

Treatment for

**Unoriginal**

by

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Is she a twisted killer, or just a bad artist?

### **Prologue**

Washington, D.C. Late September. Two in the morning. SUE is spending a solitary, sleepless night. So is LUCIE. ALEX sleeps blissfully, a bed-mate beside him. And VICTOR, the victim of a stabbing, falls into a pile of leaves in a deserted park.

### **Act I: Will Lucie meet Harrison?**

Washington, D.C. The tony neighborhood of Georgetown. Lucie, a girl-next-door in her mid-twenties, is rushing to a very important meeting. She discovers that the park through which she walks every day has become a grisly crime scene. As her curiosity takes over, she ignores the clock striking the half-hour and tries to get closer to the body. A bike messenger nearly runs Lucie down. She eavesdrops on a conversation he has with another courier and thinks they are making a cruel joke about the murder – that the killer's technique wasn't "artistic" enough. She confronts them and learns of her mistake. Lucie is about to go when she becomes mesmerized by HARRISON, a detective, standing over the body. The dead man still clutches a torn fifty dollar bill in his hand. Fiery autumn leaves drift down and frame the distraught detective. To Lucie, the scene appears incredibly beautiful.

Lucie arrives too late for a hearing where she was supposed to give moral support to Sue, a fellow grad student who has been nabbed for plagiarism. That afternoon, Harrison breaks the news to Victor's fiancée. He himself seems a little too upset about the murder. Lucie brings her artwork to the Maelstrom, the gallery where her friend Alex works, and suffers a humiliating rejection. Harrison confers with his macho partner STEWIE, who accuses him of taking the case too personally. That night, Sue has a fight with Lucie and wounds her where it hurts: her loneliness and insecurity about never being noticed. Lucie finds consolation in drawing a pretty decent picture of Harrison. She traces her pencil in endless loops around his image.

A week later, Lucie shows up at the Ramrod, Alex's favorite gay discotheque. Alex is surprised to see her there, but he's pleased too – he's been nursing a secret, and baffling, crush on Lucie. Lucie bumps into Harrison and is transfixed. Harrison, there to interrogate the bartender,

politely ignores her. Alex teases Lucie for living the life of a nun and encourages her to pursue the handsome (though shabbily dressed) detective, but Lucie seems paralyzed. Harrison receives a message: another body has been found.

Harrison comes home at the end of a long day to his forlorn bachelor pad. Waiting for him is girlfriend CHLOE, a worldly jazz singer. Chloe, annoyed that he missed dinner, reports that his cat ran away. Tension fills the air. As he is about to leave to look for his cat, she vents her anger and frustration with her perpetually-absent, preoccupied lover. Harrison finds that the cat has run back to his former apartment. He returns to his now-empty home, puts on a sentimental Tchaikovsky record, and looks through a stack of crime-scene photos. He notices a scrap of money peeking out of the victim's pocket.

Lucie meets her jet-setting grandmother EVELYN in a café and shows all the signs of deep depression. She is lonely and confused about what to do with her life. Evelyn tries without success to get Lucie to admit that she hates economics – her chosen profession. She warns Lucie that life is short. Lucie finally opens up and tells Evelyn that she can't stop thinking about Harrison, but despairs of ever meeting him.

Harrison insists to Stewie that the two deaths are related, and that the scraps of money are the "signature" of a serial killer. Stewie laughs this off as another one of Harrison's eccentric theories. He loses his patience with his partner. As he storms out, Chloe drops in for an unexpected visit. It's nighttime, and her hair is soaking wet from the rain. Overcome by affection and protectiveness, Harrison sweeps her up in his arms. They begin to make love, but are interrupted by Stewie's brusque announcement of another murder. At the crime scene, Harrison finds a five-dollar bill torn in half.

Alex tries to reconcile Lucie and Sue (who has been expelled from the university and is now jobless), but the two women have another falling out when it becomes clear that Lucie cannot get over Sue's "theft" of another's ideas, and Sue cannot forgive what she sees as Lucie's betrayal. They learn that a woman their age has been slain, making this the third murder in their neighborhood. Harrison interrogates suspects who fit the profile of the serial slasher. He and Stewie follow leads.

