

A Scar to Talk About

Julian Winter

508-904-8319
PO Box 331
Framingham, MA 01704
www.julianwinter.com
julian@julianwinter.com

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FADE IN:

A dark rain paints the night black. Morse code for SOS repeats three times, then fades into. . .

INT. SOMEWHERE IN LOS ANGELES, A TAXI, REAR SEAT POV - NIGHT

The wipers thump randomly, clearing rain from the windshield.

The driver, RD, naps. Mid-40's, four days of stubble, shoulder length hair needing a cut, yet handsome beneath it all.

A cigarette burned to the filter clings to his fingers. A scrungy Styrofoam cup holds a few ounces of stale coffee.

A rabbit's foot and something like a piece of dried jerky hang from the rear-view mirror.

Snippets of dispatcher crosstalk burst from the two-way radio.

The rear door jerks open, waking RD. TWO MEN, one THIN, one BALD, push into the cab in a hurry, dodging the rain.

RD eyes them in the rear-view mirror as he shifts into drive and starts the meter all in one Zen motion. The men argue.

THIN MAN

Don't have the money.

BALD MAN

I need it now.

THIN MAN

Ain't got it.

The thin man glances to RD. The bald man takes the cue.

BALD MAN

Hey, cabbie, can you break a Franklin?

RD pulls out ten singles. He speaks with a Cajun lilt.

RD

Just came on. This is all I have.

The bald one looks to the other shaking his head, unconvinced. The bald one nods and puts a handgun to RD's ear.

BALD MAN

Don't believe you.

With an eye to the mirror, RD turns on some classical music.

RD
Then pull that bad boy and search
my empty pockets.

The bald one leans back to consider his next move. Thoroughly calm, RD still eyes him in the mirror, almost daring him.

RD
Meter's runnin'.

The music, screeching violins, disturbs baldy's concentration.

BALD MAN
What the hell is that?

RD, brow furled, cocks his ear as if to listen.

RD
Chopin's Piano Sonata in A minor.
Outstanding piece of music, no?

The bald one thinks some, then holsters the gun, laughing.

BALD MAN
Drive, you crazy bastard.

AT THEIR DESTINATION

The bald one throws a crumpled ten over the seat as they exit. RD swigs the coffee and grabs the mike in one silky motion.

RD
Six o six, clear.

He pulls a smoldering butt from the ashtray and takes a drag.

Late 60's guitar music filters behind the dispatcher's voice, blending seamlessly with the violins from the car stereo.

DISPATCHER (VO)
You been out fourteen hours. Ready
to come in?

RD counts a fist-size wad of twenty-dollar bills and inserts the ten. He glances to the time, 3:30 am. Taking the mike,

RD
Sun'll be up in a few hours.

He taps the gas gauge. The needle moves from E to half tank.

RD
I'll hang around for a while.

He reaches to turn off the stereo, but not before,

RADIO DJ (VO)
That was the lovely sound of Brahm's
Violin Concerto in C major.

RD
Concerto, sonata. Potato, potahta.

He grabs his pencil and idly taps it against the meter.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

RD's tail lights fade into the rain-glossed night.

INT. A PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

A gloved hand, could be male or female, dials 911.

911 OPERATOR
Nine one one emergency.

The other hand, also gloved, taps Morse code for SOS, three times against the receiver, with a pencil.

INT. RD'S CAB, PARKED - DAY

RD's cab sits atop a cliff, the ocean below. He reclines in the seat, eyes to the east. Finishing a cigarette, he taps a pencil waiting for,

THE SUNRISE

Driving guitar music precedes the dispatcher's inquiry.

DISPATCHER (VO)
Six o six, RD? The Children's Shelter.

RD grabs the mike without taking his eyes from the sun.

RD
Six o six, copy.

He flicks the butt out the window, then pencils the address in his log.

INT. A DARK BEDROOM - DAY

Dimly lit, shadows vie with the light. A rack contains several radio scanners. Teeny bopper music pines in the background.

A MYSTERY WOMAN'S hands, with nails polished, tunes a scanner to eavesdrop on RD. A young girl's doll sits on the table.

DISPATCHER (VO)
Six o six, RD? The Children's Shelter.

RD (VO)
Six o six, copy.

An audible inhalation, as one might smell a rose.

