



A New Direction

A Short Story

By

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Terese adjusted the two feathers sticking up from the back of her headband, and pulled the polyester Indian blanket tight around her shoulders. She spotted her two cohorts at the corner of Delores Park, across the street from their daily dose of hell, Mission High School.

Alex lifted his mask and squinted at her, "What the hell are you supposed to be?"

"I'm a Navajo Healer, of course." She glanced down at her outfit, shrugged, "It's not authentic, but it's the best I could find here among you Anglos. It's not like yours is any better. What are you, a cat?"

She hid a smile at Greg's sharp intake of breath.

"He's Batman. How can you not know who Batman is?"

Terese didn't read as many comics as her friends, but she knew exactly who Batman was. She'd seen Val Kilmer's new Batman movie that summer.

"The pointy ears look like a cat, and the cape is too long."

Alex turned his back on her, and stalked over to the fence surrounding the park's tennis courts. He headed down the walkway at a fast clip.

"I'm Superman," Greg announced.

"The huge 'S' on your chest was a hint." Terese skipped after Alex, her fingers skimming along the chinks in the chain link fence.

"We should formalize our plans before we just go running off," Greg panted, trying to keep up with Terese.

She caught up with Alex and tugged on his sleeve, "Greg's right. We should figure out our path and how long we'll patrol tonight."

It was their first night for their quest; modern day hero's patrolling where the cops didn't bother. They'd read about the Super Hero group in Seattle and couldn't let that soggy city beat San Francisco.

Alex angled his watch toward the weak light spilling from the corner lamppost, "It's almost midnight. I say we stick to the park tonight. Should take about an hour."

"Cut through or stick to the perimeter?" Terese asked.

"Perimeter, definitely the perimeter," Greg said, peering at the pool of darkness in the middle of the fifteen acre park.

A flicker of movement crossing the park cut off Terese's snide remark. She grabbed Alex's cape. Her voice dropped low. "It's a coyote."

"You've been smoking that peace pipe again," Alex said, tugging his cape from her hands. He shook out the edges of his cape so it hung smoothly. "There are no coyotes in the middle of the city. It's just some stray dog."

Terese thwacked him on the chest with the back of her hand. "I know the difference between a dog and a coyote, you ass. You forget where I grew up."

"Were there a lot of coyotes on the reservation?" Greg asked.

"A lot, actually," Terese said, but didn't mention that many were spirit animals and not 'real' in the way he understood it.

Alex shouldered past Greg, "Let's get on with..."

A piercing scream sliced the air. It echoed off the steep sides of the park.

"Jesus Christ," Greg dropped flat to the ground, his head arching up and around, staring into the shadows.

"I think that was up by the Muni tracks." Terese tore off at a dead run, cutting through the park. As she crested the rise, a tall figure disappeared into the darkness of the light-rail tunnel. She carefully approached a pile of rags near the boarding area.

The pile of rags shifted, moaned. Heart pounding, Terese raced over and yanked off a crumpled coat, revealing a woman. "Are you okay?"

She rolled the woman onto her back. Her hand came away sticky wet, a coppery smell wafting up from the body.

"Alex. Greg. Get over here. Now," she shouted.

She whipped off her fake Indian blanket, wadded it up, and pressed it against the wound. Alex ran up, Greg trailing behind, out of breath.

She kept her hands pressed on the wound and looked up at Alex, "Run to the 7-Eleven® and call 911. I think it's a knife wound."

Alex sprinted up the hill and disappeared in the direction of the all-night store.

"What can I do?" Greg asked.

Terese glanced over her shoulder, nodded down the tracks toward the metro tunnel. "Stand there and make sure no one comes out. If anything moves, yell."

* * *

Terese rubbed the caked-on blood from her hands. The cracking mini-fissures created a rust-colored jigsaw puzzle on her palms.

Glancing up, she searched for coyote tracks in the mud near the boarding area of the J-Church line.

