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The Body

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The Body

Matt Miller

I'll tell you again that I'm really sorry about what happened. I can't imagine what it must have done to those people...mistaken identity is one thing, but I imagine it must be even worse when the guy's dead.

Yes, that's right. It's Greg Mahoney, M-A-H-O-N-E-Y. Came to Philadelphia about two months ago. I got this job at Shady Glens through a temp agency – real nice girl, Amber, I think, fixed me up here. Said the hours were great for a part-time student. Go to school during the day, work nights. Real 'Paper Chase' kinda stuff, only without the law degree.

Well, it happened that Thursday night, before my shift. I came about an hour early so I could show Cass around. You know, do her a favor, maybe get a little pick-me-up to help me through my shift. Anyway, once we got here, she almost dragged me by my wrist into the prep room, where...

Who, Cass? Short for Cassandra. Dupree, I think her last name is. No, with two 'E's. Real goth/punk kinda girl, if you know what I mean. Really cute, too. I met her in my clinical rotation class. I could barely get her to say two words to me until I told her that I work at a funeral home for a living, and then she couldn't wait to go out with me. I, uh... I kinda think she was more into my job than me, you know? She'd been pestering me for a week or two to take her to see where I worked. Said she wanted to see "where the dead people lived." That girl is really into corpses. I guess it's part of the whole goth-image thing. She was a little out there... but man, she knew how to drive a man wild. There was this one time, right, on the city bus, where out of nowhere she starts to...

What? Oh, sorry. I'll try to stick with what happened.

So anyway, we got here, and she started dragging me, like I said, back to the prep room. You ever been back there? No? Well, it's got these stainless steel doors, floor to ceiling, like you see on cop shows, where we keep the bodies until they're needed. Then in the middle there's a big table where we can lay them out to get them fixed up for viewings or whatever, and a sink at one end to clean up at. It's a really creepy place – fluorescent lights, all metal walls, knowing there's dead people on all sides... gives it this really sterile feel. After she dragged me in there, she started looking around and examining everything.

I asked her if this was what she wanted to see, and she started to get all happy. "Yes," she said, "it's very nice, but what I really want to see is one of the bodies." Well, I immediately told her no, that I could get fired for that. So she leaned back against the counter, did this really sweet "Pleeeeeease," and started undoing the buttons of her top. Real casual-like, too, like I wasn't supposed to know she was trying to bribe me. But I figured hey, I ran away from that podunk town, I ran away from my drunk-ass dad, and hell, I got this job so I wouldn't have to deal with people – live ones, anyway – I was not gonna run away from this girl. See, Cass was the first... well, nice things just don't happen to me very often. Besides, if you saw this chick, you'd understand.

So I gave in. I know, I shouldn't have, and like I said, I'm real sorry about how all this turned out. I didn't know at the time. Anyway, so I pulled out one of the trays with a body in it – Kenneth Roberts, it turned out to be – and she immediately started poking at it. She was really fascinated with it. Well, I let her go on for a minute, but then she went to prodding the guy in earnest, and really messing around with him – I'm talking about stuff I would get fired for doing. So I started telling her to lay off, and that it was probably time to go. Well, Cass spun around with this wide look in her eyes, and pleaded with me not to make her go. Like I said, I think she liked my job more than me. The weird thing is, the way she said it... she sounded almost afraid. I've never heard that out of her before.

Well, that brought me up short. I kind of stood there a moment with my mouth hanging open, not really sure what to do. I mean, I told myself I wouldn't run from this girl, right? Only here I am, just minutes later, trying to shoo her out. My mind sort of locked up on that concept.

But Cass made the choice for me. Before I could tell her to leave again, she just sort of leaped into my arms and shoved her tongue in my mouth. Any sense I had up until then went right out the window at that point. I don't remember a lot after that... I mean, I remember losing my shirt somewhere, and I remember fiddling with the clasp on her bra, but not a whole lot outside of that.

The next thing I remember, she pulled me backwards like we're gonna fall back onto the floor, only she missed. See, she wanted to keep so close to that corpse, that when she went to fall back, it was in the way. So we tumbled in a heap onto this dead body, only this guy was having none of it. He went sliding off the table and crashed onto the floor, and when he hit, he hit head first at this really awkward angle – snapped his neck clean through. It made this really awful crack sound, too.



Touch

Brooke Opie Ragusa

Well, that sound killed the mood instantly. I scrambled over there and started lifting him back onto the table, but in my hurry I pushed something wrong, and his jaw snapped loose. Tore up some of the skin around his mouth pretty bad. I finally got him back on the table and started looking at the damage, but he was pretty messed up. I was freaking out at this point, because I knew this much damage was going to take me days to fix, if I even could. I made the mistake of glancing over at his chart, and damn it if the bastard wasn't scheduled for a viewing the next day!

Oh, sorry, pardon my language. Yes, I'll try.

Well, that just blew the lid off whatever cool I had left. I just snapped out at Cass, since this whole thing was her fault anyway. I yelled at her, saying something about... I don't remember exactly... something about how her obsession with my job was now going to make me lose it. Apparently, that was too much for her, because she just broke down into tears, cursed me for being a dumb country hick, and ran out before I could say anything.

So I stood there a while, slowly losing my grip on my patience. I had days of work to do in eight hours, I was probably gonna get fired, and the girl I swore not to run from just ran out on me. I was pacing around pretty frantically, trying to figure something out. Well, as it happened, my eyes fell across the sheet for one of the other bodies. I saw height, weight, skin color, hair color, all about the same. So I pulled the guy out, and to my surprise, he looked really similar to Mr. Roberts.

I still don't know why I did it. The logical part of my brain can keep on saying that it was easier to put makeup on the other guy than it was to fix all the damage to Mr. Roberts, but that doesn't make it right. I know I'll never be

able to make it up to the people who came to the viewing and found someone else there... all I can do is say I'm sorry. In a way, I guess it was just another thing for me to run from.

So I got him fixed up and wheeled him in for the viewing the next morning. At first, everything was cool... I mean, I thought I was gonna get away with it. But then eventually, people started murmuring at the back. That gossip, it's like a freaking tidal wave – you can't stop it, not until after it just rolls over everything. So, eventually, they called the director over to talk to him. That's when I knew I was toast.

But you know the really messed up part about it? Some of those people at the viewing, they mourned over that body. It took the people running the whole thing almost two hours to figure out something was wrong, but during that time? I mean, people cried over that body. Some of them even kissed it.

They told the funeral home people later that they thought something was wrong... but what did they do about it? They grieved over the corpse of a man they'd never met, rather than stand up and face the fact that they'd never seen him before.

Only they already had this idea worked up in their heads of how it was gonna go down, see, and they didn't want to let anything mess that up. They even lied to themselves to keep that idea going.

I mean, who does stuff like that, anyway?



Is It There

Brooke Opie Ragusa