

Beckler's Bridge

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Saturday, 10:33pm. The call came over the radio. 10-50IP, Code 3. Vehicle accident with personal injuries, proceed with light and sirens.

The cab of the truck did little to block the sound of the siren. The red and white lights bouncing off the trees lining the lonely two-lane road, apparently afraid to enter into the woods at this hour, cast an undulating glow over my partner as she drove.

"Unit 7, 10-23," I said into the microphone, placing it back on the magnetic holder on the dashboard even before the "10-4 Unit 7" response came back from dispatch.

There was nothing on the roadway. This was supposed to be a vehicle accident with injuries. "There", Sally said, pointing to a rear bumper that was trying its best to stay hidden, betrayed by the flashing lights from our truck.

It was deathly quiet as we exited the cab of the ambulance. The police were not there yet, and the fire truck was still some five minutes away. It was us, my partner and me, and whatever we might find. She grabbed the crash kit while I made my way to the edge of the road. I noticed the skid marks veering off the road just before the bridge.

"Down there," said the girl in the white dress, pointing to the creek." I could not quite make out her face; my eyes had not yet adjusted to the darkness.

I placed my hand on the right bumper as I made my way down the embankment.

"What do we have?" Looking back, I saw Sally was there with the kit.

"Not sure yet."

"The girl up here said there are four people. All teenagers."

"Oh crap." I have two teenagers at home. "Careful, that bank is a little steep. Go ahead and slide the box down."

I peered in the driver side window. The driver was dead. Visual confirmation. Neck clearly broken. From the other side of the vehicle, Sally confirmed the passenger was also deceased. Difficult to survive laying over the dashboard with a partial decapitation.

"You can't help them", said the girl in the white dress. She added somberly, "They were my friends." Pointing to the creek where the front of the car was partially submerged, "There are two more down there. I am sorry. I am so sorry." Why was she apologizing? Did she have something to do with this? Was this her fault? I pushed the questions from my head. There would be time enough for that later. Plus, those are questions best left to the police. Focus. I am a paramedic, not a cop.

Making our way to the creek, we found them, floating in the water roughly ten feet away. In the distance I heard approaching sirens. Help is on the way. A lot of good it is going to do now, I thought. I grabbed one body; Sally grabbed the other. Mine was a teenage boy, eviscerated; his guts spilling out of his gut. How ironic. Pushing the thought away, I pulled him onto the bank.

Sally's corpse was a girl, a girl with no head. At least the breasts on the torso indicated it was a teenage girl. She pulled it ashore.

The sound of restrained retching. Looking up, I noticed for the first time the highway patrolman standing next to the car. “Um, the head?” The officer tried his best not to vomit. “Any idea where the head is?”

“There, it is over there,” said the girl in the white dress. “By the branch over there.”

Our gaze followed her slender finger. Sure enough, there was a head bobbing face down, caught in a tree branch that extended into the water near the opposite bank.

We looked at each other; the patrolman, Sally, me. Since I was closest, and was already in the water, it was up to me. I crossed the creek; it was only about three feet deep.

I stepped out of the water onto the muddy bank. It was darker on this side of the creek. I chose my footing carefully. Twelve feet to go. I squinted; I could see the branches in the water but could not quite make out what I was there to get.

“Here, here it is.” The girl in the white dress pointed down at the head. How did she get over here? “Be careful. Please be careful. It is very slippery.”

Ten feet. Eight feet. I made my way slowly. Six feet. Four feet. I could now see the head, right where she was pointing.

“I am sorry. I am so sorry,” from the bank a few feet away from me.

Holding onto a branch, I reached into the water. The best I could do was grab her by the hair.

“I am sorry, so, so, sorry,” the girl in the white dress wailed.

I pulled the head from the water. The girl on the bank stood, clasped her hands together and erupted into a deep, guttural moan.

The head I was holding by the long blond hair slowly rotated. I caught a glimpse of the face.

My daughter’s face stared back at me. I was holding my daughter’s head in my hand. I dropped to my knees in the mud on the other bank, and erupted into my own deep, guttural moan.

The girl in the white dress squatted next to me. She put her arm around me to comfort me. “It will be okay; it will be okay daddy. It did not hurt. Tell mommy I love her.” My head jerked up at the sound of my daughter’s voice. The girl in the white dress was gone.