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Movie House Murder

Alicia stood in the doorway as the last movie ended. Her watch read 12:34 pm and she was tired and ready to leave. For being such a slow night, her shift had gone by rather quickly, especially during the last show after taking over for Paula behind concessions. The past couple of hours zipped by and before she knew it, she was closing out her register.

Finally the lights came up as the credits rolled. A handful of people stood from their seats and began leaving. As they passed by, Alicia wished them a goodnight and walked into the auditorium to begin her rounds. When she did, she immediately spotted a lone man seated in a side aisle on the other side.

As he continued watching the screen, Alicia strolled down the aisle, glancing between rows of worn seats for any personal belongings left behind on the sticky floor. She checked behind the curtains for remaining guests, and made sure all exit doors were locked. She then made her way up the other aisle on the side where the man sat. As she drew closer, she took notice of the man's drooped eyelids and slightly parted lips. Alicia stopped and studied him a moment.

"Sir?" she said over the movie soundtrack. "Sir, are you alright?"

When he didn't respond, Alicia leaned forward and shouted, "*Sir!*"

The man didn't move.

Alicia became concerned and decided to check the man's pulse. Slowly she reached her hand toward him. She expected the man to jolt awake just before she touched him, scaring them both into an early grave. But he didn't move an inch, so she held her breath and pressed her fingers against his neck. He felt icy, as if he'd been sitting under an air conditioner vent all day. Alicia searched for a pulse.

There was no beat. Not. . .one. . .thump.

The credits ended; different colors flashed throughout the auditorium and loud *pops* and *burrrrrrs* blasted through the speakers as the tail end of the film played out.

Alicia jumped back when the sound burst into her eardrums. As familiar as the sound was, it still caused her heart to skip. She glanced at the screen and then back over to the dead man.

How did he die? Alicia wondered while reaching into her pants pocket. She brought out her cell phone and dialed 911. "Shit," she cursed. "No signal."

"What's going on?" someone asked, entering the auditorium. She turned as Vic the projectionist came down the aisle.

"Saw you through the window while I was shuttin' everything down upstairs," Vic said, stopping near her. His eyes traveled down to the man in the chair and asked, "What's his problem? Is he drunk or somethin'?"

"He's dead."

Vic stood silent for a long moment. "You're lying."

"I'm not lying."

"Aw, c'mon, man."

She hated it when he called her man, or dude. Apparently, Vic didn't hang out with many women.

Vic reached for the man's wrist. "He's probably asleep or something'." He searched for a pulse. Alicia waited for him to make the discovery for himself.

In spite the situation, she choked back a laugh as he quickly withdrew his hand, jumped back and shouted, "Holy Crap! That dude is really dead."

"Told you," she fired back. "I might just be a manager at some dive theater, but I'm smart enough to recognize when someone's dead."

Vic studied the corpse with morbid curiosity. "Wonder how he croaked. He could've had a stroke, but he looks too young."

"You're never too young to suffer a stroke," Alicia pointed out. "He could've been a drug user."

"He doesn't look like a drug user," Vic argued.

"How would you know?"

"Well, besides him being a stiff and all, he looks pretty healthy. Y'know, in tip-top shape."

"Maybe he was a pill popper," Alicia suggested.

Vic rolled his eyes and said, "If he'd had a stroke, he would've most likely fallen over trying to get up for help, or at least be slumped. I mean, look at him, he's sitting too casual like."

She hated to admit it, but Vic had a point. The dead man sat straight back in the chair with one arm resting comfortably on the armrest and the other lying across his lap. There were no signs that he had experienced any kind of trauma before his death.

"Hey," Vic said with odd excitement in his tone. "What if this dude is a victim of the *Venom Killer*?"

"The who?"

Vic turned to her with a disdainful expression on his shaggy face.

"You haven't heard about him?"

"No."

Vic focused back on the corpse and moved his hand up the man's T-shirt. Alicia winced in horror as Vic lifted up the shirtsleeve.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Just checking."

