

# **Macabre Memories**

**Eclectic Tales to Chill the Soul**

**George Larson**

## Bert's Curious Dilemma

My awakening really began with the discovery of a severed arm with a gold, signet ring still attached to the forefinger on the owner's hand. But I'm getting too far ahead of myself in telling you about my curious dilemma.

My name was Albert Perry, or simply Bert to my friends and family. I'd been a crime reporter for the *Milwaukee Sentinel Journal* coming on thirteen years. My beat was a large one: the entire state of Wisconsin which kept me on the road for many days each month. I covered crime stories for the paper, the more sensational ones that seemed to resonate with our readers and sometimes for those living beyond our borders. I was proud to say I'd picked up a handful of journalistic awards over the years. While the kudos might be ego rewards, they didn't pay the bills. There was no serious money in journalism, but it was the profession I'd chosen and loved. My English degree from the UW in Madison set me on this particular life course and I'd never looked back in regret.

I hired on with the *Sentinel* straight out of college and was mentored by the paper's managing editor, Billy Donovan, for a number of years before he died of cirrhosis of the liver at fifty-five years of age. Yes, like many Irishmen, Billy was a serious drinker who reveled in telling bawdy stories at his favorite watering hole located a block over from the newspaper's offices. But he was one fine editor who was nationally recognized for his integrity and honesty in reporting the news, no matter the consequences. The *Sentinel* skillfully stole him away from the *Chicago Tribune* with the promise of journalistic independence and a healthy salary boost. But more than anything else, Billy was a father figure to me and someone I could implicitly trust. His guidance, advice and occasional admonishments of my work shaped me into the person and reporter I am today. A number of my early stories were ceremoniously spiked by him in front of me and the rest of the newsroom staff. I believed the spike was a gag gift from his colleagues when he left the Trib. It prominently sat atop his uncluttered desk. He would laugh loudly as he performed the ritual that had never gone out of style, at least in his opinion, and tell me what was wrong with it and how to make it better. I was always chagrined, but I learned my lessons about crafting a good story. I still miss him very much.

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One of Billy's constant, journalistic mantras concerned truth and accuracy in writing. He'd say truth was an iffy thing at best because readers were human and information was processed through differing prisms. Interpretation of a story would simply vary from one person to another. What was the takeaway message for the reader, he'd constantly ask. He'd say that truth was best left to the philosophers and not journalists since it was an impossible thing to determine. Accuracy, however, was another matter altogether. It was the one thing a reporter could control. Facts were facts and nothing more. There was no room for innuendo, speculation or bias as they were anathemas in the news business. But facts had to be parsed, logically weighed and presented in such a way as to approach, but never truly achieve, that illusive thing called truth.

As a cub reporter, Billy had me go through the paper's obits to see if any unusual death notices were posted that needed my follow-up. Of course, such things were rarely found and it was merely Billy's exercise of instilling the virtue of attending to detail while building self-discipline in me. It was a training regimen and really nothing more. Then I visited local police stations to review the crime blotters. It was another bit of scut work he assigned me to dry the wetness behind my ears. These onerous chores lasted through my probationary period and then I was cut loose to report on real crimes. But I had cut my baby teeth on those and other of Billy's lessons.

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Sure, real crimes, but typically after the fact. Robberies, kidnappings, serious assaults and murders were my meat and potatoes. Corruption cases were popular, but suicides less so unless it involved a prominent person. While Milwaukee was fertile ground for my articles, it was the suburban and especially rural settings that seemed to get the most attention from the readers. Why was that the case? I wasn't certain, but supposed it was about that old adage: "it can't happen here." But even the most bucolic, Wisconsin towns weren't immune from crimes and its criminals. And that fact of life kept me busy and gainfully employed.

Now I had an active case of serial killings that had baffled the authorities and piqued my interest. Truthfully, I was becoming obsessed with it and used my travels to piece together what

may or may not have happened to the victims. I wanted to solve it on my own and score a Pulitzer in the process. I couldn't let the cops beat me to the identity or identities of the killers. But I had to be careful not to step on any police toes in doing so or I could be charged with obstruction of justice and also risk being fired from my job. However, I was an investigative reporter to the core and couldn't help playing at least a passive role as a detective. My mind then flashed on the proverb about pride going before the fall. I simply couldn't afford to make any missteps, yet I was determined to bring the perpetrators to justice. It was a personal challenge and one I couldn't, wouldn't ignore.

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Denny St. Germain was a full-blooded Ojibwa born on a reservation in northern Wisconsin. His tribal name roughly translated to "Feather in the Wind." When he was about ten, the family moved from Lac du Flambeau to Milwaukee since his dad had a job offer to work the assembly line at the Harley Davidson factory south of the city. He was a bright kid by all accounts and liked by those who knew him. Denny decided to visit his great grandmother who lived in northern Wisconsin during his summer break from school at the UW, Milwaukee. He would begin his sophomore year with a generous academic scholarship no less. But hitchhiking to the northland wasn't something his parents looked forward to. He reminded them he was now an adult, legally of age and could do as he pleased without their permission. The naiveté and arrogance of the young had raised its contentious head within the family once again. Denny promised to call his parents every day and he did so on the first day of his trip. But he was then silent for the rest of his short life.

According to police, Denny was last seen at the Petro truck stop on I-94 just north of Madison. I knew it well from my travels and its fare was better than most, but maybe that wasn't saying much. The parents were frantic when he didn't call. They checked with his great granny, friends and anyone else they could think of to see if he'd made contact with any of them. He hadn't. His choice of routes made perfect sense to me. He likely hitched I-94 out of Milwaukee that flowed seamlessly into I-38 and then a direct shot north. A missing persons report was filed with the Milwaukee PD and a BOLO was issued statewide. But initially there was no locating of one Denny St. Germain, dead or alive.

Denny's mutilated body was found by a trucker behind the weigh station off I-94 North. While waiting in line for inspection, the trucker took a leak behind the building and noticed something strange at the edge of the woods. Taking a closer look, he discovered Denny's bloodied body, or what was left of it, lying in tall grass. The trucker was so traumatized by the gruesome sight he lost his breakfast on the spot. The state patrol from the Madison barracks then took charge of the death site and opened an investigation. It took the police a couple of days to confirm Denny's identity through dental records since his body had been badly mauled and eaten; 'beyond recognition' was the phrase the cops used to describe the insult it sustained. I took an immediate interest in the news clip and convinced my boss it would have commercial legs as a follow-up piece for our paper: local college student, Native American, Milwaukee resident. It couldn't miss. He readily agreed so I headed to Madison to investigate a horrific incident; one that would later reverberate through our state and far beyond. It would be the first of several murders and I couldn't foresee then how they would ultimately conclude. I wished now I'd left the investigation in the hands of the professionals.

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I started with interviewing staff and regular customers at the Petro station where Denny was last seen alive. Some were forthcoming and some not. It was simply the way things worked. Regardless, Denny's death was the number one talking point of the patrons and wait staff alike. So I sat back and listened while covertly jotting down some notes to refresh my memory later. A redheaded waitress recalled serving Denny: ham and two fried eggs with black coffee with toast on the side. That was how she remembered customers; by their orders. So Denny was Mr. Ham and Eggs to her. She noticed he was talking to a trucker named Ted or Ed or Fred, she wasn't sure which, a long hauler who regularly stopped at the station on his run from Chicago to the Twin Cities and return. So Ed or Ted or Fred was my first lead. I didn't bother to ask her what he typically ordered.

An older guy sitting at a table joined the conversation and speculated that Denny was attacked by a rogue black bear. He claimed there had been several attacks recently throughout the state, many attributed to mothers protecting their cubs. He said his brother-in-law was a police officer on the Sun Prairie force and the scuttlebutt among the rank and file cops suggested it was a bear attack. But they were at a loss to explain the savagery. That was what had the old-

timers puzzled. Bears typically didn't feed off humans or so he believed unless they came out of hibernation early. Then hunger might cause them to attack and feed. Of course, this was late summer and not early spring in Wisconsin so I dismissed his theory of Denny's death. I thought perhaps it was a rogue bear, but not necessarily a hungry one.

The guy went on to describe what was left of Denny's body when it was discovered. Again, he said his information came from a wholly reliable, unimpeachable source; his brother-in-law. It didn't amount to much, not what he said, but what was left of the body. According to the man, the body was dismembered with its throat ripped out. Limbs were left scattered about at the scene, except for Denny's right arm which went missing. At that point of the story, several patrons headed for the front door or the restroom. This was not a tale to be told over breakfast or any other time while eating. It was stomach churning in its gruesome detail. Being a wiseass at heart, I asked him how a cute teddy bear could do such damage to a human body. He laughed at my silly question and told me that large black bears can weigh-in at over 700 pounds. Those in the 500 to 600 pound range were pretty common in these parts. Well, so much for my knowledge of bears. I always thought they were cuddly creatures.

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As you could tell, I wasn't much of an outdoorsman having been born and bred in Milwaukee. My one woodsy encounter with an animal was when I was on a camping trip with my parents in the upper peninsula of Michigan or the UP to the locals. I was seven or eight years old at the time and playing at the edge of our campsite at dusk. As I walked along a path cut in the trees, a large dog rushed at me and bit me on my right forearm causing lacerations and copious bleeding. My dad heard my screams and came to my aid, shooing away the creature with his loud voice and a large stick. It took nine stitches to close the wound and a course of rabies shots afterwards which I will never forget. They hurt like hell! The dog was never found and to this day I'm not sure of its breed. Maybe it was from the Shepherd or Alsatian family of dogs. I didn't know which since I was just a young kid at the time. Oh, but I did remember those shots. And I still bore a star-shaped scar as a reminder of the encounter. I'd never seen my dad so frightened before. And he'd never mentioned the episode since. But that was a camping adventure I'd never forget. It was the last one I ever went on.

