

MAN KILLING

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Welcome to the little leagues. Catch a whiff of that freshly cut grass, hear the sound of children playfully competing, feel the summer breeze against your skin, it seems to whisper “everything’s gonna be alright”.

Here we are in just a normal town, on a normal summer day where children play *organized baseball*; it’s a family affair, boys coached by dads, daughters cheered on by mothers in the stands, brothers and sisters playing their positions. It is quite clear after the dust settles who these children belong to; every parent in the stand leaves the ballpark with one or more kids by their sides, no adult in the stands is left unmatched to their progeny...that is, except for one man... As the family units head out of the park for their post-game dinners and ice creams, one solitary man is left sitting in the bleachers. He looks like a father, he looks like a husband, a man. Nobody took any special notice of him. He watched the entire game, emotionless, not having any reason to take sides, not having anyone to root for. He just watched, forearms on knees, a squint wrinkling his brow. And now, even though the game is over, he continues to watch. He takes in every pat on the back, every parting high five. He is keeping an especially close eye on one family, the coach of the winning team, his son and his wife as they pack up their equipment together and head towards their minivan. He watches them all the way to the minivan.

The sun can’t help itself from going down on another day, bringing on the night. It’s time to go home, lock your doors, wait in sleep for another day to rise with the morning.

Our man is no longer sitting in the bleachers, he too has abandoned the playing field. For now.

11:30pm. More baseball, this time the big leagues. The coach of the winning team is now safely parked on his couch, kid and wife asleep. He’s catching a little west coast action: Giants at home against the Reds, as San Fran tries to sweep the three game series and open up a four game lead against the second place Dodgers in the NL west.

What a weird feeling it is to watch live sports so late at night. It seems so unlikely, so uncanny. It makes you wonder, am I the only one seeing this? Is everybody else in the world asleep, including the athletes and the crowd on my tv? Have I been duped by a recording or an illusion of some sort? Hello? It was under the effect of these creeping late-night sports anxieties that the coach then had to listen to the sound of heavy boots walking up the front steps. Hmm. This family never receives visitors at this time of time. Now the turning of a doorknob, locked, now the sound of the lock being picked. picked.

Now, the coach could have bolted from the couch, aggressively confronting the lock picker, or he could have grabbed the phone and called the police from behind a locked bedroom door where he and his wife and boy were huddled together, or he could have found a good hiding spot! But instead, he found himself unable to do anything at all. His mind said “yell”, but despite some interesting shapes performed by the lips, no sound emerged from his mouth. His body wanted to “move”, but his ass never felt so heavy. So he just sat there with the great look of fear in his eyes, staring at the door knob as it continued to be worked over. a click, a thud, a creak and the door is swung open. Oh lord, what could death look like! Actually, the man in the door

looked...normal in his classic-fit jeans prewashed for softness with a relaxed cut in the hips and thighs and his light cotton wrinkle-resistant twill sport button-down and oiled full-grain brown leather steel-toed work boots that bring comfort and craft to the workplace. He looked so normal in fact that the coach felt a sense of relief and was finally able to force out a few words, "Hey, you got the, uh, wrong house or something buddy?" The man in the doorway, whom you probably already guessed is *our man* from the ballpark, responded not with words, but by grabbing one of the *baseball* bats sticking out from the equipment bag by the door. He rushes the coach on the couch, who is still unable to move but has at least found voice enough to whimper. *Ehhaa, egghh..* And then baseball bat to the head, baseball bat to the head, bat to the head, bat to the head, bat bat bat bat bat bat.....

Our man has exhausted himself. He has entered a state where time and memory do not exist. At some point during the beating, the bat broke, so now he is finishing the job with his work-gloved hands. Punch, punch, punch. His victim had died a while ago, so now the man is just beating a thing. A thing that had once been a man, but now does not even resemble one. The couch is a mess. *And he strikes out the side, Blood what a way finish to the game, blood on the carpet, it's a three hit shutout, on the wallpaper, dripping down the television screen. and the Giants sweep the Reds.*

It's a good morning. If you breathe enough of this kind of morning, it will fill you full of life. It's the kind of morning that makes you want to start jogging again, go for a hike, perform random acts of kindness. Jump up, click your heels this morning.

