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JON and His Dead Lover

by

Michael Vocino

Jon hated to leave the basketball court. It was a beautiful Spring day in Boston. The sun was shining between the apartment buildings on Marlboro Street to light the basketball court students made in the parking lot the summer before. The basketball net was not there, but the iron rim was intact, and as he hooked another basket, he realized that his days of having time to engage in the pastime of his choice would be even more limited now that he was about to graduate from medical school. As he jumped for the next shot, the eye-glasses his father had made for him shot from his pocket and landed with a crack only plastic can make as it hits a paved surface. There were no glasses in the frames, only pieces of stiff balsa wood his father had inserted in a pair of his old frames. The wood only covered the lower half of each side of the frames. His father, an optometrist, made the frames for him to help him dribble better. "You've got to learn not to look at the ball when you dribble! Keep those eyes on the action on the court!" his father would scream at him as he dribbled his ball in the driveway of their suburban New York home. His dad was as crazy about basketball as he was. His dad was also obsessive about Jon getting good grades and getting into medical school. Jon saw himself as lazy, but he loved his dad, and because of him, everything he did, he did thoroughly. He thought of himself as the classic overachiever. He wanted nothing more than to be with his many friends playing basketball, but his dad taught him the value of going the "extra step" with everything he undertook. Today, he needed to leave the basketball court because, once again, he did more than he needed to do, and he wanted to report his recent lab results to the managing director of clinical services at the medical school.

Normally, he wouldn't have made an appointment with the "head guy," but the results of this particular autopsy jarred him, and he didn't want what Dr. Gerhard Miller had to say about them filtered through the instructor's mouth. Jon wanted to hear from the "horse's mouth" what these results meant.

The Medical School is supplied with cadavers from donations. Not only donations, however, the School also buys cadavers from healthcare suppliers and jobbers as well. Yesterday, he was performing a routine autopsy on a cadaver of a Caucasian female who died of natural causes at age 65. She was slight, and from what Jon could see, she must have been an attractive woman.

As he thought this, he continued by saying out loud, “Jeez, Jonnie-boy, you’ve gotta take a break from studying and find a date!”

He was running routine blood and tissue tests when he came up with a higher than normal reading for arsenic in this little lady’s tissues.

“What have we got here, Little Lady? Did someone try to do you harm?” he said chuckling as he thought he must have run the tests wrong.

“We’ll cross check this against that beautiful hair of yours, Sweetie, it will be quicker for me and less painful for you,” he smiled at his “friend” who was looking so sad lying on the table all alone.

When the results came back, Jon was shocked to see that the levels of arsenic in the woman’s hair were elevated to such a point that Jon believed she was actually poisoned. He ran the tests on her hair three times to make sure that what he was reading was actually true. They were true.

He laughed nervously when he said, “I think I found a murder,” to himself.

He still was incredulous and searched the medical database for arsenic levels in cadavers stored for long periods of time under refrigeration and found nothing. He even stooped to asking Dr. Clark, Melville Clark, “that pompous ass” if he ever ran across such an anomaly in a preserved specimen. Clark brusquely noted, “No.”

Jon made an appointment with “the man…Dr. Miller.” Miller was by all accounts the star of the medical school. Miller was classically trained in medicine in Europe with a residency at the prestigious UCal-San Francisco Medical Center, where he later practiced forensic medicine. Jon relished meeting Dr. Miller on a one-on-one basis. He was Jon’s “hero” when it came to medicine. Jon, too, wanted to specialize in forensics, and he followed every lead about the famous Dr. Miller from the local medical journals, to the lunch room gossip, to the prestigious Lancet of the British Medical Society. Miller could do no wrong as far as Jon was concerned, so when he opened the door to Miller’s office, he began to think, “What if I am wrong. This guy will think me a fool and never take me under his wing for a residency as I want. Maybe I should leave,” Jon began to panic.

Just as Jon was about to retreat, Miller called to him, “Yes, what can I do for you?”

“Crap, he would be in the outer office,” Jon thought to himself.

“Come in to my office,” Miller said as Jon followed him into the inner sanctum of forensic medicine. “What is it?” Miller continued as he sat behind the big, marble topped desk, strewn with papers, open journals, and sided by a computer waiting patiently for Miller to respond to a hypertext question Jon couldn’t quite make out.

Jon told Miller about his “little lady” and after Jon’s assurances of the tests he ran and how many times, and after asserting he still he found lethal levels of arsenic in the system of the cadaver, Miller stood up, and said, “Let’s go run them again…”

Jon was as anxious as he had ever been as Miller personally ran the appropriate tests, first again the woman’s hair and then against skin tissue to see if Jon’s results were valid. He ran each test twice. Expressionless the entire time, Jon figure the first test must have backed up his results, or why would Miller run them a second time.

Miller turned to Jon and said, “OK, fella. I think you may have found a homicide here. The tests confirm your initial results. Stick around the school for a few days. I’m going to report this to the police and I am sure they will want to talk to you.”

As Miller left the room, Jon could feel himself filling with pride. He had impressed the famous Miller with his results, his findings. After Miller left the lab, Jon jumped into the air and slammed his hand against a chart hanging from the ceiling, while screaming, “YES!” in joyful exuberation.

In a quick sense of guilt, Jon turned to the little lady lying on the table and said out loud, “Sorry, honey. I really am, but you don’t know what it means to me to impress the famous Dr. Miller!” he faux kissed the corpse’s left hand.

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