Lucie, who seems oblivious to the enormous risk she's taking, goes door to door conducting a survey about the relationship between people's values and their valuables - research for her master's thesis. One night, she feels as if she is being watched as she returns home. She begins to gather laundry, but she is so exhausted that she soon collapses on the sofa and falls asleep. She dreams that she is being attacked in the laundry room by a faceless stranger who strangles her with one of her own scarves. The doorbell wakes her from the nightmare. Harrison is standing in her doorway. He's canvassing: last night, a body was discovered in the building right next door.

### **Act II: Will Lucie find love with Harrison?**

Lucie tells Harrison that she was followed on the previous night, and offers to describe her stalker. Harrison takes Lucie to the station to give her statement. He is intrigued at the way she responds to the news of the murder with curiosity instead of fear. A brave girl. But the world is such a dangerous place... His chivalrous instincts kick in. Lucie promises him that she will be careful. On the subway home, however, she sketches a sinister-looking drifter.

Harrison and Stewie close in on their prime suspect, a former jailbird with a penchant for painting himself green and an apartment full of violent, pornographic digital photos. They pursue the crazed suspect across a snowy expanse. In the interrogation room, he tries to defend himself as merely an artist with an imagination, but as far as Stewie is concerned, they have found their killer.

It's Christmas time. Lucie shows up at a party at the Maelstrom Gallery, the site of her former humiliation. She tries to make peace with Sue, who has found a job there as a receptionist. Lucie tells Sue that she is no longer doing abstract paintings and has moved on to an exciting new art project: "I've found something I'm good at." Sue isn't paying attention, distracted by the cute "cult consultant" she has just met. Lucie suggests a morbid way for Sue to find a new apartment. Alex wonders why Lucie is so obsessed with death recently. Lucie replies that she is just anxious about the murders that have shaken their neighborhood and wants to help Harrison with the investigation. Later, on her way to the subway, she passes by a slightly tipsy traveling salesman. He weaves his way over to his hotel,

where he is brutally slaughtered while watching a documentary on the U.S. Mint.

Harrison arrives for a lunch meeting with Lucie. Just as he'd found himself back at square one (their prime suspect was in custody when the last murder took place), she called and told him she had an idea. So now, here she is, with her sparkling eyes and swinging silver earrings, talking about... a cult that worships the Washington monument. What the--? Lucie charms Harrison with a theory that is even more bizarre than the ones he usually dreams up. And she's so eager to help him with the case. No one else in his life – neither his girlfriend, nor his partner – cares about his theories, but she has goofy theories of her own. They really seem to be hitting it off until Harrison innocently remarks that Lucie reminds him of someone. She turns cold and takes brisk leave of him. The next day, he shows up at her apartment with a peace offering – an antique book of poetry (he knows nothing about poetry, but, noticing the antique jewelry she wears, he thought she might like it), although he is unsure what he is apologizing for. Lucie is overjoyed to see him. She reads him her favorite, rather sexy, John Donne poem. That night, their flirtation quickly develops into something more, and drunk on nothing stronger than tea, they fall into bed together.

For winter break, Lucie goes to Italy, where she visits crypts and writes a postcard in the shadow of Michelangelo's *David*. Harrison and Stewie catch the man who murdered Victor, but Harrison studies the evidence and concludes that the first murder does not fit the pattern of the subsequent ones. It appears that the killer must have taken a cue from the first crime scene; and he seems to be planning a total of nine victims. Harrison gets Lucie's postcard, which precipitates a fight and a bitter (though long-overdue) break-up with Chloe. Lucie returns, gives Alex the brush-off, and beelines for Harrison. At his apartment, after they make love, he cooks for her and she offers more help with the case. He is eager to tell her about the progress in the investigation, but stops short of explaining why the cops have started to refer to the killer as "the Banker."

Harrison, inspired by Lucie's theory, pursues the angle of ritual murder. He mobilizes the entire squad to look into all manner of local secret societies. He and Stewie interrogate a Mason who, Stewie believes, is hiding

something. Lucie runs into Sue, who asks her where she's been. Lucie, her arms full of art supplies, drops hints about her all-consuming art project, with Harrison as her "muse." As usual, Sue is only half-listening.

