

A Lover Scorned



by
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A short story
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Author's Note:

This story was a lot of fun to write, because I'd never written anything like it. I had just watched an old noir movie, and I absolutely loved it and wanted to write a story with a sort of noir-ish feel too it, and this is what came out of it. I've never written any kind of murder mystery before, so I'm sure it's not perfect, but I like it all the same, and it was definitely a learning experience.

Smoke snaked lazily from the ashes on the end of the cigarette Calvin held in one hand. He slurped Scotch from the glass loosely grasped in the other. His eyes were closed and he had his chair leaned back on two legs, his own legs propped up on his desk. Sinatra crooned from an old record player in the back of the room. Calvin took a deep drag from his cigarette, savoring the peace and tranquility. It didn't last long; moments later a loud knock on the door caused him to start and almost tumble backwards.

"Come in," Calvin said grumpily. He settled back into his chair and slurped more scotch.

David Rosewald, a large man in an open blue shirt and a New York Yankees baseball cap, swaggered in. He grinned at the record, which kept playing Sinatra's soulful voice, ignoring the disturbance in the room.

"You and your old records," he said.

Calvin raised his arm in protest, but didn't move otherwise.

"Don't knock the classics! You don't know anything about music!"

David grinned.

"So, are you busy?" he asked.

Calvin looked at his computer monitor on the oak desk in front of him. His story was on

the screen, the cursor blinking mildly. The headline screamed at him in bold letters, but didn't interest him at all. Some dull, local piece.

“Why do you ask?”

“Well, I was going to Porter’s Hole. I thought, maybe I’d do a little fishing.”

Calvin glanced back at his computer screen. He wasn’t finished, and if he didn’t get it in by deadline his editor was going to skin him. Calvin smiled.

“Let’s go,” he said.

#

The drive out to Porter’s Hole was long, but nice. The sky was a brilliant blue, with a few wispy clouds streaked through it. The air was crisp and cool and a breeze blew periodically, carrying the white fluffs of dandelions across the road.

The road that led to Porter’s Hole was a side road off of the highway. A few old farmhouses dotted the side of the road, old and rickety with their white paint chipping away. Trees lined both sides of the road as well.

“Have you heard about that woman that went missing a few days ago?” David asked after a long silence.

Calvin sat up alertly. “No, what happened?”

David shrugged. “No one knows. Her family doesn’t think she has run away; she was happy at home. Her boyfriend was taken in for questioning, but he doesn’t know anything either. The two were actually planning to get married next month.”

“How did we not hear about this?” Calvin asked.

“The family and the police didn’t want that information leaked.” David grinned “You know how they feel about the press.”

Calvin nodded. Then his brow furrowed.

“How did you find out about this?”

David laughed. “I’m friends with some important people on the police force.”

The rest of the ride was in silence. The only sound was the rumble of David’s old pickup and the bangs as it hit potholes and rocks. When they arrived at the lake, Calvin was on the shore with his pole in his hand in a flash. He cast his line out and sat back to wait. Neither of them made a sound. Birds chirped periodically, but there were no other sounds. Suddenly, Calvin thought he felt a tug on his line. He jerked his pole and reeled in furiously. The line went left and right, making his pole bend and strain. It was a big one, and it was a fighter. Then, his line went still and he couldn’t reel anymore. He scowled.

“Fish went under a log,” he said under his breath.

He started whipping his pole up and down, trying to break the line. When that didn’t work, he set his feet and pulled the pole straight back. He felt the line give, but it didn’t fall slack. He reeled a little and realized something was still on the line.

“Good,” he said, “I don’t have to put another hook on.”

As he reeled in, he watched for brush or a big stick that might have broken off. Instead he saw a flash of fluorescent pink. When he lifted the line out of the water, he saw a woman’s thong sandal caught by the hook.

David saw it and laughed. “Whoa! That’s a whopper!” he cackled. “The things people

lose!”

Calvin didn't smile. He stared down at the lake and rubbed at his stubble absently. Then, he quickly threw off his jacket and shirt, stripped off his socks and shoes, took off his jewelry, rushed into the water, and dove down.

“What are you doing!” David screamed. “You're going to scare the fish away!”

