

The Gypsy Girl
By: Matthew Lee

Healdsburg wasn't the nicest of cities to be in. It was run down with crime and violence, filled with screwed up people who had lost their minds and gone mad thinking they run the place and blood-thirsty gangs. Secret clubs hopping with illegal hitmen and giant skyscrapers filled with those who had more money making life more miserable for those who were poor. The air smelled of gasoline and the skies were always dyed gray with the color of the smoke from the Healdsburg Asylum and the huge companies downtown. Streets covered with trash from the homeless and rusty barrels kids burned stuff in. The HPD wasn't the greatest of places either. Sure, they were cops, but they didn't have the cleanest backgrounds. Everyone had something to hide. But unlike the rest of the cops, there was one man who had the cleanest background and history of all of them. Ben Patterson.

His father had worked at the HPD before him and was one of the favorites, which gave Patterson an advantage at getting the job. He stood at an average height for a man and he had a short buzz cut. His hairline was a little far back and he didn't have much of a beard or mustache. He normally wore a gray suit and always had his gun on him whether or not he was on duty. He typically had a stern look on his face and was very straightforward when he needed to be. His assigned partner, Nathan Willson, on the other hand, was very secretive in the activities he when off duty. He was one to drink a lot and fall in love for those in a certain "business." Other than that, he didn't tell anyone what he did in his extra time. Nathan was a little taller than Ben and always had a slight wobble in his step for he was always either hungover or drunk. He wore a white button down shirt with a brown tie and a black leather jacket. His hair was gray and was on the longer side, and he typically wore a fedora to cover up his bald spot. He had a short gray

beard and a small mustache. Patterson had been seeing a woman for about three months and her name was Leslie Thompson. She had worked at the Healdsburg Asylum for a while as a nurse for the patients if anything ever happened until she met Ben when he was on an assignment there. After having dated for about three months, Patterson asked her to come work as the medical examiner at the office. At first she was hesitant but she eventually gave into the idea and was hired the next week.

“Hey Ben, would you like to go to the circus with me tonight?” she said after work one night, a slight smile on her face. She looked around at all the officers to make sure they weren’t listening because she knew how he felt about their relationship at work and in the office. “Oh c’mon, please? It will be fun!”

Ben looked around the office and finally looked back to her. Their eyes locked and he responded, “Okay, fine. But under one condition; we don’t tell anyone.”

She chuckled and replied, “Fine, fine. I won’t tell anyone, I promise.” She looked around once more and when she realized that nobody was looking, she hopped on her toes and gave Ben a peck on the cheek. Leslie smiled and walked away with a slight trot in her step as he watched after her with a smile on his face and he went back to work. Nathan walked up to Ben with a file in his hand, rolled it into a cylinder and tapped Ben in on the shoulder with it.

“Hey, you got in with the medical examiner, didn’t ya,” Nathan said to Ben.

Ben looked around nervously for he knew there was no getting out of this. Because once Nathan suspects something, he will go to anything to prove he’s right. Even if he’s wrong, he’d never admit it.

“Fine, yes, you caught me. We’ve been seeing each other for about three months,” Patterson replied under his breath. “But don’t tell anyone. I don’t need everyone thinking this is some sort of random hook up, okay?”

“Okay okay, was just checking things out.”

Ben rolled his eyes and Nathan gave him a subtle laugh and then they went back to work. Eventually, the office started closing up and all the cops and detectives began packing up their things to head out for the night. Ben and Leslie met right out back behind the building, caught a taxi, and went on their way to the circus.

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When Ben and Leslie arrived at the circus, it was crowded with people. No matter where they looked, there were hundreds of people all trying to push through to get to the big tent in the center. They hopped out of the car and started on their way to the popcorn stand near the entrance. Once they got through the line of people going into the huge tent, they sat down in the front row of chairs; and right after they got in their seats, the show started. It consisted of flying acrobats swinging across the stage back and forth. Fire breathers blew fire right over the heads of the crowd. Unicyclists juggled bowling pins and sword swallowers on balance beams. Eventually, they all came into the middle of the ring and started bowing. But right in the middle of that, a small clown car drove right into the ring and twelve men and women hopped out of it. They all ran to those bowing and started to fight with them. Ben gave a sudden surprised look at Leslie and once he realized that it wasn’t part of the show, he stood up and walked over the hay bails separating the audience with the performers and pulled his badge out from under his jacket.

“HPD! Everybody put your hands up! NOW!” Ben shouted in a stern voice. “HPD EVERYONE ON THE GROUND!”

