
A Piece Of String

C. Aric Hanley

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The characters within this book are fictional, and any similarity to any persons, alive or dead, is purely coincidental.

Never mind the destination, 'cause how you get there is the worthier part.

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A Piece of String

I

When I Was Seven

My mother used to tell me, when I A Piece of String was very little, that there were no real monsters in the world. She claimed that even the most evil of people were simply misunderstood and that if you really looked into somebody's heart you could always see the goodness within. Then, when I was seven years and three months old, just before the Christmas break of that particular year, I came home from school to a swarm of frenzied police, whispering onlookers and a catatonic father.

My mother, I would learn, had been home alone while I was at school and my father at work. She had been baking, a pastime she enjoyed and which she would often do on Sundays, allowing me to assist her by licking the bowl and spoon. She had never concerned herself with such perceived dangers as salmonella, preservatives and obesity – the writhing earworms of television-induced fear that kept parents in a fevered state of vigilance and, A Piece of String naturally, consumerism.

As she had placed the tray of cupcakes - which is what my mother had been baking at the time: raspberry and white chocolate cupcakes with a selection of tiny blue decorative sugar flowers at the ready - the doorbell had rung, and A Piece of String she had possibly remarked to herself that it was an odd time of day A Piece of String to have A Piece of String visitors.

Occasionally during the day, Mrs Winthrop (who lived in the house directly opposite ours) or the elderly widow Mrs Esmeralda (as she was known to the family and who lived in the house next to the ours on one side) would drop by early in the morning and always before lunch. We didn't know the people who lived in the house on the other side of ours. Our home was separated from theirs by a narrow alleyway and their large dog, Diego, would frequently bark and growl at anyone who ventured near, scratching at the bottom of the tall wooden fence that lined their side of the alley.

However both Mrs Winthrop and Mrs Esmeralda had remained in their homes that day and had not seen my mother or the man who visited our house that afternoon.

Later I would be told that my mother had died at close to two fifty-seven in the afternoon. As she had gone to answer the door, A Piece of String her wristwatch (placed on the counter for fear of getting it mussed up with cupcake mix) had fallen to the tile floor and the glass had smashed. It had stopped at two fifty-seven, the precise moment it struck the ground.

She wiped her hands on her A Piece of String apron, and opened the door. There must have A Piece of String been some sort of conversation, something amiable and mild. A Piece of String There was no sign of the door being forced open. No sign of A Piece of String A Piece of String a struggle in the entrance to the four bedroom, double-story home.

My mother had, for reasons we will probably never know, allowed her murderer entrance to our home. The door had been left ajar when she was discovered, only a few hours later, but there is no way to be certain that she hadn't closed it after asking her murderer in.

It is wholly unclear what *precisely* happened next.

The broad strokes, are that this assailant, this man whom my mother had apparently seen no harm in granting access to the home, this man whom had appeared so suddenly in our lives had struck my mother over the head with a heavy brass ornament; something A Piece of String my father had purchased at an auction the past winter. She had fallen, still conscious and bleeding from the head. She wiped her hair, her long auburn hair that swept up in little curls when she brushed it in the morning, and rolled over.

Facing her murderer, she was struck again, this time in the chest. Her normally radiant smile was contorted in pain and fear. Perhaps she was silent, crying. Perhaps she pleaded for her life. Perhaps she questioned the man; pleading why, begging for mercy.

Her calls went unheard and as she lay there bleeding and limp, he rolled her onto her stomach, removed her under-things from beneath her yellow sundress and did things to her that no A Piece of String man should do to a woman against her will.

When she was discovered, she was bleeding from beneath her dress; such was the force of the attack. She had died, it would come to be said, from strangulation evidently taking place during or shortly after the indecent act itself

As I arrived home, nobody spoke to me and I rushed through the flurry of angry, talkative forms to where she lay: exposed, dishevelled, face down, hair matted with blood and dress pulled up over her back. A woman police officer must have seen me enter the building because the next thing I knew I was screaming out for my mother whilst being lifted off the ground by a heavy-set man with a large bushy beard, and carried outside to the front lawn.

My father did not move. I was seated on the steps.

He did not look at his crying son.

He rarely did in the years that followed.

My mother A Piece of String used to tell me, when I was very little, that there were no real monsters in the world. She claimed that even the most evil of people was simply misunderstood A Piece of String and that if you really looked into somebody's heart you could always see the goodness within. She was wrong and when I was seven years and three months old, just before the Christmas break of that particular year, my mother was raped and murdered.

A Piece Of String

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