He took a seat on a big rock and swore to the trees. When Calvin didn't surface right away, he started getting worried. The longer Calvin was gone, the faster David's heart began to beat. He started staring at the truck, wondering whether he should call an ambulance. Finally, Calvin burst out of the water like a missile, his arms flailing around wildly as he spluttered and gasped for air.

“What were you thinking! You ruined our trip! You probably scared the fish away!”

Calvin crawled out of the water and pushed back his drenched hair. He pulled on his shoes and socks while David continued to shout and rant.

“-- had me worried sick! You were down there for so long I thought you'd drowned! Why'd you go -- ”

“There's a body in the lake.”

David stopped talking in mid-sentence. The color drained from his face and his eyes widened.

“That might be the woman that disappeared,” Calvin said grimly, “What was her name?”

David stood blankly for a moment. He looked like he was deciding whether to question more, rant more, or answer. Finally, he said, “Josie Dawtree.”

Calvin nodded and quickly walked to the truck. He grabbed David's cell phone from its case clipped to the sun visor and dialed 911.

"I've found a body in the bottom of Porter's Hole Lake out on County Road 276, three miles south of the old bowling alley."

He answered a few more questions and hung up.

He turned to David and laughed darkly. "And to think, I could have been finishing my story for the paper at home."

The police arrived roughly fifteen minutes later. They taped off the area and started interviewing David and Calvin. A cop with a broad face and broader gut walked up to Calvin and pulled a small notebook from his breast pocket.

"So what happened?" he said.

Calvin knew they weren't supposed to know about the missing girl, David told him that in confidence.

"I caught a whopper when I was over there. Almost had him, but he broke the line and flopped his way home. I dove in after him, and I thought I saw something weird looking, like a shoe. So I swam down there and pulled at it," he saw David's questioning look and nodded at him while he was talking. "When I saw the shoe was on a foot, I called you guys."

When he finished the cop snapped his notebook shut and stared at him for a second.

"Why'd you take the shoe with you?"

Calvin shook his head, trying to make sure he looked traumatized. "I didn't realize I'd carried it with me. I was more worried about getting out of the water and away from the body."

The cop stared at him for a little longer before he nodded and swaggered off. Most of the cops didn't like Calvin that much. They didn't like any reporters.

The police got the body out of the lake and laid it out on the grass. When Calvin went over to check it out, a few officers were checking it over before a stretcher could be brought.

Calvin crouched down next to them and looked the body over, trying to memorize every detail. There didn't seem to be any noticeable damage. No gunshot or stab wounds. He noticed strange marks on her neck, but before he could get a closer look, he heard someone bellow over his shoulder.

“Hey! What do you think you’re doing?”

Calvin turned. A tall man, probably six feet, with brown eyes and shiny black hair rushed over. Calvin started to defend himself, but the man walked past him. He turned and saw the man was talking to someone else – a cop with scrawny arms and legs and an unsure, defeated demeanor about him.

“What are you doing?” Tall Man asked.

The scrawny cop jumped and almost dropped his bag.

“I-I was bagging evidence,” he managed to spit out.

Tall Man's face turned bright red. “You use gloves and tongs, Jerry! You don’t touch evidence with your hands!”

“Sheesh, Jerry’s in trouble again,” one of the cops behind Calvin said.

“Does this happen often?” Calvin asked him.

“More often than it should. The big guy is Roger Girard, newly elected sheriff around

here. The scrawny cop is Jerry Cornwell. He's new on the force... He's not very good, he screws up a lot, and he doesn't seem to know the first thing about police work."

"How did he make it through the academy?"

The cop chuckled. "He must be related to someone. A daddy that's a chief of police or mayor or something."

Calvin shook his head and they both went back to studying the body.

She was wearing a sleeveless light blue shirt with a picture of a dog with wide eyes on it. She also wore blue jean shorts and had a thong sandal on her left foot. Her hair was brown and shoulder length, pulled back into a ponytail by a green scrunchie.

"Was she robbed or anything?" he asked one of the cops.

He shook his head. "No, her purse was found in a bush over there," he indicated with his right hand. "She had one hundred thirty-five dollars in cash, so we can rule out mugging."

