

Beating Vic Found

On Thursday, just in time for the early broadcast of the evening news, the badly beaten body of a man was encountered laying on one of the feeder roads in the county just outside Arlington city limits. Reporters attended by cameramen, television crews, vehicles large and small all swarmed out to the location within moments of their learning of the call made to the police by a distraught citizen.

A solitary bicyclist out for an afternoon ride in the early spring sunshine had made the gruesome discovery. Unnerved the young college student had eyed the corpse in dismay as he reached for his cell phone. The 9 1 1 call to the authorities was made within seconds of the discovery of the body. The shoeless corpse had no identification on his person, or in his pockets, on that account at the time the first announcements were made over the several television channels, the body had not as yet been identified. As he did each evening the newscaster, every perfect coifed hair in place, gazed into the camera and set forth the facts of the matter in his usual blasé manner. It did appear, said the newsman in his well modulated, faultless voice which neither wavered nor showed the least inflection no matter the story, that the bruised and battered body of the deceased may have lain out on the edge of the roadway for as long as two or three days. A report from the Medical Examiner's Office was expected within 24 hours.

The screen filled with a picture of the investigation site. Police cars, officers, yellow tape and waning sunshine revealed a bleak, little traveled roadway where the body appeared to have been dumped. The coroner's van could be seen in the background. Slowly it drove away from the site as the newscaster continued his report. The police were keeping a tight lid on the investigation, the officer in charge did allow the statement that the late victim had been found laying in a sequestered locale near a little used strip of asphalt. It was an area well known to local law enforcement. More than one body had been dumped in that same region over the years.

Nolly Penderson's cobalt eyes narrowed as she gazed across the comfortable chamber toward the lighted television screen. She had changed from her customary navy two piece sheath and jacket to a more comfortable pale lavender caftan. Her shoes had been placed in their customary spot next to the open door way. Sitting in her usual spot on the cozy velvet settee with her stockinged feet curled under her the tall woman was silent, thoughtful, as she listened to the newscast. Nolly's brow furrowed as she attended to the report.

Across the room, unmindful of the news broadcast, Nolly, or anything else on earth at the moment, Kevin Wilson continued devouring a second bowl of still warm blackberry cobbler over which he had poured a hefty dollop of canned 'cream' while his long slender fingers flew across the computer keyboard. His eyes narrowed. Man alive, he mused between scoops of the berries and flaky pastry, now we are getting somewhere. Nolly sure can put two and two together and come with the right answer every time. Who in blazes would have thought that Hooks Enterprises were involved in so many borderline dealings. How did Nolly know? Or how did she figure out to suspect it? He turned to ask the tall literary agent what had prompted her to take this tack. His question would not be asked.

Through the open doorway leading from the foyer laying beyond the living room where Nolly and Kevin were sitting into the corridor the hullabaloo being made by Robin and Tyrant came nearer. As the pair of small dogs continued another in their near relentless round of games of tag they approached the terrace just outside Nolly's pleasant living room. A sudden surprised shout from out in the second story passageway brought both Kevin and Nolly to their feet. Kevin took a preliminary step toward the doorway. Perris Finney, a tad breathless and a more than a bit flustered, sprang into the apartment. Pursued by the pair of obstreperous yammering pups the tall thin man burst straight into the living room.

"Stars above," Nolly Penderson said in a strangled voice. Her eyes grew round as she watched the boisterous agitated pair circling the lanky lean attorney. Perris was the other tenant there on the same level of the building.

Keven stood shaking his head while trying hard not to laugh. He made a grab for Robin, she spun just beyond his fingertips as Nolly lunged for Tyrant. Neither was successful.

"Silly louts," the older man said as he patted both frenetic dogs. A moment later the team had again sprinted from the chamber, ascended the stairwell and could be heard galloping along the corridor on the third floor overhead. Nolly stood shaking her head in disbelief.

"Ah, do come in Perris dear won't you," Nolly grinned. "Made some right nice berry cobbler tonight," she waved her hand toward the buffet, "would you like some?" Nolly turned toward the settee.

With a chuckle Kevin settled himself before the monitor screen once again. Picking up his bowl the young computer expert returned to plying his fork with joyful vigor as he began again searching the internet for more information.

"Delightful," Perris chuckled as Nolly settled herself again upon the sofa. He made his way across the room to the dutch mahogany console where the steaming cobbler had been placed beside a stack of blue glass dessert dishes. "How are you doing this PM Kevin," he asked. Not waiting for an answer Finney picked up a small plate. Spooning himself a generous portion of the pastry, Nolly's attorney and friend came to sit on a commodious chair near the computer where Kevin again was hard at work. The hand woven rattan armchair was Perris' favorite seat here in Nolly's pleasant household. He ran an appreciative hand over the hand carved swan's head topping the front of the burnished wooden frame. Beautiful.

Perris considered himself more than fortunate to have encountered Nolly Penderson. Unmarried, the thin attorney had spent most of his adult life in lonely solitude. His friendship with Nolly was one that gave him a good deal of enjoyment. Since his moving to the Brakehurst building soon after Nolly had bought the edifice Perris and Nolly had spent many of their evenings together in comfortable

acceptance of one another. Kevin Wilson and little Robin had moved into the apartment up on the third floor a year ago. The younger man had settled right in with Nolly and Perris as though the trio had known one another for years. Down on the ground floor level between the 'Come and Get 'Em' café and a whole flock of small mercantile shops Leo and Mary Herbert had carved a comfortable residence of their own. No one else lived in the building, and Nolly had no plans that any one else would be doing so.

