



Dead Lady In The Woods

A ZINE STORY 2022 C

By Randall Colley

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A student was reading the assignment board at the archeology department.

Cooper asked, "What site did I get?"
"You got the Cottonwood Sawmill site."

"What did you get?"

"I got the trash dump behind the old train depot."

"Who's your partner?"

"Whoa dude... you lucky dog, never mind who I got for a partner."

"Who did I get?"

"You got Sally O'Malley."

"Looks like you will be in the woods all day with Sally O'...Malley."

“Yeah...She’s kind of bossy, I don’t think that’s going to be a whole lot of fun.”

“She might be bossy, but she’s still the best looking girl in this whole college, I will be glad to trade with you.”

A female voice called out, “Let’s go Cooper, it’s supposed to rain this afternoon, so let’s get going.”

“And that would be Sally O’Malley.”

Cooper asked, “Did you get the supply kit?”

“Of course I did. I got everything 10 paper bags, a small shovel, brushes, a rake, and a camera... grab the map and let’s go.”

Sally drove while Cooper looked at the map.

"Turn right on Sawmill Road, it says it is a clay road. You know we have GPS on the cell phone."

"Yeah, but you don't always go places that have a signal. We need to be able to read a map. I say we park the car here and walk."

Cooper carried the shovel and supplies, while Sally used the map to find a small clearing next to the road assigned for the dig site.

Sally reading the instructions,
"This was the old Cottonwood Sawmill. Back in the 1930's and 40's the workers and townspeople used this area as a landfill."

"We are supposed to stake out a 10x10 area, then log and photograph everything we uncover in that area."

“Ok, Cooper, where do we start?”

“Well... I would say we start over there. It looks like the wild pigs have already rooted-up that area. I say we make it easy and start there. Look at all of those bottles and cans they’re already dug up for us.”

“Ok Coop, here’s the tape mark off the dig area and I will take some pictures. We need to get started before the rain.”

Cooper used the yellow tape to mark off the dig site. Sally snapped pictures of the bottles that were exposed.

They put the bottles and cans and other artifacts they found in the paper bags, while Sally entered them on the log sheet.

“Hey, Coop, we could pretend like we’re digging the pyramids of Egypt.”

“Yeah, and not some trash pit in the middle of a mosquito infested mud hole swamp.”



“Why did you take this class? I take it you don’t like all of this Indiana Jones stuff. So what is your major?”

“Baseball, baseball and more baseball. I’m the best first baseman in the state, full scholarship just waiting for the big leagues.”

“So why did you take this class?”

“I don’t know. I thought I would have a whip and might get to ride a camel. Why do you do this?”

“I want to be a crime scene forensic detective. I’m a criminology major.”

“Well, the only crime committed here is this can of pork and beans and that broken bottle of whiskey. So what do we do with all of this stuff?”

“We take it back to the school and do some research to find out when that brand of pork and beans was made, then we can date when it was thrown away.”

“Research..... hey I’m just digging the stuff up, what research?”

“Oh Coop... this is just the start. We have to let this trash tell us a story about the people that threw it away.”

Cooper held up an old beer bottle and a rusty sardine can and said, “It looks like they got drunk and ate beans and sardines. Case closed.”

They worked all day unearthing more cans and bottles and other artifacts.

A baby shoe, some pottery, broken plates and medicine bottles.

“Whoa... look what the pigs rooted up... an ancient multicolor ink pen, you push red it writes in red, push green it writes in green and if you push blue it writes in blue.”

“Jesus... Cooper, you are a simpleton.” Sally snapped a picture of the pen and put it in the bag.

“Why are you putting that pen in the bag you know it didn’t come from the 1930’s.” “We have to log it as we find it that’s the rules.”

They put the bags of artifacts and tools in the car just as the rain came and called it a day.

“Tomorrow we can start researching these artifacts and see what they tell us.” “Oh, I can’t wait....”

The next day Sally had the artifacts spread out on the tables in the archeology lab.

She had already researched the internet and was able to match some of brand names on the cans and bottles with their manufactures.

“Sorry I’m late..baseball practice this morning. Whoa look at you... you have been very busy this morning. So what did you find out..?”

“Looks like the cans and bottles are pre-war.”

“WWI or WWII?”

“World War II dumb ass, before 1939.”

Cooper picked up the multicolor ink pen, “What did you find out about this ink pen?”

He scribbled on a sheet of paper with the pen and showed her the cartoon face he drew. “Still works.”

“Ok, Cooper, I need you to research the sawmill site and see what you can find out. I need to know when it was built and when it closed... stuff like that.”

“Make yourself useful your grade might depend on how much effort you put into this class.”

Cooper looked up the Cottonwood Sawmill on the internet and found that it was built in 1921 and closed in 1945.

“The area was logged out in the 1940’s, and they moved the railroad tracks, so they had no way to bring in the logs for lumber.”

Cooper looked up the history of Sawmill Road. “Wait... wait.. Sally you are not going to believe this...”

“What did you find...?”

