

STAR-CROSSED MURDERERS

Campbell Anderson

STACEY:

Knives are sharpened, flowerpots are in place, the freezer is empty, but not for long, and the apartment is immaculate. I want to show him as much hospitality as I can during these last few hours of his life. Looking across the room, nothing seems unusual; it's all rather peaceful. Automatically, my fortifications of deception lower themselves, so when there's a loud banging at the front, it startles me. *Wow, the time's already seven!* I open the door to meet luscious blue eyes, accompanied by a warm, confident smile, a moustache and the tattoo of a snake on the side of his neck. Some wax has been rubbed into his fair, black hair, and there's an enveloping smell of aftershave.

"Hey, I'm Shawn," he gleams.

"I'm Stacey," I return, leaning in to hug him, to which he gives me a peck on the cheek.

"Here, come inside."

Once I've checked that nobody saw us in the hallway and have closed the door, I turn around to find him holding out a bouquet of flowers. "These are for you."

"Chrysanthemums - the 'get well soon' flowers. Thank you so much, Shawn; they're beautiful," I sigh, placing them in a vase on the coffee table, then pretending to admire them for a second, while thinking, *Perhaps I can bury them with him.*

"It's so warm and clean here. And I love the street view!" Shawn remarks, striding over to my Chews Lane apartment window.

"It is rather pretty, isn't it," I agree, pouring him a glass of wine. If I encourage him to drink - and if he drinks enough - the alcohol will impair his awareness, making him an easier kill; the fists on this guy could crush me to dust if he was sober. "Come sit down; make yourself at home," I say, leading him to the black leather couch.

"Wow, this is very comfy; I may never leave."

To this, I slip a giggle and sigh, "You're perfect already." I'm truly loving Shawn's irony. Poor idiot's signing his life away.

"So, you're a bartender?" I ask, sidling closer to him.

"That's right. The service of my customers always comes first. I can see you have a good taste in wine, Stacey," he says, letting the 's' and the 'c' slide off his tongue beautifully, for satisfaction, then taking a gulp of his Pinot Noir. "Your job is a florist, yeah?"

"Correct. I own a piece of land in Otaki, where I plant and grow my flowers. It's always more difficult in winter; a lot of the flowers are vulnerable to the icy chill in the air...Do you like flowers, Shawn?" This time I'm the one lisping his name. By now, he's undone his top two buttons and is leaning back.

"Do I like flowers? I love flowers! Freshly cut roses are my favourite."

"Roses have such a splendid colour; as dark red as cherries, fiery sunsets and flowing red ball dresses," I sigh, running my finger around Shawn's wine glass and inching my face closer to his. The sweet smell of his tangerine aftershave surrounds us, like mist along a road, not allowing us to see what's ahead. "Dark red: the colour of wine, chili peppers and blood."

Suddenly, the oven timer dings just as my lips are almost touching his. I tuck a cork of hair behind my ear and smile. Tonight on the menu is roast lamb, mashed potatoes, gravy and sautéed asparagus, For dessert: murder.

SHAWN:

I never knew that faking a liking to flowers could sprout such a topical discussion, especially on our first - and last - date. Flowers are ugly. They're only ever pretty when they're propped up against a headstone.

As she strides over to the kitchen, deliberately swishing her long, golden hair behind her, I ask, "May I use the bathroom?"

"Of course. It's at the end of the hallway," she sings, bending down to open the oven door.

“Sweet.” *Time to sketch out my options for where to hide her body.* Before I ‘go to the bathroom’, I quickly drop a pill in her wine that’ll slowly cause her body to stop functioning properly; a painless death. Mental note: *Leave flowers with the corpse.*

According to her Tinder bio, she’s twenty-eight but has cancer. It’s a terrible thing, so this’ll be a painless death.

Inside the bedroom is a wardrobe, packed with clothes, which are all black; her taste in style is appealing to me. A hot water cupboard in the hallway contains three shelves that go back quite far. The bathroom, however, offers no useful places to hide a body, and there’s no way I’d be able to flush her down the toilet. *Unless... no, that wouldn’t do.* Therefore, it’s going to have to be the wardrobe, the hot water cupboard, or over the balcony. I mustn’t let myself get reeled into her; a serial killer doesn’t have time for love. Cannot let my walls down. *Walls. Oh my, I could hide her inside the walls! I’m a genius!* Grinning malevolently, I flush the toilet and wash my hands, though they’ll always be stained with blood.

STACEY:

“Bon appétit!” I beam, placing a plate in front of him before topping up his glass. “Tell me more about yourself; we only chatted informally on the dating site. You ought to lead an interesting life, I bet.”

He expresses thought, then, after swallowing a forkful of lamb, answers, “When I’m not working, one of my favourite things to do is watch the sunset from the top of Mount Vic; the day’s final scene, throwing handfuls of gold, pink and magenta across the sky. A good sunset always astounds me. What about you, Stacey? What do you do when you aren’t selling flowers?”

“Good question. What do I do when I’m not selling flowers?” I ponder, sounding like I’m in an interview. I lift my glass to my lips and drink as I think. “Writing. That’s what I do to clear my mind after a long day, when I’m so exhausted I could well have been digging a grave.”

To this, Shawn squirms a little in his seat, then downs a swig of wine. “What type of stuff do you write, Stacey?” he inquires, pricking into an asparagus.

“All sorts. Diary entries, poetry, letters to my future self, opinion pieces. Overall, it just helps take away some of the dread from the cancer. When I write, I feel like a totally new, refreshed person, like a butterfly breaking out of its cocoon.”

Slowly, Shawn arises from his chair and walks across to the window. “I can see how living up here would give you lots of freedom. The city is stunning at night, isn’t it?”

Now’s my chance! Immediately, I take the sharpest carving knife from the set on the kitchen bench and throw it forcefully at Shawn. Just as he turns around, it enters his chest; a direct bullseye!

Like a stunned fish, he gapes his mouth open and close, then blood begins to dribble out. “Stacey,” is all he can say before he collapses to the floor. Everything goes dizzy. I also plummet to the carpet.

SHAWN:

I never thought this day would come, that I would happen to be deceived by one of my cold-blooded kind. Lying next to me, breathing ragged, is Stacey, staring at the creme ceiling.

Quietly, she mutters, “Who are you?”

“A serial killer. There was poison in your wine, yet you were foolish enough to drink it. Shawn isn’t my legitimate name...It’s James. I’m twenty-nine. I kill for a living... At high school, there was a bully who would taunt everybody, steal their stuff, push them over, but I was his favourite target. ...He’d trip me up when I got to school, then push me into the gutter after. However...his weakness was that he had a peanut butter allergy. Waited for him in an alleyway one night, ...took him by surprise and smeared peanut butter all over him...Considered calling an ambulance, but I realised I’d be doomed. It was too late, yet...just the beginning. Now here I am, at the end.” All my insides ache; my mouth’s a sea of blood, and I’m starting to lose consciousness.

“I, too, am a serial killer. My real name’s Delilah. D for death, deception, delusion. I’m thirty-one and don’t have cancer....but my first murder was when I was seventeen. My mother had a really...nasty, abusive boyfriend. She’d tell me about him and how he’d barge through the front door, pushing her into the walls when he was drunk. Always drunk. One night I decided

to hide in the backseat of his car...Thrashed the evils and all life out of him with a spanner, then slit his throat. Hiding bodies is always the hardest part, isn't it, James?"

"...Yes. Thank you for having me over, Delilah."

There's no reply. Gently, I close my eyes, letting the darkness consume me. After all, darkness is the only thing I've ever known.