



## GONE MISSING

*by Patton D'Arque*

“**She was a waitress** at Quentin’s Steakhouse down by the rail yard when I first met her. It was a popular cop hangout. So popular that they called it ‘Quentin’s Stakeout.’ A beauty, tall, blonde. Seeing a lot of guys, law enforcement mostly. And trouble. Two guys from homicide actually threw down over her.”

Paul Fernando had finally stopped talking to the camera as if it were an audience. A retired cop, in his late sixties, balding, gray at the temples, he took a long pull on his cigarette as if retrieving a memory, his other hand firmly wrapped around a tall glass of high octane orange juice.

“She was few years past thirty then, but she could still drive men crazy with a look, a smile. She had a teenage daughter, fer crissake.” He sat back in his chair shaking his head, his features obscured by shadows. Of the three, he’d been the most reluctant to agree to tell his story even with the generous compensation for acting as a technical consultant on the production. The initial interview took place at his country home.

“I was working for the DA’s office in those days. Chasing paper. Light duty after I took a bullet going after a bad guy. They musta liked what I was doing because it soon became a permanent assignment. I didn’t mind. After ten years boredom on the Robbery and Burglary detail, I was ready for a change. I liked to hang out with old friends, though. I was still a cop. I went down to Q’s pretty regular. Especially after my divorce. I liked my steak and fries.

“I never planned it that way but she was my waitress most of the time. Always real friendly, ready with a smile, a laugh at one of my lame wisecracks. I wasn’t her type. I knew that. She went for the flashy fellahs. Gold chains, fancy rings, Rolexes, expensive suits. That wasn’t my style. I bought my suits at the same place I bought my tools. Sears and Roebucks.”

He chuckled at his little joke lifting the glass to his lips. The second unit director, a kid just out of film school, let the camera do the work occasionally focusing on the butt filled ashtray and pale smoke curling up into the dark room. He was shooting available light. The storm had knocked out the power.

“She flirted with everybody. It seemed all very good-natured and fun. And on some nights, after my steak and fries, when I stuck

around in the company of a glass or two of scotch, I'd see her get her coat and purse, have a drink and some ear nuzzling with a young cop and then leave with him.

"I quit smoking twenty-five years ago. I started up again not long after that phone call. It was from Kim. We'd done time together in the domestic pen under the thumb of warden Jackie. Her mother and my second wife."

**The production company** had flown Jackie's daughter down from Portland and put her up at the Marriot where the second unit crew was staying. It was convenient and she'd agreed to tell her story in the comfort of her suite. Kim Summers, in her early forties, was tall with a blond pixie cut, a little overweight, favoring men's shirts and snug jeans. Her most startling feature was the blue intensity of her eyes. The camera made her nervous and her hands moved all the while she talked, lightly touching an arm or knee or cheek as if to assure herself she was still there.

"I kept a calendar for her meds on the wall in the kitchen. She's on anti-depressants and tranquilizers and I knew she smoked a little weed on the side. Heck she's almost sixty. I was just happy it wasn't anything stronger. Or booze.

"I noticed there were little ticks in the corner of certain days on the calendar. I hadn't made the marks and I didn't exactly think too much about them. I figured mom was keeping track of something though for the life of me I couldn't figure out what that was. There are some things about her that are just not explainable. I've grown up with that. She's an incredibly intelligent woman. I mean, I've always been in awe of the things she knows. I'd say 'mom, how do you know that stuff?' And she'd say, 'I seen it in a tabloid in the supermarket checkout line or I read it in the National Geographic at the doctor's office.' But you'd think that someone that smart would have some common sense."

She looked at the camera as if she'd forgotten to mention something. "I never knew my father. He was killed in Viet Nam. She said she'd tell me about him some time. But she never has.

"Before Paul, I hadn't known a real father. With the exception of Injun Jerry, there was an endless parade of uncle so and so or cousin such and such. Injun Jerry. . . he's something different. . . wears his hair long like an Indian, more wild animal than human. .

. which is probably why they say he's crazy. He was a bounty hunter. Might be still is."

**The second unit director** was supposed to be scouting locations but the weather wasn't cooperating. Being an ambitious sort with time to kill and wanting to make a good impression with the producer, he'd volunteered to shoot the interviews for the special features segments. Principle shooting on the 'based on a true story' feature hadn't even started and he'd already spliced a lot of the material into a rough narrative on his laptop.

"Now that was a fine piece of ass. More than a piece of ass. It was more than just ass. She made me do things I never dreamed of doing. I don't mean just in bed. I mean all the time. She was electric. All the time."

