

# TOO MUCH TELEVISION..



NEWS  
WEATHER  
SPORTS  
NEGATIVITY  
CRITICISM

A COOPER WRIGHT MYSTERY  
BY ROB STEELE

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“You’ve pulled a big case this time,” they’d said. “You’ve never had a bigger case than this one Coop!” they’d said. I know several people I’d like to smack about the head right now. I enter the living room of our victim and see his body in a recliner in front of about a 60” flat-screen television. The screen has a kitchen chair sticking through it and into the wall behind. Our victim has a rope wrapped around what passes for his neck. It’s hard to tell as the rope disappears into folds of skin. This guy is over 500 pounds, easy. Yeah, yeah. Biggest case ever. That’s funny.

There are CSIs swarming the house collecting evidence in their own well-organized manner. Our coroner, Dr. Seong-ho Young is arguing with Henry Ruth, his new assistant, on how exactly they’re going to use their gurney to get the body back to the office for autopsy. Doc pauses long enough to nod a greeting and spreads his arms in a very clear “yeah, that’s how he died” manner. Strangulation – that would explain the Bluetooth keyboard, spilled soda and bowl of cheese puffs scattered across the carpet.

I’m more formally greeted by Officer Scott Walker who says that this time he hasn’t moved a thing. He hands me the wallet of our victim. “Our victim is Richard Bear-Lee...”

“Barely?! This guy doesn’t look like a barely anything!”

“No, sir. Bear dash Lee. Hyphenated name. Age 53. Near as we can tell, he lives alone. No obvious sign of what he does for a living.”

“Did you say Richard Bear-Lee?” piped a very young-looking CSI whose name I didn’t know. Walker nodded at him. “I always wondered what he looked like. This guy is famous on the internet. He does reviews of movies and television programs. Y’know, *Reviews From Ritchie* dot com?” I shoot Walker a look and he replies with a shrug. But now we have a lead.

Our young CSI went back to work but was talking about the victim with some of the other CSIs. Ritchie was a blogger that reviewed movies and television but never seemed to like anything. I hear one of them say that he

didn't even like the original *Star Wars*. How can you not like the original *Star Wars*? I look back at our victim and with guy this size, I'm struck with flashbacks to *Return of the Jedi* and that scene where Princess Leia strangles Jabba the Hutt. That's when I pick up on some chatter around the room.

"Did you hear how he went off on that weather girl?" A suspect – and a female one at that. Of course, triggers the memories of Carrie Fisher in that metal bikini. "He didn't like that she was still doing the weather report while pregnant." Now, I'm picturing a pregnant Carrie Fisher in the metal bikini. "The one from channel 12?" "Nah, channel 6." Now it's a black, pregnant Carrie Fisher in the metal bikini. "Isn't she the one who lost an arm serving in Afghanistan?" Now it's a... you know what. Never mind. I shake my head to clear it out – yes, like an etch-a-sketch.

I take a good look around noting that there doesn't seem to be any sign of forced entrance. There is an odd remote by his chair that has only one button. I glove up and examine the remote a little more closely. It looks homemade. It also looks very 70s. Wood trim and a large black button. I push it and look around to see what happens. From behind me I hear a *whompf* sound and a bit of a grunt. I see that the front door to the house has closed automatically... on one of the CSIs. I push the button again and the door opens. Now we probably know how the killer got inside. I grab the closest CSI, it's the young one whose name is Carter, apparently, and have him dust the door and doorbell. Might get a print off that. And it might go with any epithelial cells we can get off the rope.

Just at first glance, I'm guessing someone didn't like a review, strangled him and then put the chair through the TV. If the chair went first, my guess would be that even Jabba here would have gotten up. "Who found the body?"

Officer Walker consults his notepad. "That would be Eddie Nash. He says he delivers groceries here once a week. We ran him and he has seventeen outstanding parking tickets. I had him taken in and booked for you. He's at the station all nice and ready for you." As Walker finishes, he looks up and notices a disapproving scowl on my face. "Now what'd I do?"

