

# **Everybody Has to Die Anyway**

By Leigh Barbour

## **Prologue**

This is the story of my life. Or, rather, the story of my life so far. I've gone through many phases in my life, of which you'll read about. I'm not proud of many things I've done, but I am a very different person now than what I was. As you read my story, try not to judge me, rejoice in my eventual capacity for love.

## **Belinda**

Mrs. Downing was taking a while – much longer than I'd assumed. This is good for her, after all, this house is absolutely miserable. I'd even seen funky mold in the bathroom.

Geez, she just wouldn't give up – kept kicking - strangling her was taking forever. I was saving her from this neighborhood. The houses were so close you could practically see into the neighbor's kitchen while taking a crap.

Yep, putting her out of her misery. You'd think she'd be in a hurry to die, but no; the wire was cutting deep into her neck and she was still struggling even when she must know her fate was determined. So why fight?

Then her dainty foot in her taupe orthopedic shoes kicked one last time and she was still. Kicked the bucket, as they say.

I could now have a serving of the Brunswick stew she'd prepared for me. I

ladled it out of the little pockmarked pot. Grunge lined the thin aluminum lid. How could anybody stand to live like this?

This place had no decorating scheme and the chairs were so old they gave way when you sat on them. Just plopping down might take you all the way to the floor. I shuddered to think I could ever be reduced to this kind of existence.

I had a generous trust fund, well, I sorta had it. I took a spoonful of the stew and enjoyed the taste of the potato pieces and kernels of sweet white corn. Not too spicy - not too tomatoey – just right. She was gone now so I'd rarely get the Virginia favorites – deviled crab, buttermilk pie, and out-of-this world Smithfield ham with the appropriate size home-made biscuits.

Sinewy chicken pieces floated around in the thick broth. She is a good cook – correction - was a good cook. From the kitchen I could see her foot at an unnatural angle. Other than that, she looked darn right peaceful on the floor.

Here's where the work starts. Luckily, I came over here fairly often so it wasn't a problem that my DNA was here. I did the dishes, dried them, and put the stew in a container - she had no disposal - pathetic!

She had an estranged sister which would make it all the much harder for the authorities to figure out where she was. I packed her square circa 1950 suitcase to make it look like she was going away.

I grabbed a sheet from her moth-balled linen closet - probably smelled like that to cover up some disgusting smell. Then I wrapped up her corpse. Her face still looked friendly - she was a nice person - but she reminded me of poverty. And

poverty made me think of where I'd be if my mother robbed me of my birthright, my trust fund that she withheld from me since she didn't approve my lifestyle. Why did I need a job? I tried that several times and management thought they could control my every movement from 9-5. And getting and keeping a job was the only thing that would make her happy.

“Well, commence *schlepping*,” I said to myself. Had to use Yiddish once in a while - the most expressive language in the world. “*Oy vey gevault*.” Took a Yiddish class and wowed the teacher with my prowess. Course I absorbed languages like a sponge in a flood.

What was the big deal? You learned the syntax, a few words, and you were off. After that, all you had to do was converse with a few native speakers or watch TV to get the cadence and rhythm then you were off. At first Arabic was difficult because of the script - since the letters change form depending on where it was found in the word. Course a month in Cairo fixed that. And Chinese was a challenge until I saw the patterns in their writing system and stopped focusing on syntax and conjugating tenses.

Mrs. Downing was heavier than she looked. Occupational hazard, I chuckled at the use of the word occupation and Belinda Seay. Seay – loved it how my last name made people do double takes in Richmond. And I liked responding to the question, “You mean ‘THE Seay Family’?”

Yep, that was me. We were Huguenots and that's part of why we were rich and why my hair was almost black – incongruous with my blue eyes and pale complexion. Buxom with a tiny waist - my hips swayed as I walked (I was told) –

some people called it a sashay. Of course, my critics say I walk that way because ‘I think my shit don’t stink’ or because I got a stick jammed up my ass. Ha ha, jealousy. Truth was I just didn’t care what people thought of me. That didn’t make me very popular on any college campuses.

