

For detective, Greene a girl caught in 'dope beef'

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Ferndale -- "It's a B.S. scenario straight out of Hollywood," the homicide detective told the lawyer. "This ain't Hollywood, it's Detroit."

It wasn't exactly Detroit. The men were sitting in Ferndale. In a bar. On gay night. In a corner booth near the window. Underneath the painting of Marilyn Monroe. Hanging on a blood red wall.

It was late spring, the evening was cold and wet. The meeting between the men was arranged by this reporter at the request of the detective, Mike Carlisle.

Carlisle was good at his job. In his 20 years on the Detroit Police force, Carlisle captured a serial killer who preyed on prostitutes, a fetishist who wore his victims' shoes and a gang of punks who mowed down a woman's cockapoo.

Carlisle was also the last man in charge of tracking down the killer of Tamara "Strawberry" Greene, the stripper at the center of the fabled wild Manoogian Mansion party hosted by then-Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick.

The lawyer was Norman Yatooma, the flamboyant counsel for Greene's family, who is suing the city for \$150 million in federal court, claiming the disgraced Kilpatrick covered up the investigation of her murder because Greene danced at the party and was beaten silly by his wife Carlita.

No evidence of a party has ever come to light. Nor evidence of Greene taking a beating with a high-heel shoe. Nor is there evidence that Greene's death in a drive-by shooting on April 2003 was a hit ordered by City Hall.

Carlisle, who retired from the department a year ago, wanted a meeting with Yatooma. He had some information.

Yatooma arrived late. Despite the wind, his copious and well-groomed hair was still in place. "Is this a gay bar?" he inquired.

Close enough, said the reporter.

"I thought so," Yatooma said, sliding into the booth.

He ordered a hot tea. Carlisle got a beer in a frosty mug.

After some small talk Carlisle cut to the chase. Yatooma was chasing the wrong dog, he said.

"I don't want to get into a pissing match in the newspapers," Carlisle said. "I believe there was a party, but there is not a scintilla of evidence that Strawberry danced at the party, much less that Kilpatrick had her killed."

"Honestly," Yatooma countered. "I don't give a s--- who killed her. I don't even care if she danced at a party. All I have to show is that there was a party, somebody got injured and they covered it up. There's my obstruction and I've won my case."

Carlisle said he believed that a female cop, moonlighting as a stripper, was beaten by Carlita in late September 2002. He remembered having gotten a "cop down" call at home that instructing him to rush to the Manoogian.

"Halfway there, I was told to turn around," Carlisle recalled. "If you subpoena my overtime requests from then, it'll give you a lead."

"Those records would disappear the day I ask for them," Yatooma countered, popping his knuckles, looking over his shoulder, then sipping his tea.

Carlisle handled the Greene case twice. Once in the summer of 2004 until police brass shut it down. When the text message scandal broke that would eventually bring down Kilpatrick, Carlisle was reassigned the case and was told by police brass to take it wherever he needed to take it.

The facts led him to a feud between two men with long records for drugs and violence, he said.

Carlisle believes Greene's killer is Darrett King, a street tough known as Little D. He said as much in court. Carlisle was not able to arrest King in the murder of Greene before he retired, but he was able to send him back to prison on an old case of attempted murder at an east side gas station.

"Do I think Kilpatrick made the case go away?" asked Carlisle, who was smoking like a damp log. "Yes. But not because he had anything to do with Strawberry's killing. As far as her murder goes, she was just a working girl caught in the middle of a dope beef. Like I said, this ain't Hollywood."

"Is it possible the mayor hired this drug dealer to kill Tammy Greene?" Yatooma asked.

"Is it possible?" Carlisle asked with an arch of the eyebrow. "Anything's possible. I guess even life on Mars is hypothetically possible."

"Are you willing to give a deposition?"

"Yes. That's why I'm here."

"Do you have a lawyer?"

"I don't need a lawyer," Carlisle said.

"Why wouldn't you need a lawyer?"

"Because I know the truth and I'll tell it."

It is half a year later and Carlisle -- the man perhaps most intimate with the Strawberry Greene case -- has never been deposed by anyone.

Meanwhile, Yatooma released a sworn deposition earlier this month from a state police investigator who says some 911 dispatch tapes or police computer files went missing from a sealed box in Detroit Police headquarters when he was looking into the rumored party back in 2004.

Beyond his claim of missing tapes, the investigator -- State Police Detective Sgt. Mark Krebs -- offered no hard evidence or any reliable witness to the party.

To date no one has. Carlisle wanted to meet again to express his disgust. Yatooma could not be reached to attend.

Carlisle sat in the same corner this week with a frosty mug and an ashtray. He ordered a salad to go.

"Sooner or later, someone is going to have to subpoena me," he sighed through a Marlboro, the portrait of Marilyn staring down upon him.

"People are trying to get rich off a broke town. Damn be the truth."

Credit: Charlie Leduff The Detroit News

[Illustration]

Retired Detroit homicide Det. Mike Carlisle was on the Tamara Greene case twice. Elizabeth Conley The Detroit News