

Green Eyes

by Dale Lerner

I never cried over a dead body before, but something about this pretty girl got to me. She was stretched out on her back in a field of wet grass. I bent over and took a knee next to her body and felt the cool dampness soak through to my skin. I had to look away when I saw her eyes half open. Two officers were searching the tall weeds at the edge of some woods. When I was sure they weren't looking my way, I quickly wiped away the tears.

Forcing out a breath, I pulled a pen and small notebook from my inside coat pocket and started some notes: White female, seventeen, blonde, green eyes; single bullet wound to center of forehead; blue jeans, long green coat.

The corners of the wide collar of the green coat lifted slightly now and then from a breeze down near the ground. Her right arm was by her side, and her left arm was bent with the hand resting on her stomach. A lighter band of skin around the base of the ring finger was visible. The coat sleeve was scrunched up, as if someone had shoved it back out of the way, and a dark red line on the inside of her wrist looked ready to bleed—which it might have, had her heart continued to beat.

Leaning over her torso, I was stunned by the freshness of her perfume. The left side of her jaw was bruised and swollen. Both earlobes were pierced through with silver half-moon earrings, and higher up, a single diamond stud was pinned through the rim of each ear.

I sat back on my knee when I heard someone approach from behind on the soggy grass. My partner, Chaz, stopped and hovered over me and the girl.

“Sure was a pretty thing,” Chaz said, between gum smacks.

“Yeah, she sure was,” I said, and pushed off my knee to stand.

“What do ya think? Jealous boyfriend?”

I turned to see if somehow that always-vacuous expression of his had changed. It hadn't.

“Possibly,” I said. “The diamond earrings look like a boyfriend with money.”

“Her best friend said she had a steady at school,” Chaz said, and he paused and flipped through a small notebook I had given him a year ago. “The name's Jesse Tyler. They're looking for him now. He wasn't in school today.”

Chaz had a habit of offering me information I already knew.

“I don't think it was the steady boyfriend,” I said, and pointed down at her left wrist.

“The killer yanked her bracelet off, and also took her ring.”

Chaz walked around the feet of the girl's body with his hands tucked in the pockets of his black trench coat. He bowed at the waist and eyed her left wrist.

“I would think,” I continued, “that the bracelet and the silver moon earrings were from her steady, but not too many High School boys buy their girlfriends diamond studded earrings. It's too classy. More likely they were from an older man.”

Chaz nodded his empty head.

“Then why didn't the killer take those?” he said.

“He simply forgot them in the panic,” I explained. “He took the missing ring because he gave it to her as a gift, but he took the bracelet because he suspected it was something new from the steady boyfriend.”

The two officers who were searching the woods came out brushing off their dark blue pants. Their noses were red from the cold. I watched the fog of their breaths as one of them said they didn't find anything. Chaz thanked them before I could speak, as if *he* were running things.

One of the officers had a smirk and avoided my eye contact. I had the feeling Chaz and this guy were in on something.

Chaz stepped over to the girl's head and bent down to her face. Her long blonde hair was fanned out over the muddy grass, and the toe of his shoe was just touching the ends of a few of the clean strands. His carelessness no longer surprised me.

"It looks like he gave her a good whack before he killed her," he said, as he smacked his gum next to her left ear. "I wonder why that wasn't enough. Why didn't he just knock her around and walk away?"

"Perhaps he hoped hitting her would do the trick, but then she didn't go along with what he wanted."

He looked up at me with those dimwitted eyes of his and said, "You mean sex?"

I pulled out a handkerchief and wiped some mud off my hand. "No, I feel certain they already had that kind of relationship. I think she was trying to end it, but he didn't want to. He persisted, and she threatened to tell someone about him if he didn't leave her alone. He probably drove her out here to give her that whack as a last attempt to scare her."

"And it didn't work," Chaz said and straightened up. "Instead, she only became more defiant."

"Yeah, basically."

As usual, I was beginning to wish I hadn't shared anything with Chaz. He always took the pieces I gave him and fitted them together as if they were his own.

"Then it's possible she took off the ring he gave her and threw it at him," Chaz speculated. "She told him it was over and to stay away. Maybe he then saw the bracelet dangling

from her wrist, and his jealousy drove him over the edge, and that's when he drew his gun and put a bullet in her pretty little forehead."

"Something like that."

Chaz turned his attention to the top of the hill behind me. He flipped up a hand and said, "We'll be right there."

I turned and saw the officer who had avoided my eye contact earlier nod and wave back, and then he disappeared behind my car when he saw me looking up. Again I felt the two of them were in on something, and Chaz's presumptuous remark didn't go unnoticed. *We'll* be right there, he had said, as if he spoke for me. As if *he* was the lead detective with fourteen-years of experience.

Chaz circled around the girl's hair with an arm lifted in a corralling motion.

"Come on, Jack," he said. "They've got the boyfriend. Let's go see what he has to say."

I paused for a last look at the girl's face. The sun sat cold and white beyond the leafless trees, and the dim light thinned her thick makeup. She looked young and innocent now. The air suddenly felt colder, and I had to stop myself from reaching down and buttoning her coat. Tears stung my eyes again, and I turned and marched up the muddy slope behind Chaz.

I turned back at the top of the hill and watched two men lift her body onto a gurney. The sides of her green coat hung down and glowed in the last of the fleeting daylight, just as her green eyes certainly glowed when they had life in them. Her killer, on some similar evening, under the same twilight, may have told her in a hushed voice that he had bought her the coat to match her beautiful green eyes.

One of the officers turned a flashlight in my direction. The harsh light caught me off guard. As I tried to blink the spots away, I saw the Tyler boy sitting in the backseat of a squad

car looking my way and nodding. Chaz put his hand on my shoulder and tossed an evidence bag on the trunk of my car. The diamond ring I gave her, and that cheap, vulgar bracelet the boy had given her, glared back at me through the plastic bag.
