

W A R N I N G: Adult Material. **Reader Beware**

The car radio crackled.

“Feindt. Come in Feindt.”

Detective Copper took his right hand off the wheel to pick up the microphone, turning on the mike.

“Yeah Sarge. This is Copper. Ten-two, whaddaya got?” He clicked off.

“What’s your twenty?”

Clicking on he said, “Old Crain Highway, just south of Croom Station Road. Headin’ for the barn. What’s up?” He clicked off the mike.

“Turn around for the *Deep Rest*. Possible ten-fifty-six, one eighty-seven. Called in fifteen minutes ago by the owner. Behind room seventeen. Black and white’s on the scene.”

From the passenger seat, Lieutenant Detective Ezkiel Feindt glanced at his partner Sergeant Detective Copper behind the wheel. His partner nodded.

Feindt took the microphone from him and clicked it on.

“On our way. Be there in ten. What about a doc?” He clicked off.

“Call came in with a forty-four. On his way. Should be waitin’ for ya.”

He clicked on. “Roger that, Sarge. Ten-four.” Feindt clicked off and replaced the mike.

Copper shifted to the left-lane, making a U-turn at the T-intersection to head back south on the dual lane highway connecting Route 4 with 301.

“Damn,” said Copper shaking his head.

“Whatsamatta, Mike?”

His partner Mike Copper shook his head, staring down at the floorboard.

“Always seem to get one of these gruesome deals right before a meal. Ever notice that? Was lookin’ forward to a soft shell, fries and a beer up at the Grille. Now, probably won’t feel like eatin’ til dinner.”

Feindt chuckled. “Aaah, you’ll get used to it. Might not be so bad. Might not be bad at all. Mebbe it was poison? Or an overdose? No blood, no guts.”

“Wanna bet?”

“Sure. Betcha lunch at the Grille after,” said Feindt. Copper nodded.

“You’re on, Ezey” he said.

Copper turned right into the pea gravel drive of the *Deep Rest Motor Court* just north of Cheltenham. Room 17 was easy to spot. The one with all the cars parked out in front. There were two black and whites, a dark sedan that looked like County issue and an ambulance with lights flashing, hemming in a green ’69 Dodge GT convertible parked perpendicular to the motel. The door to 17 was open. Copper pulled in through some deep puddles left by last night’s thunderstorm to park at the near end of the motel in front of Room 20.

Feindt knew the *Deep Rest Motor Court* as a one-story brick motel parallel to the highway with ten rooms either side of the office. The owner Noah Slumberin lived alone with his wife of thirty-some years back of the office. The place was a red brick affair with a white-shingled roof overhanging the concrete sidewalk bordering the room fronts. It sat back well off the road, about seventy-five yards, facing east by southeast. The motel had been around about twenty-years but the owner kept the place and the grounds in good shape. Grounds and rooms all neat and trim, prim and proper presented an inviting appearance to weary motorists travelling north and south on 301. But the interstate a few miles to the west took most of the traffic now. The former owner Aiden Gottmein sold out to Slumberin several years back when the Government built the Beltway connecting I-95 around D.C. with the rest of the eastern seaboard. To make ends meet, Slumberin occasionally let luggage-less, “engaged” couples overnight here discreetly with no questions asked. The law let him alone knowing he didn’t tolerate prostitution, just young lovers or spouses cheating on their partners.

A uniformed officer with a name tag of Y.B. Eager greeted him and Copper as they entered the room behind the aluminum screen door. Eager said the bodies were out back along with the motel owner, a maid, a police photographer and the coroner. He said no one had touched anything. The room was just as he’d found it. Feindt thanked him, saying he’d be out back in a minute.

“Watch the door,” said Feindt. “No one else, in or out. Got that?”

“Yes sir,” replied Eager. Eager stepped outside to guard the door.

Feindt stood just inside and left of the door with Copper to his right. His trained eye scanned the room. The bed had been used. The covers and sheet were turned down, kicked to the floor. The bottom sheet was rumpled and stained. He pointed out the stain to his partner, who nodded, but like him remained stationary, scanning, observing, taking in everything.

