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Never Somewhere Else

Written by Alex Gray

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NEVER
SOMEWHERE
ELSE

Alex Gray



SPHERE

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To D.D.

with love

*The frontier is never
Somewhere else. And no stockades
Can keep the midnight out.*

Norman MacCaig: from
'Hotel Room, 12th floor'

PROLOGUE

‘See you tomorrow!’
‘Sure. See you!’

Donna Henderson turned into the narrow cobbled lane that was a short cut to the taxi rank. Her friends continued down the street, chattering like sparrows, their much brighter plumage a vivid splash against the drab city night. The older girls were heading off to yet another club, but Donna was on a strict curfew. Protestations about being nearly old enough to vote had cut no ice. Still, it wasn’t long till her birthday. Then she’d go clubbing all night if she felt like it.

Her mouth relaxed into a smile as she thought about tomorrow. Tomorrow she would be working with that new stylist, Mark. In her mind she saw them together. She would be all attentiveness while he would surely reward her efforts with one of his gorgeous smiles. The fantasy continued on down the lane, past the back doors of restaurants and the cinema, past the chained-off squares of car parks belonging to the darkened offices above. There was a street light halfway down, an ornate structure dating from the earlier part of the twentieth century. Its weird elongated shapes, which were now a hallmark of this city, drew the eye upwards.

Donna, looking up at the lantern's black outline against the sodium glow of the sky, did not see the movement from the shadows until it was too late.

The silver bicycle chain swept upwards in a graceful arc then two leather-clad fists yanked it tight. Donna's hands scrabbled towards her neck for a moment.

As she fell, the lamp swung overhead, scattering shards of light. Then unseen hands put out the light for good. Donna never heard the thud as her body hit the cobbles.

The shadowy figure bent over her body and smoothed her hair from the now distorted face. Fingers traced the brow line in a slow caress. From the depth of its shadow, the figure breathed a long sigh over the dead girl. Under the lamplight a blade flashed out and there was a frenzy of activity as flesh and hair were hacked away.

For a moment only the sound of traffic could be heard passing by the mouth of the lane then the black figure laughed softly, holding up a blood-soaked scalp.

Donna Henderson's body lay in the narrow lane, arms flung out as if in protest, blood shining like a pool of patent leather over the cobbles.

It was over so quickly. All her dreams of tomorrow crushed in that swift and brutal act.

Hilary Fleming strode through the knee-length grasses, her hands stuck into the pockets of her waxed jacket. The wind which blew her blonde hair over her eyes flattened the grasses around her. For a moment she lost sight of Toby then, pushing back her hair, she saw his feathery tail thrashing through the thicker undergrowth ahead. Hilary smiled

as she raised her face to the morning sun. What a perfect way to begin the day!

Suddenly Toby broke into a paroxysm of barking, darting backwards and forwards at an overgrown laurel bush. Squirrels, thought Hilary. Stupid dog. She quickened her pace, the grasses swishing against her green wellingtons.

Then she stopped abruptly, the smile freezing on her lips.

From under the bright green laurel leaves a white arm protruded. White, bloodless and certainly dead.

Hilary's gorge rose and she was aware of Toby's concerned whines mingling with a strange high noise which became her own scream.

CHAPTER 1

The tall man in the raincoat stood a little apart from the activity surrounding the body. He had seen enough to fill in his report, had asked the pathologist all the relevant questions, but he lingered still, regarding the section of the park that was cordoned off by police tape. This was the third young woman to be found in St Mungo's Park and it was the business of the man in the raincoat to find answers to the questions of who had killed them and why.

As he stared at the scene of this latest crime a worried blackbird flapped out of the laurel bushes, breaking into his reverie.

They would have to close the park now, for sure. Round the clock surveillance would put an even greater strain on their limited resources but something drastic had to be done to stop the killer revisiting the scene of his crimes. The Press wanted to know if it was the work of a serial killer. He hadn't confirmed that yet, but the corpses certainly bore the hallmarks of that type of murder.

His gaze returned to the girl's body. It was out of sight now, its grisly contents concealed in the body bag. He wondered at the mentality behind such a vicious act and, as

ever, how on earth he was going to find words that sought to explain this to a grieving mother and father.

‘No, I’ve told them to wait for the forensic report. No. We’ll discuss it later.’

Chief Inspector Lorimer put down the phone and glared at it. He sat for a few moments, fists clenched on the desk in front of him, face set in grim, determined lines.

It was a face which could never have been called handsome, but there was something which made you look twice. Craggy features and a strong jawline might have indicated a well-weathered sportsman.

In fact he had been a rugby player in his younger days. The mouth was thin, downturned and looked incapable of smiling. It didn’t have much practice in this line of work. What really made a person stop and look again, though, were the pale blue eyes. A dreamer or a poet might have been gazing out of them. Combined with Lorimer’s sterner features, they came as a disconcerting surprise. Hardened criminals had broken under these strange staring eyes.

Lorimer had his blue eyes to thank for his career as a policeman. He had never considered the police force as a way of earning his living when he had left school. University had been the obvious choice and he soon immersed himself in a variety of Arts subjects, favouring Art History as his principal discipline. In a decade when job choices had been plentiful, Lorimer had not been overly concerned about what career lay ahead of him on graduation. One with prospects, he’d assured himself vaguely, except that it would never be banking. That decision had been taken one week into his first summer job in a city

bank. The tedium and office small talk was only just bearable for a few weeks; certainly not for a lifetime.

