

Undead and Unemployed

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Extract

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PROLOGUE

Police interview of Robert Harris.

June 30, 2004

55121 @ 02:32:55–03:45:32 A.M.

Filed by Detective Nicholas J. Berry

Fourth Precinct, Minneapolis, Minnesota

After being treated at the scene, Mr. Harris denied the offer of hospital care, and consented to accompany the responding officers, Whritnour and Watkins, to the precinct for an interview.

The interview was conducted by Minneapolis Detective Nicholas J. Berry.

Robert Harris is a fifty-two-year-old Caucasian male who works for Bright Yellow Cab as a taxi driver. Mr. Harris was on duty during the events transcribed below. Mr.

Harris has passed a breathalyzer; labs are pending on possible drug use.

DETECTIVE BERRY: Are we ready? Is the tape . . . okay.

Would you like something to drink? Coffee? Before we start?

ROBERT HARRIS: No thanks. If I have coffee this late, it'll keep me up. Plus, y'know, with my prostate, it's just asking for trouble.

DB: Can we discuss the events of this evening?

RH: Sure. You wanna talk about the Twins getting their asses kicked, or why I was dumb enough to take a job where I haveta sit all the time? Goddamned hemorrhoids.

DB: The events—

RH: Sure, you wanna know what I meant by that story I told those fellows, the ones who took care of me. Nice enough fellows, for a coupla flatfeet. I don't mean no disrespect by that, either. I mean, that's why we're here, right?

DB: Right.

RH: Because you guys think I'm crazy or drunk.

DB: We know you're not drunk, Mr. Harris. Now, earlier this evening—

RH: Earlier this evening I was sittin' on my ass, thinking about my kid. She's nineteen, goes to the U.

DB: The University of Minnesota, Duluth Campus.

RH: Yup. Anyway, that's why I pull so many second shifts, because cripes, those books are expensive. I mean, a hunnerd and ten bucks for a book? One book?

DB: Mr. Harris—

RH: Anyways, so there I was, mindin' my own business, eating my lunch. Course it wasn't exactly lunchtime,

cuz it was ten o'clock at night, but when you're on second shift, you do what you can. I was sittin' at Lake and 4th. A lot of the cabbies don't like that neighborhood, you know, because of all the Negroes. No offense. I mean, not that you look it, but—

DB: Mr. Harris, I'm not African American, but even if I were, I'm sure I would devoutly wish we could stay on course.

RH: But you never know these days, am I right? Goddamned P.C. Nazis. A man can't speak his mind anymore. I got a friend, Danny Pohl, and he's just as black as the ace of spades, and he calls himself a-well, I'm not going to tell you what he says, but he uses it all the time. And if he don't care, why should we?

DB: Mr. Harris . . .

RH: Sorry. Anyway, so I'm in this neighborhood, which, yeah, some people say ain't so great, and I'm eating my lunch—ham and Swiss with mustard on Wonder Bread, in case anybody needs to know—when all of a sudden my cab was on its side!

DB: You didn't hear anything?

RH: Son, I didn't have a single hint. One second I was eating, and the next I was lying on my side and all the garbage on the floor was raining down on me and I'd dropped my sandwich and the side of my head was resting on the street. I could hear somebody walking away, but I couldn't see nothing. But that wasn't the worst of it.

DB: What was?

RH: Well, I was still trying to figure out what happened, and wonderin' if I could get the mustard out of my new workshirt, when I heard this really loud scream.

DB: Was it a man or a woman?

RH: Tell you what, it was hard to tell. I mean, I know now, because I saw them—both of them—but I didn't know then. Whoever was yelling was having their legs pulled off or something, because they were shrieking and crying and babbling and it was the worst sound I ever heard in my life. And my daughter's tone deaf and is always takin' up new musical instruments. Like that time with the tuba. But that was nothing compared to this.

DB: What did you do then?

RH: Well, shit, I climbed out of the passenger side of my cab as fast as I could, what d'ya think? I was a medic in the war—Vietnam, that was. I hung it up after I got back stateside and I never went to a hospital again, nope, not even when my wife, God rest her, had Anna. But I figured I could maybe help. My cab was insured, I didn't mind about that, but someone was really in trouble and that was a lot more important. I thought maybe somebody had backed over their kid by accident. Some of those alleys are pretty dark. Hard to see stuff.