Finally, I got Mrs. Downing in the trunk of my car along with her ratty ‘older than dirt’ suitcase (although some people valued this stuff and called it vintage). I softly closed the trunk and made sure no tell-tale skirt tails or shoes were trying to get out. I didn’t have to worry since, in this white slum, nobody was bright enough to put two plus two together anyway. Nobody would notice she was gone. Weeks ago I convinced her to visit her long-lost sister. I knew she’d blab it to the old biddies in the neighborhood. Nobody’d miss her for a while and with no body and the fact that she was visiting someone who she had conflicts with – the police would be quite frustrated.

I drove out quietly, careful not to spin out on the gravel driveway. Soon we were on Broad Street, then a right on Libbie, on to River Road to cross the Huguenot Bridge. They’d never look on the other side of the James.

I drove the speed limit so as not to draw attention. Not that this used piece of shit caught anybody’s attention. My mother made sure my allowance wouldn’t let me have a decent car. So I drove this Hoopdie around Richmond.

I pulled onto the dirt road that led to the quarry – knew it well – been here done that. The water was a magnificent turquoise and way too deep to ever find anything in it. And, most importantly, it was so cold bodies didn’t decompose – meaning they’d never float to the top. For me this was a way of honoring the

deceased. Who would want their body floating to the surface? face down? Go through the indignity of an autopsy? Be laid on ice for an indeterminate amount of time so they could catch the murderer? Geez. They were dead already.

I opened the trunk and pulled back the sheet. I'd miss poor Mrs. Downing, but I kept being reminded of her poverty. I hated to be reminded of what could happen to me if my mother took away my trust fund. I was not the type to give blow jobs to some man just to have a nice roof over my head. Not that I didn't like sex, but I didn't want to feel obligated. I didn't want to worry about someone else's happiness.

I dropped Mrs. Downing into the quarry and watched her disappear.

Then I felt it, that feeling of being watched. Instinctive. Foreboding. But then I remembered that it was probably my mother's private investigator. Not to worry. He'd never tell. Whoever he was, my mother would be very generous with him. His lips would be sealed with a very fat check.



Officer Derek Minor watched Belinda Seay as she nonchalantly threw the corpse in the blue waters. They'd never see that victim again. He'd lost Belinda when she'd left her parking lot this morning. She was brilliant - you had to give her that - never took the same route twice. From what he'd seen of her, she was naturally sneaky. Doubtful she saw a tail, just instinctively drove so nobody could catch her, but she usually ended up here so all I had to do was camp out and wait.

Sooner or later she'd appear and dispose of some poor soul.

Thing was, most of her victims had no one looking for them. The police couldn't convict her of murder of somebody who'd never been reported missing. And, somebody with the last name of Seay, scared the living daylights out of everyone – lawyers, police, even judges. That's how life was for Belinda Seay, granddaughter of Claude Seay, who built half of Richmond and his descendants who clandestinely owned most of the city.

Belinda was an interesting character. She wasn't the most beautiful woman in the world, at least not like a supermodel, but she dripped sexuality. Well, the sex appeal of a black widow. Who could get close to her and live?

She'd confounded local law enforcement for years. They were all sure that one day she'd made a mistake - they'd catch her red-handed. But that day hadn't come yet. He'd done research on her. She tested out in the genius range on IQ tests.

Belinda's mother, Imogene, came from poor white trash and was rumored to be manic-depressive. Little known fact - Imogene had been exceptionally abusive to her only daughter. Belinda'd been checked into multiple hospitals on numerous occasions with suspicious injuries. But, money does talk, it sways minds, thwarts justice. Belinda's father was much older than Imogene, and took off shortly after Belinda was born. Detective Minor had snuck into the bowels of the hospitals to find the concealed records of her child abuse. Just like in a popular movie, her mother beat her with bags of oranges. Did Imogene learn it from the torture technique from the popular movie? Or did the writer learn about it from Imogene?

According to the records, Belinda had refused to divulge the secret, but the social worker interviewed Alma, the faithful family servant, and she had given a heartrending account of the abuse. To no avail, the Seay money was too much for any social worker to work around. The abuse continued.



