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## Touch

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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**

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