

LISA

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Chapter One

The young woman walked briskly through the deserted streets. Her footsteps drumming a staccato on the sidewalks. She was a striking figure with her long auburn hair, and swirling green cloak.

A frosty moon rode high in the fitful sky, and a train whistle wailed in the distance. She glanced nervously around her, as she approached the eerie darkness of Roanoke Park.

Silent rows of evergreens loomed overhead; their bristly arms reached out to ensnare her. She quickened her pace, head bent low against the wind.

The sudden cry of a screech owl startled the nervous girl, and she broke into a run. She raced past the isolated park just as the moon slipped behind the clouds. Her breath froze on the frigid air, and the urgent tempo of her footsteps echoed through the midnight stillness.

But there was now another sound, far more sinister. Barely perceptible at first, it grew louder and more persistent, until there was no doubt. It was the menacing beat of another pair of footsteps, heavier than her own and gaining on her with alarming speed.

She ran across the road, in a desperate bid to escape, but was grabbed roughly from behind. Her agonized screams were cut short by a hand clamped cruelly over her mouth. Kicking and struggling she was dragged into the hovering darkness of the waiting park.

Her body was discovered the next morning by a neighbor out walking his dog.

* * *

The celluloid images flickered on the projection screen before being replaced by a series of declining numbers.

“So what do you think?” Lieutenant Neil Slater switched on the lights and invited everyone to help themselves to coffee.

This dramatic re-enactment of the possible events leading up to a murder was part of the Vancouver Homicide Squad’s unsolved crimes program. They were hoping to interest the press and media into publicizing it.

“I remember the case well.” Said Scott Preston, the Morning Herald crime reporter. *If you only knew **how** well, you’d be shocked*, he admitted silently. “The victim’s name is Lisa Craig, and she was murdered twenty years ago.”

“That’s right,” Slater nodded. “You wrote an update on the case a couple of years ago.”

“It didn’t produce any new evidence though, which was disappointing,” Scott said. He recalled that the murdered woman had been only twenty-three years old when she met her killer on that freezing midnight in Roanoke Park. A receptionist for Mitford Realty, she lived with her mother and aunt.

He should know. My God he’d absorbed every detail of the tragedy for years. Lisa Craig obsessed him. The re-enactment of her murder had shaken him to the core. Scott excused himself and went to the men’s room. His mirror image looked tense; anxious blue eyes, fair beard and an earring. He washed his hands

and tried to compose himself.

When he returned to Slater's office, he said, "The boyfriend was the prime suspect, wasn't he?"

Slater nodded. "His name is Garrick Boyd, and they worked at the same place." He gave a quick rundown of the details, which Scott already knew by heart. Lisa and Boyd had been dating outside the office for several months, before the fateful night that would end one life, and change many others forever. They had gone to a movie and were having a late snack afterwards at the Peach Tree Inn.

That is when the argument began.

According to eyewitnesses the disagreement ended in Lisa leaving the restaurant abruptly and alone after shouting. "We're through, I never want to see you again."

A few minutes later she was followed by a furious looking Boyd, who threw some money down on the table, not even waiting for the check.

Lisa boarded a westbound bus, the last one of the night, while Boyd screamed out of the parking lot in his sports car, heading in the opposite direction.

Witnesses last saw her alive when she left the bus approximately twenty minutes later.

"Boyd was a nasty piece of work with a bad temper." Slater said stirring his coffee. "But unfortunately, we didn't have a shred of physical evidence to link him to the crime scene."

Scott nodded. The official cause of death had been a blow to her left temple, but the murder weapon had never been found.

“Do you think he did it?”

“I only worked briefly on the case. But it wasn’t one of those cut and dried affairs, and I can recall having some doubt...”

Slater went on to explain that Len Barthrop, the officer in charge, retired a few years ago.

“So what was his feeling about Boyd?”

“He was convinced of his guilt.”

“I’ll run it past the editor,” Scott promised. “If I get the green light, I’ll do a full page article on the murder to coincide with the anniversary of the crime.”

* * *

“It seems to me that we’ve done this case to death already.” Senior Editor, Greg Mowatt looked grim. “No pun intended.” He fixed Scott with an icy stare. “I mean, you would have to come up with something new. Snoop around, see what you can find out, and then we’ll take it from there.”