Calvin frowned. "I didn't think so..." he trailed off and his frown deepened. He pointed at her left hand.

"Look at this," he said.

He pointed at the ring finger on her left hand. The skin at the base of the finger was paler than the rest, like a ring had been there.

"Where's her engagement ring? She was engaged wasn't she?" one cop asked.

The other cop nodded.

"Yes, she was about to be married next month, on the fifteenth."

Calvin rubbed his stubble absently again while he studied the mark around her neck. It

was a tattoo of braided blonde hair that ringed her neck like one of those choker necklaces

Calvin had seen teenage girls wear.

“No other tattoos?” Calvin asked.

“Not that we've found, but once the coroner gets hold of her we can find out for sure.”

“What was the time of death?”

“My guess is around three days ago.”

After a few more minutes, Calvin rose from the body and strolled back to David.

#

Sunday morning was a dreary, rainy day. The slate gray sky unleashed a torrent of rain that hadn't slacked since it started at noon on Saturday. David set in his Lay-Z-Boy, his feet propped up and his ball cap over his eyes. A book lay flopped open on the floor next to the recliner, and David's hand was loosely wrapped around a half-empty, watered down glass of tea, the ice long since melted.

A loud knock on the door caused David to stir. He stared blearily at the front door and scowled.

“Who could be out in this weather?” he mumbled to himself.

He opened the door to see Calvin wrapped in a bright yellow poncho.

“It wasn't from around here,” he said loudly.

“What?”

“The tattoo! It wasn't from around here!”

“Get in here!” David shouted grumpily.

Calvin hung his dripping poncho on the hook near the door, and took a seat on the couch. He set down a huge folder with papers and clippings that he had apparently held inside his poncho, and he began to spread the contents out on David's coffee table.

“I’ve been to every tattoo shop within ten miles of here. I got records of all the tattoos they sold and any custom orders they might have done. None of them have any record of a braided hair chain tattoo.”

David was still confused. He closed his eyes to the headache that was developing from his rude awakening.

“What are you talking about?”

Calvin sighed. “The woman’s body! It had a tattoo of a braided chain of hair that went all the way around her neck.”

David nodded. “Well, maybe she got it on a trip?”

“Yeah, I’d thought of that already,” Calvin said, “and I may just be chasing rabbits, but I don’t think she’s the kind of person to just get a tattoo. It’s not usually an impulse purchase, you know?”

“Maybe she partied a lot. You’ll do some surprising things when you’re smashed. You remember what you did that time when we went to Tijuana?”

Calvin ignored him. “Well, either way, it’ll get cleared up when I talk to her parents. Do you mind if I use your phone?”

David shook his head. “No, it’s through that doorway, on your left on the wall.”

After a few minutes, Calvin came back into the room.

“Well, they said I can see them tomorrow at around one.”

“Alright then, it's all set.” David flopped back out in his recliner. After a few seconds he sighed restlessly and sat back up. “You just infect everyone you talk to, don't you?”

Calvin stared at him, confused. “

“Now, I'm curious! Did the police ever say what the cause of death was?”

“Yeah, from what the coroner's report said, she was strangled. Apparently the bruises were masked by that tattoo.”

“Maybe you're not chasing rabbits after all.”

#

The Dawtree house was a three story brick building in the country with a large yard and a paved circle driveway that led off the small, two-lane paved road. The front had a big porch with four or five black, iron chairs and a table with a glass top. A two car garage was built onto the right, and the left had a nice garden of flowers.

Calvin pulled his Mustang into the driveway and parked in front of the house. He got out and crushed his cigarette beneath his foot. He approached the door and knocked. The door opened immediately.

“Mr. Brown.”

The woman that answered the door was of average height, with bright blue eyes and sandy blond hair that hung down to the small of her back. Her face was beautiful but pale, and she had deep circles under her eyes. She had dressed in a hurry because her blouse was buttoned haphazardly and her hair was a little mussed up.

“Are you Mrs. Dawtree?” Calvin asked.

The woman’s sorrow filled eyes lowered.

“Yes, I am.”

“I have a few questions for your.”