"Checking for what?"

"There," he said, pointing to the dead man's bicep. "See it?" Alicia couldn't believe what she was doing, but leaned in anyway.

"See what? I don't *see* anything?"

"Right there," Vic said, drawing his finger closer to the spot. "See that little red mark?"

Alicia noticed it and said, "So? It's a pimple."

"It's not a pimple. It's a mark where a needle pricked him. You really don't know about the *Venom Killer*?"

Alicia gave no answer.

Vic lowered the shirtsleeve, "The *Venom Killer* is a serial killer, man. He's been knocking people off across the nation. He gets his jollies by killing his victims in public places."

"How does he do that?"

There was a brief silence before Vic replied, "He injects them with poison."

Alicia's eyes widened.

"With what?"

"With a hypodermic needle. Duh, dude,"

“Wait a minute. I think I have heard about this guy,” Alicia confessed. “Doesn’t he drug them first?”

“Yeah. They say when he targets someone, he finds a way to slip ’em a roofie. He got some twenty-two year old chick like that in a New York City nightclub. He drugged the girl and poisoned her after she was down for the count. They later found her propped up by the bar. Sometimes he really lucks out, though. Like, the other night, he found some dude here in Atlanta passed out drunk on the MARTA train and killed him. For hours no one noticed him dead ‘til some lady sat next to him and the dead dude went *flop!*—fell right over onto her lap.”

“Do the cops have any leads?”

“They don’t even know what he looks like.”

Alicia slid her eyes over at the corpse. It was apparent that the victim had come to the movies alone, and in such a dark atmosphere with so few people around it was all too easy for a madman with a poisonous needle to strike. She noticed the soda cup inside the cup holder next to him and the thought came that the killer may have slipped Rohypnol in his drink whenever the victim had left his seat during the movie.

All evidence pointed to it being this psychopath. If the Venom Killer had, in fact, killed the man it made sense that he’d choose this nearly vacant movie theater to play his sick game. Vic just said it himself that the killer’s latest murder had been local.

Alicia felt sorry for the dead man. He appeared young, in his early thirties, handsome, with a dark complexion. He seemed the type of guy who’d have many friends and possibly a loving family, soon to be devastated by the news of his senseless murder. Then her sorrow turned into fear when Vic said, “The killer must’ve done this at the last show. That means he was just here, man.”

Alicia shuddered at the thought that a serial killer had perhaps brushed by her as the other customers were leaving.

“He might even still be in the building,” Vic added unhelpfully. “Let’s go upstairs in the projection booth and call the police.”

She followed Vic out from the auditorium and through a wide corridor. They came to a door on the left hand side with a sign reading: EMPLOYEES ONLY. Alicia thought to leave for the office located on the other side of the theater. It would take minutes to reach, but she didn’t want to risk it, not with the possibility of a serial killer looming about. She even considered leaving through an emergency exit door, but was afraid that the killer would be lurking in the shadows somewhere.

“Why did Paula leave after the seven o’clock shows?” Vic asked, unlocking the employee door.

“There’s a murdered man in our auditorium, plus the threat that his killer might still be around, and you’re asking me about Paula?”

“Just making conversation, dude.”

She found Vic’s nonchalant attitude about their gruesome situation more and more disturbing. Vic opened the door and they went up a flight of stairs leading to another door ahead.

“She asked to leave early,” Alicia answered. “How did you even know she left?”

“I saw her leaving while I was outside smoking.”

“Well, since you’re so curious, why didn’t you ask her yourself?”

“She don’t like me much.”

That came to no surprise. She herself didn’t particularly care for Vic. There was just too many things about him creeped her out. His slick, heavily jelled hair that he kept combed straight back

was as black and shiny as the leather jacket he always wore. He was very narrow-minded when it came to conversations, and generally wouldn't join in on topics that didn't involve movies. Also, he walked with a slight hunch, almost like he was trying to repel people from him. The general manger had once told her that Vic was a loner with virtually no friends and wasn't very talkative with the floor staff. Granted, most were in high school and had little in common with an oddity like Vic. However, something about him had always rubbed her the wrong way.

