



## The First Cut is the Deepest – Paul Blake

The man sat there, on the sagging pretend-leather sofa, staring through the woman seated opposite him. Between them was a low coffee table, on its surface two barely drunk coffees in homely mugs grew stale and bitter on top of cork coasters. The late afternoon sun coming in through net curtains hung over the street-facing living room window. The woman sat in a dining chair, upright, not moving. The duct tape held her in place. The tracks of tears and cheap mascara had run down the right-hand side of her face, hitting the piece of tape that covered her mouth, and changed direction towards the back of the jaw and her dark hair and dripped on to the white cotton blouse, staining it with black and grey blooms. Her eyes were red and unfocused. There was a thin red line on her left cheek about an inch and a half long. Straight and parallel to the ground. Dried brownish-carmine beads dotted the line at irregular intervals. The man sat there, in his royal blue chinos, and an off-white polo shirt. In his hands, he absent-mindedly spun a basic looking kitchen boning knife around the flat of his palm. It turned around and around like a glass bottle accidentally kicked will spin around the concrete paving slabs of your local high street on a Friday night. The man's hand flicked it every so often to keep it

spinning. If fidget spinners had been invented thirty years ago his and his victim's lives would have turned out so much differently. His sandy-grey hair was two months past its ideal length and bunched at the sides and swirled in the nape of his neck. He wore it with a rough side parting. His pale blue eyes focused but not seeing. He was away in his thoughts. Occasionally the left eye would twitch for a few seconds, only slightly, but definitely.

The man was thinking about love.

Not the romantic kind, but the longer, harder, more painful, more fulfilling love that weighed on a man's soul like an addict's longing. Where the highs were tougher to reach and lasted only fleeting moments before being consigned to the memories. Where they competed with the mundane, monotonous, more familiar, more everyday life memories. Acres of hold music, pointless meetings, adverts. God, the fucking adverts, competing against Bowie's stutter in "Changes", against Ewan McGregor and Iggy Pop's Choose Life intro, against the attitude from "Straight Outta Compton", against that first thrust of a blade, the way the skin resists momentarily before opening, allowing the steel to enter. Wider, further, deeper, until you hit bone and withdraw to repeat the process. In and out, in and out. Fast, slow, faster, faster. Harder, harder. Blood spurting. Gushing. Pouring.

A moan escaped his mouth. It was the first sound he'd made in too long. The knife wobbled in his hand. He stopped it with his free hand. He focused his eyes on the woman. She was in her mind. Looking, but not seeing. They'd been sitting two feet apart but separated by an ocean of unreality. The man decided he preferred it that way, at least for the moment. Two islands. The currents that pushed them together when he'd decided on a whim to choose her door had changed direction and they drifted apart from each other. His need to cut and destroy briefly sated by slicing her face, however, the feeling lacked the usual intensity; it felt different, hollow, and he didn't know why. He hadn't changed his method. His modus operandi. Bang on random doors, in random towns, cities, and countries. Let the game of chance decide someone's fate. Ring the doorbell, rat-a-tat-tat on the knocker. Whoever answers the door is the champion. The knock of opportunity. That lucky strike. A knife in the chest. A blade in the face. There had been many winners. The woman opposite being the latest. Congratulations. A life-changing prize. The man had studied and honed his craft over the years. If you want to get better at something,

practise and learn. His knowledge of law enforcement procedures, profiling techniques, criminal psychology, and forensic detection measures were his specialist subjects. The bookshelves at home full of books about captured serial killers his guides to avoid their mistakes, books on anatomy, books of flawed geniuses. He had his rules to help him survive. No trophies of victims. His memories would have to be enough. If they weren't, well there's an easy cure for that. Just go for a trip. No victimology, everyone was fair game, male, female, young and old, black, white and all the shades in between. Target the near and far, no home ground security to stand out as an aberration. He'd seen far too many episodes of Criminals Minds to fall for that one. 'The kills have all been in these locations except for this little town. That must be where he lives.' Some of his favourite contestants had been from his neck of the woods. Blitz attacks his specialism. Door open and he's fulfilled his goal and turned to leave before the body even hit the floor, sometimes adding a bit upheaval to make it look like a burglary gone wrong. A little misdirection and the cash helped pay for his transport costs. Inter-railing across Europe, flights to the Caribbean and South America. The occasional drawn-out session to muddy the waters. He chose his countries by the cuisine he fancied when booking the flights. He was looking forward to varying his diet by adding Thai, Indian, Chinese, and other Asian dishes to the menu. However, this afternoon the love was missing.

