

MOUNTAIN MYSTERY

Missing: Syringa” by Anthony E. Zuiker (Chapter I)



(“Missing: Syringa” is an original crime story written exclusively for LACC. It will be published in 10 parts. The author, Anthony E. Zuiker, is a resident of Lake Arrowhead and Creator of the hit TV franchise “CSI: Crime Scene Investigation.”)

If the BlueJay could talk...

The passerine bird could solve the mystery of Lake Arrowhead and spare law enforcement the trouble. For it was a lone BlueJay who last saw “Syringa” alive. The 14-year old barefoot mystery girl who walked into a Bill’s Villager Coffee Shop on State Highway 189 and told an over-caffeinated waitress, “This is my last day on Earth...” Prophetic words spoken at 11:34 a.m. on March 8, 2019. The mystery girl, known to mountain folk as “Syringa,” was never seen or heard from again. It wasn’t until a young boy with Autism fished out a pink t-shirt from the still shores of North Bay.

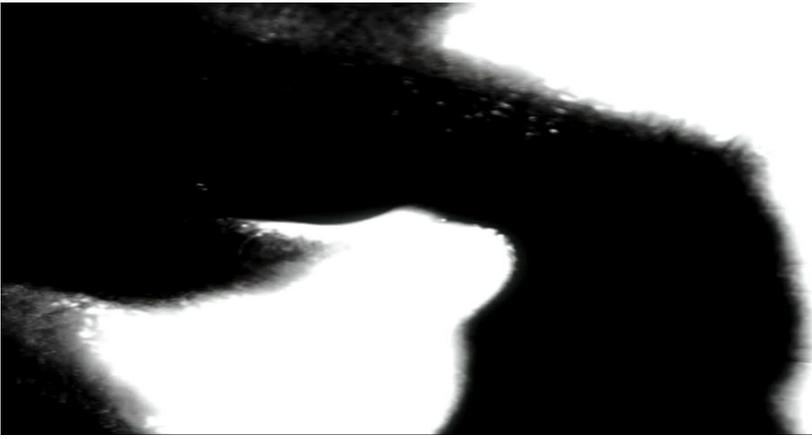
This boy is not a resident of Lake Arrowhead. His parents were renting a cabin for Spring Break. At first, the boy’s mother scolded the low-functioning Asperger’s Syndrome child for being “near the water.” She might’ve served better scolding herself for not keeping a watchful eye. Nevertheless, the 6-year old visitor from Sacramento, California has accidentally found the only personal effect of Syringa. A pink t-shirt with a picture of a lilac on the front. The boy, who does not speak, was questioned by retired Sergeant Bill Holloway and former CSI Level III from L.A. County. The silent boy took the Sergeant’s wrinkled hand and walked him to the edge water. He pointed up at a nearby pine tree near the shore where the t-shirt was found. Sergeant Holloway squinted up with curious eyes. Nothing. He lifted a pair of binoculars to see if there was anything specific the boy was referring to. On its perch, the BlueJay who flew away before his eyes could settle.

And as for the lone BlueJay who could possibly attest to “Syringa’s” last whereabouts...

She’s most likely fluttering among the thousands who migrate down to Lake Arrowhead from Newfoundland, Canada. If her beak could talk, she just might have the answers to Holloway’s most burning questions. “Who is this little girl called ‘Syringa’?” “Where did she come from?” “Did she drown in Lake Arrowhead?” Sergeant Holloway would love to get his meat hooks into the deeper bones of these unanswered questions, but there is only one problem...

Sergeant Bill Holloway doesn’t speak “BlueJay.”

And so, the mystery deepens as the plot thickens. A missing girl, no one knows, who professed her own death. An Autistic boy who found evidence of her, but does not speak. A Sergeant assigned a “missing person” case from concerned residents of a small town. And a BlueJay who might be the only eyewitness to a drowning, childlike hijinks... or worse. If the BlueJay could talk, it just might hold the case cracking answer to what a mountain is dying to know. “Where is the girl on the poster?” “MISSING: SYRINGA.”



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The law enforcement poster printed out of the Public Information Office read “Missing: Syringa.” A 14-year old girl who disappeared in Lake Arrowhead one week ago today. A hotline was provided. The auditory message - “If you have information about this young girl, please contact Bill Holloway at the Mountain Police Department of San Bernardino. Case number 73FT46EA6.”

The case of missing Syringa was assigned to legend Sergeant Bill “Adroit” Holloway. A 64-year old retired CSI-Level III from the L.A. County Sheriff’s Department. His legacy was cemented when he was the only volunteer from LASD who would drive three hours every weekend to help solve the 1971 disappearance of two bikers in Crestline.

