
I, OBJECT**EMILY WOODWORTH**

Crowbar: an implement used to pry things open, pull out nails, or bash in windows.

Johnny: a guy with a crowbar.

Jane: a gal with a vendetta.

The Window: once transparent and fragile, now shattered, its remains christening the floor of the farmhouse in mixed shards like knives and glitter.

‘I’ll go first,’ says Jane to Johnny as she pushes the Crowbar aside.

‘Typical,’ says the Crowbar to itself. ‘I do all the work, they get all the glory.’

‘Quiet,’ says Johnny.

Glass pieces fringe the window frame like the remaining teeth of a veteran boxer. Jane removes her dark sweatshirt and covers the surviving glass. She unlocks the knob of the door and swings it open rapidly. It creaks once, then stops with a nervous tremor.

The three look down at the glass ruins beyond and Jane tiptoes ahead, crunching unseen grist beneath her Converse.

‘You should have let me attack the doorjamb,’ says the Crowbar, its voice like the clangour of an aluminium baseball bat hitting a homer.

Johnny hushes the Crowbar again.

‘I should be used with finesse,’ says the Crowbar, quieter. ‘You could have bashed that window in with anything – a hammer, a rock, your fist. Why bring me anyway?’

‘For the job, dumbass,’ Jane hisses over her shoulder. She stands on clean pine boards now, removing her shoes. Johnny picks his way through the glass more loudly.

‘Don’t step that way, Johnny,’ says the Crowbar, ‘to the right – what job?’

‘Would you shut up?’ Jane says, almost breaking her whisper as she sets her shoes aside gently, belly up. Johnny makes it through the window spatter and scraps his shoes too.

Jane signals their next move with a wave of her false nails. They make their way through the kitchen, a 1970s drop ceiling event with yellow glass windows and a dinosaur refrigerator that roars to life as they pass.

Clementine: an orange tabby cat of the mouse-hunting profession; consummate business person, unwilling to interfere in others' affairs.

'Don't give us any trouble, pussy,' says Johnny, brandishing the Crowbar.

'Stop swinging me like that!' says the Crowbar.

'I'll just be leaving,' remarks the orange tabby coolly as she trots with noiseless padded paws to a pet door.

'A pet door! You could have just unlocked that door from outside and saved me a night's work,' says the Crowbar in a huff, a nervous pinging in its metallic voice, like a dime dropping in a copper bucket. 'By the way, I think this is far enough. Why not leave me in the kitchen while you steal whatever it is you're after?' Johnny walks on. 'I feel a bit queasy, really. Best to stop off and catch my breath. It's all that almost-swinging you did at the cat, I'll warrant –'

'Can't you shut that thing up?' says Jane with a venomous look at Johnny. The whites of her brown eyes are lit ghostly from the porch bulb outside, streaming through the broken window.

Johnny tightens his grip on the Crowbar and seethes, 'Not another word, you.' Then they continue creeping down the hall. As they go, Jane begins trembling.

'Hey, you cool?' asks Johnny from behind.

'No, that's what I've been saying!' says the Crowbar.

'Give me that thing,' Jane says, ignoring them both and taking a deep breath. She has stopped outside a door on the left side of the hallway. It is open just enough for a cat to slither in and out, an arrangement made by Clementine against the better judgement of her roommate. Jane knows what is beyond the door. She has spent hours at a time there while her price was negotiated. She gently puts her hand on the glossy wood, but does not push yet.

Doris: roommate to Clementine; a farm woman to the core; a Madame during droughts; a rough character pretending to sleep, having woken at the crackle of glass a minute earlier.

Shotgun: an implement used to hurl tiny objects at a velocity high enough to kill; only deadly when loaded; current condition: unloaded.

Bedroom Door: a paranoid criminal's last alarm clock.

Doris hears the signal of the door, but not the footfalls that bring Jane closer to her bedside. Her Shotgun attempts to whisper something to her. Her hand tightens on the Shotgun, stifling its warning. The pillow absorbs her sweat. She is facing away from Jane.

Jane can see the outline of Doris' ample hip beneath the light blue quilt. Johnny begins to follow, but she signals with a flick of her hand that he should stay his progress. She creeps closer. The Crowbar tries to speak, but finds itself hampered by Jane's steel grip. She draws up to the side of the bed.

Doris has heard the creak of the door and what she believes to be Jane's halting footsteps at the threshold, but she has mistaken the footfalls of clumsy Johnny for her cash cow. She wonders why Jane has stopped, and for a moment her heart swells with gladness as she thinks that Jane must still love her after all.

As Doris imagines Jane's slender figure and silky hair, Jane lifts the Crowbar, her aim fixed on Doris' head.

But as she swings back her grip loosens and the Crowbar screams a metallic shriek of agony, like a dull table-saw defeated by plywood. 'Don't make me!' it says, and Doris whips around and out of bed in one move, the Shotgun trained on Jane.

Johnny flicks on the light.

Doris' bed is twin-sized. Jane knows she could reach Doris' skull across it. But Jane also knows that the Shotgun is empty. The shells are in her very own pocket. The Shotgun tries to speak.

