

Ink Spot

by Kevin Anderson

I'm a lot of things, adulterer, barroom brawler, and -- if you count the war -- killer. But I'm no liar, and it rubbed me wrong to have to fib to my granddaughter when she asked me who was the strangest person to ever come into my shop. Telling her the truth would have been kindred to a sin. No twelve-year-old needs to know that the things going bump in the night aren't always products of a youngster's imagination. My granddaughter doesn't need to know that monsters are real.

Hell, I'm in my fifties, and I wish I didn't know. But there is no going back -- not after that night.

It started out like any other. The sun fell out of the sky fast, plunging the 6th Street club district in Austin, Texas, into darkness -- the kind that seemed to be an open invitation for the city's night things. Young neo-punkers and club-hoppers spilled out thick onto the street that Friday night. All believed the night was theirs. All believed they could live forever.

I own the Ink Spot Tattoo and Piercing Parlor on the south end of 6th street. There is a head-shop on my left and new age book store to the right where all the young Wiccans seem to gather. I see them as they walk by my window -- their long hair resting on flowing cloaks. Makes me wish I were twenty again.

On this particular August evening, I had just walked into the shop after my semi-nightly viewing of the Mexican free-tailed bats leaving the Congress Avenue Bridge. I had seen it a thousand times, but it never ceased to fill me with wonder, watching that black cloud of just over a million bats leaving all at once in search for food.

"How were the bats?" my assistant Chloe asked.

"Hungry." It was my standard reply.

She checked out early that night leaving me alone to pierce and tattoo the dozen or so college kids that would eventually stagger in.

By a little past eleven, there were three girls in the waiting room and one in my chair. I was doing a quick touch up of a rose that had faded from too much exposure to spring break, when out of the corner of my eye I saw a very tall black woman speaking with the girls in the waiting area. Didn't notice her come in, but the hum of the needle draws most of my focus.

When I had a second to look up, she was handing out money. Each girl quickly snatched an unknown amount of cash from the stranger and promptly left my establishment. Then the women had the gall to turn my open sign to closed.

By this point, my blood pressure was about ready to do a Mt. St. Helens.

She casually walked to the back of the store, as if what she had done was the most natural thing in the world. Without addressing me, she looked down at the girl in my chair. "Sweetie. How 'bout you come back some other evenin' and it'll be on me."

The girl in the chair looked at the two hundred-dollar bills the tall woman was holding out to her -- then back at me. With a sigh, I held up my hands in surrender, and she jumped out of the chair.

In the span of a moment, I was alone with this tall, gaunt woman. Her hair was cut so tight around her

scalp I swear it was painted on. She wore a black leather mini-skirt, patent black boots, a tight fitting blouse with a macabre array of zippers and a long scarf, completely concealing her slender neck. She looked Caribbean or Creole -- probably from New Orleans or thereabouts.

Still pretty pissed, I gazed into her brown eyes. "You just sent about a thousand dollars worth of business out the door, honey. Can you give me one good reason why I don't bounce your butt outta here?"

She reached into her coffin-shaped purse and pulled out two thousand-dollar bills. I had never seen a thousand-dollar bill, let alone two.

I tried to get my bug eyes under control as she said, "I need a piercing done. I heard you were quite good."

In the greedy glare of all those zeros, my anger evaporated. "So you need a piercing, do ya," I said as I grabbed the bills, tucking them into my shirt pocket.

"Yes. First things first, though. The security cameras, they feed into a VCR?" She pointed to the three cameras mounted around the shop.

"Yeah. Won't be much help to the cops catchin' the guy who blows my brains out if they weren't." I pointed to the VCR strapped under my worktable.

She stepped forward bent over and popped the tape out. "If you don't mind?" Fact was I did mind, but there was two thousand dollars in my pocket that seemed to scream, *No ya don't, dummy!* The bills won out.

"What kind of piercing do you have in mind?"

"Not me." She grinned showing teeth. "Him." She gestured to the front of the shop.

Standing in my waiting room was a dead man. That was my first thought anyway, but when it started walking toward me, I thought — okay, it's a walking dead man.

