

## “Vengeance and the Offending Page”

by C. N. Nevets, © 2009

“Bloody – !” I screamed haltingly as I threw the book against the wall. The corner of the spine hit the wall, cracking the binding. A few sheets of paper drifted to the floor. Including the offending page.

I grabbed a bottle of cheap blackberry brandy and flung it at the debris. The bottle shattered and spilled liquor over the pieces of the book. Including the offending page.

The swaggering gall of the page steeled my nerves, and my hatred was cool as I stared at the page, soaked reddish purple with brandy. A flip of my left hand and an unlit cigarette found its way from my pocket to my mouth. A flick of my right wrist and a match sparked to life. Another simple movement brought the cigarette and the match together. A few puffs to get it good and hot, and then I tossed it onto the ruined book. Including the offending page.

The brandy-soaked offending page.

Unfortunately, the movies had led me astray. There was no great, instant conflagration. There was not even a simmering fire. All there was, in fact, was a cigarette that went out atop a broken book. Furious, I kicked the legs out from under my end table. One splintered off as the table toppled, and the glasses and decanter on it spilled over the floor.

“Murderer,” I spat, kicking again at the table.

My anger was directed at inanimate objects, primarily because the animate object of my rage was not available to be kicked, sworn at, or covered in brandy and set afire. If she had been, I might have. She had taken everything from me. Everything that mattered. She had murdered the woman I loved. She had broken my heart, emptied my soul – and then written the offending page. Or perhaps she had done it the other way around. Scripted her evil on paper before acting it out in my wife’s destruction.

I flopped onto the couch, staring at the mess that I had created. As my heart beat calmed but the adrenaline continued to pour in, I got tipsy on my own anger. I laughed. I couldn’t even destroy the book properly. I had tried, and all I had done was wreck up my own apartment and waste a bottle of brandy and a cigarette. She probably would have thought that was funny.

I wondered if she had thought killing Linda was funny. Had she laughed? Had she sneered? Had she cackled when she had forced my fiancé to swallow the barrel of her gun? Had she taken dark pleasure in her own malice?

I suspected she had. She was a stranger. I had never known this woman, this killer, but I had seen her a couple of times. She had seemed a bitter woman with an ironic sense of humor and shadows in her eyes. Her smile had seemed chilly, like a twisted mockery of the true

expression. Not like Linda's. My beautiful, sweet Linda, whose smile had lit up the clichéd room and turned on the clichéd world.

“And now the grave has her,” I said aloud to myself. And all I had was the offending page. That would never do.

With an athleticism I had not seen in myself in several years, I vaulted to my feet from the couch. Hurried by a sense of mission, I went to my bedroom, yanked the sliding closet doors open, and searched for my gun. And found it. A .38 revolver. The ammo was in an olive green foot box on the floor near my bed. I took out a few rounds, loaded the gun, and went to go administer justice.

I knew where she was. I knew how to find the killer. The police did, too; they just didn't care. Linda didn't matter to them at all. I had angered them by snarling, “Since when don't you care about white on white crime?” They had told me I was off-balance and needed to cool off.

I slammed my front door behind me and bounded down the stairs. I would cool off alright. I would cool off once I had confronted my wife's killer and written my own offending page with my .38.

I practically threw myself into my car. I banged the door shut and was off. It's luck I didn't get in a major accident on the way. I was hardly paying attention. All I could think about was my Linda, and how much losing her hurt.

And the offending page. I could hardly get it out of my mind. The mockery. The cold-hearted, level-headed scorn. As if it was not enough to kill my wife, she had to write. She had to put words to paper. Our paper. A page in the book Linda and I had been keeping, filling with mementos of our times together and images of the times we still hoped to have. It wasn't a proper scrapbook, just a bound book with blank ivory pages. But it was our book. And my wife's killer had stolen it.

She stole my wife's life. She stole the light from my heart. And then she stole the only clear tie I had to both of those things.

And she had to pay.

If I couldn't burn the offending page, I would burn her.

I stopped at the liquor store. I grabbed a bottle of vodka both cheaper and more flammable than the brandy I had tried on the offending page. I set the bottle on the counter, tugged a matchbook out of a plastic tub by the register, and pulled out my wallet to pay.

“Dude,” said the forty-five year-old wannabe hipster working cash, “I ain't got no money worth taking.”

I lay a twenty on the counter and frowned.

He looked at my pants, then into my face. “The gun.”

“I’m not robbing you,” I assured him. “I wouldn’t be giving you a twenty if I were going to take your cash.”

