

**Adjudicator's Comments.** A psychotic tale with a hint of Tarantino about it. Here is an unnamed killer, apparently without any sense of guilt or shame, who has just slaughtered the latest of a series of men, revelling in the gore and grime of her deeds. Why did she do it? What have they all done to her? Or is she just using the men to take proxy revenge on an obviously unloved father, who now lies buried? Buried because of her? What did he do to deserve it? The many unanswered questions leave us with a sense of mindless brutality trying to make its mark in an indifferent universe. Though it is slightly let down by some careless punctuation, this viscerally descriptive story hits home mercilessly.

PEN NAME: PENELOPE SCOTT  
SECTION C

TITLE: HIS FACE WAS EMPTY OF EXPRESSION

His face was empty of expression as he lay there on the wooden countertop, his arms outstretched between the panelling like a frail mock-up of Christ. But he had never been a saint, he had barely been a man, and now the knife sticking into his back was the only thing to prove that he had been.

She looked over him and then around the room. The dark wood of the cabin was only lit by the fire now and the moose head above the door looked as uninviting as it always had done. Not that anything about a dark hunting cabin in the woods was particularly inviting.

"I'm telling you if I ever get murdered, it'll be in this cabin! It's rural enough to get the job done and have time to run!"

She couldn't count how many times he'd said those exact words, but now even the thought of his voice cut her mind like a razor blade.

"Murder cabin!" She laughed to herself as she strode over to stand behind his shrunken body. Lifting her hand up, she stroked his hand from the back of his neck into the roots of his bright blonde hair, leaving a trail of dark crimson through the strands as she went. It would have been a shame to ruin such beautiful hair, but she'd always hated blondes, they were always too opinionated in a way, or maybe they just reminded her of her father too much. But there was no hair on his skeleton now, so that was a somewhat comforting thought.

"Never could just keep your mouth shut, could you?" she said looking contemptuously at the corpse in front of her.

Her hand gripped his throat and move his face to the side. His once-forest-green eyes now shone with an odd milky white glow and half the brightness there should have been was gone.

"No tears?" she said with a mixture of both surprise and disappointment. "Wow didn't fear me until the end, did you? Who am I kidding, you couldn't even fear your own death. Pathetic," she said as she dropped his head onto the counter making a loud crunch as it hit the edge of the firm wood.

"Uch!" She reached towards his back before gripping and pulling out the carefully placed knife. "Can't leave this here, there's too many finger prints on it. If they ever do find this place," she said nonchalantly to the bleeding man in front of her.

She reached out her hand and drew the knife across it, leaving a thin slit across the palm and wiping the new shade of crimson on the table cloth behind her.

“At least they won’t think you died alone my darling,” she said before moving towards the body and kissing his cheek slowly before turning and moving towards the only bedroom in this desolate place.

As she entered the bedroom, the smell of blood left her and she was confronted by the sight of their belongings. All of his things were thrown across the right side of the room and all of her things neatly stacked and styled on the left. Before glancing to her right, she strode towards her bag and pulled out what she thought she’d need: a change of clothes, comfortable, practical; money, all cash, all American dollars; ID, not hers, not his, not anyone’s; a few other essentials snacks, small water bottle, and a hair brush among other things. Lastly there was the bag itself, she’d bought it almost 15 years ago now with her father and would have never guessed what she’d be using it for now, but it was big and practical and reminded her of home in its own special way. Even if very few of the splats of red on the front belonged to her family.

She lifted the bag onto her back and strode back into the main room of the cramped cabin. She stared at the man whose body now lay even lower than before and whose blood had stopped gushing over the counter and began to drip on the floor, and she wondered if he had deserved it. Had any of them? She brushed away the thought almost as quickly as it came and turned towards the door, before gasping and stepping back. The moose’s head mounted above the door seemed to glare down at her as if it were guarding the gates of heaven. She stepped back and looked at it. The pearly glass eyes of the thing reflected the light of the fire and its antlers stuck up as if it were reaching for the sky.

She took a deep breath before walking beneath it and out of the door into the dark forest outside. As the cool air hit her face, she inhaled deeply, clearing the scent of death from her nose and the thought or doubts of her actions from her mind. She turned back one last time, staring at the results of her actions before turning back and striding into the forest behind her.

She couldn’t turn back now, she could never return to the cabin, return to him. But she understood the gravity and she didn’t even flinch at the thought. Or maybe she did. Maybe this time was different. Maybe this time there were consequences. Before letting her thoughts continue, she looked up at the stars and the clouds covering them and realised how trivial her actions were. Maybe one man had died in his cabin tonight, but who’s to say many more hadn’t done the same? Maybe there were no consequences, maybe it all really didn’t matter.