

TTYL

By Luke Whaley

The clock on her cell phone read 10:23 as Bri stepped through the front door and pulled it closed behind her. Her eyes were magnetized to the phone's screen as she walked past the television set. On the TV screen a reporter in a burgundy dress nodded at the camera while she spoke: "Authorities are urging everyone to stay indoors and lock-"

She pressed the Power button on the TV remote and dropped it on the recliner. It seesawed on the slope of the seat and came to rest with half of it hanging over the edge. The apartment was silent, save for the irregular staccato of thumbs typing on her phone's keypad.

Bri: u left the tv on again u goob.

Caroline: Sry. He call yet?

Bri: No... :(

Caroline: :(dont wry. hell call. want 2 go 2 inferno tonight?

Bri: eh. No clubs. Not in the mood. gotta study anyway.

In the kitchen that adjoined the living room, she flipped on the light and grabbed an apple from her drawer in the fridge. She took a plate from the cabinet beside the stove and set it on the counter, then found the big knife in the kitchen sink wedged in a pile of other dishes. She fired a text message to Caroline before she washed the knife.

Bri: Ur turn 2 do dishes. Remember?

Outside and a few blocks away a police siren wailed, followed by at least two more coming from different locations. Their high-pitched drawl played in the background, providing the only sound in the apartment except for the murmur of the refrigerator and the irregular clack of the vertical blinds dancing over a vent near the French doors. Bri stared at her phone for a moment with the dripping knife in her hands, and eventually made her way to the apple on the counter. She cut it into four chunks, cored it, and then set the knife down. The blade dripped juices onto the counter. Bri walked with the plate in one hand while her eyes were still glued to the phone in her other, and she stopped when she reached the counter's edge. She frowned and pushed her ear out. A murmuring noise came from behind the left hand door down the hall. She set her plate on the counter and lowered her phone. For a moment her eyes widened in alarm, and then her shoulders dropped and she sighed and stomped toward the door. her thumbs scuttled across the keypad to the electronic ticking sound as she walked.

Bri: jeez girl. Ur room tv 2??? And lights???

She opened the door with her free hand and stepped through a landmine of dirty clothes around Caroline's bed.

"...facility is on lockdown until the police find the missing inmate. Again if you are just tuning in and live in the Jackson Heights area..."

"Where the hell is the remote?" Bri murmured to herself. She scanned the room. "Looks like a Goodwill threw up in here." Her phone vibrated and she jerked it to her face.

Caroline: I like the noise. givs me company.

Bri: Also gives us a higher elec bill! Where r u anyways?

Caroline: @ Garretts. Cum over here and hang

Bri: No tks. Rly have to study.

Caroline: Suit urself. TTYL

Bri: K

Bri began digging through the sheets and pairs of pants strewn across the bed for the remote. As she looked the television droned on.

"...the infamous thrill killer. Crenshaw is unarmed but extremely dangerous. We repeat, extremely dangerous and unpredictable. He disappeared from his cell at the Bryson Psychiatric Hospital just three hours ago. Crenshaw is wearing a white jumpsuit. He is irregularly tall at six-foot-eleven. He has blond hair that may appear unkempt or scraggly, and large blue eyes. This is the last image taken of Crenshaw four weeks ago."

After rummaging through Caroline's belongings Bri sighed and climbed off the bed. She walked over to the television, nudged a can of Sierra Mist out of the way, and ran her finger along the frame until she found the power button. The image on screen of a man with sandpaper scruff along his jaw and eyes that were too large for his long face went black with a barely audible click. Bri picked up her phone.

Bri: Cleaning the apartment tomorrow?

...

No answer.

Bri scrolled through her messages until her thumb came to rest on the name Brendan L. She selected the thread and stood in Caroline's room reading through the old messages between herself and Brendan. The last one was from him.

Brendan: Sure. Call you in a bit.

Delivered: Yesterday at 3:23 p.m.

She began typing a response, and then deleted it. She began again, and deleted that one too. Then she stood there staring at the screen of her phone until it dimmed and finally went black. An alarm blasted into the silent room, and her phone buzzed in her hand as if trying to break free. Bri jolted. A white banner lit up on her screen, with bold red lettering:

WARNING - POLICE ALERT - APB - CLICK FOR MORE INFORMATION

Bri chose the SILENCE button instead.

"I swear I'm gonna uninstall that damn thing." Bri mumbled as she exited Caroline's bedroom with a flip of the light switch. "I'm not a child."

