

Hands Wring for Duty

* Based on a True Story

Allouette Lake, BC
February 10, 1997

4 am, full moon. The dawn will rise steadily. Steven Densen is in the front seat.

Man says, here. Here's a fruit punch.

He hands the young man juice in a Mason jar. He holds the jar steady so the young man can drink it. It will take about 20 minutes for the antifreeze in the juice to take effect. The young man believes he is drinking fruit punch.

The man speaks to the younger man. I have taken you to beauty. This is a better place. You will like it here.

Time passes. The young man begins to struggle. He vomits. There is enough antifreeze in the juice even vomiting will not help. He writhes in pain.

My stomach! Ugh! My stomach!

It goes on for exactly 27 minutes. Man is watching the clock, breathing, waiting.

Steven screams, I need help. I need a doctor.

Man waits. He'll be done soon.

Steven turns blue. He keels in his chair.

Man hauls him out of the chair. Takes the body, cuts off the arms with a chainsaw. Blood flies. Infernal sanguine fest. Cuts off the ankles with a chainsaw. Beheads the body with a chainsaw. The pieces are buried in a quadrant at the south end of Allouette Lake.

Man takes the wheelchair, throws it back in the car. He peels out, drives home, showers, goes to work.

109 days later, late spring, a hiker and his dog come upon a decaying, beheaded body in the lake: no arms, ankles amiss, no head. The police investigation begins immediately. No word of this has reached town until the police search starts.

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Mission, BC
1978

Dolores Densen was born a little smaller than her 7 siblings. She was the oldest, with a dulling fragility about her. Tiny and sensitive, Dolores could fool anyone into thinking she was somehow also nice. She was often sickly and wheezed with breath. In truth, Dolores could take a hoot owl head's and twist it right off. When it came to how to fight, Dolores was a true senator.

Dad Densen had been swiped from the family too early in the Burgoyne's Cove, Newfoundland B-36 crash in 1953, shortly after baby Jemima arrived. Mom Densen was left with her hands full. Dad had been part of the crew and had died instantly, leaving Mom Densen with 7 to raise alone. Mom did it, but they were dirt poor. Any chance she got, mom took to the bottle. By the end of Dolores' childhood, Mom Densen was a toothless hag and had become a recluse.

From the time Dolores was 5, she helped. She helped her mother; bathed the other children. She helped with feedings. There was a shadow about all the Densen children, but Dolores was particularly Machiavellian. She had random eye spasms which gave her the appearance of an eagle about to swoop. Whenever she got up, her leg twitched and it was hard to stretch it right out. Dolores had it in her head she'd have her own damned brood and her husband wouldn't die in a crash. She'd make him live long.

When it came time for Dolores to start her own family, she left. Hitchhiked straight across the country, found her place in Mission, BC. Dolores mainly wanted children. She liked playing with babies. She could handle the diapers; she liked the way they listened. She could tell the little ones just what to do.

Dolores met Dwight that year; she was 19. She had taken work as a chamber maid in a local hotel and Dwight had walked in one day. A wharf rat who'd migrated from Vancouver to Mission in the hopes of securing land and farming, he'd stopped in at the hotel to drink. Dolores had caught his eye. Dolores liked to drink and so they had some beverages together after she got off shift.

The two began dating, decided it was a thing. They'd be a couple. They'd have children. Dwight took work on a farm to learn the ropes so he could save for a farm of their own. Dolores kept on as a chamber maid.

Mission, BC
1982

Dr. Shayla Candor was new in Mission, a general practitioner and the only woman in her family to attend college. She had set up a family practice in Mission in 1980, partly to get free of her roots, partly because Mission needed a doctor at the time. Dwight walked in, told her

he needed a check up. He didn't have much time for female doctors, but he wanted to be sure he could learn to operate the mill saw. Lurvy, the fellow he worked with insisted Dwight get a check up. He'd noted Dwight's sudden lean-ins and a swagger time to time and felt it was prudent Dwight get his nerves checked.

