

Last Meal: A Murder Anthology

I absolutely love your premise. The opening scene with the detectives' interview is great. With some tweaks to make it sound more like a seasoned cop is speaking, it will add to the seriousness and realism of the article.

I love that Heinous Abe is writing stories told by others, with some creative liberties. Heinous Abe's part is well written. It shows you took a LOT of time for the article and his part at the beginning.

Because of this, I was hooked from the beginning.

Chicken Pot Pie, Pot Roast, Mashed Potatoes, and Butter Pecan Ice Cream

I love the premise of the story. New couple into the neighborhood. Creepy, weird old neighbors. So, let's get into it.

There are many notes throughout the story you can read to get a good idea of the "this is great" and the "this isn't quite working".

Leading up to the first story, I was excited. It was well written and thought out, as well as intriguing! Then we get to the first story, and unfortunately, it reads like a completely different person wrote it. It doesn't sound like the same writer of the intro, nor does it sound like Abe telling a story. While writing you want to keep the same voice. After all, Abe is writing this story. Even with creative liberties, it should still sound like he's the one telling it.

I found it difficult to like and connect with any of the characters, except Lisa. The other characters seem quick to anger or irrational thought. Blair jumps right to reaction, and she reads as a 14-year-old girl with how she speaks and acts even though she's supposed to be married and moving into a new beautiful house, in a nice neighborhood. She can totally be nosy, and that's a great trait for this character. However, with the lack of exposition, it seems like she's doing everything without thinking about it and jumping to conclusions without any reasoning what-so-ever.

- There is a point where Blair mentions she's worked with old people, showing she's likely had experience as a nurse, care giver, etc. yet, she overreacts when recounting the first meeting with the old lady? If she's told that the old woman has dementia, she wouldn't react like she didn't know anything about what it does to someone at all. Then later, she does it again when she's spying with the drone. She sees old lady cooking and balancing a check book, then immediately goes to anger and "FAKER!" Most people who have a basic understanding about dementia or Alzheimer's, knows they have moments of clarity. Her first thought should be like "Oh, it must be a good day for her." (not this literally. But the feeling) and then when she sees the husband acting like the hulk without a cane, THEN she should be like, omg... "he's faking it. omg is she faking it?" It makes her seem a little more rational in her irrational obsession.
- We are lacking an explanation for Blair mentally falling apart while not having work even though her husband is Okay with it. I don't know if you're trying to establish her growing obsession with the neighbors with the stress of losing the job, but the way it's written, she's going nuts for no real reason of any kind.
- Is husband always quick to exploding? Other than the first chapter, he reads that he just thinks she's crazy all the time and shows no understanding at all.

- Other than the convo with Gwen and the bartender, all the conversations read like they are fighting, yelling, angry, etc. The dialogue could be much stronger if there was a mixture of emotional, or jovial or comedic conversations mixed in.

I liked Lisa's pov and think you should keep it. Maybe even add a little to it.

Timeline: What is the timeline? I was very confused. Were the old folks killing people before Blair moved in? Or did they start after? Are they killing over months? Or just the two weeks?

Victims: After reading, I don't think you need the end of chapter victim pov's. It causes confusion, and the nature of the victims wouldn't make sense unless these old folks killed all of them within a week or two.

- The meals on wheels victim: it would be obvious their car would be there for a long time. And with that, if the food had been sitting there for weeks, Blair would have seen it while she was snooping the first day. If she is able to see into the house and see boxes, she's likely to be able to spot the rotting food and flies swarming the front door.
- The home care givers: It would have to be 4 within like a week or two for no one to catch on right away, because if they don't show up, or the old people request a new giver, they will call the old one and see what's up. I could see maybe like 1 or 2 givers, but not 4. You can suspend belief, but these 5 deaths are a bit much just because they would be missed soooo quickly.

Driveway: There is a little discrepancy about the length of it. It's silly, but hear me out. you mention that Blair can see everything from her front yard. Lisa gets dropped off at the road. But the meals on wheels lady says she drives up a long driveway. Etc. Maybe revisit.

I am a little confused as to why they would kill their daughter. It seems a little out in left field. Or that maybe it happens so fast? There's just something off about the way it's laid out that makes it hard to believe.

One last thing. I think a lot of this could be helped/fixed/aided with some exposition. To help build what's happening. There was almost none, which made it harder to understand a lot of what was actually happening.

The first 6 chapters are very short then you have chapter 7 which is almost the same length as the first 6 together. they don't need to be the same length, but they should be in the realm. I think you can really elevate those chapters with the exposition and drop the victims pov, Then, revisit the 7th chapter, possibly splitting it into two parts. OR! Condensing some of the others. (also with doing this, you realize exactly how many people they killed, not just the one Blair and Lisa see.) Maybe even mention Blair seeing the meals on wheels truck one day only for it to disappear or something (again, just trying to find reasons for her to become more curious about the neighbors). As it stands right now, it's hard to see a real reason for her to become obsessed.