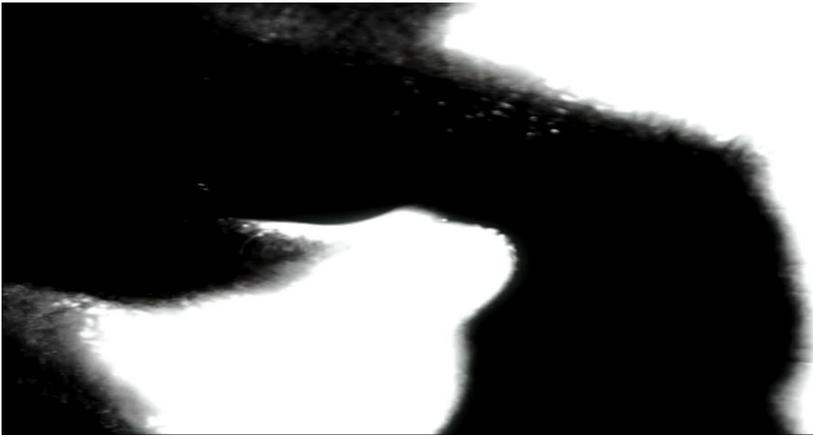
He got the nickname “Adroit” from the locals who were impressed by his “cleverness and skill” to solve a case that plagued the mountain for decades. Today, Bill Holloway has dedicated his timesolving any heinous crime that plagues Crestline to Running Springs and all that’s in between. Including her majesty – Lake Arrowhead.

Today, Bill is back on the case. He’s a hard-boiled man of few words who only works alone. Always alone. Branches crackle as his all-terrain boots walk the crime scene area off North Bay where the missing girl’s pink t-shirt was found. Holloway cordons off the crime scene with yellow caution tape and the jab of wooden sticks. Boaters try to enter North Bay with concerned eyes, but are quickly turned away by the unapologetic horns of the ALA.

Hours prior, Sergeant Holloway ordered Syringa’s shirt to be put in a temporary dry locker for analysis. Once dry, the crime lab was tasked to examine the pink cotton t-shirt with a high-powered magnifying glass and atape roller. Hoping to capture an errant hair follicle. The shirt was also tested for the presence of blood.

Turns out, a hair follicle was found nestled inside the right armpit of the shirt. It was a short, brunette strand with a tag cell attached at the end of the follicle. Signifying the hair was “yanked out” in a struggle. The shirt also bore faint evidence of an admixture of blood. The admixture meant blood was sourced from “more than one person.” Between the hair and the blood, Holloway surmised that an “aggressive altercation” took place on or near the water.

Sergeant Holloway’s pulse begins to hammer. The innate switch that flicks on when foul play is suspected. He lifts his radio with a raised eyebrow. “Dispatch, send water recovery out to North Bay. Stat. We’re going to need to drag the lake. Possible drown victim... or victim’s.” Suddenly, out of the corner of his eye he spots a lone BlueJay. Nestled in the same pine tree a week prior. A bird’s eye view, of the alleged crime scene. Sergeant Holloway stares down the calmly perched BlueJay. Off his stolen eyes...



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Retired Sergeant Bill Holloway works the crime scene near North Bay with an iron fist. Urgency stabs the air. He is joined by “Aquatic Recovery Team” on loan from L.A. County. Several tug boats chug innocently around North Bay on this overcast day. Holloway has ordered the ALA to ban all boating for the next 48 hours. He’s even benched the Arrowhead Queen Tour Boat. Holloway, “Last thing we need is fishing a young girl out of the water and have these tourists speed dialing TMZ.”

The chill of 5,174-feet of elevation has blanketed the lake with a distrustful white haze. Thankfully, the currents and the wind are cooperating today. The tugboats rely on steady waters to pull two tons of nets to “drag the river for a dead body.” Sergeant Holloway has silent internal doubts about this recovery operation. Bodies usually “wash up” after a day or so. It’s been seven days since 14-year old Syringa walked into a coffee shop to profess her “last day on Earth.” And now the whole mountain is looking for her.

Syringa is a bit of mystery herself. No parents have filed a formal “missing persons” report within a 250 miles radius. She could be a runaway, a child escaping an abuser, or be a victim of human trafficking. The possibilities of a missing teen are endless, but Holloway has a way of picking cases with teeth and bite down on the truth until it’s solved. So... Holloway is in for the long haul.

Speaking of haul... The Captain of tugboat No. 2 calls out to Holloway from a raspy bullhorn. “Got somethin’, Sarge!” ALA scoops up the Sergeant and brings him to the tugboat. Once aboard, Holloway stands back as the iron nets crank up with rapt anticipation. At first, Holloway sees nothing but moss, mud, and muck. Seconds later, a bloated body emerges from the dark and murky water. Holloway, “Don’t bring the victim up until we tent the boat off. I don’t want any photography.”