The police have been at the murder scene since the sun first poked its head onto the horizon, which was soon after the victim's body was found by his wife. Quite a scene for this little suburban neighborhood. A number of the neighbors are out on the lawns and curbsides, the new crew has just arrived, the body has just been carted out from the house to the sound of gasping. No one seemed to notice that the killer was standing right there on one of the lawns. He blended right in. He looked just like any concerned suburban citizen. He watched the proceedings, taking particular notice of the sheriff.

The news crew wants his attention, his officers want his attention, the Sheriff is *the man* in this situation. Our man envies this position, he takes special notice of the sheriff's uniform, how perfectly it fits, how well he wears that hat. Sheriff meets the reporters on his own time. He doesn't flinch, he owns the moment. When he has said all that he was willing to say, he tersely walks away, no time for feelings, only duty.

This kind of atmosphere is new to the sheriff; he's never had to deal with a grisly murder before. This has always been a quiet town. Being the sheriff hasn't always been easy, but this kind of case makes it hard to be a human.

When he arrives home late that night, he feels a deeper sense of responsibility, a magnetism to his family. He is the protector, yes, but more aware of it at this time of vulnerability. How can someone kill another man, how can someone disrupt a whole family, a whole town. Why is there evil in this world? A heavy night for this sheriff. By the time he gets home, his two little ones have long been tucked in. His wife has stayed up waiting for him to come home. She had been watching him on the local news all day and wanted to greet him with the warmth of a good wife;

steady, loving. Few words were said, the sheriff acknowledged her gestures of companionship, but indicated that he needed to be alone. When the sheriff is upset by feelings he doesn't quite understand, he retreats to the basement, his tool room. He can relax there, spread his thoughts out, release his anxieties onto wood work or small repairs. Tonight he just wants to do a little house-keeping, clean up the work table, oil the saws, make sure all of his tools are where they need to be. He checks the peg-board where he hangs his most-used tools, even tracing them in marker so he knows what tool is missing by its outline, just like a chalk-drawing of a corpse. Let's see: knife is where knife goes, wrench is where wrench goes, screwdrivers all in place, hammer... hey? His trusty hammer is not hanging in its place on the peg-board. It's marker outline begging to be completed by the tool itself. He could have sworn that he saw it hanging there just the night before. He's so sure of it that he actually says, "I could have sworn I saw it hanging there just last night." As he stares at the tool wall, he sees on it the inverse of the outline of the hammer- its shadow. It rises slowly behind him. His instincts are good, he's been in some dangerous situations before. On any other day if he felt the threat of a hammer coming down on the back of his head, he may have spun around, grabbed the wrist of the assailant, wrestled him to the ground and subdued him. Ooh, maybe he would have even grabbed the utility knife from the table and cut him with one graceful spin-move. But tonight, as he felt the breath of his murderer on the back of his neck, something in him just said, "what a day!" Man down. The sheriff takes two quick-but-heavy blows from his own hammer. He grabs at anything to steady himself, but he only manages to bring a tool-box down to the floor with him. One hand on his head, the other reaching out to defend against further attack. Of course, it is our man who has snuck in through the storm door, waiting for the sheriff to enter the dark recesses of the cellar. And now he stands over him, in a powerful position, and takes aim at the sheriff's skull with the blunt end of a hammer. After the third forceful blow, he feels the head of the hammer sink through the skull, he wedges it out, looks. looks some more. lost, looking. and finally drops the hammer and backs away from his work.

