

# NOT A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND



A CALVIN GLEN MYSTERY  
BY ALEX LYDON

# NOT A Girl's Best Friend

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Most homicides are not story worthy. Those stories have already been told. Once you hear about the husband who got tired of his wife, make up some insurance scam, killed her, collected the money and then got caught – I mean, really. How many times do you have to hear that? Even television has over-done that storyline. Think of some police show that hasn't done that one. Go ahead. I'll wait. Not that I'll have to wait long because you've already thought of one, haven't you?

It's like Mama Glen always used to say: "Calvin, everyone knows about the everyday. If you want to tell a story, at least make it different. Tell people what they don't know, like a duck's quack doesn't echo. Make them interested in the different."

Well, I think that this one counts as different – at least in my book. Night shift had just started when we got a call from a local club called Distortion. It's supposed to be a cross between a speakeasy and a burlesque. I'll be honest, I'm not entirely sure what the difference is there.

The call said that one of the dancer the show they do was killed on stage. That sounds like it should be a fairly easy one, but it had more twists than I expected. When I arrive at the scene, there are already several uniformed officers there keeping the crowds at bay and taking statements from witnesses. Officer Scott Walker, the senior on the scene, well, before I get there, fills me in. "This one is weird, Cal. What we've got is Maureen Ayers, age 28, and lead dancer. She came out on stage with the other dancers, five total, and they do a..." he frustratedly consults his notepad looking for a word, "Rockettes routine? What's a rockette?"

I sigh. Am I getting old or are they just not as popular as they used to be? "You can Google it later, kid. Keep going."

"Right. Anyway, they've all got these big head-dress things," he continues leading me to the stage where I see our victim, still on stage, in a spangled red leotard and a massive feathered head-dress. I knew she was dead already but I wasn't expecting to see her throat slit and the amount of blood

on the stage. CSIs were already on stage collecting samples and right next to the body I see the night coroner Gabrielle Rosenberger in a full, CSI hazmat suit examining the wound. Walker noticed my confusion and resumed, “witnesses say she came on stage and looked woozy. She kept trying to do the routine, that is usually the finale for the night, but collapsed about two minutes in, clutching at her throat. I haven’t found anyone that says they noticed her bleeding like that. Maybe her outfit hid the blood?” He sounded skeptical about that but it does look like her leotard is soaked.

We start to walk onto the stage but Gabrielle holds up a hand to stop us as she leaves to body and greets us on the stage stairs. It is a little disconcerting that she doesn’t seem to notice that her previously pristine white suit is covered in blood. “Let the CSIs finish up here. There’s been enough evidence lost,” she says. “When they saw her collapse, some of the security here ran on stage. So did one of the customers, Doctor Wilton Reeves,” she motions to a man in a bloodstained suit giving a statement to an officer. “He tried to save her, or at least keep her going until paramedics arrived, but there was nothing he could do. She was way too far gone. I’ll keep you apprised on the autopsy proceedings but it’s going to be a while. CSIs want to cover this scene thoroughly before I move the body. Y’know, just so the gurney doesn’t accidentally take anything with us.” She returned to the body.

Wow. “So, you’re telling me that she was dancing on a stage with four other women, when her throat was magically slit and she bled out on stage?” Walker nodded and said that all the witness statements seems to say the same thing. How does someone magically get her throat slit on a stage with four other people. If I remember my Rockettes correctly, their arms are behind each other, so no one would be able to get at our vic’s throat without drawing attention to herself.

Time to talk to some suspects and witnesses to see if I can make sense of this. It would help to have a motive or a murder weapon. But, as Mama Glen always says, “You can’t have everything.” And that’s true. Where would you put it? First on the list is Dr. Wilton Reeves, who gives me nothing I don’t already have. He says he was watching the show when he saw her collapse. “Her outfit might have changed colors with what

happened but I'll be honest, detective. I wasn't looking at her outfit during the show," he says with an embarrassed scratch of the back of his head. I picture the Rockettes in my head and, yeah, I probably wouldn't be looking at their outfits either.

The other audience members I spoke to said pretty much the same thing. No one ran on stage to do it; it just happened. Maybe I'll have better luck talking with the other dancers. Jacqueline Roberts, the dancer on stage left, gives me a little more to go with, between sobs. "She was such a professional. She taught most of us how to do the routines. She choreographed the dances. She was everything here."

"So, no one had a problem with her?" I try to keep it professional but I have this urge to try to comfort her. Unfortunately, that would not only be terribly unprofessional, but I think it could also bring me up on kind of harassment charge, and that's the last thing anybody needs.