You wrote a good short story; I could see it all in my head as I read. However, unlike movies, in books we can't see certain things, and that's where the exposition comes in handy!

One Stuffed Crust Meat Lovers Pizza, One Double Whopper Combo Meal with Cheese, 3 Piece Chicken Tenders and Jojos, A ½ Sheet Cake Covered with Little Debbie's Oatmeal Cream Pies-All Covered in Gravy

Because of the nature of this story, I would highly suggest changing the show to a different name and say its similar to 600lb life. Like the goodyear comment, tlc could pursue legal action. Especially if any info (the now “they do mental evals before. During. After”) isn’t true. It can still be on TLC. But you could say she loves Dr. Now in 600lb and wished her doctor on the knock off show was like that. That way you can still use the silly things he says. In stories like this it can be tricky. But can even add to it by making troll comments like "600lb life didnt even want her. She had to go on the knock off show". If that makes sense.

Think about the rage this woman has for mark.

There are many places that can be condensed to get the point across and word count down. Out of the first 4 stories, this one is double the word count (17k+). It’s an intriguing story premise. How much is too much? People can only be pushed so far emotionally. It plays into self-esteem and how media really adds to that self-hatred. It’s an important topic.

She does mention she’s proud of herself but is easily dissuaded from that. With that being said, due to the lack of any positive reinforcement at the beginning, the story reads fat phobic. As someone with weight issues myself, while reading this it was a little hard at times, not because of the things said, but that there seem to be almost no reprieve from the fat shaming. Mammy loves her and is proud of her. But outside of that, not one person seemed to comment “congrats!”? This would be a huge additive to her character. If she sees positive comments but chooses to ignore them in favor of the bad comments to reinforce her own self-hate (because of her ex), then this is 100% on her. Then we see its not a fat phobic story, it’s a story about someone that is looking for a reason to hate themselves.

The TV wrestling scenes could be condensed. As a reader, we aren’t as interested about the details with the fight on the tv, so much as we more about how she perceives it.

Raw Fish

The pacing of the first half is a little slow and most of it can be condensed and relayed to the reader during our journey with the Doctor. When readers are given a lot of information that causes them to lose interest, they might start skimming while they read, and we don’t want this to happen. If the goal is to show their relationship building before it gets to the tub scene, there isn’t enough leading up to that moment, or that much after, to feel like it was a complete story.

The intro that tells me this story and the “why” might soften hearts. Unfortunately, that wasn’t really conveyed. Yes, we find out what happened to him as a kid. And it’s freaking terrible (good job), however, he kills and eats people. There needs to be more of a reason other than his childhood trauma for someone to feel empathy for him. That is where his time with Dr. Wright is so important, and the things she is trying to do for him.

The character of Rufus is great. I enjoyed his progress, and he was interesting.

Dr. Wright, like the FMC in your previous stories, comes off a little like a teenager as opposed to an adult female with life experience, and a doctorate. The way she reacts/interacts with Rufus at the end

of the story feels unprofessional and kind of and diminishes her as a character. She can feel a sense of sorrow for him, and she should with the story you're telling, but as a professional, she would never say something like "wonderful man", to a serial killer, nor cry for him in front of him. Especially since it seems they've only known each other a few weeks.

A Lukewarm Hungry Man Dinner and a Taco Bell Five Dollar Chalupa Box with a Side of Cinnamon Twist

As a reader and editor of sorts, I liked this story way more than the previous 3. There was wit (as I mention in the comments). The main MMC for the most was interesting to follow. It did get a little lost in the middle. I would have rather seen the impact these decisions were making on Dave, over the recounting of every murder they committed. The characters were likeable, even as they killed people. It was plain to see that Dave was just at his end basically. He was done and didn't care anymore. But I would have loved to have seen if it changed anything for him, before they got caught of course.

Nothing

Overall: This was an interesting read. I was trying to figure out how you got from chapter 1 to chapter 2. There wasn't much that happened in 1 that would really got me to believe in chapter two, especially for how much information its missing to make me feel that its all warranted.

Readers may find it difficult to feel anything for this woman and her situation just because things are happening that aren't connecting, or people are just acting without any thought. Even if that thought is a bit out of this world. The husband has an understandable frustration in the beginning but then immediately flies off the handle. The beginning of the next chapter starts with his wife suddenly in possession of a baby doll and he rings up the doctor and calls her crazy (this could read like he's overreacting a lot because of all the exclamation marks). It's too much too fast. We are lacking a sense of the scenes, the emotional build up, the tension, and then the conflict that arises from it have almost no build up.

