

VENGEFUL MURDER

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Vengeful Murder

Black Friday brings people to the mall for the early Christmas shopping. The coffee is bitter, and the donuts are stale. A mom pulls her screaming toddler away from the play area. The Selfie Photo Booth is a teenage make-out spot. A regular customer sits at a corner table with his pants too low, exposing his butt crack, as I drive coffee, watching everything unfold.

The bitter cologne makes me nauseous as my enemy walks by. His tall stature, slim body, and handsome face would fool anyone. His friends call him Slim, but I know him by Bartolomeu Henderson. He is the man who murdered my parents five years ago when I was thirteen years old. The grand jury did not indict him based on the lack of evidence.

He walks by me, never noticing me. My hands

feel clammy and shaky as I think of my next move. Slim works as a teller at the mall bank. I watch him return to the bank with a slight limp in his right leg. I never played much softball or baseball as a child, but the bat came in handy on the night of the encounter. He screamed in agony as the bat shattered his kneecap.

I watch a blond female standing at the teller window laughing at his ironic jokes. I grab my belongings, leaving the hell hole before the mall closes, knowing Slim's routine; Monday through Thursday, he leaves the bank at five after ten and drives his old Buick home, greeting his wife at the door. He goes to Lonnie's Pool Hall for drinks on Fridays and returns home a quarter after eleven.

* * *

Thursday morning, I arrive at Lawson and Lawson before nine. I wait for Henry Lawson to greet me; he is a short, overweight man with thinning hair. He greets me with a smile as we walk to his private office. The office is overcrowded with law books and smells of old smoke. Every other month, I come here to plead

for the attorneys to refile.

"Starla, we attempted to file a motion, but the judge overturned it."

"I don't understand. How does Slim get away with murder? Why was my testimony not good enough?"

"According to my father's notes. The grand jury did not feel you were a competent witness. My father felt Mr. Henderson bribed some jurors, but there was no evidence to prove it."

"Do you know which members?" I ask.

"Starla, the courts seal the grand jury records."

"Did your father write anything in his notes?"

"Starla, please move on from this tragedy. Your parents would not want this for you. You are a bright woman with plenty of opportunities."

"I will not be happy until Slim is dead or in prison for murdering my parents," I warn.

"Starla, move in with your aunt. Where is she, California?"

"Washington State. I enjoy living here in Lenora, where everyone knows everyone, but no one gives a damn about my parents' murder."

I leave Lawson and Lawson, heading to my daily job as a mall watcher. My artistic talent describes my life events in the sketchbook I carry. I watch the same routine daily, mall walkers, moms fighting with their toddlers, and teens making out. I close my eyes as his cologne embraces my nostrils. His presence is behind me, but I am too frightened to open my eyes or turn around. I listen to his Oxfords embracing the floor as he walks away. I call it a night around nine, too tired from the daily events.

* * *

The following day, I sit in the food court, hearing police radio disturbing the silence. I watch Bo and Scott, who are twins walking toward me. Their father was the first person on the scene after my neighbor dialed 911. We all went to high school together and were acquaintances, but not really friends.

"Starla, we need you to come with us," Bo whispers.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

"Starla, we don't want a scene. It would be

best to come down to the station," Bo explains.

"Are you arresting me?"

"We need information," Scott warns.

"Information about what?" I snap.

"Starla, please stand up. You are under arrest for the murder of Bartolomeu Henderson," Scott informs.

Scott was a jerk in high school and still is, but he is a law officer, and I follow his demands. I watched the mall walkers jogging in place, witnessing the scene unfold. The handcuffs are cold against my wrists as Bo reads me the Miranda rights. Scott gathers up my belongings.

* * *

Three hours later, I sit in the godforsaken interrogation room by myself. The carpet has coffee or dried bloodstains, and the room smells of body odors. I waved legal representation when the twins placed me in the room and disappeared, never to return. The door opens.

"Starla, I am detective Barnett. I will record our conversation."

"I know who you are. You testified at Slim's murder trial."

"Tell me about, Slim."

"There is nothing to tell. You have his history,"
I say.

"Where were you last night around midnight?"

"Home, asleep in my bed."

"Can anyone confirm this?"

"No. I am single, living in a studio apartment above Bill's Tackle Shop that closes up around seven."

"Do you own a gun?"

"You know the answer. The Smith brothers apprehended my gun at arrest," I remind.

"Tell me about the gun," he asks.

"It's registered. I have it for protection."

"Did you kill Slim?"

"No. I did not kill Slim."

I watched him grab his folder leaving the room. I sit in the stinky room for another hour, knowing they are watching me on the other side of the two-way mirror. Several times I thought about waving but felt that would be inappropriate.

Detective Barnett enters the room once again. I watched him place photos of Slim on the table with a bag of my clothing covered in blood.

Slim lays naked in front of his house, with a bullet wound to his right temple and multiple stabbed wounds to his chest.

The word REVENGE is written in blood on the sidewalk. I have no idea how or why there is blood on my clothes. It's crazy to think someone killed Slim as I imagined. It's like someone deciphered my sketchbook and the deranged thoughts. Taking a few deep breaths to calm myself before addressing the detective.

"I did not murder Slim," I disclose.

"Starla, you need an attorney," he warns. "Don't say another word until your attorney arrives." He leaves the room after gathering the evidence from the table.

A few moments pass before I wave at the person behind the window so that I can make the phone call to my attorney, Henry Lawson, with the hopes he will defend me.

THE END

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