Once they reached the top stair, Vic unlocked the door and went inside. Alicia hesitated a moment. A sudden bad feeling crept into her very core and hunkered down inside her gut. It made her stomach ache.

"Are you coming, dude?" Vic asked, standing in the doorway.

"I . . .uh. . .I think I'm just going to call from the office."

"And what are you gonna do if you run into the killer, huh? Offer him free movie passes to let you live? C'mon, it's safe up here. No one but me has a key to the booth."

Again Alicia dithered, but in the end, decided to push aside her suspicions and follow Vic into the room.

Everything was dead quiet inside the projection booth. The steady hum of the projector machines had been silenced when Vic shut off the breakers. Minimal light from the auditoriums came in through three small windows in front of each machine. One window was for the projectionist to check the film on screen and make sure the picture was in frame and in focus, the actual movie projector faced the middle window, and the third was for the theater's old fashioned slide projector to show local advertisements and movie trivia questions.

To distract herself from her anxiousness, Alicia studied the movie projectors as she walked by. They were bulky machines, and the area where the film threaded through for viewing was like looking into a mechanical jigsaw puzzle. The movie prints, which looked like large vinyl records, sat on one of three stainless steel platters attached to a seven-foot tall tower erected right beside the projectors. Most theaters had gone digital, but due to finance, the owner hadn't been able to transition.

They walked through a short, dark hallway and into a more spacious room where a laptop rested on a single desk against the wall. The dim room was lit by two bulbs, slightly reflecting off the water stained ceiling. The walls were painted light gray and adorned with different movie posters. Alicia had only been in the projection booth once before when the general manger had given a tour on her first day.

"It's pretty dark in here," she observed.

"Well, duh, man, it's a *projection booth*. It's s'posed to be dark 'cause bright lights can shine through the windows and reflect off the movie screens."

"Doesn't it bum you out to be in the dark like this all day?"

"Nah, I actually like it. Sunlight is way overrated."

Alicia stopped beside a table, pulled out her cell phone from her pants pocket and redialed 911; still no signal.

"Dammit! Why can't I make a call anywhere in this freakin' place?"

"It's caused by electrical interference," Vic explained, approaching the desk.

"Do you have a phone we can use?"

Vic unplugged his laptop and shrugged, "Yeah."

"Well call the cops, *dude*," she demanded. "If you can't get a signal either, we ought to leave for the office."

“I never said I couldn’t get a signal,” replied Vic, carrying his laptop with him as he walked back. “Besides, you said you wanted me to show you this before we spend hours talking to the fuzz.”

“I said what?” she said, confused.

“Hold this,” Vic ordered, handing something over to her. She took the object so Vic could set his laptop down on the table.

“What the hell is this?”

“It’s a splicer.”

She studied it as Vic logged onto the Internet. The splicer wasn’t large but it was heavy and awkward looking with a small slanted cutter that resembled the blade of a Guillotine.

“Check this out,” Vic said. She turned her attention away from the splicer and looked over at the monitor. Vic had looked up the Venom Killer on a local news website where an image of the killer had been caught by a MARTA train security camera. The killer was sitting beside the unconscious passenger he had recently killed. He wore an Atlanta Braves ball cap and sunglasses. It was clearly seen that in his hand was the syringe he’d used to murder the unsuspecting passenger.

“See?” Vic said. “Look how he hides his face. He knows that cameras are on ’im, but wants people to see him actually killing this dude. Isn’t he friggin’ great?”

Is he serious? Alicia thought. It’s like he actually admires him.

“Great? Sounds more like sick-o, if you ask me. Why are you so interested in this guy?”

