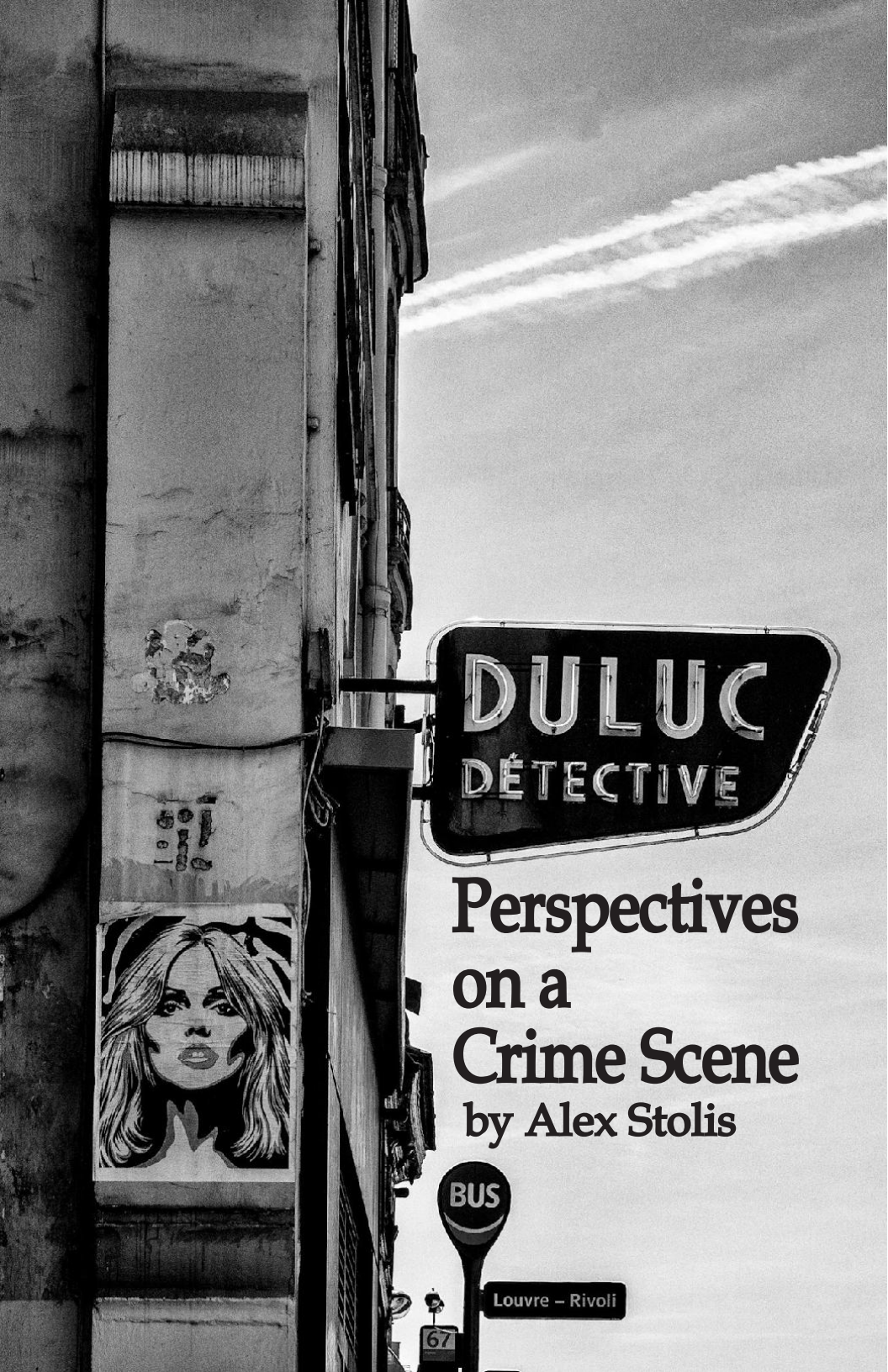

Perspectives on a Crime Scene

by Alex Stolis

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Victim

Do I have to draw a picture? It was a gun it was the sky caving in making cliffs slide into the sea. My legs are numb, too much cash and temptation and even Christ on the Cross wouldn't be able to see as far as we did. I did nothing. I'm not guilty and her sins can't be tattooed on me. In a dark room I'm someone else 's hero. In the light of day I'm undeserving, unrepentant; a step away from obsolete.

Victim's friend

I'm not sure if it was colors or random lines, some geometric force that made him bolt. It wasn't fear but a different breed of cowardice. My baby, he loves a talisman, a holy ghost; loves me in a way that doesn't exist. We were gone long ago but not together. There's a ragged dirt road, desolate white house, black birds nesting in the eaves. It has a barb-wire fence past mending, a sun that never sets. I know it's a dream but that's where I am when I'm not in me.