MYSTERY WOMAN
(imitating his Cajun)
RD, Mister Sex o sex.

Another inhalation and a moan as she exhales, her arousal palpable. She pushes a button to replay his response.

RD (VO)
Six o six, copy.

INT. A BEDROOM - DAY

A bedroom crime scene. An ATTRACTIVE WOMAN lies naked on the bed, wrists and ankles tied. Scarlet colors her throat.

The MEDICAL EXAMINER (ME), mid-60's, seen it all, checks her vitals and listens through a stethoscope placed to her chest.

NIKI SANTANA, 39, ice cold Latin looks, examines the body. Her partner, KELLUM, mid-40's, one French fry from a heart attack, enjoys the view from the foot of the bed.

He reads a note taped to the victim's crotch, eyes lingering on her nakedness.

INSERT NOTE

"No rape"

He reaches for the note. Niki reacts lightning fast.

NIKI
That hasn't been dusted.

KELLUM
He never leaves prints.

He snatches the note, exposing her remaining secret.

NIKI
Damn it, Kellum, she's not even dead.

KELLUM
(grinning)
Just looking for signs of forcible entry.

Niki tugs on the women's wrist restraints drawing a glance from the ME. She contemplates the women's naked body, then pulls the top sheet to the victim's shoulders.

ME

Vitals are stable. Should I wake her?

Niki shakes her head looking at Kellum.

NIKI

Wait until we're done.

The CAPTAIN, mid-50's, battle-hardened, enters.

CAPTAIN

Anything new?

Niki shakes her head.

NIKI

Just like the others, everything
but dead.

With a tweezers Niki lifts a note taped to the headboard.

HEADBOARD NOTE

"CRIME SCENE DETAIL. Victim: Nora Pena.
Cause of death: Slashed throat." ...

Niki scans each list item and notes it in the crime scene.

NIKI

Thorough.

ME

Yeah, I could use him on my staff.

Niki looks to the 'No rape' note. She covers the 'na' on Pena.

NIKI

Nora Pe. No rape. Coincidence?

Kellum shrugs.

LATER, IN THE BEDROOM

Alone, Niki stands beside the victim, eyeing the scene, focused on the restraints. She slides a finger along the ropes.

The ME enters with a FEMALE ME. Niki jerks her hand away. The ME eyes Niki, questioning.

NIKI
I'm stumped. What does he want?

ME
Perhaps, that is it.

FEMALE ME
(to Niki)
Ready?

Niki nods. The female ME undoes the victim's wrist restraints.

INT. RD'S CAB, PARKED AT THE CHILDREN'S SHELTER - DAY

A woman COUNSELOR, mid 30's, and a GIRL, maybe 10, enter the cab. The girl tries to handle her school supplies and too many books, in obvious need of a backpack.

RD looks to the run-down building. The 'Children's Shelter' sign hangs askew.

COUNSELOR
To Grace Elementary School.

RD shifts into gear, putting his finger to the meter as he looks to the young girl from the rear view mirror. Her left hand and one eye are bandaged.

The woman catches his glance in the mirror. He doesn't start the meter until well down the street.

CURBSIDE AT THE GRACE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The meter reads \$9.00. The woman fumbles for the fare, then finds a ten. She extends it tentatively.

RD has a one waiting in exchange. She motions him to keep it. He pushes it into the girl's hand.

RD
For that backpack.

The girl fixes one of what must be a pretty set of eyes on RD.

GIRL
Thanks, Mister.

The woman thanks RD in her glance. She offers a business card.

COUNSELOR
Donations are tax-deductible. God willing, we'll have enough money someday to renovate the shelter.

They exit. The young girl turns to wave with the bandaged hand, but can't find a smile. RD flips the card over to read,

BACK OF CARD

"And God so loved the world he
gave his only Son"...

He shoves it into the ashtray beside a still lit cigarette.

RD

Right.

Flames slowly devour the card.

INT. RD'S CAB, PARKED AT 148 FLOWER ROAD - DAY

RD sketches the young school girl waving to him. In the sketch though, her bandages are gone and she sports a smile.

Snippets of radio crosstalk until,

DISPATCHER (VO)

Six o six, your 148 Flower Road
just cancelled. But, oh lucky day,
I've got a call for 147 Flower.
Sounds like helluva package. Enjoy.

