

Serial

by Bonnie ZoBell

He beats the girl, stabs her 22 times, rapes her, then uses his fingertips to push her orbital sockets into the back of her head before killing her. At trial, he laughs about whether or not there are others. The reenactment posed in front of us by some under-employed actor makes him out to be dumber than he probably was.

"You want any more?" I ask Rich, whisking our plates from the coffee table, stalking them into the kitchen.

He nods.

Rich is still seated, but soon after dinner we'll recline into prone positions on our separate couches, our "boats," as we like to call them. On our boats we are safe, neither sharks nor serial killers can get us. We idle unthreatened in our living room.

"Was work okay?" I ask during a commercial for diarrhea medicine, then one for better erections, then one in case you're depressed, then one about a law firm that will sue just about anybody you like in a class action suit.

"Okay," he says, his finger tracing over a passage in the bible while I place another piece of turkey loaf in front of him. "Assholes want me to work overtime for nothing," he says closing the book.

I grunt.

On TV, Gil tells us that a friend from Georgia asked him if he wanted to move to New Orleans the following week. "I'm like, yeah, sure," the friend, Gil, is telling police in an interview room. Gil is wearing large pajamas with bold black and white stripes.

Once they get to the big easy, Gil says the guy gets weird. "He started saying he was an assassin," Gil, happy-go-lucky Gil, says. His eyebrows shoot to the top of his forehead.

"Then he meets this girl named Kyla, a stripper, and murders her."

Gil is just a little too upbeat while telling this story. Close-ups of his Georgian buddy show creepy dilated pupils, only it doesn't seem like drugs, but like his body, his soul, have turned out wrong. Like the inside of him is a place you don't want to know about.

Our shepherd mix lays his whole body out on top of me and hooks his neck over mine once I've collapsed onto my boat. Soon he's asleep with his paws straight up in the air. His feet twitch, like he's on the run, and he starts crying about something not in the real world. On the commercial, Rich gets up to use the toilet and locks all the doors on his way back.

"What about you?" he asks.

"The lab says they're going to lay off twenty-five of us before Christmas."

A preview for next week shows a wicked couple who have a "play room" where they rape and torture. The girlfriend tricks women into the van, then watches at home. She'd rather have her man doing it in front of her than straying. Torture devices arranged neatly sit on the floor, on tables, and hang from nails on the walls: electric cattle prods, a gynecological examination table, horse bits, nipple presses, surgical blades and saws, chains, a 12-volt motorized breast stretcher, straps, clamps, a vat of acid, leg spreader bars.

As the commentator tells it, a couple involved in torture will be driven to far more heinous acts than either would pursue alone because each has a partner, someone who understands. The intimate thrill of performing the torture together becomes a sexual aphrodisiac.

I wake the dog mid-yelp when he gets so loud I worry. When we walk him in the woods nearby, he takes off, the predator emerging, his teeth showing. And if this fluff ball catches an

opossum or rat, he shakes it, breaks its neck. After waking him, I give him a hug, get him curled onto his pillow for the night.

Rich glances at one last thing in his bible before replacing it on the shelf. "All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on the earth—came out of the ark, one kind after another."

"Come here, you," I say, and we embrace.

In bed our hands crawl all over each other.

