In which the narrator avoids talking out their feelings by suffocating some guy with a pillow and getting too emotional over girl scout cookies. Tell-Tale Heart parody.

Wrote this for an English course. Yes, really.

They all said I was crazy. My therapist said I was crazy, but like a person with a degree in psychology knows anything about that. The policemen said I was crazy, but you know what, factual evidence and a court order does not a case make. Even I said I was crazy, but if I am crazy, then obviously I can’t trust what I’m saying right now and if I recognize that, then I’m obviously not crazy, right?

Look, point being, I’m not crazy. Not crazy. Got that? Great.

Now that we’ve got that all cleared, I’m going to tell you something certifiably nuts so buckle up. I’ve got this housemate of sorts. Not sure what his name is--it never really came up--so we’re just going to call him the old man. That’s what I call him anyways. Because he’s old. And a man. Not the most original of nicknames, but it’s functional enough. It’s just--we’ve been housemates for so long that it would be awkward to ask him now, right? You’d think so, too, if you knew him. He’s not much of a talker, or a listener really. He’s a watcher.

With his eye. That’s how this whole matter started. He’s got this big, nasty eye that he just pokes around into other people’s business with. The right eye? Just fine. I actually quite like it--it’s a nice shade of blue and if he were a pretty girl, he could probably do mascara commercials with it. But the left? It completely ruins the picture. I can’t look at him without gagging. It throws me off every...
The other day we were having breakfast and he barged in without warning me with his disgusting eye glancing around. I had just made some English muffins but as he entered the room and his eye caught the light, I nearly dropped them.

“Hey there, roomie,” he said, his one eye gleaming like something that is shiny and luminescent—you know, gleaming. “Do we have any cornflakes?”

I curled up into a ball and began to hyperventilate. Today, his eye was not as bad as other days so I kept my cool. It wasn’t enough for him, though. Nothing’s ever enough for him and his judgy, judgmental eye. While getting some milk out of the fridge, he set his eye on my body (which was in the fetal position besides the table) and grunted.

“Are you okay?” he said, his eye so filmy that it was practically making its own movies. “Um--do you want me to call an ambulance?”

I rolled under the table and screamed from the depths of my chest. I screamed into the linoleum tiles. I screamed as the image of his one repulsive but really not dissimilar to the other eye replayed in my mind like a film as filmy as his eye. I screamed until I watched his feet edge out of the room with little more than a, “...I’ll just pick up some coffee on my way to work. Uh, bye.”

When he left, I stood up and brushed myself off, tsk-ing to myself. “What a self-righteous snob.” That’s how it was for at least six weeks, maybe seven. Every morning, him and his eye blemish and his cornflakes spoiling my breakfast. Just the thought makes the blood rush through my ears like a heartbeat. It made me chillier than a bowl of chili verde. Like, come on, could the man not afford an eye patch?

I would have bought one, but...oh, but it’s too late now, isn’t it? Because after the cereal incident aforementioned, I watched him leave to work. I watched him just like that eye watched me. As I watched, I came upon the rational and totally-thought out decision that the only way to get that eye out of his life was to just kill him senselessly.

Of course I pursued other options. Moving out? So much hassle, and I really hate packing. Anyways, what if I ever ran into him on Twitter or something and saw that eye of his on social media? Gross. Kicking him out? It was his house, and anyways he gave me a really good deal on the rent. I couldn’t just kick him out after that. It wouldn’t be fair.

What about ignoring it, you say, and knock it off with the whole “his eye is evil and must be eliminated” shtick? What, are you crazy?

So you see, the only reasonable option was to kill him. I decided this shortly after his car left, standing in the hallway.

“Right, then,” I said to myself, wringing my hands. Then I brightened. “Well, no sense plotting murder over an empty stomach!”

So I finished the English muffins, washed them down with a nice cup of orange juice, and then wrote down the details of my defenseless elderly roommate’s demise.

I chewed on my pencil as I thought it over, drumming my hands on the table in a way that much resembled a heartbeat. “Hmm--decisions, decisions. How should I rid myself of this evil eye? It’s got to be symbolic. Meaningful. Planned. But how to do the planning?” I snapped my fingers. “Ah! I have just the thing!”