I hadn't seen Jack Edwards for a while. Seeing him would be nice. I drove by College Hall, my old high school. We'd worked out a signal. I'd drive past his classroom, honk, wave then he'd meet me at 4:00 at the Hotel Jefferson. I loved the classiness of the Jefferson, but now I had limited resources. This would be our last time meeting there. From now on it would be the cheap no-tell motel - it would be hard to order champagne and strawberries there.

I pounded on the steering wheel at how pathetic my life was. I'd had to give up my place across from the Country Club of Virginia and relocate to a dump labeled "luxury apartments." I now had a kitchen too tiny to boil water in, natty carpet, paper thin walls, and mini-blinds on the miniscule windows. How could my mom do this to me?

At least she had apologized for the way she treated me before she got on meds. Bi-polar, shmi-polar, she'd just been plain long mean. But if I had to choose, I'd rather be beaten than live with the humiliation of being poor, common, and struggling.

I got to the Hotel Jefferson a little late and found Jack leaning against his car. He was nice-looking, but he was beginning to gray around the gills, though on him it was distinguished; or was I just really horny?

“What’s this?” He stared in disbelief. “Never thought I’d see you in a ride like that.”

Something told me he expected me to laugh. I didn’t.

“Let me guess. Your mother wants you to straighten up and fly right.”

“You got that. Wants me to get a job.”

“Hey, that’s what most of us do.”

Again, I didn’t smile.

Then his face softened. Yep, thought he might lose out on this free pussy. “I get it. You’ll figure it out. Ever considered going back to Georgetown?”

I rolled my eyes. “Studying wasn’t for me.”

“You know, Belinda, everyone else in the world would give anything to be you. Fluent in, what is it, seven languages? Smart as a whip. As rich as anybody can be and I must add, beautiful.”

This was an issue I always had with people who thought they knew me. Nobody ever felt sorry for me because I was rich. Poor kids with abusive parents are pitied, but if you’re rich, no one ever ever ever feels sorry for you. Nor do they think your problems are real.

“I just hope one day you find what really interests you.” His hand touched



my elbow and my mouth watered at the thought of devouring him.



“Hey, Minor,” the lieutenant called. “Since you’re finally back.” He purposely paused. “Yeah, since you’re back from one of your mysterious absences.”

Derek looked up at the lieutenant who was clearly trying to get an emotional response.

He tapped his foot. “Yeah, well. There’s a lady lives down by Horsepen. Her neighbors claim she’s been missing.”

“For how long?”

“That’s the catchy part. They don’t really know. In fact, they don’t really know if she’s missing, but they say about a month.” He shook his head. “I don’t get it, Minor. Anybody else takes that much time off usually gets canned, but not you. The brass really seems to like you.”

“Kay, I’ll get down there ‘n check it out.” Derek grabbed his sportscoat. “Catch you later, Sir.” Then headed out the door.

He knocked on the door of the person who’d made the call. An overweight lady in a floweredy housedress opened the door. “May I help you, sir.”

“Ma’am, I’m Detective Minor with Henrico County and I’m here about a report of a missing person.”

“Oh, of course you are.” Large pieces of food were wedged between her teeth. “I was just having a bite to eat.”

“Yes, first, can you tell me who’s missing?”

“Certainly, sir, it’s the lady who lives next door.” She pointed at the house just a few yards away.

“When was the last time you saw her?”

“Oooh, it’s bound to be more than six weeks now.” She stepped out on the concrete step. “She usually comes over every few days to talk about the weather, you know how neighbors do.”

“Ma’am, could she simply be with family or friends?”

“Oh, why Dottie, doesn’t really have family.” Her eyes widened, then drew down, “She has no chi-ilruns and she’s not in contact with any of her people. Sad and I’ve told her so.”

“Well, I think everybody has some family.”

“Poor Dottie has a sister, but she hasn’t seen her in about forty years. It surprised me when Dottie suddenly began talking about visiting her. I don’t even think she knows where the sister lives.”

