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Ed Chambers would do anything for his wife Marguerite.
The couple who lived in the city of Grand Rapids, Michigan, were a team.
Together they had provided a safe and loving home for four children and built successful careers.
But in 1972, Ed noticed a change in Marguerite's personality.
His highly intelligent and quick-witted wife became forgetful and confused.
After seeking medical advice, the couple received devastating news.
At 42 years old, Marguerite had Alzheimer's disease, an incurable type of dementia that destroys memory and thinking skills.
Over the following years, Marguerite became frail and was unable to carry out the simplest of everyday tasks.
Ed took an early retirement to help his wife, but by the early 1980s, he accepted that Marguerite needed round-the-clock care by professionals.
Live-in care facilities around Grand Rapids at that time were few and far between, so Marguerite's name was added to a long list of applicants.
After a two-year wait, a bed became available at Alpine Manor.
Situated on the outskirts of Grand Rapids and backing onto a densely wooded area, the 208-bed nursing home was only three blocks from the chamber's house.
This meant Ed could visit Marguerite as often as he wanted. He couldn't believe his luck.
When Ed Chambers approached the single-story brick facility, he was greeted by the director of nursing who gave him a tour.
Alpine Manor was divided into four wings. Each wing had its own nursing station.
The facility was very clean and the staff were polite and well-presented.
In a common area, residents sat together chatting and playing games.
Ed had anticipated that the nursing home would be sterile and cold, so he was delighted to see that the floors were carpeted, curtains hung from the windows, and artwork lined the walls.
Residents could visit a beauty shop and there was a designated dining room for meals.
There were even craft activities and social studies classes on offer.
Although Ed felt immense guilt at having to move Marguerite into Alpine Manor, its homely atmosphere helped ease some of the pain.
The director of nursing reassured Ed, telling him that Alpine Manor had been assessed by the

Michigan Health Department as a standout nursing home facility.

By the mid-1980s, Marguerite Chambers could no longer walk or talk. She spent all day in bed, often curled in a ball and rocking back and forth.

Ed still visited her every day.

The minute Marguerite heard his voice, she stopped rocking and reached her hand up for him to take.

He sat beside her holding her hand and talking to her.

Occasionally, she would make eye contact.

Ed knew that she still recognized him.

Each night, Ed talked Marguerite into bed and left her to the care of the staff at Alpine Manor.

At the age of 17, Marguerite was able to work as a nursing assistant in high school and enjoyed helping people.

At the age of 17, Marguerite's career was put on hold when she became pregnant.

Now that her daughter was at school, she was able to work as a nursing assistant in high school.

At the age of 17, Marguerite was able to work as a nursing assistant in high school and enjoyed helping people.

At the age of 17, Marguerite's career was put on hold when she became pregnant.

Now that her daughter was at school, Marguerite was eager to rekindle her passion for nursing.

A nursing home a few blocks away was hiring. Alpine Manor.

She started as a nursing aide and started immediately.

Some residents only needed minor help such as assistance with getting dressed or showering.

Others were high needs residents who required help with daily living such as eating and drinking, bathing and turning in bed to prevent pressure sores.

Before long, Cathy came to know every resident and their specific needs.

She was a hard worker, intelligent and easy to talk to.

Before long, she became a valued member of Alpine Manor's staff.

Being a night owl, Cathy gravitated towards the night shift.

It was less busy than day shifts and gave her more time to socialise with her co-workers.

Nursing aides joked that Cathy was like one of the cool kids at high school because her colleagues followed her around, hanging off every word she said.

Cathy Wood wasn't used to the attention.

She had struggled with her weight her entire life, reaching almost 450 pounds after the birth of her daughter.

As a result, she spent most of her married life indoors, fearful of the judgement of strangers.

But at Alpine Manor, Cathy was showered with compliments.

She began taking double shifts just to spend more time with her colleagues.

Over the following months, Cathy's husband Ken watched as she changed before his eyes.

Most of Cathy's days off were spent socialising with Alpine Manor staff.

She never used to drink alcohol, but returned home from these get-togethers drunk and high on cannabis.

The once dedicated stay-at-home wife and mother now had a little interest in spending time with her daughter and fought with Ken often.

When they weren't fighting, Cathy told Ken all the work gossip.

Love triangles among the nursing aides were common, as were drunken threesomes and altercations

between love rivals.

Fighting among staff members often occurred at work, while residents listened on, unable to extricate themselves from the toxic environment.

As Cathy pumped Ken full of staff secrets, he often thought to himself, What the hell is going on at Alpine Manor?

In September 1986, less than six months after Cathy Wood started working at Alpine Manor, she told Ken that she had fallen in love with someone else, an 18-year-old fellow nursing aide named Dawn.

After seven years of marriage, Cathy wanted a divorce.

Ken believed she was going through a phase and would return to him.

In the meantime, he took their daughter to live in a hotel, while Cathy remained in their family home.

Without Ken at home, Cathy needed help paying the bills.

A staff member introduced her to a new nurse's aide at Alpine Manor, 22-year-old Gwendolyn Graham, who went by the name Gwen.

Gwen had no previous experience in nursing, but had taken on the role as a stepping stone to become a paramedic.

Alpine Manor was chronically understaffed, so, like Cathy, Gwen had been hired on the spot.

Cathy and Gwen hit it off immediately.

Having recently broken up with her girlfriend, Gwen was looking for a place to stay and jumped at the chance to move in with Cathy.

Within a week of Gwen moving in, Cathy had broken up with Dawn and she and Gwen began dating.

Alpine Manor's nursing staff were amused at the couple's appearance.

Gwen was athletically built, weighing 140 pounds and was 5'2 with freckles and a ginger mullet.

Cathy was 6' tall with a large frame, blue eyes and bleached blonde hair.

The staff joked that the pair completed each other.

