

Obsidian Sky

Night shift is always pretty weird. People have this instinct that says they can get away with more at night. Just because we can't see you as well, that doesn't mean we can't see you at all. That's what detectives are for. We see what the normal person can't... or doesn't want to. I don't mind the weird. I've been on night shift so long, nothing really surprises me anymore. I'm not jaded. I just don't get as surprised as I used to. It's still weird, though.

I've enjoyed the past several years in homicide. Solving cases and locking away the bad guys gives you a good feeling. Despite what the current administration might tell you, crime is down. And that's a good thing. That's why I'm riding the desk tonight. It's a "Murphy's Law"-thing. If I start patrolling randomly and end up on the east side, then something will happen on the west side. Mama Glen always said, "Calvin, you don't go looking for trouble!" Of course, I became a homicide detective and looking for trouble is my job. I just don't go looking unnecessarily. I know I'm going to get a call soon.

Sure enough, about an hour into the shift, I'm called by officer Scott Walker. He wants me to join him at a crime scene he's been called to. A woman was bound and forced to watch her husband killed. As I head out, I notice the moon is full. That makes this shift all the weirder. Mama Glen always said the full moon did things to people.

When I arrive at the scene, it's not what I had expected. A small house in the suburbs on the south side of town, white picket fence and everything. It's also well-lit by street lights. That usually deters the common criminal. But this one was anything but common. I join Walker on porch of the house and he fills me in on what transpired.

"The victim's name is Rory MacDougal, age 34," Walker explains. "Until recently he was an accountant but he lost his job when the firm downsized. His wife, Lindsay, said they'd just gotten home from a party at a friend's house when her Rory was attacked from behind. She says she was so startled she didn't even defend herself and she was struck from behind, too.

"Says she came to in her kitchen with her hands bound behind her in a zip tie. She was also blindfolded with a," he holds up a piece of rough looking cloth in an evidence bag, "I guess this is canvas? Maybe burlap? Whatever. Lab guys can tell us more. Anyway, she says that it slipped a bit and she saw small person in a black cloak leaning over her husband and, get this, sir, eating away at his neck. Neighbors heard her scream, called 911 and came over and found her and her husband. Nothing they could do for him though. His neck was pretty much gone. He bled out in the kitchen. She was covered in it too. They took her to the hospital to get checked out.

"We had a blood trail," he says motioning to the ground, "but it fades out pretty quick. I put a call in to the canine unit but they'll be a while. Something about a surprise inspection. You'd think they'd be more interested in seeing the hounds work than testing them for rabies *again*."

I thank Officer Walker and move inside. There is a series of bloody footprints running across the living room carpet from the door to the kitchen. There's also two sets of bloody wheel tracks from where they wheeled out the victim and his wife. One set of footprints stands out though. Considerably smaller than the other prints and with a pattern I recognize. It's the pattern the CSIs use at crime scenes. They wear paper shoes over their regular ones so they don't contaminate the scene. I notice one of the CSIs, I think his name is Davis, getting photographs of all the footprints.

I do a brief check of the kitchen, but I don't stay long. I know I said nothing really surprises me anymore, but the amount of blood and ripped skin is still disturbing. How could someone do this to another human being? There seems to be no sign of a murder weapon – Davis says CSIs didn't find one either, and all the knives in the kitchen seem to be accounted for.

This is a nice house. The carpet looks new, apart from the blood. There's a television, several books on a shelf, a couch and love-seat. Nothing seems to be missing. That usually means we can rule out robbery-gone-wrong. Walker said the victim was unemployed so probably nothing job related. Why would someone eat his throat, though? Sounds like a vampire, but it's March – Halloween is *months* away.

My phone rings. It's the coroner, Gabrielle Rosenberger. The connection is a bit static-y so I take the call outside on the porch. "Hey Calvin, I've done the preliminary on your vic, Rory MacDougal. He was worked over pretty good. Not a whole lot of blood left in his system, but judging from the scene photos Davis sent me, there is a lot of blood missing. There's a pretty good bump on the back on his head from where he got hit. I heard from the hospital that Mrs. MacDougal has a matching knock, so there's consistency. Looks like a lead pipe did that.

"As for your murder weapon," she continued, "I hesitate to say this but, it looks like teeth ripped his neck out. But that brings me to the good news. Well, as good as you can get with three dead guys."

"Three?" Ok, that surprised me. "What do you mean three?"

