

## Since He Left Her

By Karen Burgess

Since he left her, his only pleasure in life is bowling with Jimmy Lerkowitz.

“Marry me, Jimmy,” he burped into his best friend’s chest. “Be mine forever.” Tom slid drunkenly, and surprisingly gracefully, to his knees in the parking lot at Central City Lanes. His head rested comfortably on Jimmy’s paunch.

“Get up, asshole,” Jimmy said, laughing. “Get up before a cop comes by and throws us in jail.”

“Okay. Okay. Okay,” Tom said, separating his head from its warm cushion. Overbalancing, he dropped to his hands and knees, crawling around like a newborn kitten until he bumped his head against the fender of his aging Toyota. The patch of rust nurtured carefully by a dozen Chicago winters pricked his forehead and he opened his eyes.

“Oh, fuck, Jimmy. Oh, God. Oh, sweet Jesus.” Tom sat back on his heels and looked up at his friend beseechingly.

“What? What is it?” Lerkowitz leaned on the bumper and craned his neck, then leaned over further, stretching his oversized frame and polishing the mottled hood of the car with his t-shirt. She lay on her side, halfway under the car, in that red dress she liked so much. Her dark hair curled sweetly on her cheek, pale in the halogen glare, and her dark left eye gleamed dully. “Oh crap, Tommy, it’s Gloria.”

“We were bowling. Like I told you before. Like I told the other officer. Like I told every friggin’ person who asked me in the last two hours. Me and Tommy go bowling every week at least twice.”

I eyed the guy. Even sitting on the edge of the concrete planter dividing the parking lot from the covered entryway, Jimmy Lerkowitz had a couple of inches on me. He was wearing jeans and a smudged t-shirt, but looked blood-free. I caught the acrid smell of stale beer.

“And now you need to tell me, Mr. Lerkowitz. I’m the detective – Detective Kathy Martinez. I need to hear it from you.” I held his gaze, 5’4” of Latina steel. Something softened in his eyes.

“Yeah, okay.”

“So you got here when?”

“Five.”

“It’s after 10 now.”

“Yeah, well, we bowled five lanes. Then we had a pizza and a couple of pitchers. Then we played pool with a couple of girls. Then we went home. I mean, then we left to go home.” He sighed, straightened up, leaned back and gazed at the sliver of moon. His shoulders pushed against the seams of the t-shirt and I felt my interest quicken. He looked to be 15, maybe 20 pounds over his varsity weight.

“Girls’ names?” He told me and I made a note of them. “Who else can vouch for you two?”

He gave me a list, first names mostly. “I swear, we were together every minute.”

“So you killed her together?”

Lerkowitz smiled. He had a nice smile, a little crooked on the right side. “Tommy didn’t kill Gloria. Me neither.”

“Okay, Jimmy, wait here.”

I signaled to the uniform – God, was I ever that impossibly young? – to keep an eye on Lerkowitz and headed over to the parking lot. Loose gravel crunched underfoot. My black Reeboks matched my black jeans and even blacker leather jacket but my mood was anything but dark. The headlights of the ambulance and a couple of halogen spots lit up the front of Tom Doyle’s Corolla and the techs were working the scene. There was plenty to work: lots of litter, cigarette butts, old beer cans and plastic Mountain Dew bottles. The Toyota was grimy with fingerprint dust. Probably come down to *nada*.

They were loading Gloria Doyle into the back of the ambulance.

“Hey, wait up, Doc...” I scrambled, but the tech waited patiently.

He drew back the heavy black plastic and exposed the face. “Pretty girl.”

“Raped?”

“Doesn’t look like it. We’ll do a kit.” He snapped his gum. “Death was pretty quick, one stab to the heart, in and out.”

“Knife on the scene?”

“Took it with him.”

“Huh.” Woman stabbed in a bowling alley parking lot, estranged husband inside bowling, no weapon on the scene. “It’s curious.”

“It gets curiouiser.” Doc said. “Lookee here.” He unzipped the bag further, settled it around the body. Nice figure, but she was older than I’d first thought, in her mid-30s at least.

Doc reached over, his gloved hand turning Gloria's hands palms up. Each pale wrist had a dark pink worm of a scar.

