

INTRODUCTION

This book is dedicated to the brave young men and women, who unselfishly gave of their time, and some, their lives to defend our freedoms. Also to those wild and crazy characters who step outside the norm and do what most of us would never think of doing and have fun while doing it. and through their zany actions, make life fun for the rest of us.

A PROFESSIONAL DIPLOMAT

I grew up in the border town of Brownsville, Texas. I had me a woman and she got it on like an Easter bunny. She rocked me, swept me away. She carried me along to places I'd never been and made me strong; until one night I came home and she told me to fix my own supper and she ran off with the Fuller Brush man. That woman rode me into misery. After she left, I didn't care about tomorrow. To me, tomorrow was just another day.

I don't understand the things I do. I was still a dumb kid who couldn't see farther than the end of his dick. I hated my parents because of my old man. He was making every effort to drink the town dry and he left outta here like his dick was on fire. The last thing I heard him say was, "I'm going to ride the cold wind high and free and this will be the last you will see of me."

He was right. Three months later his body was found floating in the Rio Grande, the truth of his evil deeds silenced forever.

I spent some time in Matamoros, a little border town in Mexico, across the Rio Grande from Brownsville, where I blew my money on a gal with big brown eyes and bigger tits who swore she loved me long enough to get me drunk and in bed. Next morning, she and the money were gone, and I was hungover and broke. So I walked back across the border into Brownsville and I joined the army.

Two years later I finished my stint with Uncle Sam and, like a bad penny, I returned to Brownsville. Times got rough and cotton wasn't selling and I figured all we get is the chance to play the game, not make the rules, so I went into business for myself. While I was away I learned how to kill and I learned it well. I could shoot the eyes out of a snake at one hundred yards.

I found out there was a dark side of our society that had a need for the skills I had and I wasn't shy about hiring myself out. I help people make peace or make war, it don't matter which as long as the money makes it into my account. Business was good. I spent a lot of time in South America assisting our government in removing undesirables from positions of power in countries we needed to control.

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I didn't know my old man had made enemies and that they were looking for something he had and they thought I had it.

It wasn't long before they found me and left me bleeding in an alley behind Lucky's Bar. Two armed Mexicans in civilian clothes rushed around the corner, charging toward me. One was tall and thin and the other one was taller and muscular. He's the one that hit me with his revolver. I guess I should be happy he didn't shoot me. They said they would be back and I had better have their pharmaceuticals. They must have thought they worked for Merck or something. Pharmaceuticals? These beaners couldn't even spell the word. They told me I wouldn't be leaving Brownsville alive if I didn't have it for them by the end of the week. They hit me two more times to make sure I got the message. That was a mistake.

I wasn't going to let these strong-arm deuces come into my town and try to play rooster and beat the crap outta me. I couldn't let 'em get away with it, pharmaceuticals or no pharmaceuticals.

So, a week later I set a trap and sprung it on them.

Late Thursday evening, I watched as a stolen van, the sides advertising a nonexistent plumbing company, pulled to the curb alongside Lucky's Bar. One block away, I watched the two men who were sitting in it smoking cigarettes. They were studying the third-floor window across the street from Lucky's as I studied them. A lone figure was visible moving around the apartment. It was my apartment, I liked to live close to where I spent most of my time, Lucky's, and that figure belonged to Ice Malone, my long time friend.

Soon, the two goons exited the van and walked across the street and into the alley that ran behind my apartment.

I took a deep breath and vaulted through the door into the alley. Crouching I looked up and down the thin strip of dirt and saw them near the rear entrance. There was a commotion at the north end, the river side of town. A figure emerged like a phantom from the dark enclosure and took two quick steps behind them, and swung his club with everything he had. The blow knocked the big guy forward, sending him crashing into the sidewalk with a large gash on the back of his skull. It turned out he was the lucky one that night because we caught up with the second scum bag before he could make it back to the van. He lost a couple of teeth and a lot of memory, and from the beating he took, his own mother wouldn't recognize him.

Ice and I hogtied them and threw them into the back of the plumbing van and drove them over the border, south of Matamoros. We gagged them and pinned notes on each one of them, in case they weren't given a chance to talk. The notes said the next time they showed up in Brownsville, we would send them back in a body bag, cut up into little pieces.

I also left my card in case they might be in need of my services at a later date.

BECOMING A SPOOK

The man in front of me was big with his hair clipped short on the side, military style. He was wearing a white trench coat and a brown hat, brown oxford shoes, white shirt, brown tie, and I assumed he had a government issued revolver on him somewhere.

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He didn't offer his hand and neither did I.

I was wearing my brown Dan Post cowboy boots, brown corduroy sports coat, Wisconsin Badger sweatshirt, Wrangler Jeans, and my silver belt buckle I won for being the runner-up all-around cowboy on the Texas Rodeo Circuit in 1937. I had my Colt .45 belly gun in its rig, situated snugly under my left arm pit. I topped everything off with a white Stetson hat. I looked good.

I had a brandy manhattan in front of me and he had a Scotch and some change. He bought the drinks. It was his meeting.

"Thank you for agreeing to see me, Max. I realize you are a busy man."

"That's true but Harry said it was important. Something to do with national security?"

He ignored my question and asked one of his own.

"You and Lieutenant Harry Marshall pretty tight?"

"I guess. What's this about?"

It was a Monday afternoon, 2:15 p.m. Central Standard Time, to be precise. We were sitting in the back of Rocco's Pub, near the ladies room and close to the phone where I receive most of my calls. My friend and proprietor, Dan Ciorrocco, known as, The Rocco Man, was busy wiping down the bar and filling the cooler with beer, preparing for the evening crowd that would start arriving around 4:00 p.m. It was dark. I asked Rocco to keep the lights turned down and he agreed. This was a secretive meeting.

"Yes, well, I'm Colonel Jack Clarkston, I'm the Assistant Director of the Central Intelligence Agency." He paused to let the importance of that set in, I guess. I stared at him.

He continued. "What do you know about the CIA, Max?"

I thought a moment and realized I didn't know a great deal about the CIA, so I did what I usually do when I found myself lacking knowledge, I lied.

"Quite a bit actually. You are a bunch of weird spooks snooping around in everybody's business trying to overthrow governments of small defenseless nations. How's that's for starters?"

He stared at me nodding his head.

"That's fairly factual. Actually, we gather intelligence. We deal with two types of intelligence gathering. First, there is white intelligence which is information gathered from open sources such as newspapers and magazines and then there is covert intelligence gathering and this is what I am interested in hiring you for, to work directly for me outside the normal channels of the agency. I believe you are the perfect candidate."

"Hire me? What for?"

Clarkston stared at me for an instant before pulling out a cigarette and lighting it. He blew smoke over his head and took a sip of his Scotch.

"Max, you have military and investigative experience. You don't have a family. No siblings, your mother is dead and your father disappeared years ago, most likely died and buried in a pauper's grave somewhere. Your history with women is shaky at best. You don't have a wife or any kids, no attachments. You are familiar with the southwestern states as well as Mexico and South America and you cheat on your taxes. In other words, you are a perfect candidate for covert operations, this operation. We need someone outside the agency, someone we can trust. Are you interested?"

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“And why should I do this?”

“Because you love your country and because we are asking you to do it. You don’t need any special talent or high intelligence. If intelligence, talent, and ability were hereditary, we would have to dig deeply into your family tree to find its source,” he said with a flicker of a grin, “and we don’t have the time to do that.”

I didn’t appreciate his failed attempt at humor.

“I don’t know. I’m making some pretty good money now. I would hate to give it up.”

“Max, we know what you are making and it isn’t what you have been reporting on your tax returns. We don’t care about that. We are willing to pay you twice as much as you brought in last year and we’ll lose the information we have on you so the Treasury Department will not get their hands on it. We don’t play games, Max.”

We looked at each other across the table.

I picked up my brandy and took a big swallow.

“Since you put it that way, I guess I’m your man.”

“Good, that’s good, Max.”

He took another drag on his cigarette and continued to look at me.

“We found over the years a man becomes a spy for different reasons, hatred, anger, political zeal, money, and sex and then some of them are coerced. You exhibit all these qualities. Hell Max, you voted for Senator Joseph McCarthy. In addition to these qualities, you seem to have inner demons which could also help you be successful. This is an opportunity to do something special, something important for your country. Because of your tradecraft, and independent nature, we feel you would be a perfect fit for this job. There is no reverence in what you will do. I have to tell you, now that you are a part of this,

there is no way out. You can't fuck around with these people. They will break you and turn you into something awful.

"I'm just a private dick, Colonel. I'm not a Spook."

"We'll make you one and you will be one of the best. Hap Schultz will join you.

We want you guys to fly under the radar. When someone comes to us saying they have some information relating to this job, we want to send you and Hap, someone who cannot be traced back to us. You set up your network of friends you can trust. No more than ten people. We will train you and pay you well. Tomorrow morning at 8:00 a.m. you and Hap Schultz will meet me in Lieutenant Marshall's office down at the Milwaukee Police Department's 16th Precinct. Don't be late. Hap is being briefed by another agent as we speak.

"Have you heard of a sleeper agent, Max?"

"No, I can't say I have. What is a sleeper agent?"

A Sleeper Agent is an inactive deep-cover agent. What we are about to tell you came from a sleeper agent. It is top secret and if any of this information leaks out, it could cause the death of many people and that will make me angry and you don't want to make me angry, Max.

After you sign these forms I am going to tell you some things and you cannot breathe a word to a soul. You are also going to meet some very powerful people who are going to pass along some top secret information to you and you are going to forget you ever met them. Do you understand?

I nodded my head. I figured I had already forgotten more than I know and forgetting more shouldn't be too much of a problem.

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“Good. Your cover will be that you are traveling and writing about life on the rodeo circuit throughout the southwestern United States, Mexico, and South America. We will assist you in getting jobs as a pickup rider at the different rodeo events. Those where we can’t help you, you will be on your own and will have to figure out how to maneuver around the event. We want you to mingle with the cowboys in the area as well as the people who are putting on the event. You will just be another rodeo junkie while you spook some really bad people.

“Since you are a writer and a former newspaper man your background fits.

“We will teach you a code and provide you with a code book.

“Dan Cirrocco will be your contact. You will leave your encrypted reports here at Rocco’s Pub with Dan. You will learn the code. Mr. Cirrocco will have no idea what the codes mean. He will hand them off to Homicide Detective Harry Marshall who in turn will get them to us.

“We will never leave you naked. We will have friends in the area at all times but you will never know who is covering you.

“Your code name will be Cheese Head.”

“Cheese Head? Where the fuck did you come up with that?”

“It doesn’t matter. All your correspondence will be signed Cheese Head. No exceptions. I’m going to leave now. A car will be out front in fifteen minutes to pick you up and take you to the Pfister Hotel. You will be meeting another Harry, Harry Truman.”

I stared at him in disbelief.

“President Harry Truman?”

David Hesse

“It’s the only one I’m aware of, the man who created the CIA, this Frankenstein I work for. This is big, Max, real big.

“Oh, and by the way, if asked, I was never here. We never talked.”

SPOOKS

THE SPY

He glanced at his watch. It was 11:45 pm and the street was still deserted. He had been standing there for fifteen minutes. It was a Sunday night and the buildings were dark. A lone streetlight cast shadows across the street and sidewalk and he watched the mist as the wind blew it across the yellow beam put forth by the light. It was remarkably quiet. Not a sound. Nothing!

Earlier that evening, the fog moved in and soon after the heavy mist began to fall. The tall thin-faced man pulled the collar of his trench coat up around his neck and pulled down the brim of his hat to keep the dampness out. Nothing about him drew attention. He kept an eye on the phone booth down the street. It was still empty. He reached into his breast pocket and removed a package of Chesterfield cigarettes. He tapped the package on the back of his hand and bent down and removed a stick with his teeth. He replaced the package in his pocket and removed his lighter. He spun the wheel, igniting the flint and a flame shot up momentarily illuminating his lined and

haggard face. He hadn't slept in two days. He snapped the lid shut and returned it to his pocket. The smoke he exhaled was lost in the thick fog that enveloped him.

He looked around. He didn't see anything, but he felt it. He didn't like the feeling. He stuck to the plan to make sure he wasn't followed, but you just never knew. From experience, he knew he couldn't trust anyone and it was one helluva way to live your life.

He glanced at his watch once more. It was 11:53. He took one last drag of his cigarette and flipped it in a nearby puddle. He listened to the brief hiss before the butt was extinguished.

He inhaled deeply and looked to his right and left once again to make sure nobody was around before he moved out. Hurriedly, he crossed the street to the phone booth. He stepped in and closed the door. A light went on. He wrapped his hand in his handkerchief and smashed the light, enveloping him in darkness. He lifted the receiver and dropped in a dime. He knew the number by heart and had dialed it many times in the dark. The phone rang once before it was picked up. There was complete silence on the other end.

The tall man said, "7-1-1-3-4. I've been burned."

"Where are you?"

"Zone three, drop one."

"Stay there."

The line went dead.

He hung up the phone and took a deep breath. He lit up another cigarette and hungrily sucked in the smoke. His throat was raw. He had been smoking too many of these things. He opened the door and tossed it across the sidewalk. He reached under his coat and removed his gun, a 9mm Beretta. He chambered a round and put his hand

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and gun in his outside right coat pocket. Even though he dry cleaned the area he could never be too careful.

Quickly he walked to the corner and turned left heading toward an alley behind an old warehouse. He stepped into the shadows and waited. His mind wandered to his earlier conversation with Serena and he couldn't erase it from his mind.

"Paul, she said, "I have the bona fides, documents that prove the CIA along with a German expat, one of those Paperclip Nazi's, named DeMohrenschildt, a Dallas oil geologist and close friend of Lee Harvey Oswald's, was in on the plot to kill John F. Kennedy and it goes higher than we thought. Paul, this makes me sick."

It had been so long since anyone called him Paul, he had to pause for a moment to gather his thoughts. "Okay, put it together and meet..."

Was that a click on his phone, or hers? "Selena, did you hear that?"

"Yes, I have to go. I'll meet you..."

Those were her last words. He heard her scream and a moment later an unknown voice came on the line.

"You're next Paul. We know where you are."

The line went dead.

It wasn't long before a black Lincoln limousine pulled around the corner and came to a stop in front of the alley. The back door opened as it slowly rolled by and Paul jumped in closing the door behind him.

When he caught his breath he said, "We lost our Asset, Selena. They got to her this morning and they outed me. They called me by name."

As they drove away his handler looked at him and gave him a scotch. "We are going to have to bring you in, Paul."

“Why? I am about to tie this whole thing up. We got ‘em right where we want them. What we gathered isn’t chicken feed. It’s some serious stuff.”

“No, we don’t.”

“What?”

“Your swallow was killed last night. She was beaten and raped and dumped in the East River. They found her body this morning. She is currently at the morgue. Her apartment was trashed and her camera, typewriter, and files are all gone. Nothing.”

The tall man was quiet for a moment, taking this all in. If this was true, all the work he put together for the past year was ruined, compromised. Without supporting documentation, all he had was his word and he would be going up against some of the most formidable men in the world, not just the CIA but the President of the United States himself.

Paul threw back the scotch and looked over at his handler and found himself looking down the barrel of a silencer.

“I’m sorry Paul.”

Ffitt, the sound of the silenced gun was the last thing Paul heard before the .22 caliber slug entered his skull, mixing up what was left of his brain. The slug didn’t exit his skull. It was the perfect caliber round for an execution.

He died instantly.

SUPER WARRIORS: DRUGGED UP GI'S

HOME:

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I felt the liquid creep through my veins and the tension and fear leave my body. I was mellow.

I was trying to escape all the ears in the walls. Every night it was the ears, always the ears.

Yesterday silence was the only friend I had. I thought the bottom was the only place I'd been but I wasn't there yet. No matter how hard I tried I was always behind.

Tommy got into a fist fight. He didn't fare well. His right ear was almost severed and he re-broke his nose and dislocated his ring finger. I didn't know if we would be able to remove his wedding band without cutting it off. I fixed him up the best I could using my wife's sewing kit to sew on what was left of his ear.

Thanks, Doc," he whispered.

That night I watched the needle take another man and I silently cried once again.

Chinese Premier Chou En-lai told the president of Egypt in 1965: "Some American troops are trying opium, and we are helping them. We are planting the best kinds of opium especially for American soldiers in Vietnam...Do you remember when the West imposed opium on us? They fought the war with opium. We are going to fight them with their own weapons."

VIETNAM:

I fell in love with a Saigon butterfly of the night, a whore named Kim Lien and she kept my plumbing clean. She looked like a bottle of cheap wine and worked on Tu Do Street and swore in English like a sailor. But she was mine and I was hers. We had a need and we filled it for each other.

She told me she was a hired wife for a CIA agent in Saigon. "He had a lot of money, money to burn. The CIA was accountable to no one in the United States

government. Congress did not have a clue what money they had or how they spent it. That the CIA was its own government with its own set of rules. He didn't care what happened to his money. He said he could always get more. The mother fucker kicked me out because I could not cook his stew properly. I was not a good housewife, he said."

She told me she started working in tea houses when she was 10 and now she only worked for her father on his Flower Boat, a sampan, and for her brothers who pimped her out on dry land.

She informed me she was 19 but I don't think she was a day over 16.

That night I held her hand for the first time in the bottom of her father's sampan. I kissed her for the first time five minutes later and it was then that I gave her father 300 piasters so we could spend three hours together. I gave him another 100 piasters for some opium. We smoked it before she cleaned my pipes.

I told her I loved her in front of a bar on Tu Do Street with her brother standing on a nearby corner.

I proposed to her in front of the Meyerkord hotel, ranked #11 by the GIs, #10 being the worst and #11 being beyond the call of duty.

We were wed by a Buddhist monk on her father's Flower Boat.

We spent our romantic honeymoon in a hooch I rented for 1200 piasters a month.

I delivered our first child in that hooch two months later. A boy. He didn't look anything like me.

Lien told me, "In my village, they call our son bui doi ("dirt of life"). I am shamed."

I held her close to my chest as she sobbed. We shared a

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joint and made love.

“Don’t worry, Lien everything is going to be all right. Let’s live life like there is no tomorrow because for us, there may not be. Let’s make love all afternoon. I don’t have to be back until this evening.” We shared some opium.

HOME:

I wept at night as I thought of her and my son and what fate had in store for them. I feared my bui doi boy more likely than not, was forced into prostitution along with his mother.

I still meet her in our secret meeting place and our small son joins us. In my mind, miracles can happen. I need miracles.

VIETNAM:

It was 1969, Saigon, South Viet Nam and it was raining, again. It rained every day since we got in country.

“Name’s Pappy Smith,” he said, holding a half-empty bottle of Tiger beer which he told us tasted better than the Viet Cong Bia Hoi.

He had skin like leather and welcomed us to Viet Nam, “You are in for a helluva fight. The average age of a ground pounder over here is 19 years old. The average age of a ground pounder when he is sent home in a body bag is 19 years old. I’m 35 and I have spent three tours in Nam and three years in Korea when I was younger than you are today. I went along with General MacArthur, chasing those fuckin’ slope heads right to the Yalu River before Mr. Truman and the rest of those fuckheads in Washington stopped us. If they woulda’ let us finish business back then, you boys wouldn’t be here today.”

He stopped his orientation long enough to finish off the rest of his Tiger beer.

“You may not believe this, but the sun does shine here once in a while. You boys just missed all the fun, the big Tet Offensive. Of course, it was a huge surprise to the folks back home, and the reporters claimed it was a victory for the NVA even though we won. We set the NVA back quite a bit killing millions of the little Gooks. But you would never know it reading the Washington Post and the rest of the American press. Obviously, to our newspapers, black is white.

“You are all fresh meat, our new Cherry Boys, and I’m your caped superhero and you always trust your caped superheroes, not one of them butter bars back there,” he said jabbing his thumb over his shoulder referring to the gold bars on the shoulders of the new second lieutenants that just arrived and were being processed in behind us.

“I’m telling you up front even if you are on the right track, you will get run over if you just sit there. So always be doing something positive. Be alert it could mean your life and more importantly, mine.”

We knew now when he was around we never sat down.

“Okay, shitheads, let’s saddle up I’m going to show you how to ride the skids. You Cherries will sit in the middle and watch this time. After that, I don’t give a fuck where you sit. Just don’t sit in front of them Door Gunners.”

“Hey you,” Pappy said, pointing in my direction.

I turned around and looked at him and replied, “What, Sarge?”

“You our medic?”

“Yep,” I replied.

He looked at me a bit and finally said, “I don’t know what they told you in doc school back in the states, but here is the real story. You and me go out on the first unsecured insert and stay out and return with the last pickup. You

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and me are on call 24/7, 365 days a year until you either rotate out or you buy the six-by-three farm. I do it because I get the big bucks, you do it because you are the most important man here. We all need you. Now, di di mau, haul ass, and get your shit together."

HOME:

I dreamed of Lien and our son again and woke up crying. My wife asked me if I was okay. I wanted to tell her "Fuck no. What do you think? I'm fucking nuts. I'll never be okay. But I told her, "Yes, everything is fine. I just had a spell."

My wife takes me in her arms and rocks me. She's a good woman and she loves me and I love her too. She thinks it's PTSD that makes me cry. I don't tell her. She wouldn't understand.

"When do you see your grief counselor again?"

"Tuesday."

"Do you think it is helping?"

"I think so," I lied.

"That's good. Do you want to go with me to pick the kids up from school?"

"I looked at her for a moment and said, "No, I think I'll go see what Tommy is up to."

"Please don't do drugs again, please. The kids haven't seen you straight in over a week. They are scared and so am I. Please, please don't go."

I grabbed her and pulled her close. I didn't know what to say. I couldn't lie to her, not anymore. I felt the warmth of her tears soaking my chest. I knew I was going to shoot up with Tommy. "I love you," I said.

I felt like a shit when I left.

VIETNAM:

Our squad consisted of Bizo, Bug, Cotton Top, Dizzy,

Doo Rag, me and Pappy Smith. We didn't know each other's real names and never did. To all of them, I was just Doc.

