

Morbid Heat

Written by

BEA 48 Hour Crew

For the BEA 48 Hour Short Film Challenge

UM BEA Club

ENTER BLACK

SLICE. SLICE. SLICE.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

A knife goes through a RED PEPPER.

The pepper is deseeded into a bowl.

The pepper slices are put into a food dish. Muffled sounds are heard in the background.

The knife is being cleaned. Rack focus to a TIED UP MAN in the background, with tape over their mouth, squirming.

The tied-up man's eyes move back and forth rapidly.

TABITHA (V.O.)

Eyes. He always starts with their eyes.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

TABITHA, mid-twenties, walks with a purposeful stride through the forest, recording a voice memo on her phone.

TABITHA (CONT'D)

The Carolina Reaper was the most notorious serial killer the South had ever seen.

INT. ??? - NIGHT

THE CAROLINA REAPER'S fingers are coated in residue from the red peppers.

The Carolina Reaper sticks his fingers into the tied-up man's eyes. The tied-up man screams.

TABITHA (V.O.)

The reaper's signature method of torture was by sticking his fingers...

Close-up on a RED PEPPER.

TABITHA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...that are coated with red pepper...

Close-up on the tied-up man squirming from being blinded.

TABITHA (V.O) (CONT'D)
 ...and gouging their eyes out with a
 hellish heat.

Continued close-up on victim screaming.

All his victims were tied up with
 lacerations and were bleeding out from
 their wrists.

We see the victim tied up, bleeding from their wrists, with
 lacerations on their arms.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

TABITHA (CONT'D)
 And for the reaper's finishing
 touch...

INT. ??? - DAY

We see the back of their head being covered by a trash bag.

TABITHA (CONT'D)
 Strangulation. He puts the trash bag
 over their head 'til their final
 breath.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

TABITHA (CONT'D)
 Morbid, but not the worst that I've
 covered.

Tabitha strolls through the woods.

TABITHA (CONT'D)
 It's been five years and radio
 silence. No murders, no bodies, no
 noth--

She stops. Stunned. She drops the phone.

The phone drops. In the background we focus on a body on the
 ground. There's a bag over its head.

Tabitha is locked in her stance, shaking nervously. She takes
 the bag off of the body's head.

Her confidence is depleting. Her hand rises to her mouth. She
 rushes to a nearby bush and begins to throw up.

We see a closer shot of the body.

Back to Tabitha. She's a mess. Shaking. She is phased.

TABITHA (V.O) (CONT'D)
And that's why nothing phases me,
y'all.

CUT TO:

INT. PODCAST ROOM - DAY

Tabitha is speaking into a microphone. Her confidence is back. We've flown back to the past.

TABITHA (CONT'D)
You can show me a picture of a rotting
corpse with no eyes and mushrooms
coming through its nose, and you still
not gonna get me! Thank you again,
guys, for that 100K subscriber goal we
reached yesterday for the "Tabitha's
Eye" podcast! Don't feel skittish
about sharing it with your friends to
get some more attention—speaking of
which, let's move to our next caller.
What, dear caller, is your favorite
serial killer?

Audio connects to an outside call. Tabitha listens in, taking a drink. Nothing is being heard. She begins to become eager.

TABITHA (CONT'D)
Hello?

We hear audio crunches. It's almost inaudible.

TABITHA (CONT'D)
Listen, if you don't say nothing I'm
gonna--

CALLER (V.O.)
Hello? Hey, sorry.

TABITHA
You sound weird there. Is that AI?

CALLER (V.O.)
(forcing a laugh)
No, pretty sure I'm as human as ever.
Ha!

TABITHA
 (awkward)
 Um. Okay. Well...wanna talk about your
 favorite killer?

CALLER (V.O.)
 Oh! Yes.

TABITHA
 ...well?

CALLER (V.O.)
 Sorry.

The audio gets crunchy again.

CALLER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Ever heard of the Carolina Reaper?

TABITHA
 Yeah! We've covered him before plenty
 of times—all the victims come from my
 home state. Why is he your fav?

CALLER (V.O.)
 'Cause I know who he is.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

Tabitha downing some vodka in her car. She puts it aside.
 Takes rapid breaths and slowly begins to wind down.