"Still healing?"

Doc nodded. "Look close at the left wrist."

There were a couple of fainter scars. "Practice?"

"Yeah, she got up her nerve and then went for it."

"How old?"

"Three weeks, maybe."

"Thanks, Doc. Go ahead and take her out."

I stood and watched the bus pull away. Suicide attempt. Murder. Lot of trouble for one pretty girl in a red dress. Made me wonder about Tom Doyle. Troublemaker?

But when I slid into the back of the squad car, I thought I'd never seen a more pathetic face on a human being, victim or perp. If he was a troublemaker, he was making himself a world of hurt. Tom Doyle was as pale as chalk under the freckles, his thinning red hair sticking up all over his head, his eyes twin pale islands in the dark bruises of the sockets. Sad guy. I kept my voice business-like to keep him from breaking down, and took him through the evening's chronology. His story matched his buddy's, not perfect like they'd worked it out, but close enough given they'd both been drinking. He was sober now, though.

"When was the last time you saw your wife, Mr. Doyle?"

"About three weeks ago." He kept his eyes on his hands, folded in his lap.

"And where was this?"

"I saw her at the hospital. The ER. They called me."

“And she was there because?”

“She tried to...” he shuddered, “... kill herself. She cut her wrists.”

“Why?”

“Why?” His eyes were soft-boiled eggs of confusion.

“Yeah, why’d she want to kill herself?”

“Some would say it’s because I left her,” his voice was almost inaudible.

“And what would you say, Mr. Doyle?”

His eyes came up, searched my face, gathered strength. “I’d say it was because she wanted to make my life a living hell.”

The story he told me was bizarre. To hear him tell it, he was an ordinary guy and she was some kind of demon trying to take his soul. Gloria had entered his life three years before – in this very bowling alley – and within a month, had moved in to his apartment. She took over his life by rearranging his furniture and buying a new rug and some drapes. She was a great cook and went down on him every day, so of course he married her. But then she didn’t want him to see his friends. She didn’t want him to visit his mother in Berwyn. She didn’t even want to have a baby! She had an abortion without telling him. And every day it was Tommy this and Tommy that, from the minute he got up till after he closed his eyes at night. He was suffocating. So he moved out and of course she cut her wrists to get him to come back to her. They called him from the hospital and expected him to come down, so he did.

“You should have seen her, in that ER, her dress all bloody, those clean white bandages on her wrists. ‘Please, Tommy,’ she said. Like I couldn’t see right through her!”

I was rapidly developing a dislike for Tom Doyle.

“Did you kill her, Mr. Doyle?”

“No! No way!”

“Then who did?”

“I don’t know.” He shook his head, then buried it in his hands. “I don’t know.”

I kept quiet.

He looked up at me. “But when you figure it out, I’ll bet you... I’ll bet you somehow, someway, she did it. She made it happen. Somehow.”

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I had two big White Hen coffees in the cupholder when I swung by the Williams’ house in the morning to pick up my sometime partner. Flowers cascaded from hanging pots, where Rick’s wife Brenda waved cheerfully from the doorway, a cluster of rugrats around her knees and ankles. She wouldn’t have been so cheerful if she knew about us.

The smell of Rick’s shaving cream teased my nostrils and I glanced his way. His strong jaw gleamed clean and the auburn mustache softened his upper lip. “Big night,” he commented, reaching for a paper cup.

I ran it down for him, right down to Tommy Doyle’s offering up his clothes for forensics and willingness to take a lie detector test.

“Find anything?”

“Nope. Looks like Gloria never went into the bowling alley – she didn’t show up on the security tapes.”

“Anything from the outside camera?”

“Only shows the covered walkway. Nothing further out.”

“And no witnesses, of course.”

“None.”

We decided to follow up the wrists and headed for the hospital closest to the Doyle's. It was a little after 8 a.m., but the Emergency Room was timeless in its wall-to-wall misery. Exhausted smeary-faced children lay across the laps of their grandmas lethargically watching cartoons on the TVs that hovered overhead, bolted to every wall. Sour-smelling men with blood-stained towels around their hands, or arms, or legs, sat stoically in silence. A cheery woman in clean scrubs with a clipboard greeted us, braids rattling gently. I let Ricky take the lead.