We were quiet as we contemplated what we were about to do and talked in hushed tones about our families and loved ones, and what we were going to do after our tour was over.

We packed our rucks, drew fresh ammo, cleaned our weapons and filled our Canteens and tied them on the back. For me, being the medic, I made sure my Aid Bag was packed and that I had enough dressings and meds for the next 10 days. Everyone was nervous about what was about to happen.

I passed out twelve Dexedrine to each man. We would be alert!

Then Pappy yelled, "Saddle Up and climb the hill to the pad the birds are on the way."

And then we could hear them, that distinctive sound of the Huey's as they approached the firebase; the chopping sound of their blades getting louder and louder the closer they got. It was at that moment as they were about to descend to pick us up that the adrenaline started to kick in. We got up, crouched over, and ran with our hundred pound rucks, weapons, and ammo toward the birds. We turned around as we got there and jumped on board. We sat with our legs hanging out of the bird; we were no longer Cherry Boys. We talked about the times we went out on recon and how we forced the "Cherries" to sit in the middle.

Once the Huey's arrived and we were situated the bird ascended and the firebase receded as we banked and headed for our LZ.

As we approached the LZ we could see all the activity

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around it, the smoke and artillery fire and then the final dusting by the Cobra gunships flying down below us.

Then it was our turn, the 1st Bird, we made our way down. The Crew Chief and the Door Gunner unleashed their weapons spewing rounds on the LZ and perimeter.

We rode the skids in so we could get off faster and then we made our way to the perimeter to watch and wait until the last bird dropped its load.

HOME:

The needle goes in and I can feel it relieving the pain. I smile and look over at Tommy. Is he dead? I laugh. I don't know why I laugh because I am sad.

I start to shake and my mind goes back to Nam. Then I silently cry.

VIETNAM:

While in Nam, Dizzy would shoot up and get high and we would ask him, "How's the war going, Dizzy? He'd respond saying, 'real smooth. Today we've got ourselves a real mellow war'.

When Dizzy was killed, we tried to convince ourselves that he was just high, in a higher place, that he had taken so much dope that he was up there floating in the clouds somewhere. To help us believe this, we all smoked what was left of Dizzy's dope.

HOME:

I was catching bass and getting drunk the day I found out I was being sent to Viet Nam where I learned to hate my brother. Viet Nam robbed me of my liberty and I realized that I wasn't going to live forever and then I realized that I was as free as I would ever be. You do what you do. It don't mean nuthin'.

VIETNAM:

The bombs started falling pounding my brain and all I

wanted to do was disappear.

I couldn't see the bodies for the clouds of dust. It made me wish I was in Wisconsin drinking Mad Dog 20/20 not caring where I was or what I was doing. I was just a poor boy. Many times I walked away from trouble but I couldn't walk away from this.

My dad told me to do what I could do and do it well. Shit, I don't think this was on his list.

I was holding Pappy Smith's body close to mine while pressing a field dressing against the gaping wound in his stomach, hoping his intestines would stay in. We were waiting for the last bird to drop its load and come back for us. This is why Pappy got the big bucks.

The bird finally arrived. It came with the dust and left with the wind and took the rest of our wounded and Pappy from us. This time Pappy didn't make the last pickup. I was alone.

I tried to shut my eyes and get him out of my sight, but I couldn't.

VIETNAM:

I stared down at the man I killed, more a boy, really. There was a star-shaped hole where his left eye was. His face was bloated. He hung upside down from a branch in the tree he used for his sniper position. Strips of skin were missing from his face; he was thin, like a woman with a concaved chest. His straight black hair was streaked with blood and hung toward the swampy ground below him. I felt nothing, absolutely nothing.

HOME:

I saw Kim Lien standing in the heavy mist ahead of me on the dock by her father's Flower Boat.

"Lien, where are you going?" I sob.

"I'm going to find Tommy. Do you wish to come along?"

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“Yes,” I cry.

She yells at me calling me pretty boy and to hurry. “Di di mau, dep trai.”

She beckons to me with her hand before turning and walking to the boat

I put the needle in my arm one last time and smile before calling to her, “Lien, please wait for me. I can’t make it alone.”

WAR:

You pay for your sins and this war was filled with more than enough sins on both sides.

The Vietnam War was many things and among them, it was a pharmacological war.

A 1969 investigation by Congress found that 15-20 percent of soldiers in Vietnam used heroin regularly and that over 40,000 soldiers returned from Nam as drug addicts.

The armed forces issued over 225 million tablets of stimulants to our troops, mostly Dexedrine (dextroamphetamine), an amphetamine derivative that is nearly twice as strong as the Benzedrine used in WWII.

THE BIG BLACK MAMBA AND THE COBRA GUNSHIP

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, who shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, here am I, send me.” Isaiah 6:8

They promised a ceasefire after Nixon agreed to stop bombing Hanoi and the next day Old Nixon got a taste of the little pastry chef, Ho Chi Minh's, shit donut and got pissed. The North Vietnamese broke their word and launched a mini-Tet Offensive into South Vietnam and now we were going after them.

We crossed the Rach Cai-Bac River that separated Vietnam from Cambodia and set up a firebase FB. The air was full of dust from the hovering Chinooks and incoming Eagle flights. They started dropping more troops off at 010:00 hours and gave us our big orange pill for malaria as we continued setting up our firebase. By midday, they had dropped Charlie and Delta Companies.

We had just finished setting out our claymores and getting ready to settle in for the night when a dark shadow fell over me.

The largest and blackest man I ever saw dropped down beside me. He was blue-black. Strapped around his massive body were two ammo belts hooked together, each belt had one hundred rounds for the 60 he carried that looked like a small .22 caliber rifle in his massive hands.

“Hey honky, I'll be bunkin' with yo tonight.”

I looked down at his feet. “What size are those boots?”

“Fifteen and a half; I wear sixteen but they don't have sixteens, so I took fifteen and a half. Said I could wear track sandals if I don't like it.”

“What's your name?” I asked.

“Johnny Mack Thompson, that's with a P, but you just call me Mamba, everybody does. Big Black Mamba, from Quitman, Georgia,” he said, flashing an enormous grin, exposing large white teeth.

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“Well, Mamba, why don’t you go setup your Claymore and get your ass back here before it gets dark. We are in for a long night.”

Soon he returned and dropped back down beside me and immediately started talking. I was on the verge of learning more about the Big Black Mamba then I cared to know.

“Don’t yo love it here, man? This is my home. The jungle. Don’t make no difference to me, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Africa. This is where I am from and this is where I belong. This is my third tour. Yesterday they issued me a bayonet, man. Did you get one? It’s the first time they issued bayonets in Vietnam. Are they expectin’ some crazy ass shit, or what?”

“Yeah, I got a bayonet. Third tour? Damn man, are you crazy? I’m a short timer. I ETS in three months and no way I’m coming back to this hell hole.

Mamba let out a big laugh, shaking his gigantic head he said, “I ain’t crazy, but I sure am purty and my mamma is the ugliest woman you ever wanna see. I’m tellin’ ya. She beautiful on da’ inside but, yew-eee, she one ugly woman on da outside. That’s why I’m so pretty, ya know? Ugliness skips a generation. It’s a fact. You ever see Mohammad Ali’s momma? She ain’t pretty and Mohammad is so pretty he could be my brother. Shit’s the truth man. I’m 100% pure black and proud of it.

“Yessir, I was here before, playing in Chuck’s backyard. My first tour I volunteered for a couple of them Daniel Boone Missions. I was assigned to the 1st Cav’s LRRP., Long Range Recon Patrol. Only five of us, three of you honkies and two brothers. Man, we were tight. All five of us alone in the middle of all them Lao Dong; they dropped us off in the Fish Hook a couple of clicks off

Pich Nil Pass. You wouldn't believe some of the rabbit trails I been down. We lived on the sharp end of the spear, man. Yep, I know what it's like to be on the sharp end of the spear. We lived on Nuouc Mam and rice every day for two weeks. If we was lucky, we got some fish. I hate that shit man. We killed a pig one day and we roasted it. Best damn BBQ I ever ate, for sure. We had to call in one of them Cobra Gunships to get us out, man. They had us surrounded. We were on the tip of that spear, honky, the tip of the spear.

Man, they sprayed the shit outta them gooks with them two mini guns and 79 launchers. A site to see, my man, a site to see. And fast? Just like a Cobra. Fttt... and then they gone. A hunnerd and seventy they say they go. Yew-ee. We loved to see that snake comin'.

“Let me tell you, honky, we are on the tip of that spear right now, and none of y'all know it yet. Yep, two missions with the 1st Cav's LRRP and I can tell you from first-hand knowledge that we is in for some real shit, man. There are more NVA and Chuck in Cambodia than there are in Vietnam. I saw 'em, man. Scared the shit outta us. Hell, you wouldn't believe the truckloads of supplies and shit the NVA were just driving into Vietnam. That and on barges across the river? Shit,man, it was crazy I'm tellin' ya. There were thousands of 'em and we couldn't do nothin' about it. Rules of fuckin' engagement, man.

It's too quiet out there, honky. I'm tellin' ya, there are some Sappers nearby. I can feel it. It won't be long and we is going to be in for some real shit. We need them Cobra's man, send in the clowns is what I say, send in the fuckin' clowns.

Short Stories

I hear Nixon says we can go in about nineteen miles and then we gotta stop. Can't go no further. More rules of fuckin' engagement, honky. What kinda shit fightin' is that? You have some boy come in your backyard and give you some shit, you gonna bust his ass wherever he goes, even in his own backyard. You white boys don't know how to fight, man. Nineteen miles, shit. That will take us just south of the Neak Luong. I been there before. Bunch of shit happenin' there, man. I'm tellin' y'all in for some real down home fun."

"Well, I want to get this over. I'm ready to leave this jungle home to you, Big Mamba. You can have it."

He laughed that big laugh. Everything about him was big. "You seen some shit, honky?"

"I was at LZ X-Ray, Ia Drang Valley. We chased the bastards right up to the fuckin' Cambodian border and had to stop. Not pursuing them into Cambodia violated every principle of warfare. Rules of engagement? I agree, Mamba, who fights a fuckin' war with a rule book? Not the Viet Cong, I can tell you that. Not the NVA. The bastards are gettin' it this time. On that, you can bet the farm."

"What farm, honky? I live in the city of Quitman. Nearest farm is ten miles away. Here they come, honky."

"Okay, Big Mamba, let's pray and spray."

We put our weapons on full-automatic and opened fire. They wore the green and brown uniforms of the NVA and they came at us in wave after wave. I looked over at Mamba and the barrel of his M60 was white hot and the empty shells were piling up around his massive feet. As I was staring at all the brass, I saw his right foot explode and bits of flesh and blood flew over both of us. I looked up and saw the left side of his face was blown off and he

was covered in blood. Mamba didn't even let out a moan. All he said was, "Shit. Now where am I gonna find another fifteen and a half boot in fuckin' Cambodia? Look at all these little gooks. They got little feet."

I threw a grenade over the bunker. It landed about ten yards in front of us and we could feel the concussion as it exploded.

I told him to hold a compress to his foot, a medic, who was making his rounds, should be by soon. I slapped in another clip and resumed firing. When emptied I ejected the clip and inserted another one. I saw Mamba rise to his feet. He was quivering as he stood. He placed his left hand on the ground as he tried to gain his balance and move towards me. He took his right hand and smiled and flashed me a peace sign. All I could see through the red blood were his white teeth and the peace sign. He started talking, "My mamma makes socks. Them tube socks at the hosiery mill in Quitman. She gonna be mad at Big Mamba for losing his foot. Now I can't wear them socks she makes for me. She gonna be mad, honky. She gonna be mad at Big Mamba."

THE YOUNG APACHE WHO COULD FLY

The Young Apache Who Could Fly

We met in Nam in 1969, He came home sporting a hundred dollar habit. I heard there was something in the chemical makeup of Indians where they couldn't handle alcohol, well, evidently they can't handle drugs either. He couldn't get away from the White Rabbit.

"Before Nam," he said, "I had a dream that I could fly. Did I tell you that, White Eyes? So I jumped off a cliff and flapped my arms like a bird. I did fly until I lost altitude and crashed into the rocks. I broke my wing in two places. When I was assigned to the 101st Screaming Eagles, I told them about me flying and breaking my wing. Sergeant McGuire told me I should have used a parachute. Hell, before I was drafted, I never heard the white man's word, parachute. Apaches do not have a word for parachutes. Sergeant McGuire asked me once if Indians celebrate the 4th of July? He said it's not like you were set free or anything. Sure we do, I said. Yeah, we do.

My dad died in the Philippines, fighting for this country, the same country that tried to kill him for years. Then I went to fight for this country and now it's killing me too. Ha, nobody told me my senior trip would be to Vietnam, White Eyes, nobody told me."

"I know. We were so young when we arrived in country, our balls hadn't dropped. We were still boys when we were chasing Charlie in the swampy rice paddies in the Mekong Delta while the rich college guys were running around campus chasing skirts."

"Ha, they did not know they were missing out on all the fun, did they White Eyes?"

"I guess they didn't."

"Ha, we went in boys and left men, is that not so, White Eyes? At least those of us that left.

I dream, White Eyes, do you know that?"

"Yes, I do. You always did. You told me some of your dreams while we motored along the Mekong River on our way to Laos. I remember."

He saw a small bag of grass sitting on the counter next to a dirty coffee pot, with an inch of thick, black, coffee, scorched from being left on all night, coagulating on the bottom. He got up and walked over and grabbed the grass and looked around for rolling paper.

He found some and rolled a joint. Bending over, he lit it from the pilot light on the gas stove.

"Yeah man," he said dreamily as he slowly took a toke and held his breath. A few seconds later he gasped and the smoke exploded from his mouth.

"Now they're giving tours down that river, into those swampy rice paddies," I told him.

"Hmmm, why would white people want to travel through that swamp? Remember Danny? Danny

McGuire? What an asshole, eh?” He nodded his head dreamily.

“Yeah, he was an ass,” I replied.

“I think I’ll call Danny but what will I say? He’ll ask what’s new and I’ll say nothing what’s new with you? Nothing much he’ll say.”

I looked at him standing there in his dirt stained t-shirt and noticed something under his left sleeve. I pulled the sleeve up and saw the picture of a naked woman tattooed on his arm.

“Who is that?” I asked.

He stared at the tattoo and tried to concentrate. He squinted his eyes, crinkling his forehead.

“Damn, that’s my best friend, Eagle Feather’s, wife. Shit, she had her friend do that. I remember it hurt like hell. Eagle Feather will not be happy.”

“I don’t suppose. Are you all right?”

“The tat hurts a bit.”

“No, I meant you. You know, do you think you can come out of this?”

He looked at me and took a deep toke and sat down on the floor.

“I need to get my wits about me before I try to stand, White Eyes. How did you know where I was and that I was so fucked up?” he asked, as he stood and shuffled into the kitchen scratching his balls and rubbing his stubble of hair on the top of his head. His hair looked like it was cut off with a knife.

The last time I saw him, he had long black hair. He looked like an Apache. Not now.

“I heard on the wind, from the birds, and felt it in the sunlight,” I said.

“Ha. White Eyes. you are not Indian. The wind and birds do not talk to White Eyes, only to Indians.”

“And your sister called. She said the only talking you did was to dogs and old tractors.”

“Ha, I thought my sister might have something to do with it. My sister, how does she know you?” He took another toke, holding his breath before expelling another puff of smoke. The joint was burning down to the clip.

“She said she got my name from some of my letters that were scattered on the floor. Unopened, by the way.”

“Ha. Shit, White Eyes, it smells like rain and feels like hell. Where do I belong, man?”

“I don’t know brother, but I don’t think it’s here.”

I looked at him closely and noticed his face was gray, sagging like wet paper. His eyes were yellow and rimmed in red and held up by multiple bags. It looked like he lost all of his muscle tone. He was an old man at forty.

I noticed the hole in his left arm where all his disability check goes. I watched him last night climbing walls while he sat in a chair and I tried to keep him awake.

He told me when the sun comes up he gets a little spark like he used to but he is running out of time, he just doesn’t know it. I know that any day could be his last. Damn, time goes by so fast.

He’s an Indian, an Apache. He says his home is the hills and the trees around him and the sky is his ceiling that holds the stars and moon above him.

Grass and heroine temporarily take all his troubles away, or so he says, until the evening comes to take him home; but it has also taken his life away.

I wanted to get him to talk to me. Talk about his old life. The Apache ways, the life he loved before the White Rabbit destroyed him.

Short Stories

“Are you a Shaman,” I ask, “or whatever you Apaches call a man who has visions?”

“Yeah man, last week I had this vision. It told me to go to Phoenix. I went and stood on the bridge, waiting for a vision. What river is that, the Gila? My squaw, Pale Moon, came by and asked me what I was doing there. I told her I was waiting for a vision and she was my vision. She took me home and we smoked and I shot up again then she said I was not an Apache no more and she cut my hair.”

His eyes started to well up with tears and soon they were running down his face

“Then we got naked and she held me while the shakes took me where I did not want to go.

I messed up White Eyes, Pale Moon gave me her soul. She tried to love what was left of me but I would not let her. There is nothing left to love, White Eyes. She left me now.”

I felt sorry for him. He started to ramble, a sign he was losing his hold on reality maybe what was left of his life.

“I am not sure of nothing no more just that old folks grow lonesome. I am old White Eyes. When did we ETS? It seems like so long ago. Man, I hated Laos, more than anything. Hot LZ’s, C4, smell of that shitty country still is in my nose. Ha, you would think with everything I snorted up there it would be gone, but it is not. It is like we are still there. I can hear those two M60’s firing from the choppers as they come into the hot LZ. It hurts White Eyes. My head. It hurts.”

I saw his beaded and fringed deerskin jacket lying on the floor. What looked like vomit coated the front and a big cigarette burn on the left sleeve ruined it. He showed that jacket to me a few years ago. He took pride in

wearing it. He told me his mother spent hours putting on the beads, so he would have a beautiful Apache jacket to wear to events. He said that was when he still wanted to be an Apache.

“White Eyes, do you remember the song “White Rabbit” by The Jefferson Airplane? They say that rabbit makes you feel ten feet tall. I often wondered why they didn’t sing about how it felt when you fell ten feet. The fall is hard, White Eyes.”

Today he smelled like death. What happened in Nam, took all the fun out of his life and left him with horrifying memories and his long lost dreams.

“White Eyes, I am on fire and this freight train is running through my head. I need the White Rabbit.”

I light my cigar and watch him as he shoots up. It won’t do any good to try to stop him. I stare at his ancient hollow eyes and want to say, “Hello in there, hello, but I knew it was too late. I would stay with him to the end. It wouldn’t be long now. He was wasting away. He lost so much weight. He wasn’t eating and when I could get him to eat something, he threw it up minutes later. I could hear him in the bathroom.

In a few minutes, he staggered into the room. I noticed he was soaking wet. He’s running out of time, I thought, but he believes there’s a lot more standing here than what he sees live each day.

“White Eyes, I am ready. When the rooster crows, I will be gone.”

I want to say, “Come on, Gray Wolf, you gotta fight this,” but I don’t. I know it’s no use.

“I am overmatched and just plain tired, or maybe just too damn old,” he whispered.

We both searched for words. He spoke first.

Short Stories

“Hey, White Eyes, did I tell you I write poetry?” His voice was beginning to get scratchy and it was losing volume.

“No, you didn’t.”

“Here, listen to this,” he said walking back into the room with a sheet of yellowed paper.

“I call it A Soldier’s Cry. I think it is pretty good. Let me know what you think, brother,” he said as he sank into the couch.

He began to read it to me.

Every night when all is still
I feel a paralyzing chill
I lie awake consumed with fear
Waiting, for those eyes to ‘ppear
I lock and load and wait alone,
On this piece of land I own
Those shining eyes that are so still,
Staring at me from on that hill

Every night they call to me
Taunting me to lose my will,
I vow to fight with my last breath
I’ll fight them ’til my certain death
I close my eyes and see them still
Staring at me from on that hill

All my brothers who dropped and fell,
They lost their lives in this living hell
They were some of America’s best
Those shining eyes put them to rest
They disappeared in this burning pit
And I vowed to them I won’t forget
Never to be heard from ever again

David Hesse

They were some of my best friends

I watch those eyes as they come for me
But I stand fast, I won't flee
I will battle them to my last breath
As did my friends, as bullets ripped their chest
They were some of America's best

They kept their loved ones safe and sound
swallowing bullets, round after round
But here they come those eyes so still
Staring at me from on that hill
I lock and load and wait alone,

Sitting here in fear's cold sweat
Knowing they won't get me yet
Lord, I pray, I'm not done
I pray for one more morning sun

As he finished, the paper dropped from his hand and floated to the floor and his eyes rolled up into his head and he gasped his last breath.

"Don't quit on me, dammit, don't quit on me! You damn Indian, why'd you have to start on this stuff?"

Now tears were rolling down my face. I angrily wiped them away.

I realized through the poem, he was finally able to express the anguish that had been haunting him since 1969.

I took a deep breath and picked up his deerskin jacket and covered him with it, hoping his friend, Eagle Feather, wouldn't see the tattoo of his naked wife.

I reached down and picked up the paper and looked at it. It was blank. He wasn't reading anything.

He had that poem written on his heart and it died with him. As it should, I guess. He suffered long enough.

MY CHET AND MELVIN BERNSTEIN

I'll never forget that day when Melvin Bernstein arrived in Cambodia. It was our first day over the fence. We were attacked by the NVA and the smell of death, mixed with cordite, napalm, crispy critters, and human waste was oppressive.

Before we arrived, we had been operating around the Song Be area in Vietnam and the Viet Cong rarely moved in groups larger than four or five soldiers. Once inside Cambodia, we were in for a surprise as they moved in groups anywhere from 20 to 100. The NVA were in the thousands.

It was the beginning of Monsoon season and it rained constantly with the humidity over 90% and the temperature at 96 degrees with a heat index of 130. We were dusting off a lot of guys due to heat exhaustion.