Typical room. The head of the lone bed rested against the wall to the left, while the foot stretched into the center of the room. Two shade lamps stood atop night stands either side of the head of the bed. The room contained screened, double sash windows in both the front and back walls. The front windows sat open as high as they could go. The Venetian blinds rose as high as the sash. The rear window near the head of the bed housed a window fan but no screen. The fan was running. The screened window next to the fan was also wide open. The blinds of the rear windows matched those of the front. To his right, stood a desk against a wall. A light blue man’s T-shirt was thrown on the floor at the foot of the desk. A small, swivel fan sat on the desk behind a partly used wax candle seated in a brass holder. A beige clutch lay next to the brass holder. The fan was

running now, spraying the foot of the bed from one side to the other with muggy, musty June heat. The *Deep Rest* did not feature air conditioning. Without A/C during the night-long thunderstorm, he wondered how much deep rest you could get in this place. Must have gotten plenty steamy in here last night. Plenty steamy.

Why would a candle be sitting in front of a fan? Maybe the power had gone out during the storm? Made sense. He'd find out.

Ezey Feindt turned to talk to Officer Eager through the screen door.

"These fans on when you came in?"

"Yes sir," replied Y. B Eager. "The owner said the maid turned them on this morning when she came in to do her housecleaning. She's the one found the bodies. She's out back, too."

Feindt nodded.

"What about the windows—they open?"

"Yes sir," said the officer through the closed screen door. "The maid said they were open just like that when she came in."

Glancing around the room, Feindt found no luggage. Clothes were scattered here and there. At his feet to the left was a pair of women's low brown pumps, lying at odd angles a foot from the wall. There were scuff marks on the white dry wall about a foot above the shoes, as if the shoes had been kicked off against the wall. At the near corner of the foot of the bed, the only part of the bed still holding cover, spread and top sheet, was a female's top. The light top appeared to be made of white cotton. It was sleeveless, collarless. The back was unzipped. The top hems were scooped. The garment was so short, so small; it looked more like that of a child than a woman. Must be one of those mid-riff tops that were popular now. On the floor beside the bedding at the corner of the bed was a woman-sized, white bra. Yeah. Must be a mid-riff.

A pair of horse flies buzzed from the back door, bouncing off the ceiling and walls, circling the bed a couple times before one landed over a stain on the sheet. The fly investigated the stain.

"Beat us to it," said Copper standing beside him.

Feindt nodded, stepping forward and left, stooping down to the floor. The second fly vanished the other side of the bed.

Taking a ball point pen from his shirt pocket inside his suit coat, Feindt reached to lift the back hem of the bra and turn down the soft label.

MaidenForm – Sweet Classic 32C.

Feindt swiveled his head to face up to his partner. He jerked his chin up.

"G'ahead. Guess."

"Thirty-two C," said Copper.

“Make?”

“I dunno. Maidenform?”

“Damn, you’re good,” said Feindt. He grinned. “No wonder, you’re named M. A. Copper. How’d your folks know what you’d become?”

“Hey. Don’t start,” said Copper. “Any policeman name of Ezey Feindt got no call to start anything about names. What’s that green thing on the floor there under the bedding?”

Feindt stopped his silent laughing to lift up the bedding to find a green denim skirt, opened in the shape of a circle on the carpet as if someone had stepped out of it. His hand brushed something hard on the floor under the bedding. He lifted the covers further to find a pair of square-toed, brown leather boots, belted with a brown leather T-strap around the ankle. A brass ring beside the ankle held the straps in place. He checked inside the boot.

Dingo 12D.

Feindt jerked his head around, questioning Copper by raising chin.

“Dingos, Eleven D,” said Copper.

“Ah, you’re slippin’, Mike. Twelves.”

Copper smirked, rolling his eyes. “Big boy,” he said. “Big boy, small woman.” Copper chuckled. “Don’t figure she was too big for him.” He grinned.

“That’s a dirty crack,” Feindt, deadpanned. Copper shook his head.