The Aquatic Recovery Team gets cracking. Within minutes, the boat is flanked with black canvas covers. Holloway helps the other boatmen lift the human slab on deck. Entangled in the nets, Holloway steadies his trained eyes on a dead man with a nautical rope tied around his neck and a sharp anchor jutting out of his back. Holloway snaps on a pair of latex gloves and fishes through his wet jean pockets. In the left pocket, a soggy pack of Marlboro cigarettes. In the right pocket, nothing but lint.

Holloway lifts a radio, “Dispatch... we have a drown victim. Caucasian male, fifties, roughly six-two, 250. Send a medic to transport him to the morgue.” Holloway pulls off the latex gloves and discards them with concern. He gives a firm order. “Bag him up. Don’t touch the rope or the anchor. I want him in the coroner’s office as if he’s still at the bottom of the lake.” Holloway knows two things right away. One, this is “not” Syringa. Two, he has a new homicide on his hands. Question now is... are the two cases related?...



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A cold spotlight illuminates the mysterious dead man who was found at the bottom of Lake Arrowhead. His body is bloated and discolored from the murky waters. The unidentified corpse lies motionless on a steel metal table at the coroner’s office in San Bernardino. Sporting a smock and surgical mask is the man working the case – retired Sergeant Bill Holloway. He is armed with a DSLR (Digital Single Lens Reflect) camera to photograph the body. The dead man does show signs of broken ribs on his right side. His neck shows ligature marks from a nautical rope that’s been tightly wrapped around his neck. The Coroner gently turns the man onto his stomach. Jutting out of the small of his back, Holloway leans into photograph a cast iron rusted boat anchor. SNAP! SNAP!

Holloway asks the Coroner to surgically remove it. He knows the exact make and model. “This is a vintage LUND maritime naval anchor. I’d be willing to wager it weighs exactly 14-pounds.” The Coroner is impressed. “I’d never bet against you, Bill. You think the suspect served in the military?” Holloway, “I don’t know yet, but this anchor is sentimental to someone affiliated with this lake. For now, that’s a good enough lead for me.”

Holloway asks for the Coroner to gently remove the rope from the man’s neck. He does and Holloway bags the anchor and rope as evidence. Up next, Holloway wants to fingerprint him. The problem is the man’s lake soaked hand has inflated like a boxing glove. Holloway suggests the Coroner cut off all ten fingers from the man’s hand and slip out the finger skin. SNIP! SNIP! SNIP! The Coroner’s steadily pulls the loose finger skin from the flesh and bone. Now, he can slip his own finger inside the skin and do the formal printing. Press, rotate, set aside. Press, rotate, set aside. Within a few minutes, Sergeant Holloway is armed with a ten-card filled with fingerprints for processing. The front burner question now is... “who is this man who drowned in the bottom of the lake?”

The Coroner asks, “You sticking around for the autopsy?” Holloway, “Normally, I leave the carving to you, but I need to see what’s in his lungs besides nicotine from smoking. Did he drown?” The Coroner’s nods and begins to slice a Y-incision on the dead man’s chest and cracks open his chest plate with a spreader tool. The dead man’s lungs are now exposed for the scalpel. The Coroner gently removes the lungs and slices them in half. Inside, the Coroner sees that the tubular branches (bronchi) and tissue lines (pleura) have no evidence of lake water. The Coroner, “He didn’t drown. Based on the blunt force trauma to his back and rope around his neck, he most likely died on land or on a vessel.”

Holloway shuts his eyes to mine his thoughts. If his mind could talk, he’d ask the obvious. “How could a 14-year old get the better of a man 6’2, 250 pounds?” “Why was Syringa’s pink t-shirt found in the water?” “The evidence of the hair follicle and blood insinuated a struggle, but her shirt was not ripped.” If only Holloway could sit and have a beer at the Lakefront Tap Room with that lone BlueJay. The only witness to a crime still in progress.



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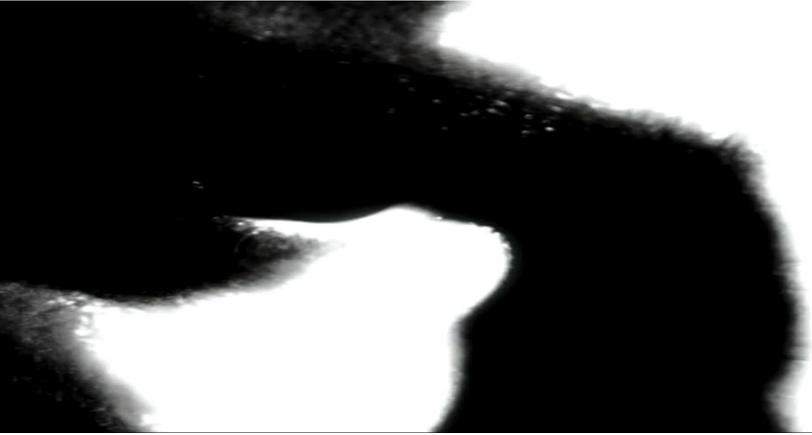
Sergeant Bill Holloway works alone. He, also, eats alone. It’s been five weeks since he voluntarily took a case of a missing 14-year old named “Syringa.” Near the shy shores of North Bay, Holloway is having a meditative lunch under the tree near the alleged crime scene where an Autistic boy found a pink-shirt of the girl. The boy, who was visiting, has now left the vacation spot for his home in Sacramento. What plagues Holloway is the boy’s insistence of the lone BlueJay perched in a pine tree above the “hot” crime scene.

