

Sweet Revenge



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BY

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by Liese Sherwood-Fabre
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George Henley stepped into the bar and pulled up short. He could feel the other patrons' stares hit him and light him up like a spotlight. In the presence of so much black leather and scruffy beards, his khakis and polo shirt might as well have been neon. So much for being inconspicuous. He was about to act on his urge to turn and flee when a tall, thin man in a leather vest and no shirt sidled up to him.

"You looking for Windom?"

George's eyes twitched. He nodded.

The thin man pointed to a far corner through the thick layer of smoke hanging just above eye level. George threaded his way through the tables and chairs. His loafers made a scritch noise on the beer-stained concrete littered with peanut shells.

His vision adjusting to the dim lighting, he made out a figure, back to the wall, appearing as out of place as George. The man was small, almost effeminate, with long, thin fingers wrapped around a beer glass. George couldn't take his eyes off the fingernails. They gleamed in the dim light as if polished. One hand unwrapped itself from about the glass and gestured to a chair across from the man.

"Have a seat, Mr. Henley," Windom said.

His voice was high and whiney. George was beginning to think this was a wild goose chase. No way could this be the man he wanted.

George pulled the chair out with a scraping sound that echoed throughout the bar. Only when he sat down did pockets of conversation begin bubble about them.

A woman with pale blonde hair plodded over to their table. Two large hoops and several smaller studs decorated her ears. George guessed her to be in her early twenties, though she resembled a very tired thirty.

"What you want to drink?" she asked through a large wad of gum.

George cleared his throat. "Beer."

Windom waved his hand over his own glass. The nails reflected the red and blue glow from the beer sign over the bar. "I'm fine."

The waitress cracked her gum and swayed back to the bar.

"So, Mr. Henley, tell me about yourself."

"Huh?"

"I like to get to know my clients. It makes it a little less...impersonal."

George shifted in his seat. He just wanted to make the arrangements and go.

"What do you want to know?"

Windom shrugged. "Let's start simple. What do you do for a living?"

The waitress returned and slapped a beer mug on the table. The foam sloshed over the top and slid down its side, forming a puddle around the glass.

She snapped her gum.

"Three-fifty."

"Keep the change," George said, handing her a five.

With another crack of her gum, she was gone.

George studied the mug and grimaced. Something floated about in the beer.

"What do you do for a living, Mr. Henley?"

George's gaze jerked back to Windom's face. The man was smirking at him, as if he already knew the answer and just wanted to see if he could catch him in a lie.

"I own, *owned*, a chain of laundromats."

"Ah, an entrepreneur."

"Yeah, I guess you could call me that."

Windom leaned back in his chair, his gaze fixed on George. His hand rose to his chin, and his fingernails caressed his pale, sunken cheeks. George's mouth felt like cotton. He took a sip of beer, despite its extra condiment.

"Married?"

"No. Divorced. Betsy, my wife, said I didn't understand her."

Windom again smirked.

"What man can say he truly understands the fairer sex?"

"Fairer. Right. Wasn't anything fair about her. She took me to the cleaners."

"Taking a laundromat owner to the cleaners. How droll. She the reason you're here?"

Before replying, George glanced back over his shoulder. The black-garbed patrons had all resumed what appeared to be their usual activities. One

group congregated about a pool table in the opposite corner. Most gathered at the far end of the bar, staring at the snow-flecked image on a TV mounted overhead. One man appeared to sleeping face-down on a table.

“Not her. Her husband. My partner. My former partner. Karl.”

Windom leaned forward on the table. He put his face close enough to George’s, he could smell the beer on his breath. “So he took your wife and your business.”

George rolled his shoulders and studied the flotsam in his beer. “You got it.”

“And you want revenge.”

“Not just revenge. I want him to suffer.”

A smile stretched across Windom’s face, revealing two straight rows of gleaming white teeth. “That can be arranged. Imagine him gasping, trying to catch air and cling to life even as it flows out of numerous wounds.”

“Yeah.” George’s reply came with a sigh that was almost orgasmic.

He glanced about him again, licked his lips, and asked, “How much?”

“Five hundred thousand dollars. Two-fifty now. Two-fifty a month after the job’s completed.”