As the man approached, it was painfully clear he was very ill. His skin was snow white and dripping with sweat. It was a hot August night, but not that hot, not by a long ways. When he was about halfway to us, his body went into some kind of convulsion, slumping against the wall.

Creole Lady rushed forward, and put his arm over her shoulder, then dragged him to the chair. Strong gal. Stronger than she looked.

"What's the matter with him?"

"Doesn't travel well. He'll be fine."

His face was pale and ghostly. I could see dark veins just under translucent skin, as if the blood inside of them had stopped flowing a while ago. I wanted to say this boy needs a mortician, not a piercing, but I settled for, "I think he needs a doctor."

"They can't help him," she countered. "Now let's get this done." I looked into the man's eyes. They were hauntingly gray and old. Very old.

I realized at that point that I wanted Creole Lady and Zombie Man out of my shop as fast as I could get them gone. "All right, I have a selection of stainless steel posts, studs, and hoops over here. What did -"

"No, I have one," she interrupted. From inside her purse she pulled out a small leather box.

Embroidered on the top was an Ankh -- big and ancient looking. It wasn't an uncommon symbol, especially after that movie with David Bowie that I never got around to seeing. It's supposed to be Egyptian or some such thing -- means everlasting life.

Pulling the lid back, she revealed a chrome metallic-looking post of a very thick gauge. "That's a bit big for a new piercing," I offered.

"It doesn't matter. Just do it," she barked.

I put on some rubber gloves and retrieved the thing from the creepy little box. "I need to sterilize it."

"No need. It's taken care of." She snapped the box closed as the dead man in my chair started to convulse again. "Besides, there isn't time."

He writhed in his seat and leaned forward almost with his head between his knees until the spasms stopped. As he sat back, his eyes seemed to fixate on my throat. His mouth dropped open and released a soft sigh. I swear he was watching the blood flow in my neck.

With my attention captivated by Zombie Man, I failed to notice from where Creole Lady had pulled a set of handcuffs. By the time I noticed what the gal was doing, she had just finished cuffing her friend's hands to the chair. The clinking sound of the cuffs closing reminded me how much I wanted them out of my shop.

"Hey now. I don't know what you two are into, but I don't do anything weird. Look, maybe we should do this some other time. Your friend here seems real sick, and to be honest, a little creepy. So..."

If my mama has told me once, she told me a thousand times, *if it don't feel right, it ain't right*. The small 22-caliber pistol Creole Lady was now pointing at my nose seemed to echo Mama's sentiment. Damn, I really should have listened to her more.

"No more screwing around. Get it done. Now!" demanded Creole lady.

It wasn't the first time a gun had been thrust in my face, but it was the first time I didn't ever for even a minute question the gun owner's willingness to use it.

"All right. Where does it go?" I tried to sound cool. Not sure if I was successful.

"Left eyebrow will do," she snapped then pointed with the gun.

I leaned forward to mark the spot with a pen when he suddenly lurched outward with his mouth and snapped at my throat like a rabid dog.

"Jesus! I can't do anything with him bouncing around like that."

Creole Lady seemed to have a moment of indecision, but just a moment. In an obviously practiced move, she took up a position behind the chair and swiftly wrapped her free arm around Zombie Man's neck. Her other hand kept the gun waving in my face.

"Let's get on with it," she snarled with locked teeth.

I tossed the pen to the ground and took up my piercing blade. As I pinched the skin above the man's eyebrow I heard a soft fracturing sound. I glanced down at the man's open mouth and watched in horror as his canine teeth grew a full inch.

"What the hell is he?" I screamed and recoiled.

"Pop, you got less than a minute to get this done or we're both real dead!" Her eyes met mine, and I could see that I wasn't the only one about to piss their pants.

When I heard the splintering sounds again I tried not to look, but couldn't help myself. His mouth was open wider than was possible and the rest of his jagged ivory was growing. His teeth looked like inmates during a prison break, scattering in all directions – escaping the confinement in the once human mouth.

"Do it!" I heard someone scream.

I reached up for his eyebrow again and my fingers slipped off. First, I thought it was the man's sweat that was making him slippery, but as I took a harder look, my jaw dropped open with a gasp.

