



DECLAN MAYFAIR

**A HORROR
STORY**

**PATIENCE
IS WAITING**

BEWARE THE FURY OF A PATIENT WOMAN

Patience is Waiting
A Novella by Declan Mayfair

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Helen Reimensnyder Martin

for Regina Ayala

for teaching me a thing or two about *murder*

BODY (FIFTEEN)

His body was heavy. It took every ounce of strength Patience had to pull him from the back of her mother's station wagon, lower him to the ground without losing her grip, and drag him into the water. He was wearing a suit, under which was a dress shirt that was missing the third button down. It was the same stale color as the gloomy sky. His favorite tie, the black one with tiny white checkered squares on it, had loosened around his neck. It flapped in the wind, rising up and brushing her left cheek. Her hands were cupped under the arms of his dry-cleaned navy blue suit coat. His balding head bobbed between her legs and smacked between her knees like a weighted balloon attached to a fat middle-aged stick. Until he was in the water, she couldn't breathe. It was there she let him drop.

There was little splash or sound when he slipped beneath the murky water. His eyes were open, though; gaping and staring up at her, wide and alert and permanently terrified. The knife – the one her mother had ordered off of television because the commercial boasted it could cut through anything – was still in his heart. The black handle, wooden with gleaming silver trim, stopped where it met his split, ripped skin. Within seconds he disappeared. Finally, after four years and twelve days of his berating and his criticism and his nightly sermons on God, the apostles, the saints and the detrimental temptation of sins and lust, he was now resting quietly on the bottom of the lake like a botched baptism.

It was easier than she expected. She waited for him in the garage after school, in the far left corner, near the water heater. It was a place she knew well, as it'd come to be her hiding spot. It was the one place he couldn't get to her. She was small enough to wedge herself into the tiny space between the cinder block wall and the cylindrical heater. He was too big to get back there. Sure, he tried. But after a few futile attempts at shoving his fat arm through the narrow gap, he would tire and give up.

Day after day, she would wait there until her mother came home complaining about another long day at the day care center, demanding to know why nobody had filled the dishwasher like she'd asked. Later, she'd fix them pot pies or tuna casserole. They would eat dinner in silence, avoiding each other's eyes, ignoring one another's existence. From across the table, Patience would watch her stepfather's mouth gnashing bits of food like an animal. All the while she fantasized about slitting his throat. Or, better yet, stab him deep inside his fat, black heart.

Once she finally decided to go through with it, the worst part was the waiting. She was anxious, longing for the act to take place. She thought about it, imagining it every second of every day, while she sat in the back of the classroom or lay awake in her bedroom watching the red digital numbers on her alarm clock. She couldn't wait to do it. The excitement of it all nearly drove her insane.

The deed was done, though. She stood on the lake's edge, reflecting.

Patience hadn't been to the lake in five years. Not since she was ten, freckled and sunburned and she kissed George Bartlett at summer camp. The kiss had been nothing more than furtive young lips smashed together, but it lingered, like a haunting, during episodes of nostalgic loneliness that periodically ghosted her since. The memory still tasted of strawberry lip gloss. Thinking about it made her cheeks turn pink and the corners of her mouth lift into a smile, which caused anyone who met her to take pause and reexamine the undeniably innocent charm she possessed.

George Bartlett was long gone. He was studying at Stanford now. He was a freshman there, about to embark on an exciting life – without her. Rumor had it he was destined to become

some kind of doctor – a brain specialist or something fancy like that. He always was a smart one, too smart for his own good. The camp counselors referred to him as “Smart Ass Georgie.” She was labeled “the good one” and was told repeatedly she had “the face of an angel.”

Her eyes, small and wistful, skimmed the lake’s tranquil surface. She watched, first with a forced ease, and then with a sudden sense of calm. A brown bird with huge sweeping wings danced down from the sky and dipped the tip of his right wing into the water. Like an incision, the wing sliced the surface, and lake water was spun into an arc of tiny drops like transparent blood. The bird seemed to effortlessly pirouette. He was a music box ballerina or a synchronized swimmer, dragging his wing through the water for at least forty yards. Finally, the bird lifted away and the lake shimmered with tender ripples like unspooled Christmas ribbon. Towering pine trees surrounded the lake like a landscaped force field. Their sweet and sharp smell caused her to tremble with a slight shiver.

