

A Memorable Murder

A Jennifer Malone Mystery

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ONE

The voices were familiar yet distant, as if the speakers were communicating through bullhorns miles away. Their words drifted in and out of clarity, spoken in measured tones, although Lynn sensed an undercurrent of urgency in their manner. Rushing to tell their story; trying to convey a particular feeling - a scene - to those listening. As the stream of hopelessly unintelligible words droned on, Lynn thought she recognized a sound in the background. A police siren? Possibly an ambulance? Regardless of its origin, the disembodied noise did not reassure her in the least.

Her head began to pound as she opened her eyes. It took a moment for them to adjust to the semi-darkened room. Although her vision was blurred she saw the walls were bathed in a faint blue light that flickered sporadically, creating a strobe effect. She found it near impossible to lift her upper arms or body, which felt like they were filled with concrete.

Where am I? she thought.

Lynn turned her neck toward the source of the mysterious light. The twenty-inch television on the bureau answered many of her initial questions. On the TV was a split-screen showing a well-dressed man and woman at an anchor desk and a female reporter outside a large building. At the top of the screen "NCN Special Report" appeared.

Lynn strained to hear their conversation. Their mouths moved, words came out, yet she was unable to decipher what they were saying. Was it in code? Frustrated, she studied the images, trying to piece together what was important enough to have interrupted the afternoon soaps.

Was it afternoon?

Lynn's eyes moved from the screen to the tiny window where curtains hung haphazardly. Through the numerous rips in the material and at the centre where the curtains didn't quite come together, she could see the blue light strobing off the glass. Beyond it, however, it was completely black.

No streetlights.

No headlights.

No moon.

No sun.

Nothing.

Panic set in as an increasing sense of doom engulfed Lynn's mind. While certain she wasn't restrained in any way, she still couldn't move.

She quickly resolved she was in a rundown motel room, one that she couldn't remember checking into, or ever wanting to check into. Not knowing the time of day, Lynn willed her left arm across her chest and stared at her watch which read 8:15.

Her body went limp, the exertion leaving her both mentally and physically drained.

Was it morning or night?

What day of the week was it?

Why am I here?

The answers were not forthcoming.

Again, Lynn turned her attention to the news report. The words were slowly getting clearer. She was determined to learn all she could before the station cut back to its regular programming. As her vision also focused, Lynn realized the people at the news desk were Jason Morris and Susan Donallee, the co-anchors of the National Cable Network's evening newscast.

"When was the last time this type of incident occurred, Tanya?" Jason asked the reporter.

The screen went full-frame showing Tanya Grahame, an extremely photogenic young woman, in front of what Lynn recognized as the network's flagship station, WCNY. The building's huge two-storey windows, which served as a backdrop, were part of the morning show's much-publicized new set, allowing the public to view the show as it aired live across the country.

It was at this moment Lynn noticed the sun was shining brightly.

It must be 8:15 a.m., she thought.

She glanced again at the darkened window.

Was this place located where the sun hadn't come up yet? It would mean a difference of time zones if that were true, her mind screamed.

She tried unsuccessfully to put the thought aside, as she concentrated on Tanya's answer.

"Televised incidents like this have occurred before, but this type of gangland-style shooting is thought to be the first of its kind for a nationally broadcast program. Other shootings have taken place during local news reports, where a distraught family member or friend has shot an alleged killer being transferred through an airport or courthouse. And although those killings may have subsequently received national exposure, today's shooting was seen live by millions of people, many tuned in to see Presidential candidate Douglas Adams."

Was Douglas dead? He couldn't be, Lynn thought frantically. *I was just with him last . . .*

The thought drifted away as she wasn't sure if last night was now this morning, or if it was, in fact, a couple of days ago, or even last week. Almost immediately she felt a sudden tightness in her chest as she experienced a shortness of breath. Desperately she gulped for air in an effort to fill her lungs. With one final intake of precious oxygen, the seizure passed and she began to feel tingling in her arms and legs.

She lay on the bed stiff as a board, not daring to move a muscle until her breathing returned to normal and the prickly sensation subsided.

"Thank you for that report, Tanya," Susan Donallee said as the screen cut back to the studio. "We will hear from Tanya again as new developments arise in this tragic story." Susan turned to her co-anchor. "Jason."

