

GRAVE MISTAKE

By:

David Lambertson

(c) 2020. This work may not be used for any purpose without the expressed written permission of the author.

Dlambertson@hotmail.com

OVER BLACK

The frantic PANTING of someone running.

The SNAP of tree twigs - the rustle of leaves. Someone's rushing through a forest.

YOUNG WOMAN (V.O.)

Help!

More twigs cracking, leaves rustling.

YOUNG WOMAN

Help...help!

Then -- totally quiet other than the GASPS of a young woman, trying to catch her breath. The gasps gradually slow.

YOUNG WOMAN

Please...just go. I won't tell.

A sickening THUD, something striking flesh.

Silence. Then --

The RIPPING of clothes.

FADE IN:

EXT. HIGH SIERRAS/INYO NATIONAL FOREST - DUSK

Densely wooded. Darkening from winter-storm clouds creeping across the skies.

We see a shallow make-shift grave, clumps of fresh dirt on the side. A GRUNT, as a rusted SHOVEL removes a load of dirt.

Another GRUNT and another load of dirt.

The heavy breathing of an exhausted MAN the only sound as the shovel lands on the ground next to the grave. Then --

A CORPSE is rolled into the grave, falling face-up revealing the frozen dead eyes of a young American-Indian woman.

Her clothes are torn. Her face smeared with dirt, blood coagulating on her forehead from a blunt-force wound.

Snowflakes gently float down onto the woman's body - a few at first. Then more and more as the winter storm strengthens.

EXT. BISHOP CALIFORNIA - DAY

A small town nestled in the High Sierras dissected by an interstate highway. Snow-covered mountains on both sides.

SUPER: THE DEAD OF WINTER - TWO MONTHS LATER

On either side of the street, restaurants and gas stations to serve passing tourists - small shops and local craft stores.

ON THE SIDEWALK

A strong, weathered hand holding a wooden mallet taps a small nail into a MISSING PERSON POSTER on a power pole.

On the poster: a picture of the young American-Indian woman. Peaceful brown eyes, a content smile, dark, long, brown hair perfectly framing her innocent face. Underneath the image:

SISIKA TECOPA, LAST SEEN NOVEMBER 30, 2020.

The weathered hand taps a second nail into the poster. That hand belongs to CHIEF JOSEPH TECOPA, (60).

He's tall and thick, with long silver hair pulled back into a braided ponytail. His face is bronze and pocked marked - too many days in the sun. His nose is crooked, misshaped - too many fist-fights.

The Chief, with the mallet in one hand and a bundle of posters in the other, strides towards the next pole.

ON THE STREET

A black and white POLICE CRUISER slowly passes by. It proceeds about a hundred yards before making a U-turn.

BACK ON THE SIDEWALK

As the Chief nears the next pole, he starts coughing, a deep raspy rattle.

The Chief stops, removes a white handkerchief from his pocket, covers his mouth with it as he bends over and coughs even more harshly.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Hey, Chief.

The Chief removes the handkerchief from his mouth. What was once pure white is now stained with blood.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Chief...

The Chief pockets the handkerchief, turns and sees a POLICEMAN approaching.

This is HUNTER MARSHALL (30), uniform sleeves purposefully tight to highlight his biceps. Premature balding - not a handsome man. You just know the muscles are meant to compensate for that.

Hunter's breath creates fog in the cold winter air as he walks. He rubs his bare arms with his hands as he nears.

HUNTER

Jesus Christ, Chief - ya going to freeze yourself to death out here.

CHIEF TECOPA

Cold is a state of mind.

Hunter points at the posters in the Chief's hand.

HUNTER

Ya need help?

CHIEF TECOPA

No. This is the last one.

The Chief points at the pole. We can now see all of the street's poles have been peppered with the poster. All of the shop windows as well.

Snow starts to fall. Hunter looks skyward.

HUNTER

Well, at least let me buy ya a cup of coffee.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

A small local shop. The Chief and Hunter in a booth. A YOUNG WAITRESS comes by, fills their cups.

CHIEF TECOPA

Thank you.

The Waitress places her hand on the Chief's shoulder.

YOUNG WAITRESS

Any news?

The Chief shakes his head. The Waitress gives his shoulder a sympathetic squeeze.

WAITRESS

I'll keep praying for her.

The Chief nods. As the Waitress walks away, Hunter takes in her backside.

HUNTER

That was nice of her.

CHIEF TECOPA

Yes. But her prayers are wasted.
Aren't they?

A confused look from Hunter.

CHIEF TECOPA

Sisika is already dead.

HUNTER

Dead? Naw, I don't think so. I mean
people leave all the time.

CHIEF TECOPA

She would have not left the Tribe.

HUNTER

How do you really know that?

CHIEF TECOPA

The spirits in the sky tell me so.

A dismissive eye roll from Hunter.

HUNTER

Well, you listen to your spirits if
you want. We're going to keep
looking for her.

Hunter takes a sip of coffee.

HUNTER

But ya need to know, it's a tough
road. We got a ton of land and bout
ten-thousand tourists driving
through here every day.

CHIEF TECOPA

She was killed by a local. By someone who knew to use the cover of snow. Someone who knew that it would cover her grave as well as their tracks.

HUNTER

Hmm. Maybe. Maybe not. But if you're right. We'll get more clues in Spring.

