

THE BIRD WOMAN

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Melanie Weingarten spent her 39th birthday alone with her cat Sherman. It didn't really hit her until that evening that no one was coming. No one had even sent her a card. No one even cared. Her mother had called to wish her a happy birthday, that was it. That was as good as it got. Her last relationship ended abruptly almost three years ago, as did her dreams of marriage and a family. She had become the person she used to pity as a younger woman. Her fiancée had broken off their engagement because even at age 43, he just wasn't ready to settle down. She bought herself a birthday cake and told the store to write "Happy Birthday Loser" on it. She got drunk on wine and passed out at ten o'clock that evening.

It wasn't supposed to be like this. Ten years ago, she had a strong group of friends and suitors. One by one, they simply stopped calling. She had attended several weddings of her friends and family, only to watch everyone else get married and start families. Not every marriage had worked out, but at least they had gotten a chance at it, which was more than she ever got. Her last girlfriend Janine had moved to Texas over a year ago with her husband and two children. It was probably for the best, their lives were simply headed in opposite directions. They had little to talk about, mostly reminiscing about past times from their college days. That was it, she had exhausted her last remaining friend. Her only companion now was a cat. He was a good cat, but he was still a cat. She had become a cat lady before age forty.

She had a decent job, not great, but with so many people out of work these days, she was glad to have it. She made enough to put a roof over her head and food on the table, but that was about it. Living in the city was expensive. She had considered moving, but all her memories for the past 19 years were in this city. It was home and would always be home. Problem was, she just wasn't the same person she was almost 20 years ago. She spent her first year in the city going to clubs and parties and meeting new and interesting people. Life was just one big adventure. She turned 30 and figured it was time to start settling down and maybe do grown-up things like buying a house and invest in a 401k plan. By the time she was 35, she was engaged to be married. At 39, she had very little to show for the first 39 years of her life. She had great memories, but that was all they were, in the past. There was nothing for her in the future.

She tried to be one of those terminally single women in their late 30s, or early 40s. She just wasn't one of those girls, who seemed focused on their careers, or saving the rainforest. She was the girl who needed to be with somebody. The loneliness was beginning to take its toll. She was dying a little bit more every day.

At some point in her life, Melanie (whom everyone just called Mel) had taken up a new hobby. She used a pellet gun to shoot and kill birds outside her home. It started just as a warning to the birds, she just wanted them to leave her yard and shut up, but at some point, she started shooting them from her back porch. She would just sip wine and take aim at the birds in her trees. At first,

she couldn't hit anything. It took some practice and a hell of a lot of pellets, but eventually, she got better. Pretty soon, she could take out a bird in the air. Her yard was fenced in on all sides. Both houses next to her were empty. She lived on a dead-end street. It was fairly secluded.

She also upgraded her pellet gun. The gun could fire .177 caliber pellets at over a thousand feet per second. More than enough to take out a bird. In some cases, it would literally blow the bird in half.

If you asked her why she was shooting and killing birds, she couldn't give you an answer. She was just tired of them singing and chirping and enjoying their bird lives. Birds always seemed happy in a group. She was always shy in a group. The honest answer would simply be that she was jealous of the birds. They were happy, she was not. If she wasn't allowed to be happy, no one was.

She made a little game out of it. She became a de-facto bird watcher and could now identify many different kinds of birds. Thrush, Longtail, Robin, Blue Jay, Quail, Crow, etc. She had a point system for each one of them. She was always trying to break yesterday's score. Once the bird fell to the ground, Sherman would pounce on it. Sometimes he would eat it, other times he would play with its dead body. Once in a while, he would even bring it inside. He made a great assistant. This was her life at age 39. Bird killer. She had lived in Paris for a year in college. She spoke French. She spoke Italian. She had participated in marches and sit-ins for various causes and her life had turned into bird sniping. She couldn't wait to see what age 40 would bring.