Injun Jerry, real name Jerome Sorenson, was ex-cop, former bounty hunter and one of Jackie's ex-boyfriends. In his late fifties, stocky, broad shouldered with a full head of long graying blonde hair down past his shoulders, he'd dressed in a dark suit, open collar dark shirt, strands of gold chain showing in the thicket of graying chest hair, a large gold wristwatch, and dark sunglasses for the occasion. He did his best to charm the lens, all smiles and exaggerated expression. He had no qualms about telling it like it was. "I'd been a city cop, narcotics, vice. I got splashed by some dirty partners and we all went down together. I missed the rips so I got into skip tracing. The money was good. The crowd was fast. That's how I met her. She was running with a couple of wannabe criminals with family money."

Then Kim, frowning, looking down at her hands. "When she was with him, she was more alive than I'd ever seen her. I think it was the danger. They would go on takedowns together. He taught her to shoot, how to take care of herself in tight situations. I resented him most because he alone could take her attention from me."

"I wasn't looking for a partner," Jerry pled to the camera. "We hadn't hooked up but a short time. She had a kid, girl, pretty, like her. Left the kid with a friend, or in a motel room in front of the TV. She just took to it like she knew exactly what she was doing. Fearless. Careless, too, and that made her dangerous."

Kim voiced concern. "I didn't know he'd been let out on parole. He's dangerous. He probably did what they said he did. I'd

heard mom say, ‘with him, you’re either shit at or shot at.’ He isn’t nice.”

Jerry waved a large hand to make his point, flashing a row of knuckle rings. “I invited her out on a collar. My mistake. It was a wild ride while it lasted.” He shrugged and looked away in a moment of self-reflection. “I ended up getting fifteen for involuntary manslaughter. I behaved myself and they let me out early. I didn’t want to go back to man hunting. I thought about looking her up but then I might have ended up back in a cell.” He smirked. “My ex-brother-in-law lets me stay in a trailer on his property. I been there ever since. Minding my own business.”

Kim smiled at a picture in her head. “But Paul, he was different. He wants you to think he’s a tough guy but he ain’t. He’s a pushover. . .grumpy, but a pushover. So Jackie, my mom, she shit all over him and I had to kinda protect him. That’s how we got to be friends.”

Cutting in the Fernando material created too much of a continuity problem. The kid played through it again just to make sure.

“Yeah, it was kinda like I’d won the lottery. I felt like the bride walking up the aisle. . .in Vegas. . . I couldn’t believe that we were actually getting married. . .that I’d end up with someone. . .a beauty like her. . .I know that sounds crazy. . . . Anyway her daughter . . . Kim, she checks in on me every once in a while since my retirement. . .usually small talk, how the job’s going, and the new boy friend, how mom is holding up, like that. And I had to give my report, too. No I’m not drinking much. . .what’s much? And no, I wasn’t going to be another retired cop suicide statistic. I can’t say I didn’t appreciate the attention.” Fernando fit a cigarette to his lips and lit it. “We’d weathered the mood swings, the unexplained absences, the lies, the deep depressions, the lies about the lies together. I made sure she finished high school. She kept me off the potato juice. Until the divorce anyway. A woman is fine, but a vodka tonic don’t sass back. Jackie terrorized herself and everyone around her. After a while it was either cut loose or die of an ulcer. I kept my pension and she got the house.” The camera focused on the smoking ashtray and the near empty glass. “So Jackie’d taken off like she used to. Kim felt that this time was different. . .and in my gut I knew it was too. She was on her way over. She had found something she wanted to show me.”

The kid ran back the footage to where Kim picked up the narrative. “When she didn’t come home that day, I worried. I always do. But I know her. I called around. I went around. Nobody had seen her. I got more worried. She needed her medication. After day two, I called Paul. He told me to notify missing persons, and that he’d check the hospitals. That was all he could do.” Kim’s face tensed trying to keep from losing it. “I had found something. I wanted him to see it. Maybe it’d help.”

Paul’s voice droning over the rising smoke of a fresh cigarette resting on the lip of the ashtray was a perfect segue. “After I looked through the envelope of photos Kim had brought with her, I realized that I should have been asking more questions about everything.”

Kim stared at the camera defiantly, her battle won. “I looked through mom’s stuff all the time. Sure, I’ll admit it, I spied on her. It was for her own good, I told myself. She needed looking after. Most of the time it was just making sure she kept her appointments and did the shopping. She was either forgetful or just apathetic, depending on the way her meds were affecting her. If she skipped her meds, she got very agitated and fearful. Afraid of what, she wouldn’t say. I used to think it was Injun Jerry. Eventually I came to understand that it wasn’t him. She wasn’t afraid of him.”

