

Killer

by Patricia Leonard

WHY WE LIKE IT:

Graphic Content! Reader Discretion Advised. *There are lots of reasons we could've turned down this submission. The character of the narrator fails to convince, the violence described is arguably gratuitous and in our minds the ending could've been stronger. So why did we choose to publish it? For the same reasons, we suspect, the author wrote it. To confront us, from her subjective feminist perspective, with our denial, our practiced alienation, of the institutional horrors at work in a society that sustains an entirely optional carnivorous suckle culture. How many of us would be willing to take a tour through an abattoir? If not, why? Literary shortcomings aside, Leonard's descriptions are as raw as a bleeding club steak and if this were visual art not grunge nonfiction we'd be looking at Ed Keinholz or Mark Prent. We'd all be better off ordering the mixed green salad. Seriously.*

To the naked eye, I look like an average female who is family orientated but what most people fail to realize is that there is a dark shadow that lurks beneath my smile.

My days consist of killing.

I can slit a chicken or duck's throat in a matter of seconds having their warm blood flood from their living body down my hands and clothes. It splashes on my face and exposed neck. I used to get it in my hair but it became a hassle to wash out every blood clot. I now tie it with a plain white bandana and wear it as a bloody badge of honor. After their blood has drained and they are no longer alive, I toss them into the tank that is filled with boiling water. I de-feather them in minutes by throwing them into the cylinder lined with rubber spikes. Less than thirty-

seconds with an abusive spin cycle and the animal is ready to move on. Some feathers are a bit more stubborn which results in me ripping it from its flesh in one swift motion.

I then take a large blow torch (like the ones you see in movies) that is hooked up to a gas tank larger than myself to their skin as they hang in a row of six by their feet. I watch the grease bubble to the surface then catch fire before I send them off to the last room.

Once on the other side, I immediately start gutting their steamy bodies. Both birds, chicken or duck, get the same treatment. The front of their necks are sliced open to remove their trachea. Then their bottom is sliced open in-between their legs. The insides are pulled out. The animal is rinsed and the heart, kidneys, liver and lungs are put into the cavity for the customer.

When it comes to the larger animals, I can do it all. I can wrangle down a goat or lamb, hang it by its legs and cut through the jugular while I watch it breathe its last few breaths of life. As it screams, I wash the blood down the drain or sometimes if the customer wants the blood, I have to hold the head while aiming the blood into a bucket. Afterwards, I skillfully and artfully skin its entirety with swift movements of my sharp blade. I start at the back of one leg a little above the ankle. I cut around the leg but not in too deep. There is a sweet spot on the inside of the leg that will allow my blade to cut through the skin like scissors to wrapping paper. I cut all the way through to the anus and penis. I repeat the process on the other side. I make a light slit down the stomach all the way down to the neck. I typically start on the left side because I am right-handed. With my left hand I pull away while my right hand guides the knife along the skin careful not to puncture any fat or meat.

When I am all done removing the skin, it is time to remove the head by snapping the neck and cutting through the muscles. It is then carefully slit by the belly without bursting a hole on any of the inside organs to remove the stomach along with the intestines. The organs that are left

after are the liver, kidneys, lungs and heart. After carefully removing the bile duct without rupturing it, the organs can be safely detached. If the gallbladder burst onto the meat, it will be spoiled and inedible. The heart and lungs are carefully removed with a quick slit while still steaming hot, being as gentle as one can be.

With the help of a few men, a 1200 pound bull can be manipulated into the killing room where it is restrained. There is a meticulous process in how to tie the animal down without any one getting hurt. The head is tied with a rope before the animal is released from the trailer. Depending if the bull has a nose ring or horns, this process can be easy or difficult. There is an iron loop that is cemented into the floor called an eye inside the killing room, right next to the door. That is where the other end of rope that is already attached to the bull feeds through to lure his head all the way to the floor. Once the head is on the floor, the rope wraps around the back legs and front legs to bring all of them together in one place, then the animal is tipped over onto its side. When all four hooves are almost ready to be knotted, the tail is tucked in-between the back legs and pulled to the stomach and around. Once the animal is tied up completely, it can be killed in less than a few minutes depending how much of a fighter he is.

I have been an accomplice to at least 70 bull deaths in my six year stretch. I have seen it all. From the easiest to put down, to having one escape. Another breaking the door with its horn and having two run out the trailer at the same time, leaving 10 men handling two bulls with safety concerns for the general public and everyone scared for their life.

Once the animal is ready to be killed, there is always one person holding the head while another one will slice through the massive neck. Typically for bulls, an extra sharp machete is used to kill the animal as quickly as possible. Sometimes this can be tough as the skin is much thicker than that of any other animal. Once the process is done, everyone scatters away from the

powerful beast. The animal is left to bleed out while everyone stands by watching so they don't get kicked from limbs that are in rigor mortis. Even after death these animals kick with force. I was kicked one year in my ankle, put me off my feet for the rest of the day. However, I can then skin and butcher the entire animal in forty-five minutes without too many reflex spasms, although, I do need help with many lifting situations. As skillful as I am in my field, I am still a female. And a proud one at that.

The sight of blood or the thought of killing something is enough to make most women run the other way. I, on the other hand, am eager to go to work. I absolutely love killing animals. It gives me a feeling of accomplishment like no other. I wish there were words to describe exactly how I feel when I am in these three killing rooms. How it feels to watch life disappear in your hands. To feel the warm wet blood on your body, or even what it is like to blow torch an animal with fire that was alive less than three minutes ago.

This lifestyle I live is not only barbaric, but a lost art. Most people are used to going to the grocery store and picking up their meat without even knowing how or when this animal was killed. Killing these animals brings me closer to the food I eat and back to a simpler time when people had to hunt for their food. If the life we are so accustomed to living somehow ended up being blown to shit, I would have impeccable survival skills. The fact that I enjoy killing, not only for a source of food, but for sheer fun, makes me feel powerful and exhilarated. As crazy as it sounds, killing is not easy. It takes a lot of guts to kill another living being. It's sorta like fishing, only a lot more bloodier and a hell of a lot more fun.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

This story is a creative nonfiction piece inspired by my days as a butcher. I spent several years working in a slaughter house where I killed numerous animals for human consumption. I wrote the story to shine

some light on the nit and grit of the process of what goes on behind the doors of your favorite chicken dinner. The intention of empowering women, proving that we are not weak beings but also showing that we are skillful in what is seen as man's work. It is typically seen as taboo for women to be the ones who are killing let alone to wear it as a badge of honor and tell stories of it.

BIO:

Patricia Leonard is a 31 year old writer from New York. She has her B.A. in English linguistics and a minor in creative writing. Her work has been featured in Three Rooms Press' yearly anthology, Maintenant 10, Maintenant 11 and Maintenant 12. Also in the Voices project, Broke Bohemian and Hamilton Stone. She is featured in Culture Cult and Bards Against Hunger anthologies for 2017. She is a poetry and non-fiction writer who always leaves her readers wanting more. Her style is raw and captivating; permanently staining you with vivid memories you'll never forget.