Cathy provided the brains in the relationship, while Gwen provided the brawn.

Cathy and Gwen bonded over their troubled upbringings.

Cathy's father had been a strict disciplinarian, often resorting to physical violence.

Her mother took a back seat and left the care of her other children to Cathy, who was responsible for making sure they were looked after.

Gwen had been the victim of child sexual abuse at the hands of her own father.

She self-harmed in her teens, describing it as a way of freeing herself from the pain of her childhood.

Both Cathy and Gwen knew they were carrying a lot of emotional baggage.

There was also something else they harboured, hatred for their elderly parents.

Deaths at Alpine Manor were common.

On average, 5 to 10 residents passed each month from conditions relating to old age.

Flu seasons saw the death toll climb even higher.

It wasn't long after Gwen Graham started that she witnessed her first death.

An elderly woman named Helen, who died from pneumonia.

Gwen appeared devastated at the loss.

But after Helen had been transported to the funeral home, the tears stopped.

Gwen told her colleagues,

I couldn't stand Helen. I couldn't stand that woman. All she did was whine all the time.

[Transcript] Casefile True Crime / 304: Case 260: The Alpine Manor Murders

About a month after Gwen started working at Alpine Manor, another new nursing aide was on the night shift when a resident pressed the call button next to their bed.

The room was occupied by two residents, so the nursing aide entered quietly and in the dark.

As she approached the bedside, the aide could see that the resident was sound asleep.

As she searched for the call button to see how it had been pressed on its own, the aide felt a tight grip around her ankle.

She fled the room screaming, waking Alpine Manor's residents.

Moments later, Gwen Graham emerged from underneath the resident's bed, laughing hysterically, while other aides comforted the frightened residents.

Gwen played practical jokes on her fellow staff almost every night at the expense of the residents of Alpine Manor.

When coming on shift, Gwen would turn their beds around so the bottom of the bed was where the headboard should have been.

When this got old, she moved residents into different rooms to surprise and confuse nursing aides.

Gwen pulled all the wire screens from the windows that backed onto the courtyard so she could make a hasty retreat if the charge nurse was coming.

She also hid in the courtyard at night to bang on the windows and scare staff. It also terrified the residents.

Nighthouse supervisor Tish Prescott was sick of the shenanigans. She knew a lot of the trouble stamped from Kathy Wood and Gwen Graham.

They used the PA system to gossip about other staff and had residents with speech impediments read announcements just to laugh at them.

Tish had tried to separate the women, but they swapped shifts with other aides so they could remain working together.

Tish had resorted to sneaking up on the pair to keep her eye on them. She often found them alone in residents' rooms.

Tish had also heard reports of nursing aides sneaking off to spend time together in unoccupied beds.

Rumors circulated that Gwen Graham had sex with an orderly in one of the residents' rooms.

Tish took her concerns about Kathy Wood and Gwen Graham to the director of nursing, saying, Those two were just no good for each other.

She pleaded for something to be done, explaining that resident care was suffering as a result.

Upper management declared that they weren't in a position to step in. Whatever the staff chose to do on their breaks was out of their control.

One night, Gwen Graham came to work so drunk that she couldn't walk in a straight line.

Tish Prescott sent her home and reported Gwen to management, expecting she would be fired.

However, Gwen was back on shift the following night.

At 4.30am one morning in December 1986, Nancy Hahn was woken by her telephone ringing.

The caller identified herself as a nurse from Alpine Manor.

She explained that Nancy's mother, Belle Burkhardt, a resident of the facility had declined quickly in health.

Belle wasn't expected to make it through the day.

Nancy lived three hours drive away from Alpine Manor.

She couldn't afford to miss work that day, so after a long, anxious shift, she raced to her ailing mother.

[Transcript] Casefile True Crime / 304: Case 260: The Alpine Manor Murders

She hoped and prayed that she'd still be alive to say her goodbyes.

Nancy arrived at Alpine Manor and rushed to Belle's room.

Her bed was empty.

Nancy inquired at the nursing station.

None of the nurses knew where Belle Burkhardt was.

They appeared bemused when Nancy told them she had received a phone call in the early hours from a nurse telling her that her mother was about to pass away.

Belle Burkhardt was discovered sitting at a dining room table, alive and like her normal self.

Nancy fed her dinner and then stopped to talk to the charge nurse who checked the record.

Nobody had logged a call to Nancy.

Furthermore, there were no staff notes indicating concerns for her mother's health.

It became clear that Nancy had been the victim of a cruel hoax call from the night shift.

The charge nurse checked who had been working that shift.

One name stood out, Kathy Wood.

At the end of 1986, an anonymous complaint was made to the Michigan Health Department regarding the level of care at Alpine Manor.

There were reports of residents sitting in soiled-in-continent aides for hours and only being bathed once a week.

Staff turnover was cited as the main reason for the lack of care.

112 nurses aides had been hired during that year. By October, 71 had left.

To quell public concern, Alpine Manor was subject to an unannounced visit from a health inspector.

A lot had changed in recent years.

One staff member described Alpine Manor as having an eerie atmosphere.

Residents were treated like children.

Staff spoke to them in child-like voices and styled the female resident's long hair into pigtails.

The craft room now only contained children's coloring books and a few crayons.

Cartoon pictures and drawings were taped to the walls.

Residents reliant on wheelchairs were pushed together with nothing to keep them occupied.

Meanwhile, a local radio station blasted over the PA system to drown out the screams from residents with dementia.

Following the visit from the health inspector, a report was issued.

It found that Alpine Manor was safely practicing within state guidelines.

No further follow-up was needed.

Despite the ongoing issues caused during their employment, both Kathy Wood and Gwen Graham continued to receive praise from upper management.

They regarded the women as extremely hard workers.

Both often pulled double shifts to make up for understaffing.