Cooper read the newspaper headlines.
FEMALE BODY FOUND IN THE WOODS
AT SAWMILL ROAD.

“Look at this... this was from 10 years ago. In 1999 a school girl was walking home from the bus stop and saw a female body next to Sawmill Road.”

“That is the same place we were yesterday. They identified the lady as Tracy Owens a topless dancer from Orlando. They had no suspects.”

Sally brought the photo of the ink pen over to Cooper and showed him the address on the ink pen, Lumber Mill Works Orlando.

Copper asked, “Why do you think there is an ink pen from a company in Orlando, at the crime scene of a murdered lady who was from Orlando, is that a coincidence or what?”

Sally eyes wide, “I don’t think so...”

“Hey O’Malley, you want to be a crime scene forensic detective here you go.”

Sally was already calling the phone number on the ink pen.

“The number is not in service. Look up Lumber Mill Works, see if they are still in business.”

“Yes... they have a web page with the same address on the ink pen, but a different phone number.”

“I wish I could read the police report, maybe this is a clue they missed?”

“Or, Sally, maybe that pen had nothing to do with the murdered lady.”

“But Coop, what if it has been buried in the mud for 10 years and the pigs rooted it up for us to find and to solve this murder?”

“Let’s stay away from police, and police reports, I don’t really want to get that involved if that’s ok...”

“Ok Cooper, see what we can find out from the newspaper.”

“I am way ahead of you, I just printed the article. Looks like you got a real murder mystery O’Malley.”

“I know what you’re thinking O’Malley, and that’s not the way I wanted to spend my Saturday, but for you, I will do it.”

Cooper and Sally drove the next morning to Orlando. Sally read the newspaper articles to Cooper on the way.

“So we know she died in December 1999 a week before Christmas. She was a dancer at the KitKat club and she had a bunch of petty crimes and drug charges and one arrest for prostitution.”

“She was 25 years old, and she had a 10 year old daughter. Oh... and she was strangled.”

LUMBER COMPANY OFFICE

Sally asked the guy at the counter if he could tell them about the ink pen with their logo on it?

“Ma’am I am just a salesman, and I have to be in Kissimmee in one hour. Let me get the bookkeeper Chris, he could probably help you better, since he has worked here the longest of anyone in the company.”

The salesman asked Chris to come out of his office and help these people, since he had to go on a sales call.

Chris was a surly little man with a scar over his lip. He came out of his office and up to the counter.

Sally said, “We’re archeological students from the college, and we’re working on a dig site, where we found this ink pen with your company logo.”

He looked at the pen and became angry and demanded to know where they found this pen.

“We found this ink pen at our dig site near the Cottenwood sawmill....”

Chris, interrupted... “The sawmill over in Tangelo?”

“Yes.. in Tangelo and we have to log and try to date everything we find, it's for our grade.”

“We're hoping to find the date when this pen was printed, then we might be able to determine when it was left in the woods. Do you know the place?”

“Lady... I know a lot of places.”

“I order these for the salesmen, they give them away to the customers.”

"So maybe a customer dropped it. Do you know when you first ordered them so maybe we can set a time line?"

"I don't see the big deal. I've ordered a thousand pens over the years."

"Would you please check... so we can close our case... I mean our assignment, we have to date all of our artifacts and this is the last one."

Cooper whispered, "Way to go O'Malley you are a good liar."

He took the pen to his office came back in few minutes, "It was in 2000 when we got the first order for these pens, in January of 2000, that's the best I can do for you," and he gave the pen back to Cooper.

"If that is all you want I am very busy."

Cooper and Sally got in the car.

"That was one intense... angry little man. You really pissed him off O'Malley."

"Yeah... there was something about him, I really did not like him."

"I don't think he likes women, and I know he did not like you from the get go."

"So if they got the first pens in 2000 and the murder happened in 1999 then there is no connection."

"Nope, just some random hiker with a multi-color ink pen, that they just happened to drop at a murder site, I am sure that happens all the time. So what now O'Malley?"

Sally defeated, "I guess we go home."

"Wait a minute, I thought you wanted to be a detective O'Malley and yet you give up so soon."

"I say we go to the KitKat since we're already here and see what we can find out about the lady."

"Yeah right... all we will find at the KitKat are naked girls and creepy old men."

"Ok.. so you can question the creepy old men, and I will question the naked girls. Come on O'Malley we've come too far to quit now. I will buy you a lap dance."

The KitKat was a smoke filled strip club full of creepy old men.

Cooper ordered drinks and cheered and whistled at the dancers while Sally was mortified.

"Come on Sally, if you want to be a detective you have to get comfortable with the underbelly of society, the nitty gritty dark side."

"The rich churchgoers don't usually kill prostitutes and dump their dead bodies in the woods."

Sally reminded him, "Let's not forget Jimmy Swaggert, he liked prostitutes."

"I'm going to the bathroom, I'll be back."

Cooper, "OK Arnold.... get it..?"

Sally, "NO..."