The Coroner's car pulled up at the edge of the light-rail tracks. A man jumped out of the car, hustled down the long walkway toward the dead woman. He took the clipboard from the

paramedics, scribbled his signature. "Thanks boys, I'll take it from here." The Medical Examiner pointed at Terese and turned to the patrol officer, "Move that girl away from the crime scene."

Terese turned toward the two plain-clothes cops talking to Alex and Greg. She could hear snatches of their conversation as Alex leaned toward the fat cop and started jabbing at his chest, "... my father is a lawyer and he'll want to know why we were detained for so long. What's your badge number..." Terese shook her head. Alex was always so quick to use his dad to get what he wanted.

The younger cop walked over to Terese. "Inspector Mallory," he said, flashing his badge, "I need to ask you a few questions."

Terese sighed, nodded.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Terese said, "it's not my first dead body,"

Mallory paused, his eyes flickered up, meeting Terese's gaze.

"What were you doing out here so late?"

"We were patrolling," she said, "you know, like those guys in New York with the red berets."

"The Guardian Angels?"

"Yeah, but we're upping the style factor, like the super hero group in Seattle."

Mallory shook his head, shrugged. "Do your parents know where you are?"

"Both my parents are dead."

"Sorry," Mallory said, as he scribbled notes. "You in the foster system?"

"No, I live with my father's sister and her husband," Terese said, rubbing her arms from the cold.

"So, your Aunt and Uncle."

Terese crossed her arms and glared at Mallory. She never called them her Aunt or Uncle and never would.

"Can you tell me what happened tonight?"

"We were patrolling, like I said, and we heard a scream. I thought it was up here by the J-Church, and I can run faster than those two so I got here first." She wasn't about to reveal she followed a spirit coyote. How could she explain she'd been seeing Coyote in times of danger since she was a child? He'd think she was crazy. "Anyway, by the time I got here, some big guy was running down the track, and the woman was bleeding on the ground."

"Get a good look at the guy?"

"He was tall, taller than you by at least a couple of inches. He had on a black hoodie and jeans. And he was white."

“Did you see his face?”

“No, but he ran like a white man.”

Mallory scratched behind his ear with the eraser on his pencil. “So you wouldn’t know him if you saw him again?”

“Well, um, I think...” How could she explain that she thought she would just ‘know’ him if they met again? “I couldn’t pick him out of a line up, if that’s what you mean.”

Mallory closed his notebook. “You know what you kids did tonight was very dangerous, not to mention illegal. Can I get your promise you won’t do it again?”

Terese shrugged, “It’s not like we did much good anyway. She’s dead and the guy got away.”

Mallory motioned over the uniform officer, “Take them all home, and make sure their parents are aware of what happened here tonight.”

He turned to Terese and scribbled his home number on the back of his card, “If you think of anything else, call me.”

* * *

Terese trudged up the steep hill, sipping her lime Slurpee and eating a chocolate donut. Stopping at the boarding area of the J-Church she waited until a crowd of passengers left, then knelt by the outline of the bloodstains. She placed the last of her donut near the stain, and poured some of her Slurpee in a circle around it. Shooing the pigeons away, she searched the sky for black wings.

A crow circled and descended.

“You’re late,” she said. The crow cocked its head and stared at her with shiny eyes. “I don’t know her name, but her spirit left last night. This offering is for you. Find her and help her on her way.”

The crow pranced around the food, a spirit dance.

“Perform your ritual.” Terese kept the pigeons at bay while Crow pecked at the offering. When it had eaten most of the food, Terese bowed and whispered, “Thank you for your assistance.”

In the distance, the school bell rang, signaling the end of the lunch period. Terese thought about running down the hill to make her fourth period class, but she hated history and decided to ditch. As she wandered to the edge of the park, she spotted Mallory and his partner sitting in an unmarked police car, half a block down the street.

She sauntered over and leaned against the car near the open passenger window. “You two look like a couple of pervs scoping out the talent in the park.”

