



ESCARGO PRODUCTIONS

THE MERCY LIST

Is someone you love on the list?

Treatment

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THE MERCY LIST

Is someone you love on the list?

Treatment by Jan Wilson

It's nighttime in a lovely suburban front yard. Green grass, flowers line the pathway leading to the front door. Bushes and trees frame the house. No moon tonight.

A pair of human feet plod across the garden path. Soft, quiet shoes. A window beckons. Lights on, no curtains. The feet leave the path and quietly make their way to the secluded window.

Later, the yard is still and quiet. The white night-blooming jasmine seems to glow in the darkness. A garden gnome watches in silence. The human feet return. Faster this time. Scurry down the path toward the street. Gone.

The next day Tanner Zelinski, mid 30s, arrives at Best Val-U Drug, a medium-size chain store. He's the pharmacist. He wears soft, quiet shoes. Two 19 year-old college girls, Lydia and Rochelle, are cashiers up front. They snicker as Tanner comes in. His long hair and morbid interests cause them to call him "The Creepy One" behind his back. He knows he's considered odd by the young girls, but he doesn't really mind. He happily goes to work in the pharmacy at the back of the store. He likes his job and he's good at it. He knows all about the medicines and drugs. He's in his domain.

The store manager is Brenda, in her 50s. She is a colorful vision in a flowing skirt, multiple bangles, and sandals. The crisp "Best Val-U Drug" apron she wears does not disguise her granola nature. She is the ex-hippie den mother of the Best Val-U Drug employees. She and Tanner get along great, they chat before their shifts begin.

Brenda tells Lydia, the more impressionable and skittish of the two young cashiers, that she needs to work back in the pharmacy with Tanner tonight because one of the pharmacy techs quit. Lydia is mortified, but she agrees.

Back in the pharmacy Tanner's boss barely contains his disdain for Tanner's long hair, but Tanner remains the consummate professional, so there's really no reason to find fault with him. Lydia is given a brief training on how to work in the pharmacy – she's not to ever touch the drugs, she can only handle the prescriptions once they are in the bags ready for customer pick-up, and she is shown how to enter the prescription information into the computer, which Tanner will double-check of course. She's told "Knowing Tanner, he'll triple-check it."

Later that evening an elderly woman comes in to pick up her prescription and Lydia watches, with some surprise, as Tanner deals with her with grace, kindness and incredible skill. Lydia's impressed. In the break room Lydia makes an attempt to chat with Tanner. It's a bit awkward, but it's a start.

Before Tanner's break ends he goes out onto the loading dock at the back of the store. One of the guys who works in the warehouse is Wade, mid 30s. A big overgrown kid. He and Tanner mention going to a nightclub to see a band. Tanner's startled by a noise nearby. There's a disheveled-looking man rooting through the dumpster. Wade just explains, "Don't worry about him. That's Crazy Yellow Pants. I let him dig out fresh cardboard to sleep on." Wade goes back inside. Brenda comes out. Brenda's shift is ending, she's waiting for her ride. She's going to see a play with her 'women's group'. Tanner jokes that it's a group for angry divorced women. Brenda says that no, it's a nice group of women and they are helping her heal her lonely heart after her divorce. Tanner makes fun of Brenda's hippie nature, and Brenda makes fun of Tanner's morbid interests; serial killers and poisons and things she considers gruesome. They are truly friends and are only ribbing each other. In fact Brenda likes Tanner so much that she wants to fix him up with her daughter Sara. Tanner says no, he's just not up for that. She says she thinks love can fix all. He only rolls his eyes. "Such a hippie."

Before closing time Lydia's fellow cashier Rochelle passes by the pharmacy. Tanner inadvertently makes himself look even more morbid by joining their conversation and discussing different ways to commit suicide, such as with four cigarettes. Even though Rochelle is turned off, Lydia is intrigued and asks him how on earth smoking four cigarettes can kill you. He explains, "No, not smoking. Ingesting them. Nicotine is a insecticide, it's poisonous to humans too. You could put several cigarettes in a glass of water for an hour, filter it, drink the water, and be dead in a few hours. It'd taste horrendous though." Lydia's fascinated. Rochelle is disgusted and leaves. This is the first sign of Lydia's allegiance shifting from alpha dog Rochelle to underdog Tanner.

After watching Tanner constantly flicking his hair out of his face all night as he leans over to fill prescriptions Lydia boldly announces, "Tanner? I have an idea."

Lydia stands behind Tanner braiding his hair as he sits on his stool. It's a long process, and he closes his eyes as she runs her hands through his hair. She takes her time. She finishes, and ties it off. Looks good. He's a bit slow to come back to life.

A customer approaches the counter, and Lydia goes to help him. It is Marty Carmichael, in his late 50s. He's dropping off a prescription for an asthma inhaler. Tanner sees him, and all of his calmness evaporates. His eyes lock onto Marty. He stands to get a better look. Doesn't take his eyes off him. Strains to hear the chitchat between Marty and Lydia, but it's just pleasantries. Tanner stares at Marty as he leaves the pharmacy. Watches him until he is out of sight, deep in the aisles of the store.

After work Tanner goes to visit his mother, who is out in her garden killing slugs with salt. Tanner brings up his sister Tessa, reminisces how Tessa used to love to play in the yard when she was little. Mrs. Zelinski doesn't want to discuss Tessa. Tanner tells his mother that the salt she uses to kill the slugs damages the plants; it'd be better to use ammonia. It works better, plus the extra nitrogen is good for the plants. She says "Really? Okay, I'll have to remember to get some." "I've got some." He stands up to go get it. "You have it *with you*?" He explains enigmatically, "In the car. I use it too."

In living room he passes by old high school photos of his older sister Tessa. A flashback montage begins, quickly intercut news footage from the early 1990s and 'man on the street' interviews with citizens. A reporter says "...self-proclaimed 'mercy killer' Bennett Langley now retracts all claims he made only two weeks ago of killing as many as a dozen or more people in the past three years...."