By that afternoon, the rains started to lift and the sun sparkled off the green vegetation surrounding Brown. It almost had the appearance of a well-kept golf course, almost.

Captain Smedley had ordered an RIF, Recon in force, at first light and we had finished field stripping our weapons. We were drenched in sweat from just walking across the firebase.

Sarge finished his meeting with the Captain and was starting to field strip his M16 and clips and had the pieces

and springs spread out on his poncho and we were passing the time away by talking about a CBS News correspondent we met in Saigon a few weeks back who was walking around in his correspondent's suit, what he considered his combat zone attire, trying to impress all the Red Cross girls and, of course, about going home.

"What's it now, Sarge?" We didn't have to say what "it" was, he knew what we meant. We all knew.

"Fifty-two and a wake-up."

"What's the first thing you are going to do when you get back to the world?"

He thought for a moment before replying, "I'm gonna fill a tub full of hot water, as hot as I can stand it, and dump a full bottle of my little sister's lilac bubble bath into it and I am going to lie there smoking a cigar and sipping whiskey and count my toes."

"You're going to need someone to help you count all them toes, Sarge. Take me with you?" Robbie our RTO, Radio Operator, said.

"Hell, I got someone else in mind to help me do the counting, and it ain't you, Robbie."

"Hey, look at the boot. I do believe our turtle has arrived," Walter Wilson, our 60 grunt said, pointing in the direction of a small GI covered in sweat, walking across the firebase wearing new fatigues and a steel pot. His M16 was pointed toward the ground and he was bent over from all the gear he was carrying on his back. "No way that cherry boy can hump a 60. Shit, no relief for me. Wish the Black Mamba was still here. That beast carried everything and never broke a sweat."

The FNG, fucking new guy, stepped in front of Sarge with his head down and in a soft voice said, "I'm PFC

Short Stories

Melvin Bernstein, sir. Captain Smedley told me to report to you.”

“What did you call me? Don’t you ever call me sir again, those ring knockers back there,” Sarge said, jabbing his thumb back toward the direction Bernstein just came from, “It’s them you call sir, not me. You call me Sarge, dick head, or whatever, but don’t call me sir. You understand, Private?”

“Yessir, I mean, Sarge,” he mumbled in a voice so soft we could hardly hear him.

“You a Heebie?” Wilson asked.

Melvin didn’t look up but nodded his head.

“Damn, I guess that makes us one big melting pot. We had us a real live Apache Indian and a couple of blacks, Swenson is a Swede, Perone is an eye-talian and Jablonski is a Polack and now we have us a Jew,” Wilson said.

“Shut up, Wilson, where are you from, Melvin?” Sarge asked.

“Maryland.”

“You go to college?”

“Yess.., Sarge, Georgetown.”

“Ewwwee, we got us another college man too, Sarge. What’s your degree in?”

“Political Science.”

“That’s good. It will help you survive your little vacation here.”

“Why don’t you get Melvin here settled in, Robbie?”

“Come on, Melvin, I’ll show you around Palm Beach. Did you take your big orange CP pill?”

“Big orange CP pill? What’s that?”

“Birth control, Melvin. If Charlie catches you, he is going to get your cherry and you don’t want to end up pregnant. We got good docs here, but none of them has any experience delivering little baby sans.”

Berstein stared at Robbie, with his mouth open.

“It’s a malaria pill, Melvin. Don’t listen to him,” Wilson told him. “Get your shit together and get back here most ricky-tick. You’re a boonie rat now, Melvin. You are going to earn your CIB, combat infantryman badge, but you better hide that if you ever get back to the states. Those assholes back home hate us almost as much as the slants hate us here.”

Robbie took Melvin around introducing him to all the squad members. When he got to Frankie Perone, Robbie warned, “He’s a double veteran. He went dinky dau so just keep your distance.”

“What do you mean, a double veteran going dinky dau?”

“FNG, you don’t know shit, do you? Double veteran is a crazy mother fucker. He killed a woman after he fucked her. Sarge was real pissed. She was a VC. Perone’s Dinky dau- crazy man, don’t you know? Stay away from him. This place is in his head, man. If he makes it out of here, his mind will stay here. Ain’t right in the head,” Robbie said, tapping his right temple.

We all had a lot of fun at Melvin’s expense. We did everything we could to disrupt his morning rituals. He began each day by sitting up and placing one hand under his chin and the other at the back of his head and he would twist his neck until it would make a popping sound. Next, he would pluck any nose hairs that he could see protruding from his nostrils and then he would squeeze

Short Stories

out a strip of toothpaste exactly the diameter and length of his toothbrush and brush his teeth. After a few minutes of vigorous brushing and swishing of mouthwash, he would slowly and deliberately shave his face of all facial hair. He was the only member of our squad who did not sport a mustache.

“Come on, Melvin, Mr. Charles awaits us. Quit your fuckin’ around and let’s go!” Wilson yelled.

After all his preening, Melvin still looked like shit and we let him know it every day; every day that is until Sarge got it. Sarge was at 39 and a wake-up.

“No boonie hats, guys. Put on the steel pots and your frag vests.”

“Aw, come on Sarge, really? Those fuckin’ pots are heavy.”

“You heard me, Smedley’s orders and each of you pack five frags. Also, we’ll be wearing two bandoliers each with seven clips. Put only nineteen rounds per clip. I don’t want any jams. Make every fourth round a tracer. If you are upset about wearing your pots, you’ll love this. Everyone will be wearing a bandolier of 60 ammo. M16’s don’t fire through this bamboo and we are going to be in the middle of it. Wilson, do you think you can carry a thousand rounds for the 60? We’ll be shootin’ a lot of sticks before we can get at Charlie.”

“I got it, Sarge.”

“Swenson, you got the thumper, the M79 grenade launcher, and the extra barrel for the M60.”

Swenson wiped the sweat from his face and nodded his head. The sun wasn’t up yet and we were already sweating.

“Okay then. Kit Carson will join us today. Perone, you got a Thumper too and you take point with Kit and

Melvin, you'll be walking slack. Make sure we don't leave no evidence, no footprints, no tall grass pushed over, no litter on the ground, no nothing, you got it?"

"Yes, Sarge."

Be ready to move out at 0500 hours. That's it get outta here and saddle up."

"Fuckin' A, Melvin, we are going to mix it up with Charlie again today. It looks like it's beans and dicks for dinner again," Robbie laughed.

At first light, we were already humpin' it looking for signs of Charlie or the NVA. The temperature and humidity were over ninety degrees and it had been raining all night and all morning with no sign of a let-up. We were all covered with black leeches that seemed to be everywhere.

Our Kit Carson Scout was worth his weight in gold. He was a former VC guerilla who changed sides and was trained under the Chieu Hoi, open arms program. He was on a vendetta. He wanted revenge. He was a committed warrior. He was familiar with the terrain in Cambodia and understood VC tactics in setting ambushes and bobby traps. He also knew what VC bases and assembly areas looked like and where they might be

We crossed a red ball, what looked like a main road, and followed a blood trail to a spider hole and Sarge turned to our Kit Carson and said, "Didi mau," – go quickly, and take the mighty mite and shoot some gas down that spider hole before you drop in."

Our Kit went in. Soon we heard a burst of M16 fire and Kit emerged, dragging out a dead VC.

We booby-trapped the body with a couple of finger charges and left it lying in the middle of the trail for when his buddies came back for him. We moved on.

The jungle was very thick, a triple canopy; nothing compared to Vietnam. Sores and bamboo cuts were all over our bodies and feet and sweat continued to pour into our eyes. We tried to stay off the trails but the thick bamboo kept forcing us back to the well-beaten paths.

“I can’t take much more of this,” Robbie said. “Please God, get me out of here alive.”

“Cradle your M16 and flip the safety off just in case,” Sarge commanded in a harsh whisper, as we slowly and deliberately moved forward. We hit a gully that ran next to a river and we continued to the top of a knoll. Then we all froze. Up ahead, just a few yards, we saw what looked like a small footbridge over a creek. There was a sign that looked like it had been written in blood. It read, “My Chet.”

“What does that mean, Sarge?” Melvin asked.

“GI’s Die.”

It wasn’t long before we made enemy contact and found ourselves in a cluster fuck, a real ballgame, and we really had to buckle for our dust.

Sarge pointed to sandal tracks that slid into a gully. The gully wasn’t that big about an eight-foot drop down a muddy trail. It ran about fifty feet to where it went back up a hill on the other side. The river was on our left. Robbie radioed a report back to Captain Smedley in the command post that we encountered a gully and there is a blue line (river) on our left with a boat load of fresh sandal tracks all over the gully”.

Frank Perone said we shouldn’t enter the gully, but Sarge didn’t listen to him. By the time we started to slide down into the muddy gully, Sarge was struggling in the mud to get up the other side. We noticed an enemy bunker across the river facing right at us. Frank Perone put up his

hand to stop the squad from moving further. Robbie dropped back and called Captain Smedley to let him know we discovered an enemy bunker across the blue line pointing directly at us. Then two eight-round-bursts of automatic fire shattered the stillness. Everyone dove to the ground, into the mud. At the first sound of gunfire, you get that sick feeling that grabs you deep inside your stomach while your knees turn to butter and you feel yourself growing weak. Then you make a quick assessment of your body to see if you are hit.

Sarge struggled in the mud to get up the other side of the gully and was unable to survey the area. He turned to lend a hand to, Wilson who was humping our 60 and a thousand rounds of ammo up the hill behind him when an enemy soldier shot Sarge through the back of the head and hit Wilson in the butt. There was total silence. Not another shot was fired for several minutes. During that time we hoped the NVA were running away. They weren't. They formed a banana shaped ambush, completely covering the gully pinning us down.

Before we could call in support fire, our Kit Carson grabbed Wilson and helped him get back up the other side of the gully where our medic began first aid. Wilson told us he saw eight or nine NVA soldiers on top of the other side of the gully and saw one of them shoot Sarge in the back of the head, He confirmed that Sarge was dead. Everyone was quiet. Sarge was a good friend to all of us. He looked out for us. He spoke of his younger sister often. Even though he appeared older, he was only 21 and barely needed to shave. A sick feeling enveloped everyone. The harsh reality that Sarge was gone hit us hard. We were numb.

Short Stories

It was then that Melvin did something that logic couldn't define. One of the things you learn in battle is that the difference between a hero and a coward is an extremely thin line; just because someone was a hero once didn't mean they would be again. Whatever decision they made, they made in a split second with no regard for their own welfare and often without thinking of the consequences. Melvin became a hero. He looked like John Wayne with his M-203A1 on fully automatic he fired a burst and ran to a log and came up behind it firing again. Then, without regard for his life, he threw down his own weapon and ran to Wilson's machine gun that was left halfway up the hill. Melvin knew we needed an M-60 to get out of there. Sarge was dead and Melvin was going to retrieve our M-60 to get the rest of us back to safety. He didn't make it. Just as Melvin went to grab the machine gun a North Vietnamese soldier reached down the hill grabbing the M-60 leaving Melvin weaponless. Melvin dove away from the hill and tried to find cover. There was none.

We looked up along the ridge line and realized that the NVA could have killed us whenever they wanted. They were on the edge of the gully above us and we had nothing to hide behind. Shooting up from the gully did not give us a decent shot at them. The few soldiers that we had on top of our side of the gully were still administering first aid to the wounded and Robbie's radio was jammed.

So the NVA played with us. They started with Melvin. They shot off his trigger finger, then his middle finger on his right hand. Then they started picking away at the side of his face. They took his jaw off, from the ear to the bottom of the mouth. This was over the course of several

hours. We thought Melvin was dead. If he wasn't, he should have been. Melvin made us all proud that day.

Robbie finally got through on the radio and was pleading for an M-60 then for a react, a unit to come to our aid. He finally called in our coordinates so they could rain down holy hell on the NVA and us all in the form of mortar fire.

Finally, the snakes came, the Cobra Gunships, and they took care of business

We ended up with two walking wounded and one wasted, Sarge, and one possible expectant, Melvin, and one with a million-dollar wound, Wilson. He would be going home. We called for a dust off and soon popped some smoke to let the chopper know he was coming to a hot LZ.

The sound of the slick, a UH1 Huey, approaching brought a feeling of relief over what was left of our squad. We loaded our wounded and dead and headed back to Brown.

The next day Sarge would have been at thirty-eight and a wake-up, but he went home early, in a box and he took a part of us all with him.

AN OLD COWBOY JUST DOESN'T KNOW WHEN TO QUIT

AN OLD COWBOY JUST DOESN'T KNOW WHEN TO QUIT

Ol' Jughead Thompson and me were leavin' outta Spooner, Wisconsin heading for Eau Claire for our next rodeo. It was 11:00 pm Friday, August the fourth and we had to be in Eau Claire by 10:00 am Saturday for the draw for Saturday night's rodeo. We got a late start because we had to wait for Jughead to stop pissin' blood.

I been knowin' Jughead for going on thirty years now and I was hopin' he learned a lesson in Spooner. At least he wouldn't take a full finger tuck this time. He would play by the rules. Earlier tonight his bronc stood quietly as he pulled his riggin'. When he nodded, I opened the gate and he got wadded up into the gate. I thought they would give him another chance to nod but before he could get settled back in, that big flathead saw the crack in the gate and he blew out of the chute. His head, neck, and everything just disappeared as he bucked and kicked. For

a moment ol' Jughead actually looked like a bareback rider again until that damn flathead jerked the handhold out of his hand and it wasn't long before Jughead was flat on his back. He was out for a few seconds and didn't remember much when he came to. He said he recalled the horse's head almost touching the ground and then the lights went out.

We picked him up and loaded him in my rig and then I went and got our horses and loaded them before we took off for the Spooner Hospital.

The doctor there in the ER wanted Jughead to spend the night but he didn't want to forfeit his rodeo fee in Eau Claire, so we left. We no sooner hit the outskirts of town when I had to stop so he could piss out some blood.

My name is Bill Toft. My friends call me Buck, or when they are jabbin' at me, Buck Toff. When I was younger, I rode saddle broncs and bare backs, but now I'm too old for that. No way I want to put myself through that pain anymore. My body hurts just gettin' outta' bed every mornin'

We arrived in Eau Claire in the middle of a heavy rain. Jughead drew #88 name of Widow Maker.

"I'm gettin' on that son of a bitch," Jughead declared.

"Don't you think it's about time you acknowledge the corn. You just ain't made out for riding bucking stock. You have a lot of heart, little talent, and no quit in you. Like a bull, you don't know when to quit. That's a recipe for a quick death, little buddy. Let's just stick to being pick up riders and hauling rodeo stock and leave the rest of this shit to the young ones. You ain't going to like hearing this, Jughead, but..."

Short Stories

“Some things are better off left unsaid,” Jughead replied, glaring at me. “But you are going to say it anyway, aren’t you, Buck?”

“Yep, can’t help myself. If you do this, you will be sucking blended food through a straw for the next six months. Worse case, you’re going to end up in the bone orchard.”

“Hell, I still got some kick in me, Buck. I know I can ride this horse. Look at him. That horse looks dead.”

“So do you Jughead. I gotta say this, you lasting eight seconds on that horse is as likely as the Pope leading a gay pride parade.”

“Well, we’ll just see, won’t we?”

“Yep, common sense is like deodorant. The ones that need it the most don’t use it.”

“I assume you are referring to me?”

“Yep, Jughead, I am. Listen, if you feel yourself losing it, just choke that horn, will ya?”

“No way. Ol’ Jughead never has and never will be caught choking the horn. It just won’t happen.”

Well, that ‘ol dead horse threw Jughead ‘bout up to heaven and when he landed, he landed on his head before a hind foot from that bronc landed down on his chest.

I was looking down at Jughead in a crowd of cowboys and he gave me a warm smile as well as a thumbs up. Then I heard someone say, “Okay boys, let’s get as many hands as we can under him and lift him onto the stretcher.”

They put him into what I assumed was an ambulance. I crawled in after him and we took off. The driver was cursing as we hit some pot holes.

“I don’t know if I’m going to survive this one, Buck Toft,” Jughead groaned.

“You’re going to make it, Jughead. I remember that time in Noches, Texas, about twenty years ago, when you were in the recovery room and your spleen ended up in the operating room trash can. You walked away from that one. You’ll walk away from this too. From now on, we will spend our time spreading hay and hauling bucking stock, not trying to ride ‘em.”

Jughead nodded, smiled, and closed his eyes.

“You all right back there?” the driver asked, as the stretcher rolled across the floor and slammed into the side of the vehicle.

The ambulance driver wasn’t actually an ambulance driver, he was tending the beer tent and he had to close it down when they asked him to drive Jughead to the hospital. Actually, it wasn’t an ambulance, it was an old yellow cab and the driver was slurring his words.

“Damn, the gate is closed. Hey, girls, have them boys open that gate,” he yelled. I was sitting next to him. He turned around and was holding a can of Blatz Beer.

“How’s he doing?”

“Not good, he’s rolling around like a damned billiard ball,” I yelled.

“God damn right it’s rolling. We’ll get him there in no time. Now don’t let him die on me. He’s pretty old to be doin’ this, ridin’ broncs, ain’t he?”

“That’s what I’ve been tryin’ to tell him.”

Turns out Jughead didn’t last the ride. I don’t know if it was the ride on the bronc or the ride in that old Yellow Cab that did him in, but deep down in my heart, I know’d it was his stubbornness that finally did him in. He just didn’t know when to quit. I think the good Lord finally did him a favor calling him home but I sure am going to miss that boy.

BUCKAROO FROM AHEAD OF THE GAME

I wrapped the leather strap around my wrist until it was good and tight. My hat was pulled down as far as it would go and I adjusted my chaps. I was known for my hat always being on my head at the end of my rides, something I was proud of.

It was 1957 and I was leading in points for the all-around cowboy award with only two more events to go before the end of the season. Barring any unforeseen accidents, I was a shoo-in to beat Beanie Franklin who had won the title three years running. I looked forward to getting the silver buckle, silver studded saddle and bridle as well as the nice check that was waiting for the winner. Saying nothing about a chance of crawling in the sack with that little rodeo queen from Austin who was sitting in the crowd today.

It was Austin Texas and it was hot. Austin is a rodeo town, a breeding ground for the rodeo, not just for animals, but for the men who ride them as well. I am an outsider, from Wisconsin and nobody from Wisconsin had won this title. I am going to be the first.

I wiggled my seat around on the back of the big two thousand pound Brahman bull named Dirty Sam, squeezing his sides with my legs to let him know I am taking over today. The bull rolled his eyes back and looked up at me the best he could in the tight chute as if to say, "I'm ready for you. Everyone else thought they could

stay on me for eight seconds but nobody has lasted more than two and you won't be any different."

What Dirty Sam didn't know was that I had been studying him all season. Oh, he is one tough son of a bitch all right, but I noticed that every time he shot out of the chute, he turned to the right and dropped his head and gave one helluva twist then he would surprise everybody and turn back to the left; but I would be ready for it today; it didn't take much to outsmart a dumb ol' bull. Eight-seconds to fame. It doesn't sound like much time but when you are on the back of a beast like this, it feels like an eternity.

I looked up and scanned the area in front of me. The little rodeo queen from Austin was sitting in the front row off to the left of the chute and next to her was former President Teddy Roosevelt and the famous Chief Quantah Parker, both big rodeo fans. I also noticed the three rodeo clowns standing behind the barrels in the middle of the arena chatting with one another. I looked down one last time and checked my wrap and smiled at Ike Stovall, my team roping partner and header, who was standing on the railing next to me.

"Give 'em hell Slade. It's been one helluva season. One these damn Texans will never forget."

I didn't say anything, but turned toward the front of the chute and nodded to the boy at the gate. He slipped the latch and ol' Sam burst out like someone had just put a hot poker up his ass.

I was leaning to the right, anticipating his first move when he surprised the ever lovin' crap outta me by turning left. He dropped his head digging his nose in the dirt and twisted his massive body, bringing his hindquarters nearly up to his nose.

Before I knew it I was flying off his back with my right wrist still securely wrapped around the leather strap that surrounded his girth. My feet hit the ground like they were shot from a cannon. My hat flew off my head for the first time that season but that was the least of my worries as I felt my wrist snap. I was bouncing along with Dirty Sam, my feet touching the ground every time his hindquarters landed and lifting off every time he kicked up. I kept pumping my legs running as fast as I could, trying to keep up with him and keep myself from falling. If I fell, he would drag me around the arena and I would end up shredded like a head of lettuce.

Then Dirty Sam lived up to his reputation of being one mean son of a bitch as he slammed me up against the wall right in front of the little rodeo queen from Austin. Not once, but three times, breaking my ribs and busting my nose. It was as if he knew I had my eyes on that gal and he was letting her and me know that I wasn't that tough cowboy I thought I was. Where in the hell are those damn rodeo clowns, I thought as Sam slammed me one more time for good measure. I felt my left eye swell up and close.

The last thing I remember was my wrap finally loosening up and me high flying it in the air over the arena and looking down at the astonished look on the face of that little rodeo queen from Austin and me wondering if I ever would end up in the sack with her.

MY FIRST AND LAST RIDE

I was about to enter my first competition in the Tri-Cities Rodeo Classic in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin. The announcer introduced me to the crowd of nearly 9,000 fans who packed the State Fair Arena that night.

“Next on his maiden ride, we have Stanley Herdlin, from Brookfield, Wisconsin. He’ll be riding #12, outta’ Wheatland, Wyoming, a bronc named Peaceful, but I can assure you, that little bronc is anything but peaceful.”

A shiver ran down my spine, was I really going to do this? I looked at Juan Gutierrez, my coach and noticed he was smiling.

Nearly all the spectators were either standing or perched on the edge of their seats. Suddenly, the crowd grew eerily silent as they released my bronc into the chute, but it wasn’t the bronc I had drawn the night before. It was a big black stud named Black Smoke.

“Hey, what’s this? I drew number 12, the little buckskin bronc.”

“Yeah,” the handler said, “but he kicked out the side of his stall last night and cut up his leg. We had to pull him. This here fella is his replacement. I know he looks pretty mean, but he was rode last night by Ferrell Bannister who pretty much rode the buck outta him. You’ll be fine, pardner.”