Dwight had been downing whiskey at the pub the night before. Dr. Candor could smell him from behind the door as she entered to speak with the patient. She conducted a full physical, but something darker than the scent of day-old alcohol seemed amiss. She asked him to walk a straight line. Dwight fell over.

Dr.Candor asked him if his gastrocnemius muscles ached at all, noting he had very developed calves.

'What's 'at?' Dwight replied.

'Excuse me. It's your calf muscles on the backs of your legs. Do they ache?'

'Whole fuckin' body aches. Life aches, Doctor,' Dwight replied

'Can you raise your arms, please, Dwight?' Dr.Candor asked

Dwight's shoulder blades stuck out like crow's wings. It was unusual.

'Dwight, I'm going to send you for a full blood test. When was the last time you ate?'

Dwight replied he'd eaten breakfast and lunch and needed to get back to work. Dr.Candor insisted he take the lab requisition within two days.

Dwight left the office, returned to the farm, finished up work that day. One his way home, he stopped in for some whiskey before he returned home to have dinner with Dolores. She was waiting with a surprise.

'Dwight, I got news for you. We're pregnant!'

He poured them each a shot. They downed the shots, ate the chicken fingers she'd stolen from the First Avenue Food Mart. And then they made love.

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Dwight went to get his blood work done the next week. Dr.Candor called him in as soon as the results arrived.

'Dwight, I called you in right away. This comprehensive blood work is saying you have the markers for Muscular Dystrophy. Have you ever been tested before?'

'Doctor, my mom died when I was 12 and my dad never got over it. Haven't seen a doc in 15 or 16 years.'

'Dwight, this is quite serious. Muscular Dystrophy is a chronic weakening of the cell muscles. It will take you down slowly but surely. I'm so sorry to have to tell you this. It would be wise for you to reconsider children. It will be very difficult for you to be able to care for or provide for a family long term.'

Dwight couldn't be fucked with women doctors. They were all hysterics, he felt. Histrionic. Tryin' a prove themselves. He got up, pushed the chair in Dr.Candor's office over. Walked out. Fuckin' lyin' holier-than-thou bitch.

Dwight grabbed his flask: whiskey panacea from under the driver's side seat. Took a shot. Dolores was 4 weeks along.

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Mission, BC
1997

Camden Stock had grown up in Mission, BC. Her mother was a PE teacher, dad had his own mechanics shop. Camden was 9 when she saw a man beat his wife bloody in a parking lot near their home coming back from the movies. 'Stop! Stop!' she'd wanted to say, but her voice stuck. She was 9. That moment never left her mind. When Camden was 18, she set out to become an officer of the law. Mom beamed with pride the day she got her badge. Camden worked a regular beat in Mission as well as she was the P.I. on the force. She knew Mission inside and out. Ever since the trauma of the man beating his wife, Camden had looked a little deeper into things.

Camden dressed for work, stopped by The Sweet Spot Cafe for her morning coffee. A murder case involving a 15-year-old boy had come up, body parts in various hidden pieces in the hills, south end of Alouette Lake. A head-less, arm-less, ankle-less body in the lake. Nothing rattled Camden. A true beauty: lean and tall, cascade of blond hair. They called her 'Ditz' as a joke on the force because she was a anything but. Camden would sit for hours at a time with a miscreant and get the truth if that's what it took. She was always the first on scene, always the last to leave work. She was focused and loved her work. After hours, she worked out, ate and slept. Camden was not a hugely social creature. It took her majority of her time off work to be able to come in to work each day.

The question was this: was a serial killer loose in the area, or was this a random occurrence? The body of Steven Densen was being investigated.

Tess Chance was a mere 23 when she got her first case load through Mission Home Support Services. She had a background in education and had a friend who worked with young people with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and other pervasive disorders in the area. Her friend talked to the people at Home Support, got Tess a job. Tess was on with Celestia that day for the first time.

Tess was bright, bubbly, and full of heart. She had been the town empath growing up in Thunder Bay. She went west for a change. Thunder Bay had it's time for her. She was ready for a challenge.

