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Raymond Carver

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Harry's Death · *Raymond Carver*

Mazatlan, Mexico
3 mos. later

EVERYTHING has changed since Harry's death. Being down here, for instance. Who'd have thought it only three short months ago that I'd be down here in Mexico and poor Harry dead and buried? Harry! Dead and buried, dear Harry—but not forgotten.

I couldn't go to work that day when I got the news I was so torn up. Jack Berger, who is fender and body man at Frank's Custom Repair where we all work, called me at six-thirty a.m. as I was having a cup of coffee and a cigarette before sitting down to breakfast.

"Harry's dead," he said just like that, dropping the bomb. "Turn on your radio," he said. "It's all on the radio."

The police had just left his house after asking him a lot of questions about Harry. They told him to come down right away and identify the body. Jack said they'd probably come to my place next. Why they went to Jack Berger's place first is a mystery to me since he and Harry weren't what you'd say close. Not as close anyway as Harry and me.

I couldn't believe it but I knew it must be true too for Jack to call. I felt like I was in shock and forgot all about breakfast. I turned from one news broadcast to another until I had the whole story. I must have hung around an hour or so listening to the radio and getting more and more upset as I thought about Harry and what the radio was saying. There would be a lot of crummy people who wouldn't be sorry to see Harry dead, would be glad he'd bought it in fact. His wife for one would be glad, though she lived in San Diego and they hadn't seen each other for two or three years. She'd be glad, she's that kind of woman from what Harry had said. She didn't want to give him the divorce for another woman. No divorce, nothing. Now she wouldn't have to worry about it any more. No, she wouldn't be sorry to see Harry dead. But Little Judith, that's another story.

I left the house after calling in at work to report off. Frank didn't say much, he said he could understand. He felt the same way, he said, but he had to keep the shop open. Harry would have wanted it that way, he said. Frank Klovee. He's the owner and shop foreman rolled into one, and the best man I ever worked for. I got in the car and started off kind of aimless in the general direction of the Red Fox, a place where Harry and myself and Gene Smith and Rod Williams and Ned Potter and some rest of the gang hung out nights after work. It was eight or eight-thirty in the morning by then and the traffic was heavy, so I had to keep my mind pretty much on my driving. Still, I couldn't help thinking now and then about poor Harry.

Harry was an operator. That is to say he always had something going. It was never a drag being around Harry. He was good with women, if you know what I mean, always had money and lived high. He was sharp as they come too and

somehow he could always work it around so that in any deal he came out smelling like a rose. The Jag he drove, for instance. It was nearly new, a twelve-thousand-dollar car, but it had been wrecked in a big pileup on 101. Harry bought it from the insurance company for a song and fixed it up himself till it was almost better than new. That's the kind of guy Harry was. Then there's this thirty-two-foot Chris Craft cabin cruiser that Harry's uncle in L.A. had left him in his will. Harry had only had it about a month and had just gone down to look it over and take it out for a little spin two weeks ago. But there was the problem of his wife who was legally entitled to her share. To keep her from somehow getting her hands on it if she got wind of it—before he'd even laid eyes on it in fact—Harry had gone to a lawyer and worked something out so that he signed it over lock, stock, and pickle barrel to Little Judith. The two of them had been planning to take it for a trip someplace on Harry's vacation in August. Harry had been all over, I might add. He'd been in Europe when he was in the service and had been to all the capitals and big resort cities. He'd been in a crowd once when someone took a shot at de Gaulle. He'd been places and done things, Harry had. Now he was dead. Gone forever.

At the Red Fox, which opens early, there was only one guy in the place sitting at the other end of the bar, and he was no one I knew. Jimmy had the television on and nodded at me as I came in. His eyes were red and it came home to me hard, Harry's death, when I saw Jimmy. There was an old Lucille Ball-Desi Arnaz show just starting and Jimmy took a long stick and turned the channel selector to another station, but there was nothing on right now about Harry.

"I can't believe it," Jimmy said, shaking his head. "Anybody but Harry."

"I'm the same way, Jimmy," I said. "Anybody but Harry."

Jimmy poured us two stiff ones and threw his off without batting an eye. "It hurts as bad as if Harry'd been my own brother, it couldn't hurt any worse." He shook his head again and stared a while at the glass.

"We'd better have another one," he said.