He glanced at her nametag and smiled sincerely. “Hi, Tanequa. I'm Detective Williams and this is Detective Martinez. We're trying to find someone who might have been on duty a few weeks ago when a Gloria Doyle came in to the ER? Pretty white woman with dark hair? She'd tried to commit suicide by slitting her wrists.”

Tanequa smiled, but she'd had the training. “I'm sorry, Detective Williams, but if you're looking for patient records, you'll need to take your subpoena to Medical Records.”

“We're not looking for anything official just now,” he said. I smiled encouragingly when she glanced my way. “In fact, Gloria Doyle was murdered last night. We're just trying to get an idea of her personal relationships. I understand her husband came down to the ER that night.”

“Well...” she thought another minute, then made up her mind. “Shelly, I'm going to step around the corner for a minute, okay?”

It turned out that Tanequa had been on duty herself when Gloria Doyle came in. “Lady was a mess,” she told us. “Covered with blood, all over her white dress.”

“What did she say when she got here?” Rick asked.

“Not much, just asked for her husband. Never did give a reason that I heard.”

“Who brought her in?”

“A neighbor, I think.”

My eyes met Rick’s. No ambulance? When asked, Tanequa didn’t know why the paramedics weren’t called. “And what about her husband?”

“She worked herself up a bit, moanin’ about Tommy, where’s Tommy, calling out for him, you know? It was like she expected this Tommy guy to be there already! The neighbor said she hadn’t seen the husband in a few days, so I looked in the lady’s purse while the doctor was talking with her. She had a next-of-kin card there, it had a number with a 708 area code on it. I called it and got her husband, he came down.”

“What happened when he got there?” Rick asked.

“Well, it took him a little while. By the time he got there, Dr. Flanders had her all stitched up, had the bandages on. She’d had a shot for the pain and she was kind of logy. Husband showed up and went in the room, he just stood there.”

She paused a minute. “Craziest thing I ever saw. Here she was, propped up in the bed, hair dark and wild against the pillow, lips red and eyes half open. She had her arms out in front of her, with those clean white bandages against the bloodstains on her dress. Her husband comes in and she lifts up her arms and says something like, ‘Tommy can you forgive me?’”

“And what does he say?” I was mesmerized.

“Nothin’. He just looks at her. Then he walks out.”



We talked to a few more staff, but didn't learn much more, except that Gloria had left the ER under her own steam. She wasn't released and she didn't sign out, she just stood up and walked out in her bloody dress. It was more than an hour before they noticed that she was gone.

"I can't believe these people. What, it's too much trouble to keep track of their own patients?" Rick yanked open the passenger door and threw himself into the seat.

I flipped the visor up and got behind the wheel. "Lots of patients."

"That woman was desperate. But nobody cared, didn't notice she was gone. And her husband ..." Rick sighed.

"She asked for forgiveness."

"For trying to kill herself?"

"Or for killing their baby. Doyle told me that Gloria had an abortion."

"There's his motive to kill her. If Brenda ever ..." His voice tailed off, suddenly reminded that his wife's last pregnancy was the end of our affair. The baby was born three months ago and I hadn't slept with him in nine.

"I don't know, he didn't seem particularly upset about it," I said, keeping it all business. "It was just, like, one more thing on the list."

"Let's see if we can find that neighbor."

The Doyles lived in a three-flat on a pleasant street, middle floor. I looked up from the sidewalk – the white curtains were closed. A quick dash up the stairs, but as I expected, Tom Doyle wasn't home. The door was locked.

I'd only been upstairs a minute, but Rick was already seated on a chintz-and-maple rocker when I slid through the half-open door. Mrs. Lillian Jenkins was going a mile a minute.

About 70, she was neatly dressed in polyester slacks and a matching blouse, glasses on a beaded chain resting against her narrow chest.

“I heard this big crash from upstairs, just as my show was coming on. I watch General Hospital every day at 1:00, while I eat my lunch. Every day. Usually nobody’s home up there, but I saw Gloria come home from work early. I figured she was sick.”