On a competency test issued by the state health department, Gwen scored a 97% mark.

On her test sheet, the examiner wrote the word great on every page and drew a big smiley face.

They were particularly impressed with Gwen's use of washcloths.

On her exam paper, Gwen wrote that she rolled them up into log shapes and put them in the palms of residents' clenched hands to stop their fingernails from digging into their skin.

She always carried washcloths with her and could be seen with at least one flapping from the back pocket of her pants at all times.

Kathy and Gwen had a tight friendship circle of fellow nursing aides, but there were a few staff members who saw through their charade.

They regarded Kathy and Gwen as bullies and liars who ruled through intimidation.

Kathy once complained about a fellow aide she didn't like to a superior, saying that the aide wasn't changing incontinence aides overnight.

The charge nurse accompanied Kathy and found a resident lying in a puddle of urine.

Later, it transpired that Kathy had asked Gwen to pour cups of water over the resident's legs to make them soaking wet.

As detailed in the book *Forever and Five Days* by Lowell Corfield, Gwen later said,

Everybody was scared of Kathy. Kathy would fuck with you. That was just her thing, and everybody knew it.

It kind of made me feel good because she was my girl, and as long as she was my girl, nobody was going to fuck with me.

One morning, a nursing aide was working with Kathy to dress a particularly difficult resident.

All day, he screamed and yelled, yet whenever he saw Kathy would, he quietened straight away.

Nurses had previously joked about Kathy's ability to silence the man.

On this occasion, the nursing aide asked Kathy how she managed to quiet him.

Just watch, Kathy said.

She proceeded to whisper something into the man's ear. Within seconds, he became fearful and silent.

The aide asked Kathy what she had said. With a smile, she replied,

I said, Go ahead, scream one more time. But look at me, I'm bigger than you. I'm huge, in fact.

You are helpless. I am not. You scream one more time, and I will kill you, and there will be nothing you can do to stop me.

The aide considered reporting Kathy Wood's remark to management, but she was too frightened of the fallout from Kathy and Gwen, and chose to keep it to herself.

Nights later, a nursing aide named Ladonna was working the night shift when she answered the call button of 87-year-old Clara Pierce.

Clara had been at Alpine Manor for six years and suffered from dementia. She was still quite lucid and could hold conversations with the staff.

As soon as Ladonna entered her room, Clara screamed, They're gonna kill me. They whisper to me that they are going to kill me.

Clara had recently been found wandering the halls at night, so the doctor had ordered that her wrists be tied to the bed while she was sleeping.

Ladonna released Clara and escorted her to the bathroom and back to bed.

As Ladonna reapplied Clara's restraints, she begged not to be tied up, yelling, You don't understand. They're coming to kill me.

Ladonna reassured Clara that no one was coming to kill her.

Ladonna turned off the light and left Clara alone, strapped to her bed.

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On Christmas Day 1986, Ed Chambers drove to Alpine Manor to visit his wife, Marguerite.

He was joined by his daughter, Jan, who had some warm clothing to give her ailing mother.

Marguerite's room in Alpine Manor always seemed to be cold and Marguerite often kicked off her bedsheets with her rocking movements.

Upon arriving at Alpine Manor, Jan noticed dried food caked around her mother's mouth, indicating that she hadn't been cleaned since her last meal.

Jan found a washcloth and dampened it.

When she went to wipe her mother's face with it, Marguerite jumped.

She turned her head from side to side, refusing to have her mouth cleaned.

Marguerite's Alzheimer's prevented her from speaking, so Jan couldn't ask her what was wrong.

But when she looked into her mother's eyes, she saw something she would never forget.

Absolute terror.

During the week prior, Marguerite Chambers had been looked after by two nurses more than any others.

Kathy Wood and Gwen Graham.

Post Christmas, Marguerite was not herself.

She was feverish and appeared to have gone downhill physically.

Nobody could pinpoint why.

A little under a month later, on Sunday, Jan 18, 1987, Ed Chambers returned to Alpine Manor.

Marguerite made rocking movements in bed as Ed held her hand and talked to her for an hour.

At 8pm, he said good night and left.

30 minutes later, a nursing aide found Marguerite Chambers unresponsive in bed.

Efforts to revive her failed and Marguerite was pronounced dead.

She was 60 years old.

One by one, nursing staff went into Marguerite's room to pay their respects.

Among them were Kathy Wood and Gwen Graham.

As per protocol following a death at Alpine Manor, the charge nurse phoned the facility's uncle, Doctor.

It was a Sunday night and he didn't want to drive through the heavy snow to examine Marguerite's body in person.

Instead, he ordered her to be transferred to the mortuary over the phone.

The following day, the doctor signed Marguerite's death certificate without having seen her body.

Under the cause of death, he wrote, heart attack.

Three weeks later, on the morning of Tuesday, February 3, a registered nurse began her shift at Alpine Manor.

She soon noticed that a 95-year-old resident named Myrtle Loose had blood dripping from her nose.

The nurse applied a compress and made a note of the incident but didn't think any more about it.

A series of strokes and organic brain syndrome had robbed Myrtle of her normal functions.

Although she was somewhat aware of what was going on around her, she could no longer walk or talk.

Myrtle spent the majority of her time curled up in bed in the fetal position.

The only time Myrtle seemed to know what was going on around her was when her son came to visit.

When she saw him, Myrtle changed instantly. She smiled and padded his face.

Because of her high-care needs, Kathy Wood openly complained to her colleagues that she didn't like Myrtle Loose.

She found her too difficult to take care of.

A week after Myrtle was treated for her unexplained bloody nose, a nurse aide found her deceased in bed.

This time, her nose was covered in mucus and looked bruised.

On the mattress beside Myrtle's body was a rolled-up washcloth.

Myrtle's body was sent directly to the mortuary by the Alpine Manor doctor without examination, as in the case of Marguerite chambers.