“Thanks for that information, Ma’am, what is your neighbor’s name?”

“Her full name is Dorothy Downing. We call her Dottie and she’s lived next

to me for at least 50 years. You see she was married, but he died shortly after they moved in.”

“No nieces or nephews, cousins?”

“None. Would you like to come in? Don’t you know I just made a buttermilk pie and I’d like to serve you a piece since you’re such a nice gentleman.”

“I’m afraid not, ma’am. I’m on a rather tight schedule.”

“Oh, I know ya are. You have that look about you, hurried and important...I see you don’t have a wedding band. You know I have a granddaughter about your age and-”

“I’m sure she’s a nice girl, but about Mrs. Downing.”

“I can tell you the last time I saw her.” She darted into the house and returned with a large calendar. “I keep this calendar on my refrigerator, you know I write everything down. It’s something my son has been asking me to do. Well, he really wants me to get one of those phones ya’ll young people carry around.”

“Do you know which date you saw her last?”

“Yes, you see it was right here.” She pointed to a date. “See it was May sixth. Right here.” She raised her index finger. “I know exactly when it was ‘cause it was the night my son called me to say I’m going to be a great-grandmother.”

“So, the last time you saw her was May sixth?”

“You see my other granddaughter is married but my oldest granddaughter hasn’t met the right one yet-”

“Did you talk to Mrs. Downing on the sixth?”

“No, I saw her through the window, it was in the morning, that is, the morning after I found out about my first great-grandchild. I saw Dottie that morning. I waved, but she didn’t see me. I could see her through the window.” Her eyes lit up. “You know Dottie’s a good cook.”

“Okay, so the last time you saw her was on the morning of the sixth of May.”

“Yes, Officer.” She gave me a wink. “Such a fine young man. I wish you’d let me introduce you to my granddaughter.”

“You wouldn’t happen to have a key, Ma’am?”

“Yes, come to think of it I do have a key.” She touched her finger to her forehead. “Le’me see where I put that thing.” She disappeared into the house.

As Derek looked around at the working-class neighborhood; some houses were taken care of but several of the houses had cars on blocks and some of the houses had more weeds than landscaping.

He looked at the calendar on his phone. And made a notation that Mrs. Downing was last seen on May sixth. There was another notation on that day. He swiped the text to make it bigger. Interesting. That was the day he followed Belinda, lost her, and then saw her at the quarry. Now he knew who she’d put in the quarry.

“Yes, here it is. This is the key she gave me many years ago. I had it under

my recipes.”

“Did Mrs. Downing have any visitors the last day you saw her?”

She squinted her blue eyes. “Yes, yes. I’m glad you asked that. That lovely girl that visits her all the time. I’m not sure what her name is but she visits fairly often.”

“Can you describe her, Ma’am?”

“Oh, she has dark hair, in her mid-twenties. She wears it parted on the side and she wears those clothes, you know the ones that cost so much in the stores-”

“Is she tall or short, do you remember?” He took a deep breath.

“Oh, she’s on the short side, but she wears those shoes that look more like stilts if you ask me. You know, my granddaughter is much more sensible-”

“Do you know the relationship of this young woman to Mrs. Downing?”

“Oh, of course. You see Dottie takes in sewing – some tailoring, hemming, alterations. In fact, she’s made quite a few things for my granddaughter, you know the clothes in the stores don’t fit everyone.”

“So, she did alterations for this young woman?”

“Yes, she does alterations and the like for many people in Richmond. I hope she’s all right. I really miss her. You know we used to talk about everything.”

“I mean, do you think this young woman came for measurements that morning?”

“Oh no, Dottie considered her a friend. Dottie cooks for her and is really the mother the poor girl never had.”

“So, the girl was living there in the house with her?”

“No, Dottie invited her over, you know. Right before she disappeared she told everybody she was making a Brunswick stew. Actually, I was surprised she didn’t bring me over any. When she makes a stew, she makes a mess of it and she always brings me some and the other neighbors too. You know, the way to make a good stew is to use the entire chicken carcass-”

“The key?” Derek held his hand out.

