

Four Short Stories,

By K. E. Ward

Introduction

This series of four short stories was written over time. The first is the longest; but all of them, really, are very short. I'd like to think that each story is a visually appealing picture through which one may think about a concept and learn from it. I think that you will see that they are simple, and yet enthralling.

This first story, though partially untrue, could have happened.

No Way Out

Shadow Collins worked as a waitress at one of the city's premiere nightclubs. She had long, medium brown hair, chocolate colored eyes, rimmed with steel-gray eyeliner, with long lashes, a rosy complexion, and a long, thin body she always carried as though she were a woman who was used to taking charge.

In Seattle, WA, there were quite a few strip joints dotted along the many neighborhoods' streets, as well as bars, dance clubs, and casinos. Rumor had it that the previous owner of many of the strip joints, Frank Colacurcio, Sr., had a connection to the Sicilian Mafia, although these rumors were never proven true or false by the law enforcement.

That night Shadow was closing the strip club, feeling agitated. *Damn*, she thought. *I wish the patrons would give better tips, and my boss would take it easier on me.* You see, Jimmy Razor, as he called himself, was the new owner of the strip club, Teasers. After that nasty Frank was caught in the 2000's for running a prostitution ring, Teasers was also closed

down, though it was never owned by the Colacurcio family. It was investigated, and no evidence of prostitution or any other illegal activity was discovered. But the old owner jumped ship and sold it after it was OK to re-open. Teasers was a two-story building that sat on a hill close to, and competing with, the old, infamous Rick's Nightclub.

She wiped off a few last dirty tables and lifted the last of the dishes strewn across its glass tables accented with marble frames. *Where had the girls gone?* They had gone backstage a long time ago, after the last customer, who looked drunk, left, and Shadow would swear someone had given him one too many drinks on purpose.

Shadow heard a voice come from behind her left shoulder, a man's voice, and not recognizing whose it was, she figured one of the customers had never left or had found some way to break back in. "Shadow, is it? Is that your name?"

She turned and was about to threaten him with the police, but then he pulled up a badge of his own. "Detective Dan Morrison. I work with the SPD. May I have a moment of your time?"

"How did you get in here?"

"You left the door open."

"It wasn't me. And what's this all about?"

"I have reason to believe that criminal activity is taking place at your nightclub, and I need to ask you some questions."

"It's late," she said, but started batting her eyelashes when she took a closer look at his face. He had kind eyes, the beginnings of a five o'clock shadow, not a full head of hair anymore, but what was left of it was cut short. Laugh lines and worry lines both creased his face, but Shadow figured there were more worry lines than laugh lines. But she said, "Can we make this quick?"

"Shadow, how good are you at noticing what goes on and when in the entirety of the club?"

"I couldn't tell you what happens all of the time. Jimmy Razor, my boss, goes into the back most of the time, doing God knows what. I don't always see the dancers. The bartenders stay behind the bar. I see the other waiters all the time. They're just as busy as I am, and we've got a hard job to do. Razor is probably in the back now, so again, can we make this quick?"

"You're obviously serious about your job, and would never want to jeopardize even the meager living that you earn, am I right?" He leaned in closer to her for a stare-down.

"Of course not," she said, looking back up into his eyes, hoping that he would read her innocence. "I am an honest person. I'm not married. I don't have any children. I have a roommate. We have a dog."

"I believe you," he said. "But I need you to tell me everything you see when you work here, and everything you don't see."

She understood his request. "What I see when I am working the tables is of course, the usual drink and food orders, sometimes unpaid tabs. We've 86'ed a few people (kicked them out), mostly men and some women. When it gets too rowdy at night, sometimes we call the cops. What I don't see is what happens in the back when I'm busy doing my thing. I don't see what happens when a lot of the dancers leave. I don't see what goes on when everyone goes home. And for the most part, I don't see what happens outside, although we try to get rid of the drug smokers as much as we can."

"Shadow, I thank you for your time. I know you want to get home. Here's my card. Call me with any new information you have."

Shadow watched him leave, thinking to herself, first of all, that he was very attractive, and, second of all, that she

had never even had a sinking feeling about anything wrong going on in the place.

Shadow went back to her apartment, feeling lonely and still processing what Detective Morrison had said to her. It was true that she had not heard or seen anything.

Dottie, her roommate, was an older woman who worked as a bartendress at a bar in North Seattle. They had an apartment in Ballard together, and their dog, Chumpers, a part-Collie and part-Spaniel mix, woofed and jumped up on her once she turned the key and got in. Dottie was sitting on the couch, watching an old episode of The Voice.

"Hey, Shadow," she said.

"Hey, Dottie."

"You look kinda sad tonight. What've you been up to?"

"Oh, Dottie, it's nothing much. I had a hectic night at work, and then a police detective wanted to talk to me. Don't tell anyone, but he thinks there's something going wrong at Teasers."

"Of course, I won't tell anyone. I'm sorry that had to happen to you. There's soup I made tonight and some beers in the fridge, if you want them."