And like that incident, the doctor listed Myrtle's cause of death as heart attack.

Myrtle's loved ones were surprised by the news of her sudden death.

She had undergone a physical exam just days earlier, during which the doctor had described her heart health as impeccable.

Following Myrtle's funeral, her family panned a card to the Alpine Manor staff to thank them for the care and compassion they had shown Myrtle while she was alive.

It was pinned to the staff bulletin board.

Days later, Kathy Wood and Gwen Graham invited Kathy's ex-girlfriend Dawn over to their place.

As they sat in the living room drinking, Gwen casually mentioned that she had been responsible for Myrtle's death.

Gwen asked Dawn if she wanted to see proof.

Dawn followed Gwen and Kathy into the bedroom.

On a shelf lay a single sock.

This belonged to her, Gwen said.

Dawn was well aware of the twisted pranks and mind games the couple often played.

She passed off the comment as a sick joke.

Kathy was known to steal from the residents of Alpine Manor, once taking a resident's rosary beads to hang from the rearview mirror of her truck.

The more Dawn thought about it, the more she believed that the pair had just stolen a sock, or that it belonged to Kathy.

Dawn told herself, Gwen's just fucking with me.

On the morning of Monday, February 16, 1987, an Alpine Manor nursing aide named Sean peered into the room of 79-year-old resident Mae Mason.

Mae, who had Alzheimer's disease, was awake.

She fidgeted with her hands in bed and seemed agitated.

Sean took a damp washcloth to freshen Mae, wiping it over her face and hands.

But this only heightened Mae's distress.

She kept clutching at the washcloth, not wanting it to touch her skin.

Sean tried to calm Mae, but had to check on other residents.

She rolled Mae from her side onto her back and tucked her in, pulling the covers to her neck.

When she left, Mae was wide awake.

Two hours later, Sean checked on Mae again.

Her skin had turned grey and her fingernails were now blue.

Her pulse was imperceptible, and she was pronounced deceased at 4am.

Sean was devastated and sought support from her colleagues.

Fellow aide Gwen Graham did her best to comfort her.

Mae Mason's cause of death was listed as cardiac arrest by her family physician.

Her death came six days after Myrtle Loose.

The next day, 74-year-old Alpine Manor resident Belle Burkhard was found to have bruising to her face,

particularly around her nose and right cheek.

The injuries were reported to management.

[Transcript] Casefile True Crime / 304: Case 260: The Alpine Manor Murders

As Belle often suffered from seizures, they put the injuries down to an unwitnessed seizure during the night.

It was assumed she must have hit her head on the bed's metal railings.

The nurse assigned to Belle that night was Cathy Wood.

She was never questioned about it, and it wasn't investigated further.

Cathy often complained to other staff about Belle Burkhard's high-care needs.

She didn't like Belle. The feeling was mutual.

Belle made it difficult for Cathy to turn her, often gripping onto bedbars.

Whenever Cathy tried to verbally intimidate her, Belle would just laugh in her face.

At 3am on Thursday, February 26, Cathy volunteered to supervise the nurse's station while the other staff went on break.

Belle Burkhard was found deceased a few hours later.

The nursing aide who found her noticed that Belle's arm was positioned at an odd angle underneath her body.

When Belle's body was bathed for the funeral home, the aide noticed that the same arm was badly bruised.

Nobody knew why.

One of Cathy Wood's nursing friends suggested that the bruising might have been caused from the nursing aide not turning Belle during the night.

The matter was dismissed.

Belle was released to the mortuary without a doctor viewing her body.

The cause of death was listed as a heart attack.

Like Myrtle Looser's family, Belle Burkhard's couldn't believe what had happened.

During a checkup a week prior, the doctor had mentioned her heart was fine.

As the number of sudden deaths in Alpine Manor grew, Cathy Wood, Gwen Graham and their Alpine Manor cohorts became increasingly out of control.

The couple would host wild parties at their home on their days off, during which staff in attendance would run down the street topless.

For no discernible reason, the disorderly group would get into physical fights with each other at pubs and clubs, resulting in serious injuries.

Nursing aide La Donna had two of her teeth knocked out during one inexplicable altercation.

In the book *Forever and Five Days*, La Donna said,

We had all gone crazy. We didn't care for each other's feelings. We didn't have any feelings.

One day, in April 1987, a nursing aide named Catherine snuck through the back door of Alpine Manor and into the director of nursing's office.

With a black eye, her arm in a sling and a cracked rib, Catherine didn't want to be seen by her colleagues as she asked for time off.

Initially brushing off her injuries as the result of an accident, the truth was soon uncovered.

Cathy Wood had lured Catherine to a deserted area on the outskirts of Grand Rapids with the pretense of hooking up.

Other nursing aides were also there, watching in amusement as Gwen Graham confronted Catherine.

She knocked her to the ground, then punched and kicked her repeatedly in the chest and stomach.

Gwen was called into the office and asked if the story was true.

[Transcript] Casefile True Crime / 304: Case 260: The Alpine Manor Murders

Smiling, Gwen explains, I wouldn't do something like that.

She left the office and faced no repercussions.

The incident had staff terrified of Cathy and Gwen, with many refusing to work with them.

Reports continued to flood management about the pair's toxic behavior.

Yet when given a report about Cathy's bullying, the Alpine Manor manager ripped it up and threw it in the bin.

She was friends with Cathy and didn't want her to get into trouble.

Instead, the manager decided to separate Cathy from the aides that were making the allegations against her.

Cathy was called into the manager's office and was given the good news.

She had been promoted.

She was now in charge of nursing aides on her shift.

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Many of Cathy Wood's work friends were thrilled with her promotion.

But there was one who wasn't. Gwen Graham.

She believed she worked harder than Cathy and she should have been the one promoted.

It made things difficult at home.