DB: And then?

RH: Then the bus pulled up. It almost hit my cab! And that was weird, because it was pretty late for the buses to be running, and this one was empty except for one passenger.

Then this gal jumps out. And the bus just sits there. I seen the bus driver just staring at the gal like she was made of chocolate ice cream. And then I got a good look at her.

DB: Can you describe her?

RH: Well, she was tall, real tall—'bout my height, and I'm just shy of six feet. She had light blond hair with them streaky—what d'you call 'ems?

Highlights! She had kind of reddish highlights, and the biggest, prettiest green eyes you'd ever seen. Her eyes were the color of them old-fashioned glass bottles, those real dark green ones. And she was real pale, like she worked in an office all the time. Me, my left arm gets brown as a berry in the summer-time, on account of how it's always hanging out my cab window, but my right arm stays real white. Anyway, I don't really remember what she was wearing—I was mostly looking at her face. And . . . and . . .

DB: Are you all right?

RH: It's just this part's hard, is all. I mean, this gal was maybe five or six years older than my daughter, but I—well, let's say I wanted her the way a man wants his wife on a Saturday night, if you know what I mean. And I'd never been one to horndog after kids young enough to be *my* kid, and never mind that my wife's been dead for six years. So it was kind of embarrassing, too, that even though those awful screams were still sort of echoing in the air, here's me all of a sudden thinking with my dick.

DB: Well, sometimes, under stress, a person—

RH: Wasn't stress. I just wanted her, is all. Like I never wanted anybody. Anyways, I stared at her but she didn't pay me no notice. Gal like her, she probably gets old coots like me staring at her twenty times a day. She didn't say nothing to me, just marched back toward the alley. So I followed her. There was a couple of street lights back there, so I was finally startin' to be able to see stuff. Made me feel a lot better, I can tell you.

And just like that, before we could even get there, the screams stop. It was like someone had shut off

a radio, that's how sudden it was. So the gal, she starts to run. Which was funny to see, because she was wearing these teetery high heels. Purple, with bows on the backs. She had teeny feet, and these pretty little shoes. It was kind of funny to see that.

DB: And then?

RH: Well, she could sure move in them shoes, and that was a fact. She musta been a real track star or something. And I was right behind her. And we get to the alley, and right away I seen it was a dead end, and I didn't want to go too far in. It's funny, I never think about the Nam no more, but that night it was like I'd just gotten back home. Man, I was noticing *everything*. I was really wired.

DB: Could you see anyone in the alley?

RH: Not at first. But then the gal says, real loud but firm, you know, like a teacher, "Let him go." And then I seen there were two guys and they weren't standing ten feet away! Don't know how I missed them before. One of them was this little short squirt, but he was hoisting a guy bigger than me, holding him up off the ground! He was slamming the guy into the brick wall real hard, and the big guy's head was sort of lolling all over the place, and he was out cold.

But then, when the gal talked, the little guy let go, and the guy who'd been doing all the screaming hit the bricks like a sack of sand—I mean, he was *out*. And the little guy marches up to us, and all of a sudden I was just scared shitless.

DB: Did you see a weapon, or—

RH: Nothin' like that. He was just . . . bad, I guess. He was about a head shorter than me and he had kind of gray skin. And one of those little black mustaches,

real thin. Me, I think a man should grow a real soup strainer or nothing at all.

Anyway, he looked like a little punk, but there was somethin' about him—I just wanted to get away from him. It was like somethin' inside me knew he was bad, even if I couldn't see for myself exactly what it was. And let me tell you, I watched my own dear wife die from cancer of the stomach. She went an inch at a time and it took eight months. I didn't think nothing would ever scare me after watching that. But that guy . . .

DB: Do you need a break, Mr. Harris?

RH: Hell, no, I wanna get this over with. I promised I'd come down and tell you, so here I am. Anyway, this guy, he gets real close, and he says, "This is none of yours, false queen." And the way he talked—it was real old-fashioned. Like, I dunno, like people talked maybe a hundred years ago. And his voice—Jesus! I got goose bumps all over. I wanted to run, but I couldn't move.

But the gal didn't seem to care. She straightens right up and says, "Oh, blow me. Get lost, before I lose my temper."

