

#METOO



***A timely Cooper Wright Mystery
by Rob Steele***

#MeToo

By Rob Steele

I'll be the first to admit that I don't understand all the pressures a kid goes through these days. When I was growing up, things were different. We didn't have five-billion channels of tv with nothing on, we had three... not billion, just three. We didn't have mp3 players; we had AM radios. LPs weren't exactly portable music and if you don't know what an LP is, go Google it. We played outside for crying out loud! Today, inside on a computer texting your friends next door. I don't get that.

We did have prejudices, though. Some kids were made fun of because of their... well, we didn't call it sexual preferences back then. Some even got beaten because of it. I didn't understand most of that. I had a friend I was reasonably sure was gay but I wasn't sleeping with him so it didn't matter. I may have teased him about it but I didn't mean anything by it.

I am rather proud of this new "#MeToo" movement. The premise, as I understand it, is that if someone gets sexually harassed, they report it! Immediately! It doesn't matter who did it or where or when, even. Just report it so it can be handled. People are reporting by the truckload, and that's great. But I have a feeling that many more aren't reporting it.

This case, I suspect, should have been part of the movement. The victim is 19-year-old Michael Devin. A college student studying finance. Doesn't live in a dorm. Stays at home with mom and dad, which makes sense. Saves a lot of money that way. Unfortunately, his parents found him this morning, hung in his closet.

There are a lot of extenuating circumstances going on here. Is suicide a possibility? Certainly, but he's also beaten and bruised. I'm also curious about the marks on his left arm. I don't know what makes markings like that. I point it out to our coroner, Dr. Seong-ho Young, and he just shrugs. "Well, Cooper, I have no idea what could make marks like that. I'll take a closer look when we get to autopsy." He makes a note in his pad and gets Henry Ruth to help him get the body back to HQ. CSIs have already been over the scene and collected (hopefully) pertinent evidence: his laptop,

some school notes, the rope.

Dr. Andrea Strong of the 'sympathy squad,' our nickname for department psychologists who do initial consultations with victim's families and take some of the awkwardness away from detectives so we can focus on the case and not melting relatives, has been here for a while and tells me that the parents are ready to be questioned. That sounds a bit harsh. Not interrogated, certainly, but we do have to ask some questions.

"No, lieutenant," answers Margaret Devin, our victim's mother, "we don't know of any trouble he... he..." she broke down into sobs again. That is understandable. Michael was their only child. I left her in the care of Dr. Strong and went looking for dad.

His father, Hank, a long-distance truck driver, was outside. It appeared as though he was unloading the cab of his truck, angrily. Climbing up into the cab, a few thumping sounds followed by him jumping down and throwing a satchel or box into the garage of his house, then repeating the process. The truck, the cab section of a tractor-trailer, or semi, looked a little out of place backed up to the garage of a suburban house. I never understood why they were called 'semi's either. I was brought up in a house where my dad did a lot of math, so 'semi' meant half. And if this was just half the truck, how big is the whole thing? They're huge as it is. But I digress...

Mr. Devin stopped his furious unpacking long enough to give me a dangerous look. "Ok, lieutenant. I know I'm supposed to be all upset over my son's death. And I am. But I'll deal with it in my own way. You don't have to keep watching me like that." He picked up a box and headed back into the garage.

"Sir, I have a few questions..."

"Look!" he said, rounding on me with a fury. "You're a detective, right? So, go detect! You figure it out! That's your job!" He turned again and stormed into the house, slamming the door. That's what I was doing, y'know.

Detecting. Most of it has to do with asking questions. I didn't know Michael Devin so I have to ask people. That usually means starting with the grieving parents. I know it has to be a hard thing to do, but police can't just magically make information appear out of thin air. It would be great if

people realized that.

Of course, it would be great if people didn't have to be investigated either. Just be good to everyone and there we go. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. While the death of Michael Devin looked like a suicide, there were issues that made it appear otherwise. Homicide investigates suicides anyway, but this one looks more homicide than suicide to me.

Something that was almost immediately, but partially, confirmed when I got back to my car. There was the usual police activity surrounding the Devin house. A few squad cars, the coroner's van was already gone, and my car. On the far side of my car, someone was, I don't know... lurking? It was a young man about Michael's age. I suspect one of his friends.

"You're Lieutenant Wright, uh, right?" he asked.

I nodded. "Yeah, and the reason you're lurking by my car is...?" I hear a slam from behind me and turn. Hank Devin is throwing things around in his garage, again. I hope Dr. Strong can take care of him, too. I turn back to see the young man getting into my car. "Ok, what the hell are you doing?"

He stared straight ahead, almost boring a hole through the dash. "I need to talk to you, sir. But not here. Not with them around," he said nodding toward the Devin house. To prevent an incident, I just got in the car and asked where we were going.

"Anywhere. Anywhere but here." I started the car and began to drive back to HQ. I was halfway there before the kid spoke again. "My name is Julian Croft, sir. I grew up with Michael."