Cathy and Gwen argued often, with the fights often culminating in violence.

The walls of their house were damaged with holes as a result of punches thrown in fits of anger.

When Cathy learned Gwen had sex with another nursing aide, she became furious, yelling so loudly that her screams were heard from down the street.

When Gwen tried to leave the house, Cathy dragged her back in by her hair and slapped her repeatedly.

She was often seen at work covered in scratches and bruises.

By mid-1987, Gwen had had enough. She moved out of Cathy's home and into a trailer.

Joining Gwen was her new girlfriend, a 21-year-old nursing aide from Alpine Manor named Heather Barrager.

Heather, who had never been in a relationship before, told Gwen she was madly in love with her.

[Transcript] Casefile True Crime / 304: Case 260: The Alpine Manor Murders

Together they hatched a plan.
They would leave Grand Rapids and return to Gwen's hometown in Texas to start over.
Cathy found out and visited Gwen, demanding she return home.
After an argument, Gwen agreed.
Cathy took her to the bedroom where they had sex.
As detailed in Forever and Five Days, as Gwen lay on the bed, Cathy retrieved some restraints she had taken from Alpine Manor.
She tied Gwen's wrists to the bed. Then she walked to the foot of the bed.
In her hands was a loaded gun that belonged to Gwen.
Cathy inserted the gun barrel into Gwen's body, threatening, I'll kill you.
Cathy left Gwen tied up for three hours. When she returned, Cathy removed the gun and untied her.
After a discussion, Cathy agreed it was over between them.
Gwen returned to her girlfriend Heather.
She asked why Gwen dropped everything to please Cathy.
Gwen responded, Cathy has something over me.
Gwen and Heather decided now was the time to act.
In August 1987, they packed their belongings into Gwen's car and fled for Texas.
With nowhere else to turn, Cathy would return to her ex-husband Ken.
She told him she and Gwen had done things she was afraid of.
She wanted to tell Ken, but he had to promise her first that he would keep it secret.
He gave her his word.
After a moment's silence, Cathy said to him,
What's the worst thing you could think of to do to someone?
Ken replied, Murder would be the worst.
Thinking there was no way Cathy would murder someone, he was completely taken aback when she replied.
Well, try six times.
Cathy told Ken about one of the residents they had killed, 97-year-old Edith Cook.
Edith was one of the most popular residents among staff and other residents at Alpine Manor.
She had been there for six years, once telling a social worker that Alpine Manor is grand.
Everything is all very lovely.
She spent her days visiting and chatting to other residents.
But in the months before her death, Edith's health had deteriorated rapidly.
One night, she was found with her legs poking through the metal bars on her bed.
Pressure source developed which turned into painful gangrene.
Edith's condition was deemed to be palliative, meaning that she would not survive.
At 2.30 on the morning of Thursday, April 7, 1987, Edith Cook was found deceased in her bed.
The night nurse assigned to her care was Cathy Wood.
Also working on the wing that night was Gwen Graham.
In an effort to understand what his ex-wife had just confessed,
Ken asked if Cathy and Gwen killed people to end their pain and suffering.
Cathy replied,
No, we did it for fun.
Cathy went on to detail her experiences.

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The idea to murder residents at Alpine Manor arose one day as she and Gwen sat at their dining table doing the morning crossword puzzle. Work had been getting boring and the pair had always wondered what it would be like to kill. They chose 60-year-old Marguerite Chambers to be their first victim. On the night of Sunday, January 18, 1987, after Marguerite's husband left for the night, Cathy said she and Gwen approached her room. Keeping watch by the door, Cathy made sure the coast was clear as Gwen slipped inside. She held two washcloths rolled into log shapes. Cathy claimed that Gwen took one washcloth and positioned it under Marguerite's chin to support her jaw. She placed the other washcloth over Marguerite's nose. Then she squeezed hard. Marguerite thrashed in bed trying to free herself, but Gwen easily overpowered the ailing woman. Marguerite then went limp. Gwen slipped out without drawing attention from anyone else and walked back to her assigned wing. Both she and Cathy were tending to other residents when Marguerite was found deceased less than 30 minutes later. This was not the first time Cathy and Gwen had tried to kill Marguerite. They had attempted the same method a month prior. Cathy explained that it had all gone to plan. They waited for the nursing aide assigned to Marguerite's care to find her dead, but Gwen had only rendered Marguerite unconscious. From this failed experience, Gwen learned she needed to suffocate her victim for a few minutes after they stopped moving. This attempted murder explained why Marguerite chambers had been so terrified of having her face cleaned with a washcloth. Cathy gave a strange explanation as to why they targeted Marguerite chambers first. At Alpine Manor, there was a logbook. Every time a resident passed away, their name was entered into the book with one entry per line. Marguerite started with the letter M. If they could find another five residents to kill with the initials they were looking for, then running down the page, they could spell out the word murder. But their plan was too hard. The residents they needed to make the murder acronym were active and lucid. Instead, the couple chose victims who were non-verbal or suffering advanced dementia. That way, if they survived the suffocation, they would not be able to tell anyone. Even if they did, no one would believe them. Cathy and Gwen pinched residents' noses while they lay in bed to see how they would react to having their air supply cut off suddenly. If one put up too much of a fight, the pair moved on to someone else. This was why some residents were found with unexplained bruising or bloody noses. When it was time to carry out the killings, Gwen used washcloths to prevent any bruising that could raise suspicion.

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According to Cathy, Gwen said she felt more relaxed after killing someone, saying it helped to ease her tension.

Cathy and Gwen believed that sharing the secret of the murders would bind them together forever.

Ken struggled with what to do with the information Cathy had given him.

He wanted to believe it was a fabricated story, but he didn't want to dismiss it entirely.

Over a year passed as Ken agonized over what to do.