Eyewitness #1

It was him it was him it was not him the other one. She didn't know couldn't see. White skin pale ash tattoos. It was a knife and money and someone yelled for the cops, somebody else was taking video with their phone. It was a lie, sex & sex & sex & sex & Christ, she was gorgeous. Radio's on, stereo surround sounding. There was thunder. Me, I know he did it. Plain as day she's innocent no way she saw it coming. The curve of her hip met the corner of the sky, there were gunshots; she's gone.

Eyewitness #2

It was bright, for a moment the sun hid behind the bank building, a U-Haul truck honked at a bike who cut in front of him. The bum over there looked, smiled at her as if he knew she was frightened and when the knife's pulled out everyone froze. She was excited her boyfriend/lover/confidant/partner was cocky; the smooth blue of his expectations met her honey brown skin. It exploded in a flash the sky went dark to keep their secret. Traffic slowed, sirens blared and the street cooled down. She cupped her hands around the flame as he lit a cigarette; disappeared under a crush of smoke.

Mother taking her son to school [Mother]

It's his fault. He blames her. He blames JFK and Lee Harvey and 9/11. What do the dead know that we don't. She's not a tightrope walker. She's a stray cat, a not quite slut; looked like a rendezvous of strangers. There's sharp sounds, muffled hallelujahs coming off wicked lips. We will lust. We'll thirst we'll burn the first witness to judgment. It's alright, all good God no longer pays attention to our innermost thoughts.

Mother taking her son to school [Son]

I know the truth but no one will ask me. If you asked I would make sure you never forgot. It wasn't the girl's fault, it was a film running backward, some blurred B&W version of suicide in slow motion. I'm invisible, off balance, non-descript; easily lost in a crowd. He's not as innocent as you think, not a victim of circumstance; has the scar to prove it. God's away on other business. Whoever's responsible will have time to reassemble the evidence into a paint by number world.

Married couple having an argument [Her]

This is what it feels like to be alive. He's no idea. It was Tom Waits sing/talking. She's an orphan with a flair for the dramatic. It's not important. I'm not important. I need to be rocked to sleep, tied up and down; my mind is fire unbound. You'll find the truth, not here. Last time he looked at me, last time he cared, it was about the boys college. Had to be Ivy, a hard-knock history of tradition. Let me tell you the scene. I know it by heart. She's dead wrong, she was craved and coveted; drew that chalk outline around him.

Middle aged couple having an argument [Him]

She says it's not taboo it's not fucking for pleasure it's work. It's a morass, a collage: sin, movie clips retread lyrics. One excuse melts to another to our end result. It happened right there where the side walk's stained; broken glass, burst balloons, spare change. She's magic, not even real. Raven haired, all kohl-eyed Goth-ed out top to bottom. You know it would be different if I was with her now.

Bus Driver

It was Charlie Parker. Yardbird Suite. They've no idea who he is. Everything should still be green but it's turned early fall the birds gone for good. I'm not sorry, everything's got its end. What isn't rubbed smooth by time, by weather, by regret and second-guesses. He knew better. She's bad news from nowhere. No innocent flower, no naive little girl. Stone killer that one. Together they looked like some noir tableau, a Hopper painting. When he got the drop on her she looked straight-edged, full of sin; ready to burn him to the ground.

Cyclist

It's nothing worth remembering. Not a goddamn thing happened in the seconds it took to pass. She was painting her nails a Velvet Underground pale blue. There was a cigarette scar on his forearm I saw it as he kissed the road burns from her fingers. No one could have stopped it from happening; a runaway train and a tinny piano to play the soundtrack. She was beautifully undone, had that sullen look of the un-fuckable. Everyone's guilty of something or they're waiting for somebody to pull the trigger for them.

Man walking a dog

It's normal. It's mundane. It's nothing I haven't seen before a cliché waiting to happen. I swear I heard Firewater singing that Cash cover. It was a sign. The Greeks were right, tragedy needs a chorus. It's every day. It's Folsom Prison, a paraphrase of a declaration of love. There was a beautiful woman in white she didn't say a word her eyes said it all. Someone laid on their horn blasted the birds away. The woman looked scared. I could feel the beat of her heart. I am the chorus. I know all the words.

Woman late for work

I don't have time for this. What a waste. Waste of space, words, waste of skin. She carries the fire. His palms wet, his face flushed shy. Every plot's got a distressed damsel. It was a perfect monochrome diorama, garters and fishnet; layers of gray, silver on black. You know they just fucked. It's dead center in his field of vision. Everybody could see he knew what he was doing even if he denies it. There was sex involved for sure. There's always sex. They still look hungry and bitten; hard, shiny and guilty as sin.