"I was talking with Seong-ho (the day shift coroner) and he was talking about two others that had the same M-O. I pulled their files. Ms. Sorley Allen and Mr. Greg Monroe. Sorley was a cook. Greg was a pilot. She was married, he wasn't. She was black, he was Asian. The only thing Doc Young was able to connect them with were death by exsanguination from a neck wound, time of death, which was about a month apart during a full moon, and their new tattoos. Our new guy, Mr. MacDougal has a new tat also. All the tattoos are different, MacDougal's is a... I don't know what this is. I'll send a pic to your phone."

Shortly my phone receives a picture of the tattoo. And, frankly, I have no idea what this is either. Rosenberger sends the address of the tattoo parlor, Obsidian Sky, where Allen and Monroe got their new artwork. It's a lead that seems a bit too easy. Why would a tattoo artist kill the people he or she just inked?

The Obsidian Sky is downtown and, as a pleasant surprise (hmm... two in one night), it's still open. The proprietor is a Vivian Lowe. I'm welcomed into the shop by a small, and visually out of place, receptionist named Ebony Wind, rather obviously an alias but I don't push it. Once I introduce myself, she asks me to wait for a moment as she asks for permission for me to come back and see Ms. Lowe. She says client privacy is very important.

Behind the reception desk is a hallway with four doors. She opens the first and asks if it's ok and soon she leads me to the room where Ms. Lowe is working on a very elaborate tattoo on a large and very hairy man's back. "Wouldn't it be better and easier to shave his back first?" I quip.

"NO ONE TOUCHES MY HAIR!" the large man rumbled, although he didn't move.

"Good, you're learning," said Ms. Lowe admiringly. Where Ebony Wind looked waifish and, if anything, so fairly-like that she seemed out of place, Ms. Lowe was so dominatrix that she fit the tattoo parlor

almost too well. "It's so hard to get people to understand that if they move, I'm going to stab them in a way they won't like. Incidentally, yes, it would be easier without the hair..."

"NO ONE TOUCHES..." he began to repeat, this time rising from his prone position on the table.

"Sit down, Samson!" Ms. Lowe admonished. "Regardless, Ebony said you were needing some information? I really hope another of our clients wasn't murdered. That detective, what was his name? Vasquez! Yes! He was nice, if a little slow. He told me about Greg and Sorley. That was a terrible shame. Don't tell me you have another?"

"I'm afraid I do. Rory MacDougal. Can you tell me anything about him? For example, what is this?" I showed her the picture on my phone of his tattoo.

She snickered, which seemed a bit out of character for her dominatrix persona. "Ah, poor Rory. He got this just last night, you know." She sighed. "And that poor tattoo. I can't explain why he wanted that. It's a snake over the *Batman* logo. I think it might be the worst tattoo I've ever done, but he said that's exactly what he wanted. Didn't say why."

"Was there anyone else here when he got this done?"

"No," she replied. "Just myself and Ebony. Same with the others as well. I know that's a horribly coincidence, but that what it has to be. You say Rory was killed tonight. We've been here working on Samson since around seven. I know alibiing each other isn't the greatest, but we do have a camera on the front and back door and you're welcome to the footage," she says gesturing to a computer server in the corner of the room with a monitor showing both doors. "If I'm going to be doing a tat this late, I like to work in here since I can see the monitors of both doors."

"I appreciate that, ma'am. I would like a copy of that footage. Like Mama Glen always says, 'it's good to be thorough.'"

"A wise woman, to be sure." She opens a drawer under the tattoo table and retrieves a USB thumb-drive and plugs it into the server and, according to the monitor, copies three files to the drive. A minute later she hands me the drive saying, "I put the footage from today and the past two on here as well as our records of who was getting ink. And keep the drive. It's promotional."

I thank Ms. Lowe for her assistance and head back to the CSIs lab. I know it technically isn't protocol for a suspect to get the footage like that, but I know Detective Manny Vasquez. And if he's already checked her out, I have a feeling she's good. That's part of Manny's charm. He seems slow sometimes, but that lulls people off guard. He's really good with that. Now if we could just get his facial hair under control.

Working the lab tonight is Darryl Silverstone. He used to work for a cruise line as an IT guy until Cooper Wright recruited him to work for us. That was a great catch because Darryl knows his stuff. "Another one? Manny just brought me one of these about a month ago."

"Well, another victim with another connection. Let's see what we've got."

He plugs the drive into his laptop and scans it for viruses and malware. Just because the drive from Manny was clean, doesn't mean this one is. And it's always a good idea when you get a drive and don't know where it's been. We do a quick scan of tonight's video footage, and, sure enough, there's Ebony

Wind, Vivian Lowe and Samson. That's a pretty solid alibi for tonight's event. But just to be sure, we check the other files as well. Last night's footage shows something very interesting.