They moved into the house down the end of her street that had been empty for years. She didn't even know it was for sale. It was a man woman and their son. The boy looked to be in his late teens or early 20s. He was a massive hulk of a man. She would guess 280 or more, and it wasn't all fat.

Her mom would have called him "redneck big". He wore a baseball cap and helped them carry in several boxes. She didn't really mind neighbors, they were just a big liability. Some were cool, some were a nightmare. You just never knew what you were going to get. She got a weird vibe from him. She wasn't sure if he was "special" or just shy, but he avoided all eye contact with her. It was ironic. A man that massive who could crush just about anyone else and he was a wimp. Go figure.

She went back inside and looked at herself in the mirror. She had a few grey hairs and a few extra pounds. She bought a treadmill and elliptical and used them frequently, but she had to face facts. She inherited some lousy genetics from her mother. She wasn't ugly or unattractive, but she was no model either. She was more the type that some guy would take home after last call, then never speak to again. Melanie, though painfully lonely, still had her standards, she vowed never to be anyone's mistress or fall back plan. She was plan A, not plan B. She hadn't come this far just to throw her life away on some loser just because he could keep her company.

It's true what they say, all the good ones are gone by age 40. Once in a while you might luck out and find a newly divorced person who had simply married the wrong person and still wanted to give marriage a second try, but those were few and far between and divorced couples always had miles of bullshit to deal with. Mel had a very strict no-drama policy in her life. It had cost her

one relationship about six years ago. He was a decent guy, with a good job, but he had two teenage daughters from his marriage they had to deal with. 14 and 16. Not a good age to be a girl. In the end, they simply broke it off. She didn't expect him to simply dump his daughters and he didn't expect her to deal with their drama. Sometimes she thought about calling him, but she would come off as desperate and pathetic, which she was, she just didn't want anyone else to know that. She thought about throwing herself a huge pity party when she heard the sirens and saw the lights the next day while coming home from work. They were all parked at Mrs. Blackwell's house at the opposite end of her street. She turned her car off and walked down the street to see what had happened. She figured the old bitch had simply died in her sleep. But, if that were true, why were there all the cop cars here? She stood around for a few minutes before she saw someone she recognized and walked over to him. She thought his name was Tom or Steve or something. She had met him a few times in the neighborhood when he was jogging or walking his dog.

"Hi....Tom, right?" she asked

"Yes.....Melissa?"

"Close, Melanie.....what the hell happened?"

"It's terrible. Looks like somebody broke into the house and beat Mrs. Blackwell to death. Her granddaughter found her."

"Oh, my God! Do they know who did it?"

"Well, the family thinks it was a burglary. Some expensive jewelry and paintings are missing, along with the money from her wallet."

"God, that's horrible. What kind of a person could do something like that?" she asked

"Anyone who could do something like that isn't really a person at all," he said

Melanie walked home in shock. She hadn't known Blackwell very well and didn't really seem like a very personable old lady, but no one deserved to die like that. She looked around and wondered if it was someone in their neighborhood? She went home and locked the doors and checked the windows. She also made it a point to take that gun safety course she had read about and buy a gun. As much as she hated them, the reality was you simply had to have one these days. Too many whackos and lunatics with guns. She didn't want to be the only one on the block without one. She went to her kitchen and grabbed her pellet gun. It wasn't much, but it was all she had. She decided to go out to her backyard and see what kind of trouble she could make for her birds.

Over the next few days, she began to get more and more concerned about the death of her neighbor. The quickest gun safety class wasn't until next week. She bought a can of mace and a small hunting knife. She couldn't buy the gun without the handgun safety class, something the city made law last year. She wondered if it really was a robbery and if it was, it had to have been somebody she knew. She had lived in this house for over five years and never had to fear for her safety up until now. She made certain no one was behind her when she parked her car or waiting

by her front door when she came home. Maybe Blackwell was in the wrong place at the wrong time, or maybe she wasn't. Either way, life in the old neighborhood would never be the same. Even the birds seemed different. There were far fewer of them in her yard. She had one in her sights and let it go. She just wasn't in the mood for it. She also had to dispose of several bird carcasses in her backyard. Sherman could only help so much.