They went into the study and sat down. It was a wonderfully furnished room. The walls were red wood paneled and the floor had a shag rug laid out as well. A table with several stacks of newspapers, magazines, and books was islanded in the center. The walls were decorated with paintings and pictures of the family, including one of Josie Dawtree with her hands over her eyes and blushing.

“What kind of girl was Josie?” Calvin asked softly.

“She was a sweet girl. She was soft-spoken young girl, and she spent most of her time reading. She was fascinated with mystery stories, fantasy, adventures. She wasn’t much for romance, though.”

“And her fiancé?”

“He was outspoken, funny, and fun to be around. He wasn’t much for reading, he mostly read the paper. He liked your articles.”

Calvin smiled. “Thank you.”

“He wasn’t even in town when she disappeared. He was in Mississippi with his mom. She has cancer and her health just took a turn for the worse. He came back when he heard she was gone. He was really broken up about it. He lost five pounds since then.”

“Has she lived here her whole life?”

Mrs. Dawtree nodded. “Yes. Well, except for about nine years ago. When she was nineteen she went to some college in northern Arkansas. When she came back, she had that awful tattoo.”

“So, she got that in college?” Calvin asked.

Mrs. Dawtree nodded. “Yes, she was a member of some club the girls there formed called ‘The Rapunzels.’ I wasn’t very happy with it, but she was a grown woman...”

“Do you know anyone else who was in the Rapunzels?”

Mrs. Dawtree sat back and frowned. She clicked her thumb nails together, nervously.

“Darlene Woodrow was one. She lives on Maplewood Drive, that’s in the southern part of town. Here, let me get my address book.”

She left the room for a few minutes and came back with a folded up scrap of paper.

“This should be it unless she moved.”

Calvin smiled and took the paper. Then, he rose and started for the front door.

“Thank you very much, Mrs. Dawtree. You’ve helped a lot.

She bit her lip and the lines on her forehead deepened. Tears formed in her blue eyes and ran down her cheeks in streams.

“They’ll find him, won’t they? The one that killed her?”

Calvin smiled sadly. “I’m sure they will, ma’am.”

#

Darlene’s house was a simple, one story house. It was rock walled, and had a basketball goal at the end of the driveway. A nice flower bed ran in front of the house in a little two-foot-

wide strip.

Calvin rang the bell and sighed. He was exhausted. He had been working on this case for several days, and it was finally getting to him.

The door opened and a short woman with shoulder-length red hair and emerald green eyes answered the door. Her intelligent eyes studied him, and he thought she knew why he was there before he did.

She also had the tattoo.

“Yeah?” she said, putting her free hand on her hip and keeping the other on the door handle.

Calvin tried to speak but couldn't find his voice. She was about a foot shorter than him, trim, and strikingly beautiful.

He cleared his throat.

“Are you Darlene Woodrow?”

She raised an eyebrow questioningly, and her flaming red hair fell down into her face.

“Why?”

“I’m Calvin Brown, from *The Morley Report*.”

She nodded, “Oh, yeah. I’ve seen your stories in the paper.”

“I wanted to ask you about Josie Dawtree.”

Darlene’s composure broke for an instant, and in that instant, Calvin saw how deeply she was hurt by the recent events. A moment later, though, she had recomposed herself, although the sadness was still there, reflected in her eyes.

“I knew Josie in college. I can't believe she's dead.”

“I want to know about your college years, even the Rapunzels.”

At the mention of the old gang, Darlene's hand went to her tattoo.

She led him to her living room. It was a nice room, neat but homey. A couch ran along the far wall, and two overstuffed easy chairs were against the wall to the left. The right wall had a fairly large TV, and a coffee table with a vase of flowers set in the middle. She situated herself in one of the easy chairs and Calvin took a seat on the couch. She brought him a cup of coffee and a piece of chocolate cake.

After they were situated, Darlene began.

“Josie and I knew each other from our freshman year. She was a quiet person, but she was talkative if you got to know her. We both joined the Rapunzels at the same time. Josie needed a little pushing, especially since you got a tattoo as a membership initiation.”

“But she went through with it.”