Mr. MacDougal is on the footage, of course. He looks quite drunk, but is sober enough to sign the forms and get a tattoo. He's shown walking to the back but we lose him there. Ebony is at the front desk when a small woman comes in and hangs a cloak on a hook near the door. The footage is black and white, Darryl says it saves space on the hard drive, but that cloak looks black to me. Short with a cloak. Sounds like we have a person of interest.

I place a call to the Obsidian Sky and, thankfully, Ms. Wind is still there and answers the phone. I hear a mumbled grunt in the background and a buzzing. Sounds like Samson is still getting worked on. I glance at my watch. They started at seven and it's almost four. That's a hell of a tattoo the man's getting. Wonder if it will actually be visible under the forest of hair on his back. I ask Ms. Wind about the woman with the cloak and she immediately apologizes. "Oh, my god! We forgot! She's here so much!"

The background buzzing stops and I hear Ms. Lowe take the phone. "Detective Glen, I assume? I apologize for Ms. Wind's conduct. She is usually so much better behaved than to yell into a phone like that. What is the matter with you?" I hear her berate her receptionist. "What do you mean?... Oh dear. Detective," she says changing the object of her voice. "There was someone else here. I do apologize for our behavior on this occasion. She is here so often and so quiet that we don't think about her being here."

My patience is running a little thin from the exposition but I manage a fairly civil, "Who?"

"Oh! My apologies again. Jezzy. She says she's an aspiring tattoo artist. She comes in the shop several times a week and just watches. Rarely says anything so we usually just forget she's there. But if I think about it, I think she might have been there the night Greg and Sorley got their ink, too."

"Do you have her full name? Or maybe an address?"

Ms. Lowe supplies us with the name Jezebel Skye, like the shop name but with an 'E' on the end. She said that's why she chose this parlor for her observations. Ms. Lowe describes her as a little dark and gothic but a fairly nice young girl – lives in an apartment not too far from the shop.

I contact dispatch and have them send two squad cars to the address. I don't want to take any chances. She may be small but if she really is who we're looking for, she's found a way to kill three people, at least, and that is never a good thing. After obtaining a search warrant, which Judge Castillo signs without hesitation, I join the officers.

We enter the two-story apartment building and make our way to the suspect's apartment – B6. Outside we see a lead pipe leaning against the doorframe. One end looks coated in blood that has run onto the hallway carpet. A young couple enter the hall from the stairs at the other end of the hall. We try to wave them by, but one just can't resist talking to us rather drunkenly.

"What 'cho' goin' after Jezzy fer? She's such a cute young thang." I try to wave them on down the hall but the young man just won't shut up. "She's an artist, y'know. She paintst such cool stuff. Like that pipe. Lookth like real blood, don't it?" His girlfriend mumbles an apology and pulls him down the hall and into apartment B3.

I knock on the door rather and rather loudly exclaim, “Ms. Skye, police! We have a warrant.” After waiting a few heartbeats for a reply, I motion for one of the officers to open the door. He tried the knob first, and to our surprise, it opens. (Three surprises in one night? Last time I ever claim to never be surprised!)

The apartment is almost I had expected it from the description by her drunken neighbor. It was rather small and plain but covered in half-painted canvases and paint tubes and bottles. In one corner of the room is a mattress with a small figure on it. Telling her not to move seems redundant but I do it anyway as we enter the room. One of the officers turns on the light revealing a bit more than we’d anticipated. The figure on the bed is Ms. Skye, and she’s covered in blood. Beside her on the bed are three mason jars of blood and an assortment of pills. It looks as though we’ve found our killer, but the pills, and her lack of responsiveness, certainly doesn’t make this feel like a win.

The rest of the night is spent getting care for Ms. Skye. First the ambulance to get her to the hospital. Then the CSIs gather the pills and the blood for analysis. The blood, as it turns out, does belong to our victims. We didn’t find any phlebotomist equipment, but that doesn’t necessarily mean anything. It could have been disposed of anywhere along her route.

The pills, however, tell a different story. They were prescription medication for a delusional disorder I can’t pronounce. We back track and find they were prescribed by Doctor Griffith Markus, psychologist. We explain the situation and he tells us a story about a young artist woman who had delusions about being a vampire. Although he also says, that may not be the case here and that he’d provide more information about Ms. Skye but the doctor / patient confidentiality thing applies to this case.

Not the happiest ending to the case. But as Mama Glen always used to say, any ending you can walk away from is better than one you don’t.