There was hair growing out of his forehead. Thin at first but in seconds it merged with his hairline and became as thick as anyone's scalp.

Then the real noise started. Bone cracking sounds came from his whole body as he started to reconstruct from the inside out. His mouth started to push forward, becoming a snout barely able to restrain its teeth. The skin covering his convulsing fingers splintered and cracked as claws forced their way out of the tips, like new-born reptiles bursting through eggshells.

"Do it!" came the voice again.

"I can't even see his eyebrow any more! Lord, have mercy!"

Diving in, I made a hole somewhere about the eyebrow – or where the eyebrow used to be. As fast as I could, I shoved the unsterilized post in the hole as a set of teeth snapped at my arm.

I heard the sound of breaking metal and I saw one of his clawed hands, now free, flailing wildly. The torn half of the handcuff still encircled the wrist, which was covered with thick and still growing fur. I fell out of my chair, hoping to stay out of the monster's grasp.

Creole Lady dropped the gun and used her other arm to try to restrain the flailing hair covered hand. As she grasped at it, the claws and hair started to retract. After several more violent moments, filled with thrashing and God help me, howling, their hands finally met in the air and their fingers intertwined, like long-lost lovers.

The beast's face began to fade away and in its place was one that started to look human. I got a few seconds glance at what a Neanderthal might have looked like as the inhuman snout and teeth retracted, leaving large hairy cheekbones and brow, framing the man's face. In a moment more, even those disappeared, sinking back into the normal folds of human expression.

I pulled my butt off the ground as Creole Lady uncuffed her companion's other hand.

He stretched like someone waking from a long nap, looking much better than he did when he came in. He looked alive. "Was I a bother?" he said to Creole Lady.

"No, sweetie." She kissed his forehead. "We were running a bit late, that's all. Won't happen again. Promise."

He spun in the chair and looked at himself in the mirror. "Very nice," he said, touching the new pierced eyebrow.

Creole Lady must have read the confusion on my face. "He doesn't have it under control yet. The silver helps." She smiled, turned to her companion. "Lets go. You're on stage in a half hour." She dropped a

couple of tickets in the chair and said, "Come check out the show, pops."

"No, thanks. I'm a Crosby, Stills and Nash man."

"Suit yourself." As I watched the two exit my shop, arm-in-arm, Creole Lady stopped at the entrance and changed my closed sign back to open. Then as quickly as they had come, they were gone.

I stared at the reflection of the full moon in the glass of my front window just listening to my heart pound. After my circulatory system returned to its normal rhythm, or as close as I would ever get to it again, I looked down at the tickets. They read – *One night only at The Bone Yard – The musical stylings of THE LON CHANEY JUNIORS.*

Yes sir, I'll tell you what, that is one tale I won't be telling my grandbabies.

Copyright © Kevin Anderson 2004

About the Author (updated 8/5/05):

Kevin Anderson got a late start in fiction writing but in the last three years his work has been published more than forty times appearing in such publications as *Surreal Magazine*, *The Book of Dark Wisdom*, *Deathgrip: Exit Laughing*, *Darkness Rising 2005*, *Farthing*, and the *Vacant Funhouse*. Anderson has been published alongside notable authors such as Ramsey Campbell, William F. Nolan, Tim Lebbon, F. Paul Wilson, Nancy Kilpatrick, Thomas Deja and Mort Castle. Anderson earned a B.A. in Mass Communication with a minor in Media Production from CSUF and attended graduate courses at Texas A&M in the field of Marketing Management. As an advertising and marketing professional for the last thirteen years, Anderson has written award winning copy for TV and radio. He currently lives and writes in Menifee, California, sharing a humble residence with his beautiful wife, Hope, and three year-old daughter, Avalon Rain. For more on Anderson, please visit his [website](#).

Lone Star Stories * Fiction and Poetry with a Texas Twist * Webzine Copyright © 2003-2004

[Home](#) | [Current Issue](#) | [Past Issues](#) | [Staff](#) | [Submissions](#) | [Contact](#) | [Links](#)