Old news footage of "Marty Carmichael" a.k.a Bennett Langley, younger, with darker hair. He's escorted by cops from a courthouse. A polite smile for the cameras. A perky morning TV show host puts on her 'serious face'. "Langley confessed, some would even say bragged, about finding mentally ill homeless people whom he termed 'hopeless' and killing them." Her co-host chimes in. "Experts are speculating that Langley has narcissistic personality disorder, sometimes called 'The God Complex.' And with a possible plea bargain, Langley could serve only 14-18 years."

Back in his mom's garden with the ammonia Tanner admits that he thinks he saw Bennett Langley, the serial killer he always assumed was responsible for his sister's disappearance. Possibly in denial, his mom says no, Tessa wasn't murdered, she just ran away and never returned. Apparently Tessa's teen years were not happy at home. Tanner reminds her that Langley targeted 'helpless' people on the street, maybe he considered heroin addicts helpless too. Maybe Tessa was one of his many victims. Mrs. Zelinski still says no. "A mother knows. He didn't get her. I can feel it." Tanner replies, "I don't wanna *feel* it. I want to *know* it. I want a list."

Tanner tosses and turns that night. He eventually gets out of bed, gets dressed. His house is tastefully decorated with somewhat morbid things. Antique poison bottles. A nicely framed "Helter Skelter" movie poster. Many books on crimes and killers in addition to his job-related books on chemicals, toxins, poisons and medicines. Tanner grabs his keys and heads out.

Tanner's nighttime search for another window to peep into is intercut with Tanner sitting in a nice comfortable club chair. He speaks to an unseen companion. He begins a shameful, yet eventually therapeutic session. "Damaged. I'm damaged." He explains how his voyeurism began in childhood by accidentally seeing neighbors having sex in their yard. The problem deepened. Now Tanner is a hardcore voyeur, a.k.a. a Peeping Tom. He cannot have a normal relationship with a woman. Until now it's a secret he's never told anyone, but it's very healing to speak about it. He admits that watching someone who doesn't know they are being watched feels very empowering.

The next night Lydia actually offers to help in the pharmacy again instead of subjecting Rochelle to do it. Tanner asks Lydia to ring up an item for him, a bottle of ammonia, and then uses it to concoct something. Lydia is curious, asks him what he is compounding. He says he is making himself some smelling salts, which are sometimes used to cure headaches.

Back to Tanner's therapy session in the club chair. He continues to explain his condition. He is trying to use aversion therapy on himself to help curb his voyeurism. He's not used to talking so much – he stops to sip some bottled water before continuing. When he gets the urge to go peeping he takes a deep whiff of the smelling salts. A deep whiff of that will stop almost any behavior in its tracks.

Back in the pharmacy Lydia is still chatting with Tanner when Marty Carmichael (a.k.a Bennett Langley) returns to pick up his prescription. Lydia, having no idea that Marty is a killer who has been released on parole, is super friendly with him. Marty is indeed a very chatty and friendly man. Tanner's morbid curiosity gets the best of him and he joins in the conversation. Marty and Lydia are both avid bowlers and Tanner enthusiastically exclaims that he is too, and he finagles an evening of bowling for all three of them. Probably not the coolest thing to do to include an innocent 19 year-old girl in his quest to find the truth about his sister's fate, but Tanner is socially awkward and is unable to arrange the social interaction without Lydia. After the date is set, Marty leaves. Only then does Tanner implore, "Lydia, I need you to teach me how to bowl."

After work Lydia and Tanner hit the bowling alley for Tanner's first bowling lesson. Lydia asks why on earth he said he loved bowling when he's obviously never played before. Wanting to believe in this underdog she readily accepts his answer that Tanner felt sorry for Marty, he seemed lonely and thought it'd be nice to go out with him. This only makes Lydia like him more. A crush is developing.

As they eat nachos and sodas Tanner asks Lydia about what her major is. She doesn't know, hasn't picked one yet. Tanner tries to help her narrow down her interests but frankly she doesn't seem very enthused to be in college at all. But to Lydia, "creepy" Tanner is now becoming "interesting" Tanner.

She tells him that her dad wants her to be a lawyer, but she doesn't seem interested in that. Tanner tells her with great sincerity that he hopes that whatever it is that she ends up doing, he hopes it's something *she* loves to do. That seems like a foreign idea to her, she lets it sink in.

Late at night Tanner and Wade listen to a heavy metal band in a crowded, darkened nightclub. An attractive woman has her eye on Tanner, but he doesn't bite. Wade can't imagine why not. Tanner's therapeutic voiceover continues, he explains that he doesn't date. He can't have normal sex, so what's the point? Women don't want to date a freak, and that's what he is. Tanner turns down the attractive woman, but as he watches her walk away he takes his small vial of smelling salts and takes a strong whiff. Wade can't understand why Tanner would turn down a sexy woman. Tanner jokingly offers her to Wade, but Wade admits he already has a secret hot affair going with a cougar.

The next morning Lydia looks like hell on toast. She obviously has a hangover. Tanner doesn't bust her, he keeps her secret. And he lets her onto a very powerful and secret cure for a hangover: water. He gives her a big bottle of it and explains that alcohol severely dehydrates you, so the best cure for a hangover is to drink water. She follows the advice of her new crush.

Tanner then goes to the warehouse where he realizes his friend Wade is stealing from the company. Tanner doesn't approve, but agrees to say nothing.

Lydia goes to the front of the store to get change for the register. Rochelle makes some snarky comments about Tanner, but this time Lydia defends him. Brenda knows a crush when she sees one. She says nothing to embarrass Lydia.

Finally it is time for Tanner and Lydia to meet Marty at the bowling alley. Marty indeed does show up. Marty and Lydia really bond. Lydia's father moved away years ago when her parents divorced, and Marty instantly tries to be a surrogate father to her. Tanner is uncomfortable with this for obvious reasons, but can't really say anything. And Tanner is mortified to learn that Marty is now working at a home health care business. "There's a lot of poor, terminal people who suffer so greatly. So you and I are in the same business, sort of. *Taking care of people.*" Tanner is mortified to think what this might mean in Marty's sociopathic mind.