“*Half a million dollars!*” George’s voice was almost a screech. He could feel the whole room turn and stare at him. He hunched down into the collar of his polo shirt and forced his voice to a whisper.

“I don’t have that kind of money.”

Windom leaned even closer to him. His voice was almost a hiss. “Do you think it’s easy for me? I live off the grid, deal strictly in cash. No credit, no record of any type on me. Legally, I don’t exist. That’s what you’re paying for. A totally untraceable assassin.”

He leaned back in the chair again and waved his hand about the bar. “Any of these fine gentlemen would be willing to accomplish the task for a fraction of my fee.”

A few of those seated near them scowled in their direction. Windom ignored them.

“I will tell the result, however. There will be evidence. A fingerprint, a fiber, something to trace back to him. Once arrested, he won’t remain silent, take the blame—not even if it were his own mother.”

“And you won’t talk?”

“Won’t have to. *I’ve never been caught.*”

“You mean, you’ve...”

“Hundreds of times. I told you, I live off the grid. And that takes money. I do this for my own survival. My fee reflects my skill. *No one* will suspect foul play. It will appear as an unfortunate accident and never be traced to either me...or you.”

George picked up his mug and drained it. “I’ll get the money together. Just tell me what you need to know.”



George let himself into his apartment and loosened his tie, letting it hang about his neck. He studied the sparse, second-hand furnishings. *What a dump.* He’d sold everything Betsy-the-bimbo hadn’t fleeced from him in the divorce, mortgaged what he had left of his business, and scraped together the first half of Windom’s fee. He was living at poverty level while that shyster lived off his quarter million dollars. If only he could’ve predicted the future, he’d have saved himself a bundle.

Karl was dead all right. Betsy-the-bimbo, too. But Windom had nothing to do with it. They’d been mauled by a dog in a park. A goddamned dog. He kicked the leg of the flimsy coffee table, and it scuttered across the greasy, matted shag carpet.

He just arrived back from the funeral. Closed casket, of course. The whispers circulating among the mourners were that the medical examiner had had a hard time telling them apart at the scene (they’d been wearing his-and-hers jogging suits). They needed an autopsy for final identification.

George’s stomach rolled.

He went into the bathroom, took a bottle of Pepto out of the medicine cabinet, and chugged down half of it. When he closed the cabinet, he nearly jumped out of his skin. Windom’s reflection appeared behind him in the mirror.

“Jesus H. Christ,” George said. “Where’d you come from?”

Windom smiled. “It’s not where, but why. I’ve come to remind you about the rest of my fee.”

George spun around. His face darkened.

“Look, as far as I’m concerned, you’re not getting another cent from me. In fact, I want my money back.”

“You’re not satisfied with my service? I even threw in a little extra. Took care of your ex-wife as well.”

“Took care? You didn’t ‘take care’ of anything.”

“They’re dead, aren’t they?”

“Yeah, by a dog.”

George started to push past him and marched into the kitchen. Pulling open the refrigerator door, he selected a bottle from a six-pack. He shoved the door closed, turned around, and found himself staring into Windom’s eyes again.

“Your former partner is dead. I want my money. I’ll be here in exactly twenty-five days at six-thirty in the evening.”

George ducked past Windom and stood in the middle of the room, his mind already forming a plan. “It’s going to take time to get it together. I’m still Betsy’s beneficiary. She hadn’t changed any of the policies or anything, but it still takes time. Probate and all.”

“I told you I’d come for it a month after the death. I’ll be back in twenty-five days.”

He walked towards the door and paused just inside. George expected him to give a little bow, like those butler guys in old movies. Instead Windom set his gaze on him. “See you then.”

With that, he was alone. It was then George realized he’d been holding his breath. He let it out in one slow exhale. He moved to the tattered sleeper-sofa, still opened into a bed, and slumped onto its thin mattress. He’d already decided Windom wasn’t getting another cent of his money. The man had cheated him out of all he was going to get. George straightened his back. Windom wasn’t the first who’d tried to swindle him. He hadn’t become the king of the coin-ops without meeting such frauds in the past. What had surprised him was the audacity of the man to actually demand the rest of the money.