Everybody froze within a second and they all looked at Ben with a worried expression on their faces, only to roll their eyes back in their heads and back up into a relaxed pose, for they all knew there was nothing they could do. Ben turned around and looked at Leslie for a split second, then nodded his head and put his badge back on his belt.

About ten minutes after the situation, the HPD and an ambulance arrived at the circus. Leslie was helping out with the medical services while Ben was interviewing each individual who was involved in the fight. He walked over to the guy who seemed to be the head of the clowns and asked for a name.

“Trevor Morgan sir,” the man replied.

“Okay Trevor. Why’d you do it? Why’d you start the fight?”

“I dunno,” Trevor said, shrugging his shoulders.

“Well you gotta know. You’re the man who started the fight, are you not?”

Trevor looked down at his feet and continued to say nothing. Ben sighed and rolled his eyes back in his head and walked away to one of the acrobats. He walked over to a tall and slim guy who had a small mustache and no chin hair. He had a thin yet slightly chiseled face but gave no expression.

“Name?” Ben asked with his pen readied on his paper.

“Leonard Miller,” the man said in a straight voice.

“So, you have any idea why Trevor might have started that fight?”

“Well, maybe because he’s just an arrogant son of a bitch,” Leonard said, looking up in an agered expression.

Ben looked up immediately from his notepad and gave Miller a confused facial expression. “Well, why do you say that?”

“Well, because he just is. See, our families have had a feud for more than four generations. Plus, he’s probably just mad that I slept with Gwendolyn Hammond, the snake charmer, Trevor was probably mad that she chose me over him.”

Ben stared at Leonard and then looked back at Trevor. He walked away while taking notes on his pad of paper. He went over to Leslie who was tending to one of the fire-breathers who had a gash in their head.

“So? D’you find out why the clown guy started the fight?” asked Leslie.

“Well, not exactly. So far, the most plausible reason is that Trevor was just mad that Leonard was sleeping with the snake charmer, Gwendolyn Hammond. She apparently slept with both of them and ended up choosing Leonard over Trevor. You hear anything about that?” asked Ben while looking around the tent.

“No. Not besides you. Then again, I never asked about it because I was planning on leaving that to you and the rest of the detectives. But the man who runs the circus is over there sitting in the back of the ambulance. I think your friend Nathan is checking him out,” replied Leslie.

Ben looked at the ambulance with the man in charge of the circus sitting in it. He walked over and pulled Nathan to the side.

“You find out anything? What’s his name?” Ben asked while gesturing over to the truck.

“Well, his name is Don Floyd, and he’s been working at the circus for the past 7 years, and apparently it only consists of two families: the Morgans and the Millers. They’ve had a bit of a history,” replied Nathan.

“Yeah, that’s what I heard. Did he mention anything about a snake charmer or something like that?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

Ben nodded and looked down at his shoes slowly sinking into the grass. He walked over to Don’s ambulance. Don Floyd was a stout man wearing a bright red suit with gold buttons and a black top hat. His dark skin covered with vibrant face paint and his mustache curled upwards towards his nose.

“Hello Mr. Floyd. Is it okay if I ask you a question?” requested Ben.

“Yes. Sure. Ask away. What’s on your mind?”

“Well, I was talking with both Trevor and Leonard about why they had started the fight, and they had mentioned something about a snake charmer by the name of Gwendolyn Hammond. Would you mind telling me who she is?”

“She has been here with us at the circus for the past 4 years. She and her son live in a trailer on the west side of the property.”

“Would you mind showing us to where trailer is?” asked Ben.

“Sure. Follow me.”

Don hopped off the ledge in the back of the ambulance and started walking towards the west side of the circus. Ben and Nathan followed after him in a quick walking pace.

They eventually made it to the circus’s trailer park and Floyd showed them to one of the larger trailers where Gwendalin had stayed.

“D’you know if anyone’s here right now?” he asked.

“Her son might be home. Who knows though? He’s always out doing something,” Don replied.

Ben went up and knocked on the door of the trailer and stepped back. A young man no older than eighteen stepped into the doorway. He had short red hair slicked to the left and wore a plaid flannel under a blue vest. He had khaki pants and black dress shoes.

“H-h-hello?” said the boy.

“What’s your name kid?” asked Nathan.

“Jerome s-sir. A-a-anything I can h-help you w-with?”

“Hey, no need to be scared. We just want to know, are you Gwendalin’s son?”

“Yes, why?”

“Well, is she home?”

“No, she’s been gone all day. S-s-she left sometime this morning but she hasn’t returned yet. Why, is she okay?” Jerome asked in a frantic tone.