We encouraged her to keep talking.

“Well, I went upstairs and knocked on the door. It came right open and I could see Gloria inside. She was sitting on a chair at the dining room table and her arms were covered, just *covered* in blood. I said, ‘oh Gloria, what happened?’ And she said, ‘Lillian, Tommy doesn’t love me any more.’ So I gathered up her things and I got her down the stairs and I took her to the hospital.”

“Mrs. Jenkins, why didn’t you call 911?”

“I wanted to, but Gloria said no. She asked me to take her, so I did.”

“It must have been hard to get her downstairs and into the car,” I commiserated. “You must be pretty strong.”

“Oh, Gloria could *walk*. No problem. The cut wasn’t too deep, it just bled a lot, I guess. It was already clotting. But she needed stitches.”

“How was she in the car?” Rick asked.

“Quiet. Looked out the window. Trying to be brave, I guess.”

Mrs. Jenkins was one of those healthy elderly women who fill their lives with the neighborhood goings-on, in fact, she reminded me a little of my own mother. She thought the

Doyles were a very nice couple and she'd been happy for Tommy when he'd married Gloria.

"Such a pleasant girl! And so pretty. And she had a good job, so they were doing okay."

Surprisingly, she hadn't been aware of any problems in the Doyle's marriage until the wife cut her wrists. There hadn't been any coffee klatching with Gloria and she had no idea about their plans for kids, if any, although she assumed they'd have a baby eventually. In her eyes, they were a nice young couple that needed to work out their differences. As a last question, I asked her what had caused the crash that made her climb the stairs to the Doyle's apartment.

"You know, Detective, I don't really know," she answered. "Their place was as neat as always. 'Course I was focusing on Gloria..."

Mrs. Jenkins knew which Chase branch the dead woman had worked at, so we went there next. The branch manager was kind enough to give us his office, and we spoke with the other tellers there one at a time. They all told the same story, that Gloria was a pleasant, if somewhat reserved woman, who spoke fondly of her husband and not at all of any other friends or relations. "It's like he was it for her, you know?" one very young teller told us, her lips all soft and quivery with borrowed emotion. "Like he was all she ever needed."

The manager, Terry Farnsworth, said he hoped we'd find Gloria's killer soon, but he didn't have much to add. She'd worked at his branch for about three years, and had brought a letter of reference from another bank to her interview with him. He'd hired her on the spot. "Gloria did a good job, was accurate, friendly to the customers, and always on time," he commented.

"What did you think about her suicide attempt?" Rick asked.

“What suicide attempt?”

“About three weeks ago,” I explained. “She left work in the middle of the day?”

“You’re kidding me.”

We assured him it was no joke. According to her boss, Gloria Doyle asked in advance for the afternoon off to take care of “some personal business.” He had no idea she had cut her wrists, and told us that she had been at work, as usual, at 8:45 the morning after she walked out of the ER. We left the branch with a copy of Gloria’s resume and a shared sense of unreality.

“Okay,” I said, not even turning the ignition. “She is either the most reserved, keep-to-herself woman on the planet or there is something seriously bizarre going on here. Who *schedules* an afternoon off to kill themselves?”

We kept up the discussion over lunch, take-out tacos al fresco. A steady stream of SUVs with the occasional car thrown in for variety sped by us, adding dust and exhaust to the salsa.

“She must have worn long sleeves,” I mused.

“Cold in there,” Rick said. “Banks are always cold. All she had to do was wear a sweater.”

“Remind me how this is getting us closer to her killer.”

“You’re the one who wanted to check out the husband’s story.”

“Yeah.” I crumpled my paper bag and took a last swig of my lemonade. “You ready?”

“Where to?”

“Morgue.”

Of course the ME hadn’t completed the post, that’d be later that day, thanks to the ever-murdering citizens of this great city. But he did have the rape kit – negative – and had done a

superficial evaluation of the body. The diener rolled her out for us. She was cold and pale. No bruises. The stab wound was surprisingly small.

“Might not even be a knife,” Rick offered.

“Huh.” I looked at her wrists. It was easier to examine them in the clean light of the morgue. “These look pretty messy to me.”