George smiled.

He knew exactly how to take care of swindlers. Pulling himself off the mattress, he went to the refrigerator for another beer.



George paced in a circle about his stuffy, one-room apartment. Despite having already made huge crescents of sweat under each arm, he kept his sports jacket on. He glanced up at the ceiling fan. The blades spun, moving the air, but not enough to cool him off.

With each circuit, he checked the time on the plastic clock over the refrigerator. At exactly six-thirty, the apartment door opened. The sunset’s red blaze silhouetted Windom’s figure. It took time for George’s sight to readjust after Windom closed the door. When it did, he found himself

staring into the assassin's eyes once again, red glints like the sunset flashing in them.

"My money?" Windom asked.

"You don't mess around, do you? Don't you want a beer or something?"

"I want my money."

"I'll get it. I just thought—"

Windom looked out the front window. "I have things to do. I want it now."

George shrugged and pulled a suitcase out of the closet. He set the case on the sofa and zipped open the lid. Windom walked reverently towards the case, his upper lip curled back.

He ran a finger over the neatly banded stacks and hissed through his teeth. "Excellent."

"You said you've got to leave," George said behind him in a husky voice. "Close it up and get out."

"I'm so glad you agreed to pay the rest of my fee," Windom said, leaning forward to shut the case. "I hate to have to argue with my clients—"

George pulled a gun from inside his pants waistband and struck Windom on the side of the head. The man dropped, face down, at his feet. Without hesitating, George pointed the gun at his head and fired, point-blank. The smell of gun powder and singed hair assaulted George's nostrils. George gave him a kick in the side for good measure. He checked the ticket in his jacket pocket and finished zipping the case. If only Windom had been happy with the first two-hundred and fifty thousand.

"Fool me once, shame on you," George said, aiming his foot for a second blow to Windom's body, "Fool me twice—"

Before he could complete his thought, Windom flipped onto his back and grabbed his foot. With one twist, George fell to the floor, and Windom popped up to tower over him. Windom's foot landed square onto George's chest.

"Shame on me," Windom said.

"You're dead! You have to be. I shot you point blank."

Windom raised his foot and brought it down hard onto George's chest, shoving the air out of his lungs. "You think you're the first to try and back out of a deal with me? I completed my part of the bargain. Your former partner and wife are dead."

His foot ground into George's sternum, making his lungs burn as he tried to catch his breath. He managed to gasp out a few words. "Dog. Killed. 'Em."

The pressure on his chest increased.

“It wasn’t a dog. It was a wolf. You think it was happenstance *they* were the ones attacked? Other people were there.” Windom leaned forward, putting his elbow on his knee. “I told you, hire me and no one would suspect foul play. No one would trace their murders to you...or me.”

“You? Wolf?”

“Yes. Me. Wolf. Did you think it coincidence I said I would collect one month after the murder?”

He lowered his face towards George’s. George heard something in his chest crack. Black spots danced in the small distance between them. “One month. One lunar cycle. From one full moon to the next. And guess what tonight is?” Windom’s gaze shifted to the window. “Only a few minutes to sunset...and moon rise.”

He returned his gaze to George. His eyes glowed in the darkening room. Reaching through the space between them, he ran a fingernail down George’s throat. His nails were longer than George remembered them.

“I’ve learned from experience that despite my best effort to meet my clients’ demands, they balk at paying the full fee. Arranging for the second payment during a full moon allows me to tie up any loose ends. I can’t have anyone bragging they got the better of me.”

George raised his head. Blood flecked the spittle foaming at the edges of his mouth. He forced out a few words. “Take. Money. Let. Me. Go.”

Windom clucked his tongue. “Can’t. Bad for business.” His gaze shot to the window again. “Tell you what I will do. I’m a sport. I’ll give you a running start.”

The pressure on George’s chest disappeared. He took a deep breath and a knife-sharp pain stabbed into his left rib-cage. With his right arm, he pulled himself to a sitting position.

Windom held out a hand. Long hairs graced his knuckles. “Car keys, please.”

George fished the keys out of his jacket pocket. His gaze landed on the pistol lying next to him.

