

Murder in Paradise

By: Aaron Alvarez

Beep! Beep! Beep! The dreaded sound of the everyday alarm ringing in my ears. I extend my left arm over and hit the off button, hard, with no remorse. Then the radio starts blaring. “Good morning, Nantucket! It is currently seven a.m. with a beautiful blue sky on this Monday, July 7th. Some breaking news this morning, as residents inform us of a large police presence along the Sconset Bluff. Police have barricaded the walking path and are actively diverting traffic away from the area. You may experience a longer commute time, but do not worry as we have the perfect playlist to brighten your mood. Up next is “A Pocket Full of Sunshine!”

My eyes shoot open, and I sit up in bed faster than when I was training to be a Navy SEAL. Did the broadcaster just say Sconset Bluff? Nantucket is known for being a haven for the overly rich who want a summer escape. The island is relatively safe and occasionally an arrest is made for a tax evasion. Which is the precise reason why three years ago I bought a cottage on the island to escape to. So why such a large police presence? Suddenly my phone rings and I know instantly its my boss calling me in. “Hello?” I ask, still groggy from the nights sleep. “Special Agent Valencourt, I’m aware this is your vacation time; however, you are needed at Sconset Bluff immediately. You will be given the details when you arrive. Henderson is already on the scene.” I say, “Yes Sir” and proceed to get dressed. I grab my gun and badge from the nightstand, kiss my wife goodbye, and drive my stereotypical black ford expedition the seven miles to the bluff.

Upon arrival I am greeted by my partner Charlie Henderson. Charlie and I were SEALS together and later became agents stationed at the Boston division for homicide. We have known

each other for almost 20 years. The two of us are inseparable and our family's vacation together on Nantucket every summer, staying in separate cottages.

“Hey Valencourt, this is a gruesome one. The worst I've seen in a long time.” Henderson studders with a shaky voice.

“You okay, Henderson? You don't look so good.”

Henderson lets out a short snort and says “Yeah man, my lady attempted to make haddock last night and I think my stomach is reaping the consequences of letting her cook. Anyways the body is down on the beach, right this way.”

I follow close behind and listen as Henderson fills me in. “The body was found this morning by a young woman and her dog walking the beach during low tide. At first the woman believed it to be an old fishing tarp buried in the sand. However, when she moved closer, she saw strands of hair sticking through the top of the tarp.”

“So, the body is wrapped and buried?”

“You tell me Valencourt” Henderson says pointing to the scene.

The body is wrapped loosely in what looks to be a fishing tarp and buried in a shallow grave. The high tide throughout the night must have removed a layer of sand and brought the tarp to the surface.

Footsteps approach from behind and I hear a clearing of someone's throat. Henderson and I turn around and we are greeted by the local medical examiner. “Hello gentlemen. I wish it were under different circumstances, but it is nice to finally meet the two F.B.I agents Nantucket

has grown to love. I am Dr. Rodger Brenan, and I am the medical examiner for Nantucket Island.”

“It’s nice to meet you Dr. Brenan I am Agent Valencourt, and this is my partner, Agent Henderson.” We both shake Dr. Brenan’s hand and get straight to work.

Henderson gives a detailed account of what we know so far while Dr. Brenan listens and begins to examine the body. He looks quickly at the tarp, pulling back a portion revealing the victims face, then says in a strong English accent, “Well gentlemen before I begin my assessment there are two things, I can tell you rather quickly. First the victim appears to have been dead no more than twenty-four hours.”

“And the second?” I ask.

Dr. Brenan continues, “The second is that with the place of discovery being so open there is a high probability of losing any potential DNA evidence, I suggest we remove the body from the grave, keeping it wrapped in the tarp and bring it to my lab.”

I nod agreeing and call into headquarters in Boston requesting a forensics team to be sent as soon as possible.

“Okay Dr. Brenan the forensics team will be landing on the tarmac in 40 minutes. Until then should we preserve what we can by enclosing the body and immediate surroundings with a canopy?”

“Yes sir, that sounds like a smart move.”

Fifty minutes pass and the forensics team arrive. We give them all the information that we have, and standby as they help Dr. Brenan move the body into the medical van. Dr. Brenan

says goodbye and that he will call when he has an update. Henderson and I stay behind and supervise for three more hours while evidence is collected, and potential witnesses are questioned.

“Hey man, I’m assuming it’s going to be a while before the examiner can give us any information. Do you want to come back to my cottage and chill for a bit?” Just as I was about to respond to Henderson’s tone-deaf question, my phone rings.

“Hello, this is Valencourt.”

“Hi Agent Valencourt, this is Dr. Brennan can you come to the lab? We have found quite a few discoveries, as well as the identity of the victim.”

“Yes sir, Agent Henderson and I will be right there.”

After a five-minute drive, we arrive at the Nantucket medical examiner lab.

Dr. Brennan greets us at the door. “Thank you for coming so quickly.”

I nod and ask, “You said you already have a positive I.D?”