I ran to the games cabinet (well-loved on the old man and I’s Monopoly Tuesdays) and pulled out the Clue game. With the solemnity of a killer, I pulled out one card after another as the details of the crime unfolded. “Alright, let’s see. So the bedroom card--we’ll do it at night, then, while he’s sleeping. And with what?” I pulled out one of those metal weapons—a pillow. I squinted. “What? A pillow? Should I stuff it down his throat, or what? No--strangling! Oh, this is great! “But hold on,” I said, digging further into the box. “Who’s the culprit? Plum? Mustard? Who’s the--”

My hands dropped and I set the board game aside. I stared at my hands. That’s right. I was the murderer. Suddenly, the Clue box seemed a lot duller than before.

“Well, that’s alright,” I said to myself, somewhat reassuringly though I still frowned. “It will be all sorted out once this eye business is behind us... right?”

After that, I went to work. I worked as an overworked hack who writes mysteries in which most
of the narrators are insane and kill people for absolutely no reason (I like to distance my personality as far as possible from my work.) It’s hard writing the same character going insane over a variety of everyday triggers, but the heartfelt wails emitted from my readership makes it all worth it at the end of the day. On this particular occasion, I wrote about a man who doesn’t like his cat so he burned his entire house down and then dies. Worried that perhaps the story was too rational, too mundane, I drove home and quickly forgot about it. “Other fish to fry,” I reminded myself as I pulled into my driveway right behind the old man’s car because I’m a jerk like that. “Other houses to burn down.” The old man had already settled inside by the time I walked in. He was standing over the opened Clue game board. When I walked in, his hands fell to his hips and he raised his eyebrows (AND HIS EYE) at me.

“Why is this out?” he asked me, his eye glaring at me glaringly. “It’s not Tuesday, is it? Come on, you got all the cards out. Ugh, this is going to be murder to clean up--”

I screeched at him like a raven and, flapping my arms, stumbled into my room. He was onto me. His evil eye knew. I grabbed my heart. It was racing fast enough that it sounded like--like a--heartbeat. I sunk to the ground and, still clutching my chest, whispered, “Tonight--tonight is the night--”

The old man knocked on my door. My breath caught. His muffled voice came through the door. “Er, I was thinking of ordering a pizza. Tonight a bad night?”

I hesitated and, in a strangled sort of voice, said, “Hawaiian would be nice. Do you want to go Dutch on that?”

“Oh, that’s alright. Your friendship is its own payment.”

“If you say so. Just make sure you get Hawaiian. I am feeling festive.”

Waiting until his footsteps trailed off, I slammed my fist into my other hand and muttered, “That’s it. Him and his evil eye are going down. Justice will be served! As will pizza! Hopefully Hawaiian! But after that--justice!”

After the pizza (Hawaiian, bless his heart) and a rousing game of Scrabble, the old man and I got into our pajamas and made our way to bed. Except instead of going to bed, I stood outside of his door and watched him in between the cracks. I held a sole pillow in my hand. Although I tried to be stealthy, he sat up in his bed and made tittering sounds.

“Er...something I could do for you?” he asked, shifting around among his pillows, his one eye blinking in confusion and the other SCOOPING OUT THE DEPTHS OF MY SOUL WITH ITS FOUL RETINAS.

“No,” I said lightly, clutching the pillow to my chest. “I’m just getting a drink of water.”

“You have been sitting here by my bedside for two hours.”

“And?”

He didn’t really have anything to say to that. After another hour or so of painful small talk (in which I looked away to keep my pizza inside my stomach), he rolled over and tried to ignore me. That’s when the harder work began, really. It’s one thing to plot and another to stand outside someone’s doorstep, listen to him breathing, and say to yourself, “I’d like to end that”? Besides that, what if he woke up? Oh, that would be so awkward! I’d have to make up some lame excuse and feel like an idiot as I carried on back to bed. Anyways, I’d have to talk to him and that would involve looking him in the eye.

Solution: every five minutes, I shined a flashlight in his eyes and said, “Are you awake?”

The first ten times, he responded, “Yes. Yes I am awake.”

The next eighteen times, he said, “Look, I have work in the morning, so could you please--”

“Are you awake?”

The nineteenth time, he said, “Stop it. Just stop. I have had quite enough of this. Please go to bed.”