“Of course. Here’s the key and here’s my granddaughter’s number. She’s a lovely girl but she doesn’t get out very much.” She clasped his hand. “Promise me you’ll call her. You two will hit it off.”

“Thanks, Ma’am, I’m busy but I’ll try to give her a ring.”

The house was tiny but neat. Supposedly she’d been cooking the morning of the sixth, but the dishes and pots and pans were all put away.

He turned to look out the back. The backdoor neighbor had a better view of the house than anyone else. If somebody saw something, it would be them.

He rapped on the door. No answer. A car was parked in the driveway meaning somebody was there. He rang the doorbell a few times.

Finally, the door opened and a weed cloud engulfed him.

“Hey, what’s up, Man?” A shirtless young man stood in the doorway. Long

oily hair ran down across his hairless chest. “Are you one of the new neighbors?”

Derek showed his badge.

“Shit, man. Who narked me out?”

“Don’t worry. I’m not vice. I’m investigating a missing person’s report.”

“Somebody’s missing? Yeah, well, you know sometimes people have to get away from things.”

“Yes, the lady in the house behind you. She hasn’t been seen for a while.”

“First, let me tell you I don’t actually live here. I mean I have a crib in the Fan, but you know I’m here because, you know, fuck, the landlord. If the rent is a couple days late, he’s knocking on my door and shit.”

“So, were you here on the sixth of May?”

“Fuck, yeah, I was here. My girlfriend’s birthday is on the fifth and you know I didn’t have enough to buy her a present or take her out, so shit, I had to get out of my apartment. You know how it is. Women.”

“Did you see anything suspicious when you were here? I mean I see you have a clear shot to what’s going on in Mrs. Downing’s house.”

“Well, you know, I don’t want to get anybody in trouble.”

“No, nothing like that, it’s just that her neighbors wanted to know where she was.”

“Yeah, me too. That ole Mrs. Downing was always bringing food by and

shit, you know, sometimes I get the munchies.” He looked at Derek. “I mean, like you’re a cop, so you probably wouldn’t know about the munchies.”

“So, if you saw anything, it would be helpful if you let me know. I mean, somebody at her age, she might be wandering around confused...”

“Yeah, yeah. I feel you.” His eyes moved upward as if trying to remember through the fog of being high. “Yeah. I remember that smoking hot bitch being there. I saw her putting a bunch of old clothes in her car.”

“Old clothes?”

“Let me tell you, dude, this chick has a pair of tatas on her. Shit.”

“Can you describe her?”

“Shit. When you see tits like that, you don’t notice much else.”

“What color was her hair?” This was sounding more and more like Belinda. And yes, he had noticed.

“Dark. Definitely dark. And she was driving a different car than what she used to have. This bitch used to drive a sweet Mercedes 650 XL. Man, I’d like to get in on that action. Big tits and she’d take me riding around in her car. Damn! But that wasn’t the car she was in that day. I figure they must’a repo’d that motherfucker.”

“Are you sure you saw her on May sixth?”

“Yeah. I remember that I was watching her, I call her Tits. I know when it was because my girlfriend called to give me shit while I was watching Tits bending



over to pick up a pile of clothes and I caught an eyeful of that rack. But my girlfriend was giving me a load of shit, right when I was watching Tits.” He touched the back of his head and pulled his greasy locks back. “Shit, if I hadn’t been on the phone I was gonna go over there and offer her my services. I mean, you never know where these things might lead.”

“How were you going to help her?”

“Well, shit that pile of clothes must have been pretty heavy because I saw her struggling to get it into the trunk.”

Derek raised his eyebrows.

“Shit, if Mrs. Downing has taken a hike, guess I won’t see Tits anymore.”

Derek went back to the precinct to type up his notes.

The Lieutenant sauntered over. “Yeah, so, Minor, I smell the Seay girl all over this.”

“And how do you know this?”

“I have my sources.”

Derek tensed. “Checking on me?”

“No. I wouldn’t do that.” The lieutenant smiled wryly.



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