She stomped into the living room and picked up her bookbag. Hefting it over her shoulder, she turned toward the hallway leading to the two bedrooms and stopped. Her eyes locked on the front door. She frowned and cocked her head. A ribbon of light from the porch shown at the edge of the door. She walked across the living room with her bookbag dragging on her shoulder, pulled the door closed, and twisted the deadbolt. A *snock!* signaled that the door was locked. She popped her eyebrows and shook her head, and then killed the lights while checking her Facebook page. After she grabbed the plate of apples from the counter she hit the kitchen lights and retired to the bedroom, leaving the main living area silent but for the constant tap of the blinds and the grumbling of the refrigerator.

She dropped her bookbag on the floor beside her bed and climbed in. Her thumb swiped through two dozen exchanges between herself and Brendan L. Back and forth, back and forth. Her eyes moved through the words in a frenzy. Eventually they began to slow, and then gloss over with tears. Her chin quivered.

Somewhere outside her room something crashed to the floor.

Bri's eyes shot to her bedroom door. For a good three minutes she didn't move. Another police siren whined a mile away. Bri inhaled deeply and climbed off her bed, and selected the pull-down menu on her phone where the flashlight app was located. She switched the light on and walked down the hall. When she reached the kitchen she flipped the light switch.

Something laid in the floor near the old recliner. The living room was sparsely lit from the kitchen's lights, and after a moment to let her eyes adjust Bri's body seemed to loosen and she walked into the room. She picked up the TV remote and dropped it into the seat as she had done when she got home, only this time the remote rested in the crease against the back support. She walked across the room to the front door and checked the lock, and then turned the living room light on. She stood and listened, her eyes scanning the room and the kitchen beyond. The kitchen lights reflected on a small puddle of liquid on the counter near where Bri had cut her apple. Her phone in hand she typed a Twitter post while brushing past the counter.

brihannon99: Creepy sounds in an empty apartment = not cool.

She left the kitchen light on and walked into the bathroom at the end of the hall. She froze in front of the shower, where the curtain was pulled across to conceal the bathtub. Tentatively, she inched her hand toward the curtain's edge. With a swift motion she flung the liner back and half crouched in defense when the tub was revealed. It was empty. Bri smiled and straightened up.

She sent another text to Caroline as she urinated.

Bri: So i guess ur gonna ignore me now. Bitch.

Picking up the plate of apple slices she scrambled onto the bed and worked her way beneath the comforter. Her bookbag sat unopened on the floor. Bri glanced at it, and then went back to her phone. She slipped a chunk of apple into her mouth.

Two large, bare feet stuck out from beneath the foot of her bed. The man, dressed in a white jumpsuit, held a knife that glistened with apple juices at his side. He stared at the underside of the mattress, his large eyes blinking slowly, deliberately, like seconds ticked from a clock.

Twenty minutes later there was shifting on the bed above, and then the light on the nightstand clicked off. In the darkness that rushed in beneath the bed, Russell Crenshaw smiled.

* * *

Bri: Hey! Sry 4 being bitchy earlier. Come home. Bring Garrett. I got tequila!

Russell leaned back in bed and flipped on the television, then tossed the remote. His arm was around the shoulders of Bri Hannon. He held her like a comfortable lover. The wounds from what was left of her face stained his white jumpsuit, and her matted hair clung to the fabric as if coated in wet plaster. Crenshaw positioned her arm across his chest, and he stroked it absently as the television pulsed light into the room. He popped an apple slice into his mouth.

"The police have expanded their search but have no leads on the whereabouts of Russell Crenshaw. It is believed that he may not have travelled far. His therapist has been contacted and has informed our station that Crenshaw is not concerned with getting caught. His therapist has quoted the killer as saying 'I don't care if I'm out for five minutes or five years, I just want to do it all again one more time.' The reporter stared solemnly into the TV cameras as she finished the quote.

Crenshaw giggled.

Ding! He lifted Bri's phone and read the message that bloomed on the screen.

Caroline: Wtf? No studying?

Bri: Already done. Started drinking already. Bring margarita mix!

Caroline: K! On our way.

Bri: Awsum. C U Soon! B ready 2 party!

Crenshaw tossed the phone off the bed as if he were throwing a Frisbee. He grabbed Bri's hair and lifted her head. "Honey," he said, "we're having company over. Go wash up, you look terrible." The corpse drooled blood from multiple gashes in her face.

Russell Crenshaw dropped Bri's head and burst into fits of laughter. After a while the laughter faded. His large eyes settled on the television and he waited.