Feindt stood up. Looking over the far edge of the bed beneath the widow fan, he saw men’s clothing. A pair of boxer briefs, light blue with white stripes along the hems, rested on top of a pair of beltless, navy blue cords. A horse fly was prowling over the briefs. This guy was color-coordinated he thought, right down to his boxer shorts.

The back screen door to the room opened. An officer stuck his head inside. It was PFC Willie Shooter, one of the few black cops on the county force. Came on with five others via the County’s new affirmative action program couple years ago. Feindt had recommended Willie for the Academy. Willie was a good boy. Never got into trouble. A good athlete. He’d coached Willie in Boys Club sports. As a teenager, Willie had been his M.V.P in basketball and football three years running. Knew his family well. Thought Willie’d make an excellent cop. Yeah, Willie came from a long line of straight Shooters.

“Ah Coach,” said Willie, smiling a broad, welcoming white-toothed smile. “Glad you’re here. They’re all out back waitin’ for ya. Maid’s lookin’ kind o’ poorly tough.”

“Okay, Willie. Be there in a minute.”

Willie nodded, ducking back out the way he’d come.

“Check that clutch Mike. See who we got here.”

“Right,” said Copper.

Feindt stepped around the bedding on the floor as Copper inspected the purse. Feindt bent over the blue cords to pull a fat brown wallet out of the back right pocket.

“Got us an Isabelle Deedee Bolthem here,” said Copper looking in a wallet. “Driver’s license says she’s born 4-15-53—tax day. Hunh. Nineteen. Address up in Hillcrest Heights. Got eleven dollars and change. Family photo. Nice lookin’ family. Nothin’ out of the ordinary. Triple-A card, what looks like a laundry receipt—Qwik-Press Dry Cleaners, insurance card. Usual female stuff.”

Feindt opened up the wallet. He inspected the contents.

“Santos Michael Angelo Concepción,” read Feindt, “according to his driver’s license, also from Hillcrest Heights. Born 10-12-53—Columbus Day. Eighteen. Just a couple of kids. Say, what’s today?”

“T’day? Wednesday, the fourteenth,” replied Copper.

“Flag Day,” said Feindt, slapping the wallet with the back of his hand.

He stuck the wallet in his pants pocket. A fly was crawling over the kid’s boxer shorts. He leaned over to inspect the bed sheet, shooing the other fly away from the stain. The sheet was stiff and crusty there, denoting recent activity. Feindt nodded to Copper. He stepped toward the back screen door. The carpet squished beneath his shoe in the brief hall that led to the bathroom on his right. He bent down to inspect the carpet.

“It’s all wet here,” he said, feeling the carpet with his hand.

Copper tapped the window screen above and to his left. “Rain must’ve blown in here all night. Where’d that storm come from? You remember?”

“Out of the Southwest. Makes sense,” said Feindt.

A bathroom door was open on his right, opposite the back door. Stepping across the threshold, he flipped on the light switch. Feindt felt his partner behind him, looking over his shoulder. On his left was a toilet between the sink and shower tub. On the black and white square-tiled floor to his right were two towels thrown against the base of the wall.

“Looks like the shower curtain’s torn off a couple rings there,” said Copper into his ear.

The shower curtain was scrunched back against the wall by the toilet. He could barely see the shower head other side of the curtain. The plastic curtain was torn away from the shower curtain rail. A couple of chrome rings dangled free on the rail.

“Yep.” Feindt stepped toward the tub. “Some long strands of red-brown hair on the tub floor, too.” Copper moved around him to check for himself.

“A long black hair’s stuck to the side wall there, above the soap holder.”

“Yep—oh! What’s this?” said Feindt. “Looks like a red wax ring on top of the toilet tank, wax drippings leading to the edge.”

“There’s a candle lying on its side between the sink counter and toilet,” said Copper. “A fat, red one. Wick’s burned.”

Bending down past the toilet Feindt said, “Yep, you’re right Mike. Let’s get outta here.”

Feindt led Copper out of the bathroom across the brief hall out the back door.