Rick agreed. “Scars are thick.”

I leaned over for a closer look. “I think there’s a thread or two in there.”

The morgue assistant leaned over my shoulder. “She never went back to have the stitches removed.”

“Huh.” I said, thinking about it.

“Looks like she was picking at the scabs, worrying at them, like,” he added.

“Like she wanted to make the scars bigger? Not let ‘em fade,” I suggested.

Back in the car, we took stock. “I still like the husband for it,” Rick said, “’cause it’s usually the husband. Plus, there was violence there.”

“On *her* part,” I reminded him.

“He drove her to it.”

“So, you think he put on his cloak of invisibility, ran out to the parking lot where she just happened to be waiting by his car, stabbed her with a nonexistent weapon, ran back inside and bowled the next frame... “

“The buddy could have been in on it.”

That security tapes hadn’t shown either man leaving, but there wasn’t a camera at every entrance, and it was a sensible avenue of investigation. I pulled my notes from the night before

and looked up Lerkowitz's place of employment. Surprisingly – I'd assumed he was blue collar – he held an office job and walked us into a conference room to talk. The cube farm had a cleaning-up-at-the-end-of-the-day buzz to it, as papers were stuffed into folders and coffee cups dumped. Jimmy Lerkowitz himself cleaned up nice, in dark suit pants and a dark blue dress shirt that matched his eyes. I glanced at his left hand – no ring. We stood awkwardly just inside the door, the men regarding each other over the top of my head.

"Thanks for talking with us, Mr. Lerkowitz," I said. "This is Detective Williams."

"No problem. What's up?"

Enough craning my neck. I got Lerkowitz and Rick to sit down just by sitting down myself. Then I asked, "How well did you know Gloria Doyle?"

"Pretty good, I guess. I met her the same day Tom did."

"At the bowling alley, I understand?"

"Yeah."

Rick jumped in. "He beat your time?"

"I was going with Carol back then. Gloria was attractive, sure, but I wasn't looking." He turned his face my way. "Besides, she seemed interested in Tom from the start."

Now that seemed a little odd. Granted, I hadn't seen Tom Doyle at his best, but most women wouldn't swoon over Doyle's weak chin, pale eyes and thinning red hair. Lerkowitz was definitely the better prospect.

"Yeah, she fastened on him right away. He bought her a couple of drinks, even drove her home that night. I had to get a lift."

"I understand their relationship progressed quickly."

Lerkowitz confirmed the story I'd heard from Doyle, but he couldn't really corroborate any details of their marital relationship. "First thing I knew about it, he was at my door with a duffle bag and told me he'd left his wife. I thought he was crazy."

"Crazy for leaving her?"

"Crazy for moving out. He owns that building – inherited from his dad. Lives on one floor, rents out the other two. He moves out, he may as well *give* Gloria the whole building, way divorce seems to work."

I traded looks with Rick. Another motive for wanting her dead? "What reason did he give for separating?"

"Said she was smothering him. Wouldn't give him an inch to himself."

"And was she?"

"I don't know." He tapped his fingers on the conference table, thought it over. "After the wedding, he stayed home more, but I guess that's natural. He brought her along, but it was different somehow. But I couldn't say she smothered him more than any other wife would."

"He cheat on her?" Rick asked. Rick assumed everyone cheated. The answer was no. Lerkowitz thought that dealing with Gloria took all the energy that Tom Doyle had, one way or another, since he'd met her. And as far as he knew, there was no infidelity on Gloria's part, either.

I circled back around to the day they separated. "So you say he moved in with you when he left Gloria?"

"He just stayed a couple of days. That weekend he moved in with his mom in Berwyn."

Rick leaned forward, all seriousness, man-to-man. “Tom ask you to help him kill his wife?”

Lerkowitz’s eyes went wide and he flushed red, but the only word he said was “no.”

“He never said he wished she was gone?”

“No.”

“Never asked your advice on how to get rid of her?”

“Asked me for the name of a divorce lawyer.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, but I’ve never been married, so I couldn’t help him out.”

I kept a low profile while Rick went back over Jimmy’s statement from the night before, looking for inconsistencies, details that could trip him up, playing the hard cop... not that it was such a stretch. I can be hard, too. It comes with the territory.