He took my money and started to count change. “That’s how it works,” he explained. “Give me a bill to get me to open my drawer, then stick me up.” He paused. “You better be careful, ‘cause you shouldn’t be carryin’ that thing in here.”

“Don’t worry,” I promised. “The woman I’m going to shoot isn’t anywhere nearby.”

His eyes were wide as he watched me leave. I could feel them on my back. And I didn’t care. Not one bit.

I didn’t realize I was there until I had skidded into a parking spot and turned off the car. I sat still in the seat, breathing and trying to calm myself. I wasn’t trying to cool my anger, just settle my nerves. A shaking chest and trembling hands didn’t seem like the right recipe for shooting someone. Or for moving through crowds of people with a concealed gun that I apparently didn’t conceal so well. And crowds of people there were.

As soon as I felt clear-headed and steady-handed enough, I exited my car and slipped through the parking lot up to the front doors of the building. There was no posted security, but there were people hanging outside smoking, others inside chatting.

As inconspicuously as I could, I read the directory on the wall and found the suite I knew she’d be in. I clenched my jaw as moments later I took the elevator down to the second basement level. I felt as if I were chasing her. At least I knew she wasn’t going to get away. I was coming, and she had no way of knowing. She would not be able to evade.

I wasn’t alone in the elevator, but I didn’t allow that to make me nervous. No one seemed to notice the gun in my pocket, nor the shallowness of my breathing, the dilation of pupils, nor the elevation of my somewhat thready heartbeat. I was just an awkward, uncomfortable guy going to see someone in an awkward, uncomfortable place.

“Doctor,” I said, nodding to a doctor getting on the elevator at the same time I was getting off.

I wasn’t a patient; he didn’t even notice me.

That’s the beautiful thing about hospitals. There are a lot of people around, but most of them are focused on a world apart from you. They’re sick, or they’re concerned about a loved one, or they’re shifting from one high-intensity task to the next. There is little reason to worry about being spotted in a hospital, no matter how poorly concealed your nefarious intentions.

I walked calmly down the hallway amidst the glaring fluorescent lights and the sea green walls. A few people passed by. Still no one noticed.

I took a turn, then another. I was following instinct more than signage. Every sign I looked at was simply a reflection of the offending page. Written words. A memorial cum perversion of my wife's death, penned by her very murderer.

"Who are you looking for, sir?" asked a quiet, mousy man in scrubs.

I was too zoned out to answer. He wasn't concerned. Presumably, I looked like I knew what I was doing.

He was right; I did.

And I was in the right area.

The corners of my mouth reached towards something like a smile, but there was no humor or pleasure in it. Dark satisfaction, at best. I started looking at beds. There would be no missing her. The image of my wife's killer was burned into my mind.

A man. A girl. A boy. Another man. A black woman. An old lady.

And then her.

The woman who had killed my wife. The woman who had taken from me the one thing in this world I had ever cared about. And had then mocked my pain with her sick, twisted words. The woman who must now pay the price for what she had done.

I wasted no energy on talking, threatening, or playing games. I simply pulled out my 38 caliber, pointed it at her chest, and fired. And fired again. And then a third time.

The mousy man came running in, yelling at me. I didn't care. I didn't even listen to his words. I started pouring vodka all over her chest. Into and around the wounds.

There was more shouting.

Running.

Screaming.

I swung my revolver around on a faceless crowd, and everyone backed off just a little. I was unbalanced and unpredictable. That meant I was dangerous. They would not take any chances on pushing me over the edge.

A flip of my left hand and an unlit cigarette found its way from my pocket to my mouth. A flick of my right wrist and a match sparked to life. Another simple movement brought the cigarette and the match together. A few puffs to get it good and hot, and then I tossed it onto her vodka-soaked body. The woman who had murdered my wife. The woman who had written the offending page.

The light of the flames glinted off my eyes. I did not smile, but I felt content as I watched her burn, like I had never been able to get the offending page to. It was over.

I miss you. That's what the offending page had said. Ivory-colored paper. Little red and pink hearts scattered all over it, each a different texture than the last. I miss you. It had been her note. Her only note to me. I miss you. No explanation of why she might want to take her own life. No sorrow, no misery, no anger, no nothing. Only those three words. I miss you.

As if at a distance, I heard someone ask, "What kind of crazy man shoots a dead body in the morgue?"

"A man with nothing left," I answered, watching my dead wife and her murderer go up in flames.