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Next on my itinerary was a stop at Denny's place of death. I didn't expect to find anything useful, but I needed to see it to add context to my story. Billy's admonition about accuracy in reporting had stuck with me all these years. I easily located the spot since the yellow police tape still remained attached to small stakes stuck in the ground which defined the perimeter around Denny's body. Fortunately, the weigh station was closed so I didn't have to ask for permission to poke around. The authorities likely wouldn't have agreed to my request even though all of the forensics work had been completed days before. So I got lucky. There really wasn't much to see other than a lot of dried blood on the matted grasses. I suspected that Denny had been given a ride to the weigh station by a friendly trucker and decided to spend the night before continuing his journey northward. Maybe it was Fred, Ed or Ted who dropped him off. Denny wasn't in any particular hurry to reach his great grandmother's home according to his mother and father. His only time constraint was making sure he returned to Milwaukee in time to start the fall term. And he had plenty of time to do so. After all, he was a responsible adult and free spirit at his age.

I took some photos of the site to bolster my story. They might or might not be used since it was totally the call of my editor. I searched the area for about a hundred yards in each direction looking for anything that might be amiss. The woods were dense here and I had trouble negotiating them without scratching myself on small tree branches that jutted out in different angles. I even managed to trip once on the underbrush. But my search was utterly useless, except for one thing: the scat of a large animal. I took a photo of it. It didn't look fresh and I had no clue as to what type of animal deposited it. It was larger than a dog's poop as best I could tell. It wasn't deer droppings since I had seen many examples along the roads over the years and these didn't resemble them in the slightest, but I couldn't deduce anything more. Maybe the bear theory was the correct one or perhaps it was the feces of a human.

It suddenly happened as I was about to start my car. I was damn lucky I hadn't been driving at the time. It was another one of my seizures. I'd experienced them since I was a kid, but with the new meds, they were now less frequent and shorter in duration. My brain controlled how my body moved by sending out small electrical signals through the nerves to the

muscles. My seizures occurred when abnormal signals from my brain changed the way my body functioned. At least that was the science behind them.

I knew seizures differed from person to person. Some people had only slight shaking of a hand and didn't lose consciousness. In my case, I became unconscious and my body shook or so I was told after each fit. Some people who had seizures briefly lose touch with their surroundings and appear to stare into space. Although the person was awake, he or she didn't respond normally. Afterwards, the person doesn't remember the episode. I fell into this latter category and it was a frightening experience. My only consolation was my Fitbit wristband that recorded my heart-rate and would tell me of any changes, but only after the fact. I'd constantly check the numbers to determine if I'd had another seizure. It was the only way I could keep track of them. Thank God they didn't happen often!

After resting awhile, I next visited the Wisconsin State Patrol barracks in Madison. I'd contacted Jim Thomlinson, the public affairs officer, before I left Milwaukee. He graciously agreed to a meeting, but told me he couldn't go into too much detail as it was an open, ongoing case. I had spoken to Jim several times over the years and I believed he thought I was a responsible reporter. I respected his role and situation and knew he had to be damn careful with what he released to the press. After the perfunctory greetings, I asked Jim about Denny's death, particularly about the bear theory. He acknowledged that it was the prevailing one, but more investigation was needed to confirm it. He commented that the coroner's report had just been received at the barracks and was presently being reviewed by the assigned investigator. With that comment, it seemed there was only one person assigned to the case and that made sense given the circumstances. Jim then confirmed some elements of the short blurb in *The Madison Times* weekly regarding Denny's death, the same one I'd read. Yes, it seemed it was a bear attack, and the animal fed off the body. Yes, Denny's right arm was missing and hadn't been found despite an exhaustive search. And yes, they were already aware of Ted, Fred or Ed and were tracking him down as we spoke. Then Jim dropped one tidbit of information that hadn't been mentioned before. Denny had a hunting knife with him, a ten inch one that he may have had for personal protection while on the road. His parents knew he was carrying it when he left home. It actually made his folks feel a little bit more comfortable regarding his safety. The knife was found next to what was left of his body with its sheath still in his backpack. The knife, like most everything close to his body, was bloody. So maybe Denny did put up a fight with his attacker. After a few



more questions that came to naught and an exchange of a few more pleasantries, I left for Milwaukee.

I put my car on cruise control and my mind on autopilot as I drove home. I'd taken I-94 countless times while covering stories in the southern tier of the state. As I mulled things over and over again, I was struck by an unsettling thought. I may have been at the Petro station the same time as Denny. I wasn't positive, but it was a possibility. I stopped there going north to Eau Claire to cover a story of a string of burglaries at pharmacies in the city. I did an overnight and returned via the same route and stopped once again at the station on my way home. The possibility that I might have seen Denny alive intrigued me. Kismet or coincidence, I wasn't sure which one.

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My story was shaping up to be a human interest one rather than a crime piece. But either would sell papers in my opinion. I'd tried to interview Denny's parents, but they were too grief stricken to submit to that type of intrusive journalism. I always winced when a TV reporter would thrust a microphone in front of a traumatized family and ask how it felt to lose their only son in a car accident. I couldn't bring myself to do such things so I respected the St. Germain family wish for nothing more than privacy. I didn't press them any further. I believed I still had a bright conscience and moral compass. I generally slept well at night. I wanted nothing more than continuing to do so.

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The story appeared in the Sunday edition of the *Sentinel*, starting below the fold on the front page. That was a prominent place that would grab the reader's attention or so I hoped. Well, be careful what you wish for as the saying goes because I was being bombarded with phone calls, e-mails and text messages unlike ever before. Since my name was on the byline, I took the brunt of the onslaught. I tried to slough off some to my colleagues, but they wanted nothing to do with them. They reminded me it was my story and to suck up the good with the bad. But many of the communications turned out to be bad. A number of them ran the gamut from A to Z: absurd to zany. It was just part of my job to field them.

One lengthy letter from a reader attributed Denny's demise to pure evil. Yes, that was what the sender asserted: evil. Not a bear, but unadulterated evil. He went on to explain his thesis. He posited that Denny's death and other horrific events were caused by ley lines that crisscrossed the state. He then explained that ley lines were spiritual, energy lines that transmitted both good and evil spirits along with their powerful communications. Those living along the paths of the lines were most susceptible to their effects. And the evil ones accounted for the state's history of abominations in the past. He asserted that there existed a distinct triangle of lines that pulsed evil along its route. He noted that Native American folklore contained many references to the lines and they served as mystical, magical signposts for many of the tribes.

He suggested looking at a map of Wisconsin to prove his point. He stated that the top point of the triangle of death was in Plainfield, the home of the infamous killer, ghoul and cannibal named Ed Gein. Gein was a well known figure in Wisconsin history by not only killing two women, but keeping their body parts as trophies to adorn his house: human skin lampshades, skulls mounted atop his four poster bed, then went on to grave robbing bodies from the local cemetery to make skin facemasks and bodysuits that he wore. It seemed Ed had a major, mommy problem back in the 1950's, among more serious mental issues, as I recalled. After he was adjudged to be insane, he was able to live out the rest of his life in relative comfort and obscurity at a state mental institution for the criminally insane.

The letter writer claimed the east side of his purported isosceles triangle ran from Plainfield to the Milwaukee area, specifically bisecting the small cities of West Allis and Waukesha. He noted the two were only thirteen miles apart. Well, at least that much of his fantastical story was true. He stated that Waukesha was home to the two girls who attempted to kill a classmate on the orders of the Slender Man, a tall, skinny, dark and mysterious figure who first appeared online as a game character. My writer insisted that the two attackers were under the negative influences and evil powers of the malevolent ley line spirits. That was his explanation anyway. But I remained skeptical. And I certainly wasn't ready to discard my incredulity.

As to West Allis, the writer correctly stated that the city was home to one Jeffrey Dahmer when he lived with his maternal grandmother for awhile before moving to the west end of

Milwaukee proper to continue his murders and cannibalistic indulgences. Of course, the ley lines were once again responsible for his aberrant actions. No doubt about it, at least in his mind.

And to the next leg of his triangle, it ran due west to Madison. It was none other than the spot where Denny St. Germain had died a horrible death. It was one that I was very familiar with and one that I'd never forget. He then told me to draw a line back to Plainfield and that would create a nearly perfect triangle, a Devil's triangle, as he called it. I did so by using an old roadmap I'd squirreled away in one of my desk drawers. Yes, it was a decent triangle, but only if you believed his story. And I didn't believe, but I researched ley lines nonetheless. I was nothing, if not thorough. I was nothing, if not anal retentive too. Why I bothered to waste my time on such things must have something to do with my innate sense of curiosity. I guess I was cursed with the attention to detail stuff that Billy always drilled into me.

It didn't take much research to determine what ley lines were. There was much literature about them on the internet and elsewhere. It seemed others, in addition to my pen pal, believed in their existence. Simply put, they were alignments of places of significance in the geography or culture of an area, often including manmade structures. They were, in an older sense, spiritual and mystical alignments of land forms or so the theory went. The most famous ones were associated with Stonehenge and the Druids in England. American ley lines were connected to Native American cultures, traditions and beliefs about powerful spirits moving along the lines and interacting with humans. I found little information about evil vibes or pulses or messages of a malevolent nature being transmitted along the networks. I guess if spiritual and mystical communications of various shades and stripes could manifest themselves along the lines, then why not evil energy as well?

I then pulled out the letter's envelope from my wastebasket. I was curious as to the identity of the sender since the letter was unsigned. There wasn't a name on the return address, only the words: Mendota Mental Health Institute in its upper left hand corner. It was postmarked at Madison. That hospital was the first insane asylum established in Wisconsin.

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The kooks, crazies and well meaning people often all came out of the woodwork at the same time when the paper hit the streets. I was deluged with these people contacting me at the

*Sentinel* and telling me things I should know. Mostly, it was easy to quickly separate the wheat from the chaff or, more specifically, the nutcases from the sane, sincere readers.

I received an e-mail from one reader suggesting that Denny had been mutilated by an alien being. He or she pointed out the strong similarity between the cattle mutilations in the western U.S. some years ago and the physical insults to Denny's body. I didn't see any connection and hit the delete button.