"Ok, so you guys were friends then."

"Lovers," he replied. Ok, wasn't quite expecting that. It still throws me off a bit when I learn someone has a different... view than I do. I shrug it off. If that's what they wanted, then good for them. Julian could tell I wasn't expecting that revelation but he continued. "We've been that way most of our lives. We were going to get married after college. But it hasn't been easy. Well, not for Michael. My family was more accepting. The Devin's – well, you saw the bruises."

That threw me off even more. "You mean his dad did that?" My ire was

rising. Few things piss me off more than parents beating their kids.

“Yes sir. I overheard Mr. Devin say that he wanted to put Michael back in the closet, one time. Sir, I can’t prove it, but I think they killed him, too. It just doesn’t make sense. Michael was so happy. Well, when he was away from home. And he didn’t stay there often. He would stay with me and my family a lot.” He looked as though he would explode with tears but held himself together. “I know you only have my word to go on this but, please look into his family on this. I just can’t believe Michael would commit suicide.”

Maybe the kid was on to something. Maybe not. I could, at least, clear up one mystery, maybe even two. “Do you know anything about some markings we found on his arm? Or why we’re being followed by a red VW Golf?”

Julian smiled a little at that. “The Golf is my mom. I told her I had to talk to you and she didn’t want me using my money to catch a cab or an Uber home. But those marks were probably his braces. He broke his arm a few years ago and it hasn’t been the same since.” He had a long pause before he continued. “It was a spiral fracture.”

Spiral fractures are usually a sign of abuse. Looking back at Hank Devin throwing things around like he did makes more sense now. I pull the car over and to let him switch to his mom’s vehicle and tell him that I will be looking into it. I have to cover all the angles but he’s really given me a lot to look for. I thank him and give him my card. “If you think of anything else, or see anything, you let me know.” He nods and thanks me. Polite kid. Don’t see too many of those anymore. I watch him get in his mom’s car and drive off before I continue. She stops next to my car briefly to nod and mouth a ‘thank you.’

By the time I get to the coroner’s office, I’m not in a good mood. I’m never really in a good mood when I’m working a case. This is homicide I’m dealing with. But if Julian Croft is right, and it is the parents that did this...

“Boy it’s a good thing I’m done here, Coop,” Doc Young says as I enter the autopsy theater. “You’re not dressed for it.” He’s right. I always suit up when I come in here. Last time I didn’t, Doc was cutting someone open and

got some lovely patterned blood spatter on my new suit. I've gotten so flustered thinking about the Devin's, I didn't even think about changing.

"What have you got?" I ask a bit more harshly than I'd intended.

Doc Young sighs. "I think you already know. That mark on his arm-

"if from a brace for a spiral fracture," I finish.

Doc nods. "There's more. These bruises are fresh. I know you don't want to look but his testicles are almost crushed, too. Someone did a number on this kid. And I think I know who. Henry found some splinters in his arm and we traced it back to a baseball bat that the CSIs collected. Wooden bat but a new rubber handle. Great for fingerprints. They match Hank Devin. He has a record of assault and battery in three states.

"And, Coop, it wasn't a suicide, either. The damage to his arm would mean he couldn't tie the knot. We can't prove it yet but... Coop. Coop!" I didn't listen to the rest. I'm too furious right now. How could a parent do that to a child? To THEIR child? Being gay or straight or both doesn't matter. It's your kid! You have to take care of your kids!

Before I realize it I'm in my car and speeding through the parking garage. I'm bringing in Hank Devin. That's all that matters to me right now. I'm bringing him in! As I try to leave the garage, I almost run over Manny. Detective Vasquez nearly jumps on my car. I stop, roll down the window and ask Manny what the hell he's doing.

Manny sighs as he dismounts the hood and comes to the window. "I know you, boss. Seong-ho called and all he had to tell me was that he thinks the dad did it. I didn't need to know any more. I knew you would get a full head of steam and do something that may jeopardize your career. You don't need to do that, boss. We'll get him." He picked up a radio and called for two units to pick up Hank Devin. Manny's right. I take several deep breaths to calm myself down.

It doesn't help.

I spend the next hour at the shooting range. Every paper target has Hank Devin's face on it. Every. Single. One. I'm not one for just getting my gun off. It's a handy tool in my line of work, but I'm supposed to use my brain.

That's the most important tool a police officer has.

I keep thinking about the #metoo movement. It wasn't sexual abuse that Michael Devin was receiving. It was straight up beatings, but it was sexually motivated. I think that should count, too. And I can't help but think that if he had reported it, to anyone, this could have been prevented.

Now Mrs. Devin's life is ruined. Hank's life is ruined, not that I'll be shedding a tear for the bastard. Julian Croft's life is ruined. And Michael's life... is over. There needs to be a better way. I just wish we could find it before this happens again.

If you need to report any abuse, do it. Don't wait.