

# LETTER FROM A KILLER

by Greg Stolze

Brianna Carson stares at it, sick to her stomach. An hour ago her life was OK, and now it's... this. It hadn't been a wonderful life: Relationship in limbo after a painful discovery and heated discussion about exclusivity. So-so job. Car making a funny noise. If you charted how often her dog was throwing up, the frequency of puke would be a distressingly upward trend.

But now, looking at the white paper folded in thirds, looking at the envelope carelessly torn open, her life of an hour ago seems like an impossible utopia.

*Dear Brianna,*

*You do not know me but I murdered Francis Wexler.*

The familiarity of that “Dear Brianna” makes her skin crawl, especially if the letter is telling the truth. She had no idea who Francis Wexler was when she opened it and the whole thing seemed like a sick joke—but honestly, if someone in her life is pranking her by pretending to butcher a 65-year-old retiree, that's bad news too.

(She immediately looked up “Francis Wexler murder” online. That's how she learned his age, and how many grandchildren he left behind. She learned, with relief, his location three states to the west. Learned the reporter prefers to write tastefully, rather than sensationally, and that there is only so tasteful one can be, writing about a widower getting stabbed seventeen times in his own front room.)

*I did not know Francis Wexler either but I knew enough. This was a political act.*

*Maybe I am a creep though, or wrong in the head, at least a little. Aren't we all? Everyone is a little cruel, a little bad. We live in a sick place, a sick world, it changes us. I have not felt well rested since 2015.*

*It's that bad in me, that mean-ness from a mean situation that made me able to kill him at all and made me want to. And now it is making me want to talk about it and you can see the problem with that, I am sure.*

Brianna has no difficulty seeing a lot of problems with the whole thing, starting with the homicide but including the chatty intimate tone, and progressing to the assumption that she will keep reading and not immediately call the cops.

Though, of course, she kept reading, and she has not called the cops. Not yet.

*You could involve the police, and maybe you will. Writing it maybe means part of me wants to get caught. Do you want to be a hero? Maybe I know exactly who you are and if you talk to the FBI I will punish you for being a little tattletale. That would make you even more of a hero.*

*I wrote this on a library computer. Don't worry, I didn't check it out under my name. It is easier to steal a library card than kill an old man. Once you have the knack of it, killing old men is not hard. I have done three. They were all asking for it.*

Brianna doesn't realize her lip is curling until it starts to ache.

*Do you think the cops will thank you and smile handsomely and give you some kind of citizen-of-the-year award? Or do you think they will read this and follow you and ask why I confided in \*YOU\*? Do you want your life turned up-side down? Do you want the attention of the police? Do you trust them to not think you are my confederate? Do you actually know any cops, or only what you see on those paranoid right-wing procedural TV shows?*

In her head, a little voice keeps asking “Why me? Why *me*? Why **ME**?”

The postmark is from Eros, Louisiana. It’s a little cupid. It’s almost a thousand miles from where she is, and seven or eight hundred from where Francis Wexler died. One time, on NPR, Brianna heard about how postmasters in towns with romantic names send on letters if requested. Loving, Texas and Romance, Arizona were cited. She wonders if they keep track of original destinations. She doubts it.

*Here’s the thing no one else would know. I killed all three with different knives. I made the knives myself out of scrap metal. They are crude things, just done up on a grinder like you could find anywhere at all. One was four inches long and curved. One was five and three quarters. One was four and straight. That one was pretty rusty.*

*What a game this is! If they know I am guilty of all three crimes, that they are looking for the same person for all three, does that make them three times likelier to catch me?*

She has her phone out, she thumbs in her strong password, and she strokes the silky ears of her dog. He’s a big boxer, named “War Crimes” because as a single woman living alone, she wants something better than “Snuffles” or “Cookie” to call out when she thinks she hears a prowler at night. She wonders what FBI agents would think of her dog’s name.

*Of course, the police and FBI may not be the worst that come to pass, even if I don’t have some sinister mastermind plan to harm or implicate you if you hand this over. Don’t forget the press. Who do you trust less, the police or the media? What do you think would get more clicks online, the article that says you were a good helpful person or the conspiracy theory that you were in on it all along?*

*Should you risk your privacy and comfort to help the cops? Do you want to be part of a famous murder story? Are you willing to let them upend your life to hand over exactly what I might want handed over? (What if all this is lies meant to cloud the issue? What if I never killed anyone? What if I only killed one person and it wasn't Francis Wexler?)*

*If you do this, it's not over when you want it over. It's over when the FBI and the media decide they're done getting paid to dig into it.*

*Think it over and decide if you're willing to put up with the inconvenience. Would it actually be worse to wonder if it was me and you could have stopped me, every time you read about an old white jerk getting knifed? I'm very, very interested to see what you do. Risk yourself to be a hero? Or keep it our little secret?*

That's all there is. One side of one piece of paper and now her life is different. Whoever wrote it—there's no signature, not even a pseudonym like “The Elder Stabber” or something—they've taken control of her future either way. She can speak up and come under scrutiny. Or she can stay silent, on purpose or just by waffling until it's too late, and wonder if she's helping a killer kill.

She has her phone out and is ready to dial. But she does not dial just yet.

She is weighing how much she hates to keep secrets.