They were all out on the patio. The *Deep Rest* may not have air conditioning, but behind each room out back was an eight by ten-foot concrete slab on the ground backed to the motel wall. On each slab, or patio, were the same three pieces of burgundy-painted metal patio furniture – a round, three-foot diameter, flower stem-based table and two lawn chairs with arm rests and a squared U-bracket base for support. A grassy lawn about twenty-five yards across sloped gently away from the cement slabs from the back of the motel towards some woods, thick with leaves and withering honeysuckle. Smelled good.

Here the table was overturned falling away from the patio towards the woods. Only one chair was on the patio behind 17. A woman—from her dress the maid—sat in the chair on the cement slab to Feindt’s left. The others were standing at the far back end of the patio, blocking his view of what lay behind them on the lawn. There were Slumberin with his salt and pepper hair, his wife in pointy frame glasses and a bouffant hair-do, two paramedics with a gurney between them, and police photographer Pickford Snapper, who was doing his thing from various angles beyond them. Between their legs, Feindt could see someone squatting down with his back to Feindt. All but the man kneeling behind the others turned to face him and Copper.

“Coach,” said Willie, “ya might want to talk to the maid first. She’d like to get outta here. She don’t look so good.”

“Okay Willie,” He patted the side of Willie’s arm. Willie—still rock hard. Still, the athlete.

“Her name’s Liv,” added Willie.

Feindt nodded, pointing Copper to the seated maid. Feindt introduced himself and Copper to the maid and to the motel owners Slumberin and his wife, who stood aside holding one another. He and Copper were met with curt nods, as they flashed their badges and identification. Smiling, Copper squatted in front of Liv, looking up into her face as tenderly as he could. She was a white woman in her forties, dressed in a green maid’s uniform, replete with apron.

“Why don’t you take her inside Mike? No need for her to stay out here.”

“Sure,” said Copper, rising, extending his hand to the maid. “This way, ma’am.”

Feindt drifted on through the throng. They parted for him like the Red Sea for Moses, while Copper led the poor woman back into the room. Feindt saw two nude bodies on their sides in the act of copulation, lying together in a love embrace on the wet, grassy lawn. Probably a couple dozen flies hovered on and around the bodies. A burgundy-painted metal chair lay on its side, ahead and to the left of the bodies, beyond the head of the man squatting beside the corpses. Feindt recognized the man as the coroner Dr. Clive Carver.

“Clive, long time-no see,” said Feindt as Carver rose to take his hand.

“Yes,” said Carver, rising to shake hands. “Must be all of thirty hours since that stabbing over in Colmar Manor.” They chuckled.

“Hello Lieutenant,” said Pick Snapper lowering his camera, smiling cheerfully.

“Hello Pick,” said Feindt.

“Never seen one like this before Lieutenant. Really somethin’,” said Snapper.

“What ya got for me this time Clive?” asked Feindt.

Carver extended his hand over the two bodies at their feet.

“See for yourself Ezey.”

“My God,” said Feindt, as both men squatted down over the bodies. “What’re those orange-red marks all over them? Looks like forks of lightning everywhere.”

“You hit the nail on the head Ezey. Called Lichtenberg figures or lightning trees.”

“Be damned,” said Feindt. “What about that hole in the side of her head? Must be the size of a tennis ball. Looks like an exit wound mebbe. Find any weapons?”

“No. And you won’t find any either,” said Carver.

“How’s that Clive?”

“Well Ezey. An explosion caused that hole over her ear there from the inside of her head—inside out. Happens when the brain reaches twelve hundred degrees.”

“You’re jokin’,” said Feindt.

“Nope. Fraid not. Found fragments of skin, skull and brain tissue over at the base of the wall there, some still stuck in the mortar though the rain washed most of it off down there.” He pointed to the base of the back, brick wall.

“I’ll be damned,” said Feindt. “Twenty-two years on the force. Never saw anything like it. Lightning, you say?”

“Yep. See that iron chair over on the grass? This iron patio furniture must have held the electrical charge a while. And her hair is singed there in the back just above her neck?”

Feindt nodded. "How you figure it Clive?"

"Well, the way I see it. They came out here to make love during that terrible storm last night. No air-conditioning in the motel. No power either, according to Slumberin here. Power was out when they arrived. Storm brought 'em off the road. Said they couldn't see the road in front of 'em, according to Slumberin."