“Joo sure joo want to do this, gringo?” Juan asked. “Joo might geet hurt, reel bad.”

“No, but I’ve come this far and can’t see myself backing out now,” I replied.

Juan spent the past six months teaching me how to ride saddle broncs and now I was ready to try it out.

“The first time eez alweez dee hardest, gringo. It geets“ better, I promise,” Juan laughed.

Short Stories

I stared at him and couldn't think of anything to say, so I just shook my head.

"Joo ain't got nothing under joo hat but hair, gringo. You see how beegs that flathead eez? Heez goin' to keel you, gringo. If joo" die, can I have joo saddle?"

I looked over at Juan as I climbed the chute and said, "Sure, it's your's Juan. I appreciate your vote of confidence. Coming from my instructor it gives me a positive feeling."

"Ha, ha, joo crazy, gringo. Thanks for jour saddle."

As I stood on the fence, I looked down at this big flathead horse wishing I had the little bronc I had drawn the night before.

I eased down into the saddle, holding the buck rein in my riding hand and bracing myself with the other hand on the chute. I put one foot in the stirrup that was easiest to get to. Then I gently moved Black Smoke over so I could get my other foot in the stirrup. He looked up at me as I eased my feet up to the front of his neck, and I could see the whites of his eyes and knew you could hurt your eyes trying to find any compassion in that face. I was careful not to touch him with my spurs as that might have caused him to rear over backward.

I didn't make any noise or quick jerking motions, remembering what Juan had told me, "Don't joo speak out loud joo sceer your horse in the chute." So I kept my mouth shut, for once.

When my feet and riding hands were in position, I leaned back and down in the saddle and tucked my chin to my chest. If Black Smoke reared out, I could still keep my balance. Juan told me if I didn't keep my chin tucked and the horse throws his head back, I would be thrown off balance, lose his swells, and miss spurring the horse on

the way out of the chute. How well you spurred your mount was part of your overall score.

When I was finally sitting on Black Smoke, I looked down on his head knowing a horse had to follow his head; if he rears, his head gives you the clue first. If he ducks you'll be able to determine it earlier than if you aren't looking at his head.

Finally, I was ready and nodded at Juan to open the chute gate. The big ol' horse was watching me,

Everyone thought I was gonna get bucked, and Black Smoke wouldn't just buck you. If you didn't get out of the arena, he'd camp onto you something fierce. Then he'd go wipe out the barrel. Both Juan and I were scared.

Then Juan flung the chute open. The ride started out well. Black Smoke bolted from the chute with four straight high kicks and I stuck like glue. Then the bronc lunged to the left and jerked the rope out of my hands. I hung on with the tail of the rope, shifting to the left with each whipping turn.

I was doing real good, raking his neck with my rowels; then right before the whistle blew, I found myself too far to the inside. He caught me off balance and turned me a flip and while still soaring through the air, I heard the eight-second whistle. My final thought before I landed all wadded up on my back, breaking my collar bone was, "You almost made it Herdlin."

BEANIE AND IKE COWBOY UP

BEANIE AND IKE COWBOY UP

Sometimes there are two rodeos, one inside the arena and one outside. No buckles are awarded for the one outside.

When the sun goes down the west Texas heat lets up a bit making it tolerable to sit outside at night and enjoy the quiet of the evening.

Beanie Franklin and Ike Stovall were sittin' on the rail watching the stock eat the hay they had just thrown out. Ike watched Beanie as he took his time filling a blanket. He twisted both ends and licked the entire stick with his tongue before placing it in the corner of his mouth. He struck a match against his leather chaps, lighting the freshly rolled cigarette. He squinted as the smoke rolled out of the side of his mouth and drifted up into his eyes.

"That little one is fine as cream gravy," Beanie said, as he exhaled a stream of blue smoke.

"Yep, but you don't want to get by that boy's ears," Ike replied. "That gray one over there the horse you rode

today?” Ike asked, pointing in the direction of a dapple gray gelding.

“Yep, he just didn’t seem to have it. He is just plum fagged out. Four years ago he bucked me off and hung me up and dragged me for a few trips around the arena before I learned saddle broncs and I don’t mix too well. Then I went bareback. That was ‘bout three years ago. He’s been around a long time. These damn small rodeos ain’t got the cash to bring in good stock like they should.”

“How’d that bareback work out for ya’?”

“Not much better. I got jerked down in the well and stomped on a few times. Now I do a little roping’ and ride pick up whenever I can land a gig. When you’re younger you live like the road goes on forever and the party never ends. But it ain’t long before you begin to see the bend in the road and you begin to fear what’s around that bend, the unknown.”

They both sat and let the quiet of the evening settle in while listening to the stock quietly chomp on the hay.

“Well,” Beanie said while standing and slapping his thighs, “if that sun don’t come up tomorrow, you’ ll know I at least had a good ride. You hungry?”

“Yeah, how’s the food at that joint, the Crystal Cactus?”

“Purty good and so are the drinks. It’s a right nice place. They even give you eaten’ irons but it’s the afterclaps you gotta look out for. I was on the shitter all night the last time I ate there.”

They heard a gunshot, then another before the telltale crash of panels and a cry, “Get the horses saddled.” It was the night watchman, Felix Dunn.

“Who fired them shots, Felix?”

Short Stories

“A couple of ol’ drunks came ridin’ through here yellin’ and a cussin’ and firing their dadgum pistols.”

They looked up and watched as a corral full of bulls came running past, led by none other than Dirty Sam, one of the meanest bulls neither of them never rode and never wanted to.

“Did you see that? It was Dirty Sam. He lit out of town like his dick was on fire.”

“Well, let’s go git him.”

They grabbed their saddles and tacked up their horses and took off after a half dozen crazy-ass bulls as they left the fairgrounds toward the stockyards that ran parallel to the tracks of the Santa Fe Railroad.

Beanie and Ike were just about to catch up with the rest of the cowboys when someone yelled out, “There they are,” pointing in the direction of the levee road that snakes its way east toward Pumpkin Vine Creek.

They all turned and headed out at full gallop, the steel shoes of the horses throwing sparks off the asphalt as they rode in pursuit of the bulls.

As they got closer, one cowboy tossed his rope around Dirty Sam’s big old horns and proceeded to dally it around the saddle horn when Dirty Sam busted free, taking the rope with him while he headed back for the train tracks and a platform loaded with boxes with the rest of the bulls following him. As they passed the startled cowboys one of the horses reared, tossing its rider in the tall grass lining the road. The riderless horse took off in the direction of the bulls with the rest of the cowboys in close pursuit.

When they arrived at the platform, Dirty Sam proceeded to hook the boxes and toss them all over the

yard while the other bulls stomped on the contents that spilled out on the ground.

A train whistle and the clanging of metal on metal startled old Dirty Sam and he turned and ran off across the tracks and dropped down. His left front leg got stuck under the rail and was broken and twisted grotesquely in an oblique and unnatural angle to the rest of his body. He was snorting and bellowing in obvious pain while the rest of the bulls, not knowing what to do or where to go, just stood there milling around.

"Well, one of us has gotta fix his flint," Beanie said. "You been know'd to always carry an equalizer, Ike. You got a rifle in that scabbard?"

"Ya, I got one. Damn!"

"Just put it between his eyes and git it over with."

"I can't do it Beanie."

Dirty Sam let out a deep moan and whipped his head back and forth slinging snot over Beanie and Ike's legs and both their horses. His eyes were red and still filled with hate.

"Aw hell," Beanie said, dismounting from his horse. "Gimmie your gun."

The crack of the rifle echoed in the night. Ol' Beanie's eyes filled with tears.

"It ain't right, Beanie. Dirty Sam shouldn't have ta go this way. He was one of the best there ever was."

About this time a couple of railroad dicks drove up in a white pickup truck with blue lights flashing on the top of the cab.

They saw the carnage and what was left of Dirty Sam and asked, "What in the cornbread hell is goin' on?" the bigger of the two dicks asked.

"A little rodeo," Ike replied.

Short Stories

“Well, who’s going to clean up this mess?”

“I reckon you should call the owner of the fairgrounds back there. We’ll take the rest of these bulls back and put ‘em away. They played enough for one day.”

“That’s it boys, the monkey’s dead and the shows over. Let’s throw a rope around Dirty Sam and get him off the track and get the rest of these boys back so we can go eat.”

SHERIFF OF CHEYENNE

SHERIFF OF CHEYENNE

White clouds streaked against the blue sky. From this elevation, I could see the whole valley sweeping below and to the ridge-line beyond.

It was the edge of dark when I finally rode into the fairgrounds on the outskirts of Cheyenne.

I recalled how this place was nothin' but one street with a hotel and a saloon and occasional gunfire. Now we got us a church, a store and a place to bury people properly. Even the ladies in the saloon are darn good at singin' them songs they know and I swore to fight anyone I had to so to keep it good.

My body ached as I climbed the rail to watch as a horse finished up bucking in a tight circle in front of the catch pen. Old age is a cruel thing. It lays waste to body and mind and I damn well felt it after riding all day.

The whistle blew, so the rider grabbed his rein with his free hand and looked for the pickup men. Just another day at the office, I guess, or so I thought.

Short Stories

I heard a shot ring out in the crowd. The horse was still bucking his ass off in a circle. The pickup men were having trouble riding in to get him.

I looked around as I jumped off the rail and ran over to where Old Waco Thompson, one of my deputies who served mostly as the jailer, stood slouching. He was one of those men, born with nothing, who had spent his life proving he could be less than that. He was in his work clothes, a denim shirt and denim pants that were hitched low and a corral-stained western hat cocked on his head. He was in his late thirties, pushing six feet tall. He was tough and stubborn, but not very ambitious, a combination that could make you someone's lackey or, at the very least, dead. The Wyoming wind and a few well-placed fists had hardened his face. His nose was slanted from an old break .

He was studying the cartridges in his hand before he inserted them in the loops in his belt.

He looked up at me and stood, fingering out a cigarette and lighting it with a kitchen match.

"Didn't you hear that?" I shouted.

"Yep, sure did, Sheriff."

"You know what happened here?"

"The son of a bitch was shot," he said, pointing to a small patch of gravel and grass, and a body stained and coated with what I knew wasn't rust.

"Who is he?"

"Don't know, Sheriff; don't think I never seen him before."

I walked up and turned the body over. It was Juan Gutierrez.

"Do you know who shot him?"

“Kid over there. Killed ‘cause he draw’d down on him, so’s he said, Sheriff. Here’s the gun that did it.”

He handed over the gun and I sniffed the chamber and sighted down the barrel for burned powder. It had been fired. I looked at the young man sitting on a bale of hay. I could see his face was written on by the wind and sun and he had a body shaped by working in the outdoors. The boy definitely belonged in the open.

“This gun’s in bad shape, Waco. Looks like it was used hard at one time.”

“I guess, but it still shoots purty good. Just look at ol’ Tex-Mex over there.”

“He’s dead all right. What was he doing?”

“He and another one was breakin’ in that trailer over there and running out with a bunch of stuff and throwing it on their burros. When that boy told ‘em to stop. Guess they didn’t, so he dropped ‘im.

“Where’s the other one?”

“Got away, I guess. He rode off on one of the damn burros with a bunch of the boy’s stuff. The boy said he woulda got him too if that damn old Colt hadn’t a misfired. One thing I would bet on. He ain’t dead, damn your eyes. The boy said he climbed that ridge,” nodding his head in the direction of the Grand Tetons far off in the distance. Wish’d I’d had my horse. I woulda got ‘im, that’s for sure.”

His eyes were streaked with red and his face was swollen, most likely from crying.

I did feel sorry for him.

“What’s your name son?”

“Ryan, Ryan Jackson, from Meeteetse”

“Long way from home, ain’t you. Can you tell me what happened?”

Short Stories

“I was down watchin’ the boys work the horses when I noticed some goin’ ons up here that just din’t look natural. So I mosied on over and caught this beaner and one of his friends stealin’ my stuff outta my trailer here. I dropped that son of a bitch, but his compadre got away with all my belongings. Now I ain’t got nuthin’ but what’s on me. Took what little money I had too. Damn, wisht I woulda plugged the other one too.”

“Aha, that so?”

“Yep, good thing I had that ol’ Colt with me or I’d a be lying where that beaner is lying now.”

“Waco?”

“Yes, boss?”

“Cuff this boy and take him to the jail and book him for murder?”

“What?”

“You heard me. I’ll be along shortly.”

The boy stared at me with hate filled eyes and said, “The hell you will,” and reached behind his back and brought out a small revolver, pointing it at my face.

Damn Waco, I thought, he should have made sure this boy was disarmed.

“Now listen to me, Ryan Jackson from Meeteetse, put that gun down before someone gets hurt.”

“It’s gonna be you, Sheriff,” he said cocking back the hammer.

My hand went down to my sidearm and I was clearing leather before young Ryan could blink. My .44 caliber round pierced his neck and he dropped to the ground, bleeding out next to Juan.

“Why’d you have to go and do that, Sheriff?” Waco asked.

“Waco, if you’d a been a little more alert, you’d a known that Juan is blind. Has been all his life. No way he could have drawed down on that boy. That little burro of his carried his entire life possessions and lead him around Cheyenne like a seeing eye dog. I have known Juan his whole life and he was the nicest young man I knew and he wouldn’t steal from anybody. I’d stake my life on it.”

“But what about the other beaner?”

“There wasn’t another beaner, Waco. Ryan said he took off in the direction I had just ridden in from. If there was someone heading out that way, I would have passed him. I was the only soul on that ridge today.”

MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

Americans have always been fascinated by ghost towns. A town often becomes a ghost town because its economy fails, or due to some form of disaster. Ghost towns exist in America from Montana to the southern tip of Florida.

One town, Middle of Nowhere, Texas, located in the middle of nowhere, is where Texas Ranger legend, known as Ranger Mike, is headed. He is looking for a femme fatale named Kitty Leroy, wanted for murder. But, when Ranger Mike arrives in the Middle of Nowhere, he encounters more than he bargained for. Could it be that ghosts actually exist?

I heard that kind of a sound that a ghost makes when it wants to tell about something that's on its mind and can't make itself understood, and so can't rest easy in its grave, and has to go about that way every night grieving.

-- Mark Twain

The sky was empty of birds and clouds. The sun beat down on the small town in the middle of nowhere. Tumbleweeds blew across the dry rutted street. The town hadn't seen rain in months and everything was dried up. The streets were deserted as if the town was forgotten.

The tall stranger rode in from the East; the sun scorched his eyes. The wind bit at his raw and sunburned face. A stubble of beard ran from ear to ear; the lines around his mouth etched a story of a desolate and rough life. There was no sadness, no anger, and no emotion.

He shifted in his saddle and squinted into the afternoon sun. A film of water covered his coal black, hardened eyes, reflecting the light from the fading sun. His long scraggly hair hung in greasy strands from under his sweat-stained hat. His horse, a brown and white paint, was covered with dust. They had been riding for four days.

The stranger gazed to his left and right as he rode down the deserted street. The town was eerily quiet. Nothing moved, not even a stray cur.

A face suddenly appeared at the window of Maude's Saloon and Hotel; but just as quickly, it was gone.

He dismounted and tied his horse to the post in front of Maude's, the only hotel in town. A town named Middle Of Nowhere, because it is located in the middle of nowhere. The air suddenly stilled as if it was tense with nerves for what was to come and seemed to suck even the sound of his footfalls into the nothingness of the street. He stopped, and in the distance came hoofbeats of horses; getting closer, louder, he turned but saw nothing.

The wind picked up and whipped the white duster around his legs. He pushed it back, exposing the pearl handles of his two Colt .45 Peacemaker's, each perched on a hip in a shiny black holster, adorned with silver

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conches, fashioned from silver dollars by a little señorita he spent time with down in San Antonio in '58. He removed his hat and wiped the sweat from his brow with a red bandana.

He turned and gazed at the sheriff's office and the General Store; both were deserted. He removed his duster and folded it over his saddle, securing it with his quirt. The Texas Ranger Star pinned to his chest, shimmered in the late afternoon sun. He untied his saddle bags and threw them over his shoulder before removing his rifle, a Henry Repeater, from the leather scabbard on the side of his saddle. The smooth metal glimmered in the sun. He reached down and loosened the saddle's latigo, allowing his horse to expand his belly and drink of the warm water in the trough in front of him. The stranger entered Maude's. He walked to the check in counter and ran his finger across the surface; it was covered in a carpet of dust. A pen sat in a dry inkwell and next to it was a small stack of the most beautifully embossed notepaper he ever laid eyes on. He turned around. He felt a chill in the air, a shimmer of mist, something.

He noticed the curtains rustle as if blown by the wind, but there was no wind. The curtains were made of a delicate white lace, embroidered and fringed in crimson cloth, covered with cobwebs, and yellowed from the constant exposure to the hot West Texas sun. The fixtures were expensive and lavish. Dust covered the lampshades, chairs, tables, and divan, as well as the burgundy and gold inlaid Persian rug on the floor.

He laid his saddlebags and Henry Repeater on the counter and rang the bell. There was no response. He didn't expect one.

He heard a scraping noise, like a chair being slid across the floor. He glanced to his right and saw a form that shimmered and wavered, it appeared and vanished, there one moment, gone the next. It wasn't ghostly, not transparent in any way or frightening. It was some kind of an apparition. He shook his head and turned and walked into the bar. Chairs had been stacked on all the tables; dust and dirt covered the bar and floor. In the middle of the bar, there was a mirror, framed in gold, hanging on the wall. Above it was a picture of a woman, covered in a gauzy dress, draped over her reclining body while sitting in a carriage being pulled by two stallions, one white, one black. It appeared like she was smiling at him. He tipped his hat and smiled back. The bar was long and made of mahogany. At one time it must have been polished to a splendid shine. A tarnished brass foot rail encircled the base of the bar. A row of dusty spittoons was spaced on the floor next to the bar. Along the ledge, towels used by the patrons to wipe the beer suds from their mustaches still hung. In the middle of the bar sat a half-empty bottle, alone and corked, with a glass next to it. He picked it up and pulled the cork with his teeth. The pop of the cork leaving the bottle echoed in the empty room. He put his nose to the bottle and inhaled. "Smells like tequila," he mumbled and wiped the dirt off the top. He poured two fingers in the glass and held it up in a salute to the lady staring down at him. Did she just smile or was it his imagination? "I need to wash down some of that dust in my throat. I have been ridin' for four days. Left Nogadoches last Friday. Come lookin' for a lady; heard she was in the Middle Of Nowhere. I thought that was a joke the first time I heard it." He chuckled. "Don't look like she's here. Looks like nobody's here; just you and

me. Well, here's to your health, if it ain't too late," he said with a grim smile. He threw back the drink and shook his head. "Wow, I drunk some mighty strong stuff in my day, but you got something here, Miss, and it tastes very good. I might have me another; I hope you don't mind?" he said, as he poured a generous portion into the glass. He threw it back and shook his head. "Damn, that's mighty good. Tastes like Cactus Wine, tequila and peyote tea, Is that what I got me, Miss? Stuff can kill a snake."

He poured another and lifted his glass to his nude lady friend, hanging on the wall.

Before he could throw it back, he heard a voice ask him, "What's your name ranger and what are you doing in the Middle Of Nowhere?"

His hand dropped to his hip and he turned around; no one. He pulled out one of his Peacemakers and looked behind the tattered curtains in front of an elevated stage that was by the far wall behind him; nobody there. He returned to the bar and finished his drink.

"Musta been my imagination," he said to the naked lady in the carriage over the bar. "Name's Mike. They call me Ranger Mike. I come lookin' for Kitty Leroy, one of the best poker players in the West. She also dances; started at the age of ten, they say. I heard she was sittin' at one of them tables over there," he said, pointing at the round tables in the corner with six chairs turned upside down on each of them.

"She's from Michigan. Know where that is? No? Well, neither do I. She worked dance halls and saloons from Chicago to Houston before she supposedly ended up in the Middle Of Nowhere. Along the way, she picked up some other skills, specifically, I heard she's savvy with a gun and knives. Heard she would shoot apples off her

husband's head. She got restless, I guess, and wanted to take her show on the road, so she headed for Texas and left her husband behind. By the time she was 20, they say she was the most popular entertainer in Dallas, but she gave up dancing to become a faro dealer and was knowed to bring knives and revolvers to the faro tables."

"What did she do that makes you come lookin' for her?"

"Killed a man, they say," the tall Ranger answered as if the voice was coming from someone standing next to him at the bar, but there wasn't anyone there. The stranger acted like it was as normal as could be, that he would be, talkin' to a voice coming out of nowhere.

He swung around and looked over the empty bar again, his eyes squinting in the sunlight, slicing through the window.

The Ranger stared at the lady lounging in the horse carriage on the wall and said, "I think I better sit down. This here stuff is going to my head. Ain't had much to eat but Pecos Strawberries for the past four days. That's beans in case you don't know."

"I know what Pecos Strawberries are, cowboy," the woman's voice replied.

The tall Ranger shook his head and said, "This Cactus Wine is hittin' on an empty plate." He picked up the bottle and glass and went to the table in front of the stage. He took down a chair and was about to sit down when he heard a woman's voice ask, "Mind if I join you? We won't be gettin' busy for another two hours and I sure am working up a thirst havin' these two stallions pullin' me around town. I sent out invitations to all the principal gentlemen of the city, including the tax collector, mayor, aldermen, judges of the county, and members of the

legislature. A splendid band of music will be in attendance. I hope you will stay and join us.”

The tall stranger’s jaw dropped as he saw an apparition of a woman in a translucent and silky dress, step out of the picture and float to his table.

“Offer a woman a chair, cowboy?” she said.

“Why, why, yes, yes, of course; here, take mine.” He stood up and pulled out his chair for her and she sat down. “Are we going to share that glass or are you going to get me my own?” she smiled.

“Well, of course, where are the glasses?”

“Behind the bar,” she replied.