He came over at around 4 PM. He said his name was Griffin. She had never seen a man so massive in her life. It was also odd that he seemed to be painfully shy. He said he did yard work and landscaping. He gave her a business card with his name on it. She recognized him from last week when he moved in down the street. He was still wearing the same baseball cap. She told him politely but firmly that she didn't need any help with her yard, not that she had much of a yard, but if she did, he would be the first one she called. He thanked her and she figured he would leave, but he didn't. They stood awkwardly in front of each other for a second. She had the security door separating them. For a second, a bolt of fear raced through her body. He wanted to get inside the house and was trying to think of a way to do it. She thought to herself. He smiled at her and walked down the steps. That security door was the best investment she ever made. She wasn't quite sure what to make of him. Perhaps he was shy and awkward around people, particularly women. She didn't know what his intentions were, but she was glad he was gone. She didn't stand a chance with a guy like that. He looked like someone who belonged in the movies. Even his hands seemed massive. It never occurred to her that the death of her neighbor and this man could be linked. It never occurred to her that the man was just scouting her house, looking for surveillance cameras or a security system, or big dogs. Sometimes he would pretend to be a Jehovah's Witness or Missionary. Getting inside was great, but it didn't happen very often. People were intimidated by his size. He had almost got caught once because he had decided to make his move without first looking the house over. The woman had two dogs that came out of nowhere and attacked him. He was lucky to escape. He would never make that mistake again. Fake business cards were a good idea. He knew nothing about yards or landscaping. He had never even mowed a lawn.

The woman at the end of the street would be perfect. He had been watching the house for days. She lived alone. She had no frequent visitors. She had a very predictable schedule. He could be in and out within minutes. He was worried that even these idiot cops might get suspicious about two brutal murders in the same neighborhood, but that was a chance he had to take. He couldn't pass this one up. The woman looked miserable anyway. He would probably be doing her a favor. He just had to find a way to get her to open that big metal security door, then she was his. This would be his tenth one. It would be a milestone in his career. Some people had money, others had fame. Some had families. Some had bright futures. Some had done climbed Mt. Everest or been in outer space. Griffin just murdered people for fun. That was his big claim to fame. He had killed ten people and had never even once been a suspect.

His mother came into his room while he was reading. She put his food down on a tray next to him.

"Thank you, Mother. You're the best mother in the whole world," he said putting his book down

"Eat up now son. Your father and I have to go into the city for his medical appointments. We'll be back this afternoon." she said

"Okay mother, if you need anything, don't hesitate to ask," Griffin said sipping his coffee.

His mother smiled at him and left his bedroom. Maybe she knew about the women, maybe she didn't. She loved her son, but she also feared him. She had seen his fits of rage and it was enough to terrify her. He was like a grizzly bear who was starving and looking for his next meal. She wanted her son to have a normal life, but the older he got, the more she realized that her son was not a normal person and would never have a normal life. It just wasn't in the cards. He had a dark side. A side her husband refused to see or accept. It had gotten him kicked out of college and off the football team. The older he got, the more and more fearful of him she became.

The first time Griffin ever did a bench press in high school, he pressed over three hundred pounds. Ten years later, he could press over six hundred pounds for multiple reps. He had tried to get on the Strong Man competitions, but his applications were rejected. When he worked out at the gym, people watched him, in awe of what his body could do. 293 pounds at ten percent body fat. No drugs, just pure muscle. He almost felt sorry for the lady.