“Yeah, she finally gave in. She needed to join a club, and since all her friends were joining the Rapunzels...but she needed a push. Me and a few friends convinced her.”

Calvin was intrigued. Maybe he could interview these people as well.

“And who were those friends?”

Darlene wrinkled her nose in concentration. Calvin felt his heart flutter.

“Well,” she said finally, “Sandy Leeds, Christina Chancer, Dory Richmond...oh and her boyfriend Neil Jones.”

Calvin stopped drinking his coffee.

“She had a boyfriend?”

“Yeah, they were pretty close. They might have even talked about getting married, I’m not sure. Once Josie found out that Neil was moving back to Texas, she broke up with him. She was coming back here, and she said she knew the relationship wouldn’t last with that much distance. Neil took it hard. He got real depressed and then he just disappeared.”

Calvin leaned forward alertly.

“Disappeared?”

Darlene shrugged. “Yeah, one day he was just gone. When we asked the school about it, we were told the matter was confidential.”

Calvin sat up straighter; his mind raced.

Darlene continued, “We figured he was just depressed about Josie and his break up, and he just moved to another school to ease the pain.”

“Other than the tattoo for the Rapunzels, was she very adventurous? Did she just make a decision on the spot?”

Darlene burst out laughing. “No, actually she talked most decisions to death.”

“Did she party much?”

Darlene snorted again. “No, she didn’t drink at all. The hardest stuff she knocked back was Dr. Pepper.”

Didn’t think so, Calvin thought.

“Thank you very much, Ms. Woodrow,” Calvin said rising.

“Please, Darlene,” she said smiling.

Calvin smiled back, "Alright then, Darlene."

She walked him to the door and as Calvin opened the door to his Mustang, Darlene called to him, "Hey! Call me sometime. We can get a bite to eat."

Calvin felt that lump in his throat come back, but he thought he held his composure better this time.

"Sure, that sounds great," he said.

#

Calvin sat at the computer of the deserted library early that morning. The library was open everyday of the week except Wednesdays and Sundays because the librarian, Tracy McNeal, taught piano. Calvin was good friends with her, however, so she lent him the keys to the building so he could use it for research. He was searching for back issues of any papers around Josie's college.

"Ah, here's one," he said to himself

The article was short; buried in the middle of the newspaper. The headline read, "Local Co-Ed Sent Away." Apparently after the break up with Josie, Neil had suffered a nervous breakdown. The school had decided to keep the breakdown quiet, following the family's request.

Calvin ran another search on Neil Jones. The next paper was from Dalason.

Dalason was a little back-woods town with a mental asylum. This paper's headline read, "Local Asylum Patient Escapes." The article included a picture of Neil Jones. When Calvin saw it, his heart stopped. He had suspected Neil of murdering Josie since the break up was mentioned, but he didn't realize how dangerous things had become. He hit the print button and

rushed to get his cell phone. He started dialing David's number when something crashed on his head. That was the last thing he remembered before the blackness took him.

When he came to, the pain was so intense his eyes immediately watered. He closed his eyes and tried to ignore the pain, but it was no use. He was washed up in an ocean of it, and every throb of pain was another tidal wave crashing into him. He tried to put his hand to his head, but he couldn't. His hands were handcuffed together. He tried to move his feet and saw they were handcuffed, too.

"I'm sorry about this Calvin. I don't like violence, but I have no choice. You keep sticking your nose where it doesn't belong."

The voice was low and quiet, and although it was less shaky, Calvin had heard it before. He lifted his head to see Jerry Cornwell's scrawny figure. He looked wild, much more fierce than he had when Calvin saw him at the crime scene. His hair was sticking out everywhere and his trembling hands pointed a gun at Calvin's head.

"Hey, you don't want to do this. Let me go. You don't want anymore blood on your hands, Neil."

"Don't call me that!" he screamed. "I broke out and started a new life to get away from that name! My name is Jerry Cornwell!"

"Alright, I'm sorry. Jerry. Please, let me go. You don't want to hurt me."

The library was deserted; there was no hope of getting help. Even the librarian wouldn't be surprised if she didn't get the keys back until early tomorrow. No one would miss him for days, and he was sure Jerry wasn't going to leave him here for the librarian to stumble on.

