

THE QUARRY

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Picking Pockets

I, Jacob Henly, state the following to be a truthful account of my whereabouts and activities on the night of Tuesday 8th June.

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Working in the city on weeknights you're always going to meet some crazies. Most customers are those finishing late in the office or off to work night-shifts. Sometimes, you have the every-night's-a-party types stumble in to refuel on Gatorade and processed sugar. But, you never really get much of the homeless coming in.

It was a Tuesday night when she came rushing into the convenience store where I work; her head down, hands stuffed in her pockets. She was quite obviously homeless with her messy hair shielding her face and old clothes dirtied irreparably. My boss always made it clear to us employees that we need to ‘keep a close eye on them hobos. Their fingers are surprisingly quick for the amount of drugs they’re hopped up on’. Yeah, my boss is a bit of a prick. I never really understood this warning because I’ve never had any of them come in, so I don’t usually pay him much attention. But, looking at this one, I thought his warnings were on point.

Working alone in the city isn’t always the safest job, but me being male, six foot two, and having some meat on my bones help a lot in sticky situations. As in, my height means I can easily keep an eye on those suspicious-looking customers who spend a bit too long looking through one aisle only to purchase nothing. This one hadn’t left aisle 3.

I put down my phone, where I was writing up my statistics essay for uni in my notes, and stood up to have a look.

The girl leaned forward and paused as if to pick some things up and turned away from me for a moment. She then moved quickly back up the aisle, as if to flee out the exit. I scrambled awkwardly out from behind the register, banging my knee against the doorway in the process. *Dammit, I’ll get a nice bruise out of that one.*

She was almost at the exit, but I got there first.

‘Sorry mate, but I’m going to need those back now,’ my tone spoke of no nonsense and I turned my palm up to her.

Dirty blonde hair clung together in dry clumps. Her eyes darted around the store, returning to me, jumping from me, and back again. She breathed in deep fast breaths as she backed slowly away from my advancing figure. In her front pocket, she held something. I didn’t know what it was, but I knew it didn’t belong to her.

She was shaking quite violently. I’d dealt with plenty of kids stealing here, but none of them had looked as terrified as the one before me. Her eyes screamed at me when they skittered past mine, her feet shuffled as if she was ready to bolt at any time.

I stopped my advance, ‘Come on, just give it back,’ I tried to smooth my rough voice, but failed. It sounded more like a low growl.

Her clumped hair whacked her cheeks as she jerked her head back and forth. Her dress hung off her, cracked, creased, and stained. The dress came to just above scabbing knees, dried blood smudged over her shins. Her feet were bare.

‘Look, I’m not going to hurt you. But, you have to give it back... now,’ I used my normal voice this time, hoping for a better reaction this time.

Her wide eyes stopped moving and focused their intensity right on me, but she didn’t move her hands.

Enough was enough. ‘Oi, show me your hands now, girl, or I’ll call the cops.’ My voice echoed throughout the space in the small store, ‘You want to spend the night in jail? Huh?’

Her already wide eyes grew and she released a small sob.

She lifted her arms first, guiding her shaking hands out of the pockets. Freshly drawn blood clung to the fingers and palms, though I saw no source for it on her. In one hand she clutched some blood-stained package of bandages, in the other was a travel sewing kit. Both sourced from aisle three, just as I’d thought.

My first thought was, *well shit, she can keep them now*. My second, *how could she afford those nails?* Blood dripped off fake nails. Even covered in blood, they were pretty fancy. Look, I don’t know a lot about nails and shit, but I know they’re not cheap. My girlfriend gets the stupid things and has to keep getting them done. She’s always complaining to me about how much they are – certainly a lot for the homeless. *Wait, is she, though?*

My feet jerked me back a few steps as my eyes focused on her hands. The blood didn’t seem to be coming from anywhere, it was smudged all over her hands but wasn’t too concentrated in any area. I looked to her knees. *Maybe it’s from them*, I hoped. But the grazes on her knees were too shallow to produce that much blood, and they were already scabbing.

‘I think I need to call the ambos,’ I said to myself, more than to her.

A small, mousey voice burst from her mouth. ‘No, no. I’m fine.’

‘No offense, but you don’t look it.’

‘It’s not my blood.’

Shit.

I felt my body locking up and shying away from her. I reached in my back pocket for my phone, ready to dial 000 and get this chick out of here and away from me. I dug into my pocket to produce nothing – my phone was still on the counter. *Shit, shit, shit.* Suddenly, she dropped the bandages and sewing kit back into her pockets and grabbed the front of my shirt with both hands, the blood transferring there. I felt my lip curling and my neck tensing up as I strained as far as I could away from her.

‘No, please! You have to help me. Someone hurt him and he won’t wake up. He’s bleeding so much. Please. Please, help me!’ Her voice was as rough and frantic as her eyes. She moved her hands to my right arm, her fake nails digging into my forearm, ‘Come with me, please. He’s going to die!’

My whole body was numb, making it easy for her to pull me out of the exit and onto the street. I couldn’t wrap my head around what was happening to stop her from pulling me along, let alone realise that I should have locked up the store.

She rushes me down the block, the streets quiet. All I could think was how loud my feet sounded whacking against the pavement, and that I couldn’t hear her bare ones at all.

She pulls us to a stop in front of an alley. Her hands release me only to shove me roughly into the dark alley.

Oh shit.

Lying haphazardly half out of a dumpster bin was a body. The top lid was closed on him, securing him in place.

Oh God. This guy’s dead for sure.

I felt her body come up behind me. She nudged me closer urgently, ‘Come on. You have to help him. Move!’ Her voice was curt and echoed through the alleyway.

My breath caught in my throat, choking any words trying to get out. My body was as stuck still frozen as my eyes - focused solely on his misshapen form.