"Put a little water in it this time," I said.

A few guys, friends of Harry's, drifted in from time to time that morning, and once I saw Jimmy get out a checked handkerchief and blow his nose. The guy at the other end of the bar, the stranger, made a move as if to play something on the juke box, but Jimmy went over and pulled out the plug with a wild jerk and glared at him till he left. None of us had much to say to one another. We were all still too numb. Finally Jimmy brought out an empty cigar box and said we'd better start a collection for a wreath "From the guys at the Red Fox." We all put in a dollar or two to get things going and Jimmy put the box right in the middle of the bar and took a grease pencil and marked on the outside in big letters HARRY FUND.

Mike Demarest, a bartender at the T 'n T Club, came in and took the stool next to mine. "Cripes!" he said. "I just heard it on the clock radio. The wife was getting dressed for work and woke me up and said, 'Is that the Harry you know?' Sure as hell. Give me a double and a beer chaser Jimmy."

In a few minutes he said, "How's Little Judith taking it? Has anybody seen Little Judith?" I could see he was watching me out of the corner of his eye like, but I didn't answer him right away so Jimmy said, "She called here this morning and sounded pretty hysterical, poor kid."

After another drink or two, Mike turned to me and said, "You going down to see him?"

I waited for a minute before answering. "That depends. I don't care much for funerals and that sort of thing."

Mike nodded like he understood. But a minute later I caught him watching me in the mirror behind the bar. I might put in here that I don't like Mike Demarest, if you haven't already guessed. I have never liked him. Harry didn't like him either. We'd talked about it. But that's the way it always is—the good guys get it and the others go about their business.

About then I noticed my palms were getting clammy and my insides felt like a piece of lead. At the same time I could feel the blood pounding hard in my temples. For a minute I thought I was going to faint. I slid off the stool very careful, nodded at Mike and said, "Take it easy Jimmy."

"Yeah, you too," he said.

Outside I waited a few minutes to catch my breath. My head was going around and my lips felt dry and parched. I leaned against the wall trying to get my bearings. I remembered I hadn't had any breakfast and what with the anxiety and depression and the drinks I'd had, it was no wonder my head was spinning. But I didn't want anything to eat. I couldn't have eaten a bite for anything. A clock over a jewelry store window across the street said ten to eleven. I couldn't believe it, it seemed like it must be late afternoon at least, so much had happened.

It was at that moment I saw Little Judith. She came around the corner at the end of the block walking slowly with her shoulders all hunched and drawn in and a pinched look to her face, a pitiful sight. She had a big wad of Kleenex in her hand and she had to stop once and blow her nose and dab at her eyes.

"Judith," I called to her.

She made a sound that went to my heart like a bullet, and we fell into each other's arms right there in broad daylight.

"Judith, I'm so sorry. What can I do? I'd give my right arm, you know that."

She just nodded and couldn't answer. We stood there swaying back and forth, patting and rubbing each other and me trying to console her saying whatever came to mind, both of us sniffing and crying. She let go for a minute and looked up at me with a kind of dazed, glassy-eyed look, then threw her arms around me again.

"I can't, I can't believe it, that's all," she sobbed. "I just can't." She kept squeezing my shoulder with one hand and patting my back with the other.

"It's true, Judith. It's on all the radios and it'll be in all the papers tonight."

"No, no," she said, squeezing me all the harder.

I was beginning to get woozy again. I could feel the sun burning down, causing the shirt to stick to my back where she had her hands. I moved to the

side just enough so that we had to pull apart, but I kept my arm around her waist to give her some support.

“Just last night,” she started. We hugged each other again and then pulled apart. “We were going away next month. Just last night . . . Just last night we sat inside the Red Fox three or four hours, making plans.”

“Judith,” I said, “let’s go someplace and have a cup of coffee or a drink.”

“Let’s go inside,” she said.

“No, someplace else. We can come back later.”

“I think if I ate something I might feel better,” she said.

“That’s a good idea,” I said. “I could eat something.”

The next three days passed in a whirl. I went to work each day but it was a sad and depressing place without Harry. I saw quite a lot of Little Judith the next couple of days after work. I sat with her in the evenings trying to keep her talking and keep her mind from dwelling on too many unpleasant aspects. I also took her around here and there for things she had to help attend to, or to buy a few groceries, and twice I took her to the funeral parlor where she stayed better than an hour and collapsed the first time. I didn’t go in though she wanted me to. I wanted to remember poor Harry as he used to be.

