

## The Making of a Masterpiece

The knife moved slowly, expertly, from top to bottom. Through a small slit in the triangular blade face, thin, pale layers emerged. A woman placed several slices of Monterey Jack on an orange, ceramic plate to her left.

It was at that point that she decided to kill him.

It was 11:42 in the morning and she was slicing some cheese. For a sandwich. She wondered how a novice like herself would best approach the subject. It was really a rather curious notion. Perhaps even naughty, when she thought about it. Carefully stacking the pale rectangles like a deck of cards, she wrapped up the rest of the block. Any ideas of having at him with the cheese cutter—or the cheese grater—had to be quickly dismissed. Tempting though they might be. A bit of a tragedy to throw away such lovely notions, but they were far too melodramatic. Besides, not only would it be time-consuming and very noisy, but it would make a terrible mess. Stains everywhere, no doubt. And what was a poor girl to do if the screaming got to her? Any implements involving cheese clearly wouldn't do. Unfortunately.

She sighed, a bit theatrically perhaps, even though there was nobody else to hear. Just for good measure, she sighed again. Loudly. The block of unused cheese was placed in the refrigerator and a head of lettuce removed. Maybe she should just shoot him. Quick. Decisive. One shot, particularly one shot that finished him in a convenient location, and everything could be taken care of. Nice and neat, really. The stream from the tap rushed over the layers of crisp, green leaves. Maybe too neat. Where was the glamour in it? It had no style. No sense of the way to do things. It was so mundane, so *done*. The gun

would help a bit, of course, but how far can one expect an accessory to carry things?

Three crisp leaves came off the head in rapid succession. It might be a bit better if she could get her hands on a nice dress, the sort of getup that belonged next to a fedora and in black and white... The expense was bound to be just ghastly, though. She'd have to find a good purse for the gun. And it would have to be a revolver. With good wood down the sides. And the dress would have to be brown. And to flair just so. And by that point she was spending an arm and a leg that she simply didn't have.

The leaves were carefully placed on the cutting board.

All in all, it was probably just bad policy to make any attempts at adding class to something like that. No matter how one decked it out, it would still be essentially dull. And dull wouldn't do.

She could always try to gas him in some form or another. That was fairly unusual, wasn't it? It didn't involve any blood or screaming. It could even be considered an accident, which would have been decidedly difficult if he'd had a bullet through the chest. Let him fall asleep and lock him in with an open valve. All it would take. Simple, certainly. Unless he woke up. Which was unlikely. But always possible. The rest of the lettuce returned to the refrigerator. It would be an infinite nuisance to explain herself if he did wake up. And smell the gas. And want to know why the valve was open. And the door locked. The odds were slim, naturally, but even if they didn't come into play, the possibility would likely detract from the overall experience. Not to mention that it was more than a trifle pretentious to gas him. Serial killers and practitioners of genocide did that sort of thing. That was it: pretentious, far too pretentious. And an overly pretentious death just wasn't an option. Not for him, anyway.

The loaf of bread was placed on the counter. She removed a bread knife from its holder and slowly began a gentle sawing motion back and forth. Maybe it would be best just to drive him mad. At that point he couldn't make any incriminating statements. Or not any credible ones. Maybe it *would* be best that way, after all. Dammit. Maybe it would also be best to put the loaf on the cutting board before the knife got all the way through to the countertop.

On the other hand, there were things to think about even if she chose that line. It would take time. She'd have to go about it very carefully. Go too quickly and he'd leave, and that would be the end of that. Go too slowly and he might never fully go over the edge. Which would be a disaster. She'd end up as the crazy one. Which might be inevitable, but was never the sort of thing she didn't want to actively cultivate. It wasn't likely to be very enjoyable.

The bread returned to its space in the dark cabinet and a tomato found its way onto the cutting board. She reflected wistfully that her process of elimination didn't seem to be very effective. It was all very well to reject bad ideas, of course, but... Not doing anything was the sort of notion that didn't bear dwelling on. Not anymore, at any rate.

She rejected several knives that wanted sharpening before finding something acceptable for the tomato. Strangle him? Run him over with a car? At that, maybe she should just guillotine him. If only she could find a guillotine. Several slices of tomato were moved in the general direction of the lettuce. She paused halfway between the cutting board and the sink, dirty knife in midair. It was absurd. Completely absurd. There was no possible scenario in which she could be excused for failing to come up with a

decent idea. It would be madness. Even shameful. In self-disgust, she deposited the knife in the sink. Shameful. It was the only word for it.

She made a face out the kitchen window, one of those classic expressions of consternation that her years had seen her muster. It did, in fact, make her feel a little better.

Now there that was a thought. And not a bad one. She mulled it over carefully. A sufficiently tall building would be almost guaranteed to do the trick. Just a little push. And of course a satisfactory thump at the bottom. As long as she remembered to open the window, there was very little to go wrong. Really, not bad at all. It was classic, but not overdone. Original while still well-tested. Not to mention that somebody else could deal with the mess entirely. And she had to pick something. The more she thought about it, the more she liked it, actually. She paused for a moment more, searching idly for a flaw. Not that she would have changed her mind even if she'd thought of one. It was, after all, a brilliant plan. But out of politeness she gave it a cursory once-over just the same.

Satisfied, she removed four slices of deli meat from the refrigerator. A jar of mayonnaise and some ketchup likewise found their way into her hands, accompanied by a butter knife. She moved one of the bread slices to the center of the cutting board. A contented little smile found its way onto her face. Mayonnaise, just so. Lettuce. Tomato. Meat. Hmm. Perhaps the cheese should have gone before the tomato. The top two layers were removed, and she put the cheese over the lettuce. On second thought, only half the cheese over the lettuce. The tomato and meat were again stacked onto the pile, followed by the extra cheese. Almost gently, she placed the second slice of bread on top and stood back to admire her handiwork. It was like she'd said. Not bad at all.

She spun around at the sound of the key in the lock, then quickly turned back to the food as he walked in the door. She silently placed her two masterpieces on Fiestaware and sat down at the dining room table. He make some gestures, and a few words left his mouth.

“Oh I'm Fine. Just fine,” she told him.

She took a bite of her sandwich, and smiled.