Vic craned his neck around to her, sliding his hand through his dark, viscous hair. He grinned widely and narrowed his eyes as if squinting in the overrated sunlight. His creepy expression caused icy tingles to rush down Alicia’s spine.

“I’m writing a screenplay about a serial killer. My main character *is* the killer, not a detective trying to find him or a would-be victim, but the killer himself. I’m writing about what takes place inside his head and what he’s thinking about when he actually committing murder. Guess I’m trying to understand the mindset.”

An overpowering eeriness came about him as he spoke about his project. His demeanor was unnerving, reminding her of Frederick Loren in *House on Haunted Hill*, but lacking Vincent Price’s charm and grace.

“I didn’t know you were a writer.”

“You never asked, dude.”

“Why did you want to show me this?”

Vic gave her a funny look, then said with an irritated tone, “For the second fucking time, this was *your* idea.”

There was a long uncomfortable silence between them. Alicia’s stomach acids bubbled like a witch’s brew as her bad feelings worsened. “I’m going to the office.”

“Why are you so anxious to leave?” Vic asked as he reached into his jacket pocket.

He pulled out a syringe.

Vic’s voice seemed to be coming from far away when he said, “I cannot be stopped.”

Oh, my God! It’s Vic! Vic is the killer!

Before she knew what she was doing, Alicia swung the heavy iron splicer up.

“No!” she shouted as she slammed it across his head.

The impact sent him straight to the ground; his skull cracked opened like a coconut as it hit the hard tile floor.

Alicia stood over him while waves of tremors shook her every bone. She had never realized she possessed such strength. She tried to slow her rapid breathing, nearly vomiting as the blood oozed out, forming a thick red pool across the floor. Then a new terror forced her rigid body into motion.

“What have I done? I *killed* him! Oh, shit! I gotta get out of here!”

She dropped the splicer and ran out of the booth. She raced down the stairs, then darted through the lobby with the lingering scent of buttery popcorn still in the air. Rushing up another stairwell, she reached the office door, fumbling for the office key hidden within her own set of keys. Finally she found the right one, unlocked the door and went inside, slamming it behind her.

I gotta call the police! she thought, rushing to the desk.

As her hand reached the phone, a voice said, “Hello, Alicia.”

An unknown woman was sitting behind the desk; her feet casually propped up. Her outlandishly attired was a black smoking jacket, pinstripe pants and a vivid red tie tucked inside a white vest, with matching white snakeskin shoes. She had sharp facial features, sallow skin and wore thick, dark eyeliner, with glossy red lipstick that perfectly matched her tie.

Alicia stood stunned and blinked several times in disbelief before finally managing to say, “Who are you?”

“Tsk, tsk,” the intruder said, disregarding her question as she admired her glittery gold rings. “What a mess you’ve made of ole Vic.” She turned her eyes up at Alicia and said in sarcastic pity, “That poor, poor useless skin sack.”

Alicia knitted her eyebrows together with confusion and said, “What are you talking about?”

The intruder smirked and lit up a cigarette wedged inside a sixteen inch cigarette holder.

“You were never too fond of Vic, were you? I think you wanted an excuse to pop him off, so you made yourself believe he was going to harm you.”

“I didn’t murder Vic. I was defending myself!”

Smoke spread throughout the room when the intruder exhaled. Surprisingly, Alicia couldn’t smell it.

“Ever wonder where the time goes?” the intruder asked abruptly.

Alicia was taken aback.

“The time?”

“Yes, time. It seems to pass by so fast for you. So many mysterious gaps riddled throughout the fabric of your lifespan. Sometimes it feels like you’ve jumped into a time warp and skipped ahead a few hours, doesn’t it, hon?”

“This is insane,” she said, snatching the phone from its cradle and starting to dial. “I’m calling the police.”

Then the intruder leaned toward her and said, “Who do you think killed that girl in the New York nightclub when *you* worked there as a bartender?”