Holloway’s sits in a fold-out chair and takes a bite of his tuna sandwich chased by a swig of chocolate milk. He lifts his eyes and opens his mind about this “BlueJay business.” He sets his sandwich down to take a closer look through his binoculars. Low and behold, a BlueJay is resting on the same perch Holloway saw her last time. On this day, the BlueJay doesn’t flutter off. She whistles loud jeers and makes gurgling sounds. If you listen closely, it almost sounds like the mimicking of a red-shouldered hawk.

Normally, the sounds of a singing song bird would be natural nature ambience. Holloway can hear the difference. This is her “calling out” song. But calling out to who? The BlueJay’s mate? Her flock? Or, Syringa? Holloway gets to his feet and walks with the binoculars to his eyes. He notices something peculiar in the pine tree. Elevated belt-like marks on the exterior of the bark on the pine tree. He, also, spots the same marks on the tree to the right of it. Holloway walks closer and looks up with engaging eyes. On the bark of both trees, he sees spur and spike marks from the bottom to the top where the BlueJay resides.

Holloway imagines what this means. “Did Syringa use cleats to climb to BlueJay height (40-feet) and sleep in an elevated hammock?” “Is it possible Syringa was a runaway who lived off the grid and befriended a BlueJay?” “Or...are these cleat marks from an unrelated woodsman?” The theories were racing around Holloway’s brain like the Indy 500. Out of nowhere, Holloway breaks his silence with the BlueJay. Holloway, “What’s your connection to this little girl, little bird?” The BlueJay chitters more song. Loud and intentional, the BlueJay flicks a dead grasshopper down to Holloway’s boots. It floats down like a spiraled feather. It almost seemed rude, but Holloway bends down to inspect it. When he picks it up, he spots something more surprising than an “insect offering.”

Holloway is taken aback by a plethora of empty peanut shells around the trunk of both pine trees. “Is the BlueJay trying to tell me something?” “Did Syringa befriend the BlueJay with peanuts?” “Or, is it random kids eating peanuts under a tree out of boredom?” Holloway lifts his walkie, “Dispatch, Holloway here. An odd request, but it’s pertinent to the Syringa case. I need a pair of size 11 spiked shoes, climbing rope, empty beer can, and a bag of ballpark peanuts. Roasted.” The silence on the other end is understandable. Until... “Copy, sir. I’ll send a Cadet.” Turns out, Holloway does speak BlueJay after all .



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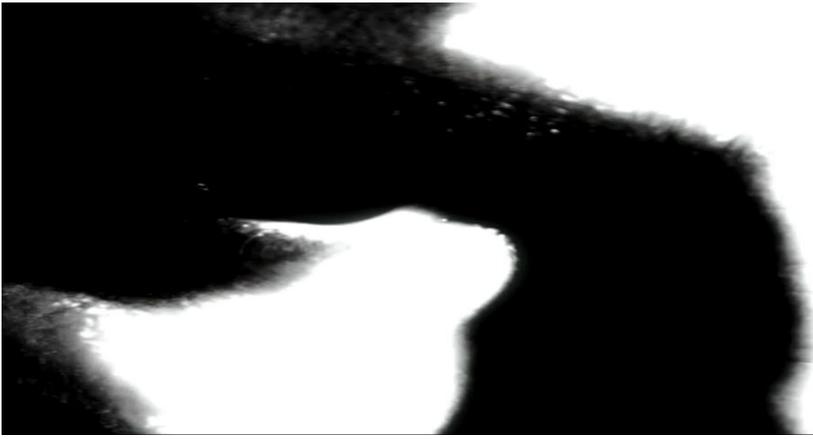
A bead of sweat surfs down Sergeant Bill Holloway’s misty forehead. He’s 40-feet above ground. His size 11-spikes claw into the pine bark like Chinese throwing stars. A thick rope tied around his waist. He pulls out his trusty pocket knife and slices the empty beer can in half to make a “make-shift” bowl for the peanuts. Next, he takes out a bag of roasted nuts and empties it into the can. Nestles the nutty experiment between two trusty branches. Holloway’s hope? “Will the Blue-

Jay return to get his Syringa themed snack?” Just when Holloway packs up to descend from the towering tree, the BlueJay swoops in, snatches a peanut, and flies off. A rarified smile warms Holloway’s expressionless face.