He is just about to dart out the way he came, but he stops, frozen, his attention seized by something on the ground. There, among the fallen tools, nuts, bolts and various hardware, a single drywall screw, spinning on its point on a piece scrap wood. He is stunned by this phenomenon. He doesn't know quite what to make of it. Is it a sign from God? Is it a hallucination? What is a screw when it stands on its sharp end on a piece of soft wood, and all by itself it turns, but does not enter the wood? It just spins, and spins, in a virtuosic display, no longer a screw, but a pirouetting ballerina. Until, at last, our man stops it with a swift kick of his work-boot. No time for the supernatural.

Two days later. The town is on edge. Something seems so unfair about these kinds of events happening in a place like this. So much is sacrificed to live in the safe part of town. These people have given up so much just to avoid the harsh realities of the rest world, and now this? So very unfair.

At the local tavern tonight, the mood has been rocking back and forth from sullen to maniacally vengeful. When the guys are talking, they're talking of the two killings. When guys are quiet, they are thinking of the two killings. At the end of the bar is one especially quite drinker. It's our man yet again. He's a regular at this bar, although he mostly keeps to himself. Tonight his head is hung low as he gazes into the bottom of his mug of beer. Half full, the liquid vibrates with

every pound on the bar by the intermittently rowdy crowd of guys. With every vibration, our man sees something else at the bottom of the mug. First, his first dog, Shabs, who had to be put down when he was seven. Next, his first wife, who had left him for Vegas when he was 37. Then, a photograph of a boy standing next to a model in a bikini at a muscle car show. The boy has an obvious erection. The boy had never seen this photo until he was a grown man, when he was old enough to handle shame. Now, he has to pee.

The urinal in this establishment is more like a trough. For some this is an uneasy way to go; there is less indication of personal space, it's a real free for all, like something out of the wild west, where men were both less than and more than men. A drunk patron enters the bathroom, stands uncomfortably close to our man, who is now finding it difficult to begin peeing.

"Fucking maniac." The drunk says as he rests his head back. Our man says nothing, just tosses him a glance. "Know what I'm talking about...", he continues, quietly and slurred, it's as if he might fall asleep at any moment in this moment of relief. "Only a fucking coward could kill like that maniac on the loose. Only a real woman of a man could kill and run away. Fucking loser. Ya know? What is he missing? What is he compensating for? Most men would only kill in order to protect their family, or their country. Protecting their source of strength. But this guy, guys like this guy, they kill to protect their weakness. The sea meets the sewer with a violent kiss. I... I swear, if he... if I were too..." There is a long pause. Then snoring. The drunk had fallen asleep right there at the piss drain, dick in hand, standing on his two feet. Our man is rather amused. He stands and looks at the drunk as if he were in a museum looking at a wax figure of a drunk. He quickly leaves the bathroom, heads to the bar where he grabs his thick glass mug of beer, throws it back and heads back into the bathroom, mug still in hand. Once in the bathroom, he sees the drunk man still standing there passed out. He locks the door. He walks up to the drunk, slowly, revolving around him, looking at his large frame as it lightly sways ready to wake and or fall over at any moment. Our man raises the mug over the drunks face, which is facing the ceiling. He holds the mug high, getting ready to drive it down over the sleeping face, but he takes his time, it's a ritualistic scene. Finally he jerks his arms up- then someone attempts to open the door- "doors locked!?" - the drunk opens his eyes, they open wide in staring at the thick base of a beer mug - then in one swift blow to the forehead, the drunk man drops to the ground, smacking the back of his head on the stone floor. Not much sound at all. "Hey, somebody in there?" Yells the voice at the door.

Our man gives him a couple more blows for good measure, then quickly drags him into a stall, locks it, and crawls out from underneath. He unlocks the door and says to the guy waiting, "Sorry about that."

He leaves the bar. The bloody beer mug which he used to execute his latest victim had been concealed under his folded arms, he tosses it into a dumpster once outside. He walks down the street, alone with his thoughts. He looks deep in thought. Does he feel guilt? Is he confused? Maybe. But one thing is for certain, he wonders how it will end. So do we. We wonder with him. How can his story end? Or better yet, will it ever end? Perhaps that's better left up to you...