Tanner manages to finish the game, keeping his eye on Marty and Lydia. She has a great time, she really likes Marty, and Marty's narcissistic personality disorder loves the fact that he has a fan in Lydia. Tanner is distracted during the game by a wholesome-looking young woman playing on the lane next to him. As his daydream unfolds, his voiceover continues to explain the peculiar subtleties of voyeurism. "To be clinically diagnosed as a voyeur the subject must have recurrent, intense or sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviors of observing others in states of undress or involved in sexual activity who are unaware that they are being observed." His voyeurism daydream echoes this; even in his fantasy Tanner never interacts or touches his dream woman, in fact she never knows he is there.

After the night of bowling Tanner realizes he was a fool to get involved with a known serial killer and to drag Lydia with him. He tries to politely end the evening, but Marty seems fixated on his 'fan' Lydia and implies to Tanner that he'd like to "be there" for Lydia more, help fill the gap her father's absence left. In order to take Marty's focus off of Lydia Tanner admits he knows who Marty really is. Marty accuses Tanner of being a "murder groupie", one of those people obsessed with murderers and crimes. Tanner says no way, he just recognized him because Tanner was a teen when Marty was on the news and remembers the media talking about his mercy killings. Tanner doesn't admit that he

wants to know if his sister was one of Marty's victims. Instead, Tanner says he admired that Marty put mentally ill homeless people out their misery and thinks Marty has been misunderstood by society. Mission accomplished – Lydia is pretty much forgotten and Marty immediately fixates on Tanner – his newest fan and possible disciple. Marty basks in Tanner's praise. Tanner pretends not to be horrified by Marty's claims long enough to get in the car with Lydia and get the hell out of there.

On the drive home Tanner is distracted. Not only was it a close call with a serial killer, but he can't get his voyeuristic fantasy of the woman at the bowling alley out of his head. His voiceover from the club chair explains that going to peep shows would seem like a good substitute for peeping, but it doesn't work. The girls at the peepshow know they are being watched, so it doesn't satisfy the need. That deep need to watch someone who doesn't know him, and doesn't know he's there. Sure, the peep show girls will pretend like they don't know he's there if he asks them to, but it isn't the same. There's just nothing as good as finding a "good window."

Lydia boldly gives Tanner a goodnight kiss on the cheek before she hops out of the car. Tanner takes out the smelling salts, but hesitates. Changes his mind. Tosses them out the window, then drives to one of his favorite peeping haunts. He continues "A clinical diagnosis of 'voyeur' is made only when this is a preferred or exclusive means of sexual gratification. Yup, that's me."

Tanner returns to his old peeping haunt from before. He hides outside her window, watches her. An average-looking woman in a robe gets ready for bed. She brushes her hair. Puts lotion on her face.

Then she pulls her pajamas from a drawer. Tanner watches her, transfixed. He unzips his pants. Begins to pleasure himself. He closes his eyes, enveloped in bliss. Much better than ammonia.

He opens his eyes again to watch her. But she is standing at the window - merely two feet from him. For several seconds they stare at each other, each too shocked to move. She gets a good look at him. Then she SCREAMS. Tanner flees from the window. Stumbles through the bushes as he zips his pants up. "You fucking creep! I saw you!" Tanner flies across the yard and down the street.

Tanner's voiceover continues from his club chair: "The second criteria is that the subject's fantasies, urges, or behaviors must cause significant distress or are disruptive to his everyday functioning."

Tanner hauls ass to his car and stumbles to get in, panicking. "Stupid fucker! I'm a fucking idiot!" His voiceover continues: "Voyeurism is difficult to treat and nearly impossible to cure."

In the club chair: "You know what "voyeur" literally means? The origins of the word? It comes from Old French. It means..." A long moment passes before he can get the words out. "...one who lies in wait." He clasps his hands together to stop them from shaking. "I'm a fucking predator! Lurking, waiting, catching them at their most vulnerable moment. And I can't even do it face to face. I'm violating them from afar. Like a fucking coward."

Tanner's pretty shaken up from being seen by the Window Woman. He ends up at a bar and gets stink-eyed drunk. Thanks to the alcohol his long-suppressed desire for punishment finally surfaces. Tanner looks around the bar. He could probably take most of them in a fight. Nah, no point. Finally he finds someone bigger and tougher than he is. He picks a fight. Luckily the kind seen-it-all-before bartender saw what was coming, intervenes and sends Tanner home in a cab.

The next day, Lydia notices Tanner over in line at the cashier before his shift. He looks terrible. She catches his eye, gives him a "what's wrong?" gesture. He simply holds up a large bottle of water. Recognizing his hangover cure, Lydia can't help but laugh.

Back in the pharmacy later that night Tanner's trying to work, but as he leans over to work his hair falls in his face repeatedly. "Lydia?" She glances over. He points to his hair, a silent plead.

Lydia finishes up a nice braid on Tanner. He closes his eyes. "Rough night last night?" she asks. He nods. "Tanner, why don't you just put it into a ponytail?" He shrugs. Doesn't elaborate, so she continues to braid his hair for him.

Later that night Tanner is taking a break out on the loading dock, playing basketball. Brenda comes out, initially mistaking Tanner for Wade. Wade plays basketball on his breaks, so she thought Wade was out here. She teases Tanner about Lydia having a crush on him. They both toss some hoops. Brenda lets it slip that she's having an affair too, that's why she's been in a better mood lately. Tanner suddenly realizes that it's Wade that Brenda is having the hot affair with. He teases her. She laments that he teases her because she is so much older than Wade and they are probably a bad match, but Tanner says no, he is only kidding. He thinks it's nice that they each found each other.

Tanner goes back inside, finds Wade and bounces the basketball off his head, scolds him. "You're sleeping with her AND stealing from her?!" Wade doesn't really think things through. He never put it together that if Brenda is the store manager it will reflect badly on her that stock is going missing.

Tanner heads back to work in the pharmacy. He glances out into one of the aisles and sees Marty doing some shopping. Tanner ducks out of sight in time, Marty didn't see him. Tanner sits safely out of sight. He sees a flyer taped to the wall. "Come to the McKenzie Art Fair!"