The next day, Shadow kept her eyes and ears peeled. She didn't think Razor knew anything about the conversation she had with the detective yesterday. Come to think of it, she *had* seen him here before; in fact, she had seen him a few times. He came by himself, ordered a meal and a couple of pops, and no alcoholic drinks. He wasn't watching the girls like the other customers. And not once did he get a lap dance. As she had heard, a dirty cop investigating Rick's had gotten many of them with law enforcement money, and didn't make one arrest.

She was just finishing a table, and after gathering her tip, she went to the back to talk with Razor. She opened the door, crept down the hall, and she heard something before she saw it.

"Jimmy, there was a cop here yesterday, talkin' to Shadow. What the hell is going on? Do you think he knows something?"

"Well, Shadow doesn't know anything." Razor's voice sounded like two pieces of sandpaper rubbing together, because he was a lifetime smoker. "I never told her one bit about it."

Hell, Shadow thought. *Now I do*. She continued listening.

"If Shadow finds out about the girls and the crack-cocaine, I'm over. That woman would turn me in more quickly than you could say, 'Big Money.'"

"Well, let's keep it from her. The longer she doesn't know, the longer we have to hide everything. The cops found a trail, and we need to get rid of the evidence. Start with the money."

"You don't tell me how to do my job, and I won't call you a dummy. I know how to keep everything a secret, and get rid of anything that might get us locked away."

Shadow retreated when she heard them starting to get up and open the door. She saw a small glimpse of Razor and the guy he was talking to: he was a short, thin man she recognized as someone who came to talk to him often, but she assumed he was once of his friends. She ran back into the club, carefully closing the back door behind her, and acted as though she had seen nothing and heard nothing.

Her thoughts were rushing through her head. If Colacurcio, who had died in prison, was over, then why would Razor and his

friend be starting a prostitution and drug ring of their own? There was no possible way there was a connection to the Mafia. The connection was within Frank Colacurcio, and he was a dead man now.

She continued her shift, finished it, and then got ready to leave. As she left the nightclub property, she was walking through the darkened parking lot, just as it was starting to rain, in this dreary April weather, and she was just about to lift her cell phone to call Detective Morrison with what she had learned today, when a hand reached out in front on her face.

What the hell, she thought. And then she felt the gun at her temple. She tried to scream and kick, though she had never taken self-defense classes, but the hand was firmly on her mouth, and his body was firmly wrapped around hers.

"Come this way," he said, in a low voice. He grabbed her and pulled her towards a vehicle, one she could only recognize as an old SUV, and in the dark, she could not see what make and model. But of course, what he had told her was not really an invitation, nor was it an order, because he was taking her there, anyway.

He threw her into the back of the SUV. When she could speak, she said, "Where are you taking me? Why are you doing this?"

All he said was, "They know you know."

There was no way out. And she feared there was no way out of what might happen at their destination. Once they had her there, how was she going to escape? She hadn't left a clue for anyone that she might be missing. She was sure that there was nothing that could rescue her now.

But police lights flashed as the siren whirred. Her captor gunned the engine. "Oh, shit!" she heard him say from the back.

There was a chase. The police cruiser slammed into the SUV and butted it towards the shoulder. Her captor tried to speed ahead, but the police were too quick for him to go any further. He crashed into the rear end so firmly, and she felt it, that he began to spin around; he spun 270 degrees, and stopped.

The one police detective jumped out and approached his SUV with his gun raised. It was Dan Morrison! He opened the driver's side car door and nabbed him.

But he tried to run by foot. "Freeze!" he said. He fired a shot. At that point the guy had a second thought. He slowed down, and then turned to face Dan. "Hey, man, you're right."

"Hands behind your back! Get down on the ground!" Dan yelled.

And he did.

Shadow sighed deeply. "Oh, thank goodness," she said. As Dan was arresting the man, she shivered.

Unbeknownst to Dan, Shadow had been in the back of the car at the same time as he had butted it, but she was alright. She started to pound on the door so he could get her out. When she heard the footsteps coming closer, she pounded again.

"Dan!" she exclaimed. He had broken the lock to get her out.

"Hey, I'm here," he said. "We already got the bad guys at the club. No one can be after you now."

She told him what she had overheard at the club, and he nodded his head.

"That's what we were able to determine, as well."

"Was there a connection to the Mafia, after all?"

"Of course. But that's for the feds to investigate further. I don't know about Frank Colacurcio, Sr., or the junior, but your slimy little boss was also a crack boss and did definitely have a connection to the Mafia."

"Seems in hindsight that it was just so simple to unravel the crimes."

"Well, it was," Dan said, "But that's not to say they weren't very dirty crimes, especially since your life was in danger, and I'm so glad that you're safe, because it's too much of a price to pay simply for the sake of nabbing the criminals—the life of the woman I now know I love."

This story is inspired by my fascination and obsession with dead ends when I was a little girl. When I first began to read, I had no idea what it was. It was a mystery to me what was beyond the dead road.

