takes a deep breath, shudders a bit. And then he poses a question: "Who likes television?" It's rhetorical and he knows it. But he answers it anyway.

"Television killed my marriage."

He knows it's surprising—he knows it's a pretty bold thing to say. Maybe it shifts the blame off of him for acting how he did. But he felt so hopeless. All those hot, attractive babes that they put on TV—you know, those girls on the news channels, the reality TV shows, the advertisements. It's really not his fault.

It's not his fault his wife couldn't compare to their blonde bustiness, their blinding smiles absolutely radiating feminine energy. It's not his fault his wife didn't recognize that he was really trying, that TV was the only way for him to relax and unwind from her constant nagging and belittling. And yeah, he adds, TV was the only way for him to get off behind his wife's back, yes, but that was different. He wasn't to blame for that, remember? That was the television provider's fault.

He mentions that when his wife finally found out what he was really doing during his "breaks," she stopped speaking to him entirely. With that, their bedroom died. His wife wouldn't

touch him or give him any affection at all, which only perpetuated the cycle that she wanted him to break.

One particular night—the night it happened—she finally initiated it with him after months of refusing him. And he was thrilled, of course. He thought she was finally coming around, finally becoming understanding of all his contributions to their family. But...he couldn't get there. He couldn't please her. She suggested in a fit of anger that he had a problem down there—that it was his manhood that was broken. This, she said indignantly, was divine retribution. God was finally punishing him for being unfaithful to her. Her words sent him spiraling into a rage he had never felt before and it ended with his banishment to the couch.

Fine then, he remembers thinking. At least I'll be able to relax with the television—just like I always do. A creature of habit, he remembers turning it on and flipping to his favorite channel with his favorite girl. And it was relaxing—therapeutic even—to turn his brain off and just admire the beauty on the screen. Things were going great, truly, until her beautiful smile let him know: “We'll be back in a minute! Stay tuned for more.”

It was late, obviously. But it still shocked him when the first commercial after the beautiful girl on the television was for—ahem—man-pills. He cracks a smile at the thought.

*Are you tired of not feeling like you used to?* the narrator pointedly asked. *Don't you want to make her happy?*

Yes, he said. I do feel that way. My wife doesn't appreciate me or my manhood. I do my best for this family and it's never properly appreciated.

*Well, call this number with this special TV offer and get your first bottle of T-PILL for only \$19.95, plus shipping and handling!*

He was enthralled. God is actually looking after him, he smiled—*hurry, while this offer lasts!*—and went to pause the screen so he could just call the number—

*bzzt*

—but he missed. The stupid remote buttons are too close together and he hit the wrong one. *Fuck*, he thought. Which channel was it again? And he was almost going to turn it back to the babe—really, he was. He swore up and down that his finger was hovering over that “last” button.

But something stopped him.

Like most tragedies, his began with an accident.

He knows he shouldn't have pressed that button. It's clear to him as he continues. He doesn't even really remember what button he pressed for sure, but he knows now it was a mistake—the biggest mistake he made that night besides trusting his wife to get him up.

He's being facetious and...well, he knows it, but that doesn't change what happened—he didn't turn the channel back to the hot babe he had waiting for him.

No, what was on the screen piqued his interest more than getting off. Written in comically large 90's-style print were the words *Ask Anything!* In the background was the sound of TV static, but not in a kind of drowned-out quiet way, but in the way that signified that the producers were trying to give this channel an old-timey feel. An edit, he decided. He appreciated that at the time. It was a surprising and even flattering change from the channels that always tried to look hip and fresh to cater to a younger audience, who attempted to modernize the old black-and-white shows he had grown up watching. This channel was a true blast from the past, he jokes. He could even see black and white flashes on the screen, like little ants running along it, which was admittedly typical for older television sets. It was a great editing trick, he decided.

And sure, he felt a bit of the disconnect between the static dancing along the edges of his screen and the funky, colorful font. But a certain curiosity got the better of him—what could *Ask Anything* mean?—and so he stayed to see where this would lead. No sooner than when he decided he would stay did the show return.

Recalling what it looked like was a bit difficult, but he did his best to explain.