He stares at it. Then goes to the counter, lingers until Marty sees him. Tanner pretends that he just now sees Marty and waves him over. Tanner uses Marty's narcissistic personality disorder to his advantage; he tells Marty he bets he's got a really great eye for art and thought he might want to

accompany Tanner to the art fair. Marty jumps at the chance to further impress his protégé. When Marty suggests they also invite Lydia Tanner implies that he wants to talk to Marty about “his work” – his mercy killings, so they should go alone. That’s an offer Marty’s ego can’t refuse.

Tanner is pleased with himself that he kept Lydia out of the equation. But then he’s alarmed to see Brenda approaching the pharmacy. Brenda and Marty meet. Instant attraction. They shake hands, flirt. Tanner finally gets her attention and buzzes her into the pharmacy so she can do her managerial duties. But it’s too late, she’s already been charmed by Marty. Brenda pats Marty’s arm before she drags herself away from him. Tanner notices the touch.

Cut back to Tanner in the club chair. “The other night Lydia was braiding my hair. Nothing sexual, she was just getting it out of my face for me. But...have you ever had a woman run their fingers through your hair? Or brush it? Feels so good.” He pauses, lost in the memory of it. “I should have known something was up with me when I had her do that. I could have just put it into a ponytail myself. What shot through my mind as she was doing it was...” He has to stop. This hits him hard. “...oh my god, it feels so good to be touched by a woman.” He takes a long drink from his water bottle to help him hide his wavering voice. “I do miss that intimacy.”

Although Tanner was planning on meeting Marty at the arts fair, Marty takes it upon himself to show up at Tanner’s house to get him. The other night Tanner convinced Marty that he wasn’t a ‘murder groupie’ – yet Tanner’s home says otherwise. The books, the framed “Helter Skelter” print, the antique poison bottles...all betray him. Marty is showing up at any second – Tanner panics, runs through the house, hides things, pulls things down off the walls, tries to hide all evidence of his morbid

leanings. Just as Marty knocks on the door, Tanner looks around and is greatly relieved to see that everything looks okay. But just as he opens the door Tanner realizes he is wearing a Charles Manson t-shirt! He whips it off before opening the door. Marty finds that a bit odd that Tanner has been expecting his arrival yet answers the door shirtless. Great, Tanner’s off to a weird start.

Tanner jokes to himself that he must be an idiot to willingly go somewhere with a known serial killer. *Yet he goes.*

At the arts fair Tanner gets a firm footing back with Marty by letting Marty feel like an art expert. Tanner laps it up, and leads the conversation to Marty’s “true work” – his mercy killings. Tanner tap dances around what he really wants – a list of victims; is his sister on that list? The conversation is a gentle give and take, Tanner carefully pulls information out of Marty without being too obvious. Pretends to be sympathetic to Marty’s “cause” and covers his horror as he listens to Marty’s detailed story of how he brought home a mentally ill homeless man, gave him a nice warm bath and cooked him a wonderful meal – Marty claims to be a gourmet cook after all – and then injected him with enough drugs to send him off to a peaceful death. Marty indeed is convincing at making it seem like the quality of life of his victims were practically non-existent. They are usually so ill that they don’t know what’s going on around them, they are constantly in a state of disorientation, don’t have enough presence of mind to eat or bathe. The women get repeatedly raped and they can’t even process what’s happening to them.

Marty adds, “I know I helped these people. It was for their own good. But there WAS something in it for me. An unexpected gift. I knew that would be their last meal, their last glass of wine. To know all evening long that I was watching their last day on earth was incredible. I was watching a secret unfold. It was *empowering*.” Tanner takes a moment to let that familiar word sink in -- “empowering”.

Tanner’s distressed to realize that Marty and Tanner have some common ground. Then he regroups. He tells Marty that he will design a website to further his cause, to get his movement to a wider number of people. Marty’s been in prison for 15 years – he is not at all internet savvy, so he loves this

idea, he truly needs Tanner's help for this. Tanner convinces Marty that if they phrase their words carefully it's perfectly legal to have a website. They won't actually instruct people to become mercy killers, they will simply state facts. Tanner of course has no intention of actually making such a website public. He can build one, show it to Marty, but not make it go live on the internet.

Tanner digs for information, pretending it's for the website. "So first of all, what are the basic 'rules'? Who exactly are the people you 'help'? Is there a minimum age limit? Do they have to be mentally ill? Like what about those teenage drug addicts out on the streets? You ever 'help' anyone like that?" He waits for the critical answer. Marty thinks. "You know, perhaps I should go home and write down a formal manifesto. Then we can go from there." Damn, so close to getting his answer, but Marty unknowingly sidesteps it.

A collage catches Marty's eye, and he ends up purchasing it. After all, he needs to rebuild his new life and needs some new art for his empty apartment. They put the art in the car, then Marty heads back to Tanner's home to drop him off. Marty asks if instead of going home Tanner would like to come back to Marty's apartment to help him decide where to hang the new artwork.

This invitation sparks several visions in Tanner's head: First, a small darkened room, grime-covered windows. Peeling wallpaper. Bare light bulb shining over an old table filled with odd, disturbing instruments. Secondly, an obsessively clean, pristine white-tiled room. Glass medical jars full of

weird samples line neat shelves. Windows covered with aluminum foil. Lastly, a large loft or warehouse, bare mattresses on the floor, trash scattered everywhere. Walls completely covered with newspaper clippings and victim photos.

Tanner snaps out of his 'serial killer lair' vision. But his morbid curiosity wins out over caution and he hears himself say, "Sure, I'll help. Why not?"

Marty's place is a nice middle-class building. Nothing fancy, nothing creepy. Marty trudges up the stairs with the art. Tanner follows, says quietly to himself, "Seriously, what the hell's wrong with me?"

Tanner is somewhat disappointed to see that Marty's apartment is a perfectly normal, very clean apartment. They hang the art, have some wine. Tanner makes a veiled joke about Marty's "work". Marty's not amused. "It's no joking matter deciding who lives and dies. I take my work very seriously." Tanner boldly asks him "Are you still...deciding? Will there be more decisions?" Marty only gives a polite, chillingly "normal" smile, and turns his attention back to admiring his collage. Tanner is filled with dread.