DB: "Blow me"?

RH: Sorry, but that's what she said. I remember it real well, because it was a shocker. I mean, I'm a big guy, and *I* was scared. She was a kid, and she didn't sound scared at all.

DB: Then what happened?

RH: Well, the little mean guy, he looked like he was gonna fall over. I was shocked, but he was . . . well, he was *really* shocked. Like no one had ever talked to him that way in his whole life. I dunno, maybe no one had. And he says, "My meals are none of

your business, false queen.” That’s what he kept calling her—“false queen.” Never did hear her name.

DB: “False queen.”

RH: Yeah. And she says, “Sit and spin, jerk off.” Seriously! Then she says, “You know as well as me that you don’t have to scare ’em or hurt ’em to feed, so cut the shit.” Or maybe it was “cut the crap.” Anyways, she was ticked off.

DB: And then?

RH: Then he grabs her! And his lips peeled back from his teeth, like a dog getting ready to bite. *Just* like that, our neighbor’s dog Rascal went rabid last summer, and before I shot the poor dog, he looked just as crazed and out of control as this guy.

And before I could help her—I was scared, but I didn’t want her to get messed up, I mean, I woulda done *something*—she whips out this cross and jams it onto his forehead! Just like in the movies! And man oh man, I thought the *big* guy was a screamer. This guy, he yowled like his lungs had caught fire, and all this smoke starts pourin’ off his forehead, and oh, Lord, the smell. You wouldn’t *believe* how bad it smelled. Like pork on fire, only the pork had been spoiled first. God, I’d like to puke just thinkin’ about it.

And he let go of her and kind of staggered backward, and she steps up just as cool as a cucumber and says, “You’ll pick this gentleman up and you’ll take him to the hospital. And you’ll pay for the bill if he doesn’t have insurance. And if I catch you feeding like this ever again, I’ll shove this cross right down your throat. Got it, or should I get out the hand puppets?”

And he sort of cringes away from her and nods.

She was so stern and beautiful, he couldn't look at her. Shit, *I* could hardly look at her! And then he picked up the big guy, who was still conked out, and sort of ran out of the alley with him.

Then the gal turns to me and kind of sighs, like she's real tired. Then she says, "Did you ever get stuck in a job you really hate?" And I allowed as to how that had happened to me once in a while. Boy oh boy, she was somethin' gorgeous.

DB: And then?

RH: Then she asks am I all right. And I say I am. And she says for me not to be scared. And I say as long as she's there, I won't be. And she gave me a big smile for that one.

So we started walking out of the alley, and she sees my cab laying on its side. And she looks all disgusted and says, "Jeez, what an infant." I guess she meant the guy who ran away. And she walks over—this is the part you're interested in—and kneels down, and slips two fingers underneath my cab, and lifts it back up until its on its wheels again.

DB: She lifted your cab upright?

RH: Yup.

DB: With one hand.

RH: With two fingers. I know how it sounds. It's okay.

The other cops didn't believe me, either.

DB: And then what happened?

RH: Then she looks at me with those pretty green eyes—except now they were more hazel then green, which was kinda strange, I dunno, maybe her contacts fell out—and says, "I think it'll still run. Sorry about your trouble." And I tell her it's okay. And she climbs on the bus—which was still waiting for her by the

way, which could be the weirdest thing that happened tonight—and waves good-bye to me. And then the bus drove away. Ran down a mailbox and through a red light, too.

DB: That's it?

RH: Ain't that enough? It was some night. Tell you what, that gal was something else. I don't *never* want her mad at me.

DB: Because of her strength?

RH: No. Because I wanted her, but I was scared of her, too. I'm just glad she turned out to be nice. Because what if she was like that little guy in the alley? The vampire?

DB: You believe the man was a vampire?

RH: Shit, who else would scream and be burned by a cross? What I'd like to know is what *she* was.

DB: You believe in vampires, do you?

RH: You've been a good listener, son, and I appreciate it, but I want you to pay close attention to just one more thing. I was in a war when I was just a teenager. And I found out that the guy who don't believe his eyes is the guy who goes home in a bag. So, yeah. I believe in vampires.

Now, I mean.

END INTERVIEW

03:45:32 A.M.