On the television was a half-circle stage with a considerable amount of audience seats. All of them were taken. They were staggered up high so each person could see over the head of the person sitting in front of them. This was important, he noted, because each member of the audience was wearing a mask. It wasn't a mask like they wore in hospitals, but a mask that covered the person's entire face. Some had smiley faces, some had more somber looking faces. Other masks were frozen in a frown while others just looked neutral. It was quite the sight.

This, he thought, would definitely be more interesting than the busty blonde's routine that had, in some ways, started to bore him. The camera was frozen on the audience for enough time for him to take it in before there was a *BEEP*. He could tell that the clapping which followed was fake, but it didn't bother him. He thought it was a bit funny. And it was, because even more cartoonish than the masks the audience was wearing was the tall man in the suit on stage.

Just by looking at him, he could tell that this man was handsome. The suit he wore was a dark navy blue. It complemented his pale skin tone and highlighted the broadness of his shoulders. Like the audience, he too was wearing a mask, one with two dark blue eyesockets and a smile that spread from ear to ear.

He thinks now that maybe at the time it should've been unsettling.

Another *beep* sounded from somewhere in the background and the automated clapping stopped all at once.

“HELLOOO EVERYONE!” said the man with the mask. His voice was deep. “I’m your host, Anonymous Andy, back from break with a special topic for you all!”

The crowd let out a drawn out *oooooooo* which he found himself joining in on. It wasn’t that Anonymous Andy’s words were particularly captivating, but...he couldn’t help it, he claims. The mere fact that this was set up as a talk show—but an anonymous, 90’s-themed one—was interesting enough to him that he simply couldn’t help it.

“Today I received a request from one of you lovely people—” Andy made a wide gesture to the audience “—that you wanted to talk about getting your libido back.”

He grimaced from his place on the couch. I guess God really wants to drive this point home, he remembers thinking bitterly. This is what my wife meant by divine retribution.

Some of the audience members audibly groaned.

“Ahh, but I know what you’re thinking—how could this apply to me? Well, I’m sure that no matter where you may be...” Andy paused for effect. “I have some meaningful words for you.”

As soon as Anonymous Andy finished his sentence, the camera panned to highlight his signature mask, his smiling mask that seemed just a bit too big for the undoubtedly handsome man underneath it. It should’ve been an awkward camera frame, but for some reason it wasn’t, because then Andy said sincerely: “I’m sure many of you need help falling in love with your spouse again.”

And that was that.

He doesn’t recall how much time went by, sitting on that couch, listening to the silly jingles and camera angles that are a characteristic of talk shows like that. The cheesy editing doesn’t bother him. All he thought at the time is how he’s smiling and laughing again, listening

to Andy. As he says that, he realizes that he can't recall a single piece of advice from Anonymous Andy, the guy who helps you out, anonymously. But he supposes it doesn't matter. Nothing matters.

Like most tragedies, his began with an outside question. It's not the rhetorical one he asked earlier—who likes television?—but something different, a bit more strange. Anonymous Andy, who, at this point, had mostly been talking and gesturing to the audience with his fabulous advice on sex and love and romance, finally turned to the camera once more. He said: “I'd now like to ask our at-home viewers to please download our app so you can now interact with me in real-time.” Andy reached into his pocket and pulled out a piece of paper with a QR code. “One lucky viewer will be picked at random to be interviewed!” The audience let out an automated gasp.

“That's right, an interview done in real-time! And, of course, your identity will be kept anonymous.” He could tell even though he was hundreds of miles away that Andy was smiling beneath the mask. And he *was* a creature of habit, after all. It didn't take very much pushing by the ideal man like Andy for him to pull out his phone and scan the code.

He supposes it doesn't really matter to include inside the grand scheme of things, but his lucky audience number was a seven. And seven was chosen.

He has to pause here to take a deep breath. It's not just that remembering clearly was difficult, but he also had a hard time putting the events together in the correct order. Did Andy call his number before he downloaded the app, or afterwards? Was he interviewed before the skit on how to spice up your sex life, or afterwards? He gets a flashing image in his head of Andy's mask and things fall into place.

“I wish somebody else got picked instead of me,” he says.

Like a true tragedy, everything started out slowly. He watched as Andy dialed a number on his phone—it's right there on the screen for him to see—and he admits he was a bit startled when his phone rung. He picked up. Andy's voice sounded even better over the phone. Andy asked for something to refer to him by, since "*the lucky chosen audience member!*" is a bit long—and wordy. The audience laughed. It's automated. He replied: Good Guy.

