

Vanished

A Short Story

By Angela Johnson

Catherine sat in the car waiting. She tried to look nonchalant as she watched the hair salon door and not like the stalker she felt like. Emily Matthews had to be coming out soon. The budget salon that she had gone into specialized in getting you in and out quickly. Catherine would have been hesitant to ever go to a shop that gave haircuts on your lunch hour, but then she was always very particular about her hair.

The bright sunny day had brought just about everyone out this October afternoon eager to enjoy the shirt sleeve temperatures before autumn blew in. The crowd made it harder for Catherine to keep her view of the door unobstructed. She thought about getting out and walking closer to the store fronts but she decided against it. She couldn't be sure that she was the only one waiting for Emily today.

The woman pushing a baby stroller with one hand and holding onto a buoyant toddler with the other paused in front of the shop doors. She carefully maneuvered the stroller around so that she could open the door and then pull the stroller, but as soon as she reached out, the door opened. The woman smiled and said thanks as the door was held open until she and her children were inside. In a moment a woman wearing dark jeans and a fuchsia long sleeved tee shirt, and sporting a flattering short haircut came out. Catherine thought for a moment that her hair actually did look nice.

“Now for the fun part.” She said out loud and grabbed the door handle of her black SUV. Her door shut and she began quickly to stride across the parking lot in the direction of Emily. She had to get to her before she got to her car or she wouldn’t get a chance to talk to her. “Ms. Matthews... Emily.” Catherine called out to her and she was crossing the road to where her car was parked.

“What are you doing here?” she looked at her with a mixture of questioning and annoyance.

Catherine had been so sure it was imperative to talk to Emily Matthews then. But now standing in front of her she was speechless. In the moment that she hesitated and tried to think of what she wanted to say, she saw the car coming.

It was coming down the middle of the aisle and although she had no way to measure it, she knew it was coming at a dangerous speed. The driver had to see that they were coming straight for Emily, who was facing Catherine.

“Look out!” Catherine yelled and Emily quickly looked around. Catherine watched her take two steps out of the aisle towards her car before the impact. The car hit the right rear bumper of a car as it sped forward leaving Emily lying on the ground. Catherine looked as close as she could at the car to embed in her memory everything that she could about it. She had to remember that it was a dark blue BMW sedan with tinted windows and there was no plate where the license plate should have been.

A shopper who had witnessed the hit and run screamed and brought the beginnings of a crowd of onlookers.

“Someone call 911!”

“Lady, are you all right?”

“Did you see what happened? That car deliberately ran her down.”

Catherine could hear the voices of the crowd all talking and asking questions at once in a panic. She knelt down beside the woman who lay unconscious on the ground.

“Emily, Emily. I’m so sorry. I just wanted to ask you why.” Catherine felt her throat tighten as she tried to swallow. She held Emily’s unresponsive hand and waited for help to arrive. “What hospital are you taking her to?” Catherine asked as she followed behind the paramedics pushing the stretcher. The confident looking young man turned to her quickly.

“City General’s closest. You can ask about her at the emergency room.” He said and closed the door to the ambulance in her face as she was about to ask for directions.

“Ma’am excuse me. I’m officer Burns. The lady over there said you were witness. Were you talking to her when this happened?”

“Yes, we were. I was trying to talk to...” Catherine stumbled.

“Just take it slow.” He gave a half smile. “May I get your name first?”

“Catherine La fleur.” She tried to steady her nerves and continued to give the police officer her contact information.

“Are you a friend of the victim?”

“Her name is Emily Matthews. I don’t know where she lives but she works at Scott and Reese.”

“Downtown?” he squinted in the sun’s glare. “The place on the news?”

“Yes, I’m a writer with News magazine and Emily and I have been talking for weeks now.” Catherine almost cringed just before she said the last part. “She’s been a source for a series of articles I’ve been writing.”

“Were you supposed to meet her here or something?”

“No, in court this morning she suddenly changed her story about everything she told me was going on at the firm.” Catherine took a deep breath. “I followed her here and waited to talk to her. She wouldn’t see me outside the courthouse and her cell phone number has been changed.”

The officer looked at her for a moment. “I guess you were pretty upset about that.”

“Sure I was.”

“Could you describe the accident?”

“We were standing right over there. We had stopped for a second when a car turned into this road and came speeding right in our direction.” Catherine paused. “but it was no accident.”

“How’s that?”

“She tried to run to get out of the way, but the car kept coming straight for her.”