Ironically the job in the bank was the catalyst which brought about an abrupt end to Lorimer's student days.

On the day that was to mark such a radical change in his lifestyle, Lorimer had been summoned to his manager's office where two uniformed police officers stood, eyeing him with interest. The manager had been terse in explaining the situation and the student had found himself being driven off discreetly to the local police station to be put into a line up.

'A man with penetrating blue eyes' fitting Lorimer's description was sought in connection with a spate of robberies from branches of his own bank, he was told. Youthful indignation had given way to curiosity after the identity parade had eliminated him as the culprit. Lorimer had lingered in the station with the officers, drinking tea and asking questions, in no hurry to return to his flinty-faced bank manager who clearly had him tried and sentenced already.

With the alarming experience of being a suspect, for however short a time, had come the realisation that villains were very much a part of everyday society; a realisation quickly confirmed by chatting to the officers in charge. There was an allure about this kind of job which sought out and found criminals who might look just like himself.

Now, several years later, Lorimer was the Detective Chief Inspector in his Divisional Headquarters. Years of experience in and out of uniform lay behind him; on the beat, into CID, learning all the time about humankind and learning too about himself.

The blue eyes were hard and cold as he contemplated this latest murder. For a few moments he allowed himself to mourn the passing of someone else's daughter, then forced such feelings aside to prepare a terse statement for the gentlemen of the Press.

Martin Enderby picked up the photo of the dead girl from his desk. She had been pretty, he thought. A blonde with a shy smile looked up at him from the black and white print. And now there was a name to match this face: Sharon Millen.

Teenager Sharon Millen's mutilated body was found today by gardeners arriving for work in St Mungo's Park.

She had been missing overnight after failing to come home from the cinema with her boyfriend, James Thomson. Police were notified of Sharon's disappearance by her parents after her father Joseph had telephoned James Thomson in the early hours. However, James had seen Sharon safely on the number 7 bus which would have taken her to within yards of her home. How she came to be in St Mungo's Park, which lies at the other end of the city, is a mystery with which the police are now dealing. They are anxious to speak to any passenger who may have been travelling on that route between 11.15 and 11.40 p.m. or to anyone who may have seen or spoken to Sharon in the vicinity of her home.

This dreadful death is now the third to have occurred in a fortnight. Although Chief Inspector William Lorimer assured our reporter that investigations are very much under way, there is a feeling that the police remain in the dark as far as these horrific crimes are concerned.

The question on everybody's lips of course is: will the killer strike again?

Martin read the article with a frown. Not enough about the victim. And certainly not enough about the boyfriend. It was a pity the lad Thomson hadn't supplied a photograph of them together, but his parents had refused to let him speak to the Press. He was too upset. Only a lad of eighteen himself. Still, he couldn't be a suspect or surely Lorimer would have him in custody. Anyway, the public could easily see the pattern of these crimes now, thought Martin.

He had written a good piece on Donna Henderson, the first victim. Poor girl had been last seen leaving a city centre club on her way to a taxi rank. Only no taxi had picked her up. Then her body had been discovered in St Mungo's Park. Martin chewed over the phrase 'Murders in St Mungo's'. Or maybe 'The St Mungo's Murders'. It was suitably alliterative, anyway. Lucy Haining had met the same fate; strangulation with a bicycle chain then mutilation. Martin shuddered. He balked at the mental image of human flesh slashed away like that. God help the relatives who had had to identify the bodies.

More on the horror of three murders in two weeks, he thought, starting to type some detail into his copy.

Linda Thomson knocked on her son's door quietly. The terrible sobs had subsided and she hoped that he had slept. She too had wept in her husband's arms, shocked and stricken when the police had come to bring the awful news. James had gone with them to the police

station in the city centre. It had been hours before they brought him home, chalk white and frozen cold with shock. Couldn't anyone see the poor lad was in a state? His reaction clearly showed that he was innocent of any hint of crime.

Anyhow, Linda thought, anyone who knows James can tell that he'd never hurt a fly. She took the mug of tea into the darkened room and placed it on the bedside table. James was lying face down on his bed, the duvet only partly covering his legs. Sitting down on the edge of the bed, Linda stroked her son's dark hair. A long convulsive sob broke from him, but he uttered no words. He was too exhausted to speak, she thought, remembering his scream of pain earlier that day.

'Why, Mum, why?'

Outside the sunset glowed on the horizon, making all the foreground shapes one black silhouette. A crow sat on the rooftops turning its head this way and that, as if waiting for a mate before flying off to roost for the night. Darkness would soon gather and in the darkness unmentionable fears would rise and percolate around the city, fears which might spill over into careless talk to give a clue to these deeds of death.

Lorimer had officers scouring several haunts in the city, primed to receive any word which could lead him to the killer. The Superintendent was breathing down his neck, talking about psychological profiling. After Lucy Haining's death he had thought, 'Not yet. Not yet.' Now he was not so sure.

*

On a glass shelf three trophies stand. The dried blood has congealed to make a brown stain like dull varnish on the glass. Three swathes of hair adorn the shelf, blonde, red and near-black, trophies of a grisly hunter.

Outside the room where these scalps are kept, daylight has broken again. A greenish light is cast on the bare dis-tempered walls from the uncurtained windows set high above the city. A bird flies past outside. Look and see. A concrete tower with blank eyes staring, anonymous. No one will ever find you here.