Alicia froze in place, her finger pressing on the dial. Flashes of her past resurfaced. She remembered dancers on the floor, dancing to the loud beats from the DJ. And she remembered the annoying drunk girl who kept ordering drinks and never leaving a tip.

“This is some sick joke,” Alicia said. “You just somehow broke in my office to play a prank, right? Vic is in on it too, isn’t he?”

“When Paula had asked to leave early, I decided it was the perfect opportunity to pick my next victim,” the intruder went on. “I put the Rohypnol in the customer’s drink while preparing it behind concessions, then I moseyed into the auditorium to poison him.”

The salvia inside Alicia's mouth instantly evaporated, leaving her tongue as dry as a shriveled up vegetable. She hung up the phone. "No, this isn't right. I didn't murder anyone, and Vic was going to kill me. He pulled out a syringe and said "I cannot be stopped."

"No, you only imagined that happened."

"What?"

"Hate to break it to you, hon, but you're a little daffy. What he really said was, 'I'll call the cops', and took out his cell phone, which you mistook for a syringe. You see, it was you who wanted to go up to the projection booth."

Alicia shook her head in disbelief. "No, it wasn't, Vic did."

"Wrong again, girly," the intruder said, tapping her long fingernail against her temple. "Think about it again."

She thought back for a moment and suddenly began remembering the real conversation that took place between her and Vic inside the auditorium.

"The killer must've done this at the last show," Vic had said. "That means he was just here, man."

"He could still be in the building," Alicia had said. "Let's go upstairs in the projection booth and call the police. But first I want to hear more about this serial killer."

"See?" the intruder said with a sigh. "Now you've gone and done this. You've really thrown everything out of whack."

"I don't murder people."

"Technically, you're right about that. You see, killing is *my* game, not yours. Your job is finding us work and places to stay like normal people do, and once settled, that's when I come out to play."

"Wait, are you saying that. . ."

"We're the same person."

Alicia stumbled back and hit the wall, clutching her pounding chest. "No," she gasped.

"Yes," the woman said. "And you can't go around killing people like this. It's sloppy, and sloppiness will get us both executed, got it?"

Cold terror took hold of her soul when she imaged herself becoming the Top Story on the evening news. She could just hear an anchorperson saying, "At last, that sick and twisted freak, the Venom Killer, has been captured. Hear how her sloppiness landed her in police custody right after our weather forecast."

She could picture herself being paraded around in handcuffs while reporters questioned her about horrors that she never remembered committing. Then after going through an agonizing trial, and hearing the merciless slam of the judge's gavel, she'd be forced to listen to her victim's loved ones curse her name and tell of the grief and misery she had caused them. Then as a closure to her short life, she'd be strapped to a cold table and injected with sodium thiopental while their piercing hateful eyes stared at her through a Plexiglas wall. All the while, this other part of her—the *real* murderess—would cowardly hide in the shadows of her mind and dare not make an appearance, allowing the innocent side of Alicia to argue all the blame. The thought nearly caused her to break down into tears.

"What are we going to do?" she finally asked.

"Don't soil yourself over this," her other self groaned. "I'll take care of everything."

She stabbed out her cigarette on the desk and then stood to approach her. Alicia suddenly felt lightheaded and before she knew it, she blacked out.

Alicia smelled a combination of rotten food and dirty diapers before opening her eyes. As her vision cleared, she discovered that she was lying in a pile of garbage. She sat up and found a flashlight in her hand. She shined the light around, seeing nothing but a field of endless waste, and surmised that she was in the city dump.

How the hell did I get here? She wondered, rubbing her aching head.

Dazed and confused, Alicia moved the beam around before a human hand caught her eye. It stuck out between some trash bags and loose debris. Alicia pushed a trash bag over. A bloody face stared back at her. She shot to her feet upon discovering it was Vic.

The series of events in which led her here were hazy, like visions in a snowstorm. An urgent voice inside her head advised that it was now time to get out of the city.

The End.

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