Lydia works with Tanner in the pharmacy the next day. She's proud that Tanner has taught her how to decipher the Latin-heavy prescriptions and she can actually read them now. She's very chipper around Tanner now, they are actually getting along great. But then Brenda's grown daughter Sara pops by to pick up a prescription. This is the daughter that Brenda has been pushing Tanner to date. And they do seem like a good match. Sara is casual, yet hip, attractive, smart. Sara is telling Tanner about a cool band she saw recently at a small nightclub.

Lydia is quite put out when she sees Tanner pull Sara off to the side so they can chat privately. Lydia tries to overhear them, but can't. A few minutes later when Sara leaves Lydia's jealousy is hard to hide. "She seems nice. You must like her, taking her off for a secret little conversation." Tanner laughs. "Lydia, it's the law. It was a new prescription, I'm legally required to counsel her." "What, off in the corner like that?" "Well yes, privacy issues, medical ethics. You don't shout a customer's medical conditions across the store." She happily takes her break, relieved to know that she still has Tanner all to herself.

With Lydia on break, Tanner hears a customer at the counter, and is about to go help her. But he freezes. It's the Window Woman from the bedroom window. He drops to the floor behind the counter

before she can see him. She keeps calling out for service, ringing the bell, but Tanner is plastered to the floor, only a few feet away. He's a nervous wreck, doesn't move, doesn't breathe.

Lydia's in the bathroom with her iPod on, she doesn't hear the bell in the distance. She is playing with her makeup, adding some new eye shadow, touching up her lip gloss.

After hearing the bell for service being rung over and over, Tanner's boss, the pharmacist-in-charge, comes back to the pharmacy from a back office. He sees Tanner hiding. Waits on the woman, then calls Tanner into his office.

The boss says he doesn't know what is going on, he won't pry, but he is disappointed in him. Since Tanner is usually so professional and great at his job he's willing to overlook this one weird incident. So now the voyeurism is not only interfering with his sexual and personal life, but it's affecting his job.

While Tanner is in his boss's office getting chewed out, Marty comes to the store to pick Brenda up for a date. Brenda thought it'd be easier if he picked her up at the store, and she'll just leave her car

there, he can drop her off later. Rochelle watches him open the door for her, and they drive off. "What a nice man."

Tanner walks across the parking lot of a café to get a cup of coffee that night. He sits outside for a few minutes. Crazy Yellow Pants sits nearby winding twine around a plastic spoon spouting his important nonsense. He's sunburned and dirty, but he keeps busy with his twine. Tanner watches him, wondering about his quality of life.

Wade passes by, sees Tanner, joins him. Wade just got paid is headed for the strip clubs. He invites Tanner, who of course says no. Wade mentions that he much prefers a more "private" type of show, and it sounds like he means that he sometime peeps too. Tanner is so relieved! Maybe he's not such a freak after all. Just as a bit of his shame starts to dissipate, Wade makes it clear that what he's referring to is watching porn in the privacy of his own home. The disappointment hollows Tanner out.

Brenda and Marty stroll through the park after their romantic dinner. She had a lovely time. The Moroccan restaurant he took her to was a big hit. But Marty maintains that he could cook a Moroccan dinner much better, but he supposes the restaurant did okay. He brags about having a huge cabin up near Blanchard Lake, perhaps they could have a weekend getaway soon. She says she'd love to.

Lydia trots down an aisle in the store, heading for the pharmacy. But Tanner's boss, the pharmacist-in-charge, heads her off and tells her he hired a new pharmacy tech so there's no need for her to work in the pharmacy anymore, she's free to return to the front registers. She's gutted. No more Tanner.

Later that night Lydia manages to 'bump into' Tanner as he heads out to the loading docks to get some fresh air on his break and follows him out. Tanner mentions that the new pharmacy tech seems nice, that he just moved here from Indiana. "Or did he say Illinois? I always get those two mixed-" Lydia blindsides him with an urgent kiss.

For a few seconds he struggles to get his bearings, his balance. He's caught completely off-guard; no time to object or analyze. Lydia's passion quickly overwhelms him. Tanner takes the helm. He transitions her awkward lunge into a deep, lustful kiss. He leans into her until she's happily pinned against a stack of pallets. For a blissful moment, they abandon themselves to the kiss. But then it is Tanner who pulls away. She's only 19, he's in his mid-thirties. He doesn't feel right about it. He puts a stop to it, she is embarrassed, and runs back inside. But what shocks him is that he not only wanted to kiss her, but he *enjoyed* it. A bit of hope for this voyeur?

Near closing time and the store is almost empty. Marty pops over to the pharmacy, and mentions that he just dropped Brenda off from a lovely date. Tanner's not happy that Brenda is now involved too,

but the date's over, no harm done. Marty stands at the counter chatting about the date, but politely steps aside when a customer approaches. Marty's stunned when the customer starts screaming at Tanner, "You! You! You're the one! What's your name?! You're that pervert!" She turns to Marty, distressed. "Call the cops! He was peeping in my window! Pervert!" Marty thinks she must be nuts, laughs, turns to Tanner. "What's wrong with her? Is she supposed to be on anti-psychotic meds?" But when he sees Tanner's panic-stricken face, Marty's smile fades. The Window Woman screams that Tanner will go to jail, begs Marty to call the cops.

Tanner can't speak. Covers his mouth in horror, shame. He backs into a corner. Covers his eyes, sinks to the floor behind the counter. Tries to disappear.

The Window Woman gathers her wits, pulls her phone from her purse. "I'll call them myself!" Marty lunges at her, rips the cell phone from her hand. Bends her flip-phone in half the wrong way. Wires dangle. She's stunned. "What the hell are you doing?" Marty grabs her, keeps her from bolting.

Lydia's been stocking shelves in the nearby cosmetics department. She stands, wide-eyed, listening to the ruckus. She darts toward the pharmacy.

Marty keeps his grip on the Window Woman. A calm washes over him. "Yes. Let's call the police. Come with me." He leads her back through the warehouse doors.

Tanner still sits, slumped in the corner of the pharmacy. Lydia bangs on the door. He finally crawls over and hits the buzzer to let her in. "Tanner, who the hell was that? What the hell is going on?"