The twentieth time, I heard nothing but his soft sobs as he tried to lull himself to sleep. The twenty-first time he said nothing at all. Ah, yes, I thought to myself, creaking the door open a little more because it wasn’t open very wide and I had been stress-eating a lot lately (hence the pizza). I tip-toed into his dark room stealthily. By stealthily, I mean stomping on the ground and shouting just to be sure he wasn’t awake.
After about ten seconds of this, he sat up in his bed with a cry and pointed at me. “AH! What are you doing?”
I froze and trembled. His eye, the iris of a thousand frostbitten ice cream cones, looked over me with utter disgust. The other eye did that as well but it was not nearly as offensive.
“It’s, er, just the wind,” I said, holding as still as I could.
He folded his arms. “Roomie.”
“A mouse crossing the floor?” I hedged. He did not seem convinced. “Oh, I know! A cricket making a single chirp!”
He sighed, slowly and consuming all of the atmosphere in the room. “A cricket? Really? Who are you?”
Well, darn.
“I—I–” Think, I told myself. Think. “I just wanted to tell you that I love you.”
He hesitated. “What?”
“In a totally platonic, bro-to-bro sort of way, of course,” I clarified and stiffened a little. “You are just a swell guy and I thought you should know that. Even if your eye reminds me of trash that has been sitting around for so long it has developed both sentience and a sense of sarcasm.”
“Wow, that was very poetic. Warmed the cockles of my heart. Really. But why do you have to do this at—” He looked to his alarm clock witheringly. “At two in the morning?”
“No time like the present, my friend. You never know,” I said carefully, my voice deepening, “when your last chance to say something will be.”
I then giggled to myself in an octave almost beyond hearing and a speed almost beyond sound, rocking back and forth-- for what I lack in madness I totally compensate in routine humor. The old man stayed as still as a rock because his rotten apple core of an eye prevents him from taking a joke, I think. Also it was two in the morning.
“Go to bed,” he said. “Please.”
With that, he rolled over, presumably expecting me to go to bed. Except I did not. I did not go to bed. I did not leave the room. I did not breathe. I did not make a single sound. What I did was hold my pillow tight and edge forward--further, further--until at last I reached him. Him and the eye. The eye that caused a thousand sours to my ego. The eye that started all of this business in the first place. The eye that, had it its own name, it would be something like “Baldwin” or “Ignacius”--something pompous that makes one want to retch just by hearing it.
“I’m sorry,” I said, raising the pillow over my head and the unconscious old man. But apparently I did not whisper that because he opened his eyes--both of them, both the nonoffensive one and the wilted cabbage of an eye--and cried out, “Wha--”
That last glance was the last straw.
“Oh, shut it!” I cried and, with a huff, pulled the pillow over his mouth, and did the business until it was done.
After a few minutes, his breathing stopped. A few minutes after that, the heartbeat stopped. Then--when at last his body was as blue as his offensive eye and when I closed it it did not open--then the heartbeat started in my own brain. It pulsed and with it, I got a little jittery.
“Oh, no! No, no, no!” I cried, holding the dead body in my hands. “I have made a horrible mistake! Who will pay the rent now?”
The old man offered no response because he was dead. Not that it was his fault, really. But the more I thought, the greater this heartbeat got in my head. It hurt with every beat. Th-thump. Th-thump. I took some Tylenol, but it just wouldn’t rid itself.
I’m not crazy--I think...but this was just too much. Even in death, this guy was still bothering me. Him and his eye. I slept uneasily that night and in the morning, even though I made myself some extra-special chocolate chip pancakes and the old man wasn’t even there to ruin it, the heartbeat noises in my mind left the pancakes too dull and my head an utter mess.
So I called my therapist. His name was Eddie. He had a collection of pinned butterflies in his office that he killed, and I quote, “slowly...ever so slowly...very, very slowly...so that I might not disturb the butterflies.” A bit of an eccentric, my Eddie, but he grows on you. I called him up and tapped my toes as my call made its way from the help desk to hold to--
“What can I help you with?” came his voice crackling through the phone.
“Hey, doctor!” I said, smiling wanly to myself as I choked back tears. “I’m hearing things.”
The doctor tutted. “What sort of things?”
“Oh, you know...” I said, twirling my hair with my finger. “Heartbeats. Not my own, though. An all-consuming heartbeat.”
“Not yours?”
“No,” I clarified. “I don’t have a heart. This is a different heart.”
The line crackled some more. I waited, kneading my forehead as the heartbeats jostled through my mind.
“Have you been taking your medication?” the response finally came.
I cried out angrily and hang up, but not without crying, “I am not crazy!”