"No sir," she sobbed. "Maybe she was having trouble with her boyfriend. We really don't have time to mingle with people. We stay busy coming up with new shows, but I hear she was pretty close with Larry, one of the new bouncers."

Maybe that's a lead. The other dancers didn't give me anything useful so I guess I'll find out if the boyfriend has anything. I ask Officer Walker which one of the several bouncers is Larry and he points me to a fairly muscular, and shirtless, man named Larry Drummond. As I approach, I notice that all the men who work here are of a similar build and state of dress. Different skin tones and hair colors, but I guess that's part of the club's motif, mostly naked men and women. Although I also notice most of the customers are men. Not sure what to make of that.

I take him aside and begin my interrogation, although he looks as though he's been crying as well. "Mr. Drummond," I begin, "I understand you and Ms. Ayers had a relationship of some kind. Could I get you to expound on that?"

He crosses his arms and wipes some tears away with a hand. "Maureen and I were seeing each other for a couple months," he nods. "But I was informed last week that we'd be taking a break. She wanted to try a 'Bindy'.

Whatever the hell that is! I hate it when women announce things like that. I know. I know. I just made myself a suspect but... I didn't want her dead. I wanted her back!"

"It's true. He did," muttered one of the other male performers as he passed us and entered the lavatory.

"I guess it's hard to keep secrets here," I quip as I look around the establishment. There are a few places I can see being quiet, like the store room or the main office, but even then, there would be people going in and out all the time. "Everyone knows everyone else's business?"

He nodded. "We know all about each other, but we don't get to interact much. The girls are always working on routines. When we have lady's night, we just have to get on the stage and do some thrusting. Those girls are the real talent here. And to keep everything straight, Mr. Belanger makes sure we keep the locker rooms separate. What me and Maureen do..." he paused with a wince. "Did. We did at our own places on our own time."

He seems genuine. I'd like to think he didn't do it but if the evidence swings that way, so will I. I start toward the main office to talk with Milton Belanger, the aforementioned club owner, when I get a call from Jay Ward, one of our head CSI techs. "I found your murder weapon, Cal. Someone did a number on this."

I'm naturally curious. "What'd you find, Jay?"

"I was examining this head-dress... thing. My first question was, how the hell does this thing stay on? The answer was obvious once I looked at it closely. There's a chin... well, harness really. It's dyed the same color Ms. Ayers skin so you can't see it. It straps the whole thing around the neck and shoulders of the person wearing it. This one is a mess, as you might imagine. But the blood deteriorated the fabric showing what was in it. Someone put a diamond wire saw in her neck strap. That's how she got her throat slit on stage. She did it to herself. Kinda."

That seems a bit harsh. "Wouldn't she have felt that? If something was cutting into my neck, I'd rip it off my head."

"Oh, she wouldn't," said a passing Torea Moore, one of the other showgirls

I'd talked to earlier. There really is no privacy here. "She was a professional. Nothing could get her to take that thing off while she was on stage. Ever."

I thank Jay for the call so I can continue with Ms. Moore. "Never under any circumstances? I know they're made of feathers, but they look heavy."

"They are," she replied matter-of-factly. "I hate 'em. But that's part of the job. And we get paid pretty well so..."

I rub my chin thoughtfully. "Now if I could just figure out what a 'Bindy' was I might be able to work this case out."

"Oh, that's easy," said Torea. "The dancers all have nicknames we use during rehearsals. Torea, is short enough but Maureen is... was, too long so she was just 'M'. 'Bindy' was Jacqueline's name. It had something to do with sewing. She fixes all our costumes, y'know."

Well, now it all fits. Almost. About an hour later, in an interrogation room downtown, I get my final answers. "Yeah, she left him for me," said Jacqueline Roberts. "She said she wanted to experiment before she got completely tied down. Once she got married, that was it for her. And she wanted to marry Larry. Marry Larry! That sounds so stupid. I've loved her since I first met her and now that I've had her, she was going to be mine and no one else's. Especially Larry!"

That's ridiculous... and kind of annoying from a story point of view. I guess we *have* heard it all. Jilted lover story all over again. Granted, I'm not sure I've heard it with a diamond wire saw in a Rockette head-dress before. I guess it really is like Mama Glen used to say: "If it looks like a duck but it quacks in stereo, it might just be a variation on a duck... but it's still a duck."

Torea - tore E uh