The warehouse is empty and dark. Marty finds a doorway, *any* open doorway, and leads the Window Woman to it. "There's a phone in here." He stands aside, as if to let her go in first. "I do apologize for breaking your cell phone. I was confused. I'll pay for it, of course." As she steps through the door, Marty lifts her purse strap from her shoulder. In a flash he whips it over her head. Pulls it tight. She is nearly knocked off her feet as he uses her long purse strap as a garotte. Her legs kick. Arms flail. She can't breathe, can't scream. "I prefer a more humane method. But you took us by surprise."

Lydia sits on the pharmacy floor with Tanner trying to grasp what's causing his meltdown.

"What? What do you mean? Why were you looking in her window?" Tanner can't even look her in the eye. "Because I'm a fucking pervert. That's how I get off!" Lydia leans away from him a bit. He still won't look at her. "I don't understand. You accidentally saw her through her window?" "No. Not accidentally. On purpose, Lydia, I do it on purpose! I've done it my whole life!" He finally meets her eye. On the verge of tears. "I'm a voyeur, Lydia." "A what?" "Peeping Tom. Sexual deviant."

Lydia recoils from him. Lets it sink in. He reaches out to touch her hand. "Lydia... please don't think-" She yanks her hand away from him. "You like watching women? Through their windows? And they don't know?" He nods. "You're a Peeping Tom?" "Yes." She pouts. She shakes her head. "No. No. No!" Touches his shoulder, strokes his hair. "You're *nice*, Tanner! You don't really do that, do you? Not on purpose?" "I'm messed up, Lydia. I can't help it." He sobs. "I'm just so fucked up. "But. But...maybe you just...you need to be with a woman who..." She flounders, there's no excuse to grasp onto. "No, there's no excuse, no explanation. No way to rationalize it! I break the law! I violate these women!" She gasps. "Violate?" "Not physically. But I violate their privacy! Don't you get it? I get off spying on them!" She shoves him away. Tears stream down his face. "I like it, Lydia. I love it! When I'm out there, hiding in the bushes, watching...it feels so good." Lydia stumbles to her feet. Takes a few steps back. "When I can find that perfect window, and I can take my time, and she doesn't know I'm watching...it's heaven." With pleading eyes, he whimpers... "I can't help it, Lydia. Something's wrong with me. I can't help it." Lydia cries too. "Rochelle was right about you." She runs out of the pharmacy. He lets her go.

Tanner wallows in self-pity for a moment. Then notices how quiet it is. “Shit, where’d they go?”

As Tanner rushes out onto the loading dock he sees Marty covering the Window Woman’s body with cardboard in the darkness. Tanner totally freaks out. Marty tries to explain to Tanner that they can’t have busybody women impeding their progress, there are so many hopeless people who need their ‘help.’ “Nosy women will only bring us trouble.” But Marty explains that ultimately he killed the Window Woman for Tanner – so she wouldn’t get him into trouble. Guilt on top of guilt now for Tanner. Telling Tanner that he’ll take care of getting rid of the body doesn’t exactly make Tanner feel

better. Marty worries that Lydia may have overheard and will have to be ‘dealt with.’ Tanner lies through his teeth, assures him that Lydia was way up front manning a cashier station.

Up near the front registers Marty sees Lydia, notices she’s a bit upset. Lydia doesn’t explain that she is devastated by Tanner’s creepy admissions. She asks Marty if he wants to go bowling. He says yes, but not tonight, he has to go to his cabin tonight.

Rochelle and Lydia watch as Brenda comes out of the little boutique next door, waving a little bag. They joke that if she’s already buying lingerie it must have been a very good date with Marty!

Rochelle notices that Lydia seems upset, quiet. “What’s wrong, did Tanner hit on you or do something creepy?” Lydia pauses. Thinks. But then she decides to think for herself, not be guided by Rochelle’s snideness. She says nothing about Tanner.

Tanner rushes up to the front, and after Lydia and Rochelle assure him that there are no more customers in the store he insists on closing early. Locks the door, closes out their registers even though it’s not quite closing time. He goes into Brenda’s office to put the register drawers in the safe. Lydia wanders in. She finally asks him point blank. “Have you peeped at me?” After all, he’s given her a ride home, he knows where she lives. He’s dumbstruck. “Oh Lydia, no of course not! You’re my *friend*.” She’s not convinced.

As they all leave the store Tanner notices that Brenda’s car is still in the parking lot. The girls verify that yeah, Marty did drop her off earlier. But she bought some lingerie next door about half an hour ago, perhaps their date wasn’t exactly over. Lydia says that Marty has a cabin up near the lake. “You know how nosy Brenda is, she probably begged him to see it.” Tanner panics to think that ‘nosy’ Brenda left with Marty. He locks up, then flies out of the store.

Tanner speeds in his car toward the lake. He calls Brenda, but gets her voicemail. He leaves several panicked messages to call him back as soon as possible. He drives out of town onto the dark highway. Out on the highway he gets Brenda’s voicemail again.

Tanner finally arrives at Blanchard Lake. The dark landscape is dotted with a dozen cabins lit up by occupants. Which one is Marty’s?

Brenda is sitting with her daughter Sara in the café across the parking lot from the store. They talk about the date Brenda had with Marty and Brenda shows her the little camisole she bought herself as a treat. She once again tries to set Sara up with Tanner. Sara agrees that Tanner is her type, but she’s flirted with him and he doesn’t seem to respond.

Meanwhile Tanner’s been driving past the largest cabins on the lake. But he doesn’t see Marty’s car, so he goes on to the next one. He looks into the darkness at another large cabin. A woman inside moves by the window. He’s transfixed for a moment. Turns his head away. “Zelinski, god damn.”

Finally Tanner finds Marty’s car in front of a cabin. A *small* cabin. Figures. Tanner should have known that Marty exaggerated about his assets. He’s about to knock on the door when his cell rings. He backs away from the door to answer it. He’s relieved to hear that it’s Brenda, and she’s at her car in the store parking lot. He says he just overreacted to something that happened in the store, and

never mind, everything's fine. He quietly leaves Marty's porch. Too late. Marty has already heard him and opens the door. "Hi, come on in!" Crap.