Lucie convinces Harrison to take a couple of hours off to see a cartoon festival. She stares at the Donald vs. Daffy "dueling pianos" sequence, a mixture of emotions playing on her face, while Harrison only has eyes for her. Outside the cineplex, she becomes infuriated by a poster advertising a remake of a horror classic. Harrison, amused, thinks that the cartoon violence must have gotten to Lucie. Alex and Sue gossip about the latest slashing victim, who co-owned a swanky restaurant with his twin brother. Alex frets about Lucie, who's never around anymore. What if she runs into this psycho? They won't even know if she's in trouble.

Lucie meets the proprietor of a curio shop who seems to be a kindred spirit. As she wanders around, enchanted by the antique bric-a-brac and the shopkeeper's attention, he tells her a story about originals, copies, and a mad book collector. It seems that Lucie and the curio shop man share some kind of mysterious bond. The surviving twin implores Harrison and Stewie to provide protection for him, but Harrison assures him that he is not at risk. The detectives notice a painting whose composition includes paper money - the Banker's "signature" - at the twin's opulent home. Out for a jog with Lucie, Alex tells her he's nervous about her going door-to-door, but Lucie shrugs off his worries. She then says something so callous about the death of the restaurateur-twin that Alex is utterly creeped out. He says he doesn't recognize her anymore. Lucie backpedals, invites Alex to a lecture, but he declines.

Lucie goes to a slide lecture on economics, eroticism, and death. Her survey work then brings her to the lair of a retired anthropologist who makes an unpleasant pass at her. She fights him off and runs out of the building. Harrison happens to be in the area. Has he been following her? He races after her and asks what happened. Lucie breaks down. When he learns that she has been going door to door, he flies into a rage. They fight, and Lucie says disjointed things about the futility of saving anything or anyone and the death of a childhood friend, things that make no sense to Harrison. Finally, he gets her to calm down a little. Lucie convinces Evelyn to come to the flea market with her, so she can set up her grandmother with the curio shop

owner. On the way there, Lucie tells Evelyn that she is in love with Harrison. At the flea market, Lucie waves to the curio shop owner and is stunned to realize that he does not recognize her. She tells Evelyn that she doesn't see him.

Harrison is unlocking the front door of his building when Chloe (returning to fetch some clothes, and in a jolly mood now that her life has picked up) sneaks up behind him and covers his eyes. Harrison begins to wonder whether the Banker, lacking brute strength, could be compensating with stealth, quickness, and the element of surprise. In the meantime, the killer strikes again. This time, the victim is an art dealer who lived outside the city limits. This could be the break the detectives were looking for. Judging by the evidence at the scene, the killer must have known this victim. As they pore through the victim's address book, Harrison tells Stewie that he thinks the Banker is most likely a woman.

### **Act III: Will Lucie draw Harrison to his doom?**

Spring. The season of rebirth, but there is a deathly pall in the air. Harrison and Lucie stroll among blossoming cherry trees, and he tells her what we've suspected all along: that the great love of his life was murdered. It happened seven years ago, at this time of year. He moved to homicide after that. He still feels guilty about what happened. He won't say it, but he's been trying to avenge her death ever since. What he does say is that his life has been bleak and sad... until now. Lucie is speechless at his bashful profession of love. He asks her if *she* regrets anything, and she tells him about betraying Sue back in September. Lucie says that she's realized she made the wrong decision because, morals or not, you don't turn against someone you care about. She says pretty much the same thing to Alex as they're walking through the National Gallery. Alex wants to show her some funny paintings that were made on the basis of a survey. Lucie acts jittery. She convinces Alex to come to her beloved portrait gallery instead. Alex peppers her with questions about the murdered art dealer – didn't he introduce them to one another? – but Lucie evades them all. Among the portraits, she launches into a rant about how portraits confer immortality. Alex teasingly asks when she will make him immortal. She replies that he'll never be her model. Lucie flashes back to the time she was eleven and, in art class she would never

forget, her talented best friend was showered with acclaim while she stood in the shadows, unnoticed.