Back at the crime lab, Holloway runs the serial number on the pack of soggy Marlboro cigarettes he found in the dead man’s pocket. It turns out, the distributor of these smokes were sold at Jensen’s Foods. The carton shipments were provided by a wholesaler in San Bernardino. The time-line for delivery was on December 1, 2018. The order was 12-cartons of Marlboro Red. The only way to determine when that particular pack of cigarettes were sold would be to watch surveillance footage from December 1, 2018 to today’s date. And since Jensen’s Foods is open from 6 am – 9 pm, Holloway may go blind watching the footage to capture when that particular pack of cigarette swere sold. But Holloway is a patient man. And with a paltry pension and no woman at home to mend his stockings, Holloway has all the time in the world. So, he gathers a hot cup of free coffee at Starbucks (inside Jensen’s Foods) and hunkers down in the back office of the grocery store to double-time through months of footage hoping to catch a glimpse of the man at the bottom of the lake. Alive.

Holloway watches shoppers living their daily lives in fast forward. Once in a while, he pauses the footage to spot people he knows from the mountain. Steve Keefe from Coldwell Banker. Wayne Carter from Country Furniture. Top Chef Sam from Stone Creek Bistro. Blurry-eyed, Holloway’s cell phone rings. It’s the Print Examiner from the Crime Lab. “I ran your 10-card for fingerprints on your floater... or bottom dweller. Name is Louis P. Del Nagro from Chicago, Illinois. Dishonorably discharged from the Navy in 1991. Series of criminal charges. Ranging from aggravated stalking to suspicion of human trafficking. Served a stint or two. He’s been a free man since February of ’19.”

Holloway thanks him for the info. He skips over the January footage and focuses on February, 2019. Starting at 6 am, Holloway pours through the footage. The vantage point he’s paying attention to is the cashier area which features the cigarette locker. First three weeks of February are a bust, but the 28th is a hit. He rolls back the footage to spot Syringa accompanied by Louis P. Del Nagro. Syringa shyly hangs back while Louis tells the cashier he wants a pack of Marlboro’s. The cashier obliges, grabs the pack, swipes it, and takes Louis’s money. And then, the most surprising thing happens. Syringa calmly holds Louis’s hand and they walk out together -- like father and daughter.



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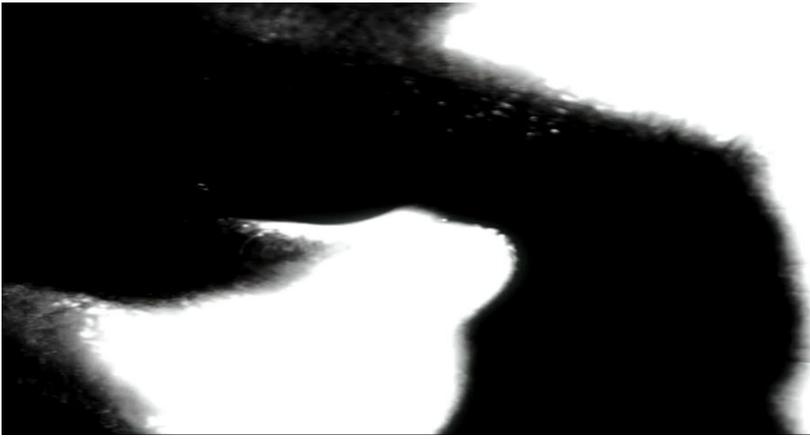
The stark of night gnaws the mountain with more questions than answers. Sergeant Bill Holloway stands on the balcony at the Lake Arrowhead Resort and Spa. He cozies up to a small vat of whiskey in a plastic hotel cup. He is saddened on this chilly evening. A little girl named Syringa is lost or missing in the wilderness somewhere. Dead or alive. The wear and tear on Holloway’s face is almost that of a concerned grandfather. It’s evident. This is a man who cares too much. Loyal to a fault. And every case to him is personal. Especially when it comes to a child...

Holloway tosses the rest of his whiskey over the balcony, shuts the sliding glass door, and hits his knees. He’s taking the time to pray in private. Scrutinizing evidence and chasing leads is one way to come closer to the truth, but Holloway has hit that part in the case where his caring heart is gridlocked with a logician’s mind. The only relief is to say a few prayers and ask for strength for tomorrow. Holloway isn’t an overly religious man, mind you. He’s just a mortal hard-wired to bring justice to victims at all cost.