Sometimes readers do come up with plausible theories, or more likely suggestions, to explain the inexplicable. One caller thought it possible that a lion or tiger had escaped from Circus World in Baraboo and was responsible for Denny's death. She noted the circus was located less than twenty miles from where his body was discovered. I thanked her and immediately followed up on the lead. Baraboo had been the summer home of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus for several decades before permanently moving its operation to Sarasota, Florida. I knew at least that much about the Wisconsin Dells history and its attractions. I found that Circus World had been in business for over thirty years and one of its major acts included big cats.

I called the main number listed for the circus and after several transfers reached its managing director, Jim Rainey, aka, Mr. Jingles, the head clown. He laughed when I asked him about missing animals. I guessed clowns do that a lot. In any case, he said all of his cats were present and accounted for and, if one went missing, the local authorities would be immediately notified. He claimed it had never happened before. As I was about to hang up, Mr. Jingles pitched me about doing a cover story about the circus. I told him I did crime and not entertainment stories, but promised to pass along his request to the responsible editor for possible follow-up. I never much liked clowns as a kid and I still don't; especially pushy ones.

So, after a hectic time, things started to slowly wind down to a more normal pace, as normal goes at a busy newspaper. The interest in my story had waned. After all, it was now yesterday's news, merely paper for the bottom of the birdcage. But that lull would only last for a short while because another mutilation and death was about to happen. And this time I would be all over the case like stink on shit to put it crudely. I was still gunning for that Pulitzer.

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Gloria Rainwater was up in years to put her ninety plus years into polite perspective. She grew up on the Ojibwa Indian reservation outside of Lac du Flambeau and had only recently moved to town for health reasons. She was somewhat of a revered figure in the community; not because of her age, but because she was one of the tribe's shamans. She, like her kinsman, practiced an animistic form of religion as their forefathers had done from time immemorial. Truth, wisdom and the pathway to heaven were to be found in nature and all of nature was sacred in their beliefs. She was also the tribe's medicine woman, a healer who gathered natural ingredients from the woods and fields of the reservation and turned them into potions and lotions for her many patients. While she believed in modern medicine, she didn't turn her back on the old, proven and traditional remedies and cures of her ancestors. But she also was a healer of minds and spirits for those seeking her help. And such help was sorely needed by those suffering from chronic depression, chronic alcoholism and chronic poverty; all common, endemic problems on the Ojibwa reservation.

Lac du Flambeau was a town of about 3,000 souls, most of them Ojibwa. It was a down-on-its-heels one with modest, clapboard houses, a nearly nonexistent downtown and a smattering of mobile homes. Its only claim to fame and income producer was The Torch Casino that employed a few tribesmen, but mostly Anglos from surrounding communities. It was an Ojibwa tribal enterprise and a big moneymaker. The Indians didn't need to work there or elsewhere since the profits from the casino were distributed each month to members of the tribe. It was enough money to satisfy their modest lifestyles, but little more. Regardless, it seemed to meet their hardscrabble expectations that didn't envision any hope for a better future.

I was south of Hurley following an ongoing story about a poaching ring operating in both state and national forest preserves when I caught the call for police backup on my radio scanner. Many, smaller police forces couldn't afford advanced, encrypted communications so I was able to easily monitor their conversations. It was something I'd done for years and it had paid dividends in the past for scooping stories that others would miss. The call came from a Vilas County Sheriff's deputy who reported a murder, yes murder, in Lac du Flambeau and he requested immediate assistance. Murders were highly unusual in Wisconsin, except in Milwaukee and a couple of other, larger cities. My story about black bear poaching would have to wait. I thought it a good one. Poachers would sell the meat, fur and paws of the animal in the

U.S., but the real money was in the gallbladder trade with the Far East. Asians would pay dearly for bear gallbladder because they believed it to be an aphrodisiac, much like ground rhino horn. It was a nasty business and federal agents from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had been called to assist in the investigation.

I sped towards Lac du Flambeau and hoped I wouldn't be pulled over for speeding. Luckily, I hadn't been and arrived in the town in less than thirty minutes. It was easy to spot the scene of the crime; I simply followed the local traffic and soon arrived at Gloria Rainwater's trailer. There were many police cars and lookie loos at her home. I parked some distance away and made my way to the crowd that had already gathered in large numbers. It was obvious that a couple of stringers were present from other news media outlets given their aggressive questioning of the baby-faced police officer manning the barrier to Gloria's residence. He remained mute despite the onslaught of questions from the reporters. He'd been taught well by his superiors.

It was evident from where I was standing that the storm/screen door and the metal clad entry door to the trailer had been pulled off their hinges and now lay in front of it. The body of a dog, a large Malamute, it appeared to me, was lying dead next to the discarded doors. I later learned his name was Edward and its throat had been viciously ripped from its body. He had been Gloria's constant companion, friend and minder for the past seven years. She called him Eddie as a name of endearment and affection. But a Malamute wouldn't give ground or quarter in protecting its turf and mistress or so I believed. It would fight to the death before that would happen. Whatever or whoever must have overpowered the dog and killed it on the spot. It had to have been tremendously powerful to do so. I snapped a few photos of the trailer and a couple of Eddie's body before calling my editor and reporting the incident. Yes, I used the word incident, but I was already thinking crime. And yes, my mind was already drawing a nexus between the deaths of Denny St. Germain and Gloria Rainwater.

Gloria was not a random victim of a violent crime; at least that was the quick conclusion of the cops. Someone or something had targeted her for death. But why and who or what were the questions that needed answers. The county sheriff had requested assistance from the state's authorities, especially its forensics lab. Even Vilas County, and those surrounding it, lacked the resources to handle an incident of this magnitude by themselves. They typically dealt with

highway accidents, drunk & disorderly cases and domestic violence calls. This was something well beyond their collective expertise.

I stayed a few extra days up north trying to piece together a story, maybe, just maybe a much bigger one than simply the death of an old, Indian woman who lived alone in a trailer in the north woods, despite the horrible way she died. A neighbor had called 911 to report that “all hell was breaking loose” at Gloria’s trailer. When the first police cruiser arrived some twenty minutes later, the officer observed about a dozen people standing outside the trailer, some crying and some standing in stunned silence. The officer took one look inside and immediately called for backup. That was the call I heard on my radio scanner.

According to the official, police report, the first responder noticed blood everywhere, pools on the floor, splatters on the kitchen cabinets and walls, along with a long blood trail down the hallway leading to Gloria’s bedroom where her body was found. And it was her body that told a gruesome tale. It had been mutilated beyond recognition. Her face had been torn or bitten off, she had been dismembered, torn limb from limb, as the report stated, and her right arm was missing. It was as if Gloria had been drawn and quartered like in medieval times. Or maybe my imagination was getting ahead of the facts as Billy might have reminded me. But the similarities between the St. Germain and Rainwater cases were obvious, at least to me. But I don’t think the local cops had yet made the connection between the two deaths. I didn’t plan to tell them since the knowledge gave me some advantage in solving the mystery first. They’d eventually make the connection, but not before I’d finish my story and publish it on the front page of the *Sentinel*. I envisioned follow-up stories to that one and I’d be busy for weeks. I couldn’t wait to receive my prize.

But the similarities and connections between the two deaths didn’t stop there. I soon learned that Denny St. Germain was the great grandson of Gloria Rainwater. Oh my God! The deaths weren’t coincidental. I didn’t think so and now I had proof positive. Through my talks with the locals, I uncovered this intriguing fact. A couple of them had connected the dots between the deaths of the relatives and attributed them to an old vendetta, a blood feud between the Rainwater and Wolf clans many generations ago. The story had been handed down for many years in the manner of the tribe’s oral history. A monster was responsible in their superstitious minds. It was plain and simple to them, but certainly not to me. It was a mythical, mystical

explanation, but wholly plausible to these Ojibwa. I didn't understand, at least then. I would learn the truth much later. And it was truth, despite Billy's claim to the contrary. You could, in fact, find truth where you least expected.

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Several of the tribe's elders related the origin of the vendetta as handed down over the years. It was a tragic, sad story and one that continued to be played out to this day or so they claimed. In 1851, the Ojibwa fished, hunted and farmed the lands of northern Wisconsin, the upper peninsula of Michigan and the far eastern portions of what is now Minnesota. They peacefully coexisted with the relatively few white settlers in the region. On a fateful day in the late spring of that year, three, young Rainwater tribesmen came upon a twelve year old girl of the Wolf clan. Her Ojibwa name was "Water Springs" and she was a favored child of her clan for her beauty, both physical and spiritual. For reasons unknown, the three boys brutally raped her and left her for dead, but she didn't die and was found later by a relative. The matter was reported to the tribal council with her father demanding justice or, more specifically, retribution for the horrific crime. The council initially voted to have the boys shunned for a period of one year as punishment, but there was such an outcry from most of the tribesmen the council ordered them banished for life. That was a fate considered worse than death, but it was the one ultimately imposed on the young men by the elders.

So, the three left the tribe to find their ways in an unfamiliar world. One, reportedly, joined the U.S. Army cavalry as a scout. The others were never heard from again. But Water Springs' father believed that justice was not served and that his daughter's attackers were treated too leniently by the council. In a dramatic pronouncement in front of his clan, he made a blood oath, a curse that he placed on all Rainwater descendants to avenge the terrible rape of his beloved daughter. And the curse remained in effect today or so the story was told. That was the gist of the legend and cause of the brutal murders by a monstrous, supernatural being: a Wendigo. The descendants of the Rainwater clan were now paying for the long ago sins of three of their ancestors. Even today, members of the two clans avoided each other like the plague. Each knew the history and each kept a distance from one another, even though they lived in close proximity. It was an awkward situation to say the least, but one fully understood by every Ojibwa in Lac du Flambeau.