The tall Ranger found a dusty glass and was using one of the bar rags to clean it when he saw the figure of a man, walking on air, materialize out of nowhere; a man he knew quite well, another Texas Ranger, William Alexander Anderson Wallace, known as Big Foot Wallace, a rough and tumble frontiersman. They rode together with Captain Jack Hay’s Texas Rangers.

Wallace sat down next to the lady and turned with a far-reaching smile, Cheshire-cat like. Ranger Mike watched him, transfixed, waiting to see if he would speak. At last Big Foot Wallace opened his mouth, but instead of words, he set in motion a stream of thoughts from his mind to the Ranger’s; thoughts of days gone by.

“Crazy? I’m not crazy,” Ranger Mike said. But he couldn’t move his hands. His head was clear, no trace of the “madness” that he could tell; but he couldn’t budge. His back began to hurt from the top of his spine to his tail bone. His mouth was dry and his heart was pounding and felt like it was ready to explode, his eyes scanned left and right for signs of someone or something to make sense of all this.

What sort of hell am I in? I knowed Wallace and he was never one to repeat the same story twice; I was with him in Mexico when we participated in what was knowed as the "Black Bean Incident." It was a lottery where 159 white and 17 black beans were drawn from a crock to determine which men would be executed. A black bean meant execution; a white bean meant prison. Wallace, always the non-conformist, drew a gray bean. The Mexican Officer in charge determined the bean to be white and Big Foot was spared death. We survived an 800-mile march to Perote prison in the state of Vera Cruz. Once Big Foot Wallace went without water for six days and then drank an entire gallon at once. We attempted to stop him, but he fought us off and collapsed in sleep. We never expected him to awaken but he did, the next day, refreshed and famished for the remainder of the mule meat he had been living on.

The last time I saw him was on Rattlesnake Ridge, outside of Austin. He went South and I went West. I sure as hell didn't 'spect ta see him sittin' here.

"Why are you here, Big Foot? Lookin' for revenge?"

"No, Ranger Mike, I'm here to see a friend."

Ranger Mike heard laughter and voices coming from the hotel lobby. A group of "painted ladies" wearing make-up and dyed hair, floated into the bar. They wore brightly colored ruffled skirts that were scandalously short. Under the bell-shaped skirts, their legs were covered with net stockings, held up by garters; their boots were adorned with tassels. Their arms and shoulders were bare, their bodices cut low over their bosoms, and their dresses decorated with sequins and fringe. All were armed with pistols or jeweled daggers concealed in their boot

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tops or tucked between her breasts, in case they needed to keep boisterous cowboys in line.

One of the ladies with beautiful red hair, twisted into a bun on top of her head and held in place with red and white roses, sat down at the table next to Ranger Mike. She wore a shell pink chiffon gown, complete with sequins and seed pearls, imported from Paris.

“That’s one purty dress, madam,” Big Foot Wallace said.

“Why thank you; I was buried in this gown with much pomp and circumstance, the funeral parade was led by the Elks Band. They played the Death March and were escorted by four mounted policemen. Carriages followed filled with business men, girls from my house, “The Row,” and many miners from the camp. My casket was lavender and covered with red and white roses They buried me at the foot of Mt. Pisgah Cemetery at Cripple Creek Colorado. It was a lovely way to dispatch me.”

“They dispatched me in San Miguel Creek. That’s in Frio County,” Big Foot said. “I lived on prickly pear and red pepper and followed my own cow with a dog for a living and ain’t nobody played the Death March for me and I ain’t much for roses, ‘cept the Yellow Rose of Texas.”

“And what’s your name?” Pearl asked, looking coyly at the tall ranger sitting to her left.

“Folks call me Ranger Mike,” he replied.

“Well Ranger Mike, my name is Pearl de Vere. I come from Cripple Creek Colorado and I come here to have some fun. Wanna dance with me, Ranger Mike?”

Ranger Mike looked up and saw the full orchestra appear on the stage and all the painted ladies were dancing with cowboys. The judges and the mayor of the

city, Middle of Nowhere, were also present and dancing. They were all floating across the dance floor while the orchestra played “The Yellow Rose of Texas”.

Big Foot Wallace was smiling and dancing with the lady from the picture over the bar.

Suddenly, the music stopped and everyone on the dance floor turned and looked at the door as five cowboys entered and encircled Big Foot Wallace. The lady he was dancing with faded away and the rest of the dancers shimmered away in a smokey mist. The five cowboys were close to Big Foot in height. They called him names, but then they pushed him and the leader poked him in the chest. Big Foot held it back as long as he could, his veins swelled, he smiled; it didn't reach his eyes. It appeared he was waiting to explode; then he did.

Big Foot grabbed the hand that poked him and bent it back to the cowboy's chin while punching him in the stomach at the same time. One cowboy grabbed Big Foot's left arm. Big Foot whirled and landed a blow solidly on his jaw, right below his eye. He went down. Two of the other three held Big Foot's arms while another cowboy hit him in the stomach twice. Big Foot kicked the cowboy solidly in the midsection, knocking the breath out of him. He bent over but didn't fall. When Big Foot kicked the cowboy in the gut, he pushed the others back and they all went down.

Ranger Mike stood up and entered the fray. One of the cowboy's was on all fours, and Ranger Mike kicked at his chin and landed a hard one on his head. The other cowboy was up and ran at him to tackle him. He stiff-armed the cowboy and pushed him to the ground. While they were regaining their balances, he pulled out his guns. He turned and he saw Big Foot Wallace standing there, smiling.

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“Thanks for the hep, pardoner,” Big Foot said, as he held up two of the cowboy’s who were still knocked out.

Ranger Mike nodded and turned and came face to face with the cowboy that he stiff-armed. He had pulled his gun and was pointing it at Ranger Mike’s gut. The cowboy’s eyes were hard-rimmed and fixed like they’d rusted into place. Ranger Mike could not see the whites of his eyes nor the vessels that flowed through them. They contained a greater darkness than any night Ranger Mike had witnessed. His fingers curled tightly around the triggers. He smiled and then he fired. So did the cowboy. The gunshots cracked in the air as loud as thunder. The cowboy dropped to the floor.

Ranger Mike looked at the cowboy lying dead on the floor. There was no spark left in the cowboy’s eye, the blood pool darkened around the stain on his shirt and spread from his stomach to the floor. The cowboy lay as lifeless as a cadaver and just as pallid.

Ranger Mike’s pulse was thready and his hands were shaking so badly, his guns slipped out and landed softly on the body, before falling to the wooden floor. But Ranger Mike was no longer watching the guns. Or even the body. He was watching his own pale hands, covered with scarlet blood, his blood, oozing from the wound in his gut, deep and warm. The pain throbbed. It felt like someone had their hand in there, squeezing his organs as hard as they could. When it waned he could move and he stumbled, when it returned he could only hold still and breathe, breathe slow and deep until it passed. There was no blood anywhere but on his hands and his abdomen which turned purple and lumpy where it should be smooth. Every step felt like a bomb exploding in his innards.

His breathing was ragged, loose hair fell over his features that contorted with pain. Silently he crumbled.

The next thing Ranger Mike saw was Big Foot Wallace bending over him. He wasn't illusory, or frightening. He was like spectral, ghostlike. His skin was as brown as acorns and his plain black cotton pants were held up with black suspenders and his ranger star was pinned on a stained white undershirt. His beat up hat was pushed back from his face. He held out his hand toward Ranger Mike in a gesture of friendship. "Come along now, Ranger Mike, it is time for us to go. Captain John Coffee Hays needs our help fightin' that Mexican General, Adrian Woll, down San Antonio way."

Ranger Mike smiled and nodded. He looked down and saw that his gut was no longer bloodied. The pain he felt had turned to an unpleasant warmth and then disappeared. His body then elevated from the floor and floated out the door with Big Foot Wallace. They mounted their horses and rode south, toward San Antonio, traveling to meet up with Captain Hays and his contingency of Texas Rangers.

BEACH ENCOUNTER

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My Dearest Dulcina;

It is hard to believe that it has been six months since we met on the white sands of the Cape Sable beaches. The first day I saw you I watched as you provocatively stretched your lithe body on your blanket in the sand, and

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later when you walked by with your two small daughters, the fragrance of your perfume captured my attention. Your little girls are so charming and there can be no doubt where their golden blonde hair and crystal blue eyes come from; they look like miniature porcelain dolls; miniatures of you, my love.

I have been unable to sleep. I lie awake at night, thinking of you and that last enchanting evening we shared while walking our dogs on the beach; when we sat at the water's edge, digging our toes in the sand while we watched the water break along the shore and how the stars sparkled and danced in your eyes; when we talked about our dreams and our lives and how unfulfilled we had become and how we let it happen. We both knew it was fate that had us find each other that euphoric night, as our dogs scampered along the sandy beach.

When we stood to go and our shoulders touched, you glanced at me and your eyes penetrated my soul. You smiled; how quickly my lips descended upon yours and your body surrendered to my trespassing hands and the soft thrust of my tongue. How we both wanted more but...

The letter arrived that morning. Her heart fluttered as she read it and her knees weakened. She had to sit down. She too had been unable to get that evening out of her mind. Was it the allurements of the moment, the musky smell of his masculinity as he drew her into him while they stood, alone, under the stars? Many times over the past few months while she worked alone, cleaning the house, she contemplated what it would be like to give herself to this handsome stranger. Was it merely a lonely woman, lusting for something that was missing in her life, or was it more? Could it be more?

She couldn't deny the response of her body when he touched her and how quickly she yielded to his demanding kiss, wanting more.

He enclosed a key, a key to his motel room. He told her he was in town on business and that he would be there for the next week.

She clutched it to her chest. Should she go? Dare she go? She couldn't believe how nervous she had become. If they had been alone on that beach, how far would that first kiss and touch have gone?

Something stirred in her. She had to find out. She would go. If he wasn't there when she got to the room, she would wait for him. She would buy a new negligee and underwear, sexy underwear.

Her husband and girls were at a father-daughter function with the church youth group and wouldn't be back until the next evening. She was alone. She needed someone; someone to hold her, make her feel wanted; make her feel special.

She drove into the motel parking lot and parked in front of the door with the same number that was on the plastic key holder he sent her. There was a new BMW convertible parked next to the room. It must be his, she thought, as she climbed out of her car. The sky was dark foreboding, threatening to open up with a heavy rain; at odds with that magical evening on the beach.

She inserted the key and was about to turn the door handle when the door flew open. There he was, standing there, shirtless in tight blue jeans, the muscles rippling on his flat stomach. Her heart fluttered, her knees became weak again. He was intoxicating. She wanted him and was so glad she came. This was going to be special. Something she could remember for the rest of her life. He gently

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pulled her into the room and closed the door behind her. He took her purse and placed on the table next to the bed and turned her around. He pressed his body into hers and kissed her hard on the mouth. She felt herself giving into the desire of her body, the lust that had been building up for months; since that first kiss and loving embrace on the warm Florida beach so many months ago. He pulled back and she opened her eyes and gazed at him. She was startled. His eyes were calm but his stare was hard and his mouth was compressed and turned down at the corners. Something was different. The hairs on the back of her neck stood up and a cold chill washed over her. Was this the man she thought she could give herself too? Immediately she knew she had made a mistake. She had to get out of there. She turned to leave. But he reached out for her; he grabbed her arm and threw her back in the room. The back of her legs hit the bed and she fell. She looked up as he stood over her, her breasts rapidly rising and falling. She began to shake. He smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. He grabbed her wrists and wrapped them in plastic straps, the kind the police use to restrain criminals. He climbed on the bed and straddled her body. He reached up and took a roll of tape from the bed stand and tore off a piece. He smiled down at her as he put the tape over her mouth. He shook his head as a muffled scream escaped her mouth. He pulled out a knife from the right front pocket of his jeans. He placed the point at the hollow in her throat. Fear covered her face. A small speck of blood bubbled up where he penetrated the skin. He turned the blade and cut down the front of her blouse, ripping it away from her body, exposing her black lacy bra. Next, he hooked the blade of the knife under the front of the bra and pulled it up, snapping the fabric away,

exposing her small breasts. She noticed his breathing had become shallow and rapid, his eyes glazed over. It was at that moment she knew what her fate was going to be. She thought of her husband, Mitchell, and her betrayal of his love and trust. She thought of her two little girls and prayed that they would know better and not succumb to the weakness of lust and desire like she did; to be more careful and watchful. Who was going to take care of them; answer their questions as they reached puberty? “Oh Mitchell, I’m so sorry.”

She began to cry and then scream as the knife cut through her neck, severing her carotid artery. Her last thought was, “I wonder who is watching his dog?”

GIRLS NIGHT OUT FROM BLUE MAGIC

“One night, after we had a few glasses of wine, she told me some guy attacked her, beat her up and attempted to rape her after breaking in her apartment at the University of Georgia in Athens. The police knew who did it, but didn’t have enough evidence to arrest him.

“I asked her if she would like to get revenge on the low life bastard. She said she did.

“We found out he was from Macon, so one weekend we went down and paid him a visit. He lived in front of this cow pasture west of town off Highway 129 in a closed up gas station his family used to run. We snuck up on the place after dark. The screen door was swarming with flies. Inside, the place wreaked of stale smoke, rotten food and diesel fuel. In one corner stood a busted up

cigarette machine. Above it hung a Rainbow Trout and a life-size cutout of Jayne Mansfield with an oil-stained hand imprint on her left breast. The cheap black and white linoleum floor was yellowed and stained and had chipped away against the far wall. The door to the bathroom was open and the lid to the rust stained toilet was up and dirty towels littered the floor. The mirror over the sink was cracked and dirty. An old condom machine was hanging on one corner of the wall. On the other side of the room was a counter made of cheap pine, and it bristled with splinters and rusted nail heads and an old cash register. Just the thought of that place makes me sick.

“He was sleeping in the back room on an old army cot. He was covered with a filthy sheet. A pile of soiled clothing lay by the side of the bed along with an empty Thunderbird wine bottle and a well used Playboy Magazine. He looked as filthy as the sheet and smelled worse. I never in my life saw a place as filthy as the one he was living in, not even one of the Mason’s flop houses in downtown Atlanta.

“We snuck up on him as he slept in his bed. He was snoring so loud I couldn’t hear myself think so I stuck my .357 magnum in his mouth.”

She continued with her story. “I bent over and whispered in his ear, Rise and shine honey bun, momma has a surprise for you and boy was he surprised.

“Now I gotta emphasize the fact that I ain’t a guy and this wasn’t downtown New York. This was Macon Georgia and I wasn’t going to put up with his crap, him trying to rape my sister. So I taught him a little, you know what I mean? I whacked him on the side of his head.

“It was night and very dark. I talked to him, not man to man, but holy ass terror to man. My sister was standing

next to me. I could feel her shaking. I told her it was alright and held her hand as I stuck my gun in this parasite's ear and asked him if he wanted to sneeze, if he felt a sneeze coming on.

"Hell, he pissed himself. The guy's a burglar, for Chrissakes, and not a very good one at that. I whacked him again, hard on the side of the head and he dropped like a bag of Georgia peanuts. I left him there bare ass naked and told him I would ice him the next time I saw him, so he better stay out of Atlanta.

"My sister painted his little dick with my tube of lipstick. You can bet I threw that tube away when she was done.

"That evening sealed our friendship."

THE CLEANUP HITTER

THE CLEANUP HITTER

The well-dressed older gentleman standing in the window was admiring his manicure when he saw the sullen young man walk across the parking lot toward the building. He shook his head in disgust and hoped he wasn't making a mistake. He could see a cigarette stuck behind his ear. The young man was wearing a black leather jacket that had zippers all over the front and on the sleeves. It was open in the front in spite of the cold December day exposing his white t-shirt . His black pants were tight and high and he was wearing white socks and black loafers. He had his hair slicked and oiled back in what was called a ducktail, the style most punks were wearing today. He was late.

The well-dressed gentleman went behind his desk and sat down waiting for the young man's arrival.

When the young man opened the office door he saw the man he was scheduled to meet sitting behind a large cherry wood desk. Against the wall was a matching credenza. Above the credenza was a large window

overlooking the parking lot and the Wisconsin River. The young man took in the office and its surroundings. He looked out the window and noticed ice had started to form along the far bank, the current in the center of the river was too strong for any ice to form, at least until after the temperature dropped well below zero and it would have to stay that cold for quite some time. More likely to happen the end of January or sometime in February, if at all. It was only December 1st.

The desk was bare except for a black phone and one 9"x 12" brown manilla folder that he assumed was meant for him.

He could tell the well-dressed gentleman behind the desk was a big man even though he was sitting. His head was large and bald and he was sporting a Fu Manchu mustache that traveled down the side of his mouth and around his jaw bone. It was a white blond. His skin was an alabaster white and his clear blue eyes were ringed in red, an albino he thought. He took a deep breath.

The large gentleman squinted as he looked up at the young man.

"Close the door," he commanded.

He did.

"What took you so long?"

"Traffic."

"Fuck, ain't no traffic."

He didn't say anything he just stared at him.

The big man asked him, "What's your name?"

"My friends call me The Cleanup Hitter."

"So, I should call you the cleanup hitter?"

"I guess," the young man replied.

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“Okay then, let’s get to it.” He stood up and handed him a gun.

“What’s this?” he asked.

“It’s a .25 caliber” he replied.

“I don’t need it. I got a .357. Should do the job.”

“You need it. That fuckin’ .357 makes too much noise and will draw attention to you. Plus it’s messy. The .25 caliber is a hitter’s gun. You take it when you know it’s going to be a head shot.

“It’s a worthless gun,” he said. “I know a guy was shot on a Saturday night with a .25 and was back at work on Monday.”

“Yeah, well, you ain’t goin’ to no shootin’ match with this one. You are going to place the barrel up against the back of his skull and then pull the trigger. The slugs will ricochet around inside the head. It’s like putting the victim’s brain in a blender. When you finish you can drop it or take it with you. They can’t trace it. But, if you drop it, make sure it’s wiped clean. Make sure you get all your brass, though. Guys got nailed by leaving partials on the brass.”

The young man looked at him and nodded.

“All right, then,” the gentlemen said, handing the young man an envelope. “This has a picture of the guy along with his home address and where he works. Joey followed him for three weeks and we got every place listed where he went. He’s got a little lady that works at Dinah’s Tap off Carson Street. You know where that is?”

He nodded his head again as he removed the contents of the envelope. There was an eight by ten picture of an overweight older man wearing slacks and a Hawaiian shirt along with three sheets of notebook paper

documenting his daily routine for the past three weeks and \$2500.00 in cash, all in twenty dollar bills.

“Who is this? I think I recognize this guy.”

“You don’t need to know. Just take care of business. The cash is yours. That’s half in advance and once it’s done, you’ll get the rest as we agreed upon.”

The young man nodded again. “So, this .25 caliber gun won’t attract any attention?”

“No, it won’t. I make more noise when I fart. Just get behind the bastard and pulled the trigger. The slug will do the rest. I’d pop ‘im again, just to make sure.”

The young man nodded again. “What did he do to you that you want him gone?”

“It’s none of your business. Your business is to take care of this. Make it clean, you understand?”

“Okay,” the young man replied as he put the \$2500.00 in his pocket and picked up the .25 caliber. “I guess I better get this over with then.”

The young man placed the barrel of the gun against the big man’s head and quickly fired two shots at point blank range into his skull.

The large man fell forward over his massive desk. His eyes were open with surprise etched on his face. It was turned to the side and blood was pooling around his neck and down the back of his suit. The young man said, “You were right, this little gun is real quiet and that second slug just to make sure was a good idea.”

He bent over the body and said, “I think I can hear them slugs ricocheting around in your head, cocksucker.” He stood up and looked at the .25 caliber gun. “I think Joey will be surprised to see this, don’t ya’ think?” He chuckled as he put it in his jacket pocket while grabbing

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the cigarette from behind his ear and popping it in his mouth.

“Damn, I forgot my lighter,” he said as he walked to the door.

The young man stopped and was about to open it when he turned back and said as he returned to the body, “Oh, I almost forgot, the brass, and by the way, my pa said to say hello. He wanted his picture back.”

THE BIG "H"

THE BIG "H"

"We've been waiting for you."

The sound of the blast had been deafening. Blood and brain were splattered against the mirror hanging behind the couch. One of the hinges on the door to the kitchen was blown off. Smoke and the smell of gunpowder filled the air. The guy who stood next to me was now in my grasp. I could feel the flutter of his heart against my hand as his life left him. His face had been ripped like canvas; whoever I was holding, would not have an open casket at his wake. I felt something warm running down my face; blood. I was shot. My left shoulder was also covered in blood, my blood. It oozed out of the holes put there by the rat shot fired from the twelve gauge sawed off shotgun in the hands of the person standing against the far wall. I heard the cha-chunk of another round being chambered. There were two of them. They were small and thin and dressed in black and covered in tats. They looked like kids, both were wearing white hockey goalie masks. Their

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eyes shone like black obsidians through the slits in the masks. One held the shotgun and the other held an automatic Tec 9 with a 32 round clip. Both weapons illegal. The Tec 9 since 1994. The sawed-off shotgun since 1934. But that doesn't matter. The bad guys still have them.

I was paralyzed and numb; frozen where I stood. The black eyes behind both masks stared at me. The one holding the shotgun pointed it at my face and squeezed the trigger.

I sit up in bed, drenched in sweat and gasping for air, another fucking nightmare. My body feels limp and I am unable to speak. My head feels like someone is applying hydraulic pressure to it. I don't know where I am at first. I look around. The surroundings are unfamiliar to me. The furnishings are cheap. So is the television sitting on the maple dresser against the wall at the end of the bed. On the wall over the television set hangs a mirror. I see my face looking back at me. I hardly recognize myself. What I see scares the shit out of me. I look like a fucking zombie, an upright cadaver. I am pale and clammy. My cheeks are drawn-in; my breathing is slow and shallow and erratic. I feel for a pulse, it is erratic as well. I must have lost twenty pounds. I look at my hands. My skin and fingernails have a purplish-black color to them.