RD looks across the street to what could only be the PACKAGE, a smart-dressed, slender SHY WOMAN hiding her eyes behind bangs and a striking face below a wide-brimmed hat.

She closes her cell phone and hails RD. He pulls a U-turn.

POV: DRIVER'S SEAT LOOKING TO REAR PASSENGER DOOR

Her leg eases in, her skirt catches the door and slides up her thigh, to reveal a well-turned leg and more.

RD catches her eye, and both know he knows she's wearing nothing under that skirt.

From a lace-gloved hand she extends an address on a scented slip of paper. He savors the perfume as he drives off.

EXT. THE FRONT DOOR AT 148 FLOWER ROAD - DAY

A MAN emerges and yells for RD's receding cab to stop.

BACK TO THE CAB, DURING THE RIDE

RD glances at her from the rear-view mirror, but she demurely parries his interest.

HER DESTINATION

Over the seat she extends a twenty for a ten dollar fare. She holds the bill a little too long, drawing RD's eyes to hers.

She notes the sketch on the front seat, then exits before he can make change.

RD

Miss, your change.

In a honey-coated voice, pure New Orleans.

SHY WOMAN

Thanks, RD.

Her accent catches his ear as she strides away. He slides the perfumed note under his nose, inhaling deeply.

From his wallet he pulls out a dog-eared snapshot of a woman in a straw hat and sun dress and holds it beside the receding figure of the shy woman.

He shoves the photo back into his wallet and presses the perfumed paper into the ashtray, where it catches flame.

INT. POLICE HQ, SQUAD ROOM, NIKI'S DESK - DAY

At her desk, pen in hand, Niki contemplates an FBI application.

A stack of crime psychology textbooks sit on one side, case files on the other. Morse code drones in the background from a CD player.

Kellum sits at his desk uncluttered by work, yet still sloppy.

The captain enters to toss a newspaper on Kellum's desk.

NEWSPAPER HEADLINE

"The Morse Code Mugger 'taps' again"

KELLUM

Clever, huh? Morse code..., taps.

The captain steps beside Niki, still lost in thought. He notes the FBI application.

CAPTAIN

A real puzzle, isn't it?

Niki snaps out of her reverie, turning the application over.

NIKI

This is just a game to him, cat
and mouse.

CAPTAIN

I had a call- the FBI's taken interest.

She immediately glances to the captain. He notes it and nods.

CAPTAIN

Yeah, F B I.

He and Niki step to the wall map containing several pins.

CAPTAIN

Anything from this last one?

Niki shakes her head, putting another pin on the map.

NIKI

Like the others, inconsistent MO.
The only clues are intentional. The
victims only remember an aerosol
spray to the face before passing out.

Kellum chomps a burrito. Filling plops on his desk.

KELLUM

The crime scene is spotless. Even
leaves a copy of an ME's report.

CAPTAIN

Have you checked that out?

NIKI

Dead end. No matches with current
or past MEs.

CAPTAIN

What's our ME think?

ME (OS)

Stumped.

The ME, exhausted, enters and drops a report on Niki's desk.

ME

No correlation between the crimes.

CAPTAIN

Are we dealing with the same individual?
Maybe copy cats?

The ME shrugs. More of Kellum's burrito hits the desk. He

wipes his mouth and slurps a soda.

KELLUM

My bet, ex-cop. Knows the ropes.

Niki puts a hand on her stack of crime psychology books.

NIKI

Could be a woman. Never a struggle.

KELLUM

(grinning)

Waddya mean, women don't like a struggle?

Niki notes that the ME looks to Kellum, then catches the captain's eye.

ME

There is a certain elegance to the randomness. A kind of symmetry.

CAPTAIN

This isn't an admiration society.

This is all practice, a dry run.

They're getting up the nerve to kill.

(motions to the map)

I don't care if they're male or female.

I want them caught.

Niki sticks a few more pins in place. Kellum's blurt sprays burrito filling over his desk.

KELLUM

Sweet mother of Jesus!

Kellum points to the pins. The ME cocks his head.

ME

Interesting.

CAPTAIN

I'll be damned. So much for copy cats.

THE MAP

The pins create a perfect cross †.

KELLUM

I revise my theory, a religious nut.

Niki steps back to study it. She looks to the ME.

NIKI

Toying with us or is it a clue?

ME

Either case they're toying with us.