Melanie was actually using an online dating service when it hit her. Just like someone flipped a switch in her head. Griffin had killed the Blackwell woman. He killed her. She didn't know how she knew, but she did. It made sense. He was probably going to try and kill her as well, but he first needed to look over the house. She stopped working on the computer and went to her front door to make certain it was locked. She then checked the back door and it was locked as well. She checked all the windows. She made sure Sherman was inside. Granted, she didn't have any proof. But she had a hunch. The way that guy looked at her the other day just wasn't right. He wanted to kill her too, he just had to make certain he wouldn't get caught. She thought about calling the police, but what would she say? Her neighbor looked at her kinda funny and is weird? People have gone to jail for much less, but it wasn't much. Maybe they would run his background and find out he was a rapist or something. She had the phone in her hand, but put it down and sat down. She had to give them more than just her hunch. Cops like straight lines and nice neat cases. She had to give them one.

She saw him raking leaves in his front yard. She got in her car and drove by. She made sure the doors were locked. She drove by him and honked her horn. He stopped what he was doing and looked at her. She honked her horn again and he walked over to her.

"Hi Griffin, remember me?" she asked through the window

"Yes....Melanie, right?"

"Very good. Hey, I do have some work for you if you'd be interested? Nothing much, but it has to get done." she said

"What is it?" he asked

"Come over tomorrow afternoon and I'll show you."

"Okay, what time?" he asked

"How bout two?"

"Two is fine. I'll see you then."

"Great. Hey, can you believe somebody killed my neighbor, Mrs. Blackwell? What kind of a sick asshole could kill an 80-year-old woman?" she asked

Griffin was caught completely off guard by the woman's question. He was too slow with his response. She knew she had him.

"A very sick person I guess," he said softly

"Yeah. Well, I'll see you then," she said and drove off

In the rearview mirror, she could see him standing in the road, watching her drive away. He may as well have painted a sign in front of his house that read "I killed Mrs. Blackwell."

Griffin wasn't quite sure what to make of the woman. Maybe she knew he killed the old bitch, maybe she didn't. No one had actually ever literally invited him over before. This was almost too easy. He had his favorite skillet knife with him. She would be dead by the second stab. He knocked on her front door. She came to the door and let him in.

"Hi Griffin, come on in," she said and opened the security door. He had his hand on his knife and was almost giddy with excitement.

He never expected to see the other two sitting at the kitchen table. There was a woman a few years older than Melanie, along with a younger guy. No way would he be able to get to all of them. He was going to have to wait. He made sure his knife was out of sight and tried to appear normal if that were at all possible.

"Griffin, I'm sorry about the short notice, but we were all talking the other night after that horrible murder down the street. We all need some work done on our houses. I was hoping you could help us out. Nothing major, just seal a driveway and help Dave here put in some sod in his back yard. If, you'd be interested," said Melanie

Griffin was stunned. This bitch actually wanted him to do yard work? He knew he had to play it cool, otherwise, it might arouse suspicion.

"Well, I am booked for the next week, but I'm free after that."

"Super! Where are my manners? Griffin would you care for a beer?" asked Melanie

"Uh sure.....thanks," he said. Melanie reached into the fridge and opened a beer. She handed it to him and smiled at him.

"I plan on having Griffin around the house doing a lot of work in the near future. It's really time I fixed this place up," she said

"Well, Griffin, we won't keep you, I'm sure you're very busy. I just wanted everyone to meet you and to welcome you to the neighborhood," said Melanie

"Well thank you, folks. I certainly appreciate it."

The other two got up to leave and headed for the front door.

"Griffin could I show you the backyard? I'd love to hear your thoughts on my little projects."

"Sure, nice to meet you folks," he said and shook their hands as they left the house.

He followed Melanie out to her small backyard. She lit up a cigarette. He felt for his knife and was tempted just to off her right now, but he knew it would mean he'd be arrested and charged. He didn't need that kind of drama right now. She said nothing for a minute and just walked around her backyard. It was then that he knew that she knew he had killed the old woman.

"What do you want done?" he asked

"Griffin. I think you killed that old woman the other night. I think you would have killed me too if I hadn't brought company."