It all comes back to me slowly. I am an undercover agent with the Drug Enforcement Agency and have been for the past ten years. Now I am through. I wanted out for a long time and finally, they came for me. During those years undercover, I did some shit I would just as soon forget. I started on flea powder, the big H, about three years ago and that's why they brought me in. That and the fact my cover was blown. I was told to stay away from the

heroin, that blue magic. They said that it would kill me. I now wish it would have.

I was forced to shoot up by members of the Mara Salvatrucha gang, better known as the MS-13 gang, considered by the FBI as the most dangerous gang in America. I think the FBI has that right.

I leaned over the side of the bed and vomited into the trash basket. It looked like it wasn't the first time.

I smelled. I couldn't remember the last time I bathed. My clothes were torn, threadbare and filthy. I couldn't remember the last time I washed them.

I throw the bedcovers off and stand. My legs are shaky. I stagger into the bathroom and turn on the cold water, I throw it on my face before cupping my hands and greedily drinking. My stomach begins to toss and convulse again. I grab the toilet bowl and let it go. Nothing but yellow bile comes up. I can't remember the last time I ate.

I flush the toilet and turn to leave and notice a prescription bottle on the counter. It says Buprenorphine. It comes back to me now. A woman brought me here yesterday and gave me this drug. It is supposed to stop withdrawal symptoms and my craving for heroin.

There was a knock on the door. I freeze and my heart feels like it will burst through my chest. My breathing is shallow.

The handle on the door turns slowly and I hide behind the bathroom door. I look out between the door and the wall and see a statuesque woman walk in with a purse over one shoulder and carrying a paper bag and two cups of coffee. She has short dark hair and is wearing a dark skirt and jacket.

Tentatively I walk out into the room.

AUBURN WAR EAGLE? I DON'T THINK
SO. UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA WAR
EAGLE? HARDLY.

The University of Georgia or Auburn University, which one is it?

For over 100 years now a battle has raged between these two schools as to which school originated the war eagle cry. But they are both out in left field because it was in Wisconsin where the true War Eagle originated. One that actually saw combat, albeit, he showed some of his chicken heritage as he feared artillery fire and took off whenever the big guns began to fire. But then, who doesn't? In fact, he was actually wounded in battle, well, maybe not in battle, but he did injure his leg during a hurricane.

My Auburn University friends say they are the originators of the "war eagle" yell, but I know this isn't true. I have read that there are three or four different theories on how the Auburn Tigers seized the War Eagle sobriquet and a couple of them have ties to football games against the University of Georgia. My favorite one is when the bird takes off in flight and screams, igniting the fans to scream, 'war eagle,' and the Auburn offense to score the winning touchdown. Immediately after the score, the eagle performs a kamikaze act, taking a nose dive onto the football field where it dies. Can you believe that? I can't. In fact, some of the stories claim Auburn actually stole the war eagle cry from Georgia. Another

one claims a Carlisle player was named War Eagle and they would call out his name during a game. But, listen, I'm here to put this silly argument to rest. Whatever side you support on the War Eagle debate, you are wrong. The cry "War Eagle" originated in Wisconsin. In fact, many cries originate in Wisconsin it's so damn cold up there, plus Lutefisk and bratwurst both produce a case of indigestion that can cause any man to whimper in pain.

The true story of War Eagle began many years ago, a Wisconsin Ojibwe, Chief Sky, one of five sons of Thunder of Bees, Chief of the Flambeau band of Chippewa Indians, part of the Anishinaabe tribe, called the first people, during sugar making time about 125 miles outside the city of Eau Claire, chopped down a pine tree containing an eagle's nest with two eaglet's nestled inside. One died. Chief Sky, gathered up the other one and, evidently, not learning from the 1626 bead transaction his brothers conducted with the Dutch for selling Manhattan, sold the eaglet to a Dan McCann from Eagle Point, Wisconsin, for a bushel of corn. Actually, the bead transaction story is also a farce. The Canarsie Indians sold Manhattan to Dutch settlers, but not for some worthless glass beads, but for iron kettles, axes, knives, and cloth. The kicker to the story is that the land that they took payment for didn't even belong to them. But, I don't think all the kettles and other gadgets involved in that transaction come close to the \$2100.00 per square foot that vacant land is currently selling for in Manhattan.

Now back to Wisconsin's War Eagle. Dan McCann eventually sold the little eaglet to the commanding officer of the Eau Claire Badgers militia company. Typical of Wisconsin, a tavern was involved in this purchase when

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tavern owner, S.M. Jeffers, pitched in to help defray the exorbitant selling price of \$2.50.

When the eagle was sworn into service, he was adorned with a breast rosette (rose shaped ornament) and a red, white and blue ribbon around his neck. They named him Old Abe after President Abe Lincoln.

While in Madison, a dog joined the regiment. Abe and the dog, Frank, tolerated one another because Frank provided rabbits and other small mammals for Abe to eat. Unfortunately for Frank, one day he ventured a bit too close to Abe's meal, bringing an end of their relationship.

During "Old Abe's" service, the 8th Wisconsin militia participated in many battles, expeditions, and pursuits of Confederate forces during his namesake's Mr. Abe Lincoln's war. Among these were the battles of Corinth; Island Number 10; Big Black; Champion's Hill; the Red River and Meridian expeditions; and the Battle of Nashville. "Old Abe" was there every step of the way. In many battles, he would circle the smoky battlefield as the enemy would be closing in and the bullets flew. He would rise high in the sky, all the while screaming at his assailants. After the battle, upon seeing his bearer, he would descend like a shot and fly into his arms. "Go War Eagle!"

Old Abe so infuriated Confederate General Sterling Price he was said to declare that he would rather "capture that bird than a whole brigade."

Old Abe entered his last battle in the Great Rebellion, also referred to as the Civil War, as well as with many other names, at Hurricane Creek, MS. The war eagle's shrieks could be heard clearly and distinctly above the victorious shouts of the Eau Claire Badgers militia. Abe

seemed to have protected his bearers and dodged the bullets of rebel sharpshooters who had failed to kill them.

Old Abe died on March 26, 1881, of smoke inhalation in the loving arms of his handler when, it has been said, he was reminiscing with his old militia pals while smoking a fine cigar and sipping a brandy. I might be distorting the truth here a bit but it was reported that one time he did get drunk on some peach brandy that was left unattended in his presence. "Go War Eagle!"

Today, a likeness of Old Abe, the original War Eagle, can be found at the main entrance to University of Wisconsin's Camp Randall Stadium.

And that my friend, is the true story of the one and only War Eagle!

Go Badgers!

PARTNERS

PARTNERS

The gray-haired man appeared to be sleeping in a chair in the back of the room. His ball cap was pulled down, covering his eyes, dark dangerous eyes. He sat deadly still but remained alert, something he learned while in Viet Nam, in Cam Rahn Bay, a deep water bay, located in the province of Khánh Hòa, on the South China Sea. He caught some shrapnel in his right shoulder shattering the bone while hunkering down waiting for a chopper on a Hot LZ. It never mended properly and the doctors at the Veteran's Hospital broke it twice to reset it, hoping it would finally heal. It hadn't.

He peered down at his hands. A slight tremor started in his left hand. This was his first episode of the day. He first noticed the tremors when he returned to the states in '69. His nerves were damaged when the United States military started the strafing of the Viet Nam jungles with agent orange. He had been waiting twelve months to get into the local Veteran's Hospital for treatment. They told him it would be another three months before they could get him

in; before it was his turn. Be patient they said. They should try living with this excruciating pain and tremors every day. Then see how patient those fuckers would be. To top everything off, he was still dealing with the sweats and shakes from the bout of malaria he got while in country.

They kept promising that things would get better at the VA Hospital, but, if anything, it got worse. Now the Nam vets are jockeying for time with the Gulf War vets. They keep piling up. Hell, he'll be dead before he gets in to see one of the VA doctors.

His brother finally stepped in and got him an appointment with this doctor, a former classmate of his brother's at Marquette University. Nerve damage wasn't his specialty, broken bones were, but he said he would see him as a favor to his brother. The doctor promised to check him out and get him to the right specialists to deal with his injuries. The gray-haired man didn't care who saw him, he just wanted some meds to stop the damn pain and the uncontrollable shaking.

The waiting area was filled with people wearing casts and braces on their hands, arms, feet and legs. A young man, wearing an arm cast on his left arm up to his elbow looked nervous. He sat, guardedly watching everyone who walked through the glass doors that connected to the congested parking lot. The cars were mainly Lexus', BMW's, and Mercedes, bearing witness to the wealth in this community. The gray-haired man knew who the young man was.

These people were trapped in the game of acquiring more accouterments than their neighbors. He saw it in the quality of their dress and in the sparkle of their diamonds, gold, and silver jewelry. It appeared people were getting

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more careless, the gray-haired man thought, as he assessed the people sitting by him. Along with their expensive jewelry, they were wearing Gucci shoes and carrying their Kate Spade Purses, all of which cost more than he made in the past year. The way they dressed communicated their wealth to everyone who saw them.

An extremely obese woman was dressed in slacks and a fox fur wrap. She wore an expensive necklace of diamonds and emeralds so large, they beg to be seen. She had a matching cocktail ring on her right hand and a diamond engagement ring that he estimated to be at least four karats on her left hand. Another middle-aged woman was garnished with gold; gold necklace and multiple gold bracelets running up her arms and rings filled with diamonds and rubies.

His gaze returned to the young man. He wore a navy New York Yankees baseball cap, navy short sleeve shirt that buttoned down the front and matching navy shorts and socks. That and his red Keds canvas shoes made him stand out from the other patients . His clothing was disarrayed. He wasn't sloppy or unkempt, he appeared to be hygienic and well-groomed. But something about him seemed odd, he didn't fit in. He was sitting in the reception area of one of the most famous orthopedic surgeons in the world. People came from all around to have him perform what they thought would be a miracle on mangled arms, legs, and knees that other surgeons were unable to fix or made worse through inexperience, ineptitude, or even negligence. So maybe the young man had a serious fracture that wouldn't heal. No, the gray-haired man knew the young man and there was something off about him today.

The young man in the red Keds looked around the room and felt the security these people perceived while being in this place. Of being in the presence of like people; the monied people. He was sure these patients never experienced personal physical attacks that the common people faced every day when they entered places like convenience stores or liquor stores. The common people are conditioned to be on the lookout for muggers. No, these people lived safe lives in their insulated little universe, like this waiting room of one of the most highly respected orthopedic surgeons in the world, located in the wealthiest section of this city. Nothing to worry about today. Relax, plan your day, make out your grocery list, worry about when the kid's soccer practice starts, and what to feed the family for dinner.

The young man had different thoughts going through his brain. What better place to pick up some nice pieces of jewelry and cash, he speculated. Plus, when someone is injured, or not feeling well, their level of resistance is going to be lower than if they are at the top of their game physically and everyone here was banged up. That old codger in the back isn't looking too good; looks like he is beginning to shake. Maybe he is having some kind of drug withdrawal. I ain't gonna worry about him, I gotta concentrate on cleaning house and then getting outta here fast.

Nobody is expecting to be ripped off in their doctor's office. Well, they are going to be in for a surprise today.

He looked around and sized up the different people in the reception area. There was one guy, wearing a high school letterman's jacket who looked like he could be trouble, at least physically, if the occasion arose. But like most of the jocks he knew, they were mostly talk; but he

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would keep an eye on him anyway in case he tried to be a hero. If he did, he would make quick work of him. He didn't want any surprises when he was gathering the valuables off the other victims. The rest of the people were older and most were women.

Oh boy, was his aunt going to be pissed at him? She was the only one in the family to agree to help him when he was released from juvie hall last month after a year's stay. His asshole father didn't want anything to do with him anymore. Especially after he stole his Porsche 911 and wrapped it around that stop sign going one hundred miles an hour. He was lucky he survived that mess. Probably because he was stoned out of his gourd. He couldn't even remember what he had taken that evening, but he was told he took everything anyone offered him.

Talk about an absent father. His dad was never there for him; didn't have time when he was there except to beat him when he got in his way. He traveled to the far corners of the world, as he put it. He was an important person and his time meant money, to himself and many others. The few days he was home, he spent it with his cronies, planning more ways to make money. His mother wasn't much better. Oh, she was home most of the time, but the pills and booze had her mind someplace else. Finally, they took her someplace else, to her grave. After she died, he pretty much lost all contact with his dad. His aunt, his dad's younger sister, came to live with them and finally became his full-time nanny. Basically, she raised him for the past ten years. She was actually a better mother to him than his real mother was but she was content to let him have whatever he asked for if it kept him out of her way. It didn't take him long to realize all he had to do is yell

and scream to get anything he wanted. She would give in to him, just to shut him up.

Well, he was fed up with everyone and if his aunt is pissed then to hell with her. After this score, he'll be heading to New Orleans. A buddy of his told him it's easy to hop a ride with a Vietnamese shrimper down there and they will take him to any island he wants to go for a price. Just one of that obese woman's rings should get him there with plenty to spare.

He knew he could get Silky Zimmerman to help him get rid of the ice for a percentage cut. There is more than enough to spread some of it around. Hell, he wasn't greedy. He just wanted what he deserved. He had been screwed all his life. Now he was getting his.

He stood up and removed a semiautomatic pistol, a .32 caliber Ruger, from the cast covering his left arm. It wasn't a big gun, but it was deadly. He walked over and grabbed the receptionist by the back of her neck and pushed her into the waiting room area. He gave her a large cloth bag that looked like a pillow case and started to brandish his gun around, turning to his left and right while commanding everyone to remain seated. "Everyone, listen up and you won't get hurt," he said. "Throw your money and jewelry in this bag as the pretty little lady comes around and hurry. I don't want to hurt anyone, but I will if you do anything stupid."

When the receptionist returned the cloth bag to the young man, it was filled with cash and jewels. He noticed she hadn't walked back to where the gray-haired man appeared to be sleeping. He probably didn't have anything worth stealing anyhow.

"Okay, sweetheart, now I want you to go behind your desk and pull out the phone line and please, for your sake,

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don't try anything funny. You are so pretty and I don't want to put a third eye between those two baby blues."

The young receptionist was obviously shaken as she walked back behind her desk sobbing uncontrollably.

After she disabled the phone, he pushed her to the floor and quickly ran out the front door, heading to the woods behind the parking lot his adrenaline pumping wildly. He could feel his heart beating in his chest and he was breathing hard as he approached his pickup truck parked at the fast food restaurant across the street.

He did it. He did it. This was his first time and he didn't know if he could pull it off, but it was easy, damn easy, he thought.

He took out his keys and fumbled with the lock.

"Damn, calm down," he whispered to himself. "You made it. There is nothing to worry about."

Finally, he was able to insert the key in the lock and open the door. He threw the bag containing the money and jewelry on the floor and stuck the key with a shaking hand into the ignition. He turned the key and the old truck sprung to life. He let out a sigh of relief. He reached up and grabbed the gear shift then the door opened.

"Turn it off," a gruff voice commanded. "Give me your gun."

The young man found himself looking down the barrel of one crazy looking gun in the hands of that gray-haired man who he thought was dozing in the doctors office. He turned off the ignition and handed over his gun.

"Okay gramps, what now?"

"Slide over."

"What?"

"You heard me, slide over or this Mauser will splatter you all over that passenger side window."

“Hell, old man, your hand is shaking like a dog shitting razor blades.”

“At this range, I could shake and shimmy myself to death and still be able to put ten holes in you before you could blow a fart.”

“Okay, I’m getting over.” He slid over to the passenger side and stared at the old man and his gray eyes. He could see a controlled danger hidden there and he started to fear for his life as the old man got behind the wheel. He started the truck and put it in gear and slowly drove out into traffic heading south toward the Interstate.

“How’d you break your arm?”

“I didn’t. I put it on so I would fit in with all those assholes in the waiting room.”

“Pretty smooth thinking. How long have you been planning this caper?”

“None of your business. Where are you taking me?”

“Where were you planning on going?” The old man asked.

“Now why should I tell you?”

“If you want to get where you were planning to go, you better tell me since I am driving.”

“You’re shittin’ me, right?”

“No, I’m not. I figure you have a plan, right? Don’t tell me you don’t.”

“I do, but I ain’t telling you, old man.”

“Oh, I think you will and I will tell you why. First of all, I’m driving. Second of all, I have control of the loot and last but not least, I have this C96 9mm Mauser that says you will.”

The young man just stared at the old man and his strange looking gun, not knowing what to say next. They drove along in silence until they approached the Interstate.

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“You better tell me which way or you are going my way and the ride won’t be that long. I can guarantee you that.”

“Go south,” the young man mumbled.

“What? You’re going to have to speak up. I spent time in Nam with all kinds of shit exploding all around me and I have a difficult time hearing sometimes.”

“I said go South.”

“That’s better, much better.”

They rode along for a few minutes in silence with the old man looking over at him periodically to make sure he wasn’t planning anything.

“What’s your name?”

“Frankie.”

“Frankie what?”

“Frankie Perino.”

“Oh yeah? Frankie Perino? You connected?”

“Yeah, I’m connected. I just been made too,” he lied.

“Sure kid, you’re connected and made. By the way, that was pretty slick in there, what you did. Who would have thought they would get robbed in a doctor’s office? I mean by someone other than the doctor. Very smooth. I’m impressed.”

“Like I care?”

“You better care, you little turd, or I’ll drop you like a hot potato and throw you out along side the highway somewhere.”

He looked over at Frankie and smiled shaking his head. “Damn, you, I mean we, made quite a haul, didn’t we? I would never have thought of holding up a fucking doctor’s office. Damn.”

Frankie just stared at the old man wondering if he was pulling a fast one on him or just what it was that he

wanted. Why hadn't he just left him and kept the jewelry and cash? What's his plan?

"Listen, old man, we gotta turn off here at the next exit. My fence is waiting in a bar there for me to come by with the goods."

"Oh yeah? What's his name?"

"Silky."

"Shit, where do you fuckin' kids come up with these names, off some fuckin' milk carton? Silky, shit."

Frankie just stared at the old man. Who did he think he was? He is riding on my success at pulling off a pretty cool heist. He even said as much. As long as he has that gun I don't have much say in what we are going to do and he may be old, but he not only looks tough but cold, like a stone cold killer. Frankie was beginning to fear for his life.

"And how much were you thinking this Silky would give you on the dollar, huh? Twenty-five, thirty-five? Shit, with this ice we should be pullin' in at least sixty. That is if you know where to take it."

"And I suppose you do old man?"

"I suppose I do. We'll go to my guy and cash in and split everything fifty-fifty. If you want to go your own way after that, fine. But I'm taking this truck. Now tell me where you are going?"

"New Orleans."

"Shit, New Orleans? You ever been there Frankie?"

"No."

"Well let me tell you, those Cajuns don't fuck around down there. They'll make you into crawfish bait before you step out of this truck." the old man started to laugh. "Little Frankie, the Cajun Queen. My God, how they are going to have fun with you."

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“I can take care of myself.”

“Oh, I’m sure you can, Frankie, seeing you’re a made guy and all.”

“Anyway, I ain’t plannin’ on stayin’ there long. I’m meeting up with a buddy.”

The old man looked at him and shook his head and turned back to watch the road.

They rode along in silence again for about thirty minutes before the old man asked, “So, what’s his name?”

“Who?”

“Your buddy, the guy you are meeting up with in New Orleans?”

“Why should I tell you?”

“Cause I asked, that’s why.”

The way the old man said it made Frankie nervous. He couldn’t see any harm in telling him the name of his pal. “Johnny Morelli. We go way back.”

“I can tell. What, you both nursed off the same titty? Shit, go way back. Kid, you don’t know what way back means. This Morelli kid, is he a made guy too?”

“No, but he will be. He goes by the name “Shiv.”

“Oh, that’s cool. Handy with a knife is he?”

“You don’t want to find out, old man.”

They drove for thirty minutes before the old man broke the silence again.

“What’s your final destination Frankie. I mean after New Orleans?”

“I’m arranging a boat to take me to the Islands.”

“A boat? And what kind of boat are you going to arrange to take you to the islands?”

Morelli’s got connections with some Vietnamese shrimpers who said they would take us if the money was right.”

Oh boy, Vietnamese shrimpers? You speak Vietnamese? Does The Shiv?”

“No, but money talks, old man, and we sure got enough of that, don’t we?”

“Yeah we do, Frankie. We sure have enough of the green stuff. Enough for all the women, booze and good times we can stand, but not Morelli. I’ll take you along since we are partners, but there ain’t room for nobody else.”

“What are you talking about, old man? Not enough for Morelli? He’s my partner.”

“Not anymore, Frankie, I’m your new partner.”

“Well, he ain’t going to like it.”

“He’ll just have to get over it. Listen, kid, I speak fluent Vietnamese. I’ll keep these gooks from screwing you over. They get all uptight and nervous when they find out a round-eye speakees their talk. We won’t let them know until we are in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico and well on our way to Costa Rica.”

“Who said we are going to Costa Rica?”

“Maybe you don’t hear so good either. I just said that.”

Frankie just stared at the old man wondering who this guy was. He had a feeling the old man knew a lot about all of his plans before he told him. But how?

“Where’d you get that strange gun?”

“I took it off of a gook, a North Vietnamese Colonel.”

“He didn’t mind?”

“I don’t think so. He was dead.”

“Did you kill him?”

“Well, he didn’t kill himself. I blew the fucker’s head off. I never seen a gun like his before; it’s a rare breed, so I took it. Notice the magazine?” The old man asked as he turned the gun sideways. It’s fitted ahead of the action and

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this grip? It's called a broom handle. It makes it easy to shoot holding it with one hand. Made in Germany before the big war, by Mauser. It's a beautiful piece. Just looks different because of the position of the magazine."

They continued to drive South on the Interstate for about sixty miles before the old man took an exit onto a County Road that was deserted except for a couple of farm houses. They drove about five miles on that road before turning off onto a dirt drive that wound through pastureland for about a quarter of a mile. It ended in front of an old white two-story farmhouse like a thousand others that can be found along every country road in the Midwest.

The old man reached down and picked up the bag containing all the jewelry and money.

"Get out."