An OFFICER, holding his phone, catches Niki's attention.

OFFICER

Got one coming in from nine one one.

Niki punches her speakerphone. It's Morse code. She writes while Kellum fumbles for his translation sheet.

NIKI

S O S, three times. It's them.

The Morse code continues. She writes as fast as it comes.

NIKI

Six five six.

Kellum lags behind, then stops to look at the map.

NIKI

Beacon Street...

The captain puts a pin in the center of the cross at,

NIKI

... Saint Linus Church.

Kellum's jaw drops. Niki heads out not waiting for Kellum, still wiping his face. He hustles to catch up.

INT. SAINT LINUS CHURCH, A CONFESSIONAL - DAY

A priest sits defrocked in his confessional, naked. Niki and Kellum check empty side chambers. The ME records vitals and notes the time.

ME

Like the others. He'll be out about two hours. Can you smell it?

Niki nods, looking around.

ME

Incense.

She notes the incense holder, beside the priest, still lit.

She inspects a note taped to the priest's Bible. Kellum eyes the priest's lower extremities.

KELLUM

Not much for equipment is he?

Niki sends a scathing glance toward Kellum.

KELLUM

Boy, when this hits the press— Any
sign of another male?

The ME examines a lipstick case and notes lipstick on the
priest's inner thigh.

ME

Appears to have been a woman.

Niki taps the crime scene note.

Niki

Thirty seven stabs with an ice pick?

The ME notes felt tip dots scattered around the priest's
abdomen and groin. An ice pick lies on the ground.

Niki thumbs through the Bible. A worn business card falls out.

BUSINESS CARD (LYING ON THE FLOOR)

"Acme Taxi. We go the distance for you."

She and Kellum exchange glances as she bends to retrieve it.

INT. THE DARK ROOM WITH RADIO SCANNERS - NIGHT

The mystery woman plays a montage of cab dispatches, all of RD.

She dabs perfume behind her ear, then rubs her breasts beneath
her robe, moves to her belly, ultimately reaching lower.

MYSTERY WOMAN

(as Mother)

What I'd say about touching yourself?

(as teenage girl)

But Mother. He's so... special.

(as Father)

That slut playing with herself again?

If she needs a man I'll show her one.

(as a child)

Mommy, no. Make him go away.

She picks up the doll and hugs it close. The taped montage of
RD's voice drones in the background.

INT. ACME CAB'S HQ, THE DISPATCH ROOM - DAY

The DISPATCHER, late 50's, arm tattoos, ponytail, stuck in the
'60s, works the board, while listening to music in ear buds.

Niki and Kellum enter flashing badges. He removes an ear bud playing guitar music loud enough to be heard from the ear bud.

NIKI
We need to know if you've had
any pickups for a Father
O'Malley from Saint Linus.

DISPATCHER
Don't you need a warrant?

KELLUM
Does it look like we need a warrant?

The dispatcher smiles that smile you give when you've been had by the Man. He consults the dispatch computer.

DISPATCHER
Nothing.

Niki steps close to confirm the screen.

NIKI
Then anything to or from the church?

He types and again the screen is blank. He shrugs. Niki displays the evidence bag holding the Acme Taxi business card.

NIKI
This was found at a crime scene.
We're going need to check your drivers.

INT. ACME CAB'S HQ, AN OFFICE - DAY

Niki and Kellum pore over Acme Cab personnel files.

NIKI
A motley bunch, but nothing here.

Niki pushes the files away and looks to a street map on the wall as she taps her pencil, pensive.

NIKI
FBI.

She slams the desk. Kellum sucks a breath and taps a file.

KELLUM
This one's interesting.

He hands her a personnel file.

KELLUM
Remember that old millionaire? Died
in a cab last year.

Niki scans the file.

NIKI
Suicide, he poisoned himself.

KELLUM
Supposedly. He was carrying three mill
in a briefcase. It was never found.

The cab driver was the primary
suspect, but there was no evidence.

She runs her finger along the text as she reads.

NIKI
Hmmm, he's still cabbing.
(looking to Kellum)
If you stole three million bucks
where would you be right now?

KELLUM
South Pacific.

She taps the file and looks to Kellum, who shrugs.

NIKI
Well, let's talk to him anyway.

She underlines the file name with her pencil, 'RD Rhone'.