Jason Morris had been a fixture on the national news scene for over thirty years. In his mid-60's and with dignified grey hair appearing at his temples, he was the epitome of a ladies' man: handsome,

intelligent, muscular, warm and caring. Almost secondary to his looks was his talent to sniff out a news story. As a reporter he'd covered every worthwhile war, election, assassination attempt and breaking story with the same intensity of a cub reporter looking for his first big break. Even though he'd made enemies over the years, his reputation was unassailable.

So today, as whenever a major story broke, households across the country turned their news channels off and switched to their one and only source of the facts: Jason Morris.

"For those of you joining us, *The Nation Today* has suspended its operations. This after an unidentified man was shot in the head as he was preparing to ask Presidential candidate Douglas Adams a question. The man, described as in his mid-40s, had stepped up to the show's street microphone when an unidentified woman came up from behind and shot him in the right temple. An explosion then detonated from within a gym bag placed amongst the crowd gathered to view the show through its new bulletproof windows.

"In the ensuing confusion, the woman escaped from the scene in a grey 4-door vehicle, possibly a Volvo. The woman is described by witnesses as being in her 40s, approximately 5'7" tall, with a slim figure. At the time of the killing she was wearing a blue and white dress, dark glasses and a blonde wig. The victim was pronounced dead at the scene and his identity is being withheld until his family is notified.

"Our reporter Tanya Grahame was told by officers at the scene that a clue to the shooter's identity was recovered. However, police are withholding that information from the public at this time.

"What we don't know yet is if there's a connection between the victim and Presidential candidate Douglas Adams, who is also the head of the powerful Health and Welfare Committee. Upon observing the shooting, Mr. Adams was rushed out of the studio by armed bodyguards and his whereabouts are not known."

Lynn felt sick to her stomach.

Douglas was safe but where was he now? Was there a connection with the dead man? More troubling she thought, was there any connection to why she was in this room?

The answers her brain feverishly provided didn't make sense. Neither did her current situation. With her tired mind now fairly clear, Lynn clutched the bedspread with both hands and pulled herself upwards. The room, its walls, the TV, the bureau, the menacing blue strobe flicker, all began to spin out of control.

You have to hold on, Lynn kept reassuring herself. It'll pass.

A moment later, Lynn stood tentatively. She took small steps toward the bathroom, putting her outstretched hand against the wall for support. Behind her, Susan Donallee was telling viewers that the scene they were about to replay was of the actual killing and small children should leave the room. The co-anchors then talked for a short time, allowing those conscientious parents throughout the nation to shepherd their children away from the TV set.

Lynn made it to the bathroom door and stood against its frame. She turned to witness the murderous footage, as the anchors described what was taking place. As she swung her head around, something caught her eye above the bathtub. There on the shower rod, was a . . .

"The woman was wearing a blue and white dress."

neatly hung blue and white dress.

Lynn gasped at the sight.

She next looked on the vanity and saw . . .

"She also wore a blonde wig and dark sunglasses."

a blonde wig and dark sunglasses.

The room began to revolve slowly around her. Steadying herself, trying to rationalize a logical explanation, she turned her full attention back to the TV.

The screen cut from a two-shot of the smiling morning show host and candidate to a close-up of a man on the street at a microphone. His head was tilted slightly downward and the fedora he was wearing obscured much of his face.

"I have two questions for Mr. Adams," the man said.

Before he could utter another word, the woman in the blue and white dress was upon him, placing a gun to his head and pulling the trigger. As he felt the barrel make contact with his skin, he looked up in startled surprise. An instant later, he became a nationally televised murder statistic. This was immediately followed by an explosion heard off-camera which engulfed the area in smoke around the dead man.

Lynn collapsed to her knees. She again began gasping for air, eerily emulating the crowd's coughing and feeling their confusion at what they'd observed. Yet it wasn't the bystanders she was concerned about; it was him. The split-second full-face image of the murdered man became etched in her mind.

With a sickening thud Lynn fell onto her side and fainted dead away.

The last thoughts that flashed through her mind frightened her beyond belief.

Where am I?

How did I get here?

Why am I here?

And finally, *why would I kill my husband?*