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A Wendigo, how could that be? It couldn't, could it? I had to suspend my disbelief to even consider such a preposterous story. What the hell was a Wendigo anyway? Here's what Wikipedia had to say:

*In Indian folklore and mythology, a Wendigo or Windigo is a cannibal monster or evil spirit native to the northern forests of the Great Lakes Region of both the United States and Canada. The Wendigo may appear as a monster with some characteristics of a human, or as a spirit who has possessed a human being and made them become monstrous. It is historically associated with cannibalism, murder, insatiable greed and the cultural taboos against such behaviors. The legend lends its name to the disputed modern medical term Wendigo psychosis, which is considered by psychiatrists to be a form of culture-bound syndrome with symptoms such as an intense craving for human flesh and a fear of becoming a cannibal. In some indigenous communities, environmental destruction and insatiable greed are also seen as a manifestation of the psychosis.*

OK, I can't make this stuff up, even if I tried. It was all too bizarre. But there was more:

*The Wendigo is part of the traditional belief system of a number of Algonquin-speaking peoples, most notably the Ojibwa and Saulteaux, the Cree, the Naskapi, and the Innu people. Although descriptions can vary somewhat, common to all these cultures is the view that the Wendigo is a malevolent, cannibalistic, supernatural being. They were strongly associated with the winter, the north, and coldness, as well as with famine and starvation.*

Basil Johnston, an Ojibwa teacher and scholar from Ontario, gives a description of a Wendigo:

*“The Wendigo was gaunt to the point of emaciation, its desiccated skin pulled tightly over its bones. With its bones pushing out against its skin, its complexion the ash gray of death, and its eyes pushed back deep into their sockets, the Wendigo looked like a gaunt skeleton recently disinterred from the grave. What lips it had were tattered and bloody, unclean and suffering from suppurations of the flesh. The Wendigo gave off a strange and eerie odor of decay and decomposition, of death and corruption. The Wendigo is seen as*

*the embodiment of gluttony, greed, and excess: never satisfied after killing and consuming one person, they are constantly searching for new victims.”*

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I wasn't sure about anything. I didn't have even a good hunch or gut feeling to go on at this point. But there was one thing that was patently obvious; ley lines played no role in the deaths whatsoever. Lac du Flambeau was located well outside the Devil's Triangle as asserted by my new, best friend at the Mendota asylum. They were simply products of his disturbed mind and nothing more.

I thought I had the makings of a sensational story and I continued to tweak it when I could spare the time. So a bear or Wendigo, which was it? Or maybe it was a human with powerful strength? I didn't have a clue as a Hollywood detective might say. I kept up on the news stories about Gloria's death, but none had yet made the connection between the two deaths. Some reporters were simply lazy in doing their due diligence. A little checking around with the townsfolk could have led to the discovery of the Rainwater bloodline, just as I had found. That tidbit alone would have made for a good story, but I wasn't ready to disclose it just yet. I needed more information to flesh out the story and that, I believed, would come in time. And it did, much to my horror.

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His name turned out to be Fred Caruthers, a driver for Yellow Line Express based in Chicago. According to my police source, Jim Tomlinson, Fred was identified as the trucker who gave Denny St. Germain a lift from the Petro station to the weigh station. He had been with the company for over ten years and was considered by his bosses to be an honest, reliable employee. Fred related that he met Denny at the station while having a late lunch and they struck up a conversation. The conversation led to Denny asking for a ride as far as the I-94/I-38 split some thirty-five miles north. Fred explained he was going on to the Twin Cities via 94 and Denny was heading north on 38 to visit his great grandmother. There was nothing amiss or unusual during the drive that only lasted about forty-five minutes. Fred wished him luck after dropping him at the weigh station. He was shocked to learn of Denny's death and its circumstances. He said he seemed to be a friendly, polite kid, rare qualities these days among youth, he added to his official

statement. His driving logs were examined and no irregularities were noted, but they could have been easily fudged. Regardless, the impression of Fred's story was favorable. He didn't exhibit any of the usual tells that a perpetrator inadvertently reveals during a police interrogation.

As far as the cops were concerned, Fred was clean. But they were occasionally tailing him and his truck when he made his trips through Wisconsin just to be certain. Unmarked cars were used to leapfrog Fred's truck so no particular vehicle would be spotted to raise suspicion. Even if it were, Fred would simply believe that a cop was on the prowl for a speeding trucker and nothing more. It was an ongoing cat and mouse game and a routine part of the trucking business. Now that was due diligence, I thought. Jim mentioned nothing untoward had been observed so far. He shouldn't have mentioned these things to me, but, of course, cleverly said we were talking off the record. Damn! Double damn! Jim had just cuffed my hands and I wasn't even under arrest.

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Every two years, the Indian tribes of northern Wisconsin gathered for a major event. I didn't say powwow, but that's what it was: Oneida, Potawatomie, Ho-Chuck, Ojibwa and Menomonee along with smaller, federally recognized tribes in attendance. The Menomonee were hosting the powwow this year on 1,500 acres of land a member owned outside of the small town of Crystal Falls. A different tribe would be selected to host the next one. It was considered an honor to be chosen to hold the five day event and bragging rights were at stake in vying for the largest get-together of its kind in the state. Each tribe would erect teepees in their respective enclaves on the property and then meet in common areas to trade and gossip with their brethren. But it was much more than a social event; it was a political and business one that had serious consequences for these Native Americans.

Politics and business were intertwined on the reservations. Indian Casinos, hotels, gas stations and similar cash cows greatly benefitted when Uncle Sam was forced to recognize the sovereignty of Native American lands. In a unanimous decision, the U.S. Supreme Court held not only that states do not have authority to tax Indians on Indian reservations, but that they also lacked the authority to even regulate those activities on Indian reservations. So, the stage was set for Indian gaming. Within just a few years, enterprising Indians and tribes began to operate

Indian bingo operations in numerous, different locations around the country. And from bingo, the gaming quickly expanded to other forms of gambling.

Managing these cows required political savvy and old boy lobbying of state and federal legislators alike. Getting their own elected to congress remained a top priority as well. However, the tribes no longer had a problem hiring the best lawyers, lobbyists and PR firms that money could buy. But a coordinated strategy, a game plan was required among the tribes since they held similar interests, goals and enterprises. The costs associated with this effort were apportioned among the various tribes based on their population, an egalitarian and very Indian solution to a problem. The bottom line of this event was the bottom line on their respective balance sheets. Money was always needed to sustain their ways of life, their cultures and their very existence as America's first peoples.

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The managing editor wasn't keen on the idea, but I persisted in beating his brow. I eventually wore him down and he finally acquiesced to my request. I would cover the meeting in Crystal Falls and not the senior political reporter for the paper, Amy Windsor. She'd be mightily pissed, but she'd get over it in time. Maybe as some point I could throw her a bone in return. I owed her that much and perhaps more. Being October, it was brat fest time and Amy would likely get stuck covering some of the activities. It was an onerous task, especially for a seasoned professional like Amy. Maybe she wouldn't forgive me after all. No matter, I got what I wanted.

And what I wanted above all else was to interview John Tallgrass, the chief of the Ojibwa, who would be present at the powwow, proudly representing his tribe. Besides being the titular head of a large, prominent tribe, he also owned a prosperous millwork in Vilas County. The tribal council, collectively, held the real power in governance of the tribe and John was mostly just a figurehead, but still a member of the council in his own right. I'd tried to talk to him while in Lac du Flambeau, but he was always too busy or so he claimed. But I believed I'd be able to buttonhole him during the event. My ruse would be a straightforward, simple one: I was covering the event for the *Sentinel*. However, my true motive was to find out more about the long ago curse, the ongoing feud between the two clans and especially the Wendigo and its possible connection to the murders. I didn't believe the Wendigo theory of the crimes in the least, but I

thought a mythological, gruesome creature believed in by the Ojibwa and others might make a great story on its own merits. Halloween was still several weeks away and I thought my paper might just go for this angle. It turned out I was correct and it was one hell of a story, but not in the way I expected.

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I booked a room at a small, mom and pop motel about thirty miles from Crystal Falls. I couldn't find one any closer. The event drew many hundreds of people from the Great Lakes Region, even though most attendees had no direct role in the powwowing or the political/business side of the meeting. Guests were welcomed during the day and could visit the various encampments to buy handmade trinkets and crafts, but had to leave at dusk. The Menominee Tribal Police enforced the rules and there were few problems other than some shooting-off of illegal fireworks and many incidences of drunkenness among both the Indians and Anglos. Despite the serious work to be done, it was like a celebration, a tribute to Native American heritage and one big, raucous party combined.

April Windsong was the first to go, so to speak. She was an Ojibwa councilwoman and this was to be her fourth powwow with the other tribes. She, like her sisters and brothers, looked forward to these five days of fun and work. But she didn't even make it to the opening ceremonies scheduled for the following morning. Her lifeless body was found hanging by its feet in a small copse of woods directly behind her teepee. She had been gutted like a deer with her internal organs removed and missing. The gutting appeared to be a sloppy, messy job by all accounts. Blood and viscera were congealed on the ground below her head. Her limbs had been pulled out of their sockets and her right arm was missing. The thing or person who'd done this horrible act must have been in a hurry according to the pundits who claimed to be in the know. The authorities speculated she's gone to the woods to relieve herself because she had an involuntary bowel movement at the time of her death. I filed the story with my boss, but left out the part about the feces. I was certain I was getting closer to whom or what was responsible for the grisly deaths. It would be here, stuck in the middle of nowhere Indian territory, we would confront the thing and/or person that committed the crimes. For some quirky reason, my mind flashed on the old joke: "What do you mean 'we', white man?" I should have said "I" instead.

I'd have to check out which clan April belonged to. If my hypothesis was correct, she was Rainwater. If so, there were now three Rainwater murders in a span of three months, each roughly one a month apart. I checked my tablet and confirmed my suspicion: each occurred during a full or near full moon. There were too many coincidences to be ignored. Maybe there was some mythological creature on the prowl after all. Perhaps, it was a werewolf avenging an earlier wrong? The full moon bit certainly played into that scenario. Perhaps I was losing my sanity, because I didn't believe in such things. Well, maybe when I was a kid reading comic books I believed in them, but certainly not now as a rational adult.