'Shut up, you,' snaps Doris, her voice made gravel by pipe smoking and dust. 'So, you come to kill the woman that raised you?'

'Yes,' says Jane.

'Seems like you forgot a few details,' says Doris.

'I guess it seems that way,' says Jane.

'Where have you been these days, anyways?' asks Doris.

'Thinking.'

'Don't go making jokes, I was asking a serious question.'

'You can't talk to her like that,' says Johnny from the door.

'This ain't your affair, Johnny. On top of being almost kin, Jane and I have a business arrangement and she's the one as broke the contract,' says Doris, 'making me the wronged party here.' Then to Jane she adds, 'You know I ain't gonna represent you to the best clients anymore after this.'

'Surely, we can come to some peaceable arrangement,' says the Crowbar meekly.

'I never wanted your representation,' Jane says.

'What's all this, now? What happened to "thank you, mama Doris"?' Without me you'd have starved eight or nine times since your folks passed. Your uncle was a smart man having me look out for you.'

'Yeah, well my uncle is not my guardian anymore. Had a wee accident in Omaha this morning. Seems to me that ends any arrangement there was between us two,' says Jane.

Doris slides her bottom lip into the gap where her top right canine used to reside, something she always does when she is turning things around in her mind.

'Alright, then, pay your debt and we're done,' she says.

'I don't owe you anything,' says Jane. These words cut Doris like shards of glass from a broken window.

'I invested food and clothes and shelter and time and ... and love into you. I intend on being repaid,' she says, knowing she's letting too much emotion show through. She grips the Shotgun even tighter to steady herself. 'Now, I've got the gun here, not you. Either you fulfil your contract the way I want and live the rest of your life – what I would prefer – or I can shoot you and get compensation out of whatever organs don't have buckshot in them.'

'Oh, I think the first option sounds jolly,' says the Crowbar in a panic.

'Shut up,' says Johnny from the door.

‘There’s just one problem with your plan, Doris,’ says Jane.

‘What’s that?’

‘Your Shotgun. It’s been trying to tell you something since this conversation started, and I think you ought to listen,’ says Jane.

But Doris doesn’t have to listen. Her eyes widen like a jack rabbit on speed. She knows.

Crowbar: an implement used to pry things open, pull out nails, or bash in windows, skulls.

‘Oh, how could you?’ cries the Crowbar. ‘How could you make me? I told you I was just coming along to bash in the window, and now this! Oh, mercy, there are brains on me – organic matter! This isn’t what I was designed for, this isn’t manual labour, this isn’t what I mean when I think of “demolition”. Oh, I shall be tainted in the eyes of my brethren. Ah, me! Ah, me! Ah, me!’

As the Crowbar melts into chaotic whimpers of self-loathing, Jane sits beside the object that once was Doris, arranging the corpse-woman’s chin-length grey hair around the split in her skull, as if dressing a doll.

Johnny has averted his eyes, and does not look up. ‘Is it done?’

Jane smiles and sighs and stands up with the Crowbar.

‘Alright, let’s get you washed up,’ she says. She pushes past Johnny and into the kitchen, where she scrubs the mewling murderer clean.

Clementine enters the house again. She raises an eyebrow, then shrugs.

‘She should have listened to the gun,’ she says, then flicks her tail disdainfully and stalks off into the night again.

Jane and Johnny sit down to replace their shoes. Jane’s socks have blood on the toes, but she doesn’t notice. As they tie their laces in silence, the Crowbar jabbars.

‘I’ll have to stand trial for this, I say. I’ll tell the jury I had no choice, but will they believe me? No. I warrant there will be not even one appliance of destruction on the jury – not a wrecking ball, or pliers, or bolt cutters. No, I’ll get stuck with construction contraptions:

drills, screwdrivers, nails. Sure I'll have an "impartial" hammer as a judge. But we all know hammers tend more towards construction. It won't be a sledgehammer on the bench, I can tell you that right now. What happened to trial by peers? No constructor could ever understand what it is to be a destructor. How could they – always building things up, always making the world more orderly. And what am I to them but a lowly –'

'That's enough,' says Jane, hefting the Crowbar in her right hand as she and Johnny exit through the side door to avoid the broken glass. They walk to Johnny's car and set out for Texas. From there Mexico. Jane throws the Crowbar in the back of the rusty blue pickup and gets in the passenger seat. The Crowbar lands with a thud beside Johnny's toolbox and is taken into custody immediately, his fate to be decided at dawn. Johnny starts the car and they drive off. Jane sets her hand on his thigh.

Ruskin: a rat with the scent of blood in his nose and an empty belly; happy to pay full price and tip well for any well-prepared meal; currently testing a dish called Doris.

Daybreak: the moment Jane knows she can no longer be bought and sold like a tool; the moment the Crowbar is flung from the truck onto the side of the road, sentence: death by rust; the moment Clementine first tries a new rat recipe; the moment Johnny knows he is a fugitive; the moment this story ends.