"Why?"

"Listen, Frankie, I'm going to let you live and come along with me as long as you do as I say and don't try to screw me over. We are partners now, whether you like it or not, and I'm the boss. You got it?"

Frankie nodded.

I guess I didn't hear you, Frankie."

"Yeah, I got it old man."

"Good, then come along. I got a friend of mine I want you to meet. I think you'll like him. But don't get sideways with him, you might regret it.

They walked up the steps leading to the farm house. The old man opened the door, "Get in," he said.

Frankie walked in and stopped cold in his tracks.

"Dad?"

THE MAGIC CANNON

The Cannon That Could Fly

We weren't robbers, we were thieves. There is a difference. A thief is a trickster a robber takes something for its value and to have it. A thief doesn't want to have it. Robbers go armed. A thief doesn't have to. Thieves are always laughing. You don't want to joke around with a robber; robbing is serious business.

Stealing is an art. A thief has to be able to carry whatever he takes. He's got to be able to hide it.

Like magic! Diamonds are magic. That is why women wear them on their hands, as a sign of the magic of womanhood. Even though we aren't women, we are magicians. Or, as the Navajo say, a character of disorder. We are coyotes, the mischief-makers, tricksters. As one story goes, the Spirit Chief sent the mischief-makers to go to the land of the dream visions.

"You will be known as the Trick-people," Spirit Chief said. "Do good for the benefit of your people."

And that is just what we did!

A good thief makes a person believe, for the moment, that even a cannon can fly.

Trick-people confuse people and confusion is a funny thing. It makes it harder for people to do anything.

At every home football game, two fraternities, Tau Kappa Epsilon(TKE) and Phi Sigma Epsilon(Phi Sig's), set up, each in their separate corner behind the end zone, their respective noise maker that they set off in celebration of a touchdown. The TKE's had a bell that

they rang and the Phi Sig's had a cannon they fired. Everything was fine until...

The bell went missing. Nobody had any idea what happened to it until the TKE's received a note from the Phi Sig's stating they had taken it and if the TKE's wanted it back, they would have to find it. They continued to mock the TKE's publicly for weeks on end and to make matters worse, the TKE's couldn't make noise in the end zone on the rare occasion our football team scored a touchdown.

Well, the tricksters weren't too happy with another group trying to meddle with their province of the unexplained, so they decided to assist the TKE's in their quest to have their bell returned.

It began one autumn evening. Darkness had fallen on our calm city, LaCrosse, Wisconsin, a small college town and home of Heilman Brewery and Trane Company, located on the Mississippi River in Northwestern Wisconsin. A town of forty-five thousand people, or was it forty-eight thousand? It was a cool, dry Saturday evening in mid-October. The leaves had already turned colors a few weeks earlier and now had fallen, leaving the trees that lined the streets surrounding the campus, dark and barren, appearing like ghostly apparitions with stick arms reaching into the inky evening sky.

They were a group of six tricksters dressed in dark clothing and sneakers with carbon black from charcoal briquettes, smeared across their faces, gathered around a table in the dining room of their house. A group of tricksters, that enjoyed confusing different groups on campus. They were going over the plan one more time. Everyone knew what they were going to do. The tension in the room was high. They were hoping for a night with

no moon. They needed the darkness of the night to pull off their magic. They had been planning it for weeks and tonight was the big night. They all agreed, drinking and stealing don't mix. Tonight there would be no alcohol.

A friend of two tricksters from their high school was an officer in the organization, the Phi Sig's, the organization they were going to confuse. Unknowingly, this officer provided them with inside information. Information such as, where they stored their cannon!

The Phi Sig's, as usual, were having a party with a sorority and the music and noise would provide the tricksters with the cover they needed to get away with this heist.

The object of their mission, the Phi Sigma Epsilon cannon, was stored in a shed just outside the frat house and this is where the heist would take place. The distance wasn't that great between the shed and the house, so they would have to be careful and use caution when approaching the target.

The house was located on a cobblestone side street just off State Street, about a block from a girls dormitory on the edge of campus. The cobblestones were of some concern to the tricksters as the wheels on the cannon were metal and would make a loud noise that would echo on the cobblestones while they rolled it away.

The tricksters had discussed this problem over the past few weeks and decided the best remedy would be to wrap towels around each wheel. So, that night, each person held a handful of towels.

It was eerily quiet that fall evening. The nearby campus seemed to be deserted. Students most likely downtown celebrating another weekend.

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The night sounds seemed to be magnified as the tricksters walked out of the back door of the house. The tricksters proceeded quietly down Seventeenth Street to the frat house they were planning on stealing the cannon from. Some tricksters excitedly spoke in hushed whispers, the level of which continued to rise as their excitement grew. A “shhh” sound came from their leader, quieting the group down one more time.

When they arrived at their destination they stopped to listen for a sign of anyone that might be around. The only sound was that of the partygoers in the house behind the shed. It sounded like they were having a lot of fun.

The group split up. Two split in different directions from the rest of the group and went to their observation points behind large trees in the backyard while the other four proceeded to the wooden shed that had once been a garage.

The two wooden doors were closed and held together by a metal clasp, but no lock. The tricksters knew there wasn't a lock. They had been by the shed at least a half a dozen times during the past few weeks. This was a well-planned caper. The doors were difficult to open and scraped on the ground as they pulled them apart. The noise from the doors made the tricksters stop for a moment to make sure nobody was alerted to their presence. After confirming all was clear, they walked inside and there before them was the ominous dark shadow of the reason of their escapade. The Cannon!

“Quiet, someone's coming,” one of the tricksters at the observation post whispered.

It wasn't long before they heard a couple of voices approaching in the dark. They were laughing about something that they thought was funny. They stopped a

few feet away from the shed by some bushes. They unzipped and took a leak.

When they finished they turned around and walked back to the party without noticing a thing.

The tricksters were safe. They were lucky those two didn't take the time to look into the shed and check on their prized possession.

The tricksters proceeded to wrap the towels around the steel wheels. As they rolled The Cannon forward, the wheels squeaked. The noise seemed louder than it actually was and this added to their anxiety.

The tricksters had to roll this heavy piece of artillery over a half a mile through campus to their destination.

It was heavy, over 1000 pounds. Two tricksters were on each wheel and one at the breech of the cannon and another in front. They had to slow it down and stop it from rolling when they approached an intersection in case a car might be coming. It would be difficult to explain if they hit an oncoming car with a thousand pound cannon.

The slope into the basement of the trickster's house from the road was steep and they had to make sure the cannon wouldn't get away from them and smash into something in the house causing structural damage.

When the cannon was safely secured in the basement, the trickster's laughed. It would be held for ransom and an elaborate ransom note would be sent, consisting of cut out letters from a copy of Life Magazine to the Phi Sigs. It would read, "Return the TKE bell or you will never see your Cannon again."

All around campus, people were asking, "Who took The Cannon? Where was The Cannon being held hostage?" Nobody knew.

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The campus was abuzz with speculation. “I bet the TKE’s took it as revenge for the Phi Sig’s stealing their bell,” some students thought.

The TKE’s denied having anything to do with it.

“I think the Phi Sig’s have it and are just trying to get publicity and pin the blame on the TKE’s saying the TKE’s are retaliating against them for stealing their bell,” others said.

The Phi Sig’s were blaming the TKE’s while publicly mocking them, “Not very imaginative of the TKE’s. You’d think they would be able to come up with something a little more original than that. Why copy us? I guess they just wish they were as cool as the Phi Sig’s and this is their way of getting attention.”

Everyone was wrong. Nobody but one person outside the tricksters had a clue who took The Cannon and even that person had no clue where The Cannon was being kept and that person was the insider, the unknown co-conspirator.

After a couple of weeks of threats and pleadings, the Phi Sig’s realized the TKE’s really didn’t have their cannon and it was not going to be returned until the TKE’s got their bell back, so the Phi Sig’s gave in and returned the bell.

It wasn’t long after that and The Cannon mysteriously appeared, like magic – ON the roof of the library, next to the main hall on the university campus. Now, how would the Phi Sig’s recover their cannon from the roof of the library? They had no clue!

One of the tricksters approached a group of students as they stood around the building looking up at the cannon.

“Who put it up there?” One young man asked no one in particular. “How in the world are they going to get it down?”

“How do you suppose it got up there?” The young girl, obviously a freshman, standing next to him asked.

“I don’t know. It surely didn’t fly up there,” he replied.

“Are you sure?” The trickster asked.

“Well, no; but have you ever heard of a cannon flying?”

“Not before today,” the trickster replied.

For over forty-five years the secret has never been revealed and if you think this trickster is going to reveal the secret now, you are mistaken. Tricksters never reveal the magic of their illusion.

THE GREAT BLACKOUT OF '63

Before the Magic Flying Cannon of '67, there was the Great Blackout of '63, precipitated by some of the same characters of disorder involved in the Magic Flying Cannon Caper. This time, instead of transforming into Coyotes, they transformed into flying Ravens.

This was before the big flood of '65, which they didn’t cause, but their shenanigans surrounding the recovery from that flood caused a couple of tricksters to take an unplanned and early leave of absence from their pursuit of a higher degree.

Who are these characters of disorder?

The Navaho call them mischief-makers, thieves, or tricksters. The Spirit Chief sends them to the land of

dream visions to confuse people and they come in the form of a Coyote or a Raven.

The characters of disorder seem to have supernatural powers which help them perform their tricks. They live, die, come back, shape shift, perform all sorts of magic.

Reality is nothing more than an illusion.

The Raven was the first bird out of Noah's ark. It just didn't return. It didn't feel the need.

The one-eyed Odin, the Norse Lord of War, Death, and Knowledge had two ravens, Huginn and Muninn. They flew around the world every day bringing back up-to-date information on Odin's enemies.

The Ravens in question, these characters of disorder, lived in Hans Reuter Hall, a freshman dormitory at the University of Wisconsin - LaCrosse, named after a professor of physical education who was instrumental in the development and refinement of many teaching and coaching techniques. Hans was a master in the use of the Indian Club, the oldest hand apparatus used in rhythmical gymnastics. He also invented a back quiver for archers which could be used from a seated position, a pendulum timer that he used in his classes, and a moveable manikin, a model of the human body used in teaching anatomy. Reuter received multiple university and community awards, including the naming of this campus residence hall in his honor.

The dormitory is located next to the university football stadium and the characters of disorder had to walk past the gridiron every day on their way to classes, or bars. At night, the lights in the stadium would be on to illuminate extra-curricular activities, not only on the weekends but during the week. This bothered the characters of disorder as the lights lit up their room and interfered with their

sleep. So, they decided to do something about it and these mischief-makers didn't always play by the establishment's rules. They decided it would be in the best interest of those living in the dormitory if they turned off the lights - for good!

Exceptional thieves never leave a trace of their existence, so, to that end, they would have to possess something to carry away their bounty, but what could accommodate everything they apperceived they would procure? They decided on a suitcase, a large suitcase!

The caper went down at sunset on a Thursday when no evening activity was planned at the stadium. The late afternoon sky was afire with contrasting yellow, orange, and red clouds that streaked along the west side of the stadium.

The characters of disorder were in place and would wait for the sun to set. They had staked out the surrounding area of the football stadium to ensure no one was there. Students who spent the evening downtown would wander in at all hours, but the thieves weren't troubled by them as they would be more concerned about keeping their balance and watching where their feet were going than they would be in their surroundings.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, it was time. The characters of disorder ducked limbs and slipped between the trees on their way to their destination. They flowed as if they'd been born in the wild. Their faces were streaked with black and one called out in a cry similar to the wolf.

The first Raven carried the suitcase and dragged himself up and flew across the open parking lot and up to the main entrance of the stadium. He turned his ankle upon landing and the pain was excruciating, but his

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survival instincts forced him to move out to another hiding place higher up the entranceway. Soon the remaining two characters of disorder were by his side and it wasn't long before all three flew over the fence and onto the playing field. They skirted across the fifty-yard line to the visitor's side of the stadium. That is the side they started on. Two tricksters picked the light tower they would attack first and flew to the top, reaching the box that contained what they wanted. They dropped the items on the ground where the third trickster gathered them up and placed them in the suitcase. They continued around the field until they disabled every light tower surrounding the football stadium. When they finished, they had everything securely packed in the suitcase. It was very heavy and they took turns carrying it as they headed out of the stadium back to their dormitory.

The three characters of disorder decided it was best to leave town that weekend. So, in order to document the activities, they planted a colleague at the Saturday night football game to observe what transpired.

Their comrade told the tricksters that as the visiting team's fans, as well as the home team's fans, were entering the stadium, total pandemonium broke out when the switches were turned on to light up the field and nothing happened.

Officials called both football coaches out of the locker room and onto the field, along with the referees, to inform them of the problem.

"What are we going to do?" asked the visiting team's coach?"

"I'm not sure," replied the head referee. "Isn't there someone here who can fix the lights?"

The maintenance men were unable to determine the cause and they sure didn't want to climb forty feet up each light tower to continue their investigation. That was an electrician's job and there wasn't one working on a Saturday night.

When they informed the coaches and referees that they were unable to locate the problem, the stadium announcer came on and enlightened the spectators of their only course of action, "Game called - due to darkness!"

The fans were in total confusion. How could this be? What happened?

The mischief makers had confused and flimflammed the fans and officials.

That Friday, before the game, the characters of disorder didn't have a smooth departure as they fled the scene of their latest exploit. The generator went out in the car, a 1959 Ford, they used for their escape and they had to make an emergency stop in Sparta, Wisconsin. They found themselves short of money to pay the garage for a replacement generator, but, the tricksters, being the wily magicians that they were, struck a deal with the garage owner. They would leave one of their suitcases with him as collateral and when they returned that Sunday night, they would have the money and would swap it out for the suitcase at that time. The garage owner agreed.

That Sunday, when the mischief-makers returned, the garage owner remarked, "That suitcase sure is heavy, what do you have in it?"

Well, the mischief-makers couldn't reveal that there were two hundred fuses taken from the university's football stadium lights in LaCrosse, so, in staying in character of confusion and disorder, they told him it was

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filled with bones from the anatomy laboratory that they took home to analyze.

SAVING A WILD MUSTANG

Saving a Wild Mustang

I pulled in and drove down the driveway and into the pasture. I stopped at the corral where the Department of Agriculture Agent was waiting. She waved and undid the chain holding the gate and pushed it open.

I backed the trailer in and shut the rig down and stepped out. I walked to the back and knocked up the lever holding the trailer door shut. The door swung open. I reached in and threw a flake of hay on the ground by the back entrance to the trailer.

Then I pulled the paneling in, securing them to the sides of the trailer. This was routine. I had done it many times before in the fifteen years I had been rescuing and starting wild mustangs. I looked across the corral at the bay colored gelding. He stood off on the other side of the corral, not scared, but wary of me watching him. I didn't like what I saw.

I ambled over and put both hands on top of the gate, placing my chin on the back of my hands and one foot on the bottom rail while I observed the mustang. The

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Department of AG Agent approached the corral and said, "I'm not sure this one is going to make it, what do you think?"

"I've seen some pretty sorry looking mustangs, but this one has to be the worst. It looks like someone stretched some horsehide over a skeleton and is trying to pass it off as a horse. This horse is close to starving to death. Look at his legs, they're wobbling. He's so weak he can barely stand up. He may die before I can even load him, and look at his feet. They haven't been trimmed in at least a year and by the look of his coat, it looks like he has the mange. Where'd he come from?"

"We ain't sure. We got a call from the guy that owns this pasture saying he found the horse wandering around down the road. He couldn't get near it to halter it, so he coaxed it into his pasture with a bucket of oats. He sold his land and has to get the horse off and that's why he called us. We didn't know how bad his condition was until we came out and saw him. We noticed the neck brand and figured it's a wild mustang from the BLM, Bureau of Land Management, so we called you. You think you can get him in that trailer? We can't get near him."

"Oh, I'll get him in there; just don't know how long it will take. I don't want to get him worked up, it will only make the job that much harder."

"You got a rope?"

"No, just this carrot stick."

"No rope? How are you going to catch him, if you don't have a rope?"

"I'm not going to catch him. Some people think they have the right to touch a new mustang, but they don't, not without their permission."

“You’re kidding me, right? You have to get its permission?”

“If you want to have him trust you, and believe me, you do.”

“You are going to get that horse in the trailer with just that stick? How are you going to go about doing that?”

“Well, first I’m going to observe him before entering the corral. I want to know as much as I can about him. A wild horse in a corral can be trouble, even one as weak as this one, You can make a mistake with a person, and you can explain it. With a horse, you have to live with it or start over. In my experience, there has never been a time when a mistake was made that one of these two things didn’t occur. He’ll appraise me and I’ll appraise him, I know where I want to get him, but he’s the one that knows how to get there. Every horse is different. I know for this to work I have to get this horse calm, focused and confident and to accomplish this I have to be calm, focused and confident. These mustangs can spot a faker before he even opens the gate. I have to speak confidently with him using his body language. It can’t be an act, it has to be real. I’ll need your help.”

“Okay, what do you need me to do?” She asked.

“I want you to walk slowly into the corral and go to the trailer and hold onto the trailer door handle. When the horse goes in, I need you to close it as fast as you can. He may not want to come out once he goes in, but in most cases, they come out faster than they go in and if we can’t secure him in there the first time, it may be a long afternoon.”

“But aren’t you supposed to slowly introduce the trailer to the horse and do a step by step training process when teaching them to load?”

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“We ain’t training this horse to load. We are here to save its life. We’ll train it later. Once we are in the corral with him, I am going to start out by tapping the ground slowly with my carrot stick. When he moves, and he will, I will start to cut down the distance between me and him and stop tapping as long as he goes in the direction of the trailer. If he stops at the back of the trailer to eat the hay I dropped there, I will stop tapping and let him relax for a few minutes. Then I’ll start tapping the ground with the carrot stick once again. This will agitate him and he will either go into the trailer or around the corral to get away from me. He can’t and I’ll continue the tapping until he gets to the back of the trailer again. Simple, huh?”

“It sounds simple, but I doubt it is,” she said.

“We’ll see. Why don’t you go in there now and secure the trailer door and I’ll come in about five minutes later?”

“Okay,” she replied, and slowly entered the corral and walked over to the trailer while the horse cautiously watched her out of one eye while keeping the other on me. After a few minutes, I opened the gate and strolled casually to the horse, speaking softly. All I had with me was my carrot stick. I got about fifteen feet from him before he turned and bolted away on those wobbly legs. His hooves barely cut into the earth and his legs lacked power. He continued to trot back and forth along the far fence, watching me, head raised, nostrils flared, and ears pointing in my direction. He quit roaming the perimeter of the corral and settled into a side away from both me and the trailer, not agitated, just alert and ornery. I could see his sides twitching. Sweat had formed on his underbelly and on his chest. His breathing was more labored than it should have been for the short time he was running around. He was nervous and in very bad health. I thought

there was a good chance this horse had a respiratory problem to go along with all his other health issues. After about fifteen minutes of this routine, I guess he decided it would be easier on him to climb into the trailer than to continue to trot around the corral.

The empty trailer clanged with the sound of the horse's hooves as he burst in. The Agent quickly closed the door. I ran up to assist her in securing the door handle and we were ready to roll. The trailer was rocking back and forth as the horse moved around inside.

"I learned something today," she said. "That was pretty amazing."

"Well, if you consider the horse," I replied, "you will find out they are pretty amazing."

We walked around and entered the side of the trailer through the escape door and stood and watched him adjust. He stomped and turned around a few times before calming down. He looked at us and blew his breath out against my face. The grainy earth smell was intoxicating.

"That's right, boy," I said, "it was pretty easy, wasn't it? You're going to be fine. We'll fix you up."

At the time, I didn't have the confidence that we could. I knew it was easier said than it could be done.

"Come take a look at this fresh manure pile," I called to the AG Agent after we left the inside of the trailer. "It's filled with worms. My Lord, I have never seen so many worms in a pile of horse manure in my life. There have to be thousands of them in there."

She looked at the pile and shook her head in amazement, "I doubt this horse has been wormed in a couple of years. You'll have to take it slow and easy on the de-worming as well as the feeding or he will die on you sure as we are standing here."

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I nodded, “It’s a damn shame what humans do to defenseless animals. We need your agency to crack down on some of these folks.”

“I wish we could, but we don’t have any teeth. If we see something bad, we have to get the Sheriff in on it to make an arrest or a confiscation. Hell, if they are arrested, it’s a misdemeanor and they get a fine and a slap on the wrist and they are back doing the same thing a month later. It breaks your heart.”

“I know. All we can do is keep saving one horse at a time. I better head back. It will take me a couple of hours and I want to get him settled in before dark.”

“Ok, I need you to sign some papers, the government you know. It’s just saying you are legally taking custody of government property.”

When we arrived at the barn, the sun was barely peeking over the tops of the trees in the west pasture. In the distance, it looked like our horses rose out of the earth, first their ears then the shape of their heads and necks. They lifted their heads and their ears pointed in our direction. Then they took off and the earth trembled under the movement of their hooves as they ran to the fence line to meet the new member of the Mustang Rescue’s family of unwanted horses. I knew it would be a long time before this horse would be turned out with the herd. One kick that landed on this poor fellow, while they went through the ritual of determining herd hierarchy, could kill him.

I backed into the barn and opened the trailer. He tentatively stepped out on wobbly legs and headed down the aisle of the barn to the paddock we had set up for him. We had the water trough filled for him and a couple of flakes of hay waiting as well.

I stayed with him awhile that evening and at one point I reached out and he allowed me to touch him and I stroked his side. I promised him I would help him.

Softly I spoke to him, “Cages are everywhere. We all have them, don’t we boy?”

He nickered and I touched his flank and his hoof flashed up.

He just set the boundaries.

With the coordinated efforts of many of our great volunteers, three daily feedings, lots of love, and multiple vet visits to help him regain his strength his progress was nothing short of miraculous. He overcame equine lice, a bout of colic, and intestinal parasites to transform into the happy and healthy mustang.