"That's right," said Slumberin moving toward them, letting go of his wife. "Little before eleven it was, they come in soakin' wet. Said the storm caught 'em with the top down and asked for a room. She registered 'em as man and wife. Uh, a 'Mister and Missus D. Santos.' You can look it up in the registry, if ya want. Power had gone out about fifteen minutes earlier. Give 'em a twenty per cent discount on account o' the power was out. Give 'em a couple candles, too. Showed 'em to the room. Told 'em to keep one burnin' in the bathroom."

"Didn't you hear the lightning? This close must've sounded like an A-bomb," said Feindt.

"Sure Lieutenant, sure we heard it, the missus and me. Like to bounce us outta bed. It'd been thunderin' and lightnin' all night—why the power went out. But this one *was* close. I got out the flashlight and checked around the building—the structure you know and the power lines and such."

"You didn't seem them out here?" asked Feindt, waving towards the bodies.

"No sir. Would have reported it earlier if I had."

"How could you miss 'em lying out here like this?"

"Well sir, it was dark and rainin' and I only checked the structure, not the yard."

Feindt nodded, turning back to Clive and the corpses. Slumberin backed off to hold his wife, who hadn't dared to raise her head the whole time.

"So, you were sayin' Clive."

"Yeah. The way I figure it Ezey, they come out here to make love in the rain—"

Holding up a finger, Feindt said, "Just a minute Clive." Feindt looked over at Slumberin.

"What time was this?" he said.

"Oh maybe, twenty, quarter of three."

"How could you tell if the power was out?"

"Checked my watch with the flashlight. 'N' all the clocks stopped then."

Feindt nodded. "Anyone else here last night besides you and your wife?"

"Yes sir. A couple from Miami, headin' for Maine for the summer. Left at seven this mornin'. They never knew anything about this."

Feindt nodded some more then turned to face Carver.

"Sorry Clive. You were sayin'."

“Yeah. Too hot for ‘em in that room—no A/C, no fans, rain comin’ in through opened windows. Must’ve been stuffy as hell. They saw the back door, figured why not go out back, see? Kind of erotic I guess, makin’ love in a storm. Rather’n lie down in the wet grass, he sets her up on the table here. She asks for some support, so he puts the chair on top of the table behind her. That was a mistake. She leans her head back on the edge of the chair—why her hair is singed there—see?” Carver pointed to the back of the girl’s head.

“And her bottom. Did ya see her bottom Ezey?” Feindt shook his head. “Look,” said Carver.

Carver leaned away so Feindt could stick his head down sideways, parallel to the ground, looking between the table and the girl’s scorched bottom.

“Damn. Looks like the burned part of a hot dog ya’d pull off the grill.”

“Yep. Some of her skin’s blistered off, stuck to the edge of the table there. Even the heavy rain didn’t wash it off. Melded right there, see?”

Carver pointed to the burgundy-painted, iron table edge covered by what looked like singed human skin.

“Be damned,” said Feindt. “Make sure ya get close-ups of this Pick,” he said to Snapper. Get close ups of everything and plenty o’ wide angles too.”

“Already took care of, Lieutenant,” said Snapper grinning like a baboon.

“Good,” replied Feindt nodding, “good work, Snapper.”

Feindt motioned with his head to the right towards the male.

“What about him, Clive? No holes? Nothin’?”

“Nope,” said Carver. “Just those orange-red marks—those lightning trees—all over him. And the burns there on his testicles and across the front of his thighs, like you said—hot dog off a grill.”

“Where,” asked Feindt.

Carver pointed out the burns. Feindt half stood to lean over for a better angle.

“Be double-damned,” said Feindt. Carver rose to stand abreast of him

“Figure she was sittin’ on the table with him just up against it, when it struck ‘em. Drawn by that chair on top of the table out here in the open between the motel and the woods, see?”

“His eyes are wide open,” said Feindt. “Hers are closed. No holes in him I can see. What killed him—the lightning?”

“Yeah. Heart attack I suspect. Stroke, maybe,” said Carver. “Find out for sure when I dig into him.”