The Chief removes the bloodstained handkerchief from his pocket - coughs into it.

CHIEF TECOPA

I don't have till Spring.

EXT. HUNTER'S HOME - DUSK

Modest and remote - not another house in sight. It's surrounded by a chain-link fence.

A good two feet of snow on the ground.

A pick-up truck pulls into the driveway. Hunter exits.

INT. HUNTER'S HOME/BEDROOM - NIGHT

Messy. Clothes strewn everywhere. Dirty glasses and plates left unattended on the dressers and night stands.

Weights and exercise equipment in the corner of the room.

Hunter, sprawled under a haphazard pile of blankets in bed, tosses and turns in his sleep.

On the bedside nightstand, Hunter's cell phone and a digital clock. The red neon letters read: "11:59 PM"

The cell phone vibrates, rattles against the clock.

Hunter awakens, fumbles for his phone. Spots a text message alert from: 555-614-3828.

HUNTER

The fuck...?

Hunter taps the icon to open the message.

INSERT SERIES OF TEXTS

FROM 555-614-3828: *"It's been two months since..."*

REPLY FROM HUNTER: *"Who is this?"*

A moment passes.

FROM 555-614-3828: *"Since you killed me."*

REPLY FROM HUNTER: *Who is this!!*

FROM 555-614-3828: *"Sisika."*

BACK TO SCENE

Hunter opens the phone APP on his phone. He keys in 555-614-3828. The ring-back tone buzzes in the air then -

Stops. Someone hanging up on the other end.

HUNTER

Fuck.

EXT. POLICE STATION - MORNING

A small white building, suitable for a town of three-thousand. Just two patrol cars in the station driveway.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Hunter at his desk. SISIKA'S CASE FILE open in front of him.

He removes a photo of her - contemplates.

A CLERK comes by, a piece of paper in her hand.

CLERK

I ran the number. It does belong to
Sisika Tecopa. Phone company said
it was just recently reactivated.

The Clerk hands the piece of paper to Hunter.

CLERK

Anything else?

Hunter shakes his head.

INT. HUNTER'S HOME/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Hunter at a dinette table, a bottle of whiskey in his hand as he stares at his smartphone on the table.

The phone display reads: "11:59 PM." It starts vibrating the moment it rolls to "12:00 AM." It's a text message alert from: 555-614-3828.

Hunter picks up the phone, taps the icon to open the message.

INSERT TEXT:

FROM 555-614-3828: *"By tomorrow, everyone will know where I am....Everyone will know it was you."*

Hunter places the phone back down on the table. He takes a large swig of whiskey, then stands - heads for the door.

EXT. HIGH SIERRAS/INYO NATIONAL FOREST - NIGHT

Snow flurries fill the air.

A full moon illuminates the sky and creates eerie tree shadows on the snow-packed ground.

The BEAM of an approaching flashlight bounces off birch trees near an opening.

Hunter appears from those trees, shovel in hand. He takes a deep breath then --

Starts digging.

LATER

Snow cleared from a grave-sized patch of land.

Hunter raises his shovel and plunges it into the soil.

He stops - surprised, the ground much too soft, as if recently dug.

He waits a moment, then starts frantically shoveling removing the dirt in record time. Finally --

The grave is revealed - empty.

An exhausted Hunter leans back against a birch tree, removes his phone from his pocket, taps an icon.

A RINGTONE in the distance. Just as Hunter looks towards it --

PFFFFT! - an arrow pierces the center of Hunter's chest. The force of it so hard it pins him to the tree.

A shocked Hunter looks down at an ominous red circle of blood spreading on his shirt.

PFFFFT! - Another arrow pierces his chest.

Hunter looks off towards the direction of the arrow.

HUNTER'S POV:

Chief Tecopa, bow and arrow in hand, dressed in full tribal gear, astride a white horse that nearly blends in with the snow, approaches.

The horse stops. The Chief stares for a moment then dismounts.

AT THE TREE

The Chief approaches Hunter.

CHIEF TECOPA

I found her two days ago. Moved her
to a sacred place. To be with her
forefathers.

The Chief wraps his hand around one of the arrows - extracts it from Hunter's chest. Blood seeps from the wound.

HUNTER

(last breaths)
How...how did you know?

CHIEF TECOPA

A silver button, clutched in her
hand...like from a uniform.

The Chief wraps his hand around the remaining arrow- extracts it. More blood seeps out.

CHIEF TECOPA

But I had to be sure.

HUNTER

(in a whisper)
How..?

The Chief removes a cell phone from his pocket. He shows it to Hunter.

CHIEF TECOPA
(re: the phone)
The spirit in the sky told me so.

The Chief removes a hunting knife from a leather sleeve attached to his belt. He places the blade on Hunter's throat.

CHIEF TECOPA
I would be dead before a trial even started. Justice was required now....You'll be hidden in the grave you made to hide her.

The Chief runs the blade across Hunter's throat. Hunter's eyes fade out as blood gushes from the wound.

CHIEF TECOPA
Perhaps they will find you in the Spring.

MOMENTS LATER

A shallow make-shift grave, clumps of fresh dirt on the side.

A man's corpse rolls in, falling face-up, revealing Hunter's frozen dead eyes.

A COUGH as a shovel loads a mixture of snow and dirt on the body.

Another cough - another load.

FADE OUT.