"What the hell are you talking about?" he asked, nervously

"You know goddamn well what I mean. You killed that woman. I know you did." she said standing only a few feet from him.

"If that's what you think, why don't you go to the cops?"

"I don't know. I know I should, but I suppose I could be wrong. I wasn't 100 percent sure until just now. Now I am."

"Whatever lady. I'm out of here. You can do your own damn work." he said and turned to leave.

"Griffin.....do you really want your parents to have to sit through your trial? Even if you take a plea deal, it's still going to be ugly. I know the old woman was not your first."

"You're crazy lady," he said

"Are you really going to put your mother through that? I know you care about her. Do you want her to know just what kind of a monster you are? It would be so difficult for her. Too much for anyone. You wouldn't want to do that to her, now would you?"

Griffin knew this day would eventually come. He had tried to prepare himself for it, but one never really can be ready. He was now angry. He had never been angry before with any of his murders. It was just for fun. This was getting personal. It was getting messy. He wanted to just off the bitch and take his chances, but he knew he may as well turn himself in if he did. Too many people had seen them together. She had set it up perfectly. He had walked right into her trap. He should have been more careful. Now he had no choice. He had to play along.

"You recording this?" he asked

"No. She said and lifted up her shirt.

"What do you want from me?"

"I don't know yet. Right now, nothing. Be back over here tomorrow afternoon. If you don't show, I go to the cops."

He started towards her and pulled out his knife. Just as he was about to plunge it into her little body, she pulled out a gun. He froze.

"Get on your knees.....now!" she said pointing the gun at him. He could see the revolver was loaded. He quickly got on his knees. She stood right in front of him. She didn't look nervous or intimidated. He knew he was screwed.

"You ever come at me like that again and I'll put you right in the ground. Or maybe, I'll just shoot you right through the belly button and sever your spinal cord. You won't be so big and bad then now will you?"

"Jesus lady, alright....I'm sorry, it won't happen again....please?" he said

She looked right into his eyes. She knew she should blow his head off and do the world a favor, but something inside of her told her not to. She could use someone like Griffin.

"Be over here tomorrow at four. Don't be late," she said

"Yeah...I'll be here," he said. He slowly got up with his hands still raised in the air and walked back into the house. She followed him. He opened the front door and looked back at her. He was amazed to see her blow him a kiss. He was now totally confused. For the first time in his life, he had met someone that was even more screwed up than he was.

Griffin sat in his room a defeated man. He had completely lost control of the situation. He had been careless and as a result, he may as well be behind bars right now. He was angrier at himself for underestimating the woman. He had gotten careless. He thought about his next move. He could kill her and should kill her, but the other two in her house had seen them together. He was the last one who would have been with her before she died. Even these cops would be able to figure it out. He had no choice. He had to play her game until the time was right. Problem was, the more time they spent together, the more likely a suspect he would be when they investigated her death. He could just kill her and hide the body, but that would be two in the same neighborhood. He had no choice. He would be there at four and do what she wanted. Maybe she just wanted sex. He could deal with that.

She met him in the driveway. She got in his truck and said nothing for a moment. We need to stop by a friend first. She lives down the street.

Griffin followed her instructions. They stopped in front of the house.

"Come on, let's go," she said and opened her door.

They walked up to the house and rang the doorbell. Griffin knew what she was doing. She was making sure as many people as possible would see them together. If she disappeared, the police would have a very strong suspect. He may as well turn himself in at this point.

"Hi Maggie.....this is Griffin, he's doing some work at my house. I know you mentioned a while back that you needed some work done on your gutters. He lives in the neighborhood, so I thought you might be interested."

"Oh, yes. After that last storm, we had so much water in the house. Total disaster. I'll buy the gutters, all you have to do is install them."

"Sure....not a problem. When would you like it done?"

"I'll order them today. Should take about a week to get here. Let me get your number, I'll give you a call as soon as they come in."