Carver pulled a cigarette from a pack inside his suit coat in his shirt pocket.

“Want one,” he asked, flourishing the nail.

Feindt shook his head. “Got mine,” he replied, pulling a stogie from his inside, suit coat pocket. Carver lit up. Feindt didn’t. He declined Carver’s light.

“Doc says, I can’t smoke ‘em. Not good for me anymore. Just chew on ‘em a little,” said Feindt. He winked. Carver chuckled.

“Gonna need another ambulance,” said Feindt around his cigar.

“Already called it in,” said Carver. “Okay for these boys to start?” Carver motioned to the waiting stretcher-bearers. “Flies are havin’ a field day.” He nodded toward the corpses.

“In a minute. Want Copp— Ah, here he comes.”

Copper came out of the motel waving his little notebook. He strode over to them.

“You’ll never guess what her name is Ezey,” said Copper. “The maid—Liv Takleenbols—T-A-K-L-E-E-N-B-O-L-S—Live to clean bowls, get it?” He cracked up, bringing himself up short when he saw the flies swarming over the two naked corpses.

“Lightning,” said Feindt without laughing. “No murder-suicide here.”

“Damn! Look at that, will ya?” said Copper. “Gettin’ it on, hunh? In the storm? Killed right in the damned act. Went out with a bang, I’d say. Yeah, one helluva bang.” He laughed. “What are all those orange-red marks all over ‘em?”

“Lichtenberg figures—called lightning trees,” replied Feindt, sounding official. “Doc here can tell ya about it.”

Carver explained what had happened as he had explained it to Feindt, showing Copper the burns on her rear and thighs, and on him—the whole bit.

An ambulance came on the grass around the back of the motel. A second pair of stretcher-bearers got out of the ambulance, pulling out another gurney.

“I told ‘em to come around here,” said Carver. “Mister Slumberin said it was okay.” Feindt nodded.

“All right, Willie,” said Feindt. “Let’s break this up. Tell the maid, we’ll take her statement down in the motel office. Mr. Slumberin? We’ll need a written statement from you, too. You and your wife can head on down to the office. We’ll be down there in a minute.”

They started filtering back through the motel room door, while he, Copper, Carver and the stretcher-bearers remained behind with Pick Snapper.

To Copper, he said, “We got some forms in the car, don’t we Mike? Otherwise, we’ll have to take ‘em into the station.”

“Think so. I’ll check.”

“What’d you say her name was,” asked Feindt.

Copper checked his little black notebook. He read, “Isabelle Deedee Bolthem.”

Feindt shook his head. He couldn’t help but smile.

“What,” asked Copper. “What is it Ezey?”

“The names,” Feindt said. “The names in this case. Ya can’t make up stuff like this.”

“What names?” said Carver. “I mean, besides the maid.”

“Well,” replied Feindt. “His name was Santos Michael Angelo Concepción and hers—”

“I. Deedee. Bolthem,” said Copper. “I didee bolt him.” He cracked up.

Carver started to chuckle. Feindt smiled.

“And his initials,” said Feindt. “—S-M-A-C—SMAC.”

“Smacked,” said Carver more to himself, thinking out loud. “Smacked by I. Deedee Bolthem—smacked *conception* by I did bolt him.”

The three men cracked up, joined by the stretcher-bearers and Pick Snapper. They laughed together for a few minutes, until the flies swarming over the corpses of the nude lovers brought them back to reality.

They nodded, staring down at the corpses.

“Good-lookin’ pair of kids,” said Carver.

“Damned shame,” added Copper, wagging his head. “Both had good tans for so early in the season. Damn shame.”

“Yeah, a double-damned shame,” said Feindt, chawing his cigar. He looked up to the stretcher-bearers.

“Well,” said Feindt, “whadda you boys waitin’ for? Get these bodies outta here ‘fore the flies devour ‘em. Act like ya never seen a couple o’ corpses before.”

“Say Ezey,” asked a mellowed Copper. “Whaddaya think? Act of love—or lust? Mebbe both?”

Feindt looked to Carver then back to his partner.

“Act of God, I’d say.”

Star-Crossed

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