The morning ceremonies went off without a hitch. It was decided they would proceed despite April's death. After the welcoming comments from the Menominee chief, the parade of tribes began with each one showing off its best war bonnets, animal skins and other regalia of its tribe. Some Indians walked and some rode ponies around the ersatz parade ground. I watched with rapt interest, not so much the parade itself, but searching for John Tallgrass in the crowds. I didn't spot him. The serious discussions of business and politics would come later in the evening in the teepee of the Menominee chief. Then I might have the opportunity to meet with him.

Everyone at the site was now well aware of what had happened, but the story was embellished with each retelling. Facts easily morphed into fiction, as was usually the case, since they were the first casualties in a story this horrific. I periodically monitored my radio scanner for any information on the murder, yet the cops seemed to be tightlipped about the case. However, I did learn the FBI had been called in to assist the state patrol with the investigation. I thought that it was a great move since the local and state authorities didn't seem to be making any progress on their own. The FBI just might energize the case and find the culprit or culprits responsible for the murders. I, for one, hoped so since it would put a nice cap on my story: "FBI Solves Wisconsin Serial Killer Murders!" "Ghoulish, Deranged Escapee from Mental Hospital Arrested in Crystal Falls!" Yeah, something like that would work nicely.

Unfortunately, that outcome never happened. Instead, there would be more carnage and bloodshed. Next was Andy Spooner to die at the hands of the monster that tormented the Ojibwa. It wasn't a pretty sight by all reports of his death. Yes, he was Rainwater, as I later determined. Andy was the chairman of the board of The Torch Casino in Lac du Flambeau and, therefore, a powerful, prominent figure in the community. His casino was responsible for pouring millions of

dollars into the Ojibwa tribal council's coffers each year. He was a rainmaker and the council damn well knew it. He could do no wrong in its eyes, as long as he continued to generate big bucks for the Ojibwa. He was a respected figure in its society and a mentor for many of the tribesmen employed at his casino and adjacent hotel. He regularly attended these powwows and his advice was always welcomed when it came to business matters. That was his forte and most important contribution to the council. And he never seemed to disappoint in his suggestions and recommendations for sound, practical actions to secure the Ojibwa's place in the larger, white society.

His body, oh my God, his body was a mess. That was the best way I could describe it. There was little left of it and that was what disturbed everyone who learned of his gory demise and desecration. The usual dismembering of limbs had occurred, but there was much more to its destruction that defied comprehension. Yes, his right arm was missing as well. But his body solely consisted of large lumps and puddles of pulp and little more. A generous load of excrement had been directly deposited on his meager remains as if his murderer was marking his spot and mocking his victim. It was a disgusting sight, even when viewed from the crime scene photos.

Andy had been walking a little used path through the woods to reach his car parked in the makeshift lot on the edge of the property. He never made it to his destination because he was ambushed by his attacker before he could do so. At least that much was obvious, but the rest of his murder less so. He was likely taken by total surprise. Whether he was able to put up a fight or not was unknown. In any case, he was dead. More dead than all of the others, if that were possible. For some strange reason, I wasn't emotionally moved by his death. Maybe I'd been hardened by the deaths of the others and that accounted for my feelings. I didn't know.

The intertribal rodeo went on as if nothing had happened. It was a major contest of wills that pitted the tribes against one another to prove which one was the best at bull riding, cattle roping, and the other skills learned long ago from cowboys. Everyone enjoyed the show, even me. It went on for two full hours and everyone vigorously clapped at the end of the performance. Other than the murders, it was the highlight of the event, no doubt about it.

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I'd finally arranged for an interview with John Tallgrass. I'd set it up through one of his fellow council members and I was looking forward to what I believed to be a one-on-one meeting. I'd finally have my chance to ask some probing questions about what was going on. Whether he'd answer them or not was another matter. All of the tribes had sophisticated public relations machines these days and were extremely sensitive to any adverse information. I had to be damn careful in parsing the questions, but still thought I could pull the interview off.

John was an imposing figure, he stood over six feet tall and dominated the teepee we were standing in at the moment. Two of his aides were present and likely would serve as witnesses in court, if my story was factually wrong or misleading or simply unfavorable to the Ojibwa. After introductions, I explained the purpose of interview. I wanted to produce a story, using the powwow as a backdrop, to explain Ojibwa legends and myths as told in the oral tradition of his people. I mentioned the Ojibwa, in particular, had a rich, cultural history in storytelling. I thought by juxtaposing the tales with the phenomena of Indian entrepreneurship would make for a great story and told him so. John allowed it was an interesting angle, but insisted he wanted to read it before it went to press. He mentioned his lawyers would scream bloody murder if I's weren't dotted and T's not properly crossed. I found his phrase of 'bloody murder' to be an interesting one and apropos in these circumstances. He added, in the old days, a simple handshake would have nicely sufficed.

As nothing more than filler for my story, I asked about Ojibwa enterprises and how the profits were divided among the tribe and the good things that resulted. It was my first pitch and it was a softball, as intended. John spent the next ten minutes or so discussing the new senior's home in Lac du Flambeau that was at full occupancy. Elderly people could now receive assisted care with minimal, out-of-pocket cost. He noted that many of their tribe lived at a subsistence level and could ill afford expensive health and home care. The senior's home also had a medical clinic that provided services for free, thanks to the largesse of The Torch Casino. He considered the home to be the jewel in the crown of the council's philanthropic efforts so far. He then cited plans to build an indoor swimming pool on the property behind the elementary school next year. He mentioned the cold, bleak Wisconsin winters and how the pool would be a great venue for the self imposed shut-ins who had few distractions and even fewer recreational outlets, other than



binge drinking while watching TV. He continued talking about other projects on the council's drawing board that would greatly improve the quality of life for his people.

About forty-five minutes later, I broached the subject of the murders and the bit of folklore about a Wendigo that the elders in Lac du Flambeau claimed was responsible. John laughed and said he didn't believe in Wendigos and other superstitious nonsense, but he did acknowledge that they were part of the Ojibwa mythology, just like the boogeyman was part of the Anglo culture. "If you're not good my child, the boogeyman will get you!" It was the same mythological and psychological creature that had existed in the various minds, cultures and storytelling of many peoples' around the world and nothing more, he said. As to the murders, that was an entirely different matter, a serious one that had the tribe council very concerned. There was a deranged, serial killer on the loose that was targeting Ojibwa for unknown reasons. Maybe a grudge or vendetta, but not one connected to the rape of a child over a hundred years ago, he went on to say. Maybe it was someone who believed he'd been terribly wronged by the tribe and was seeking revenge. In any case, it was the grisly handiwork of a seriously deranged person behind the murders, plain and simple, at least to him. However, the tribe was so worried it had contracted for private security patrols of the reservation and surrounding towns. Even the Menominee Tribal Police had stepped up security for the powwow out of an abundance of caution, as the saying goes. I thanked John for his time and information, promising to send him an e-mail of the advance draft of my article for his approval. As a sometimes wiseass, I didn't tell him I'd send the story via smoke signals. That would have been much too politically incorrect for this proud, Native American chieftain.

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I settled into a stool close to the TV at Williams' Bar & Grill. The place had been family-owned since 1942 according to the placard hanging over the bar. I didn't doubt it given its shabby appearance. I was becoming a regular at the Anglo populated restaurant since arriving in Crystal Falls. Station WKK, out of Green Bay, was carrying news of the sensational murders. The talking heads theorized, I should say speculated, about the motive for the killings and, of course, peppered their reporting with lurid, gruesome details to goose the viewers' interest. One newsy said they must have been committed by an Anglo since Indian's simply wouldn't do such a thing against another Indian. His co-anchor disagreed and mentioned the intertribal Indian wars

of the past. A patron sitting at a table piped-up to say that the only good one was a dead one. I'd heard that slur and others over the years. I wasn't surprised given the animosity between the two factions in this neck of the woods. Frankly, the whites were jealous of the Indians due to their new found wealth in the gaming industry. Of course, that fact didn't keep them out of the casinos with their cheap drinks and food.

I ordered a rare, double cheeseburger and fries along with a can of Point beer to wash it down. Like at the Petro station, I stayed mum and listened to the conversations in the bar. I'd later e-mail another of my reports to my editor so the *Sentinel* could keep up with the competition. I was now certain Amy Windsor would never forgive me for missing out on the assignment. The casual chatter in the room focused mostly on motive. I still couldn't believe that people and the media hadn't made a connection to the other murders elsewhere in the state. The guy sitting next to me asked what I thought about the killings. I told him I didn't have any; to disengage from an unwanted conversation. I actually had many thoughts, some too bizarre to mention.

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The moon was almost full and the clear, night sky blazed with stars. It wasn't an ideal one for hunting, but the hunt had to go forward since it was a preordained ritual that couldn't be denied. The frenzied feeding was an imperative and the creature's hunger was strong, so strong that it might be careless and be caught. That couldn't happen because there was still much to be done to satisfy the curse. And the curse was its reason for its existence, to fulfill a blood oath of many generations ago. And killing and eating its victims was all about blood, the bloodier the better in its twisted, single-minded brain.

It stealthily crept across a small expanse of foot-high grasses to reach John Tallgrass's teepee. With its sharp claws, it easily ripped an opening in the canvas and quietly insinuated itself inside. Its prey was soundly sleeping next to his wife. The thing went right to work by pulling John's right arm out of its socket and the profuse bleeding alone would kill him in a few, agonizing minutes. Next, it sank its long, curved teeth into his midsection and dragged out his internal organs which it hungrily devoured on the spot. Blood and viscera were now comingled on its hideous face.

Mrs. Tallgrass was now screaming and the thing could hear shouting coming from the front of the teepee. It quickly exited through the slit it had made and ran to the woods while grasping John's arm in its obscene maw. Shots rang out from behind it, but it was much too swift to be caught. It ran and ran, easily outdistancing its pursuers. As it ran, it experienced something it never had before; an acute awareness of its self. Yes, a vivid insight into its true nature and it was frightful.

