

Short story written by Nardeen Sheikh

A Quiet Motive

The city was a living thing—its veins pulsed with crime, its breath reeked of desperation. Neon signs flickered in the fog, casting eerie glows on the wet pavement. People spoke in hushed tones, avoiding dark alleys as if the shadows themselves had grown teeth. The murders had poisoned the air with fear, and the killer, unseen and unknown, had turned the entire city into his personal hunting ground. Each victim, appearing to share some connection, fell prey to the elusive killer. As I delved into the investigation, the chilling truth began to surface. What remains unclear is the reason behind the victims' demise. Was it fueled by revenge, driven by jealousy, or was there no discernible meaning at all?

My name is Michael Thornefield. I am thirty-three years old. I always had a desire to become a detective, but my parents constantly nagged me to pursue a career in medicine or engineering. I chose not to let my parents down, so I acquiesced to their wishes of me becoming a doctor, specialising in cardiology. While I do not entirely despise my profession, there are moments when witnessing bleeding patients fill me with a sense of nausea.

One evening, following an incredibly stressful day at work, I switched on the TV to get updates on the latest news. What I heard sent a shiver down my spine—a masked assailant had taken the life of the city's wealthiest businessman, Ezra Hawkins. It was reported that his wife had found him decapitated, lying on the couch inside their home. Initially, I did not think too deeply about this situation, as it is typical for businessmen to be a target to criminals nowadays. However,

when I heard of another murder the following day, the victim once again a businessman, my suspicions heightened.

This time it was Wesley Bennett, an arrogant CEO associated with a technology-related enterprise. He, too, was discovered decapitated, this time within the confines of his car. Law enforcement attempted to review security camera footage, but all events from that day had been completely erased. I was no detective. I was not trained to follow clues, to uncover motives. And yet, the moment I saw the pattern—wealthy men, powerful yet morally bankrupt, dropping one by one—I could not let it go. It was the same itch I had felt as a child when I devoured mystery novels, when I imagined myself solving the puzzles others overlooked. Medicine had never thrilled me like this did, and that terrified me.



Seven years ago, during my time as an intern at a hospital, I encountered my future wife. In the hallway, she stood as the most stunning woman I had ever seen—a vision resembling a supermodel with her long, curly blonde hair and captivating presence. Despite her beauty, she appeared stressed, nervously biting her nails. Concerned, I approached her and asked if she was alright. She shared that she was visiting her comatose brother, fearing he might never wake up. Assuring her that the hospital boasted top-notch medical professionals, I offered solace and prayers. I handed her a drink, and we chatted, sharing details of our personal lives. Her name was Bridget, and as she unfolded her passion for photography, showcasing some of her work, I found myself once again captivated. A beautiful woman with a profound passion, Bridget's allure became even more irresistible. In the following days, our paths crossed once again, and our

connection deepened. Gradually, we entered into a romantic relationship, and the happiness I experienced made me feel like the luckiest man alive. Although I was already content with my life, a realisation dawned upon me—something was missing, and that something was Bridget. Her wit, kindness, and eloquence resonated with me, causing my affection for her to grow daily. Three years later, we exchanged vows and have been happily married for four years.



A few days ago, an unconscious patient was admitted to the hospital with blood dripping from his neck, suggesting an attempted murder with the assailant seemingly aiming to sever his head. The patient in question is identified as Adrian Shaw, who later fell into a coma. According to the street cleaner who brought him to the hospital, Adrian was found unconscious after being attacked by a hooded figure wielding a switchblade. The attacker quickly fled upon spotting the witness. Although it was mentioned that the assailant did not wear a mask, the darkness obscured any distinctive facial features.

Ezra Hawkins was not just wealthy—he was untouchable. He had been accused of embezzlement, assault, and even trafficking, but the evidence always seemed to vanish. Wesley Bennett’s technology empire thrived on stolen ideas and crushed competitors, silencing them with lawsuits they could never afford. And Adrian Shaw? He was the worst of them all. His history included allegations of sexual assault against women in their twenties. Women whispered his name in fear, their accusations never making it past the thick walls of his mansion. These men did not just have money; they had power, and someone wanted to take it all away from them, one severed head at a time.

I caught the snippets of a conversation among a group of nurses speculating that, given the assailant was unmasked during the attack, Adrian might be able to describe the perpetrator's appearance. While Adrian may not be known for his kindness, I still believed that taking a life could never be the right answer to any conflict. However, much of the public fails to consider the broader context—the motivations behind the attacks on these individuals. Most people simply view the murderer as the one at fault, without delving into the histories of the wealthy men involved. Nevertheless, as I mentioned, resorting to murder should never be an acceptable means of addressing these issues, after all, the motives behind these deaths could potentially stem from trivial reasons, like the envy of their affluence.

About a month later, Adrian emerged from his coma and regained consciousness. As he was still recovering from the trauma, we chose not to overwhelm him with questions about the night he was attacked.

Bridget and I still shared the same connection we had seven years ago. We had so much in common—our goals in life, hobbies, favourite foods, movie genres, and even our taste in music. We would listen to The Smiths every night before going to bed, singing along, despite our less-than-stellar vocal abilities. I was myself when I was with her, and I did not have to pretend to be someone I was not.

But something was strange. She had been acting a bit different for the past few days. At first, it was little things. The way she turned her phone away from me when she texted, the nervous way she chewed her lip whenever I asked where she had been, the scent of sweat on her clothes—subtle, but unmistakable. I told myself I was imagining things, that I was being paranoid. It might seem like an irrational assumption, but I thought that she might have been cheating on me. The thought of seeing Bridget with another man made my blood boil. Sure, I was a little possessive, but could anyone blame me when my world felt incomplete without her?

But one night, she left the house, whispering a flimsy excuse about meeting her old high school friends. At that moment, I knew something was going on. My heart pounded as I followed her, slipping into the shadows. My confusion deepened when she headed to the hospital, prompting me to investigate the reason behind her visit. Stealthily, I followed her inside, making sure not to be noticed. I first thought she was at the hospital to visit another man, but what I saw was even more horrifying. She stepped into Adrian's room, silent as a ghost. At first, she simply stood there, watching him—staring at his unconscious form. But then—she reached into her coat, her fingers curling around something. A glint of silver.

A knife.

My breath caught in my throat as she raised it high, and for the first time, she spoke—her voice eerily calm. 'You ruined my life.' Then the blade came down, again and again, crimson splattering across white sheets, his screams for help piercing the air. Despite my proximity, shock rendered me unable to hear anything; I merely stood at the door, witnessing the gruesome scene. Soon, a rush of nurses entered, apprehending Bridget and calling the police. The events

unfolded rapidly. In our momentary eye contact, she uttered no words—no explanation, no inquiry into my presence. As the police arrived, she remained silent throughout the questioning. Handcuffed and taken into custody, I approached her for answers, but her lips remained sealed. The police made every effort to get her to speak, but nothing worked.

Bridget never spoke again. Not to the police. Not to me. During the trial, she sat motionless, her expression blank—as if she had already left this world. I begged her for answers. I needed to understand. ‘Was it revenge? Was it justice?’ But she only stared at me, eyes hollow, lips sealed. In that silence, I felt a piece of me unravel. The woman I loved was gone, and in her place stood someone unrecognisable—someone I would never understand. Whatever had driven her to this point, she kept buried—forever silent.