"While he's there, in a cell, he's able to think up an excuse for anything. Did

it occur to you he might be our killer?”

Walker looks abashed, again. “Well, yeah. But he did have a big box of groceries and another in the car. He called it in because he said he couldn’t get in to deliver. He stuck around when he could have just left without saying anything.”

I give Walker a mild nod. “Not bad thinking there. But protocol says he still stays here next time. Got it?” Walker nods back. “I suspect most of our suspects would come from this guy’s computer. We got that heading back?”

Walker nods again. “Found three of them. Near as we can tell, they haven’t been disturbed. Darryl Silverstone was here earlier. Says he lives nearby and heard the call and came to help. He says that one of them was a media server that moved media throughout the house. One was an old laptop that looked like it hadn’t been used in a while. It had a Windows XP logo on it so even I know it’s not new. And then there was the one that Bluetooth keyboard was hooked to. I guess he did just about everything from this chair.”

That was my guess, too. The chair was surrounded with used soda cans and assorted wrappers for frozen burritos and paper plates with pizza residue on them. Although I’m surprised this guy left any residue from anything.

So, recapping before I leave the scene: one 500 lb. victim who didn’t like anything, one computer that probably has a log of his recent critiques and, according to our CSIs, one potential suspect in a one-armed veteran weatherwoman who is pregnant. As much as I might want to immediately rule her out, I can’t. When she was pregnant, my wife could get so hormonal she could probably throw the car at me if she was pissed enough. So, strangling Jabba the Hutt, was probably within reason. And that’s where I’ll start my questions. Grocery boy can wait.

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I went to the Channel 6 broadcast building on 9<sup>th</sup> street. I’d been there before several times before, but never on a case. I was hoping to meet with Danika Wooten, weather girl and American veteran of three tours of Afghanistan. I have to admit, I wouldn’t have pictured her as a weather girl.

Although I am reminded by several people that weather girl is not the appropriate term these days.

At first, I'm disappointed to learn that she's not only not at the station, she's not in the country at the moment. The parent network saw her work and thought she'd be a perfect correspondent for whatever's going on in the Middle East right now. Instead I'm taken to the main news studio and introduced to Dick Preachington, the head of the stations public relations. "Y'know Lieutenant," his words almost dripping with oil, trying to sound much more slick than he really is, "we have had a number of complaints about her, but nowhere near the number of compliments and cards of encouragement. She's a beacon of hope to the American people. Not just a war vet, but a purple heart recipient that had almost an entire limb removed in the war.

"And did that stop her? Oh, no. She came right back to the town where she grew up and became a celebrity." He leaned in closer as if to whisper something in confidence, unfortunately for my ear he said it just as loud as everything else, if not louder. "Y'know, we wanted to have her be the anchor woman for the 6 o'clock news, but Margot Dennis wouldn't leave." Ms. Dennis being the long-standing anchor for the station. I glance over my shoulder to see Ms. Dennis shoot Mr. Preachington a look so fierce I felt a pain in my shoulder as it passed.

Of course, all of this may be for nothing. Mr. Bear-Lee might have been killed over something completely different. But it felt right to be here. Not sure why. "Mr. Preachington, is there a way to get a copy of the letters and stuff sent to Ms. Wooten? We'd like to do some cross-referencing."

"Absolutely," he said taking my arm, briefly before I shrug it off. I do follow him to an office but I also check my jacket for oil stains from where he grabbed me. That's when I realize who he reminds me of... vaguely. Ted Cruz – that senator from.... Wherever Ted Cruz is from. Right down to the oily hair.

About fifteen minutes later, I'm brought a good-sized box filled with letters and a USB thumbdrive on top. "I made a copy of the emails too," says Preachington. "Just in case." He winked, because I obviously wasn't

uncomfortable enough. I thank him and return take the box to the lab, where I meet with Darryl Silverstone, our resident techie. While he goes over Mr. Bear-Lee's computers, I begin sifting through the letters to Ms. Wooten.