During this time, he kept Cathy's confession to himself as she continued to work at Alpine Manor.

On Thursday, October 6, 1988, Ken was driving past the police station when he made a last-minute decision.

He went inside to report Cathy's allegations.

When asked why he had waited so long to come forward, Ken explained,

I didn't want to destroy my life and I didn't want to destroy her life by turning her in, but I felt I should find out if Cathy was dangerous.

I know she can hate with the best of them.

The following day, Cathy Wood was at work when a detective arrived at Alpine Manor.

He found Cathy wandering the hall and told her he was taking her in for questioning.

Cathy didn't act surprised or ask why.

She grabbed her coat and accompanied the detective in silence.

Cathy agreed to be interviewed.

When told that her ex-husband had implicated her and Gwen Graham in the murder of an Alpine Manor resident,

Cathy threw her head back and laughed.

The detective told her he didn't think it was very funny, prompting Cathy to sober up.

Cathy was an open book to detectives.

Although she'd told Ken there were six victims, she told police of five,

Marguerite Chambers, May Mason, Bell Burkhardt, Edith Cork and Myrtle Loose.

There might have been another three that Gwen killed,

but Cathy maintained that she couldn't remember the details or wasn't at work when they were killed.

She described planning the crime spree as, quote, almost exciting in a way.

Cathy recalled the night Gwen murdered 79-year-old May Mason.

Gwen approached Cathy and told her she was going to do May.

Cathy warned her it was not the right time.

There were two nurses nearby and Cathy was assigned to a different wing, but they came up with a plan.

Cathy distracted the nurses with gossip while Gwen slipped into May's bedroom.

They were very nearly discovered when Gwen killed Bell Burkhardt.

That morning, Cathy had volunteered to supervise the nurses station while the other staff went on a break.

As she sat alone, Gwen approached from the wing she was assigned to.

In her back pocket were two washcloths.

Cathy described how Gwen went into Bell Burkhardt's room while Cathy kept an eye out front from the nurses station.

An intercom ran from Bell's room to the station.
Cathy could hear a rustle of sheets and then groaning noises.
For a few minutes, gurgling noises sounded over the intercom and then stopped.
Moments later, Gwen appeared from the room.
Bell was discovered deceased by a nursing aide a few hours later
with her arm positioned at an odd angle underneath her body and severe bruising to the skin.
According to Cathy, Gwen said that Bell had put up a tremendous fight.
The bruising on her arm had been caused by Gwen kneeling on it to keep her still.
During her police interview, Cathy was asked what would motivate Gwen to murder.
She replied,
Gwen liked pain and painful things. She had a lot of pain in her life.
I don't know if she wanted other people to feel the same.
Cathy said her role in the murders ended because she grew tired of it and didn't want to be a lookout anymore.
She never told Gwen to stop because she wanted her to be happy.
Still, no further killings took place.
The women had originally planned to take it in turns to kill,
but Cathy said she could never bring herself to be the murderer.
She explained,
Those people in there were like family to me and I couldn't do that to them.
Cathy asserted that Gwen had kept a memento of every victim.
From Myrtle Loose, she took a sock.
From Bell Burkhard, she took a jewelry.
From Edith Cook, an earring.
And from Mae Mason, a keyring trinket.
From Marguerite Chambers, she took a balloon given to her with a bunch of flowers from her children.
Gwen kept them in a shoebox in the bathroom.
But there was a problem.
Cathy explained that when Gwen moved out, she had thrown the box away.
Police raided the Alpine Manor files pertaining to resident deaths
at the time Cathy Wood and Gwen Graham worked together.
Upper management showed little concern about the murder investigation.
Alpine Manor had just received a glowing review from the government body that certified the nursing home for Medicaid.
During their search, detectives uncovered a letter Cathy had written.
It read in part,
I love you Gwen, I think you're great.
For this afternoon, I cannot wait.
That's when we'll wake up and that's when I'll kiss you.
That's when I'll hold you, oh Gwen, I miss you.
Bunny hop over here and let me lick you on the ear.
Oh please say you'll be mine forever and five days.
Detectives asked Cathy what the last line of her poem meant.

She explained that it was their take on the Shakespearean line forever and a day. Every time they killed a resident, Cathy and Gwen added an extra day to the saying. Six days after Cathy's ex-husband first approached police, officers arrived at Gwen Graham's trailer in Texas where she'd started a new life with girlfriend Heather. With no concrete evidence of murder having been uncovered yet, police arrested Gwen for writing bad checks three years earlier. They hoped that she might open up while sitting in the county jail. Instead, Gwen protested her innocence. She was so certain that she had nothing to do with the deaths at Alpine Manor that she offered to take a polygraph test. The operator told the lead detective on the case that in his mind, Gwen was a cold-blooded killer. But the results of the test were inconclusive. Gwen Graham was free to go. She went back to her new job as a nursing aide for a Texas hospital. Cathy Wood also took a polygraph test. As one of her first baseline questions, Cathy was asked what the best thing that ever happened to her was. She replied that it was her daughter. Then she changed her mind and said Gwen. As for the worst thing, Cathy immediately said that it was when Gwen left her. She was then asked, Are you lying about Gwen to get her in trouble? After two hours, the polygraph examiner was left with little doubt that Cathy was trying to manipulate the test. She was, quote, playing a subtle, intelligent game. He believed that Gwen Graham hadn't killed anyone. It was all a ploy mastered by Cathy, the ultimate revenge for Gwen leaving her. In a follow-up polygraph test, Cathy was asked why someone would make up a story like this. She replied, They'd have to be awfully unhappy, awfully lonely. Maybe they even want to go to prison like I do because then they won't have to worry about anything. As the Alpine Man of Murder's investigation reached its sixth week, an excavator was brought to the Rosedale Memorial Cemetery. The decision had been made to excavate the remains of Marguerite Chambers and Edith Cork. Every other victim listed by Cathy Wood had been cremated. Marguerite's husband Ed had given the go-ahead. He was haunted by the realisation that she might have been murdered, telling the Associated Press, I went through Marguerite's death once. I don't want to go through it twice. Since news of the alleged murder, he had suffered nightmares every night about being suffocated in his sleep. Water had leaked inside Marguerite's coffin, making an examination of her body difficult due to decomposition.

