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Mysterious Tears Amy Gerstler

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MYSTERIOUS TEARS

A homicide detective has the grave responsibility of resolving the most serious criminal act one human can commit against another. Therefore, we bear an important burden when called upon to investigate a death, for we stand in the dead person's shoes, so to speak, to protect his or her interests against everybody else's.

We're lucky she was killed in snow. This kind of old, crumbly snow's impressionable. Her January garden. Pathetic. Shows she had a soft spot for lost causes: winter gardening at this elevation, and that Dutchman. He's handsome. I'll give him that. He'll be Miss Popularity in prison. Deer footprints all over. Plants nibbled to nubs-a real deer cafeteria. Remember that case with an African parrot as sole witness? "Don't, please don't!" is all it kept screaming. Talking birds freak me out. I wouldn't let my partner leave me alone with it. I'd be more comfortable hearing a beer can or matchbook speak. Snapped-off prairie grass: sure sign of a fight.

The Dutchman lies on his back in the holding cell, complaining to the ceiling "I'm starved! When do we eat?", eyes hot with mysterious tears. He's got such a mob yelling in his head, voices from various centuries-Calamity Jane, Job, one of Hitler's assistants, that little boy from the "Lassie" TV show-he probably can't remember which one convinced him to kill her. Maybe they ganged up on him.

Till each crime's solved I carry a post-mortem polaroid of the victim's face in my wallet-which has gotten a lot fatter than I'd like. Pictures of my kids I keep in a different compartment back here, with the cash.

Nestled in the crotch of his dwarf tree: an unexpected find. A nest and five bluish eggs scrawled with tiny purple hieroglyphics. My wife, one of the happy fraternity of naturalists, would know how to read these. I'm stumped. Slate-colored junco or common nighthawk? Perhaps an olive-backed thrush. More witnesses who won't talk. That includes you, too, bloodstained leather gardening gloves, iron gate, dead vines, and worms curling and uncurling where we dug them up, like infants' fingers.

If the photographer's all through, let the dogs loose inside the hedge border awhile. Maybe they can sniff out some underpinnings and not just piss all over the crime scene, like last time.

My wife says no dwelling has more integrity than a well-made nest.

Our search should begin in the area immediately surrounding the body and proceed outward.

Apparently all he's done since his arrest is cry. Did the beefy Dutchman weep as he stabbed her, watched by shriveled primitive winter roses?

The badly scratched victim still brandishes a fork. Bits of heavily peppered egg cling to the tines. I think I saw a wound on the back of the Dutchman's hand that looked like a forkstab: four tiny holes. Let's check. Looks like she tried to defend herself with a trowel, too. She should have smashed him on the skull with the shovel. It was right there, at arm's reach.

I don't think mammals should die with their eyes open, do you? Blood gets fanned out around the neck kind of cape-like due to arterial gushing. Don't step in it! Little tangles of dark hair, just what might be caught in her comb some morning, skitter between the tree roots like shy spiders. Bet you twenty bucks some of her hair ends up lining a bird's nest next spring.