Mallory head jerked up, “Shouldn’t you be in class?”

“Fourth period’s history, and they only write about Anglos in their books. When they start teaching the history of my tribe, I’ll show up more often.”

“We could give you a ride down the hill. You might still make class.”

Terese ignored the offer and inspected the back of the car. Candy wrappers littered the floor. Mallory’s partner took a swig from a flask, reached for the half-eaten sandwich on the dashboard.

“It’s too cold to sit out here just for a lunch break. You got a lead?”

Mallory’s partner leaned toward the passenger window, his breath fouling the air with the stench of alcohol. “The victim had a lot of drugs in her system, so we’re checking out the dealers hanging about your precious park.”

“It’s not any of the regulars.” Terese said.

“And you know this how?” Mallory asked.

“Because I take the J-Church to and from school every day. I know the guys that hang here and sell. They all have the wrong shoes.”

“The wrong shoes?” Mallory reached for his notepad.

“Yeah, all the regulars wear sneakers, easier to run in, I suppose. The guy last night had fancy shoes on. Expensive. The kind you’d wear in an office.”

Mallory stepped out of the car, took Terese by the arm and lead her down the block, back toward her school. The sound of his partner’s belch followed them.

“Those details are great, very helpful, but you need to understand we may never find out who he is or why he killed the victim. We haven’t even been able to identify who she is.”

“I could help. You know, hang out, ask some questions, listen to people. Keep my eyes open.”

“I appreciate the offer, but please promise me you’ll leave the investigation to us.”

Terese shrugged, “I think people who turn down help are wasteful and stupid, but it’s your choice.”

The bell for fifth period echoed through the park.

“Try not to miss this class,” Mallory turned and left her standing at the edge of the park.

* * *

Terese chased Coyote down the tourist-deserted streets by the wharf, the foghorn blared warnings over the black water. She herded him toward an alley, barely keeping him in sight in the thickening fog. Ready to grab him, Terese skidded around the corner, but Coyote had disappeared.

From the end of the alley, huge horses loomed out of the fog, racing toward her. She ducked behind a trashcan as they barreled passed her, pulling an old-fashioned coach.

Terese woke, freezing, her sheets a tangled mass at the foot of the bed. She sat up, rubbed her hands over her face. Slipping on her jeans and a sweatshirt, she padded down the stairs to the kitchen phone. She dialed the number Inspector Mallory scribbled on the back of his card.

“Who-the-hell-is-this?” Mallory grunted.

“It’s me,” Terese said.

“And who the hell is ‘me’?”

“Terese. Terese Nez. The murder. In the park last week?”

“God, kid, do you know what time it is?”

“You said to call if I remembered something.”

“I meant when the sun was up. Hang on a minute.”

The phone clattered loudly, Terese jerked her head away from the earpiece. Sounds of rustling clothes and paper, grunting and breathing, filtered through when she hugged the phone to her ear. After what seemed like minutes, she finally heard a door shut.

Mallory’s groggy voice came back on the line, “If my wife wakes up, she’s going to think I have something going on the side.”

“She’d never think that. You’re too old and you have too many freckles to have a mistress.”

Mallory chuckled, “Did no one ever explain that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar?”

“Why would I want to catch flies?”

“It’s just an expression,” Mallory sighed. “What is it you need to tell me at three in the morning?”

“Her coat, it smelled of fish.”

“Come again?”

“When I got to her that night, she was covered with her coat. An expensive coat. A Coach™ designer coat. My aun...my father’s sister has three and goes on and on about how expensive they are and how I should take care of one if I ever marry a man rich enough to buy one for me.”

“Okay, she had on an expensive coat. What else?”

“I told you, it smelled of fish. Reeked of it.” Terese peeked around the kitchen door to make sure she hadn’t woken her aunt and uncle.

“I think I must be too tired, but I’m not seeing the significance.”