Later that night, after I dropped Rick back at his bungalow to be swallowed up by his loving family, I sat at Sully’s and made water circles on the bar with the bottom of my beer bottle. The place was filling up with the jukebox crowd. Sully himself plunked a smoked turkey sandwich basket in front of me and pushed the ketchup for the fries my way. He waved a cautioning index finger at the guy two stools down who was about to light cigarette. The man shook his head, but stuck the cigarette back in the pack.

“Answer me this, Sully,” I said. “Does a 38-year-old man leave his wife and then stab her to death because she had an abortion without telling him?”



“Huh.” Sully’s a big man with a ruddy face and not much hair. He rocked back on his heels while he thought. “Leave her, sure. Kill her, I guess, he could. But both? Leave her and then go back and kill her? That seems kind of unlikely.”

“That’s what I thought.”

I treated myself to a second beer, chatting with Sully and eyeing myself in the mirror behind the bar. I’d let my dark hair down and it grazed my shoulders. In the soft light I looked a little younger than my years, but the smooth, closed, professional mask I wore guaranteed I could drink beer alone all night, if that was what I wanted. I grinned at myself deliberately in the mirror, shattering the persona, and said “Sully, time to call it a night.”

He said, “See ya tomorrow” like he always did.

My apartment was just around the corner, but once in the car, I found myself traveling east on Roosevelt Road. In 25 minutes I was parked at the address Doyle had given me at the murder scene. I knocked on the door and it was answered by a woman in her early 60s. Medium height, she looked solid and comfortable. She shared her son’s hair color, only in her case, she presumably freshened it up with Lady Clairol. I introduced myself and she told me that Tom was in the shower. She asked me to come in and wait.

Mrs. Doyle’s house was clean and homey. There was an old-fashioned hard shell suitcase and an overstuffed gym bag in the foyer at the bottom of the stairs—Tom was heading back to the three flat soon. His mother settled into what was obviously her accustomed place, an armchair where she could easily see both the television or the fireplace. At her feet, an elderly golden retriever raised its head and gazed at me with interest, gave a couple of tail thumps, then

went back to dozing. Mrs. Doyle clicked the TV off with the remote and picked up her knitting. She was making a light blue sweater.

“Please, sit down, detective,” she invited.

On my way to the couch, I paused by the mantel. I lifted a 8x10 studio portrait in a heavy frame. “Your family?” I asked.

“Yes, that’s Tom senior with me and little Tommy. He’s 12 in that picture.”

All three of them had the pink-cheeked bloom of an overzealous touchup artist. Other pictures on the mantel included Tom Doyle’s high school graduation picture, what looked to be a 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary studio portrait, even a photo of the dog as a puppy. “Tom’s an only child?”

“Yes, I miscarried twice after I had him, and then we stopped trying.”

“I’m sorry for your disappointment,” I told her sincerely. “And I understand your husband passed away?”

“Yes, two years ago. Heart.”

I just nodded. I could hear the pipes groan as Tom turned off the shower upstairs.

“We’re looking into your daughter-in-law’s death.” It was her turn to nod. “Frankly, Mrs. Doyle, it’s hard to get a handle on. Everybody seems to have a different view of Gloria. What did you think of her?”

Mrs. Doyle looked directly at me over the top of her knitting. “Gloria was hard to get to know. I first met her when Tom brought her by, to announce the engagement. She seemed quiet and pretty and Tom was so happy, I was very pleased for him.”

“She was his first serious relationship?”

“Well, of course he had dated before, but Gloria was the first girl he brought home.”

“Did you become close?”

“No, not really. I had hoped to. I would have liked a daughter. I suppose I thought we’d be shopping together, seeing movies, you know, girl things. But Gloria was very busy, with her job and making a home, so, you see...”

“No grandchildren yet? I know my mom is always hoping I’ll settle down and give her someone to spoil.”

“Well, of course that would be wonderful. Would have been wonderful, I mean. All in due time, though, I thought.” Her voice was calm and measured, but her eyes had dropped to her knitting.