The next morning, Holloway sits up in bed scribbling notes and time-lines. He’s pouring over all of his findings with hopes of piecing together all loose ends. He’d never admit it to another human being, but Holloway is stumped. He’s in the worst place a seasoned Sergeant can be – at a “dead end.” He puts down his notes and picks up a map of Lake Arrowhead. He refocuses on North Bay and works his eyes counter-clock wise to BlueJay Bay, Fleming Creek, Orchard Creek, to the docking area at the ALA. An idea suddenly strikes Bill Holloway. He remembers that in order to launch a boat in Lake Arrowhead all vessels must undergo a “Quagga and Zebra mussel inspection.” In his mind, if he can gain access to all new launches from February, 2019 and on -- perhaps he can narrow down anyone new on the lake.

Back at ALA, a Rep on the other side of launch ramp enjoys a smoke. After all, February is slow month for clearing boats for mussels. Holloway flashes his credentials and asks for all 2019 launch applications. The ALA Rep doesn’t need to speak to his boss or consult his files. He knows there were only three applicants due to the crush of snow post-Superbowl. The names are “Zak Griffiths”, “Louis P. Del Nagro,” and “Heath Bastin.”

Holloway immediately eliminates Zak Griffiths. Zak’s been away at flight school at the time of Syringa’s disappearance. The former golf pro is happily married to Meghan Hardin from Coldwell Banker. No foul play suspected. Louis P. Del Nagro is the male drown victim. His boat is a 2018 Pontoon. The third boat is a 2001 Bayliner registered to Heath Bastin. ‘Heath’ is a botanical name for a wasteland overgrown with shrubs. ‘Syringa’ is the botanical term for ‘Lilac.’ The same flower on the pink t-shirt. For Holloway, is this a viable connection or a peculiar coincidence? Since Holloway doesn’t do coincidences. Question on the table is... “What is, if any, Heath Bastin’s relationship to Syringa?”



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Sergeant Bill Holloway runs the name “Heath Bastin.” The name linked to a boat launching application filed in February of 2019. His Pontoon is on the eyes and minds of ALA and Holloway. While Holloway was running the name, ALA scours the lake in search of the Pontoon in question. After one counter-clockwise trip around the lake, ALA successfully locates and seizes Heath Bastin’s boat. Turns out, it was illegally parked in a dual slip owned by a heart surgeon who dry-docked

his boat over winter at Kiwi Docks, Inc.

The heart surgeon, as it turns out, slipped on black ice and broke his ankle in January of this year. He’s been on crutches ever since-- immediately clearing him as a suspect in the disappearance of Syringa and the murder of Louis P. Del Nagro. It doesn’t take long for Holloway to establish a relationship between “Heath Bastin” and “Syringa.” According to his arrest record and background check, Heath Bastin was previously charged with two DUIs, and he is the biological father of Syringa Bastin.

Bill Holloway immediately jumps on social media. With one finger, he types in the name “Syringa Bastin.” No person exists on Instagram, Facebook, or Snapchat. Next, he tries the name “Heath Bastin.” Much to his surprise, there is an account for him and it is public. He scours through a handful of pictures. Heath and a young girl. Age 6. The caption, “My heart and soul.” Heath walking in an empty field with a glorious sunset in the foreground. The caption reads, “I’m alone in this wasteland.” The third picture is a table filled with “survival gear.” No caption. The final picture is a handwritten note in a girl’s handwriting. It reads, “I’m leaving this world on Mom’s birthday. It’s time she makes room for me on her cloud.” Holloway takes off his glasses and wipes his tired eyes. It’s hard to tell if he’s struck by emotion or fatigue. Smart money is on both.

Meanwhile, several members of ALA Security cordon off the gangway at the back of the surgeon’s property off Point Hamiltair. Turns out, the Pantoon is illegally docked in a dual slip “in plain sight.” The Smith’s only frequent their home twice a year. New Year’s and 4th of July. The rest of the time the dual dock is open due to weather. It looks like Louis P. Del Nagro took advantage of Dr. Smith’s absence as well as his seasonal neighbors.

Holloway gloves up and notices a second boat is docked in the dual slip. Holloway, “Does this Bayliner belong to the Smith’s?” ALA checks as Holloway focuses on the anchor. It’s missing. When he steps aboard the vessel, he sees a pool of blood. Holloway, “This is where the murder took place.” Just then, he is interrupted by ALA Security. “Sorry to interrupt, Sarge. Dr. Smith, the resident who owns this dual slip, owns a Master Craft XL. This Bayliner is registered to a ‘Heath Bastin.’” Holloway knows the triangle of players is finally set. A drown victim, a missing girl, and a living father. Two burning questions left to answer for the final solve. “Who is the killer... and what was the motive?”.