Looking down and rather sad Dr. Brennan says, “Unfortunately, yes. As you know well, this is a small island. Everyone knows everything about everybody. As I removed the tarp from the victim it became clear that this is a female between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. When laid flat on the examination table I found a locket in her right hand.”

“A locket?” Henderson asks, with an expression on his face that I can’t quite read.

“Yes sir. Out of pure curiosity I decided to open it before consulting with forensics and I am glad that I did. Here, take a look.” Dr. Brennan hands me the locket, and on the inside is an inscription that reads “Madison, I will love you forever. CH.”

“So, the victims first name is Madison.”

“Yes sir. The fingerprints of the victim match those of Madison Buckingham of the Buckingham real estate mogul.”

I’m dumbfounded and millions of questions are rushing through my head. I look at Henderson who looks as though he is about to vomit and watch as he struggles to form words.

“You, you said you had more discoveries?”

“Yes. I was able to get scrapings from underneath the fingernails as well as remove three foreign hairs from the victim’s shirt. All these things have been sent to forensics. I also discovered that her last meal was haddock, mashed potatoes, broccoli, and white wine. I’m not sure how much that helps your case. Moving onto the biggest discovery, the cause of death. Blunt force trauma to the occipital bone was my initial conclusion. However, after continuing the autopsy I discovered early stages of healing as well as sand in her trachea and lungs.”

Henderson asks, “So what are you saying doc?”

Dr. Brennan looks sick himself and replies, “What I am saying is that the victim suffered a blow to the head that would have immediately rendered her unconscious. The suspect probably assumed Madison was dead and panicked. They put her in a tarp and buried her alive in a shallow grave. With the presence of sand in her lungs as well as inside the tarp, Madison likely woke up and chose to fight for her life. Sand collapsed onto her as she tried to free her arms and ultimately, she suffocated to death.”

I pause, take a deep breath and access the information I have just been given. “I need to ask forensics if they found any signs of a struggle or a hard object that could cause someone to go unconscious when struck.” “We also need to inform Madisons parents of their loss.”

Henderson agrees and as we are notifying the family, I am pulled away due to my boss calling.

“Agent Valencourt, is Agent Henderson with you?”

Confused I answer, “Yes sir, what’s going on?”

Sternly and with urgency in his voice he replies “Agent Henderson’s DNA was found under the fingernails of the victim. You need to detain him immediately.”

I’m panicking, what does this mean? Suddenly the victims last meal makes sense to me.

“Valencourt, are you there?”

“Yes sir, we are notifying the family now sir. We will head back to headquarters once we are done here.”

Boss sighs, lets out a long-exasperated breath and says, “Don’t tell him anything until you arrive.” He then hangs up and I do exactly as told.

An hour after informing the family, Henderson and I arrive back at the Boston headquarters. My heart feels like its racing at one thousand beats per minute, and I feel as though the tie around my neck is suffocating me. Suffocating, the same way Madison Buckingham died. We walk into the main corridor of the building and our boss immediately approaches us. “Charlie Henderson, you are under arrest for the murder of Madison Buckingham.”

I’m in shock, did Charlie really do this? Charlie looks at me with tears in his eyes and says, “It’s okay Valencourt. I need to come clean. I know what I did and I’m ready to confess.”

The boss and I sit in the interrogation room across from Charlie as he begins to talk.

“I met Madison three years ago when I first purchased the cottage on Nantucket. She was fifteen at the time and reminded me a lot of my younger self. We crossed paths a couple of times that summer, but it wasn’t until the following year on the fourth of July that we saw each other again. We started meeting on her family’s boat at the marina late at night to have a meal and sleep together. This continued for two more years, each summer. This year something changed. She changed. It wasn’t the same. Then suddenly, I found myself standing on her boat after dinner, naked, begging her not to tell my wife what had been happening for three years. I pushed her, just to get her to stop talking. I couldn’t catch her, and she fell onto an anchor hitting the back of her head. There was blood everywhere and I thought she was dead. I panicked, cleaned myself and the boat dock, got dressed, grabbed a fishing tarp, wrapped her in it and drove to the bluff to bury her. I didn’t know she was still alive; I swear! I loved her!”

I’m disgusted and outraged. “Love? She didn’t even know what the hell love was! She had just turned eighteen. She had her whole life ahead of her and you took any chance she had at discovering love. You groomed her and molested her! She was sixteen when you started this! You had the chance to end it and walk away but you didn’t and when she finally understood what you were doing, you killed her. You are thirty-eight Charlie, you are a pedophile, nothing more, and I am disgusted to think that we were partners and best friends.”

“Valencourt, that’s enough.”

I look at my boss and nod, he is right. I’ve said all I need to say. I ask to leave and am given approval. I don’t need to hear or see anymore. The murderer has confessed and the evidence back’s it up. Twenty years that man was my best friend and in two hours everything changed. As I leave headquarters I am once again faced with more questions than answers. One thing I know for certain is that Madison Buckingham will never be forgotten, and I will make sure of that.