Griffin gave her his fake business card.

"Thanks. My husband is away on business and won't be back until next week. I'd like to have them done by the time he gets back. One less thing he has to worry about."

"No problem. Happy to help," he said and gave her his best fake smile.

"You guys are a lifesaver," she said as she waved goodbye.

Once they were back in his truck, Griffin let her know he was less than pleased with her.

"What the hell are you doing?" he asked

"Just trying to be a good neighbor. When I was growing up, that's what people did, they helped each other."

"Don't give me that. You want people to see us together. Something happens to you, I'm the first one the cops will look at."

"Well, that too," she said

"I don't know anything about landscaping. I just use it to get inside people's houses," he said

"What? You idiot! I gave your card to everybody. Why would you do that?"

"I never thought anyone would actually call me on it."

"From now on, let me do the thinking. You just do the doing...are we clear?"

"I've killed ten people and never been caught. I think I can take care of myself."

"Yes, except I caught you and so will anyone with half a brain. You're not smart, you're just lucky. Big difference."

"I can't use ladders. They're not going to hold someone my size.....and I don't do heights. I'm afraid of heights."

Melanie just started laughing to herself. It just seemed ridiculous. A man his size, afraid of heights.

"Well, everybody's afraid of something.....don't laugh at me."

"Griffin, it's installing gutters, it's not rocket science. You better be able to pull this off and make these people think you've done this before."

"Fine....are we done?"

"Not yet. Let's go and get some ice cream. I haven't had ice cream in forever." she said

"Ice cream? You want to go and get ice cream? Are you serious?" he asked

"Yeah, why not? Don't you like ice cream?"

"Yeah, I guess. Just tell me where to go," he said

She told him where to go and they were at the ice cream stand a few minutes later. They ordered their ice cream and sat down together. It was almost as if they were on a date. Griffin knew he was way out of his element here. He was almost thirty and had never been on a real date before. They ate in silence for a moment, before she spoke.

"Why do you kill people Griffin?" she asked

"I'd really rather not talk about it."

'Okay...tell me something about yourself. I want to know who it is I'm spending my time with."

Griffin told her about his life. His football scholarship to BYU that he lost when he got kicked out of the school for assaulting another classmate. He told her he had a mean streak."

"Yeah, no shit. Look, I'm going to need you to keep it together here. I can't have you losing your shit when we're out in public. I don't want you to embarrass me."

"Fine....look, why are you doing this? I mean, maybe it really would be better if you just turned me in. I just don't think I can do this. Just tell me why you're doing this? I just want to know."

"Are you going to tell me why you kill people?"

"No?"

"So why should I tell you anything?"

"I have a right to know if it involves me and my life."

"All those people you killed had a right not to be murdered too, now didn't they?"

"You like to twist things around, don't you?"

"I just call them like I see them."

"Fine. Well, I guess I kill people because I can. Maybe I just want to get caught."

"I doubt it."

"How would you know?"

"If you really felt that way, you would have stuck that knife in me yesterday. You don't want to get caught. You just want to keep on killing until you're stopped."

"Are you like a shrink or something? Using me as your guinea pig to test your theories as to why people become killers?"

"No Griffin, I work in the copyright business. I'm not a shrink. I'm just a single woman, who's tired of being alone. I need a man in my life. I think you fit the bill. I want someone that can protect me. I want the alpha male. I want the guy that makes all the girls jealous."

He couldn't believe what he was hearing. This woman was nuts. Totally, bonafide, certifiable nuts. He should have killed her when he had the chance.

"Look, you seem like a nice girl. You're smart and have a great body. You can probably do much better than me. I don't think I would make a very good boyfriend. I can barely make a good son to my mother. I don't do very well with girls, as you may have noticed." he said

"I'm sure everyone gets better. You just have to be willing to put in the effort."

"Melanie. I kill people for fun. I'm not a nice person. I have anger issues. I can't hold a job. I'm sure I would make a lousy boyfriend."