Most of what I'm finding are congratulatory letters or, I guess, condolences on the loss of her arm – the left one in case you're somehow not familiar with her. I end up with a small stack of complaints, but most of them are from white supremacists and I rule those out. Killing Mr. Bear-Lee would be something someone on her side would do, again, if it has anything to do with it at all.

I also have a stack of "stalker" letters. I don't know that these guys, and they are all male so 'guys' is the right term, are really stalking her but they sound like they have potential – especially this one guy, Bruticus Checkroll. That has to be an alias, doesn't it?

I take my list over to Darryl and we cross-reference my list with what he's found on the computer. Unfortunately, none of the names match. That channel 6 thing looks like it was a waste of time. That's when Darryl runs the name Bruticus Checkroll through the system. He doesn't exist. We cross-reference with the address on the letter Bruticus sent and come up with the name T'chala Mamadou. That has to be an alias, too, doesn't it?

T'chala is the Black Panther from Marvel Comics. Maybe it is a real name. I decide to go find out.

I take Detective Manny Vasquez with me, and just because something about this doesn't set well, I take Office Scott Walker, too. The house on Manning St. isn't that big or glamorous. Actually, it's small. Looks like it might have all of three rooms, including the bathroom. That's small even for this part of town. The outside looks like it could use some repair, especially the sidewalk that leads to the door. Manny and Scott stand behind me as I knock on the door. Normally I do prefer doorbells, as they tend to have better results, but this door, unsurprisingly, doesn't have one.

What happens next is a bit of a blur. I have my badge out and am beginning to hold it up when the door opens. Unfortunately, it opens quicker than I'm expecting and I'm certainly not ready for the fist that lashes out and catches

me in the jaw, knocking me to the ground. I remember bits and pieces after that. I hear someone yell "Police." I think it was Manny. I hear an electrical discharge. And then a searing pain in my left ankle. That's when I finish falling and my head hits the uneven sidewalk.

My next conscious thought is being in a hospital bed with Manny and another Puerto Rican guy standing over me. "Uh, Manny, I didn't know you had a brother." Both Mannys look skeptical and one mutters something about not having a brother. I shake my head and the Mannys blurrily merge into one person. I put my hand to my head and feel a bandage. I try to sit up and notice my left ankle is heavily bandaged. I try to look at Manny but just fall back into what this hospital might call a pillow. "All right, I give. What happened?"

"I'll short form it for you, boss," replies Manny. He's starting to talk like me. Now if I can just get him to call me Cooper. "We were going to talk to Bruticus Checkroll, remember?" I vaguely remember nodding in response. "It turns out he's a bit paranoid, but with good reason I think. His real name is Eugene Dorkenshake, and he's AWOL from the Marines. He thought we were coming to take him back. When he opened the door, he punched you in the face and you hit that uneven sidewalk hard and badly. Doctor says you have a concussion."

I point at my heavily taped foot and try to look questioningly at Manny. "Yeah, about that," he mutters. "Well, Corporal Dorkenshake is six-foot-seven and weighs about 315 pounds. Scott and I both tazed him pretty quick but he, kinda, fell on your leg and sprained it... a bit." I do a long, slow, drawn-out facepalm.

"But the good news is," he continues, "that Dorkenshake's DNA match the epithelials we got from the rope used to kill Mr. Bear-Lee. But when we ran his prints, the Marines caught on that we might have him and they took him. They want to try him in a military court since he was AWOL and it had to do with Ms. Hooton, who the Marines said they respect greatly. Case closed boss."

I suppose that's something. I had been wanting to take some time off, and I suppose I have to now. I just can't shake the feeling that I forgot something

in this case. Something probably important. I decide not to let it bother me and let the pain meds kick in and nod off again. If it's important, I'll remember it eventually.

Two weeks later, I remember to have Eddie Nash released.