The day before the funeral all of us at the shop chipped in and collected \$22.50 for a spray. I was delegated to go and pick it out since I’d been closer to Harry than anyone. I remembered a flower shop not too far from my place so I drove home first, fixed myself some lunch, then set out again. I drove about a mile and found it. Howard’s House of Flowers. It was in with a pharmacy, a barber shop, and a travel agency, all side by side in a new building. I parked the car and hadn’t taken more than a couple of steps when my eye was caught by a big poster in the travel agency window. I went over to the window and stood there a while staring at this big color poster advertising Mexico. There was a giant stone face grinning down like the sun over a blue sea filled with little sailboats that looked like white paper napkins. On the beach, luscious women in bikinis lounged around in sunglasses, or else played badminton. I looked at all the posters, including those for Munich, Germany, and Spain, but I kept going back to that grinning sun, the beach, and the little boats. Finally I cleared my throat once or twice, combed my hair in the reflection from the window, straightened my shoulders, and went on down the street to the flower shop.

The next morning Frank Klovee came in wearing slacks, white shirt and tie. He said if any of us wanted to go see Harry off it was all right. Most of the guys went home to change, took in the funeral, and then took the rest of the afternoon off. Jimmy had set up a kind of buffet at the Red Fox in honor of Harry, with potato chips, dip and sandwiches. I didn’t go to the funeral but I did drop by the Red Fox later that afternoon. Little Judith was there, all dressed up and moving around the place like she had a heavy dose of shell shock, poor kid. Mike Demarest was there too, and I could see him looking her over from time to time. She went from one guy to another talking about

Harry and saying things like “Harry thought the world of you, Gus.” Or, “Harry would have wanted it that way.” Or, “Harry would have liked that part best. Harry was just that kind of guy.” Two or three guys hugged her and patted her on the hips and carried on so that I almost asked them to leave off. A few old pods drifted in, guys that Harry probably hadn’t exchanged a dozen words with in his life—if he’d ever even laid eyes on them—and said what a tragedy it was, and threw down beer and sandwiches. Little Judith and I stayed around till the place emptied out around seven. Then I took her home.

You’ve probably guessed much of the rest of the story by now. Little Judith and I started keeping company after Harry’s death. We went to the movies nearly every night and then to a bar or else to her place. We only went back to the Red Fox once and then decided not to go there any more but to go to new places instead—places where she and Harry had never been. One Sunday not long after the funeral the two of us went out to Golden Gate Cemetery to put a pot of flowers on Harry’s grave, but they hadn’t put his marker in yet and we spent an hour looking and still not able to find the grave. Little Judith kept running around from one spot to another calling “Here it is! Here it is!” But it always turned out to belong to somebody else. We finally left, both of us feeling depressed.

In August we drove down to L.A. to have a look at the boat, and a fine one it was too. Harry’s uncle had kept it in prime shape and Tomas, the Mexican boy who looked after it, said he wouldn’t be afraid to take it around the world. Little Judith and I just looked at it and then looked at each other. It’s seldom anything turns out to be better than you expected it to be. Usually it’s the other way around. But that’s the way it was with this boat, better than anything we’d dreamed. On our way back to San Francisco we decided to take it on a little cruise the next month.

And so we set out on our trip in September, just before the Labor Day weekend. But now I come to a very sad occurrence. Somewhere off the Baja coast, Little Judith, who couldn’t swim a stroke, fell overboard during the night. What she was doing up on deck so late, or what caused her to fall overboard, neither I nor Tomas the Mexican boy know. All we know is that the next morning she was gone and neither of us saw anything or heard her cry out. She just disappeared. That is the truth, so help me, and that is the story we told the police when we put in at Guaymas a few days later. My wife, I told them—for luckily we had married just before leaving San Francisco.

As I said, a lot of things have changed since Harry’s death. Now here I am in Mazatlan and Tomas is showing me some of the sights. Things you never thought existed back in the States. Out next stop is Manzanillo, Tomas’s home town. Then Acapulco. We intend to keep going until the money runs out, then put in and work a while, then set out again.

Sometimes I think I was born to be a rover. Or a pirate.