Patience shifted nervously from one foot to the other, trying to generate some type of heat as she stood in the foggy mist the lake emanated. She glanced down, just briefly, her attention diverted by the squishing sound made by her once-white tennis shoes. They were wet and worn from the rain-drenched soil and the seventy-mile drive to reach the spot. But there was blood, too. It took a moment for her to actually see it – to accept the fact it was even there. It was mixed with the near-black sludge and soaked through the tops of her shoes. The tips of her baby blue shoelaces were now tinged a deep red. It was a jarring feeling for her, looking down at the blood. Something inside of her felt yanked open. The absolute realization of what she’d done, the irreversible act she’d committed, flooded into her mind like an avalanche of supreme consciousness. It was an awakening. Her breath quickened. Her pulse throbbed beneath her thin, pale wrists. There was a tight, sharp feeling in the middle of her chest. Her fingertips, slowly numbing from the wintry air, went to the spot where it hurt. She rubbed, almost absentmindedly, hoping the pinching, almost choking feeling would dissipate. The red cotton of her t-shirt felt oddly foreign to her as she moved her fingers over it, just below her breastbone. Her denim jacket suddenly seemed too large for her. The frayed edges of the cuffs, folded up once, reached the middle of her hands, which trembled slightly. Her cut off shorts hung from her hips like paper. The shivering became uncontrollable, so much so that her teeth chattered and it nearly overtook her. The intense sensation wasn’t just caused by the cold that was whipping around her head and biting the back of her ears. It was also a result of the aftermath of the adrenaline surge pouring through her like contagious giddiness.

She could smell the blood. The pungent stench of raw iron floated up from her feet and into her nose. Patience coughed a little and tried to swallow the bitterness. The piercing pain in her chest clinched her again. She winced. Finally, she could feel her pulse slowing down.

The bottoms of her shoes were sinking into the milky mud.

Her gaze continued to bore into the ground as if she were waiting for something to appear. Just inches from the toes of her shoes, there were two deep indentions in the mud – four inches in width and of identical length and proportion. His loafers – his size twelve Nunn Bush loafers – had carved two tracks. They trailed all the way down to the edge of the water, where they suddenly disappeared.

She looked up as the brown bird, still in flight, called down to her with a squawk, as if beckoning her to join him on his journey.

If only I could, she thought.

Her reverie was interrupted by the call of the bird and the soft sound of the water brushing over the lip of the shore – just like George Bartlett and that strawberry summer.

They'd shared a mutual love for the macabre, especially monster movies and slasher films. They talked about them incessantly, often trying to out-quote one another with lines of obscure dialogue from even more obscure films. George always won.

For a second, she could almost hear his voice, cracking and nervous and thirteen.

"I like you a lot," he'd muttered, as they'd sat on the edge of the lake and the delicate brink of adulthood. "You're different from the other girls."

I am, she responded to his memory. I am different. I'm the good one.

She closed her eyes, licking her lips as if George's kiss still lived there. And for a moment, as brief as it was, she felt like everything was going to be okay.

Patience knew she would have to get back into the station wagon parked behind her. She would warm up the car a few moments before turning the heater on. She would listen to music, probably "In the End" by Linkin Park, because it was her favorite song. She would throw the car into reverse and leave it all behind: the pervert at the bottom of the lake and the brutality she'd endured for four years and twelve days. She would drive back to her hometown. On the way there, she would stop off at a self-serve car wash and soap down the inside and outside of the station wagon. Her mother would be so pleased to have a clean car waiting for her in the driveway when she got home from the office. There, Patience would casually remark on how strange it was that Daddy wasn't home yet. She would even suggest they call his office. She might even be the one to dial the phone. As the hours would tick by and her mother's face would grow heavier with concern, she would be the source of comfort and reason. Finally, she would be the one to call the police to report him missing. The next day, she would go to school. She would welcome the questioning stares and return them with hesitant glances of sorrow. She would tell a teacher or two that the only thing she truly wanted for Christmas was for her stepfather to be found and returned home safely.

She would mail a letter to Stanford. She would suggest that George Bartlett come home for the holidays and it would be awesome if they spent New Year's Eve together, just for old times' sake. Over Martinis made from a bottle of gin stolen from her mother's hidden stash in the garage, she would remind George of their first kiss. They would toast to their childhood at the stroke of midnight. She would make love to him and tell him how she'd always dreamed of being a doctor's wife, even if she was only fifteen.

In the years to come, she would keep only that memory of the lake in her mind, the shared kiss with George. The rest she would forget, because forgetting would be necessary to survive.

Despite the gray sky, the lake was beautiful. It was the last place in the world she remembered being innocent.

END OF PREVIEW