The creature finally stopped at a pond to sate its thirst. The surface of the pond was as smooth as glass, not a ripple appeared to mar the reflection it saw while stooping to drink. And the reflection was of it, no, the reflection was of me, Bert Perry, ace reporter and ghoulish incarnate. With the back of my hand, I swept the image away thinking I was hallucinating, but I wasn't because my visage reappeared as before. I couldn't stop staring at what I was; a narcissistic, gruesome killer of the Ojibwa. I immediately understood my role in the murders and it disgusted me. My countenance was repulsive, yet I couldn't avert my glance from it. After gazing at it for several minutes, I finally pulled my eyes away and ran for my lives.

I think the word is epiphany. That was what I experienced at the edge of that pond in the woods. It was like someone flipped a switch in my brain and I awoke from the fugue state in which I had lived my entire life. I'd seen my true self for the first time and it scared the hell out of me. I couldn't reconcile my duality; Bert Perry, reporter for the *Sentinel* and a changeling: a Wendigo. My reflection was seriously hideous. It, I, had horns protruding from my forehead. My face consisted of mottled skin that was drawn tightly against my skull. My eyes bulged from my face giving me a particularly ghoulish appearance. All and all, I was terrified of myself.

Moreover, I was sick of my selves, sick at heart, sick of mind and sick to death for the horrible, sick crimes I'd committed. I knew I couldn't help what I was, but that didn't make me feel any better. Even though I slowly began to accept what I was, I realized my mission in this life was due to a damnable curse. I didn't know why. Why me God? Was this to be my destiny: just pain and death? Is that all there is? No higher purpose for me other than to be an instrument of retribution?

My "seizures" accounted for my shift-changing into the creature and vice versa. Of that much I was certain. But I learned fairly quickly that I could now transform myself between my

personas pretty much at will by going into a self-induced, hypnotic trance. I now had a sensate awareness of both of my selves at the same time. That gave me some comfort that I could exercise a degree of control over my changes, maybe.

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I took a leave of absence from the *Sentinel*, telling my boss that I was having some emotional problems and needed time off. That was an understatement if there ever was one. I actually was having an emotional meltdown, if truth be known. I'd been having troubling nightmares about gore and blood, initially attributing them to covering the unsettling murders. Now I knew better. I was actually dreaming about a real, mythical creature called a Wendigo; an oxymoron that now made perfect sense.

But why was I chosen to perform the extermination of the Rainwater clan? When might I have been infected with the Wendigo virus that turned me into a monster? I didn't believe it was God's will. There had to be another explanation and that was when I had a heart-to-heart with my dad about the dog bite of many years ago. The star-shaped scar had puzzled me.

As a kid, I thought if I grew up to be a monster, I wanted to be a werewolf, a strong, ferocious werewolf that wouldn't take any crap from the bullies at the school playground. Since it killed at night and only during full moons, I could take the rest of the month off. That was how kids thought about things: imagination and magic; neither logic nor rationality ruled their young minds. My first girlfriend in adulthood mercilessly teased me about the abundance of hair on my back, arms and chest. She said I had a hirsute pelt like a wolf and admitted it turned her on. So, me as someone who enjoyed sex games, pretended to be the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood. She'd say "Oh grandma, what sharp teeth you have." And I'd reply, "All the better to eat you with, my dear." We'd participate in other kinky role playing, but those stories were best left untold. It was all good fun between two teenagers with raging hormones and active libidos.

We'd listen to Patsy Cline's oldie "Crazy" over and over again and screwed our brains out until we were both sated and exhausted. Yeah, crazy was apropos given my current situation. Maybe she was now living in Sheboygan with a husband, two kids and a large mortgage, I didn't know, but wished her well. They were fantastic, sexual experiences of novice lovers.

But, in point of fact, I was hairy. I had a five o'clock shadow at ten in the morning. I kept my Dopp kit in my desk drawer and would shave once again at work when I had time. I just chalked-up my hairiness to hormones, specifically high levels of testosterone. Obviously, I didn't grow up to be a werewolf, but something much worse.

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I braced my dad and pointedly asked him to relate the dog bite encounter. I didn't mention my dilemma since he'd likely try to commit me to the same institution as my pen pal who wrote me in such earnest regarding ley lines. My dad asked why I was so interested in an incident from so long ago. I told him that the scar on my forearm kept reminding me of that day and I wanted to know the truth. OK, Billy, I was looking for what passed as truth nowadays.

He fidgeted in his chair indicating he was somewhat uncomfortable in the telling, but he reluctantly disclosed. He said I was old enough to hear the truth or what he thought was the truth because he wasn't sure. He told me that it was dusk and that I was out playing near the campsite. I remembered that I was told to go play and not to come back to our tent until I was invited to do so. Maybe it was a lesson in polite behavior for a youngster. More likely, my parents wanted to make love and not be interrupted by a snot-nosed, nosey kid. I didn't ask since it didn't matter. My dad continued by saying he heard my screams and unzipped the tent flap, grabbed a stick from the woodpile next to our campfire and came to my rescue. That much I remembered with some clarity. But I certainly didn't remember what he next related to me. He said, when he reached me on the path, a large, scrawny animal was attacking me. Since it was getting dark and the smoke from our fire swirled around us, he couldn't be certain what it was, but acknowledged it wasn't a dog. Of that much he was sure, but little else. He described the beast as walking on all fours and then raising itself and running to the thick forest on its hind legs.

He didn't know what sort of animal it was, but allowed it was ugly and grotesque in appearance. It had short antlers protruding from its head and its skin was greenish-gray in color and it was completely furless. I always suspected it wasn't a dog, instead remembering my dad insisting that it was a stray that had gotten away from its owner. My dad had inserted a large dog into my impressionable memory, instead of a monster, so I wouldn't have a lifetime of nightmares. He even mentioned to me it was of Alsatian or Shepherd breed. He said he never

mentioned the incident to anyone, even my mom, because no one would believe him. Too many PBRs, they would say. That was how he explained it and that was what I remembered with his help. Now I knew better. But at least some things were starting to fit together.

Of course, it was then I was chosen, either randomly or by intent. I didn't know which and it didn't really make any difference. I was a Wendigo through and through and I had to accept my fate and live with that fact for the rest of my life. I'd been passed the torch on that fateful day and now the flame had been finally lit to avenge the honor of a child known as Water Springs and the Ojibwa Wolf clan. Why at the age of thirty-five I was awakened from my ordinary life, I couldn't fathom. Nonetheless, it was simply my time to take up the dreadful torch and continue the ongoing cycle of never ending vengeance. It was an unstoppable destiny which compelled me to kill without remorse. And I was now beginning to enjoy the tasty, blood sport which had no winners.

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I sold most of my personal belongings and stored the rest in my self-storage unit in Milwaukee. The right arms of my victims were slowly increasing in number, storing them as precious keepsakes and delicious reminders of my kills. They weren't Pulitzer Prizes, but they would do for now and I cherished them just the same.

I was heading back north to continue my feedings on the Rainwater clan. And I had a ravenous appetite to satisfy. I could smell their kinds' scents from a mile away, as the trite saying sort of went. I mercilessly tracked them down with relish and devoured their bodies until I'd had my fill...at least for awhile. And I never forgot to bring home a trophy from my hunts. Remember, I had developed a strong work ethic under Billy's rigorous tutelage and I put it to good use. There was no way I was going to shirk my duties now that I was a full-fledged, Native American ghoul, God forbid! Yes, even the truth that Billy so disdained, could no longer set me free. I wondered how he might have written the story of my lives. It was the truth, whether he could accept it or not.

## **The Strange Story of Stateville**

My thoughts of the strange happenings at Stateville waxed and waned like the cycles of the moon. Some days were full of reminiscences, others not so much. Sometimes my memory faded in and out of focus given my advanced age, but thankfully I'd kept a detailed diary of those inexplicable events which occurred at the prison. Likely, no one would believe them, but they were true nonetheless. I wasn't senile, only old and a bit slow on the uptake as some might have thought. But my revelations were shocking; whether or not you choose to believe my macabre tale of the evil incarnate haunting the penitentiary of damned souls.

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My house sat on a large knoll overlooking the Stateville Correctional Center on the far edge of Joliet, Illinois. The term *Correctional Center* was simply a pretentious way of saying maximum security prison. Like the prison, my home was old and rundown, much like me. I'd lived with this view and worked in the facility's fortified labyrinth of nooks and crannies for most of my life. I was still obsessed with it; the penitentiary's dark, troubling history in particular. That was the only way I could explain my unhealthy attraction to the place and its denizens.

I'd lived in Joliet my whole life, first with my parents and then long after as a confirmed bachelor and recluse. However, I failed to mention my two year hiatus when I served as a Marine grunt during the Korean Conflict. *Conflict* was an interesting choice of word to describe an all out war that engulfed the entire Korean peninsula. It wasn't chivalrous combat among ideologues and adversaries; only a bloody, brutal series of battles that claimed and ruined many American lives. My life was one of the casualties of the conflict.

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My story really began with the war, not so much with the war itself, but with my injuries that ultimately landed me at the Coronado Naval Hospital in San Diego. *Friendly fire* was another quirky phrase that made no sense to me. It was an accidental oxymoron or a misnomer at best. I wasn't sure which one because there wasn't anything friendly about it in my case. One of my buddies accidentally pulled the pin on a phosphorous grenade and in his panic to throw it downfield, it ended up in my foxhole instead. White phosphorous was nasty stuff, especially when it badly burned one's upper body and face. The British invented the weapon towards the

end of the WW II to mark locations for helicopter evacuations or landing strips or to lay down a smokescreen to blanket troop movements in the field. It was also a very effective antipersonnel device as I could attest. The medic who attended to me likely saved my life. I wouldn't have stooped to pun about him saving my skin because that didn't happen. I was still not sure to this day whether I should've thanked or cursed him.