There was blood... everywhere.

I heard a groan from behind me before the girl barged past me towards him. She went to lift the lid with plastic-gloved hands.

Wait, when did she get gloves? When did she put them—

My thought process was cut short when I saw how she was trying to hold up the lid with one hand and pull him out with the other.

This girl is nuts.

My jarred body jerked forward to help, but I stopped before them - unsure and reluctant.

‘Just, pull him out for me. Please!’ she huffs.

My neck tightened with the idea of touching a dead guy and I was about to tell her this when I saw it.

His chest was moving.

‘Wait! Stop! Stop! He’s alive!’

‘Of course he is! We need to help him. Hurry!’ She continued to try and keep the lid open for me.

Gritting my teeth, I grabbed under his armpits and wrenched him out of the bin. His body hit the floor as she let the lid slam close.

‘Oh God,’ I whispered as I took in the sight before me.

The guy’s stomach - along with his t-shirt - was cut open, the wound wide with blood bubbling out. How he was alive at this point, I had no clue.

She kneeled beside him and looked up to me, ‘Come on!’ she grabbed my hand, pulling me down as well.

‘Here,’ she rummages inside her front pockets and produces the stolen bandages and sewing kit, ‘do something.’

‘What the hell am I supposed to do!?’ I hissed at her, ‘I work at fucking 7 Eleven!’

‘Please. Please!’ her hands shook as they fought mine. Pushing, shoving, until I finally gave up and took the items, ‘I don’t know what to do!’

I sat back on my heels and scrubbed my face with my trembling hands. ‘Why can’t we call an ambulance—’

‘No! No! We can’t! He... he’s into drugs... and he has some coke on him,’ her eyes bored into mine, ‘please. Please! Just help him.’

When I don’t move, she rips open the sewing kit, spilling the contents on the floor. Her hands weren’t shaking anymore. They were still as she opened the packet around the string and threaded it through a needle.

Once she had prepared the needle, she grabbed my hands in one of hers and put the needle carefully between my fingers, ‘go. Do it. Please.’

Her pleading eyes screamed up at me.

Shit.

I turned to his body and focused down on the wound at his stomach.

‘God. How did this happen?’

Her breath stuttered out, ‘Um. We... we were making out back here, when... when this... guy came up to us. He w-wanted his wallet. But, he said no. And h-he had a knife... and,’ tears ran down her cheeks as she gestured towards his stomach.

She moved my hands into position, ‘please, you have to save him. If you don’t, he’ll die!’

I squeezed close my eyes and sucked in a huge gulp of air, opened my eyes and got to work.

He was still bleeding bloody bad. Only seconds after starting to stitch him back up, my hands were dripping.

I focused on stitching the poor bloke together - silently thanking God and my mother for having the sense to teach me how to sew on my own buttons.

While I focused my attention on stitching this poor bloke up, she moved to his head. She bent over and laid her forehead against his nose - staring intensely into his eyes.

‘Wake up... just, wake up,’ she mumbled into his vacant face.

The wound was pretty big so it was a while before I had done a semi-decent – that’s being generous – job at closing the wound. Once I got to the end, I lifted the left over needle and string

and I was wondering how I was going to cut it off when the girl sat up from her position and handed me a steak knife.

Where the hell did she get a steak knife from?

Ignoring my thoughts, I took it in my hand and cut the string.

‘How’s he going? Is he still alive?’ Her voice was strangely calm. But, I didn’t pay much attention to that, rather, I quickly reached my fingers to feel for a pulse at his neck - like they do on TV.

But, before I could feel anything I noticed another wound.

Along his neck and down his chest were deep gouges still leaking blood. I’ve seen wounds like these before. Not in real life – but in movies and stuff.

‘Jesus, these ones weren’t done by a knife. These are, like, fingernail wounds or something. How the hell did that happ—’ I stop, a gasp caught in my throat. Bloody expensive-ass fake nails could have done it.

No. No, no, no.

The alley way was silent except for my stuttered breaths.

A breathy chuckle sounded from behind me.

I turned.

She stood before me; her unruly hair was now controlled into a low bun. A trench coat covered her stained dress and she now wore high heels.

What the f—

Her heels clacked on the pavement as she came toward me - stopping just before me. Fear gripped me and held me firm.

She raised her taloned hand with a flourish and laid it against my cheek. Her nails raked their way down my cheek, stopping at my quivering lips. She whisper, ‘thanks for this, Jacob.’

Her body retreats, enabling me to breathe once more.

However, amused eyes keep me still as she backs out of the alleyway. When she reaches the entranceway, she pauses – her whole body and demeanour changing.

Her eyes widen and her mouth slackens in an expression of horror. She lets out an almighty squeal and runs out of sight.

I looked down at my blood stained exterior and the knife cradled in my palm.

‘Wait! You can’t do this,’ I choked out of trembling lips.

A smirk darkened her face, ‘What makes you think that I can’t, hey?’

My eyes jerked around the filthy alleyway as I search for something, anything to get me out of this shit.

‘You’re a hobo! The police won’t believe a word you say over a uni student,’ the thought came out of my mouth before I could stop it. Probably not the best idea to provoke a crazy chick with a knife.

Her smirk disappeared as she strolled back to me, looking around her as she went. As she got closer, she pulled out another knife – identical to the one still in my hand. She swung it around, stopping it at my face.

She leaned in closer, ‘So, murder-suicide it is, then.’

‘What! No!’

Her arm pulled back and then plunged. The knife dug into my stomach for a second before being sliced back out again.

I felt the cold ground hit my back. The knife fell out of my hand with a clatter.

My vision was closing in on itself. The last thing I saw was her fuzzy figure stumbling out into the street.

‘Help! He’s killed someone! Someone help!’

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That is all I recall.