Then I grumbled to myself angrily in a manner completely unlike a crazy person talking to himself.
Just as I hung up, the doorbell rang. My head shot to the door and I clapped my hands, jumping up and down. “Oh, boy, I hope it’s the girl scouts! Is it Thin Mint season already?”
But just as I scrambled up to the door to claim my delicious Thin Mints, I stopped. The body. The body? Where to put the body? Girl scouts don’t deserve to see something like that. That’s just obscene. I crept back into the bedroom and, hauling the body of the old man on my back, I carried him into the living room. Then I got a sledge hammer and broke a hole right in the middle of the wood floor. I stuffed the body in it and, ignoring the pulsing in my head, covered it up with a nice and fashionable rug.
I rubbed my hands. “Job well done.” The doorbell rang again and I smiled. “Coming, girl scouts! I’d like at least twelve Samoas, to start, and then--”
I opened the door. It was not the girl scouts. Not at all. It was the opposite, actually. The man...enforcers? The man not-scouts?
Long story short, the police were on my doorstep and they didn’t have any cookies with them. Two of them. Two whole polices.
The pulse in my head was making a ruckus, but I wiped the sweat off my brows and smiled the world-weary smile of those who had just killed their housemate for looking at them funny and somehow had to go on with life.
“Good morning, officers,” I said. “Any trouble?”
The officer on the right winked and pointed a finger gun at me. “Yes! We’re the fashion police and we are arresting you--” My heart stopped. “--on charges of being much too fashionable, sir!”
Oh. I mopped my brow with a neckerchief. “Yes, I’m always happy when turtleneck season rolls around.”
“The middle of June sure is great,” agreed the second officer. “We were just kidding about the fashion police thing. We were just stopping by and thought, hey, this looks like a law abiding citizen that has nothing to high--then I said to Carl here, let’s stop for tea. I bet he brews a nice tea.”
“Then I said to Egbert,” said Carl, nudging the second officer, “I bet he does have tea and definitely not a dead body stored anywhere! Heck, crime can be stopped later. Let’s stop and chit-chat!”
He nudged Edbert playfully.
“Oh, you!” said Egbert.
The two policemen looked at me expectantly. What could I do? They weren’t girl scouts, true... but? I sighed and welcomed them in. “How do you take your tea?”
“Strangled!” said Carl happily, hanging his hat on the coatrack. I gasped for air.
“He means strained,” said Egbert.
“Oh,” I said as the pulsing ravenously devoured my head. “That’s okay, then.”
Thumpa--th-thumpa...thump...
“You guys don’t hear that--right?” I glanced them over to check, cupping one of my own ears. “The thumping coming from the dea--from my tortured descent into psychosis?”
“No,” said Egbert.
“Wonderful,” I said.
“I like my tea with sugar,” said Carl. “Do you know any good gossip?”
“Too much, these days,” I signed.
I seated them in the dining room and made for the kitchen. “I’ll make this quick. Chat away. I should only be a few minutes.”
I brewed the tea and listened to the officers talk amongst themselves, every so often banging my head against the fridge in an attempt to stop the pain. When at last the tea was done, I brought two cups into the living room and, giving one to each officer, sat down on the sofa opposite them and crossed my legs. “So what did I miss?”
Egbert sipped his tea pleasantly and gestured to Carl. “Officer Carl was just telling me about his pet snake--”
“Bitey,” supplied Carl.
“Yes, Bitey,” said Egbert. “Do you know how snakes kill their prey, citizen?”
I glanced at the rug and felt myself getting paler. “I don’t suppose snakes are vegetarians?”
Carl laughed. “No! But you’ll find this interesting. When I put a mouse into Bitey’s cage, he latches on and--slowly, that’s the key--strangles the thing to death right there.”
My hands--how they trembled. My head--how it pulsed. My tongue was dry. “I--I--”
“Yeah,” said Egbert. “Strangles it right to death. Isn’t that horrible?”
I began to retch. “Erg--bleggerh--hmmmmrrrrmmmm...”
“Good thing humans aren’t that barbaric, right, citizen?” chortled Carl.
I goggled at him, foaming a bit at the mouth.
A line appeared between Carl’s eyebrows. “Just trying to make conversation.”
“ARRGGHH!” I could bear it no longer, no longer I say! Sweeping to the floor, I covered my head and writhed as the pulsing overtook me. Pain. Pain. Agony. Pain. “I did it! I killed the old man! It is true! His eye, his filmy old eye was too offensive to me and so I killed him! Can’t you hear the heartbeat? Oh! It was senseless, but I had to do it! I had to do it, I say! I say!”
The policemen set their tea down at the coffee table and looked over me with two parts concern, one parts disgust, and one parts lingering gratitude for the tea. They were quiet. Everything was quiet. The clock was quiet. The heart was quiet. My phone was quiet. Even I was quiet for a bit. Then I said, humbly, quietly, “And--and just for the record, I am not crazy.”

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