TABITHA
 It's okay. It's okay. It's okay.
 (she slowly calms down)
 You got this. You got this. You got
 this.
 (she finds her confidence)
 You don't need them. You can do this.
You do not need them.

Her breathing begins to build again. She quickly takes out
 her phone and types in "911," but someone begins to call her
 before she can commit. It's "UNKNOWN."

She hesitates, then accepts.

TABITHA (CONT'D)
 Who is this?

CALLER (V.O.)
 Sorry. I got, uh, a new number.

TABITHA
 Who IS this?

CALLER
 We actually went to school together.
 It's James Henry. I meant to tell you
 the other day on your show. I don't
 know if you remember me...

TABITHA
 Oh. H-hey... How have you...

JAMES HENRY
 I was the caller that gave you the tip
 the other day. About the Carolina
 Reaper.

TABITHA
 Yeah, that was a, um, a good tip.

JAMES HENRY
 Well, I actually have another one. If
 you're in town, we can talk over, um,
 over dinner—if you want, of course...

Tabitha contemplates.

JAMES HENRY
 ...unless you'd rather it go to the
 authorities.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET MURAL - DUSK

Decorated mural. Tabitha and James are standing up against
 it, on one side of the shot.

They're opening their takeout food.

JAMES HENRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 He's a super weird guy.

James' food is spicy. Has a familiar look.

JAMES HENRY (CONT'D)
 Thought he was just a reclusive guy,
 you know? Never talkative. Kinda

creepy, until I noticed how many trash bags he used—something I learned from your podcast, actually.

TABITHA

Flattered, but what makes you think it's the Carolina Reaper?

JAMES HENRY

Well, that's the thing—
 (Swallows the food in his mouth)
 —You can always tell with some people.

Steam emanates from the spicy food off of James Henry's plate.

Tabitha eyes the steam.

TABITHA

I think I know what you mean.
 (beat)
 Where is this place again?

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - DUSK

Tabitha is driving.

She parks.

She makes a note in her phone.

"His food had red peppers."

BANG BANG

Tabitha jumps in her seat.

She looks up to see James Henry banging the hood of the car, smiling. He waves for her to get out and follow him.

She swallows. And exits her car.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

We see the back of James' head.

We see her tracking him, watching him. Analyzing him.

She preps the call "911" into her phone.

Her eye moves up. She's watching.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

JAMES HENRY

Sure you don't mind going onto private property?

TABITHA

No, I...

She sees the area. The contraptions. The tools. The bloody bandages.

Tabitha is taken aback. She's still on edge, focused.

He turns around. The faintest smile on his face. He looks calm in this bizarre circumstance.

She sees his smile and then she looks down.

BLACK AND WHITE. We see a red pepper stem on the ground, surrounded by seeds.

She looks disturbed. This confirms it for her.

He seems concerned now.

FADE TO:

Black.

PODCASTER

Welcome back, everyone, to "The Perfect Murder," the podcast where we go into serial killers and their supposed "perfect murder."

CUT TO:

INT. PODCAST ROOM - DAY

In COLOR.

PODCASTER (CONT'D)

Today, we talk about South Carolina's most notorious killer: the Carolina Reaper, i.e., Tabitha Stein. Being discovered on the property of James Henry, her last victim.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Tabitha's eyes. We pull out and see her cutting a red pepper.

PODCASTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The eyes. She always started with the
eyes.

James Henry puts peppers into a dish.

PODCASTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Stein's nickname was no coincidence.

Tabitha puts on gloves.

PODCASTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
She had a signature style of torture
she was known for.

James Henry rubs his hands in the seeds.

PODCASTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Sticking her fingers, coated with red
peppers.

Tabitha forces her hands into the victim's eyes. He's
screaming. She's unphased.

PODCASTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And her finishing touch.

James Henry puts the bag over his head.

PODCASTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Lacerations followed by strangulation.

Tabitha gives a faint smile.

James Henry hesitates.

CUT TO:

INT. PODCAST ROOM - DAY

The podcaster looks straight into the camera.

PODCASTER (CONT'D)
Morbid, but not the worst that I've
covered.

CUT TO:

Black.