"Good Guy?" he remembers Andy saying. It's weird to watch his mouth move on the TV, coming out all distant and a bit garbled. It was so different from the smooth velvet which was the phone's audio. "Well, we'll see about that!"

For the first time in the whole skit, he feels uncomfortable. Maybe he should've felt uncomfortable as Andy graphically explained how to "properly" please a woman, but that kind of vulgarity didn't bother him any more. He convinced himself that he was familiar with a woman's body. Plus, that was just the nature of the show—to confidently talk about the things that were necessary. It was just...something about Andy's tone that sent a shiver down his spine.

He knows he should've hung up after Andy asked for Good Guy to tell the audience what had happened with his wife. He should've kept his mouth shut, or threatened to call the police or something. But he started talking. Was that the tragedy? He *had* kept it vague at first—"Well, I really related to the topic of tonight's show, Andy, since my wife hasn't slept with me in forever"—though he slowly got more detailed. It wasn't even like Andy was particularly understanding of what he'd been through. All he did was stare into the camera. But that didn't matter to him at the time. Once he got started talking, it all fell apart from there. Everything fell into place.

First, he started with his wife. Oh, his wife. He hadn't *really* loved her—had he? He couldn't recall why he had married her—was it for her body? Maybe at the time, but age and

bearing his children had turned her into a meat sack unlike her former self. The babes on the television, he confidently pointed out, were way more attractive. And since he didn't actually care for his wife, well, doesn't he deserve a younger, better girl every once in a while?

"Sure, sure!" Andy said in response. "We understand. Why don't you tell us more?"

He admitted his infidelity wasn't just limited to pornography.

"I slept with prostitutes," he said on television. "I'm not sure why I did, but I did."

It's a therapy session now and he knew it. He shamelessly welcomed it. A faint voice in the back of his head told him that this may be recorded. But he didn't care. God, why didn't he? It felt too good to get his dirty deeds off his chest.

He even started to cry with relief. The smiling faces of Anonymous Andy and the crowd made him feel at peace.

Finally.

"I don't really like my kids either," he said. "I mean, how am I supposed to relate to them? I can't even talk to them about anything. They want so much and I'm a Good Guy so I get them what they want anyway, but, damn. They're so selfish! All they want are toys and birthdays and Christmas presents, and I'm the only source of income. Why should I keep getting them stuff?"

He admitted that that made him sound a bit bad. "But I'm not," he said confidently. "It's my wife's fault for getting pregnant."

Andy didn't say much—and honestly, he knows it wouldn't have mattered if he did. He was talking now, that was his therapy session. This is his way of handling his emotions. He was finally pouring out his soul.

His soliloquy ended with him crying tears of relief. Finally, someone who listened. It's late—he didn't know how late it was—and his mind was tired and fuzzy, but he felt good. He felt happy. Now the world knows it's not his fault. It's not his fault his marriage fell apart. His marriage fell apart because of something that wasn't him.

Anonymous Andy stood on the stage, absolutely silent. There's not a single noise coming from either the phone or the television set. He sniffled away his tears and said, "Hello? Did I lose you?" And he had prayed then that he hadn't.

Andy doesn't reply, but the camera does. It slowly panned to the audience—the audience that never once spoke a single word, never once nodded along to his sins or Andy's words. The camera painstakingly takes its time zooming into the audience with their smiling faces. Somewhere in the back, he notices that one person's mask is slightly lopsided. He recalls that their eyes are glued to the stage, but...there are flies buzzing around them.

The camera seemed to know he was looking at the man in the back because it zooms in on him. He could now see the flies better. One lands on the man's open eyeball.

They're all dead.

The man's mask falls off completely with an audible *thud* which scares the flies away. He could see that one of the man's eyeballs was missing. His mouth was stitched shut and his ears are gone. The man is mutilated—completely and utterly dead.

A cold hand of fear gripped him from the back of his neck down to the ass that he's sat on the whole time. What the hell is going on? The flies continue their pleasant buzzing around the corpses in the audience as he started to hyperventilate. What should've been a therapeutic moment has now turned into something sinister.

And it's like he's reliving that moment in real time. He's back on the couch again, staring at the television.

Andy suddenly appears on screen, causing him to jump. He's chucking, a dark laugh that fits his smooth voice and poised appearance. "Oh, are you worried about them?" He gestures to the audience. It's as if Andy is staring right at him through the screen.

