

Tommy Shea

After your abusive father threw you out of the house at 14 you became addicted to heroin. For years you barely scraped by, living on the streets and committing petty crimes to pay for your next fix.

Three years ago, when you were 19 and desperate for cash, you tried to snatch a purse from an elderly woman coming up the subway escalator. She wouldn't let go, though (Why wouldn't she just let go!), and in the struggle she fell back down the escalator.

Her neck snapped. You will never forget the sound of it, like a rotten tree branch cracking. The sight of her lifeless body coming back up towards you on the escalator has haunted many a night's sleep, even though you've been drug-free since the day it happened.

So far, you've managed to resist the urge to escape back into the needle. One day at a time.

Amaya Ortiz

He raised you since you were 7 years old, since the day your parents were killed by a drunk driver. Your grandfather was always kind to you. To others – to those who worked for him, or to those whose companies he bought and sold like baseball cards – he was ruthless, dominating. But he always treated you like a princess.

Then the sickness came. Tests, doctors, consultations, treatments. Weeks turned into months, months into years, and the old man just kept hanging on. His inheritance, the wealth and prosperity you had been promised, dwindled a little more every day. Why wouldn't he just die?

The old woman who ran that tiny magic shop was reluctant to sell you such "dangerous magic." She said you had a black aura, warned that you were on a path to damnation. But the green of your money, enough for her to retire and move away, overcame her reservations.

You completed the spell, exactly as she instructed, and the next morning your grandfather was dead and all of his wealth was yours. Maybe it was a coincidence.

Maybe it wasn't.

Manny Ramos

You've been filled with rage for as long as you can remember. Sometimes you can hide it from the outside world, for months or even years, but sooner or later you lose control.

For nearly four years you were a cop. You protected the good people from the scum of the earth, even when they never thanked you, even when the filth of the city just grew worse and worse and threatened to drown you, and you never lost your cool, never lost your temper.

Until that day.

Punk kid was no older than 14. You grabbed him up for tagging a wall, probably would have just confiscated his paint and sent him on his way. But he spit on you. Spit on you! The world turned red, your baton was suddenly in your hand, and you just kept beating, and beating, until he stopped moving.

You made up some bullshit story about how he grabbed your gun, how you were defending yourself. They couldn't prove otherwise. But they never really believed you. You were kicked off the force, and have been making ends meet as a warehouse security guard ever since.

And that really pisses you off.

Felicia Lebrea

Ever since you were a little girl, other people have just never seemed quite *real* to you. When a childhood neighbor fell on a broken bottle and nearly bled to death, you barely even looked up from playing with your dolls (the Daddy doll was punishing the baby dolls by locking them in a suitcase).

One time in the high school bathroom a girl 2 years older than you tried to take your new backpack – you slammed her head into the sink so hard she lost seven teeth (and secretly, behind closed doors, Daddy told you "Good job" – because if you had come home without your backpack he would have been forced to punish you. He hated doing that. He truly did).

During your first college summer break, you and your 'best friend' (Why do college girls just have to have those?) went on a mountain trail hike. She lost her footing and slid over the side of a path, hundreds of feet above the jagged rocks below. She looked so silly there, dangling and screaming and crying; you almost wanted to help her up. But it was such a curious sight, you couldn't help but stand just out of reach and study her frantically trying to scramble up.

She wailed and struggled for nearly 5 full minutes, begging and pleading and finally cursing your name. But the look on her face, when she finally lost her grip and plummeted to her death, was so very – interesting.

Katie Rogers

For the most part your husband Sam is a good man – he makes you laugh, has always been loyal, and truly seems to love you. But sometimes he can be so damned indecisive!

Like that day last year, driving home from the Petersons' all-day barbecue.

The two of you had been arguing, so he was drunk. Again. You offered to drive because you'd only had a few glasses of wine, but he insisted. Neither of you even saw that little girl in the road, just heard the grinding of twisted metal from her tricycle dragging underneath the car.

Sam froze, of course. Typical. Just sat there with that pathetic look on his face, his eyes searching yours for what to do next. Well, there was no way the child had survived an impact like that – why have your

lives ruined if she was already dead? You managed to get Sam to step on the gas, then took care of everything: washing the car, checking it for evidence, having it repaired.

In some perverse way the accident, sharing a secret, has actually brought you two closer. Thankfully Sam never reads the newspaper, so he didn't see the article about the poor little girl in the yellow dress left to die on the side of the road.

Sam Rogers

For the most part your wife Katie is a good woman – she makes you laugh, doesn't sneak around with other men, and takes good care of you. But sometimes she's so domineering.

Like that day last year, driving home from the Petersons' all-day barbecue.

You'd had a few beers because Katie was arguing about something or other – she even wanted to drive home, but she'd been chugging wine all day. Maybe you should've let her. Neither of you even saw that little girl in the road, just heard the grinding of twisted metal from her tricycle dragging under the car.

It all happened so fast! You weren't sure what to do, you were in shock, and then there was Katie, screaming, "Go! Go!" You have a foggy recollection of stepping on the gas and getting out of there. Katie said the little girl was already dead (Had you seen her move in the rearview mirror?), that there was nothing you could do to help her and going to prison certainly wouldn't bring her back. She took care of everything, she always did, and most days now it just seems like some horrible dream.

Most days.

Jeffrey

You're not sure *why* the world has always hated you – but it sure does. Maybe it's because you're only 11 years old; maybe because you're so small for your age that people think you're 8; maybe because you don't let anyone bigger or older tell you what to do. Whatever.

You found your mother dead where she hanged herself when you were seven. For three days you left her there, dangling over the table where you ate your cereal in front of the TV. Finally your father came back, beat you unconscious one last time for old time's sake, then used his revolver to paint the walls with his brains. You gathered up whatever you could carry and hit the streets.

It wasn't easy at first – lots of predators out there. But they didn't know who they were messing with. Sooner or later, you always made them pay. There was the homeless guy you pushed in front of a bus, and that guy in the van you castrated with your favorite toy, a straight razor hidden in your sleeve. Funny how they let their guard down around kids. One time Child Services actually managed to keep you in custody long enough to put you in a foster home – the rat poison tea party you threw for all your new brothers and sisters was your way of saying, "No thanks."

You fully expect to die before you're old enough to vote. But you'll go out swinging.