Dead End

What was back there? she thought. She used to drive with her mother all sorts of different places: the gas station, the grocery store, kindergarten, and church. *Dead End*, she read. She

didn't remember when or how she had begun to read, but she knew what the sign said. *Dead. End. Dead End.*

"Mommy, what does that sign mean?"

She looked over briefly. "It says, 'dead end.'"

But she already knew that. "What does it mean?"

"It means the road stops right there."

"Oh," little Sarah murmured, although she did not completely understand what her mommy had just said.

She remembered lots of things. She remembered her name. Sarah. She remembered her age. 5 ½. She remembered her boyfriend. He was so cute. His name was Andy, and she held hands with him once.

She looked down for her doll, because she missed her. She also wanted her blankie. Her doll, whose name was Karen, had pretty blue eyes and brown hair. She found her blankie, too. She picked it up and it was so soft. It was orange.

"Mommy? What's behind the dead end?"

"I don't know," she said, while concentrating on her driving.

Sarah thought and thought. She was so interested in what was behind the dead end, but she would not go back there.

Mommy and Sarah got home. She was so sleepy. Her mommy carried her to her bed. She saw her daddy with drooping eyes and her brother Matt, too. But she just wanted to go to sleep.

As soon as she touched her head to her pink, lace-trimmed pillow, she fell asleep.

Her dreams were happy. She dreamed about a big, furry, pink friend with friendly eyes. There were lots of friends around in lots of different colors. They reminded her of Sesame Street.

The next dream was about eating. She ate ice cream and cake. It was a birthday party. There were balloons. Her boyfriend gave her a kiss on the cheek.

She woke up in the morning. She was not going to go to kindergarten today, because it was a Saturday. Her mommy and daddy let her play with crayons and coloring books, her dolls, and bubble stuff outside. She had a fun day. At noon her mommy made them sandwiches, and they had a picnic in the backyard. But she couldn't stop thinking about the dead end. Dead. End. What was behind the dead end?

One day she found out. They were the bad neighbors who came to visit.

This story speaks for itself.

Heart of Broken Glass

Suzanne was her name. She had long, brown, curly hair. She didn't like her eye color, though they were a radiant hazel which looked mostly brown. She didn't know this. She was accustomed to thinking of herself as having shriveled red eyes, eyes that cried so much that no one even cared.

Suzanne did like to look in the mirror, but only to wonder what she would look like if she were perfect.

One day, the object of her affection, Greg, was standing by his locker. He had a photograph in his hand, and Suzanne knew what it was: a school portrait. Wondering what it was, she walked past him and tried not to let him notice her glancing at it.

The portrait was only of a male friend of his who she knew came to talk to him quite a bit. She was relieved that the photograph was not one of a gorgeous, popular, female object of admiration.

But she didn't know Greg. She had followed him so many times, only to see him for a moment, and then he would pass by her. She wanted to know him. But she didn't know how they would meet.

That night she accidentally broke a mirror. "Oh no, now I have seven years of bad luck."

The next morning, she tried to say hi to Greg for the first time.

"Hi, Greg," she said. But he didn't look back at her.

She sadly walked away, and could have died in sorrow.

This story I thought about and worked on for a long time. It was going to be a novel, and then it was going to be a novella, but it ended up to be very short.

The Forest

There were spirits in the forest. And people. She always wondered which ones were there.

Trees had spirits. But there weren't just the spirits of the trees. There were also ghosts. There had been fights back in those woods. And sometimes people came to look at the nature and take pictures of it.

In the forest, everything echoed. There was one tree in the forest who spoke the loudest, and he was a jokester. The rest of the trees spoke, too, but they weren't as loud.

The ghosts didn't speak to each other very much. They were more into themselves, like monks or nuns contemplating religion and spirituality.

The people spoke to each other. "Honey, look over here! I found a beautiful, rocky cliff!" or, "Honey, give me my camera." Or, "How long do you think it will be before we should turn back?"

One of the fights must have happened a long time ago. Well, she knew that squirrels and other animals fought all the time.

But this particular fight had to do with two people. So much happened in the woods, but human beings didn't usually find it interesting.

Juliette knew that to go off into the deep woods alone, she needed to be very careful to be able to find her way back. But her curiosity was really nagging her.

She began to walk and found a huge rock upon which she could sit.

She knew that rocks did not have spirits, but they could hold energy.

She felt so calm and warm here. She then asked the woods, "What happened here?"

And a voice called back, "Two young boys were fighting with sticks about a girl they both liked at school."

"That's all?" she asked.

"Of course. But you just don't understand. The animals have all lived long, complicated lives. They have families. They have tragedies. They have love stories. They have little thoughts."

"But what about you? Have you lived a long, complicated life with tragedy and romance?"

"I am a tree," he said. "I have lived for such a long time. There is nothing else to do sometimes but talk to each other. I grow up and I grow wise. I see forest fires happen, and children who never take root. My dear, every life has its own story to tell. Sometimes we cross paths. But it is not endless. I am well aware that there are so many living beings in existence. I am a tree," he repeated.

"And what have you surmised after having seen so many stories with so much life?"

A drop of sap began to fall, which she realized was also a tear.