"Don't worry," he says. "They won't say a thing. I made sure they couldn't even hear you, or see you, so you could be honest with me." As Andy says those words, his body cracks and contorts upwards. He has a hard time describing it now, but the mask Andy wore started melting into his face—no, his face *was* the mask. His long limbs turned gangrenous and grisly, his spine elongated into jagged pieces of bone and ripped out the back of his suit. His long legs turned into crooked bowlegs with rotten toes and—oh, god. His hand reached towards the camera and passed through the screen, his bony fingers gripping the sides of the TV set.

"They won't say a thing," Andy says, his voice going up and down in pitch, wavering between something human and something feral. "But I'm different. I still *speak*."

Why didn't he turn off the TV?

Well, he did. An animalistic part of his brain activated at the sound of Andy's voice, that sudden high-pitched shriek that left Andy's mouth once he finished, a shriek which flayed open his skin and caused him to simultaneously smash the power button and piss his pants—simultaneously piss his pants and scream like his life depended on it.

Like most tragedies, it was too late.

The creature had made its way through the screen into his world. He knows it broke something inside of him to see such a monstrosity tear open the fabric between his world and theirs, to crawl through it so easily as if the entirety of space was nothing but wet paper. He

could do nothing but scream—scream and hope that maybe his wife and his kids would hear him and make it out alive. He selfishly hoped that maybe they didn't hear him babbling about how much he hated them and wished he had never gotten stuck in this dead-end marriage.

But that was a futile hope.

Because in the seconds it took him to scream and make a run for the door, the creature had grabbed him by the head and forced him to watch as it made its way to his wife and children's room. And then he could only listen to it cackle and giggle as it killed them. Its voice echoed throughout the house—but it wasn't the creature's voice. It was his voice. The creature kept saying—over and over—what he had confessed to Andy.

“I don't really like my kids either.” It giggled as it watched him cower and sob in a corner of intestines. “It's my wife's fault for getting pregnant.”

He doesn't remember how exactly the murders happened. He's thankful he was able to block that part out of his memory. All he knows is that it wasn't him who did it. He watched, but it wasn't him. Divine retribution wasn't his. And even though he was covered in their blood, it wasn't him. The creature—Andy?—had framed him. And nobody believed him, despite the claw marks inside the TV set.

What haunted him the most was the creature's awful screaming. “See no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil...” It continued on and on and on and on and on and on and—nobody believed him when he said it wasn't him—that it was a monster. It was a monster that got him to spill his guts about how much he hated his wife and his kids on the television and then it killed his family. And yes, he hated her. That's what he had said. Did he hate her?

He wouldn't kill her if he did.

He realizes he's rambling. He knows it. He apologizes. But this part is the worst. This part is the worst.

When the police finally showed up, they found him cradling his wife's hand. The rest of her body lay in pieces around the house. Nobody could be sure which organs were hers or his children's. He remembered being angry when they got there because they probably thought he was insane. And he was sure he wasn't. It reminded him of his wife's sharp tongue earlier that night. "I'm a good guy," he told them as his bloody wrists made clipping the handcuffs difficult. "You're making a big fucking mistake by taking me in! The real monster is in there." He gestured with cuffed hands to the TV set. They ignored him. He kept talking.

"Well now, I see what you people do on TV. You fucking pigs, killing people for no reason." He spit at the feet of the nearest officer.

"Shut the hell up," one of the officers finally said. "Jesus, just shut the hell up."

And now he's painfully brought back to the present, before he started talking. The examination room is brightly lit which hurts his eyes and makes it hard to think of what to say. His handcuffs feel cold against his wrists. See no evil, hear no evil. I hate my wife.

He hadn't slept at all. And now the FBI or something was in front of him asking for a statement.

"I already told you—you have to believe me," he says. "It wasn't me." He takes a deep breath. "I know what the police are saying, but you have to believe me—it wasn't me who killed them! I'm a good guy!"

The handsome man sitting across from him in the examination room takes a drag from his cigarette. He takes his time, his deep blue eyes looking bored and uninterested. "I don't really

care what they're saying." The man puffs his smoke out into a perfect ring. "In fact, I couldn't care less." He sighs, running his fingers through his hair as he tips his chair back and balances on two legs. "So let's get something straight—we're only here for the truth of the situation, got that? It's imperative for our investigation."