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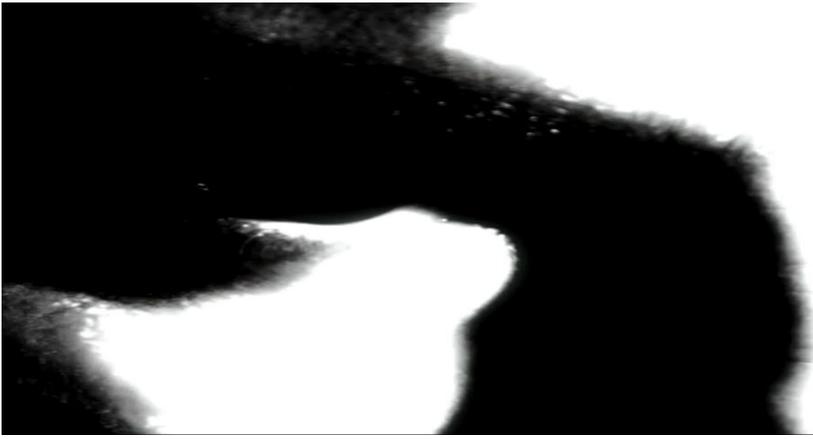
Although a lot of evidence is stacking up in Sergeant Bill Holloway’s favor, he is still sorely deficient in the “missing” category. A 14-year girl, Syringa, is still missing. Her biological father, Heath, is also missing. As well as the lone Blue-Jay who spent considerable time watching the heinous crime take place. Holloway puts an APB out for “Heath Bastin.” He also orders Heath Bastin’s Bayliner and the murder victim’s Pontoon boat be towed. The wet vessels are headed down 210 West to the San Bernardino Crime Lab for analysis.

Once at facility, Holloway gloves up and climbs aboard Syringa’s father’s boat in a secure garage of the crime lab. He slips on a pair of orange goggles and arms himself with an ALS (Alternate Light Source). Holloway shines the CSI-type Blue light on every crevice of the vessel. No signs of blood or trauma on the Bayliner. Holloway begins to open up the hidden compartments. In the glove box, he sees a receipt for the launch and his newly minted ALA card. As he checks the storage benches, he finds the usual. Anchor, life-jackets, bucket, and towels. In a side bench, he finds something odd. A flower bouquet with signs of wilting. A small card is unsealed. Holloway dares to pry. It reads, “Just because Mom left us, doesn’t mean we can’t find each other again. Love, Dad.”

Holloway checks the rest of the benches. He finds a man bag wrapped conspicuously in a dirty towel. He unwraps it and gently slides open the zipper. Inside, he finds a treasure trove of maps, highlight markers, and a confiscated “Missing: Syringa” poster. The maps trace back all the way to Albuquerque, New Mexico. Holloway finds timelines written in Heath’s handwriting. “Home... Date Syringa ran away... First sitting in Phoenix... Rumor she’s headed towards a body of water in SoCal... Check Big Bear... Lake Arrowhead... Follow the signs...”

Holloway surmises that Syringa’s father was looking for her. She was on the run. Her mission was to take her own life on her mother’s birthday. Makes sense. Syringa walked into a café in BlueJay and told the waitress this was “her last day on Earth” which coincides with her mother’s birthday. Holloway begins to piece the puzzle together. Her motive was to leave this world and be with her mother in heaven. Her father’s mission was to rescue her and bring her back home. The drown victim, allegedly, had an altercation with the suspect/victim Louis P. Del Nagro – a known human trafficker.

Questions abound? “Did Syringa defend herself, kill the victim, and dump him in the water and make a heroic escape?” If so, why were they holding hands in Jensen’s Foods? “Did the suspect make her obey his commands in public?” “How did he lure her down from the elevated hammock 40-feet high?” Maybe, the BlueJay knows. Holloway leaves the lab and goes back to where it all started. The tree area near North Bay. When he approaches, he notices something that causes him to kneel. Our eyewitness BlueJay is resting on the ground. Sadly, she’s passed. Foul play not suspected. A broken heart is.



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(“Missing: Syringa” is an original crime story written exclusively for LACC. It will be published in 10 parts. The author, Anthony E. Zuiker, is a resident of Lake Arrowhead and Creator of the hit TV franchise “CSI: Crime Scene Investigation.”)



Sergeant Holloway gently holds a lifeless BlueJay in his gentle hands. As he places her in a shoebox, Holloway hears a peculiar rustling in the trees. It’s a rustle he’s heard before, but has yet to acknowledge. Funny, Holloway never turns to see what or who it is, but he has his suspicions. He just holds his hand up to offer “peace.” This is where the “adroit” in his nickname kicks in. The “cleverness and skillful use of his hands and mind.” We are watching first hand the mystical ways of Holloway at work.

Holloway continues with his ritual to remove the Blue Jay with dignity. He puts the box under his arm and walks her to his car. For now, the old man and eyewitness are going to solve this case together. Holloway calls Dispatch. “Any word on Heath Bastin?” Dispatch calls back immediately, “Affirmative. He’s been pulled over on his way to Big Bear.” Holloway exhales. He’s finally going to get his day in court with this mystery man.