I had extensive burns on my chest, face and upper arms; third degree ones that kept me on a steady diet of morphine for many months. I'd almost lost count of the number of skin grafts I received from cadavers during my year plus stay at the hospital. Skins from cadavers were used in those days and remained the preferred treatment for severe burns, followed only by the patients' own skin. I subsequently had four more grafting procedures after I returned home. My face and upper body now looked like a crazy quilt of mottled skin crisscrossed with prominent suture scars. I resembled Dr. Frankenstein's monster, only more monstrous. I forever was a scary freak to the neighborhood kids who avoided my house on Halloween like the plague. Of course they avoided my house on all other days too. The cold days were my favorites since I could pull my balaclava over my head and pass as normal looking or, in my case, as normal as I could under the circumstances. This had been my life's sentence since being discharged from the Marines and returning to Joliet to live with my parents in our old house on the hill. It was a challenging one to say the least. It would become more bizarre after I took the job at the prison I could see in the distance from my bedroom window.

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The personnel officer at Stateville must have taken pity on me since I was offered a warder position on the spot. There weren't any human resource officers during that politically incorrect era. Besides being pitiful, I was also a disabled vet who answered the call to war. That gave me preference over those who didn't serve their Uncle Sam. Thankfully, I was deemed physically fit for the job despite my hideous appearance. The term was *warder*, rather than guard, in those days. The inmates called us screws or worse, but usually behind our backs. That was how I began my lifelong career and obsession in the corrections business at Stateville. Looking back, maybe that was my preordained destiny.

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Me? My name was Walter Jenkius, a dyed-in-the-wool Republican, an unabashed Pollock and now a warder at the Stateville Correctional Center, aka prison, for the worst of the worst offenders in the state of Illinois. My few buddies down at the VFW hall simply called me Walt. Walt was plenty good for me, although I'd been tagged as *The Boogeyman* or *Boogey*, for short, by the inmates. Those handles stuck with me during my thirty-five year career. Even some of my coworkers called me by that nickname to my face. To them, I guessed I resembled a ghoulish character who worked the graveyard shift at the prison for the better part of those years. It made perfect sense to them, although it was hurtful to me.

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What was it that I found so disturbing, so mysterious and so bizarre about the prison? I noticed, or rather felt, it on my first night on the job. As soon as I walked through the gates, I immediately sensed it. It was almost palatable, as if a malevolent pall had fallen over the place. The main cellblock by itself was imposing, formidable and foreboding, but those things alone didn't account for my reaction. There was more. And that more, I learned later, was the pure evil that resided within. I experienced those same sensations every time I reported to work.

Stateville, I always thought the name was more apropos of a facility for wayward kids or like a government sponsored Boys Town or Mooseheart. But Stateville it was: a maximum security prison for men opened in 1925 and built to accommodate about 1,500 inmates on a site of over 2,200 acres, of which 64 acres were surrounded by a 33-foot high, concrete perimeter wall with ten towers. It was one of three sites in which executions were carried out by electrocution in Illinois. Between 1928 and 1962, the electric chair was used thirteen times at Statesville, including the state's first electrocutions in 1928 of three convicted murderers. Although greatly expanded, it still remained open to this day. That was my home away from home for a very long time. But its presence and my experiences inside its walls still haunted my daydreams and nightmares.

Yes, those experiences, the supernatural ones I vividly remembered and couldn't forget. They were frightening, yet they piqued my curiosity. The first was a mild scare compared to the others that would later follow. I was working the tower in the "F-House," commonly known as the "roundhouse," that had a layout which featured an armed tower in the center of an open area

surrounded by several tiers of cells. As I scanned the cells one night, something odd caught my eye. It looked like a ghost or manifestation or whatever such things were called. The apparition was distinctly human in shape and appearance, but yet it wasn't human, couldn't be human since it wafted effortlessly in and out of locked cells at will and finally disappeared as the inmates slept. It had form, but no substance. I didn't know what to make of the incident and mentioned it to no one believing they'd think me crazy.

There was already enough craziness around here. Stateville reeked of mental illness. To that point, the sheriff of Cook County, Illinois correctly asserted that his jail ran the largest mental health institution in the United States. Ditto for Stateville, but on a smaller scale. In the late 1950's, there was little in the way of effective psychotropic medicines to soothe sick minds. We frequently administered a good helping of Thorazine to chemically restrain an inmate who was acting out. If that didn't work, on went the straightjacket, to be followed by solitary confinement in the hole and, if that remedy failed, we'd beat the crap out of him to shut him up. We politely called the last act *corporal punishment* and not a beat down. There were no such things as inmate civil rights violations in those days. The prisoners weren't in the least bit civil and had no rights in our opinion. The notion of *talk therapy* was ludicrous since our resident population was well beyond such help.

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My VA monthly disability payment, coupled with my prison paycheck, kept me financially afloat. My lifestyle was pretty modest as such things went and I really wanted for nothing. My folks had paid off the mortgage on the house well before they passed. As an only child, I inherited it without liens or worries. So I was in pretty good shape as far as money was concerned. I lived out a quiet, solitary life and that seemed to nicely suit me. I spent many of my off-hours reading as much as I could on the history of Stateville and its residents and found it fascinating. I began a diary, recording not only the strange happenings I'd experienced, but other, significant events which occurred while serving my time there. Time serving was what it was all about, for both the warders and inmates alike. I intended to write the definitive history of Stateville and nothing less. But I now damned myself for my foolishness and folly. I couldn't have foreseen the consequences of my hubris. I simply refused to believe the truth back then.

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The first specter I recognized was Richard Speck, the infamous killer of eight nursing students on the south side of Chicago in 1966. In a single, violent episode, he systematically tortured, raped and strangled the nurses one by one. I knew him well and thought he was a despicable human being, not only for the murders, but for his disgusting lifestyle while in prison that included drug use and openly engaging in homosexual acts with other likeminded inmates. In Richard's case, he took hormones to enlarge his breasts and enjoyed dressing in women's underwear while performing fellatio on his fellow cellmates. Such activities were commonplace, but usually discrete. Richard was so brazen that he seemed to taunt his keepers with his vile encounters. He'd spent a number of days in solitary confinement during his stay at Stateville for his outrageous actions. Regrettably, his death penalty was overruled and he remained imprisoned for twenty five years under my watch before he died of a heart attack. I'd liked to have personally flipped the switch on Old Sparky for Richard. He was the only inmate who I truly abhorred. The apocalyptic tattoo on his upper arm pretty well summed up Richard's life: *Born to Raise Hell*.

It seemed Richard, "Birdman" Speck, had returned to his old haunts. He was nicknamed after the character in the movie *The Birdman of Alcatraz* because he cared for a pair of Sparrows that had mistakenly flown into the cellblock. After he died, I saw him several times watching other inmates and wishing he could participate in their activities that he was so fond of when alive. At least that was what I believed: Stateville was probably the only home where the Birdman had made any friends. He'd sorely missed his brethren since his death.

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Proscribed activities, even the more egregious ones, were often overlooked by the staff. An uneasy détente existed between the prisoners and their warders. And that was the goal of trying to keep order and peace. Unless an incident involved violence, the warders simply ignored it. It was all about coexisting and serving time on both sides of the bars that separated the two. Sometimes we would conduct shakedowns of the cells for contraband, but otherwise we didn't hassle our guests. It was simply our way of reminding them who was in charge. They were, of course. The inmates ran the asylum called Stateville.

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The ghoulish sightings continued off and on over the years and I dutifully recorded each one in my diary. I believed the spirits of deceased prisoners haunted the prison and their combined evilness permeated the facility throughout. I thought it was almost tangible. I finally screwed up my courage and asked one of my warder friends if he'd experienced the same sightings. I trusted he would keep my confidence. Bill said he hadn't, but sometimes he had spooky feelings as he turned darkened corners in the main cellblock. He mentioned the hairs on the back of his neck stood up on such occasions, saying he thought that was only a literary expression and not a physiological one. He now knew better, sensing other, unsettling things as well that made him uneasy such as seeing shadows move about that defied explanation. Weird sounds which emanated from unknown sources were other strange phenomenon he couldn't explain. The building was old and in need of major repairs and maybe that accounted for the creaks and groans that he'd heard over the years. At least he believed it was the only logical answer. He wasn't so sure about odd shadows and the hairs on his neck though. Bill acknowledged there was a spooky, malevolent force at play; he felt its presence, but couldn't put his finger on it. Nor did he want to.

Less bizarre events occurred as well and as to be expected. One incident I vividly recalled since I witnessed it in the exercise yard on a beautiful spring morning in 1980. I had the tower watch and looked down in surprise as two inmates scuffled. Fights were fairly common, but this ended with one inmate dying a painful death in front of me. Despite my radioing for immediate assistance, the older attacker repeatedly knifed the other to death before my eyes. The response team had arrived too late to save him. The attacker was charged with first degree homicide and sentenced to death by electrocution. That meant he had about another twenty or so years to live before the appeals processes were totally exhausted. He'd be executed when he was about 80 years old and at the end of his life anyway, so no skin off his nose. No doubt the criminal justice system would have its way in the end. Room and board at Statesville for that period of time would cost the taxpayers of Illinois about \$640,000, not counting the costs of medical treatment for the inmate as he aged. That was simply how the system worked.

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Each warder had his own list of snitches whose names were recorded on 3x5 cards in those days and secured in the superintendent's office safe. Snitches had to be damn careful when conveying the latest gossip or infraction or planned prison break or newest contraband for sale or whatever. If they weren't, they could have been beaten or carved up with a shank. The warder had an obligation to protect the snitch even though that was impossible under the best of circumstances. Far and away, snitches were the best intelligence sources we had to work with. Surreptitious video and listening devices were still some years off, if the state could afford to buy them.

From time to time my snitches would report unsettling, disturbing things taking place on the block. Ones consistent with what I had experienced with the apparitions I'd seen quite often. Apparently, a few others shared my ability to see and sense them. But one report in particular intrigued me: the sighting of two, well-dressed men in their late teens or early twenties who walked the tiers late at night. Both were Anglos and neither wore prison garb, but double-breasted suits which harked back to an earlier time in America. I was puzzled about the two wraiths and didn't have a clue then about their identities. However, I eventually would learn the horrible truth about their incarnations and how they terrorized the city of Joliet.

