**Oleander**

*“To me, this world is nothing but evil, and my own evil just happened to come out cause of the circumstances of what I was doing.”*

*-Aileen Wuornos*

Summer is fast approaching, and summer is dangerous.

Fires ravage small communities, encouraged by the unrelenting heat let off by the sun. Heatwaves make their way through entire cities and kill the vulnerable elderly. Melanomas seem contagious, as every second person appears to have one.

Summer is fast approaching, and summer is dangerous. And just as the sun brings out the beautiful oleander flowers, so too does it bring out the strange men who lurk in shadows and lure young girls into their homes with the promise of *sweets.*

One will be drawn in to observe the beauty of an oleander bloom, only to discover that the beauty of the flower deceives. Oleander is poisonous, after all.

Oleander will kill you.

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I haven’t slept in days. Be it from the suffocating heat, or the exhausting, inexorable dexterity of my ever-active mind, I can hardly tell these days. Nevertheless, its 11pm and I lay here, unmoved.

Above me, my fan rotates slowly and lets off a gentle whirring sound as it does. The sound reverberates softly around my room, and fatigue hits me like a freight truck. But no, God please, no. I pray to stay awake forever. I refuse to return to that hellish place behind closed eyelids. No, please, keep your eyes open. My internalised screams fall on deaf ears as I begin to drift off…

*It always starts here.*

*I am seated in the Bermuda grass outside my childhood home, the summer breeze gently tickles my cheeks as it blows past, and my mother’s windchime tinkles softly. The sun is shining brightly on this beautiful 1988 afternoon, and my eight-year-old self is delighting in the beauty of this November day in Melbourne.*

*I love watching the cars drive by, I count the number of Commodores and Toyota Celicas that drive past and keep a keen eye out for Porsches as they are my favourite. My house is on a quiet street, so any Porsches I encounter do not go unappreciated. But today I consider myself lucky, as a beautiful 1980 Porsche 911 pulls up on the nature strip, and a gentleman steps out.*

*“Sir! Sir!” I call out to him, taking him by surprise as I spring excitedly to my feet. “Your car is beautiful…” I tell him, “Porsche 911s are my favourite.”*

*He considers me carefully, his eyes icy blue and focused. The way they move is almost reptilian… shifting niftily from side to side.*

*“Oh hello…” he bowed his head at me in a gentlemanly manner, and I really do believe that he is a gentleman. He drives a Porsche, after all.*

*“May I please take a look?” I shifted closer to where he was standing, until we were but an arm’s length apart, save for the picket fence in between us.*

*“But of course. Go ahead.”*

*The excitement I feel in this moment is beyond overwhelming, and I speed around the picket fence, my legs brushing against the blooming oleander bush. I consider the vehicle carefully, taking in the delicate detailing, the flawless paint job…*

*“You can look inside, if you’d like.”*

*And so, I do…*

I awake as I always do, shaking and perspiring furiously. It is this cursed reverie that reminds me day in and day out why I do what I do. I may have been unsavable on that day, but perhaps my intervention will save another vulnerable girl from the fate that I met.

And eliminate another dangerous man.

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I sit silently in my car. The night is dead-still and humid, and the moonlight may as well be completely absent, for it radiates no luminescence at all. The house across from where I am parked in silent, but the porch lights are on and emit a dull orange glow onto the oleander flowers below.

I exit my vehicle and approach the house slowly. The man that lives here is a husband and a father. He works in accounting and does volunteer work for the local church. He donates to charities regularly.

I know what this man has done behind closed doors. Those poor kids…

I knock on the door, for I know it is only him that is home. Readying my blade between thumb and palm, my hand sits on my lower back, and I can feel the sting of the blade against my spine.

Footsteps approach from inside the house. I take a single breath in and hold myself stoic as the lock clicks and the door swings open.

In his face, I see the face of my rapist. He is a dysmorphic and malformed version but has the same blue eyes and snide smile, and I feel nauseating anger sweep through my body.

“Hel-“

The icy edge of my blade meets the flesh of his neck and swiftly draws a bloody line from one side to the other, spilling thick, red blood down his chest like a horrific waterfall. I turn my back on him as he topples to the ground in a heap of blood and flesh.

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I sit in my car once more, still across from the house. I am toying with my pocketknife and examining the handiwork of it. On the side, there are three tally marks.

With a small nail, I haphazardly scratch a fourth line.

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