Injun Jerry had suggested they interview him in the café downtown he liked to frequent. It wasn’t a bad idea, but the light was crap. He draped an arm over the chair next to him and continued matter-of-factly. “Yeah, we liked the coke. I shoulda known better. It added an edge. A crazy edge. We’d snort a few lines. Then we’d do the takedown. And then after we turned the jumper in, we’d go out and do it on the hood of a car in the precinct parking lot. Any car. It didn’t matter.” He paused as the point was made. “Problem is you think you’re invulnerable when you’re on a power high like that, and it’s not something you can just walk away from. You gotta do it again, and you gotta get higher and to do that you gotta take more chances.”

Kim looked thoughtful, the chain of events falling into place. “I hadn’t been doing much snooping lately. I knew where she kept her pot stash. That wasn’t new. Her journal read like she knew someone would be reading it. It was a thinly veiled fantasy of her life, medicated as it was. There were a few poems, one addressed to me saying things like how happy I would be when I found true love and

blossomed. Pretty conventional stuff. There hadn't been any recent entries as far as I could tell. Some pages had been ripped out."

Injun Jerry sat forward in his chair, making a point. "You leave common sense behind like a failed marriage. You're running on adrenalin, pure, and super charged by the cocaine. And when it's all over, you're ecstatic to have survived and so you go through the motions, the process of making it with a thrill seeking chemical junkie like yourself." He gave a you-better-believe-it nod. "But that's all it was, going through the motions. My boys had never been hearty swimmers. Besides, I couldn't feature a strung out pregnant Jackie on takedowns. No, that's all it was, thrill-seeking, and after a while, fried, charred, burnt out you start making mistakes." He looked up from the coffee cup in front of him. "That's how I landed in the pen. It was Jackie's doing but I took the fall."

**The production company** had reserved a conference room at the hotel for the reunion of the three principles. The idea was to get them to tell the story as they remembered it together. After some initial awkwardness, Kim picked up the thread. "When she didn't come home, I tore the place apart. I found the envelope behind the broken toaster in the kitchen. Not a place I would normally look." And a tight shot of Fernando now in a suit and red tie seated to the left of Kim. "They were old faded photos of a young girl having sex with an older boy. I thought it was Kim! Why are you showing me this, I wanted to know."

Kim nodded remembering. "Yeah, you thought it was me. It was mom. We kinda looked alike at that age. What age, 12, 13? Maybe younger. I was numb at first. And then the more I thought about it the more it explained mom. She'd carried the secret of this degradation like some stone in her gut."

Paul had locked his gaze on Kim. "I checked the postmark. It was recent. Vacaville. Made sense. The hospital there says they treat sex predators. I made a few calls. They were mostly dead ends. Everyone I knew at the DA's office or headquarters had retired or was now too important to talk to me. One snotty young cop told me to get a court order if I wanted that kind of information. I was getting nowhere."

"I suggested Injun Jerry. He might have some inside connections."

“I’d had an earful of Injun Jerry. I’d had the knife of his name twisted in my gut more times than I care to remember. If I was going to be compared unfavorably with anyone, it was Injun Jerry. He was a better lover. He took her places. They did things together. He wasn’t a cheapskate. And that was on the good days.”

Injun Jerry reacted, eyebrows raised like this was news to him, at Kim’s right.

“I’d checked into Injun Jerry. Ex-cop bounty hunter. I knew the type. Adrenalin junkies. Apparently he was involved in a takedown that went south on him. His nine fired accidentally, the report said. He took the plea. That surprised me. He could have probably beat it with a good lawyer.” Fernando directed his words to Injun Jerry. “I asked Jackie about it. She’d been with him when it all went bad. She just shrugged and said something like ‘ya hadda be there.’ But that was all I could get out of her. By then, I knew not to make more waves than I had to.”

Injun Jerry tipped his head indicating Kim. “The kid’s always been a smart brat. And she’s right. Unless you’re vice, most cops hold their nose at that stuff. A lot of bail jumpers are sex-addicts. They run because they’re shamed and because they have to be getting more.” The ghost of a smile fleeting in the hard eyes. “Paul wasn’t too happy I stuck a gun in the back of his head when he tried to sneak up on my trailer.”

“I wasn’t sneaking. I was approaching with caution. You have a rep, you know.”

“You two are just like those old guys on TV. You know, the neat one and the messy one. Always bickering.”