Calvin shook his head. He couldn't give up yet, he had to get his phone. Then, he had to get his hands free.

“Hey, Jerry, let me go. I'm not gonna tell anybody.” He had to keep him talking. He might not do anything if he kept him talking.

“No, you won't.” Jerry laughed and shook the revolver at him threateningly. “I'll make sure of that.”

“We can work this out, can't we? There's gotta be something I can do for you. I'm on the paper. I could tell them your side of the story. ”

Jerry interrupted him. “I thought I was through. I had killed Josie like I wanted, I thought that I could start over. Josie is gone, and I'm glad! She dumped me! And then she moved back here and got engaged to that punk! But I like it here. I just...I just...I wanted to start over.”

Calvin kept nodding and listening, pitching in when needed, but he needed that phone. He got an idea.

“Josie dumped you, but was that any reason to kill her?” Calvin asked.

“You don't understand! You've never loved before!”

Jerry started wiping his eyes and turned his back to blow his nose on a piece of tissue paper.

Calvin seized his chance. He reached into his pocket and fished out his pocket knife. Then, he threw it into the window of the librarian's office. The glass shattered and Jerry ducked behind the librarian's desk, gun drawn. While he was distracted, Calvin rolled over and grabbed

his phone and sent a text message to David.

“Oh, Calvin. That was a stupid thing to do!” Jerry stalked toward him, holding his gun down by his side.

“I've never been very smart,” Calvin said, and threw his phone at Jerry's face.

It smacked Jerry in the nose and caused him to fall backwards in shock. His gun flew out of his hands and went spinning off under one of the shelves.

Calvin rolled to his right, going after the gun. He reached under the shelf, grabbed it, and shot the chain that connected his feet.

Jerry stood up, rubbing his nose and swearing. “Ow! That hurt! You're gonna pay for that!”

Calvin aimed and shot at Jerry, who dove back under the desk. The bullet hit a stack of papers, sending them flying everywhere.

Calvin started creeping towards the desk. He kept his gun aimed at it, his muscles tensed. “Come on, Jerry, turn yourself in. You know what you did was wrong, you've got to face it. If you turn yourself in, they'll go easier on you.”

Jerry popped up in the window of the librarian's office. He held a revolver in his hands. Calvin forgot about her revolver.

“No!” Jerry bellowed and squeezed off a shot.

The slug hit Calvin in the right shoulder. He flew backwards and slammed into a bookshelf. It tottered for a second, books falling off on both sides before it settled again.

Jerry walked up and smiled at Calvin. “Poor, poor, Calvin. You couldn't leave well

enough alone. You know, I thought about finishing the job. I thought about taking care of her fiancé, too, but people would have figured it out, and I don't want to go back to the asylum. I like it here."

He widened his smile into a big, demented grin. "I'll make it look like a mugging. They won't catch me. Goodbye, Calvin."

Calvin closed his eyes as Jerry raised the gun. The gunshot was an explosion in the library. It sounded like God's gavel, his final judgment. Calvin waited. To his surprise, he wasn't dead. He opened his eyes to see Robert Girard holding a smoking pistol like a desperado from an old western.

Jerry stumbled backward and dropped his gun. His hand clenched his chest and he gasped one final breath before collapsing. They heard a clatter, like the tinkling of a bell. A small golden engagement ring fell from his hand.

Robert unlocked the cuffs from Calvin's hand and feet.

"Are you alright, Mr. Brown? I'll call an ambulance."

Calvin laughed shakily. "You guys arrived just in time." Then he fell back to the ground in relief.

#

Two weeks later, the sun was hung high in a brilliant blue, cloudless sky. A good strong breeze was blowing and Calvin sniffed the refreshing mountain air one can only smell in a small mountain town like his. He held the phone in his good hand, his other arm bound in a sling. He stared at the phone, his heart pounding like a hammer in his chest. He started to dial when he

heard David pull up in his rattletrap pickup.

“Hey, Calvin! Do you want to go for a ride?”

Calvin grinned and shook his head.

“I’d like to,” he said, “but I’ve got a call to make. There’s someone I owe a dinner.”

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