“Well, that’s the thing. We don’t know. We need to find her,” Ben butted in.

Jerome stared at the officers and then looked down at the grass. He started shaking and then looked up with tears in his eyes.

“Please tell me what’s going on. I need to know what’s going on with my mother,” he said shakily.

“We will. Don’t worry. These are good officers. But they’re going to need your help. Do you think she could be around here somewhere?” asked Don trying to act as calm as possible.

“Well, maybe. If she was, she would probably be by the cars or behind the tent,” replied Jerome.

They all looked at each other and called some other officers over for some assistance. They split into three groups: one would search the parking lot, another the rest of the trailers, and the last behind the tent. Ben and Nathan stayed at the trailers with Jerome and Don and three other

cops. The rest left in a hurry and started the search. Nathan entered Gwendalin's trailer to see if anything in there would help them find where she might be while Ben went and looked under all the trailers and behind the bushes right next to the park. After ten minutes of searching, Ben went back to Jerome's trailer. As he was entering, his foot hit something metal. He stepped back and got on his hands and knees to see a small ax. He picked it up with a handkerchief from his pocket and got out from under the trailer. He called for Nathan to show him but right then, all the cops heard a shout from the parking lot. Ben threw the ax on the grass next to the cop cars and then rushed over as fast as he could. When they got there, they saw an officer standing next to a truck with a tarp over it. The man lifted the tarp and shone his flashlight on it and there she was dead with dried blood coming from a long deep gash on her right temple.

"Well, that answers our question," said Nathan with a slightly sarcastic tone.

Ben looked at him, gave him a stern look, and walked away. He went back to the park and found Jerome sitting in the doorway to the trailer, who, when he saw Ben approaching him, jumped to his feet and asked, "Did you find her? Is she okay?" Ben looked at him and sighed. Jerome stared back with a look of disbelief in his eyes and moved his bottom lip as if trying to say something, but no words came out.

"I'm sorry. There was nothing we could do. She was already dead when our guys got to her. She was in the back of a truck with a wound in her head," said Ben walking towards Jerome.

The boy looked at him and started to cry. His face swelled up and he put his hands up to try to stop the flow of water coming from his eyes but he couldn't. He ran up to Ben and gave him a huge hug and then stepped back. He went back into his trailer then slowly closed the door. Ben watched as the lights went off and then walked back to where the truck was. When he got there, he looked at Nathan and shook his head.

“Man, poor kid. Didn’t have a clue,” Nathan said, looking at Ben with his hand reaching into his coat pocket for his flask of whiskey.

“That’s just the thing. Right before one of our officers found Gwendaline’s body, I hit my foot on a small ax right under Jerome’s trailer,” said Ben. He raised the hand where the ax was and showed Nathan. “I’m almost 100% positive this was the weapon used to murder Gwendalin. The size of the head of the ax is the right size for the wound on her head and it’s the only lead we’ve got.”

Nathan looked at him with an unsure look on his face and then sighed, realizing Ben might be right.

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After an hour of back and forth arguing between Ben and Nathan back at the office, they eventually agreed on a plan to test their theory on who the real killer was. Ben sat down across from Jerome as Nathan leaned against the wall on the right side of the room.

“So, Jerome, how are you dealing with the death of your mother?” asked Ben, trying to start things off casually.

“I’m doing okay,” said Jerome as his eyes started tearing up.

“That’s good, considering you were the one to kill her,” Ben said as he put the ax on the table.

Jerome stared at the ax and then back up at Nathan and Ben. He started crying and put his head on the table. But soon, the crying turned into laughter, and the laughter turned into shouting in anger. He slammed his fists on the table and looked up. On his face was large smile and in his eyes, a lifeless stare.

“Ah, finally. Took you long enough. I thought I actually had you two fooled. Congrats to both of you for finally figuring it out,” Jerome said in a high pitched voice as he started laughing.

Ben and Nathan looked at each other and finally Nathan asked, “But why? She was your mother.”

“She was, but she was also a dirty, worthless, whore who would leave everyday just to fool around with countless men.” Jerome responded. “How do you think I was made? How do you think I feel about it? I could barely live with it so I finally made the logical choice to kill her. To save herself and me from her horrid ways.” . He slammed his fists on the table again and started leaning back in his chair, laughing until he couldn’t breathe. Ben and Nathan looked at each other terrified at what they had just discovered and immediately called for an officer to take Jerome out of the room and got him a one way ticket to Healdsburg Asylum.