“Oh, yeah? Which one of us is the neat one?”

Kim stared at him with a shared secret. “OK, almost like those two old guys.”

“The man can’t admit it when he’s wrong. I told him. You start with hookers. Hookers gets you the pimp. The pimp’s gonna know where to steer you for the kiddy stuff.”

“And you’re getting your jollies.”

“Hey, gotta play the part if you’re gonna be real. Besides we got a couple of good leads.”

“Is that what you call a good lead? A dead end? Both of those names were either bogus or as stale as week old popcorn.”



“It was my idea to check the halfway house. The honcho there did time with me. He knew who’d been released in the last couple of weeks. We got some good names that time.”

“OK, I’ll give you that. What was the point of the hookers then?”

“You gotta start somewhere.”

“That was my hundred bucks!”

“What, you weren’t satisfied? I thought I heard you. . . ?”

“Guys, come on. What you did was nothing short of a miracle.”

“You’re right, I guess.” Paul gave Kim a smile of appreciation. “Well, so I remembered that I’d received an invite to a retirement party for someone in the DA’s office, a woman I’d worked with. I’m still on the list of retirees that get the standard invitation to those kinds of events. I usually didn’t go. But I put on a suit and a tie and went down to Q’s. It hadn’t changed all that much. The TV above the bar had gotten bigger is all. And everyone said they were glad to see me. Even Allison, one of the gals from records.

“You need to get out more.” It was Kim.

Injun Jerry pointed for emphasis. “And you got lucky.”

“What of it? She said she’d always had a thing for me. I didn’t want to disappoint her!”

“Just saying, you got us a look at some rap sheets. I don’t care what you did with your dick, man.”

“Guys, come on. We don’t need to go there.”

“Right, and we got to peek at some records. Thanks to Allison. Matched the mug shot with the pictures Kim found. His rap sheet made him out to be the poster boy of sexual predators. Child rape, kidnap, kiddie porn, you name it, he had done it. He’d aged a lot but there was no mistaking that crazed look.”

“Yeah, I’ve seen some crazy eyes in my day, and his were definitely on the far side of evil. I leaned on one of the cabbies who was running the hooker shuttle at the motel down the street from the halfway house. He remembered our perv as the guy who wanted to know how much it would cost to get him out to the coast, near Bodega Bay. The cabbie told him to go pack sand.”

“So we were looking for an older guy, late fifties, sixties. . . .” Paul threw a look at Injun Jerry, “kinda like us. . .and according to the honcho at the halfway house, still pretty spry. But other than that we were at a dead end.”

Kim had made the connection. “Then it occurred to me. We were thinking along the lines that mom would be heading some place safe, away from danger. But when I heard Bodega Bay, it suddenly made sense. She had lived on a ranch up along there when she was a kid. With her mother, her step dad, and her step brother. She never talked about it much. We’d driven out there once when I was younger. The barn that had been there had burnt to the ground. She told me that it was an evil place. That she had died there. Back then I just thought it was mom talking crazy, being over dramatic.”

“So we figured why not. I rode with Paul, and Kim led the way in her car to this place on a deserted stretch of coast. It was one of those blast of blue windy days that flattens the grass parallel to the ground.”

“There was a pull-out and what looked like a path leading to the rocks below. The ruins of the old barn were situated a little further down where erosion had eaten away at the surrounding landscape. The cinder block understory was still intact. Then Jerry noticed the parallel tracks headed toward the edge of the bluff.”

“They tried to keep me from looking but I looked anyway. There was no mistaking the calico rear end of mom’s Honda on the rocks below. What did she used to say? It had plenty of dings, but no dongs. That would crack her up, and she’d lose her breath and then she’d cough and wheeze, tears running down her cheeks.”

“One look at Paul and I knew what he was thinking. It was that old cop instinct. We both focused on it. The gray concrete bunker with the thatch of charred timbers perched at the edge of the bluff.”

“I knew Jerry saw it too. The weathered sheet of plywood propped against the side, and the right angle of shadow that indicated what might be a doorway behind it.”

“The next thing I knew they both had guns in their hands and they had started down the path toward the old foundation. Paul told me to stay up by the road and keep a lookout for any law. Jerry was already hunched down next to the wall, his pistol out in front of him. They didn’t look like a couple of old decrepit guys anymore. They may not have been quick or light on their feet but they moved like they knew what they were doing. Jerry ducked his head down and got a look behind the plywood and then nodded at Paul. It all happened so fast after that. They slammed the plywood out of the way and charged in. I don’t know if I expected to hear gunshots or

screams or what. It was just very very quiet. The wind had died some and the grass had straightened up like it was waiting to see what was going to happen next. But nothing happened. And I panicked and started to run down the hill. Then Jerry ducked out of the doorway and he had something over his shoulder and he was racing up the path toward me and I realized that it was a body, my mother's naked body!"