He can only nod at the man's words.

"Good." The man takes another drag from his cigarette. "Let me introduce myself to you. My name is Agent Wolfe Sculder, and this is my partner, Special Agent Witherton." He lazily gestures to the dark-skinned man who's leaning by the door. "We were summoned here to get your version of events. Our goal is to hopefully get you out of here afterwards, but we don't have much time, so we would appreciate your cooperation..." There's a commotion outside the door and the other man—Witherton—curses under his breath.

"I'll be back. Get him talking," he says to Sculder. And then he's gone.

He doesn't remember it as clearly as he did when it had happened, but he's urged to speak, and so he starts from the beginning. Like most tragedies, his began with neglect. He didn't try to, it just sort of happened...

# **Know Better Who You Speak Of**

Macie Elizabeth Krumenacker

Content Warning:

*Please be advised this story contains depictions of violence and potentially disturbing imagery.*

They had a school wide assembly for the dead girl after it came out that her grave was robbed. A rumor spread that it was her friend (boyfriend, maybe?), the guy who supposedly had a full on mental breakdown at her funeral. Nobody was entirely sure if it was true or not, but it didn't help that, since then, he hadn't been back at school.

How people reacted to the news varied. Some baselessly believed those rumors about that boy were true. Others believed that it was impossible, because who would do such a thing? Surely no one at their school would do something like that. Surely no one who they knew personally, or who their friends did. And still others thought it was fake, a way for the dead girl's family to garner sympathy and attention after such an event.

Everyone seemed to have something to say.

"This is a tragedy," the principal said. "We won't tolerate rumors and speculation on what happened to the deceased. Please be mindful of others and respect the privacy of her family and friends."

"A tragedy?" said a sophomore. "Look, it was an *accident*. Let's stop making it out to be bigger than it actually is. The *real* tragedy is the thing that happened with that woman and her kids the other week. Did you hear? It was all on the news. They were torn apart."

"I need to get back to class." an overworked senior sighed. "I have—I have an exam, I have a Spanish project to finish. Why couldn't they just tell us this on the intercom?"

It was a good question. Most questions the students asked following the news were good, after all. They spoke of something deeper, something more entangled inside of each of them. And—what was that? They're wondering what that thing was that went deeper inside of each of them? Well, that's an important question. Unfortunately, it's unanswerable right now. To articulate another's story is to give it a certain presence in the world—a material presence, by

which the presence becomes *alive*, its own entity, if you will. And if he—Q—were to do that, he could only imagine the horrors which would await him. He had to be very careful now. He couldn't make mistakes. He couldn't act irrationally or reveal himself too soon.

But he supposes that is unimportant to think about right now. You see, there was something very wrong about to happen. Q knew because he had been watching, paying close attention ever since the tragedy with the people in Wyoming, ever since he arrived here, undercover, with only this growing feeling of dread that something—

How he knew, exactly, that there was something off about this school in particular was something that he could not quite place for himself. He simply did not think that he could be wrong.

It was only a rumor to go off of, after all. Sometime before the girl's death and the resulting robbery, the school hired a new teacher. His name was Mr. Duval. He was very tall—easily six-foot-five, if not taller. And he was *very* popular, almost irrationally so. Most students seemed to find him funny, or handsome, or interesting. They flocked into his classroom during lunch, perpetually and constantly unbothered by a certain aura wafting through the room, a certain something causing some to sit straight up and glance behind them because—was there something in the corner of their eye that they had just missed? Oh, it must have just been them. Had they paid closer attention, well...

Oftentimes, when things go wrong, there are certain events that lead up to it. Q was the kind of person to believe that there were always signs. He had learned that from his time spent ignoring them. He had learned that still from the dead girl and the empty plot where she was supposed to be buried. But he knew that sometimes the signs flashed like yellow traffic lights on

the road. Other times they were so loud and so large that it would be almost impossible not to notice them.

