

Number 14

A dim streak of sunlight stalks the cheerless sky and spotlights my face through the windshield. The road's wet and forlorn, and the sky wraps the forest like a funeral shroud. On the passenger seat lays an empty bottle of scotch. In the backseat, knotted pantyhose, a cell phone, and purse—everything but the girl.

Shouldn't have drunk so much whiskey, a rule made after I strangled girl number 3. Sucks the smart right out of me. But this one wanted to party, I figured why not. Alcohol takes the kill a notch higher. The pleasure hits harder. The release is divine.

My head bangs; I'm dizzy.

Jesus Christ, where's the girl?

Okay.

Okay.

C'mon, think.

So . . . I was driving down this deserted stretch of Old Redwood Highway. Yeah . . . I was driving down old Redwood Highway, and she was walking, seconds ahead, wobbling like a clown on a tightrope. As she crisscrossed the double yellow lines, she entered the dark den of trees. A perfect opportunity for a guy like me.

“Where ya’ heading,” I said, slowing my car. Three large drops hit my windshield. The sky was a blur. The storm wasn’t far. Rain-soaked clouds held the sun hostage—it struggled to break free—sorta like the women who hook up with me.

She covered her hair with her purse and kept walking but didn’t say a word.

“Starting to rain,” I said. “Would you like a ride?” She was a wasp in a web. A jackpot for me. I’d choke her to death--she’d be number fourteen.

The thing is—maybe it’s kind of a crime—my all-American-face makes my mask pleasant and trustworthy. Women climb into my car with a smile. With my charm and charisma, some call me “a catch.” But when I unravel, I’m brutal.

The rain started a cha cha on the hood of my car. She shrugged her shoulders and opened the door. “Ya some kind of killer?” she said with a slur. “I ain’t got no time to for that shit.”

“Do I look like a killer?” I flashed a nice smile.

Women say that I’m every girl’s dream.

She climbed in the car and let out a sigh. “All that talk about the Lace Ribbon Killer, gets a girl nervous, ya know what I mean?”

“All those victims were men,” I replied with a wink. “I promise you’re safe with me.”

“Can’t be too careful,” she said with a snicker. “Ya wanna drink?”

She passed me the bottle and what could I do. Chasing the dragon, I craved the high. I took one shot after another. I got kinda woozy. I pulled onto a dirt road, but she didn't seem nervous. In fact, it appeared she was game.

She said, "Where ya' heading?"

"A short cut," I muttered, distracted. The kill had my mind in a spin.

A mile or two down the dirt road, I jammed on the brakes. The roar in my head was exciting. In a flash, I was on her. She thrashed, and she grappled. I had her and then . . . I went blank.

Shit. The clang in my head brings me back to myself. How the hell did I get back to Redwood Highway? Drunk driving? I should be ashamed. I'm a stickler when it comes to those kinds of rules. What if I'd gotten someone killed? Jesus. No more drinking and driving, I promise myself and this time I certainly mean it.

Where the fuck is that bitch?

She's not in the back seat and not on the floor. Either she ran or I trunked her. I do that sometimes. I save them to play with—like a cat swiping a spider—especially the ones with spunk. Especially the ones with personality. I choke them, release them, and do it again. I choke them, release them, until they stop struggling. I choke them, release them, until they turn blue.

The fear in their eyes intoxicates me. Their terror is highly erotic.

It takes several minutes, can go up to five, simply to strangle a person. On TV dramas, writers shorten the kill time. Do the research, you'll find that I'm right.

I turn the car, head back down the dirt road. When out of view, I climb out of the car. She's either unconscious or dead in the trunk, either way I have unfinished business.

I pop the trunk. The woman springs up like a trampoline jumper, my crowbar firm in her hand. She comes at me swinging, screaming all the while. She goes for my head, and I duck. The crowbar hits me hard on the back. I stumble. She kicks me in the groin. I buckle to the ground.

"You mother-fucking pervert," she yells. "Trying to strangle a defenseless woman. I hate that shit."

I manage to pull myself to my hands and knees, but she's fast and the crowbar swings toward me.

I slowly awake like a snake charmer's cobra. For a moment, I feel hypnotized. My arms are bound behind my back. It's stuffy and hard to breathe. The darkness immediately gets to me. I'm locked in the trunk. What the fuck? This is crazy. It's too small. I need out. It's too tight—set me free. Gasping for air, panic threatens me. I bang on the metal with all kinds of pleas. My head pounds, my back aches. My breaths get shallow. "Let me out," I scream. "I'm suffocating. Let me out."

When she opens the trunk, the sky is dark soup. My claustrophobia has beat me, and I'm weak. She still has the crow bar, that dirty bitch. She swings and she swings and each time it hits. I feel my self fading. My breath almost gone. She takes a lace ribbon, ties it on my arm.

She's the lace ribbon killer, my last fleeting thought. She's the flame, she's the nightmare, and I am the moth.