Nolly Penderson had bought the grand old Brakehurst before she even moved to Arlington. The only tenants at that time were the Herberts. Nolly's decision to have the second story renovated and turned into only the two large residences and several small 'visitor's suites' was one she had never regretted. Carol often spent the night when Doug was working late. The Allison's were frequent guests. Nolly's kids had been known to come for a few days. No, Nolly had no intention that she would give up any of her space or comfort. Of course the arrival of Kevin Wilson and the box of manuscripts which were to cause them all so much grief along with good results as well had necessitated the need for another bit of living space.

Good thing the kid was as handy with hammer and saw as he was on the computer. He had turned that old servants quarters up on the third level into a real humdinger of a great apartment. The balance of the upper story was open space in case any of them should have need for one great whale of a bunch of storage.

The younger man now sat oblivious to anything or any one else in the room other than the monitor before him and his soon to be emptied bowl of cobbler. The only sound in the well lighted room came from the incessant tap, tap, tapping of Kevin's skilled fingers and the muted voice of the newsman on the television.

"Excellent as always dear," Perris said upon swallowing a small dainty bite of the cobbler. The rattan made a satisfying creak as the thin lawyer turned to face the tall blond literary agent. Perris' smile was filled with warmth as he gazed at Nolly. He felt a special affection for the rawboned Nebraska farm woman. Perris scooped another spoon

filled with berry rich cobbler toward his mouth. "Anything special?" He nodded toward Kevin.

"Actually," Nolly began. She was stopped by the noise of the outer door downstairs opening on the sidewalk level. The bell Kevin had installed trilled a merry melody until drowned out by a shrill, maniacal yapping approaching from the lower level. Tinka's barking could be heard followed by the near hysterical yelping of Robin and Tyrant as the pair tore down the east stair well to the first floor.

Doug Patterson's deep chuckle resounded along the hallway as Carol's merry giggle rang. Tinka tore into Nolly's apartment followed closely by Robin and Tyrant, within moments all three dogs had rushed back out the door and were heading for the west stairwell leading to the third floor. Footfalls on the treads leading from the ground floor to the second level indicated Doug and Carol Patterson were on their way up to Nolly's second story residence.

"Ah," Perris grinned, "figured there must be more coming." He nodded toward the two remaining dessert dishes sitting beside the cobbler container. Setting his own half eaten dish of cobbler on the carved hexagonal cabinet near his chair Perris rose and hurried to the sideboard where he picked up the serving spoon and one of the clear azure dishes.

"Just in time you two," Perris paused. Eyeing the rotund Carol the pallid attorney grinned. His eyes were filled with merry humor. "Hmmm," he chuckled. "Should we perhaps say three I wonder," the smiling Perris said as he hurried to scoop liberal portions of cobbler for Doug and Carol. "Ice cream either of you?"

Kevin Wilson grinned as Doug settled into the tapestry covered arm chair placed beside the computer desk. "No rest for the weary," the detective said with a nod toward the flickering computer monitor. Kevin agreed with a chuckle. "Not a bit."

"Goodness Nolly this is wonderful," Carol Patterson exclaimed after downing several bites of her cobbler. "We **both** love it," the smiling

girl said as she patted her protuberant tummy to the round of merry laughter from the others.

The room quieted as the breaking news logo again flashed across Nolly's television screen. Nolly hurried to increase the volume a little so that everyone might hear this latest in the report of the finding of the beating victim. Doug Patterson leaned forward to listen as the newsman brought the latest 'update' regarding the body found out on the county road.

"It will be interesting to learn when that fellow was dumped out there, Doug," Nolly said, her voice was thoughtful. Doug and Kevin both turned to stare at the serene woman.

"Got an idea Nolly?" Doug asked.

"I may," Nolly smiled, "but don't want to say too much just yet, not until we know more about when he may have been taken out there."

Doug nodded. His attention turned next to Michael Heath. Doug knew that Nolly had been in touch with the young widow several times since the death of her husband. "Don't have a thing new to tell the girl," he said. His voice sounded tired, filled with sadness. These things are never easy. And now, with his own child close to being born Doug was more aware than ever just how such a situation was to affect the wife and baby left behind.

"Well," said Nolly with a too bright smile, "I have something to tell." She gazed at Doug for a long moment, "on the surface of it, it just sounds great, but scratch a little deeper and I just have to wonder."

Doug raised a questioning eyebrow. Carol gathered the weary Yorkie upon the chair beside her as Robin and Tyrant collapsed in a heap near Nolly's shoes. "Lisa told me yesterday that Hooks' accountant wanted to meet with her. I went along with her today," she turned to Carol, "that is where I was for those hours this morning." Carol nodded. She had suspected Nolly had gone to help Lisa.

The interesting part of the visit to Hooks' offices was that the accountant wanted Lisa to sign papers setting up a half million dollar trust fund to provide income for Lisa and the baby. And, he handed her a check for fifty thousand dollars to tide her over, pay for the funeral and all of that until the trust kicked in.

Nolly was not all that sure she really bought the explanation that Rudy Hooks was good hearted and was doing this out of kindness because Mike had been such a good worker while employed for Hooks' Enterprises. On the other hand the papers were all in order, Perris had looked them over when Nolly and Lisa returned to the Brakehurst Area. And the girl sure needed the money.

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The Agent: Murder By Accident