Alex dashes around his apartment, agitated and fearful. There are suitcases everywhere. A newspaper on his desk announces that the other glamorous twin has been found dead. Alex puts a book of Edgar Allan Poe's stories into a manila envelope and runs outside to mail it. Harrison shows up at Lucie's apartment in the middle of the night, acting unhinged. Lucie, herself in a strange mood, is typing up her findings and drinking wine to celebrate the end of her research. She gets Harrison drunk. She admits that she hated doing the surveys, but she kept on, desperately hoping to learn if there was anything that people loved more than money. Harrison snoops around and finds an art book with Gentileschi's gruesome painting, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*. He deftly blindfolds Lucie and conducts a weird, quasi-erotic interrogation. It seems as if he is trying to trick or trap her. Lucie demands to know if he suspects her. Then he stops the interrogation and embraces Lucie. It seems as if the storm has passed.

Lucie's classmates receive their diplomas while she watches from afar. Sue finds her and asks why she isn't among the graduates. Lucie tells her that her thesis was not accepted, and she had also stopped going to classes a while back. She admits that her art project has taken over her life, but then again, "Art demands sacrifice!" Sue is there as a messenger. She hands Lucie a letter from Alex, who has, for some reason, fled the country (Sue has taken over for him at the gallery). In the letter, Alex accuses Lucie of an unspoken crime and advises her to turn herself in.

Harrison gets Alex's package. He turns to the bookmarked page – a story about an artist who paints a lifelike portrait of his lover, thereby killing her. Harrison realizes that Alex is trying to cast suspicion on Lucie. Harrison calls a detective in Florence, Italy, and learns that an unsolved murder took place there two days after Lucie wrote him that postcard. He searches through the Poe book and a line from "The Cask of Amontillado" reminds him of a name he saw in the art dealer's encyclopedic address book. The name is obviously an alias. He traces the accompanying phone number to a basement room being used as an art studio, rented to an unknown woman about a year ago.



Lucie tells Evelyn that she is leaving Washington. Evelyn, shocked and sad, tries to get her to stay by invoking Harrison, but Lucie tells her there can be no future for the two of them. Evelyn tells Lucie that she, too, used to run away from her problems when she was young. But Lucie won't take the hint and tell her what she's running away from. Her cryptic response makes Evelyn suspect that something is terribly wrong.

Harrison drives like a madman and pulls up in front of Stewie's building. He hasn't slept for days, and his judgment is way off. He rushes up the stairs and pounds on the door of his only friend, who hasn't been answering the phone. He needs him now, more than ever. Stewie finally opens the door. Harrison is astonished to find a young male prostitute there. Stewie, the hyper-masculine womanizer. And married, at that. Reality begins to seem very slippery to Harrison. No one is who he appears to be. By the time Stewie recovers his bearings and asks what's wrong, Harrison is barreling down the stairs.

Harrison pulls up to a desolate-looking building on the outskirts of town. He gets out of his car. Tries the door. No one there. He shoots out the lock of the basement door. and steps inside. It's dark. Pale light filters in through tiny windows. He flips on the lights. There are small canvases everywhere. Sensitive studies of hands. Heads turned away. Life caught unawares. In the next room is a large canvas: a group portrait. He recognizes the victims, one by one. Plus one unfamiliar face. And one that is all too familiar. At the center of the composition - his portrait. He reaches out to touch it, to end this uncanny, unbearable moment. Just then, he hears Lucie's voice asking him not to touch his portrait—"it's still wet." She is standing in the doorway. Judging by the look on her face, she has waited for this moment for a long, long time. Harrison can no longer lie to himself about who Lucie is. His worst fear has come true. But what made her commit such crimes? Did she ever love him, or was she just using him? What is the meaning of this hideous painting? And what will happen now? Their agonizingly tense confrontation edges closer and closer toward violence. Harrison just wants to know how Lucie managed to do what she did, and more importantly, *why*. Lucie hopes Harrison will recognize her gift and understand the role he has played in the creation of her masterpiece. Will Lucie be redeemed by love? Will she choose her lover - or her plan?