Marty welcomes Tanner to his cabin. Marty assumes Tanner was freaked out about what happened at the store and came to talk about that. Tanner readily agrees to this excuse, and says yeah, Lydia mentioned a cabin up here, so he tracked him down. When Tanner asks if Marty dumped the body in the lake Marty scoffs, saying lakes are too easy to drag. He's evasive, but assures Tanner that he's good at what he does and not to worry about it. When Tanner asks for more specific details about Marty's killings, Marty turns the tables. Referring to the voyeurism, Marty says, "Seems there's more to you than meets the eye." Marty wants to know more about that before he'll answer any of Tanner's questions. Tanner gets it, "I have dirt on you, so you want dirt on me." Tanner sits down in a comfortable club chair. He takes a deep breath and starts to talk. "Damaged. I'm damaged." Tanner's voiceover has not been a session with a therapist, he's been spilling his guts to *Marty*.

Tanner ends his tale by trying to convey to Marty that the kiss on the loading dock with Lydia has filled him with new hope. Not that he's interested in her, she's just a child. But the fact that he felt desire for her tells him that perhaps he's not as hopeless as he thought. Maybe he can have a normal sexual relationship with a woman after all.

But Marty doesn't jump on his hope bandwagon yet. He suddenly asks him "Why are you so fascinated with serial killers? Or 'mercy killers' in my case." Tanner takes a second to adjust to Marty's sudden gear change. Tanner maintains that he isn't fascinated with them, he just thought Marty wanted to go bowling and was trying to be nice. But Marty doesn't buy it anymore. "Cut the crap. Brenda told me. She mentioned, lovingly of course, that you were the local serial killer expert."

Tanner finally owns up to it. "I'm interested in psychology, what's going on in their minds. I find it fascinating how they could deviate from the norm so much." "No." "No?" "No, that's not why you're interested. You're drawn to them because you *relate* to them." "No I don't. I'm not a serial killer." "You can relate to the killer because they stalk their prey...just as you do. If you can figure out the reason why they are messed up, maybe you can fix yourself, too. But Tanner, even if you do find the answer to that, it won't change anything. *It's who you are.*" Tanner's struck silent. Rings true.

Marty continues, "You're like me. Intellectually superior to the common people. Why hope to be like they are? Simpletons. We both get off watching people's most intimate moments. My way is more intellectual of course, watching their last moments of life is a spiritual epiphany. Whereas yours is purely animalistic. Primal. But we all pick the methods that best suit us." Marty leans forward in his chair. Delivers the stinger. "*You lie in wait.*" Tanner can't deny any of it.

Marty reminds Tanner of how similar they are. "I understand how intoxicating it is to be a witness to someone's most intimate moments. Sex and death. The two most raw, soul-bearing things a person can experience."

He encourages Tanner to enjoy this delicious feeling of empowerment. To embrace who he is and stop living a life filled with guilt. Marty's spiel is starting to make sense to Tanner. A life without guilt would be such a wonderful way to live.

Meanwhile back in town, Lydia and Rochelle do homework in Lydia's bedroom. Lydia stops working on her homework, says she's not going to do it. Rochelle scolds her. "It's due tomorrow, dumbbell." Lydia tells her matter-of-factly that she is going to drop out of college and do what she really wants: she's going to cosmetology school. Rochelle tries to bully her into reconsidering, but Lydia thinks for herself now. She touches up her lipstick. "I'm going to do hair and makeup. I love it."

Back in the cabin, Tanner has laid bare his soul in the club chair. Now he wants his information. He plays on Marty's narcissism. "The media always say your victim count was 'a dozen or more.' Couldn't have been that many, could it? You keep track? I mean, a dozen, that's impressive, Marty.

IF it's true." "It's true. Actually the final count was 15." Tanner grabs a paper and pen. "Okay, so there was the nurse...."

Marty's narcissistic personality disorder can't resist adding to the list as Tanner writes. "Elderly black man, foreign accent." Tanner feigns excitement, writes it down. "Okay, that's three." "Schizophrenic woman, short dark hair, about 60 years old. Old man, long white hair, always carried newspapers." Marty continues his list finally mentioning the "blonde woman with track marks."

Tanner freezes upon hearing this. He asks how old she was, Marty says about 40. Tanner casually asks if he ever killed teenagers. "No, never anyone younger than about 24." Whew. Relief. Tanner finally has his answer. His sister could not have been on this list. There's no reason why Marty would have omitted anyone.

Marty continues to impress his young protégé by telling how lovely and peaceful their passings were. "After I gave him the injection, it took just a few minutes, but the furrow in his forehead started to lessen. You could practically see the stress and confusion leave his body. It was the most peaceful, wonderful thing I've ever experienced." Tanner nods thoughtfully. Yes, it does actually sound like a release for the poor mentally ill person. Then Tanner, ever the pharmacist, asks "What drug did you use?" "Pavulon." "JUST Pavulon?" "Yes."

Tanner absolutely loses his cool. "My god, Marty. If you give someone an injection of pancuronium bromide it puts them into a conscious paralysis. Conscious! They can feel everything! They are wide awake! It may look peaceful, but those people felt every minute of their long painful death by suffocation." Now it's Marty's turn to be rendered speechless. Tanner continues, "Can you imagine? You are slowly suffocating to death, yet you can't move. You can't speak. You can't scream. Can't even gasp. You just have to lay there, completely helpless, feeling the life drain out of you. To feel that agony, their air running out.

Imagine the mental anguish, the emotional panic they went through as they asphyxiated to death! I can't imagine a more horrific way to die."

Tanner regains his senses. "What the fuck's wrong with me? I'm taking moral advice from a serial killer now?!" Marty retains his composure. He says that he sleeps at night. He knows he is doing God's work. Putting the hopeless out of their misery. Marty then implies that perhaps Tanner is hopeless too. He can't even reciprocate when a cute little coed wants him? Marty says Tanner is kidding himself if he thinks there's hope for him. He can't change his nature. "I don't like hopeless people. It upsets me to see people like you suffer. I feel the need to help."

