

## Excerpt from *Myers* by Jeff Lee

The air feels steamy to Myers, thick like the jungles he remembers from the Philippines, air that is still, air that rejects perspiration so that it remains on the skin and soaks one's clothing and makes one think, as does Myers, why in the world one wears *anything* in such a place, much less a jacket, even one as light as the one he wears. He loosens the necktie that is a regular part of his uniform, unbuttons the top button of his shirt and, extending his chin and twisting his neck, slips his forefinger behind the tie knot and tugs to loosen it.

Standing on the dock that pokes into the Ebenezer Branch of Canary Creek at the spot where Moses Townsend had been murdered, it is so quiet that Myers can hear a slight hum of truck traffic on Route 14. Sunlight, coming through the overarching branches of the trees that overlook the creek and its bordering marshes, dapples the bowed and still rain-wet blades of marsh grass. A persistent greenhead lands on his cheek, and with a quick slap that stings his skin, Myers puts an end to the pest.

He scans the creek and wonders why he has come here; what it is he thinks he might find.

It is a few seconds before he realizes he has been staring at the place where he had first seen the reflection of the Townsend girl's eyes. I wonder how she is doing, he thinks, and not for the first time compares her with Dorothy: Pattie is taller because she is at least two years older than he remembers his daughter having been; Pattie is just as pretty, and he is certain just as innocent and just as unworthy of the hand life has dealt her.

The jacket he is wearing is one he has not worn for several months. Without intent, he slides his hands into the side pockets and feels a rediscovered and crumpled pack of cigarettes in the left pocket and a book of matches in the right. Myers removes the pack and looks at it. Chesterfields. With some difficulty, he extracts a cigarette that has a slight bend in the middle and runs the length of it beneath his nostrils, inhales its scent, and can taste the want he feels.

"What the hell," he says as he straightens the fag and puts it to his lips.

He pulls out the matchbook, strikes a match, and draws the smoke deep into his lungs. The smoke burns his throat, and he coughs. He looks at the cigarette, mutters "fuck," and drops it. The lit end hisses when it lands on the rain-dampened dock.

Myers looks down at the now wetted cigarette, and in a crack of a rotting plank, something glistens in the morning sun. He drops to one knee, extracts a .22-caliber shell casing from the crack, and examines it as he rolls it back and forth between his thumb and middle finger. He drops the casing into his shirt pocket and duck-walks in a slow circle looking for more. He finds a second that has been wedged into another crack, perhaps by the sole of a shoe, and with some difficulty and using the key to his cruiser, he manages to extract it; he drops it into the same shirt pocket.

At the instant when he spies a somewhat deformed .22 caliber slug in yet another crack in a board, he hears the sound of feet pushing to a deliberate rhythm though the rain-bent grass that borders the path to the dock. His head snaps toward the sound, and he sees Vivian Peterman walking toward him, her eyes focused on his face, her expression unreadable.

Sweat has pasted strands of hair against her forehead and wetted the ends of strands that have fallen against the bare skin of her shoulders. The no-frills, print sundress she wears is damp and clings to her thighs in a way that causes Myers to glance at them as she advances, but it is the uncertain message in the eyes boring into him that demand his attention. He stands and waits.

She is now on the dock, twenty feet away from where he stands, and she continues to advance, her thighs swaying to the measured cadence of her pace when she says, her voice low and hoarse from too many cigarettes, "I saw your car."

He does not answer. She continues to approach until she is close enough, if she wishes, to reach out and touch him with her fingertips.

"I saw your car," she whispers; her eyes have not left his since they first connected.

Seconds pass. She lowers her head and murmurs, "Chief, I ..."

When she looks up, Myers sees clarity in what her eyes are conveying. He remains mute as she takes a quick step forward, grabs the lapels of his jacket and pulls him toward her. Her eyes close, her head lists to the right, one arm encircles his neck, a hand presses against his chest, her lips find his.

The hand that has rested against him now wraps around him, and as she pulls him closer, Myers feels her breasts and belly pressing against him, notes the firm yet somehow tender feel of her lips against his, stares at her closed eyes, and feels a fear rise within him, not from the pressure of her lips or body but from the vulnerability her closed eyes suggest. Her lips become more insistent, a hand slips into his hair, and it is when he realizes he has parted his lips to receive the tip of her tongue that the fear usurps control.

He places both hands on her shoulders and pushes her away, the gentleness of those hands surprising her almost as much as the escaping lips of this man. Her eyes are open, her brows arched in uncertainty, but only for a second. She understands, blushes, turns, and runs down the dock to the path that will lead her away from this forbidden place. Her strides are graceful, even though purposed for escape; her open hands slice the dense air in time with her quick pace as the skirt of her sundress billows out behind her. Myers, frozen in place, watches her run until she has disappeared among the trees.

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