“What can I do that the police haven’t done already?” Scott demanded. “After twenty years even the hottest trail grows cold. I’m not Sherlock Holmes.”

Scott knew that Greg didn’t want to run the article. He didn’t have an ounce of community spirit, and would rather squeeze more advertisements in. This was his way of wiggling out of it.

He went to stand by the window, watching the snow fall. He could sense rather than see the North Shore Mountains shrouded by mist in the distance while foghorns boomed out from the harbor.

Greg foraged around on his cluttered desk, sending the

overflow onto the floor. “The cops are a bunch of overpaid incompetents,” he retorted. “Only those who can’t hack it in the private sector end up on the public payroll.”

“Well we can hardly privatize the police department,” Scott replied wearily. He’d heard all this before, and knew what was coming next.

“I don’t see why not,” Greg obliged. “Pinkertons did a damned good job.” He reached for his ringing telephone, dismissing Scott with a nod.

Meg Bryant poked her head around the door, dropped some mail on the credenza and left. But not before she had given Scott the usual “come hither” look. She was a pretty girl with cropped blonde hair. Older than she looked, with a bad marriage behind her, she had moved in with her mother, temporarily. He followed her out.

“Come over for dinner tonight,” she invited. When Scott hesitated, she added with a wink. “Mom’s away visiting.”

Gawd, if only we didn’t work together, he thought unhappily as he reluctantly declined, he had a strict rule not to mix business with pleasure. But her invitation had fired him up.

On the way home he stopped by Zrinka’s massage parlor for the full treatment.

* * *

Scott lived in a small apartment at Lonsdale Quay, with a jungle of houseplants and a hefty striped tomcat named Flynn. “Hey, I’ve missed you too guy, give me a hug.” He scooped up the purring feline.

From his window he had an unobstructed view of the Vancouver skyline. On the other side of the harbor, now partly shrouded in fog, it rose up in ghostly splendor like a mysterious fortress in the clouds.

After a light supper, which he shared with Flynn, he settled back on the couch with the Lisa Craig file. It was while delving into it previously that he had become fascinated with the beautiful girl and her tragic end. Almost as if there was some sort of a psychic bond between them, although Scott wasn't quite sure if he believed in all of that.

"You should, by golly, you're Celtic," his Aunt Violet often scolded. A firm believer in séances and the supernatural, Violet owned an antique shop, had been married at least three times, and was the most significant person in Scott's life.

He had been affected deeply by the Police Department's dramatization of Lisa Craig's murder. It brought back all the old emotions that plagued him when he had worked on the story before. Her long red hair and flowing green cloak were indelibly etched on his memory.

* * *

Roanoke Park glittered under the cheerful face of a wintry sun. Snow still lay around in patches on the grass, but the pathways were clear and full of joggers and mothers pushing baby carriages.

It was a far cry, Scott decided, from the dark and moody midnight of almost twenty years ago, when Lisa Craig met her untimely fate.

Her body was found behind an azara bush beside one of the

trails with the old Humpback Bridge crouching nearby. As Scott pinpointed the exact location, he shivered despite the brightness of the day.

From where he stood he could hear the rustling of the wind in the trees, and the gentle gurgling sound of the river.

What a place to meet your end, he thought unhappily, with no one to hear your final screams but the nesting birds and the small furry creatures burrowing in their dens.

The police found no signs of any kind of struggle at the murder scene. So her attacker had either overpowered Lisa immediately, or she had been too petrified to fight.

The ironic part was, that although this spot seemed utterly secluded, it was actually only about a hundred yards from Wycliffe Road, a busy thoroughfare with houses, a church and a school.

However, no one had either heard or seen anything unusual on that ill-fated night.

“But you know what happened, don’t you?” Scott murmured to the lofty rows of hemlock and spruce that crowded around the clearing in a hushed and listening attitude.

* * *

That night Scott dreamt he was lost in the park, pursued by an unknown assailant. It was dark and bitterly cold. The tall trees loomed everywhere, boxing him in and making escape impossible.

He tried to run, to make his numb legs move, but they wouldn’t work for him. In the distance he could see the Humpback Bridge illuminated by a ghostly moon, which slid

behind the clouds then reappeared again.

There was a figure standing on the bridge who began to slowly turn.

Lisa.

He woke covered in a cold sweat and imagined he could feel the gray stealth of dawn poking its chilly fingers through the window blinds.