The man had known something was off as he approached her front door. A non-descript terrace house in a street of the same in a town whose name he couldn't remember. No black cat crossed his path, no single magpies hanging around, and he hadn't broken a mirror recently. Just a feeling that things were off-kilter. He'd knocked and waited with his knife already in his hand to burst in and take control. The woman opened the door and his arm was already moving. The security chain on the door stopped her opening it the way he was expecting, and he slashed the metal chain instead of the shoulder he was going for. She backed off, screaming. He shoulder-barged the door and the chain snapped. He stepped inside, slamming the door behind him. She was begging no, please, stop. He smiled. She banged into the small table in the passageway and a plate with a bundle of keys on a keyring of a cat on it fell to the floor, cracking in two, with a porcelain tinkle and a metallic jangle. He pounced upon her, pushing her down to the wooden floor, pushing the blade into the shoulder he'd missed earlier. Her head slammed into the floor a moment before the rest of her did, and she rag-dolled, unmoving, on the floor.

He lifted her and pull-dragged her into the living room, looking for where to put her. He lay her on the floor and took a chair from around the dining table, with its dinner placement set out for

one, a single placemat, knife and fork, and glass. He placed the chair opposite the sofa and set off to the kitchen for something to bind her. Entering the kitchen, he could see she'd been interrupted cooking her dinner, chopped peppers and onions in a bowl, a cold frying pan on the stove with an irregular circle of oil swirled inside it. Roughly diced chicken pieces and a couple of flour tortillas on plates waiting for their time in the pan to bring them to life. He saw a roll of duct tape on the windowsill. He took it into the living room. He picked the woman up and propped her in the chair. The high back perfect to hold her upright as he wound the tape around her. Her head lolled as she was still out. He taped her mouth and tossed the roll on the floor beside the chair. He sat on the coffee table in front of her and pulled out the knife from her shoulder. Blood blossomed from the wound and turned the area of the blouse around it a deep red. The woman didn't stir. The man wiped the knife clean on her upper arm, two red smears on the plain white blouse. He was a patient man and could wait for her to wake. There's no enjoyment in cutting a lifeless body. It had all the fun as preparing a joint of meat for dinner. At the thought of dinner, the man stood and went into the kitchen. He'd decided it would be a shame to waste the food she'd prepared. His train didn't leave for another three hours so he had time to kill and a hole to fill. It'd be better than station grub. He cooked the dinner and took it into the living room. The woman tried to twist in the chair to see him, but the tape held her still. He ate the food at the dining table and then took the clear plate back into the kitchen and washed it up and placed it in the draining rack to dry. He returned to the living room and to the woman. He sat in front of her again. Her eyes were wide open. He picked up his knife and held her head with the other hand. She struggled against him, but the tape and his hand held her still. Tears ran from her eyes. He pressed the point of the knife against her cheek. Smiled. And pushed it in.

He waited for the feeling to come as it always had before. Blood welled up around the puncture and dropped. Nothing. He twisted the blade and sliced towards the ear. Muffled cries from the woman, but he felt nothing in his heart. The joy and electricity in him absent. He raised the knife again, but hesitated. He didn't know this sensation or lack of. Not when carrying out his little hobby. It was familiar to him in many other forms that failed to raise his enjoyment above its flatlined state. But never this. He stood up from the table and sat on the sofa to think.

Had he fallen out of love?

The woman stirred, awoken from her state by the rising-falling warbling tones of a siren. The man heard it getting louder. He sat forward on the sofa, ready to move. He'd been here too long. A neighbour must have heard the screams, the slam of the door, the thud of her head on the floor. Called the Police. He started spinning the knife in his palm as he decided what to do. Finish the woman and escape? Just go? Would they catch him leaving or on the street? Probably. He wasn't familiar with the area. Just had picked a direction from the train station and started walking. He looked at the woman. He could see her breathing had increased by the way her nostrils flared. She wasn't special enough to be the last. His final one. The last should be a masterpiece, a show-stopper, but he still wasn't feeling it. Seconds went by as he mulled over the problem. The siren got closer. They must be almost at her road if they weren't already. The spinning knife wobbled and the point of the blade scratched the fleshy part of his palm. He knew from his books it was called the thenar. The feeling of the blade against his skin brought a familiar rush. He grabbed the handle to stop the knife. His skin? Virginal, pure, untouched. Not a scar on it, anywhere. He placed the point to the padded part of his hand, which still tingled. Feeling. He smiled as though greeting an old friend. He pressed the point in. Ahhhhhhhh he exhaled in ecstasy. He withdrew the steel slowly as the room was bathed in strobing blue lights. He savoured the feeling of the knife freeing itself, the pull of the skin. An exquisite feeling. Faster now he pushed it in. Eager for the sensation. Again. Again. Again. No pain, just feeling. He stabbed his arm. Leg. Piercing flesh. Slicing. A frenzy of bliss. A crash against the door. The knife in his abdomen. Carving. Wounding. Stabbing. Another crash, the door hitting the hallway wall. The blade against his neck. In his neck. Tearing. Loving.

END

**Author's note.**

I hope you enjoyed this story, thank you for taking the time to read it.

Twenty-seven of my other short stories can be found in my short story collection *A Few Hours After This* on Amazon - <http://getbook.at/AFewHoursAfterThis>