But he figured Mr. Duval was like a tiny itch in the back of your brain, a small, almost imperceptible voice that asks you: “*What if this is wrong?*” and makes you doubt, just for a second. And at that point, you already manage to convince yourself that everything is fine—nothing is wrong. You’re just being silly, you’re overreacting. Look at how well that man is dressed. Look at how elegantly he speaks, listen to his enunciation. No bad man speaks as well as he does. Nobody—

When he finally had his chance to react, he had to take it. Q had been posing as a highschooler for a few weeks now, quietly forming a profile on Mr. Duval during their semi-daily lessons. And there was a girl in his math class—a rather young looking girl—that seemed to infatuate him. Mr. Duval was always coming up to her to chat during class. If he wasn’t doing that, he was calling her up to his desk to talk, or asking her how she was doing, if there was anything he could do to help her, or... Somewhere along the line, before the dead girl’s grave was robbed, he stopped wearing his wedding ring.

But that girl was aware of what was happening, to some degree. Even her classmates made jokes about it—said she was the teacher’s pet. It was a tongue-in-cheek way for them to admit, somewhat, that they were aware, if not vaguely, of the thing that was unfolding before them. But she couldn’t have been expected to know. Nobody was.

They shuffled back into their classrooms after the assembly was over.

“*It’s a free period,*” said Mr. Duval. “*You all deserve a break.*” And then he was sitting on top of that girl’s desk, asking her how she felt about the speeches the principal gave, something about *if you need anybody to talk to, us staff are always here for you*. He asked if she was okay.

She looked truly ghastly. Q could only watch from his seat in the classroom as they talked. She tried to put her head down and rest once she assured him that she was fine, that she'd be sure to let someone know if she ever needed help. Mr. Duval kept talking. He didn't ask her again if she was okay.

*"You know," he said, "my wife and I had a long list of baby names."*

*"Really?"* the girl replied, looking up at him. She sounded dry.

*"Oh yes!"*

*"That's nice,"* she answered, putting her head back down.

*"Do you want to hear?"*

*"Sure."*

*"You know, you should really look at me when I'm talking to you."*

*"Sorry,"* she said. *"I'm just really tired."*

*"Well, I'm sorry to hear that. But, listen—this'll help a bit. One of the baby names my wife liked the most was your name: Bay!"*

Her face went from neutral to disgusted in an instant.

*"Umm, okay."*

Now was his chance.

"Was your wife Jesse Duval?" he called from his seat in the back. Mr. Duval turned to look at him. There was a long pause before he answered.

"Yes, my wife," he finally said, glancing down at the girl and the hand he had on her back. Q wondered if he was looking at the absent ring on his finger. "How did you know?"

"My dad worked on her case," he lied, his heart beating rapidly inside of his chest.

“Did he now?” Another pause. “Well, she always mentioned how grateful she was for the help.”

He couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“She did? Well, could you thank her for me?”

“Yes,” he replied. “I’ll tell her tonight.”

There it was.

“That’s funny,” he said. Jack’s eyes twinkled with something dark. “Because her murder case—and her children’s—were never solved.”

What had he expected once he said that? To speak another’s story is to articulate its presence and give it existence in this world. That was what he believed, right? Maybe he thought that Mr. Duval would—

“I’m sorry,” Mr. Duval said. “You must be mistaken.”

—would deny it?

“I just saw my wife this morning *and* both of my kids. I don’t know what you’re saying, but it’s wrong.”

Ahh, right. Now he sounded crazy.

“Are you sure you did?” He could feel the stares of his classmates on him. They felt righteously appalled, thinking that he was spewing nonsense, antagonizing a good guy. In that moment he wished they would understand.

“Yes, I’m positive.”

“That’s funny, because I remember very well arresting you under suspicion of murder. What was that you said?—*cops were fucking pigs?*”

Q thought he got him.

“I’m sorry,” Mr. Duval said again. “I think there’s been a misunderstanding. Maybe you’re not feeling well from the assembly. I know, I know—it’s a tough time for everyone at the moment. But clearly you’re not an officer—just like I’m not...whoever you’re talking about. I think maybe you should come with me to the nurse’s office, make sure you’re doing okay.”

“Then...I don’t suppose you know an Agent Witherton or Sculder?”

Mr. Duval’s body stiffened. He dropped the small smile that had played amongst the corners of his lips. It was as if a mask had just fallen off, revealing his true self.

“How do you know that name?”

That wasn’t a question.

“I’m looking for them,” was all he could say.

He sneered. “Well, you just missed them.”

Jack felt like he had just been slapped. He thought—there was no way he could miss them. He had been following the signs, reading the files over and over and over and over and over again. He had even found *him* despite what had happened, for God’s sake.