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Both Marguerites and Edith's mouths were checked, with the medical examiner hoping to find fibres of washcloths to support Cathy's murder theory.

He also checked the skin on their faces for abrasions and checked their eyelids, looking for pimpric-sized bruises that can indicate suffocation.

No fibres or signs of suffocation were found.

Cathy claimed that when Guan killed Edith Cork, she said she had made a mistake by suffocating her with her false teeth still in.

If true, the examination would show abrasions to Edith's mouth, indicating that she had bitten down while being suffocated.

They weren't there.

Marguerite and Edith's cause of death were listed as heart attacks.

When the pathologist examined their hearts, he was certain of one thing.

Their hearts were in good condition and they had not died from a heart attack.

Based on these findings and the circumstantial evidence provided by Cathy Wood, the medical examiner changed their cause of death from heart attack to homicide.

On Sunday, December 4, 1988, detectives surrounded Guan Graham's home in Texas with an arrest warrant in hand.

The lights were on inside, but knocks to the front door went unanswered.

The trailer park manager revealed that Guan and her girlfriend had fled weeks ago.

He had no idea where they went.

Detectives returned to their vehicles and as they pulled up to an intersection, a Mustang drove by.

Behind the wheel was Guan Graham.

She was swiftly arrested without incident and held on a million dollar bond.

Cathy Wood was arrested a few hours later.

Al Van Dyke was sitting at home when he received a telephone call on behalf of Alpine Manor.

Reading from a pre-written statement, the caller explained that the purpose of his call was to notify Al that his mother, Ruth Van Dyke, was a possible victim in a series of alleged homicides that happened at the nursing home.

Al couldn't believe it. He was a former homicide detective himself.

Another call went to Donald Obansky, the nephew and legal guardian of 90-year-old Wanda.

Having been told that Wanda had died from pneumonia, Donald said the realization that his aunt could have been murdered hit him like a bolt of lightning.

He thought back to her last months in Alpine Manor and something began to make sense.

Staff were regularly contacting him to advise that Wanda had sustained bruising, abrasions and lacerations.

He had always wondered why. Wanda couldn't move.

The representative from Alpine Manor made another five calls that day.

In total, Cathy had named eight residents in her interviews with detectives that she believed had been murdered.

However, Bill Burkhard's daughter Nancy Hahn found out from a journalist who called at her home. When she rang Alpine Manor the following morning to find out why she hadn't been notified, the manager replied,

I'm sorry, it was an oversight.

In January 1988, the Michigan Health Department conducted its own investigation.

It found that Alpine Manor management had acted appropriately and had no reason to suspect that there was any elder abuse going on at the time of the murders.

As news of the homicides broke, nursing staff were ordered not to speak to the press.

One manager did tell reporters, Cathy Wood's reviews were great. You couldn't ask for anyone more professional.

Cathy was very popular. She was a favourite.

Prosecutors faced a problem. There was only enough evidence to charge Gwen Graham with the murders of Marguerite Chambers and Edith Cook, the two women whose bodies were exhumed. Even then, the case relied heavily on Cathy Wood's testimony. Without her cooperation, the case would fall apart.

Because of this, the prosecution offered Cathy a plea deal in exchange for her testimony at trial.

If Cathy pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and one count of conspiracy to commit murder, she would be given a more lenient jail sentence with the possibility of parole.

Cathy agreed, and with that, further charges were brought against Gwen.

She was now charged with conspiracy to commit murder and the first-degree murder of five residents from Alpine Manor.

Gwen's defence team were almost certain she would be acquitted. There were no washcloth fibres or fingerprints linking their client to the victims.

None of the mementos that Cathy claimed Gwen had taken as souvenirs had been found.

The only link to Gwen was Cathy's word, who they said had a motive for lying.

They alleged that the entire story was concocted by Cathy to get back at Gwen for leaving her.

It was an allegation supported by many of Gwen's friends and co-workers who couldn't believe for a second that Gwen was guilty of murder.

Yet, Gwen and Cathy had confessed their involvement in murdering Alpine Manor residents to at least three other nursing aides and to Cathy's sister.

None of them believed they were being serious.

The trial began in September 1989.

In his opening statements, the assistant prosecutor warned the jury that this is a bizarre case and it was committed by bizarre people.

Cathy testified against Gwen for two full days.

Appearing tearful and softly spoken, she detailed how she stood look out while Gwen suffocated the victims of Alpine Manor.

She appeared to the jury that she herself was a victim of Gwen's, testifying that she was the one who had been tied to their bed with a gun inserted in her vagina.

The prosecution had one final witness to call.

It was Gwen's girlfriend, Heather, who confirmed that she and Gwen were no longer a couple.

Heather told the courtroom about the day police had first come to the trailer to search.

After they visited, Heather asked if she had murdered residents of Alpine Manor.

Gwen replied, yes.

Not wanting to believe it, Heather replied, no, you didn't.

Heather showed the jury how Gwen had shaken her by the shoulders, saying, I know you don't want to believe it, but I did it. I did.

As Heather stepped down from the witness box and was escorted away, Gwen shouted, I still love you, Heather.

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The jury deliberated for six hours.

For the first degree murder of five victims and the charge of conspiracy to commit murder, Gwen Graham was found guilty.

Gwen showed no emotion as the verdicts were read.

She was sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole.

Families of the victims crowded the steps outside the courtroom.

