

ADAM KRAUSE

THE MURDERED

He seemed an easy target, and somewhat financially successful. He had founded a website that allowed people who traveled frequently to find someone in their area who would care for their rodent. It wasn't oil millions, but she would take it. She would marry him and he would slip from a ladder propped against the frozen eaves of the roof, or his antilock brake fluid would dissipate in traffic. Unfortunately they were juniors in college. Her parents forbade her to be married until after she had completed her botany degree. The long engagement turned out to be bearable, consisting mostly of winter evenings where she lay prone under his plaid blanket and watched him peck at his keyboard, negotiating the transfer of dormice. On their honeymoon, an Alaskan cruise, she planned to topple him into the waves that moved like sawteeth under the ship. But on their only moonless deck stroll he hobbled, complaining of childhood rickets, until the captain addressed them from behind a vent and asked if a cup of mint tea might not be preferable to exercise. Her disappointment was tempered by relief, for the sea looked particularly cold that night, and she did not think she would want to remember it if he reached back for her hand on the railing as he fell.

After they returned to Seattle she discovered she was pregnant with what the ultrasound revealed as a male homunculus. Forced to sleep on her side, she thought of the way strychnine would convulse the throat of the snoring man next to her, and wondered whether she should risk buying strychnine pills online with her credit card or simply buy seeds of the nux vomica tree and grind them into his soup. By the time she had decided to go the herbal route, she was seven months along and leery at the prospect of being alone with the homunculus. Her son, when he arrived and awkwardly stayed on, seemed to bear this out. Even when he moved away he was always coming back or threatening to come back, so she never felt the coast was clear to murder her husband. She was squeezing a papery pillow in the hospital waiting room, calculating what change of nurses would give her the best chance to creep into his room and smother him with it, when her son came down the hallway and told her he had succumbed, like most of his generation, to ambient electronic cancer. By now she was eighty-six years old. She felt with something like sorrow the loss of the murder they had never had together. While dusting the hamster cages three days later, an embolism ripped swiftly through her brain and she collapsed onto the carpet, surprising her son, who was climbing through her living room window with a handkerchief noose clutched in his white-gloved hand.