"Nobody's perfect. Besides, you're selling yourself short Griffin. Don't do that. I see potential in you."

"You do?"

"Yes.....come on now. I want to meet your parents."

"What? Why?"

"Griffin....we're a couple now. That's what couples do."

"We are?"

"Yes.....now take me home. I have to clean up before I meet your rents."

He was in total disbelief. He didn't know what to say. He figured he may as well humor her and see where it went. If she wanted to turn him in, she could easily have done so by now. This was beginning to get weird.

The next night, the two of them stopped in at Griffin's house for dinner. It became obvious that Griffin never told them they were coming. He wasn't sure if she was serious or not. Clearly, she was. His parents were both very surprised. Perhaps in shock might be a better word.

"Honey, you never told them I was coming?" she said as she threw her arms around him. She couldn't even fit her arms around him he was so big.

"I thought we were going to do this some other night," he said in shock himself

"Come on, help me with my food. His favorite food is spaghetti, so I made garlic bread. Hope everyone likes garlic bread." she said

He helped her bring a dish into the house and closed the door behind her.

"I hope you know what you're doing," he whispered

"Don't worry, moms love me," she said and put the bread on the table. She also bought an expensive bottle of wine. If she was trying to impress her new potential in laws, she succeeded. His mother seemed almost overjoyed at the thought of him finally finding someone to settle down with. She didn't even know where to start. She didn't even know he had a girlfriend.

"We're just happy he's finally found someone." his mother said

"She's a real looker son." said his dad smiling.

As strange as it was for both of them, the dinner went over very well. His parents never suspected a thing. At the end of the night, he kissed her good night and waved at her as she went back to her house. His mother put her arms around her son. He hadn't seen his mother this happy in years. Seeing her this happy almost made this whole ruse seem worth it. One thing was for sure, this chick was nuts. The more time he spent with her, though, the more he liked her. She was older than he was and in many ways, much more mature. A week into their relationship and he was spending the night. A month into their relationship and they were pretty much living with each other. A month after that and the two of them were almost inseparable. They went everywhere together. She liked going to the gym with him and watching him move weight that seemed almost physically impossible for a human being to lift. He wasn't just freakishly big, he was freakishly strong. Even the other lifters at the gym were in awe of him. They knew he was at the top of the weightlifting food chain.

Eventually, the local police did come calling about the Blackwell murder. They had already meticulously worked out his alibi and rehearsed it several times until they knew it by heart. During the time of the murder, he was at her house, working on installing a sprinkler system for her backyard. It took him over four hours. She told the police he never left. When asked how she could be certain he never left, she responded by saying that she wasn't going to leave a stranger

alone in her house. She pretended to be working on her computer, but she was really just keeping an eye on him.

"I guess you could say it was our first date," she said.

The police cleared Griffin as a suspect in the investigation. No one even bothered to look into his background. They had captured a burglar breaking into a house who had assaulted the owner and were convinced he had killed the Blackwell woman when she wouldn't show him where certain items were hidden.

The two of them liked to sit out back on the patio and just drink ice tea and shoot at the birds that came onto her property. He had gotten pretty good and had already tallied several kills. They had so much in common it was as if they really were soul mates. Melanie was finally happy for the first time in years. She didn't care for Griffin's little "hobby" and didn't want to hear anything about it. She made him promise that he would refrain from killing until they had made certain he couldn't be linked to the crime. If she had busted him, anyone could. He would have to be careful. Very careful. The last thing she wanted was to be known as "that chick who was banging that mass murderer." Little did he know that she was already beginning to plan their wedding. Her clock was ticking and she needed to know how he felt about children. She really had a lot to do. She also politely told him that if he just couldn't control himself and had to get one last kill that she would select the victim and plan it down to the last minute detail. She didn't want him screwing this up. In their relationship, she would do the thinking and he would do the "doing"and he was very, very good at the doing part.