“Detective... was it Martinez?” Tom Doyle stood in the doorway to the sitting room, rubbing his hair with a white cotton towel. Clean, sober, dressed in neat jeans and a polo shirt, he looked a lot more together than he had the night before. His feet were bare and bony, sporting little tufts of golden-red hair on the toes.

I stood. “Yes, that’s right, Mr. Doyle. I just have a couple of questions for you.”

“Do I need...? Um, maybe I should have a lawyer.”

“That’s up to you, if that’s what you want.”

“Oh, what the hell. Ask me what you want. I can always stop talking.”

He sat down on the arm of the couch, towel draped around his neck. I could feel his mother’s eyes on me. “In your statement last night, you told me that Gloria had had an abortion. When was that exactly?”

“About six months ago.” He kept his eyes on my face. No glance in his mother’s direction.

“Did you know it at the time?”

“No, of course not. She didn’t ask me. She just did it.”

“And how did you find out?” I asked, expecting him to tell me that he found out through an insurance payment, bill, or something like that.

“She told me.”

“Were you arguing? Did she throw it in your face, was that it?”

“No,” he sighed. “It was an argument, I guess, but it was about my going out with my friends – I wanted to play poker, she wanted me to stay home, watch a movie. She seemed to think it showed how we didn’t need anybody else, just each other.”

“When did this happen?”

“A week or so before I left her.”

Not surprisingly, Doyle said he’d slammed out the door for poker night, eager to leave his wife behind. I left the topic and went on, building up a picture of how Tom Doyle was handling the separation. He’d been sad, then angry. Finally, just empty. When I asked if he’d ever thought of getting back together with her, he said no.

“She kept thinking she could change my mind,” he said. “Cutting her own wrists was the last thing, the final straw. No way was I going back to her after that.”

“You think she just did it for the attention?” I asked doubtfully. “Kind of a big risk to take.”

“She had fresh lipstick on.”

It hit me. I agreed with him. The afternoon off. The crash, to bring the helpful neighbor running. The handy next-of-kin card with her husband’s name – and his mother’s phone number

– on it. I bet if we checked at the bank, we’d find that Gloria had changed into that dramatic white dress before cutting her wrists. I believed him. And it sure sounded like Gloria had no enemies, no friends, no entanglements whatsoever, except her love for him.

When I asked him what he thought happened to Gloria, he said, “She hadn’t given up yet. Maybe she would never have given up. She knew I like to bowl, that Jimmy and me would be there that night, and she just waited by my car. In that red dress I used to like, hoping she could, you know,” here he glanced at his mother, embarrassed, “*convince* me to take her back.”

“And it was just her bad luck to be attacked while she was waiting?”

“It’s the only thing that makes sense.”

I thanked them both for their time and Tom walked me to the door. As I stepped outside, I asked him, “So, as far as you know, nobody knew about Gloria’s abortion except you and your mom?”

“That’s right,” he said.

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I arrested Mrs. Margaret Doyle for the murder of her daughter-in-law the next afternoon. The medical examiner and forensics confirmed that one of the knitting needles found in the bottom of the trash bag out in the alley behind the Doyle’s house was the murder weapon. Phone records showed a call that lasted three minutes from Gloria Doyle to her mother-in-law’s more than an hour and a half after Tom left for the bowling alley. I don’t know exactly what Gloria said to Mrs. Doyle on the phone, but it was enough to send the older woman out into the summer night. And a second viewing of the parking lot tapes gave us a clear shot of the mother-in-law driving through the bowling alley parking lot. Her confrontation with Gloria happened off-

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camera, of course, but it was clear that the crime was not premeditated – who plans ahead to murder somebody with a knitting needle? I suspect that she just couldn't stand the sight of the woman who killed her grandchild. She'll do time, of course, but will probably get out of jail in time to enjoy some grandkids, assuming Tom junior put some serious effort into it. Sully always recommends Match.com.

Rick was irritated that I solved it on my own. We put the final pieces of the puzzle in place together, of course. And he was there when we picked her up. His name was on the paperwork. But he wasn't there for the "eureka!" moment. The downside of having a personal life is that you sometimes have to play catch-up with the people who don't.

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