Tanner starts to panic. He's hopeless? Does that mean Marty know wants to put Tanner out of his misery? What is Marty alluding to? Is he going to poison Tanner too? Tanner looks at the bottle of water he's been sipping all evening. It's almost empty now. Tanner jumps up, "What is it? What did you give me?!" Tanner darts around the room, panicking. "What did you do to me?!"

Tanner runs to the bathroom and flings open the medicine cabinet. He looks for an emetic, something to induce vomiting. He finds none. Tanner drops to his hands and knees, flings the toilet seat up. Sticks his fingers down his throat. Vomits messily, mostly water.

Marty strolls up to the open bathroom door, hands in pockets. Tanner is puking up as much as he can. Aim is not high on his priority list. "You fucker!" "Tanner. You're making a mess." Tanner's hair is wet with sweat, sticking to his face. His shirt is wet with sweat and vomit. He's a crumpled mixture of sobbing and dry heaves. "I'm not fucking hopeless!"

Tanner induces more vomiting, but it's mostly dry heaves now. He gags and chokes. Snot and tears and spit everywhere. Marty leans against the doorframe, watching Tanner collapsed on the floor.

Howls his lament. "I'm not hopeless. I'm not!"

There's absolutely nothing left in him to puke up. His sobs subside. He catches his breath. He's *fine*. "Well that was quite a show, Tanner." Tanner looks up at him, his face a sweaty, exhausted mess. Marty says, "I'm not sure if I'm amused or offended." He surveys the mess Tanner made all over the floor. "Why would I kill you? You're my *friend*."

Marty cleans up the mess in the bathroom with bleach and water. He explains how silly - but telling - Tanner's assumption is that he's so hopeless that Marty would want to get rid of him. "You know every type of poison and toxin under the sun. Exactly what kind of poison did you think you'd ingested that is flavorless, scentless and colorless?" Tanner is too worn out to respond. Marty continues to scrub and wipe down the toilet and floor. "There's no such thing. You *of all people* should have known that." "I panicked." "You certainly did."

Marty explains that he needs Tanner now more than ever. There are so many hopeless people out there, many of them he knows from his work at the home health care company. Tanner realizes that he is never going to stop killing. Tanner pours the rest of the bleach into the bucket. Marty protests, he doesn't need that much bleach. Tanner ignores him. Opens a bottle of toilet bowl cleanser. He adds it to the bucket of bleach. Tanner leaps out of the bathroom and slams the door behind him.

Tanner drops a towel on the floor. Holds the door shut and kicks the towel up against the crack under the door. Marty yells from inside the bathroom. "Tanner! What on earth...?!" Tanner pulls harder on the door as Marty tries to open it. Marty coughs. "Let me out! Tanner!" Coughing gets worse. Painful hacking. "My eyes are burning, let me out!" Tanner pulls on the doorknob with all his weight. Buries his mouth and nose in his sleeve without letting go of the door. Keeps his eyes shut tight.

Marty's shouts continue, "Jesus! Can't breathe! Arrr!" Marty's coughs and gasps turn into anguished cries of painful asphyxiation.

About 60 seconds is all it takes. Tanner hears the THUD. Silence. He coughs a bit, but doesn't let go of the door yet. After a moment, Tanner picks up the towel, covers his nose and mouth. Cracks the door open. Marty is sprawled out, hard to get the door open. Dead or unconscious? Tanner pushes the door harder, peeks in. Marty's eyes are wide open. Dead.

Tanner holds the towel to his face, grabs his victim list off the table and runs out of the cabin.

Tanner waits a while, then calls the cops. He says he wasn't feeling good and he vomited, then he laid down for a while. He assumes Marty was cleaning up the mess, closed the bathroom door so he didn't wake Tanner up, and made a common mistake of adding hydrochloric acid to bleach. Makes one of the deadliest gases known to man. And in a tiny windowless bathroom someone with asthma wouldn't have had a chance at survival. The cop asks why Marty didn't rush out of the bathroom. Tanner thinks. "Umm...panicked maybe?" "Yeah, I guess. People panic." Tanner agrees. "They certainly do."

A few days later, Tanner is back at work. He's in the break room. Tired, worn out, looks terrible. Rochelle and Lydia come into the break room. Lydia and Tanner make eye contact, but he looks away first. Rochelle sees Tanner, says "let's go." Rochelle leaves. Lydia hesitates, but then follows her out. Tanner runs his hands through his hair. Puts his head down on the table. Closes his eyes. Rests. Nothing but silence for a moment.

But then, a soft THUD on the table. A hand strokes his head. He opens his eyes. A bottle of water. Lydia smiles and leaves. He stares at the bottle of water. A peace offering. Same brand as the

water from the cabin. *Great.*

Later out back on the loading dock Tanner sits with a sobbing Brenda, consoling her. "I finally found a good man, and the next day he's dead. My luck." Tanner says that he's only telling her this because it might make her feel better, but Marty used to be in prison for something bad. Really bad. So she's better off without him. "I sure can pick 'em." "I should have said something." "Oh Tanner, it's not your fault. You obviously had no idea he was bad news when you met him, otherwise you never would have let us get involved. You're not an idiot." He lets that one sink in. "Aren't I?" Without being too specific he says he is fucked up and has serious issues. She assures him that everyone has the capacity to change, he can at least try. He sighs, "SUCH a hippie."

Later, Tanner's up by the front when Sara comes in looking for her mom. Tanner says Brenda went on her lunch break. Sara thanks him and turns to go. But this time Tanner calls her back. "Hey, you like music, right? There's this cool band playing at the Dingo Bar tomorrow night. Wanna go?"

Out in the parking lot Crazy Yellow Pants is digging through a trash bin. He talks to a passerby who ignores him. "I'm going to Moscow tomorrow to marry a general's daughter. I gotta find her buttons or she won't marry me." He wears no shoes. He's grimy and surely reeks. He finds discarded broken sunglasses in the bin. He puts them on. "I'm ready now." He laughs a contented laugh and boogies on down the street.

At home Tanner studies the unfinished list of victims. Pulls an encyclopedia of crime from his bookshelf. Flips to a chapter on Bennett Langley. Lays the victim list inside the book. Snaps the book shut.

The end.