They were collectively happy with the verdict, although Marguerite Chambers' husband, Ed, told reporters he wished Michigan still had the death penalty in place.

His daughter, Jan, said, My mother can finally rest in peace. The scars will always be there, but it helps knowing the truth.

One noticeable absence at the trial was Hazel Dredge, the daughter of murdered victim Myrtle Loose.

Hazel had been a constant presence in Myrtle's life while she was alive.

She visited Alpine Manor almost daily to make sure her mother was being cared for.

But, like her mother, Hazel had succumbed to Alzheimer's disease.

At the time of the trial, she was a resident at Alpine Manor.

Following the trial, Alpine Manor released a statement to the media which read,

Even though we find it difficult to believe that any of this actually happened, our primary goal is to help the well-being of residents and their families.

We will continue to provide quality care in a supportive environment in our nursing home.

In October 1989, Cathy Wood was sentenced.

Her lawyer read from a statement which said,

Before handing down his sentence, the judge remarked,

I'm most impressed by the fact that if it wasn't for you coming forward, I'm sure this matter never would have been cleared up.

If I turned you loose today, I'm convinced you wouldn't do anything like this again.

Cathy Wood was sentenced to 20 to 40 years in prison.

With good behavior, she would be eligible for parole after serving only 16.

Many people believe that Cathy was more involved in the murders than simply standing lookout.

Nursing staff remembered her as a manipulative liar and were convinced that she pulled the wool over everyone's eyes from detectives on the case to the trial judge.

As detailed in the book *Forever and Five Days*, a hairdresser named Maureen Haverhill was tending to Alpine Manor resident Lucille van der Veen in late 1987.

Lucille was very distressed and told the hairdresser,

They tried to kill me last night, they tried to smother me in my bed, but I fought back, I swung and I kicked and I scratched and they couldn't do it.

Maureen assured Lucille that nobody was trying to kill her, but after hearing of the Alpine Manor murders, she realized that Lucille might have been telling the truth.

Yet, it couldn't have been Gwen Graham who attacked Lucille. She had left Alpine Manor five weeks earlier.

A former inmate of Cathy Wood said she bragged about the murders in prison, showing other inmates clippings from newspapers about the case.

The inmates said that they were discussing the murders when Cathy allegedly admitted,

I did the murders, I really got that bitch back, that's what Gwen gets for breaking up with me.

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In September 2018, Cathy Wood came up for parole.

Her application was challenged by family members of the victims of Alpine Manor who filed an appeal.

They believed she had shown no remorse and, like the majority of people involved in the case, believed that she was more active in the murders than she admitted.

They also lived in fear that Cathy would hunt them down when she was released from prison.

Mae Mason's granddaughter, who was particularly vocal in her condemnation of Cathy's parole, armed herself with a gun and top of the line home security.

Despite the appeal from the victims' families and considerable public outrage, Cathy Wood was deemed as no longer a threat to society.

At 57 years of age, after serving a 30-year sentence, she was released from prison and moved to South Carolina to live with her sister.

A retired detective who worked on the case believed she shouldn't have been paroled, telling local news station Wood TV,

I believe that Cathy Wood was the mastermind. She was the one that was pulling strings on Gwen Graham.

For safety reasons, I wouldn't want my grandchildren or elderly residents around her.

She's a serial killer and she could do it again, and most of them do.

With Cathy Wood's parole came the release of court documents previously withheld from the public.

For the first time, it was revealed that at one stage, Cathy and Gwen were under investigation for a total of 12 deaths at Alpine Manor.

However, a lack of evidence prevented the cases from moving to trial.

Over the years, Cathy and Gwen earned the moniker, the Lethal Lovers.

A year after the trials, Alpine Manor was sold to a hospital group who extensively renovated and rebranded the nursing home.

Legislation in Michigan was reviewed and nursing homes subject to more stringent conditions.

In Michigan today, suspected order abuse in nursing homes must be reported to adult protective services investigators.

Nursing homes still struggle with the same problems evident at the time of the Alpine Manor murders.

An aging population requiring full-time care and understaffed workforce and overworked and underpaid nurses are enormous challenges faced in providing care.

Current legislation in Michigan dictates that only one certified nursing assistant be required for eight residents during the day.

At night, one certified nursing assistant can legally be assigned 15 residents to care for.

It will probably never be known exactly what motivated Cathy Wood and Gwen Graham.

A lawyer who represented another nurse convicted of murdering dozens of elderly patients over the span of two decades in Kentucky and Ohio told the Detroit Free Press that

the people that are commonly committing these crimes are those that are rejected by society or feel rejected.

The only people they can lash out at are those less powerful than they are, the people they care for.

Before Cathy Wood was sentenced, her ex-husband Ken wrote a letter to the judge.

In it, he said,

Cathy is guilty of taking lives or at least not preventing Gwen from taking them.

But how much life did she really take?

All of the victims weren't even living.

They enjoyed nothing, experienced nothing and were going to die.

This was the opinion voiced by the majority of the public at the time of the murders.

The general consensus was that Cathy and Gwen didn't deserve to be sentenced too harshly for their actions because they targeted the weak and sick.

It was an opinion that devastated the victims' families.

Maxine Luce, the daughter-in-law of victim Myrtle Luce, said that their targeting of the vulnerable was what made their crimes particularly abhorrent.

Quote,

When I think of Myrtle in that position and someone deliberately cutting off her breath, that's the horror of the thing.

When they're so helpless, like children.

Jean Enderman, Marguerite Chamber's daughter, said to Wood TV that she was devastated that she never got to say goodbye to her mother.

Cathy and Gwen took that away from her.

Jean Enderman, son-in-law to victim May Mason, said,

May did not deserve this sort of death.

None of those people did.

They lived good lives and expected people would take care of them until they passed from natural causes.

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DLN's Wednesday, September 13. See Home Club for details.