"Ok.. I'll be right here unless I get lucky."

Sally returned to the table.

"What took you so long, did you find anyone to talk to?"

"What do you think..... dumb ass"?

"There is nothing here but a bunch of grabby, creepy old men. You got an eyeful of naked dancing girls that's the only reason we came here."

"There is no one here that remembers a dancer that worked here 10 years ago. Let's go, "dumb ass."

"Well, we had to give it a shot. Why does everyone keep calling me "dumb ass"?"

"O'Malley...Why is that man at the bar with a bloody nose pointing at you, and why is that bouncer coming over here... what did you do?"



Sally was in a hurry, "Nothing... ok maybe I had to set some boundaries, like no touching ... but we really need to go now."

Sally and Cooper ran to their car. As they were driving out of the parking lot they heard a young woman yelling and screaming.

They saw a man trying to push one of the young dancers into his pickup truck.

She was yelling for him to leave her alone that she was not going anywhere with him.

"Wait... Cooper, that's Chris the bookkeeper from the lumber company. He is trying to kidnap that girl."

"Well, he is not getting away with it this time."

Cooper reached in the back seat and grabbed a baseball bat.

Sally looked at him surprised. "You keep a baseball bat in your car?"

"Yeah... I play baseball remember."

They ran over to help the girl. The man was yelling at the girl telling her to shut up and get in the truck.

Cooper ran up and hit the man with the bat as he was trying to push the girl into the passenger side of his old pick-up truck.

The man fell down to the pavement and the girl jumped out of the truck.

Instead of being grateful that Cooper had just saved her being kidnapped, she began screaming at him.

“What the fuck man... what are you doing don't hit him again, put the fucking bat down.”

“He was trying to kidnap you, he has done this before.”

“Done what before?”

“He kidnapped a woman from here before.”

“He is not trying to kidnap me... you “dumb ass” he is trying to take me home and make me quit dancing.”

“He thinks that I am going to end up just like my mother did.”

“Your mother... Sally asked, what happened to your mother?”

“She used to be a dancer here and someone killed her and dumped her body in the woods.”

“He thinks the same thing is going happen to me, he wants me to quit dancing and move back home.”

“He’s not trying to kidnap me.”

“He’s my father.”

Cooper and Sally sat at the counter at the all night diner with a slice of pie and cup of coffee.

"Well detective... O'Malley that was a bust, we got so close, I really thought he was the man."

"Let's have some pie and call it a night. I am really dreading tomorrow."

"Why?"

"Well, tomorrow we go from strippers, and a dead body, to paper bags full of beer bottles, sardines and pork and bean cans, how boring is that."

"So.. O'Malley, you want to go on another date sometime?"

"When did we go on our first date?"

"Hey... I took you to a strip club and a diner, the girls that I know would kill for that."

"Ok... the pie was good."

Cooper took the Manila envelope with the photo of the ink pen and wrote on the outside in red, blue and green ink, "Case closed".

He pulled out the photo of the pen for one last look. "What the f..."

"What's the matter?"

"Son.. of a bitch... that Bookkeeper kept the pen we gave him, and he gave us back a different ink pen."

"What?...."

"Look at the phone number on the ink pen in the photo, now look at pen he gave us back. It has a different phone number. He kept the fucking pen. That was the only evidence we had."

"But he said, they did not buy the pens until 2000."

"Well, I guess maybe he lied."

The headlights from an old pick up truck bounced as it sped across a dusty field on a moonlit night.

The truck skidded to a stop in front of an old cracker house. The dust drifted in front of the bright headlights that illuminated the decaying wooden porch.

The driver pressed on the horn until a light came on inside and the front door flew open.

A man stepped out onto the porch shielding his eyes from the bright headlights. "Who the fuck is out there, what do you want? What the hell is going on?"

Chris stopped blowing the horn, and stepped out of the truck. He stood there in the dark looking at the man on the porch.

"Who is that... who the fuck are you? What do you want?"



“Why did you do it Jim?”

“Do what... is that you Chris, what the fuck are you doing out here it's 3 O'clock in the morning, what are you talking about?”

“I gave you this pen that morning, you said, you were going on a sales call and you would be gone all day.”

“What fucking pen are you talking about, are you drunk or just crazy?”

Chris threw the ink pen to Jim.
Jim held it to the light and looked at it.

“It's a fucking company ink pen, I got a kitchen drawer full of them and about 20 just like it in the glovebox of my truck so what are you talking about?”

“Is that why you fired me, because I stole company pens?”

"That pen fell out of your pocket, you had the only one like it."

"I gave that pen to you that morning, and I sent all of the other pens back to the company, because they had the wrong phone number on them."

"It had to be you, that was the only pen that I kept out of the box and I gave it to you."

"I loved her, Jim."

The porch lit up from the flash of a shotgun blast.

The old pick up truck sped across the field, back the way it came.

The End



MAKE A POEM
WRITE A STORY
MAKE A DRAWING
MAKE A ZINE
EVERYDAY