“Please,” Windom said with a sigh. “Don’t even think of trying that again. Silver bullets required. Not easily obtained in this day and age. If I were you, I’d be going. I’d guess you have about ten minutes.”

George pushed himself off the floor and onto the sofa. Pain pierced his left side and radiated to every part of his body. Even the ends of his hair hurt.

Windom stepped back and watched with an amused expression. “Nine minutes.”

George willed himself to a standing position and staggered to the front door. He limp-dragged himself across the apartment complex's asphalt parking lot. The damp night air condensed in small drops on his face. Picking up speed, he could feel a slick coating form on his face and run down his neck. He took air in quick, shallow breaths. Reaching the other side of the lot, he pushed his way through a hedge and onto a grassy incline leading to a highway entrance ramp. He could hear the cars rushing past. Cars. Escape.

He heard a howl behind him and forced himself into a slow trot, taking breaths in big gulps. He thought he heard growling over the whine of the tires. He continued moving, despite the sounds of panting behind him.

Halfway up the incline, an animal tugged first at his pants' leg and then grabbed his ankle. His panic rising, George kicked a foot backwards and connected with his pursuer. With great satisfaction, he heard a yelp. Focusing on a spot at the top of the incline at the edge of the ramp, he stumbled forward.

Another bite. This time, harder. George pulled on his leg, and Windom sank his fangs into his ankle. With a scream, George fell face down into the grass. His fingers dug into the ground as Windom jerked his leg, pulling him back down the slope. George watched the passing headlights dip below his horizon. With a deep growl, the wolf leaped onto his back. Passing traffic muffled George's screams.



The wolf crept back to the edge of the parking lot. Crouching low behind the hedge, its yellow eyes shifted left and right. Sensing no movement, it slowly made its way back to the opened door of George's apartment, leaving a trail of blood-stained paw prints across the asphalt.

Just inside the door, it stopped again and surveyed the room. Its gaze settled on the suitcase lying on the sofa where George had left it.

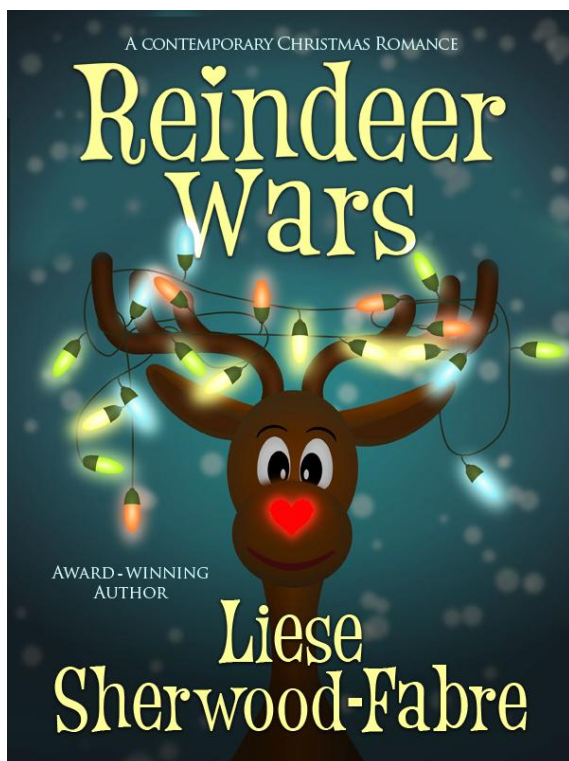
Using its snout and teeth, the wolf pulled the zipper to open the case. After sniffing the bills, it pushed one packet to the floor. The band around the bundle broke, and the breeze from the ceiling fan scattered the pieces about the room. Windom gave a howl so loud that all the other dogs in the neighborhood responded. Precisely cut pieces of newspaper and one one-hundred dollar bill danced about his paws.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Award-winning author Liese Sherwood-Fabre knew she was destined to write when she received an A+ in the second grade for her story about Dick, Jane, and Sally's ruined picnic. She lived and worked abroad for more than fifteen years before returning to Texas and seriously pursuing her writing career.

You can read about all her books and sign up for her newsletter on her [website](#). You can also follow her on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Goodreads](#).

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