I can totally see her breaking after that many miscarriages and not having the support of her partner. I can see her getting into hospital as she did. I did have a hard time believing she would run a car off the road that had kids in it, when she was so worried about the children's safety. Overall I think you did well at the story actions.

Bacon-Wrapped Filet Mignon (On a Lenten Friday)

-I loved the premise of this story, 100%. (I did read the next part saying that it got away from him because he was under the influence.) With that being known, I will say this. It can totally work if the first half of this story is strong and believable. ---

The pacing is mostly slow overall.

-It bounces back and forth between story telling and journalism/retelling.

-Most of the story line was upsetting - A seasoned exorcist, that is used to investigating and dealing with possessions and fakes, took way too long to actually investigate, including talking to the siblings.

And made the worst decisions possible, especially at the end.

-There is a moment you mention that the exorcist had priests talking too much, and wanted to spare us that, however, there are many unimportant conversations happening.

-You almost had me believing at one point that Turney was going to be the killer of this story, and Keith was just the catalyst (because he starts acting a little crazy). Accidentally killing Keith or the other priest when he drugs him. I'm not sure if that is good or not. Jury's still out on that. (but I did like it in the way it made me think more)

-Accuracy is very important and therefore research. There may have been a little, but I questioned a lot within this story. I've been researching the church myself for a novel I'm writing, and much of this confused me because of it.

-The Epilogue is way too long compared to your others, and has more story related stuff, over just Heinous Abe just letting us know what happened after the arrest. There needs to be a decision made for continuity throughout the stories. (this was before I read the next part. But I still feel the same. At least with the length of it)

Egg White & Avocado Toast

FMC was believable. I liked this story. I was a little confused as to why she kept meeting up and getting it on with abusive dude. I get her reasoning, but I wasn't entirely convinced that this character would have based on everything else. Though I love the mind games she plays. It was a little too easy to talk him into crashing into the wall, but other than that, I could totally see this happening. She was a real psycho, what I wanted to read within this anthology. I love that she gets so overwhelmed and messes up, which basically blows her whole cover. Her naming her dog after Keisha is wild! Good job!

I did have a problem with the charges. Most places would charge her with assisted suicide and/or causing a homicide. Its still a touchy subject within the courts, they still don't know what exactly to charge it as, because they still see it as a persons own choice. Etc. blah blah.

Overall, I think this is your strongest story as it sits right now. It needs some TLC, but the pacing was good. The point a to b to c was good.

Fried Fish Sandwich, Cajun Fries, Collard Greens, and Cornbread

This was interesting. I liked the transcription of the story. I am not sure I've seen that within an anthology or novel. It was like watching an episode of 48 hours or something (my favorite show). I didn't have many notes on this one because of the way it was written, but to be honest, I thought It flowed well. I'm not sure how your future readers will react to it, but for now, I would have it in your next draft.

One thing I will mention, there may be an issue with the use of all these famous people's names. I know you can use them, but they could have an issue with it if someone brings it to their attention. So, just be aware of that. Mostly just because of the context of the story. I may just be paranoid.

An Elevated Brake Made of Ramen Noodles, Cold Cuts, Sriracha mixed with Ketchup, Sweet Pickles and Cool Ranch Doritos

I'm not sure this story is a great fit for the anthology as a whole. It doesn't feel cohesive and doesn't add enough to warrant trying to spend the time to polish it. It may be beneficial to your word count to lose this so that you can add to some of the stories that need it. More so, the ending of the book.

Requested: A Medium Rare T-Bone Steak, Roasted Garlic and Asparagus, Red Skinned Mashed Potatoes, and a Glass of Red Wine. Received: Vienna Sausages, Instant Mashed Potatoes with Lukewarm Unseasoned Peas, and a Glass of Red Hawaiian Punch

Ok, I really liked the premise of this one. This would make a GREAT psychological thriller. I do have a tiny bit of an issue with how Suzanne is acting, especially because she is the reason for Tamika being there. She would want her to stay as long as she could just to finish what she started. Even if it's just to toy with her. There's actually a lot of good stuff in here between the characters, I just would have liked to have it drawn out a little, really add to that tension and surprise at the end.

I am curious though, if Abe had to do some digging to find it, how did he even know it existed? Did he look up Suzanne intentionally? I was very confused about that.

THE END

The ending leaves me feeling empty. It doesn't sound like the person who wrote the start of the book.

I was disappointed that there wasn't a final story, and that it wasn't his. As a reader, that is one thing I would want to know about after everything.

We learn a little about his final product in the beginning, and closing the story with his would have made sense.

Like a twist almost, you don't know that it's his story til later in it. Because I can tell you, I remember the name "Henious Abe" but not his actual name at the beginning that he was trying to come back to. This is just a suggestion.

I'm so proud of you for writing a complete novel! I can not wait to see what you do with it! Congratulations.