"She looked like she was gonna scream and I told her, you're mom's alive, she's gonna be ok. She got a blanket from the car and we wrapped Jackie in it. It'd been a while since I seen her like that. With the exception that she was close to comatose and had some bruises and scratches, she still had a great looking body."

"I gave Jerry the keys to my truck and told him to put some distance between him and us. An ex-felon at a crime scene raises too many questions. I figured Jackie might be suffering from hypothermia, no telling how long she'd been down there without a stitch on. Kim made the emergency call on her cell phone. It wasn't long before we heard the sirens. The Highway Patrol was there first followed by the State Park Ranger and finally the Deputy. The ambulance had arrived around the same time as the fire department. The medics decided on the copter. It got to be quite a circus. I should have packed a picnic lunch."

"I was so glad to get her back. I couldn't believe my eyes. I didn't care how she looked. Or smelled. Like she'd fell into something putrid. She had rope burns on her wrists. And she had bite marks on her face and neck and breasts. I imagined rats crawling all over her and it just made me want to hold her tighter, closer. I didn't know what had gone on down there and I didn't care. I wasn't going to let her go. Even when the medics came, they practically had to pry me off her."

**Kim had to get back** to Portland and her mother. And her job. The kid reviewed the wrap up he'd filmed with just the grumpy and dangerous old men. He liked the dynamic.

"I told the highway cop what was in the bunker and he went down to have a looksee. He was green when he came back up the path. He told me I'd have to wait till the deputy arrived to take my statement. The Ranger showed up and the highway cop told him what was down there and he had to go down to take a peek as well. He came back looking like he was reconsidering that tuna sandwich

he'd had for lunch. Then the deputy arrived and the Park guy told him what was down there and the deputy wanted to know if they'd secured the scene and they both said oh yeah, yeah, like they had never stepped away from where they were standing. The deputy took my statement and said I should stick around and talk to the detective sergeant who would be along shortly. I ID'd myself as ex-cop. I knew the routine. There was the inevitable wait. During that time, the ambulance carted Jackie to the hospital, the medics having determined that her condition was not life threatening. Kim went with them. I bummed a smoke from one of the firemen. My first in twenty five years. The detective sergeant finally showed and he was someone that I'd worked with in Metro years ago. I'd heard he'd gone County. But he agreed with me. Attempted murder, suicide."

"More like accidental suicide if you ask me. I don't think that's the way the dude planned to go out."

"It could have been any number of things. It's best to follow a basic no frills scenario in a case like this. I learned that lesson working for the DA. It cuts way down on the paperwork. Sex pervert recently released from prison kidnaps woman and sexually assaults her and then dies in a suicide failed murder attempt. No need to mention the autoerotic asphyxia angle. That just muddies the water. Kidnapping, rape, penetration with a foreign object. That's all anyone needs to know."

"Yeah, I saw his foreign object, bright purple, swollen up like a toy football."

"Don't remind me. His hanging by his neck like that with a look of surprise, all the blood drained to that one body part. Usually when they do that kind of thing there's a ledge or a stool they can step on to release the pressure. . . ."

"There was a milk crate that looked like it had been kicked to one side."

"Maybe he just got a little too excited."

"Or maybe somebody saw a chance to escape their demons once and for all."

"Going there just complicates things. The idea is to keep it as simple as possible. Kim's no dummy. She's probably figured a lot of it out on her own. But her focus is getting her mom well again. That's why they moved up to Portland. To put some distance between her and this bad movie. It's up to Jackie to fill in the details, if and when she can."

“That’s major trauma. You don’t get over something like that easy. And you’re right, why lay it on the kid. I don’t want to be the one to tell her that that was her uncle in there.”

“Step-uncle.”

“Father.”

“Yeah, father. What gave it away for you?”

“The eyes.”

“Me too. The eyes. She has the eyes.” Paul patted his shirt pocket and looked around. “You got a smoke?”

“Nope. Don’t smoke. Never have. Filthy habit.”

“Yeah, I gotta quit.”

And that was the wrap. It was Jerry who asked the question.

“Who’s gonna star in this clusterfuck anyway?”

The kid looked up from behind the camera. “Bruce Willis? Mickey Rourke? Cameron Diaz? Yeah, but don’t hold me to it. Just what I heard.”

*FIN*