Man who stopped to light a cigarette

I want to be laid in a field of green. Full suit of clothes, rose in my lapel, white. Rose argent white. There will be clouds only a hint of rain, my wife will cry stoically. The same kind of day as today; languid, uncertain of its own destiny. It was not violent. No guns, no knives. No fists. The girl didn't run she was pushed. I'm stalled in flight, left alone and unalive, I could be the last Plantagenet and she would never want me. She's urban Cinderella before the ball, waiting for her Prince of Nothing.

Woman jogging

You're asking the wrong person. I don't care. I didn't then even less now. It's a matter of perspective. Mine happens to be 180 degrees from there. I'm in another city, another planet. You see traffic and street, crime and punishment; I see plateaus and mesas, a vast desert, a sun so low birds flock to the horizon. It's not their world; a dull edged knife, coarse words and lust and greed and gluttony. I saw all of it and they're innocent. We're the guilty ones

Young Man texting

The wind tastes bitter, it's not supposed to be cold. She's that girl on the cover of Candy-O, a stripped down Vargas, a pencil sketch. We're a fierce necessity. We're knock-knock-knocking on heaven's door. Not the Bob Dylan, elegiac version but the GNR pre-delusional Axel Rose version. My phone rings, except phones don't ring anymore, they vibrate and I know it's not her. I'm going to start smoking again. I recognize the caller ID, I've forgotten her number. Used to be burned into the tips of my fingers. I play chicken with cars at the intersection. Someone shouts. A gun shoots. The red light blinks. Blinks. Blinks.

College girl talking on her cell phone

It's none of my business here. She's a hummingbird trapped. My destiny and my love are woven around me. It's an illusion of options and choice, a swift and shallow end. I'm impossibly difficult, an improbable fantasy and yet he wants to marry me fuck me, feel the buzz of me on his fingertips. I've no patience for little boys, small-minded men. The girl there's got the right idea. Dress to kill, take what you can skive, leave them broken. Let their future mother/wife live off the leftover bits, breathe life into the bones and dirt. Let them resurrect the dead.

Group of teens cutting class

I saw you looking at her. Staring at that, wishing, wishing you're him. She reaches out to touch his forearm, you're thinking she's mad about the wrong man. He's not going to picture himself in the back room watching her brush her hair; each stroke a breath that interrupts the silence. You'd love to be the one to steal a sin when everyone's distracted. Miss Rayon says the end is closer to the beginning than we want to believe. Fuck this. Fuck you. Fuck her. It ain't gonna happen. Let's blow this place, drive headfirst into our haloed ghosts; the top down and radio blasting.

Older woman carrying groceries

Past our lips fall the lies. The real story is told in the corners of their eyes. Its there you see the missing persons, the thin dog-eared pages they keep hidden. I haven't ever seen any body die but it doesn't mean they're not dead. Can't help it she's got those feel-sorry-for-me-doe-eyes down pat. Hardly blame a man for trying to help her. Nothing ever looks like it means. One long sunset is stringed to this heart that's seen God be darker than dark. Nothing cures the hands of murder and no angel's been born that can fly into the sun.

Homeless person digging through a trash bin

I am trouble. There are coyotes in the parking lot. The R & B's on deck in the CD player. I am troubled. The coyotes are bony shadows waiting under low slung branches; a squad car prowls around the corner. She's an out of state plate. One cop shines a light by the dumpster, the cop riding shotgun makes a gun with his index finger and thumb. She's untitled undocumented unreported. She's a declarative statement. I am questionable. The shotgun-cop pulls the trigger, shoots the coyotes one two three. They are still. They are beautiful. They will live forever.

Perpetrator

Look at the map of them watching me. That's the real story. You don't want or need mine. Feels good when the camera watches. You're the sculptor, painter, poet. I am the model, an object but never truly real. Someone to be molded, myth -ologized, interpreted. You need an admission, crave logic and reason. Instead, I give you this: how we die a little inside each assumption, supposition. How what we create becomes our beloved. How our beloved is the perfect memory to haunt us. I'm not guilty so there will be no confession. I'm nowhere to be found; I'm invisible and already condemned.

Alex Stolis lives in Minneapolis; he has had poems published in numerous journals. Recent chapbooks include Justice for all, published by Conversation Paperpress (UK) based on the last words of Texas Death Row inmates. Also, Without Dorothy, There is No Going Home from ELJ Publications. Other releases include an e-chapbook, From an iPod found in Canal Park; Duluth, MN, from Right Hand Pointing and The Hum of Geometry from White Knuckle Press. His full length collection Postcards from the Knife Thrower was runner up for the Moon City Poetry Award.

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