

Four Leaf Clover

from the short story collection: "[Bloody Gullets](#)"

by

[Michael Golvach](#)

In the old days, law enforcement would put up 'wanted' posters all over town if they wanted to catch a criminal really bad. Dead Or Alive. That was the phrase they always used. Most times, the wanted man was worth just a bit more dead than alive. Less paperwork, one might suppose, if they did any of that back then. Usually, there'd be a picture of the poor son of a bitch, dead centre. Not necessarily a good one. Sometimes they would substitute a sketch. Usually, whatever depiction they chose to go with, it was good enough so that you could be fairly sure the bastard you planned to gun down was going to bring you some change. They still do that to this day, but they're much more discreet. And the pictures are a lot nicer.

A friend of mine named Buster, who brought me up as a crime scene photographer, used to tell me stuff like that all the time. The history of the 'wanted' poster. Why they called money money. Fifteen different ways to jerk off in a public restroom without making a sound. Random observations. Sometimes pointless or unnecessarily obscene. And he didn't just do it to me. He did it to everybody. It didn't matter if the occasion was social, professional or otherwise. It was just his way of establishing his presence and breaking the ice. Even if the ice he was standing on was brittle and shaky, like mine. Worn thin already from the constant assault of useless information.

I always listened to him, though. And paid attention. Not because I had to, which I basically did, but because, no matter how ridiculous the subject matter, he would always tell a good tale. A tale that might make you stop crying, if you were the type who couldn't handle snapping morbid photos every single day and some nights. Documenting the many and varied ways human beings take their own lives and those of others. A tale that might make you think before you hit the bottle, if you were the sort of person who could.

Buster had his own way of doing things. He liked to get in and out of a crime scene, nice and neat. Didn't want to have to fuss with anything. Just take his pictures and go. My fascination with the minutiae turned him red, and he would always ask me why I was tapping

around the plaster in the walls with my pocket knife, trying to get the best angled shot possible of a simple bullet hole. Or why I spent time reading scraps of paper or taking mental inventory of little odds and ends. Books and papers. He liked to remind me that we weren't making art. Constantly insisting that the pictures in my wallet would suffice, if they were of a homicide, or a bullet hole or a broken glass table, and not just some woman he never asked me about. He always gave me a look when I paid for lunch and the plastic casing around the pictures unravelled. Like he recognised the face from a frame at the local pharmacy.

People would do all kinds of crazy shit in the name of love, he liked to tell me. It was one of his favourite recurring themes. Love was the number one cause of death, according to him. Number one. All time champion. Killed more people than cancer. No amount of exaggerated eye-rolling could stop him from constantly coming back around and tying that wonderful and uplifting emotion to the horrors we routinely photographed, but I let it slide. He had his opinions and I had mine. Never saw the point in arguing the relative value of the two and making a big scene over nothing. We were partners, essentially. I had to work with him and we could always find something to laugh about. No sense in ruining something rare like that over philosophy.

This one time, when he was a new boy, Buster got called in to do some shots at a crime scene. His first brush with the uglier side of love. He barely managed to finish collecting up all the evidence needed at the murder scene, and said it brought him about as close to losing his lunch as he'd ever come. She was nude, just out of the shower, cut open like a fish. There were bloody hand prints all around the sluice running down the length of her chest and abdomen. On the toilet. On the shower curtain. And bloody footprints all over the room. It was hard to photograph, because just being in the same room with the body would contaminate the scene. The killer must have had a nervous breakdown, or at least a second thought, after he butchered her. Footprints in circles all over the floor, tracing a path like a figure eight. Like infinity. Like no end in sight. Where was he going except out, anyway?

Hearing him tell that story would bring to mind visions of some sick twist pulling on his hair. Walking around in circles. Berating himself. Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. But it was much too late for her. And the pattern of footprints indicated that it wasn't much longer for him. But that was only the half of it, he would remind me. Each and every time he told the story. When the police put it all together and moved in to apprehend that sad confused boy at his place of residence, Buster got called in again. Not even a day had passed. The poor bastard had a run-in with his conscience long before the authorities arrived on the scene. Shot himself in the chest. Puncturing a lung and, maybe, grazing some other organs. Not enough to do the job quick. There were lots of bloody hand prints there, too. It took him a long time to die.

No footprints, though. He never moved from the spot on the living room floor where they found him. Legs still crossed together like a pretzel. Laid out, and contorted, on his back,

in front of an altar of sorts. A little half-table, covered with a cheap vinyl tablecloth that climbed up the wall. Held in place with duct tape. Covered with pictures of the woman they were probably still trying to stitch back together at the coroner's office. Photos shot from various locations, without her knowledge. A hodgepodge of surveillance photos, sloppy Polaroids and old school pictures from old school yearbooks or other sources he'd managed to get his hands on. Some obviously printed from digital. Things he'd found on the Internet or at the library. There were hearts all around the bottom of the shrine, made from red candle wax, and a prayer book beside them. Standard fare. Something to do with Jesus. Probably not what Jesus had intended.

Buster had a hard time shaking that particular assignment. Not just because it was one of his first, but because of the nature of the crime. This was love. Twisted and skewed. Unrequited. He made sure to punctuate the tale with that observation. The beginning of his fixation. It made him question life in a way he never had before. He was married. Loved his wife. Never been down the road this tortured soul had. Never felt that obsession. Never that he noticed, anyway.