Steven was found dead. Both twins had Muscular Dystrophy. Shane still struggled in his wheelchair, but Steven had been reduced to bed rest majority of the time by the time his body was located in pieces, Alouette Lake in Mission, BC.

Celestia Densen was the last of the 5 Densen children. Steven and Shane, the twins had arrived first, 1983. Frank had arrived in 1986, a beaming sweetheart with pronounced spina bifida-and a penchant for sugar as well as stealing the neighbour's apples. Frank somehow softened the harsher lines of the family and quickly became the favourite son. He had a strong sense of humour. Then came Corey in 1990; blind, zero understanding of consequences and the same Machiavellian switch-fight as his mother. Tiny Celestia, the only girl, completed the brood in 1992: blind, stone deaf, mute with massive nervous system irregularities no medical professional could pin down. Celestia was a handful. Social Services had assigned Tess the case, with a warning, 'Call for support if it's too much. No other Social Worker has stayed on with the Densens for more than a month.'

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Tess got out of her Subaru in a t-shirt and light pants, ready to begin with Celestia. She was still fresh enough at it that she had a smile on her face. Dolores greeted her as she walked up the driveway. Was she drunk? Her gait was clearly impaired. It was like she was hobbling, or writhing as she walked. It looked like Dolores was in pain.

'Celestia really took the last life out me, ' she said to Tess. 'Hip's been out ever since she arrived.' Dolores laughed at her plight and said, 'K, are ya ready to meet our crew?'

Tess, sensing a serious personal boundary was needed said, 'Yes, I'll be working with Celestia every week on Tuesday from 3 to 5 pm. Can I meet her?'

Dolores coughed up some phlegm and then spat on the ground. Her voice was very irregular. Again, Tess sensed an issue with drinking. Dolores Huntington's had advanced to the point she was having a great deal of trouble with nerves and control of her ANS. She trammed up the path, motioning for Tess to come.

As Tess entered the front door, a tiny girl emerged, seemingly limping.

'This is Celestia, our tiny angel,' beamed Dolores. 'She's my only girl. Blessed with four boys and then Celestia came last.'

Dolores' tone changed seemingly suddenly. She began pointing her finger at Tess, 'You can just take her to the mall. She likes to go for milk. She might let you push her on the swings. She don't like much else. And watch it. She's a biter.'

The minute they got to the mall, Celestia tried to bolt. Tess had to run and catch her so she wouldn't be hit by a turning car.

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Camden was moving through graphic photos, turning her mind around to try to figure out why Steven Densen had been killed. He was a young teen with serious health concerns. He'd done nothing to provoke this attack.

She had this information:

- dad, Dwight, was dealing with advanced muscular dystrophy and alcoholism. He had not worked in 5 years. The family were on welfare

- mom, Dolores, had her hands full with a house of growing children

- the Densens were considered a rough and troubled group, but not dangerous by any means

- Dr. Candor had identified questionable bruising on Celestia's right arm; that had been reported to the Constable as well by the family themselves and an interfacing report existed from the hospital. The ER doctor had examined the child themselves and provided the report. The parents had taken the child in.

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Tess got home began making food. The phone rang about 5 min later.

'This is Constable Stock. I have a report from the family you have been working with. It's important. The Densens?'

Tess replied, 'Yes. I've just begun working with their daughter, Celestia. I'm a Support Worker. What is this about?'

'Well, Tess. We're going to need to investigate you. The Densens have complained that you hit their child. There's marked bruising on her right arm. We'll need to do a home inspection and then I need to do a routine verbal interview with you, which will be taped. Are you free to come down to the station? This is a time-sensitive matter.'

'I'll be right down' Tess hung up the phone, took one more bite of food and drove to the station. There was no dad to protect Tess, no lawyer, no boyfriend.

Tess, a bright, bubbly 23-year-old old, full of heart from Thunder Bay was about to learn a little more about reality than she'd ever intended.

As she exited the station after being interviewed by an investigator, she went to drive away. Both her front tires had been slashed while she was in the station.

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