“There’s no way.” Then it hit him. “The girl? The...the body? No—they couldn’t have.”

The world seemed to tilt sideways for a moment at his realization. He felt in his belly once more that something had awoken. His vision went fuzzy like black and white ants crawling over a television screen. He blinked and suddenly—suddenly he saw *through* the man in front of him. There were—there were *fingers* attached to his limbs: impossibly long ones with yellow knuckles and cracked fingernails. Where they met Mr. Duval’s skin, they were stitched and rotting. The smell—god, how had he not noticed before? It was pervasive, filling up the entire room with its decay. And he watched as the fingers moved here and there, causing Mr. Duval’s limbs to jerk and twitch with every motion, like he was a giant human puppet.

Oh, that was it. Mr. Duval—the real him—was being puppeteered by some kind of creature. That was where the fingers were coming from. Q blinked again and saw another image of his face, Duval’s face, covered by a mask. It was a blue mask with dark eye sockets and a smile that unnaturally stretched from one ear to the other.

“You’re a monster,” was all he could say. Perhaps it was the only sentence he had spoken this whole time which had truly mattered. Articulating what Mr. Duval was seemed to break whatever hold the creature possessing him had over the students. Now they saw him for the rotting man he was. The students in the room took in the smell, and then—all at once it devolved into chaos as each person recognized the very real and very wrong *thing* in front of them. Students screamed for their lives, making a break for the door. And the girl—the poor girl who Mr. Duval had spoken to—she had bits of gangrenous flesh dotting her blouse. It was enough to make her puke.

He felt like doing the same. How could he have been so wrong? Had he not paid enough attention? Why had he figured confronting such a horrible thing would go well inside of a *classroom*? Had he been so hardened by tragedy that he could no longer find it in his heart to care about the innocent people who may get hurt? Reaching for the gun hidden at his side, he prepared himself to shoot at the creature before him. But—

“Now, now,” it said, giggling. “Wouldn’t want to hurt an innocent, would we?”

The girl—the one Mr. Duval liked—was in its arms, mask pressed against the side of her cheek. It must’ve taken the opportunity to grab her as she fainted with fear. Now its diseased flesh squished against her body.

Q couldn’t say a thing, but his gun remained aimed at the center of the creature’s head.

“Ahh, it seems you know about us.” He knew it was smiling underneath the mask. “We don’t like that.”

“I’m only looking for the agents,” he said, and at the moment it was true. “I thought you were working with them, so I followed you here.”

It considered his words.

“You told them about us.” It meant the children.

“I didn’t know that they would be able to see you.” All the signs had pointed to that, though. Q had messed up.

“Yes, yes.” It giggled again, this time deeper. “We like it here. Everyone hurts. Everyone could use us. We could help.”

He knew what it meant. Schools with children of this age were always a cesspool of misery in some form. And that—well, that was obvious considering how easily these kids had chosen to ignore the signs around them that the man teaching them every day was clearly predatory. Q recalled the empty face of Mr. Duval cradling his wife’s hand so many weeks ago, how the blood coated his hands as he tried clipping the handcuffs on.

“You don’t help anyone.”

“We do, we do!” The fingers stitched to Duval’s body quivered with each word, sending bits of flesh in every direction. “You just don’t see it. You are so blind. So let us help. Let us make you something. And maybe—maybe in return we will show you the people you are looking for.”

That caught him off guard. But he knew how these kinds of contracts worked. Had Mary’s case taught him nothing? If anything, he would be killed by somebody else.

“That’s a tempting offer,” he said. “I’ll consider it if you let the girl go.”

“Oh, no no no no no. NO. You don’t want her. You—.”

*Bang bang bang.*

And then with a shriek it was gone, contorting and cracking Duval’s body until his bones tore open his flesh so that it could dodge and jump out of the path of the bullets. It simply leapt out of the window and scurried away.

He was left alone with the residual stench in the room and the crying girl and the shattered glass on the floor and that empty hollow feeling that he had just done something terribly wrong, that whoever the people he was following were, were undoubtedly even worse than the rotting man that had been in front of him. Because they had known about this man—they knew what he was, or at least had a sense of what he could be, yet they chose to let him go. With a growing sense of dread, he regretted ever opening the case file.