The first time he brought me with him - years later, when he'd built up an impressive collection of stories and philosophies - we got called in to shoot a slit-wrist suicide. Nothing too extreme, but very well done. Sliced deep, with a quality razor. From the radial artery at the wrist, all the way past the inside of the elbow and up into the brachial. It wasn't a cry for help. And it was another man. Another lost man leaving nothing at the scene but a suicide note addressed to a woman he'd never even had the courage to approach while he was still breathing. When the police brought her on the premises to identify the body, she couldn't. Not because she was in shock or because she had any trouble facing the ugly reality of the incident. She simply didn't know who he was. But he'd loved her. Loved her so much he couldn't live without her. And he'd loved her for a long, long time, according to the note.

He didn't collect pictures, but he kept journals. Pages and pages of failed, mostly unfinished, love letters. Reminiscing about things that never happened. Brilliantly written descriptions of a future that would never be. Some of it was beautiful, some of it was boring as toast. All of it was detailed and accurate. Complete with endless accounts of his feelings for her and what he thought she was feeling for him. More to the point, what he knew she was feeling for him. His own little drama. Working and figuring its way out in his mind. Their relationship, recounted on reams of paper, that never actually occurred outside the walls of his apartment. You wouldn't know it to read his work. It was as real an account of a life as you might read anywhere.

The only problem was that he'd never so much as spoken to her. When he'd seen her, it must have been in passing. He'd never introduced himself or made any impression whatsoever. Yet, the loss of that love had caused him to end his own life. For reasons that

would remain unknown. Except to someone who might take the time to read through all of those volumes of prose. Perhaps, in his internal psychodrama, she had spurned him. Left him for another man. Wronged him. Broken his heart. We'd never know, she'd never know and he'd never tell. The case got filed under suicide. Nothing much noted about the man's fictional life, except a brief mention in the paperwork. For all intents and purposes, he just died. Took his own life. Case closed. Almost a victimless crime.

This morning we were making life difficult for the local police, as usual, taking photos of another damaged soul. Lost in the perceived meaning of his life. His wife was there, and she was crying and making all sorts of awful noises as the officers tried to calm her down. But she wasn't cooling off any time soon. She'd loved the man whose body lay sprawled out on the floor. And she'd lost him. It wasn't her fault. She hadn't given him any reason to do what he did. From all accounts and witness testimony, she and her husband had lived a nice normal life. Nothing wrong except the finances, which was par for the course in any union, but were, apparently, too much for him to bear. He'd reached that conclusion sitting at home that day. Out of work for a little over a year now. And she was off pulling a shift at the diner down the block when it happened. He'd taken a gun to himself. Did it properly. In through the mouth and out through the back of his skull. Over quick, and painless.

Our photographs of antidepressants and unpaid bills hinted at the rest of the story. He'd felt less of a man. Unable to provide. Taking and taking and never giving back. And he'd done what he felt he had to do. Ensuring that his wife lived the kind of life he felt she deserved. Free from the financial burden of having to carry him any longer. His wife's reaction - the total lack of comprehension - drove home the fact that he didn't kill himself to rob her of a husband. In his own drowning pool of self-pity, he just hadn't given her feelings very much thought. He'd done himself in to give her what he thought she wanted. In that respect, he'd succeeded. Their home owner's policy ensured that the love of his life would never have to worry about having a roof over her head again. The house was paid in full. Any other point of principle was lost to him now.

As I stood and pondered what dark place that man had found himself in, Buster gave me a slap on the elbow. I looked up and around, taking in the faces of all the uniformed officers. Eyes wincing. Just wanting to get back home. Maybe forget they'd ever been there.

After work, we parted ways with a "see ya" and "tomorrow." There was always tomorrow, or next week. More messes to be documented and photographed. Blood spatter patterns. Bullet holes. Bodies shot, cut, torn, twisted, tortured, broken, mutilated. Name your poison. There was always tomorrow. And Buster went back to his house and his wife and his kids. Living whatever kind of life he lived when we weren't doing the job.

I drove home to my trailer, a six pack of cold beer waiting for me in the fridge. I sat down on my couch and felt the rough weave dig into my back as I reclined and put my feet up on the cherry-wood coffee table. I pulled my wallet out of my ass pocket and propped it up against the fat red wax candle on the side table. I unpacked the plastic photo holders. Lining them up like I always did. Eight pictures of the only woman I'd ever loved. Some with me off in the background, blurred and almost out of frame. Mostly just her, looking happy for a camera.

And I watched the television and thought how much I liked the commercials. How carefree everyone seemed. How perfect their lives were. Wondering what it would be like to have that kind of life. To know that joy. That happiness. What it would take. I lit the candle with a match and wriggled off my jacket, removing the pocket knife and opening it up. Tracing a path around my left wrist. Only pressing hard enough, with the fat dull edge, to leave little red discolourations, like a figure eight. Like infinity. Like forever.

And I waited, even though she never came walking through that door. Never hung up her coat on the rack. Never called out for me. Never.

But I could always dream. Those waking dreams were so much more pleasant than reality ever could be. And they kept me alive. The dreams. The altar. The photographs. Even having her named as beneficiary on my whole life insurance policy, which had lapsed months ago. I could reinstate it for a nominal fee, and from time to time, it seemed like a good idea. I was worth just a bit more dead than alive. And it would give my knife something useful to do.