Terese let out a long sigh, “No one who could afford a coat like that would walk around for days, stinking of fish. She would have had it dry-cleaned. Right away. That means she had to be somewhere near fish right before she died. Like maybe down by the wharf or something.”

There was a long silence on the other end of the phone.

“Did you hear me?” Terese asked.

“We missed the fish smell,” Mallory grunted, “but I want to make it clear it probably won’t lead anywhere. If we can identify her, it could, maybe, point us in a direction. But at this point we don’t even know who she is.”

“So what do I do now?”

“You,” Mallory emphasized, “do nothing.”

“But...”

“No buts. No nothing. I promise to let you know what we find out. Don’t do anything more, unless you remember something else. Are we clear?”

“What if I see the guy around or overhear something?”

“Then you call me. That’s ALL! Promise me you won’t pursue this further.”

“Sure,” Terese said, fingers crossed, “I’ll wait until I hear from you.”

* * *

Terese walked down the stairs and spotted a man sitting on the bench near the boarding area of the J-Church. He slowly turned the page of the newspaper under the dim streetlight.

“Isn’t it too dark to read?” Terese plopped down on the bench.

“I have very good eyesight,” Mallory said.

She was silent for several minutes, her legs swinging back and forth, feet scrapping a trough in the damp grass.

“You here to check up on me?”

“Let’s just say I thought it prudent to ride the Muni home for a few nights.” Mallory folded his paper and laid it on the bench. He turned to face her, “Seen or heard anything interesting lately?”

Terese unzipped, zipped, and unzipped the outer pocket of her backpack, “Nope, just minding my own business, like you told me to.”

“And how much time have you spent ‘just minding your own business’ in the park? Or do you always hang-out five hours after class before going home?”

“It’s a free country, or so they keep saying in the textbooks.”

“You know, almost seventy percent of murders are never solved. It might be weeks, or months, before we even know the identity of the victim. We may never know who she was. Even if you miraculously find the man you saw running from the crime scene, we couldn’t arrest him. We have no evidence.”

“Sometimes you can get a confession with the proper encouragement,” she said, pulling a stun gun out of her backpack.

He covered the stun gun with his hand, “Put that away right now. Those are illegal.”

“Then arrest me. That’s the law isn’t it?”

Mallory sighed heavily, “What am I going to do with you?” He removed his hat and ran his hand through his hair. “They never did find the person that murdered your mother, did they?”

Terese froze, legs in mid-swing. She turned to look at Mallory. “How did you…”

“I made a few calls.”

Terese jumped off the bench and marched down the walkway.

“Terese, wait.”

The sound of Mallory’s feet pounded behind Terese. He grabbed her arm, spinning her around to face him.

“I checked on your background for a reason. You’re a bright and observant girl, and no one could say you aren’t driven to solve a puzzle,” he jammed his hat back on his head, reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a piece of paper. “Since you’ll graduate in a couple of years, I thought you might be interested in this.”

He thrust a brochure into her hands. She flipped to the front and read, “Careers in Law Enforcement”. She glared at him while she crumpled it and tossed it in the bushes. She ran to the stairway.

“You’d be a natural. You have a lot of potential.” Mallory shouted.

Terese paused, one foot hovering over the first step. It was a stupid idea. She hated following Anglo rules, how could she spend her life enforcing them? He was crazy to suggest it. Still, she did watch reruns of Cagney and Lacey every night and she always knew who the bad guy was before the second set of commercials.

Without looking at him, she walked over to the bushes, picked up the brochure and shoved it into her back pocket. “I just don’t want to get a ticket for littering,” she said over her shoulder as she turned and started up the stairs. She glanced back once, just long enough to see the smile on Mallory’s face.

About a.e. Tyree

a.e. Tyree believes anything is possible, which may be why she is drawn to writing paranormal stories. A corporate executive and life coach by day, she spends her nights writing stories.

To learn more about a.e.Tyree's work, visit her website at www.aeTyree.com