He was adopted by a ten-year-old girl who was instrumental in nursing him to health. She is currently riding him and continuing his training in Woodstock, Georgia.

KENTUCKY RAIN

“There are six times that I can recall fearing for my life and two of them occurred when driving over the mountains in Tennessee.” Mustang Dave, June 19, 2011

On June 9th, 2011, we were contacted by Ashley Clark of the Daviess County Animal Control in Owensboro KY.

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(Davie's is pronounced "Davis"), who said they had rescued a mustang mare from the flooding Ohio River. It took four volunteer firemen and two Animal Control Officers over four hours to bring her into safety. Below is what Ashley told us:

"Well...I wish I could say that she was friendly but from what I have seen of her she has never been handled.

We initially became involved due to the flood we had here back in April/May. Her owner had her in a makeshift pen for at least a couple of years. He was not home and when the water rose she was left with no food and forced to stand in chest high river water for days. I am really surprised she made it. She was underweight and very weak when we were notified of her. It took four hours to get her to dry land due to the amount of flood water we had to take her through. We actually had to push her to deeper water so we could get the boat up next to her to put a halter on to hold her head above water.

She is now in a temporary home as a favor to me. The people keeping her just provided her a place to go after the flood water went down because we had no way to catch her. She actually found them and jumped into their field with their other horse. She has been there about a month. They called this week and said she had to go. I am very fortunate they helped her this long.

I thought originally she was older but according to her brand if I read it right she is only about nine."

We replied stating that we would try to find a home for this horse. We had been talking to David Herrin, Director of Heavens Happy Hooves, a horse rescue in Cartersville Georgia. He mentioned that they were looking for a wild

mustang to work on gentling and I told him about the one in Owensboro Kentucky. David said they would take it if we could arrange for transportation to get her down to Cartersville. We put out the word and many people responded generously to make the trip possible.

So, my wife, Jacqui, and I hooked up the horse trailer and headed north to Owensboro Kentucky. Owensboro is the largest city in Daviess County, with approximately 95,000 residents, and is known for its' International Barbeque Festival, held every second week in May, and the home of the International Bluegrass Music Museum. It is a farming community whose main crops are soybeans and corn, with a little tobacco thrown in as well. Its major employers are Owensboro Milling Company, which processes the corn and soybeans, and Barton Distillery, which, I assume, uses the corn to make its bourbon. We were told that Ezra Brooks Distillery was about to reopen again as well.

After we sent out an email about going to pick up the mustang mare, we received some responses to our request for suggestions as to what to name her. We thought the name High Tide was pretty good and we were leaning toward that name over others such as Esther Williams. Needless to say, the guy who suggested this name is older than dirt and we immediately dismissed it as the younger folks would have no clue who she was. The next suggestion was Stuck In The Mud, which was cute, kinda, but just didn't seem to rise to the occasion. Please pardon the pun. Finally, as we were fighting to keep the truck on the road when a gust of wind picked up during a rain storm, a suggestion came in via email from Greg Dorfmeier that resonated as the perfect name. He said she should be named after Elvis Presley's song, Kentucky

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Rain. we liked it immediately. So that's it. The contest is closed. Greg wins the prize which is to be the first to ride Kentucky Rain. Congratulations Greg.

Well, by the time we got our affairs in order and pulled out of Roswell it was already 11 a.m. We made pretty good time driving straight through, only stopping for gas. The exit off I 65 for Owensboro is twenty miles north of the Tennessee/Kentucky border. After driving over three hours through the Tennessee Mountains, it was a relief to get onto the William H Natcher Highway in Kentucky. The Natcher, as it is referred to by the locals, is a flat four-lane highway with very little traffic; in fact, very little of anything. After awhile we were concerned about running out of gas before we saw anything besides the miles and miles of soybean and corn fields.

We called the Daviess County Animal Control office to let Ashley Clark know we were close and to find out what time we were going to meet in the morning. We were told Ashley took the day off, but they gave us her cell phone number. We called and got her voicemail and left her a message to call us back when she got our message.

As we approached Owensboro, it started to rain and the wind picked up blowing the rain horizontally across the road. It was a fight to keep the truck on the road as the wind was gusting pretty hard. Ahead of us, we noticed plumes of light gray smoke drifting across the highway in front of the black sky. Something was burning and whatever it was, it appeared to cover a large area. It turned out that farmers were burning their fields clean of debris left from the flooding of the Ohio River in May. We were told that all the farmers' crops were ruined and that all the roads, except one, were underwater. It was the worst flood they experienced since the flood of 1997.

The Natcher came to a dead end and emptied into Highway 60 on the outskirts of Owensboro. Highway 60 turned into West 2nd Avenue, which is where our motel was located. We picked a good motel to stay in as it is about five miles from the farm where Kentucky Rain was being kept in a stock trailer inside a tobacco barn. She had been in that trailer for a week as they were unable to find anyone who would allow this mustang in their pasture. She had jumped the fence where she was temporarily being held and got into the farmers' soybeans. They wanted animal control to take her off their property immediately, which they did.

Ashley Clark returned our call around 4:30 p.m. and said she had to pick up a prison work detail tomorrow at 7:30 a.m. and that she would meet us at the motel at 8:30 a.m.

We woke at 5:00 a.m. to the sound of thunder and rain slapping against the motel room window. It had been raining hard for thirteen hours and it didn't appear that it would be letting up anytime soon.

Around 8:30, Ashley called to say she was going to drive out to the barn to make sure it wasn't too muddy to drive in to get the horse. By this time, it had been raining for sixteen hours straight and we were more than a little concerned about getting stuck out in the middle of a tobacco field.

Ashley called and said it appeared safe and that she was on her way to meet us.

We followed her south out of town and turned onto a small rutted road that stretched for close to a half mile through the middle of two tobacco and cornfields before we came to a dilapidated old tobacco barn. Water was standing close to knee deep along the side of the barn and

the muddy cornfield ended about thirty feet from the front doors where we would be backing the trailer to load Kentucky Rain. We opened the doors to the barn and we were surprised at how dark it was inside. At the back of the barn was parked a stock trailer with a canvas top and inside the trailer was a terrified little mare. She had been kept in that trailer in the dark for a week and we could only surmise the fear she must have been experiencing as she wondered what her fate would be.

We backed our truck up as close as we could get to her trailer. We then opened our trailer door and went and secured two fence panels, one on each side of each trailer. We did this to keep her from getting loose when we opened the door to transfer her over to our trailer. We closed the doors to the barn just in case she spooked and knocked over the fence panels and got loose.

I entered her trailer through the escape door in the front and gently tapped on the floor with my carrot stick to get her to move out. We didn't want to get her too excited as that would increase the possibility of her knocking over the side panels. Just my presence in the trailer was enough to raise her excitement level and she started to snort and prance around before stepping down on the ramp and out on the ground. She snorted a few times and put one foot in our trailer before spooking and running back into the trailer she knew as home. She turned her haunches toward me and pinned me against the front of the trailer. A place you don't want to be. I decided to ease out the escape door and let her calm down for a few minutes before trying to move her again.

This time when I entered the trailer she moved out right away and decided to step up into our trailer. Jacqui pushed our trailer door shut from outside the panel where

she was standing and we secured it and that was that. What we anticipated to be the most difficult part of our trip actually turned out to be the easiest.

We opened the barn doors and drove to the Daviess County Animal Control office to pick up the Coggins papers.

When they first rescued Kentucky Rain from the raging waters of the Ohio River, they took her to Dream Riders, a hippotherapy riding stables. They allowed the Daviess County Animal Control to use one of their stalls. They were able to find a veterinarian who sedated Kentucky Rain with a dart gun. They put on a lead rope and pulled a Coggins on her. As she started to come out of her stupor, she wouldn't let them get close enough to remove the lead rope so she is still wearing it. They rushed through the paperwork and got it back within forty-eight hours. Now we didn't have to worry about being stopped driving back to Georgia without proof of her being up to date on her Coggins. As it turned out, that would be the least of our worries.

We left Owensboro around 11:00 a.m. and were hoping to get out of the rain, which had been falling for eighteen hours straight. Unfortunately, that wasn't to be the case. Not only did we drive all the way back to Atlanta in rain, but in severe thunderstorm conditions with winds gusting between fifty and sixty miles per hour. At one point, about thirty miles north of Chattanooga, we pulled into a McDonald's to eat, when thunder and lightning struck, causing them to lose power. The manager yelled out "Lock the doors, lock the doors", but there was no way I was going to be locked in that place with Jacqui and Kentucky Rain stranded in the trailer outside. So I ran out and was hit by a gale force wind and rain that nearly

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knocked me off my feet. I could see poor Kentucky Rain nervously pacing back and forth in the trailer as the wind and rain blew through the slats, soaking her to the bone. I couldn't help thinking about everything this little horse had been through the past two years and how brave she is.

The truck was only about thirty feet from the door of the restaurant but I was soaked by the time I reached it. Since we were parked facing the direction the wind was blowing, we decided to stay in the parking lot and wait until it let up.

After about ten minutes, we left and headed south on I 65 toward Chattanooga. It wasn't long before we were in another severe weather pattern. This time we could feel the wind lifting the trailer off the road so we pulled behind some eighteen wheelers that were parked under an overpass. We waited for about fifteen minutes before we pulled onto the highway again hoping that the rain wouldn't be with us all the way home. It was a good thing we did, as we encountered numerous trees blown over along the side of the interstate and one actually fell across the right lane forcing traffic to merge into the left lane in order to get around it.

We called David Herrin when we crossed into Georgia to let him know we had been delayed by the storms and to ask him if it was raining in Cartersville. He said it wasn't yet, but they were expecting it to be there soon. We could only hope we would beat the rain there. David assured us that we would be able to drive the truck and trailer into the round pen he had set up for Kentucky Rain even if it was raining. Again, our concern was getting stuck in the pasture trying to unload the horse.

We finally pulled into the Heavens Happy Hooves pasture around 6:30 p.m. which was close to the time we

originally expected to arrive. David was there along with his four burros, Annabelle, Buttercup, Earl and Eeyor and one mini horse, Dancer, a quarter horse, Storm and Chaslie, a mustang mare he had adopted from us the prior year. The horses noisily greeted one another as we pulled in and all the burros came out to see what the commotion was about. As promised, the round pen was situated on high ground, so we had no problem driving in and unloading Kentucky Rain.

She didn't say anything, but we are sure Kentucky Rain was happy to finally be on dry ground as she lazily grazed on the clover and grass. Three of the burros followed us around the pasture like big dogs and stood with us gazing in at Kentucky Rain, their new pasture mate. Her eyes are so soft and gentle that I am convinced that eventually, she will make someone a great horse, hopefully before Greg gets on her.

The condition of her hooves caused us some concern as she was standing in water for quite a long time. We hope that she won't have hoof problems as she has been through more than her share of trials and tribulations.

She has a bold face and appears to be a Paint. It is rare to find a Paint mustang east of the Mississippi as most of them are adopted as soon as they are rounded up.

Again, the MWHR of Georgia would like to thank everyone who assisted in the rescue of this mustang. Believe us when we say she is very happy to be where she is today and it wouldn't have been possible without the love and support from people like you.

America's Living Legends, the mustang horse!

Let 'Em Run!

The next day Kentucky Rain busted out of the round pen to frolic with the donkeys.

A PAIR OF CUT JACKS

The annoying buzz of the alarm on my phone woke me from a sound sleep. It was 3:00 a.m. December 6, 2013, one day after the 80th anniversary of the greatest day in American history, the repeal of prohibition. When I sat up, I felt like I had been celebrating every day since that glorious occasion. We were going to Piney Woods, Mississippi, just south of Jackson, to pick up a pair of burros; we were getting cut “Jacks”, gelded males. The Mustang and Wild Horse Rescue of Georgia was asked to participate in The Platero Project, a joint venture between the Humane Society of the United States, HSUS, and the Bureau of Land Management, (BLM). They would loan out a burro to a non-profit to be tamed and then the non-profit would find it a home. The HSUS would then donate money to the non-profit from money they received from The Platero Project grant. We were told not to get involved with burros because burros were stubborn and mean little buggers. But when we hear something like this, we take it as a challenge, plus we have a ¾ blooded Cherokee and an animal whisperer volunteering his services. He has tamed everything from mustang horses, a mama bear and two of her cubs, a squirrel, a fox and other critters as well as four daughters. The last I know from personal experience is not an easy task.

We took off at 4:00 a.m. with the temperature at 71degrees. At our first gas stop in Alabama, we knew this was going to be a great trip. We walked into the store and asked if they had any Krispy Crème Donuts. They didn't, so we walked out with a bag of Ding Dongs and two Coca-Colas and a Snickers Peanut Butter candy bar, super-sized. This trip would be filled with junk food.

By the time we reached Birmingham, the temperature had dropped to 55 degrees and as we passed through Tuscaloosa, it was down to 50 degrees. When we entered Mississippi, it was a cold 47 degrees, the wind had started blowing and it was raining hard.

Four hundred and ten miles later we pulled off I 20 in Jackson Mississippi, the temperature was now a balmy 44 degrees with an estimated wind chill in the 30's, raining with a heavy wind. As we stopped at the end of the exit ramp, the trusty old Ford F150 pickup truck began to shudder and make a sound which sounded like a blown rod, whatever that is. Once I turn on the ignition, I am beyond my knowledge of the workings of a combustion engine.

We pulled to the side of Hwy 49 and "popped" the hood, and sure enough, we didn't blow a rod, but we did blow a spark plug. We were lucky it could be fixed. The Cherokee God of Good Luck was with us as a NAPA Auto Parts store miraculously appeared on the horizon only 500 feet in front of us AND it had only one spark plug kit left that would fit the truck. We learned something else from the clerk while spending \$70 for a

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little spark plug and a plastic casing; this is a common occurrence with a Ford F150.

Ten minutes later we closed the hood and we were heading south to Piney Woods. When we arrived the guard waved us through like royalty. Cary Frost, the BLM agent, was eagerly waiting for us and waved us over to the chute and we backed up our trailer. After brief introductions and a chat about mutual acquaintances, we found out Cary is a former rodeo guy from Toole Utah, where I had spent some time back in the early 2000's. He was transferred from Nevada to Mississippi. The federal government is leasing the land from the Piney Woods School District. Piney Woods is a Charter High School and the BLM's facility adjoins the school grounds to the north.

Cary locked down the panels of the chute to the sides of our trailer and brought the Jacks down the chute, closing off a section at a time until they were up next to the opening of the trailer with no place to go but forward. We had Cary cut off the rope holding the Jack's identification numbers before we loaded them. After the proverbial boot in the "ass", we had two new members of the Mustang and Wild Horse (and now Burro) Rescue of Georgia, Inc in our trailer. We signed the papers admitting we were in possession of government property and pulled out heading back to the Jack's new home.

Everything went well until we got into Alabama when we were met with heavy rains and wind. Every time we have gone on a long rescue mission we have encountered miserable weather. Everything from a Tornado when we

went to Owensboro KY to get a mustang we named Kentucky Rain, and Kansas and the Missouri Ozarks when we got our mustang, Shawnee, to a near Hurricane when we went to the Gulf Shores area of Alabama to retrieve a mustang mare, Aura, we had adopted out and who we found out had been abandoned in a field.

Due to the terrible driving conditions we had to cut back on our speed and didn't arrive at the Jack's new home until after 10:00 p.m. making for a very long day for two old mustangers and two young Jacks, all happy to have made it back safe and sound.

THE GANGSTERS OF WILDLIFE, OR A DIETY?

The Prairie Wolf and Biological Warfare:

When Lewis and Clark first saw a coyote in 1804, they thought it was a fox but then corrected themselves and William Clark finally called it a prairie wolf.

In 1823 naturalist, Thomas Say officially described the prairie wolf as *Canis latrans*, barking dog, which has been the recognized scientific name ever since.

Most of us are familiar with the cartoon, Wylie Coyote, where he tries his hardest to catch the Road Runner but is always unsuccessful. That is about all that the coyote has been unsuccessful at doing in spite of man's efforts for over 100 years to eradicate him from this earth.

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To the many Indian tribes of the Great Plains down to the Southwest all the way up to Oregon, Old Man Coyote was known as the Trickster and a deity, that saved the buffalo from a monster, invented fires and helped shape the world. But to the cattlemen and sheep ranchers, they are considered parasites and they launched a fierce battle that still rages today to wipe the coyotes out.

The first government agency saddled with the job of taking care of the coyote problem, was the Bureau of Biological Survey(BBS). Don't you think this is a great acronym for a government agency? The original target of BBS and the ranchers was the gray wolf and they were almost successful in wiping every wolf off the planet. Their recipe to achieve this included biological warfare and strychnine was the weapon of choice. They found that they could kill over 300 coyotes in a little over a week with the use of strychnine. But Montana officials rose, or should I say, stooped, to another level when they introduced sarcotic mange to coyotes. Mange is a parasitic mite that causes hair loss and inflammation. It is a miserable condition that causes itching and pain that eventually will cause the death of wild coyotes and foxes. Our government's policy has and still seems to be that predatory animals no longer have a place in our civilization.

Like buffalo skulls and exotic bird plumage, predator pelts were in high demand and it is estimated that hunters, called wolfers, killed hundreds of thousands of coyotes on the Great Plains in the mid-1800's.

In 1871, when Horace Greeley told R. L. Sanderson to, "Go West!" he didn't tell him that he would encounter an animal that was as smart or smarter than he was, the coyote. Anglo-Americans were unfamiliar with the coyote

and didn't know if it was a wolf, a fox, a bobcat or something else. What they were to find out is that he possesses all the same traits as humanity, the good and the bad and that he was truly a cunning force to reckon with.

They possess a trait similar to what some humans attempt to achieve through Autogenic Training, the ability to adjust to a stressful environment and survive. This trait allows them to assess the environment around them. If they sense plentiful resources, they will produce large litters of pups, if not, their litters are much smaller.

Why is this important? Well, as the cattle and sheep ranchers of the west were busy eradicating the wolf population, the coyotes were quietly replacing them until their population was estimated to be in the millions.

In addition to the biological warfare, the ranchers employed firearms, dogs, and traps. That along with market hunting, which was later to be outlawed, they were on the way to the eradication of the barking dog.

But wait, it seemed almost impossible to even thin out this trickster, the coyote. As the saying goes, it's time to get out of Dodge and that is what they did. The coyote started to move to different locales and, like humans, they are very adept at adapting to their new surroundings.

Coyotes represent one of the most successful colonization stories of any animal in North America. In less than 70 years, they had spread to almost all habitats within the US and now they live just about everywhere imaginable to even include your backyard. Coyotes begin looking for a den sometime in March or April, and usually do not use the den again from one year to the next.

Coyotes seek out the type of prey that will give them the greatest reward with minimal risk of injury to themselves. As a result, their favored prey include small

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mammals such as rabbits, mice, rats, and squirrels, as well as human-produced food such as garbage, cat or dog food. Coyotes also eat insects, fruits, and berries.

From coast to coast they've become a fact of life in American cities. They howl in downtown Atlanta, Washington D. C., Chicago, Beverly Hills and just about every city in America. Coyotes now born and raised in cities prefer to live in cities just like humans.

Studies have found that the coyotes in the northeastern US differ from their western cousins. As coyotes migrated east across the continent, they encountered whatever remained of wolves and some interbreeding occurred. Coyotes in the northeastern United States outweigh their western cousins by 20 – 30 lbs and have more wolf-like physical traits. Urban coyotes do not feast on pets and garbage; they typically stick to a natural diet and prefer living in parks, preserves, cemeteries, and other out-of-the-way areas as much as possible. The food available in these locations is rodents, reptiles, fallen fruit and other food items that are part of a natural diet. Coyotes, of course, take feral cats or the occasional domestic cat that has been left outdoors. However, pets are not primary prey for them. A study by Urban Coyote Research Program analyzed over 1,400 scats and found that “the most common food items were small rodents (42%), fruit (23%), deer (22%), and rabbit (18%).” Only about 2 percent of the scats had human garbage and just 1.3 percent showed evidence of cats.

Probably the best-known trickster ever, Richard Nixon, banned the federal use of poisons for predator control in 1972. Like the wild horses and burros and the buffalo eradication, coyote control has been in the middle of the culture wars for years.

Between 2006 and 2011, hunter's have killed over 500,000 coyotes nationwide.

For every coyote killed, another rat lives.

BISSELL IS MORE THAN A FLOOR CLEANER

Being an unaccomplished horseman of sorts, I have been on what I would call some fairly long horseback rides when I dabbled in endurance riding. In fact, I have heard some of my cohorts and friends complain after being in the saddle for a mere 3 hours. Some of you who have never ridden a horse or who have only been on one a short time, aren't aware of the stress on a rider's body and the aches and pains you develop if you are not in good shape when you ride a considerable distance. So, if we complain after only a few hours, I wonder how guys like Frank Hopkins and Israel Bissell felt after their long rides. Some of you may have read my post awhile back on Frank Hopkins, of Hidalgo fame, who called the mustang horse the most significant animal in American History, and who was arguably the greatest horseman ever and winner of over 400 endurance rides ranging from 50 miles to over 3,000 miles, all on mustangs. These men spent a lot of time on the back of a horse. So, who is this Bissell character? Well, his first name is Israel and not much is known about him but he accomplished a truly heroic 345 mile ride when, as a twenty-three-year-old postal rider, he rode over four days and (I wasn't going to include this because it is so small) 6 hours, and I am going to say that his horse was a mustang as well since there is nobody

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around to refute that) This ride was from April 19, 1775, to April 23, 1775, between Boston and Philadelphia, telling people the war had begun. Maybe if he yelled the British are coming he may have gone down in our history books.

But talk about being under appreciated, many historical documents listed his first name as Trail and a guy by the name of Paul Revere (this was before he met the rest of The Raiders) received all of the press and glory for his ride and yelling "The British are coming, the British are coming." At least that is what I was told he said but I can't confirm that.

What must have made all this stardom Paul received all the more galling to Mr. Bissell, is that Mr. Revere's ride was only 19 miles but at least Israel got a floor cleaner named after him? Heck, this is my story and I can tell it how I want.