Holloway steps into interrogation with a cuffed Heath Bastin. Holloway, “I’m Sergeant Bill Holloway. I’ve been working Syringa’s case for ten weeks. I understand you’re looking for your daughter. I understand you lost a wife and she lost a mother. I also understand that Syringa is out there somewhere and a man is dead. Can you explain?”

Heath Bastin is desperate to fill in the blanks. He looks tired and yearns to come clean. “When Syringa lost her mother, she lost it. She was in and out of juvenile hall for every violation you can imagine. A few months before the anniversary of her mother’s death, she left me a note that she was going to join her mother in heaven. She ran away. I didn’t want to call the cops because I wanted find her myself. Figured she’d be touched that I went on a crusade to find her without any help from law enforcement. You understand?” Holloway nods. “I don’t. Continue...”

Heath Bastin, “I packed up my truck and boat. I wanted to be prepared on land and water. I tracked her from New Mexico to California. When I finally got eyes on her, I saw her holding hands with a strange man outside a grocery store in Blue Jay. So, I waited and followed them to the lake. When I found out he was keeping her on his Pontoon, I skulled my boat along side his and confronted him. Syringa’s hands were tied behind her back and her bloody mouth was gagged. I tackled him and broke his ribs. Knocked the wind out of him. I took the gag out of her mouth and freed her hands. And Syringa just went crazy. She put him in a headlock and slammed him to the ground. I pushed her away and lifted an anchor and plunged it into his back. Out of rage, I wrapped the rope around his neck and tossed him overboard. And when I went to turn to Syringa, she was gone. She jumped in the water and swam toward North Bay. I never saw her again.”

Holloway sits in solemn silence. "That story certainly explains why we found blood and an isolated hair follicle under her arm of her pink t-shirt. A headlock would certainly validate my findings." Heath Bastin, "I just wanted to save her... I just wanted her to protect her from the evils of the world... And now, I'll never have a chance to tell her how much I love and miss her." Holloway holds impossible silence. Until, he says the unthinkable. "Maybe you will..."

Just then, Syringa walks into the interrogation room. Alive and in the flesh. She's been listening behind the two-way glass the entire time. She bends over and kisses her father gently on his forehead. Syringa, "Thank you, Dad... I was living in the trees when that man camped out for five days until I ran out of food. In the end, all I had was a ration of peanuts that I shared with a friend. When I finally had to climb down, he took me against my will and threatened to kill me if I screamed. So, I played the role... as 'his daughter.' I figured he was going to kill me... I wanted to die anyway so it didn't matter. That is... until, you found me."

Heath Bastin begins to weep in silence. His dirty worn face in desperate need of pure clean tears. Syringa, "You saved me, Dad. So now I'm going to save you. I want to live... and I will be with you forever – even if it's behind bars." Holloway hands over his handkerchief to the father. Heath Bastin, "I don't care about bars. You being alive will always make me a free man."

A moment shared between father and daughter. Holloway shuts his case file holder. Holloway, "I think I can make a case to the D.A. that you acted in best interest to protect your daughter. The evidence certainly supports it. Give me some time and I'll do all in my power to see you get a fair trial." Heath Bastin nods with a deep modicum of appreciation. Holloway turns his eyes toward Syringa. Syringa turns her eyes back towards his. They hold a missing piece of this mystery only they possess in silence.

Epilogue: Hours later, Syringa walks with Holloway across North Bay on foot. Holloway carries the shoe box with the BlueJay inside. Syringa and Holloway don't say much to each other. Until finally, she has to ask. "Hey, old man. How'd you find me anyway?" Holloway, "The BlueJay told me where you were..." Syringa, "What do you mean?" Holloway lifts a much needed smile. "I knew you were watching me from afar. The only way to find you... was for you to find me. And I knew if I treated your friend, here, with the utmost respect, she would bring us together." Syringa doesn't know whether to be impressed or astonished. Holloway puts his hand on her shoulder. "I'm glad you're alive, Syringa." Syringa fights back tears. "Thank you... I just miss my mom..." Holloway understands. No words necessary.

Holloway hits his knees and begins to dig a hole in the soft soil. Syringa joins him. Fingernails dig into dirt. Sweat drips down faces. Heavy hearts pump. When the hole is deep enough, Holloway softly opens the box to reveal the BlueJay at peace. Holloway, "Anything you want to say?" Syringa shakes her head "No." This is tough for her. Holloway has something to say. "No brigadier throughout the year. So civic as the jay. A neighbor and a warrior, too. With shrill felicity." Syringa knows that poem. "The BlueJay by Emily Dickinson." Holloway and Syringa share a moment. They slowly push the dirt into the hole and put the BlueJay to rest. As well as the case of 'Missing: Syringa.' .