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Bobby Rodgers' body was found by a classmate as he walked to school one morning in early May. Bobby had been reported missing the day before when he didn't return home from school. His parents and neighbors searched the routes that Bobby could have taken without result. Bobby had turned fourteen the month before and his parents described him as a responsible kid. I knew the area where he went missing very well since it was only a few blocks from my house. I'd often walk there at night before reporting to work. It was a woodsy park with several trails leading to and from the local high school. I enjoyed my walks there because I rarely encountered anyone on the paths. I was still sensitive to the furtive, awkward glances at my face by the occasional passerby.

The autopsy of Bobby's body confirmed what the police had already surmised: he'd been strangled to death. Murders simply didn't happen in those days in the blue collar city of Joliet. Murders were the province of Chicago, some forty miles to the east, but not here. Our local

media made the most of the event with lurid stories about the murder. Speculation about the killer or killers ran rampant for several months after Bobby's tragic death. Residents even started locking their doors to keep the evil out and their children safe. It was a sad, bad time for our fair city, but things would get worse.

The police naturally focused first on Bobby's parents. What were the family dynamics? Were there any violent arguments between Bobby and his folks? How about any strange behaviors of family members? Had Bobby ever run away from home? Where were the parents when Bobby went missing? These and other questions were asked of Bobby's relatives, teachers and neighbors; perfunctory ones that ultimately led nowhere in the investigation. The circle of possible suspects was expanded to include Bobby's friends and neighbors with the same results.

I was then questioned by the cops since I'd been mentioned by the old geezer who spent many hours sitting on his front porch watching the world go by since he even had less of a life than I did. He was a habitual busybody who lived directly across the street from one of the entrances to the park. He'd watch me come and go on my walks and thought it strange that a monster would dare to be seen outdoors. That was the tidbit thrown to the cops by the bastard and they swallowed it since they were desperate for any crumbs of information. I was now a suspect simply because of my off-putting countenance. Thank God I was no longer a person of interest, just a bona fide suspect in the eyes of the police. The Joliet cops weren't up to speed on proper word-speak then. They weren't up to speed on solving supernatural crimes either.

I was interrogated, not politely interviewed, several times at police headquarters by a couple of detectives from the old school, the one of hard knocks. I was asked about my whereabouts on the evening Bobby went missing: did I have an alibi; did I like young boys and similar intrusive, demeaning questions. I answered them truthfully: I may have been walking in the park that night since I often walk there; I didn't know anyone to back up that claim; and no I wasn't a pedophile. They were looking to build a notional, circumstantial case which the state's district attorney might buy. With them, it was all about clearing cases and not justice. Those were two very distinct things in their minds. Political pressure often drove their investigations to erroneous conclusions. That was still true today. I knew of several cases of inmates being cleared of their crimes using the most rudimentary form of DNA analysis. Regardless, when they

thought up more questions, they'd politely invite me to return to the station for more of the same treatment. I reluctantly did so because I really had no other choice.

They didn't stop with me. They interviewed my neighbors in addition to coworkers and supervisors at the prison. Anything odd about Walter Jenkins, they'd ask. Well, that leading question led to responses such as: I was a mysterious loner, a decent employee, but a freakish, human monster who should be locked away because of my obscene appearance. I was a public menace because I scared children and dogs alike. The hysteria subsequently subsided, but not before I was deemed a criminal leper and shunned in my own hometown. What little contact I had with the outside world was now broken beyond repair. My difficult life had become even more difficult, if that were possible. My so-called buddies at the VFW even turned their backs on me when I entered the bar. I was now totally alone. I was ashamed, humiliated and wished nothing more than to be left alone to live my newly ordered life. I'd lost face once again. But this time was much more painful than the first. But my recently restored anonymity served me well and I was once again content with my lot in this life.

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Theories of the crime ran the gamut from absurd to zany. A traveling carnival had been visiting Joliet and maybe one of the clowns murdered Bobby or how about the hobos who rode the rails through the city. It couldn't be anyone from our city. On that point, they were absolutely correct. The speculations were endless and all wrong. Bobby Rodgers had been brutally murdered by obsessive doppelgangers, plain and simple. I knew the claim was an outrageous, bizarre one and I couldn't convince anyone of its truth. My experiences with the not-so dead couldn't be documented and scientifically proven to anyone's satisfaction. That didn't bother me since I'd written all of it down: my own definitive, very personal history of the Stateville Correctional Center. I'd let the cynical skeptics believe as they wished.

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Bobby Rodgers' murder went unsolved and would never be solved by conventional police methods. It'd been almost a year since his death when I first encountered the two phantoms mentioned by my snitches long ago. I was working tower three at the outer perimeter wall when I first glimpsed them. It was a little past midnight and I'd just started my shift.

Working a wall tower was the loneliest, most boring one among our other boring duties. It was a single-person post and we'd get pushed to the next tower every two and a half hours to relieve the monotony and ourselves. My position was located atop the thirty foot high, main wall that faced in the direction of Joliet in the distance. Seventy-five yards outside the wall was a twelve foot high cyclone fence with a three strand, razor wire top guard that angled inward at forty-five degrees. It was another deterrent to keep the inmates inside, but it had much more utility by keeping stray animals and stray people outside. Between the wall and the fence was open ground that was well lighted by a line of high-mast sodium vapor lamps. We called this strip of ground No-Man's Land or The Kill Zone. As those names suggested, one was subject to being shot without warning, although I couldn't recall a single instance of that ever happening. The tower had gun ports mounted in its thick glass surrounds and a warder was expected to shoot an escapee or infiltrator using an old M-1 rifle with a scope. The rifle had probably been handed down by the National Guard after being declared obsolete by the military. Ironically, it was the same type of rifle I'd been issued in Korea.

On that night I scanned the No Man's Land with my binoculars as was the routine to detect any suspicious activity on the grounds. Of course that rarely happened. It was like the old joke: Why did cemeteries have fences? Because people were dying to get in! Well, no one was dying to get into Stateville, just the opposite.

As I scanned, I saw two figures walking to the fence line towards the prison. I could see them fairly clearly through the lenses. What I saw chilled me. They were two young, well dressed men that had just walked effortlessly through the cyclone fence as if it didn't exist. Yet they were things that shouldn't exist. I was so stunned by what I'd seen I forgot to grab my rifle! They continued walking and disappeared through the prison wall below me. Just before they left my sight, one figure, wearing a V neck sweater, looked up, smirked and waved to me. The thing had acknowledged my presence. If I could see them, they could see me! That was a disturbing, eerie development that I didn't foresee. I didn't bother to log this incident or the others for obvious reasons: I'd be ordered to undergo a psychological evaluation and likely pensioned off as a result. They'd say ole Boogey had finally lost his marbles. No wonder given the severe trauma he experienced in Korea and living with his disfigured face. Who could blame the guy for escaping from his reality?



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Why could I see these apparitions? I'd given the question a lot of thought over the years and concluded that my war wounds may have played a part. I'd had a near death experience on the battlefield followed by many months of agonizing pain when I often wished for a quick death to put me out of my misery. On one occasion, when the pain was so bad, I begged my nurse to give me a lethal shot of morphine. Of course she didn't, but that was what I wanted then: to die quickly and painlessly, fading into nothingness and nothing more. In a sense, maybe I belonged to the living dead and that was why I could see and feel the evil spirits and their malevolence unlike others. I'd never had those experiences outside of Stateville's walls so there must be a connection of sorts to the evilness which manifested itself in the prison that I couldn't explain. Perhaps I'd lived for a reason, a higher purpose after all.

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I'd gotten a good look at the two wraiths, if that's what they were, and spent days searching the prison's archives to see if I could identify them. Richard Speck was an easy ID since I'd lived with him for many years. I didn't recognize these two characters, but soon would come to know them well.

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It was another year and another murder in Joliet. It was if there was a serial killer on the loose targeting teenage boys. The police were baffled as before with the killing of Robbie Anderson, another fourteen year old who suffered a brutal, untimely death at the hands of a sadistic killer. Unlike Bobby Rodgers, Robbie Anderson had been tortured before being strangled to death. Otherwise the similarities between the two deaths were obvious, even to the Joliet cops. Once again they rounded up the usual suspects, me being one of them. Like before, I was interrogated and released. This time, they didn't bother to question my neighbors or anyone else for that matter. My home was placed under surveillance and my movements watched around the clock. I suspected one or more of my coworkers had been recruited to report on my whereabouts at work as well. At least I was no longer an ordinary suspect. I was now their prime suspect in both murders. But their investigation was going nowhere fast. I believed I knew who killed the boys and why.

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My research had finally paid dividends by revealing the names of the two murderers: the incarnations of Leopold and Loeb; the infamous pair of young, University of Chicago students who kidnapped, tortured and then strangled to death a fourteen year old boy in Chicago. Now they were carrying out their so-called perfect murder scenario once again, but this time in Joliet. In this instance, they were perfect crimes, diabolical ones which couldn't be stopped by ordinary means. Both men had been incarcerated at Stateville after being convicted and their spirits continued to roam the cellblock they once called home.

In May 1924, two brilliant and wealthy Chicago college students attempted to commit the crime just for the thrill of it. Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb kidnapped Bobby Franks, bludgeoned him to death in a rented car, and then dumped his body in a distant culvert on the city's south side. Although they thought their plan was foolproof, Leopold and Loeb made a number of mistakes that led police right to them. They committed the murder widely characterized at the time as *the crime of the century*. It was a demonstration of their perceived intellectual superiority which, they thought, rendered them capable of carrying out a "perfect crime" and absolved them of responsibility for their actions. The subsequent trial, featuring the famous defense attorney, Clarence Darrow, made headlines around the world. Darrow championed the argument that capital punishment was barbaric, inhumane and should be forever abolished. He was persuasive since the jury didn't impose the death sentence on the two defendants, only a life sentence plus ninety-nine years. Loeb was murdered by a fellow inmate at Stateville in 1936. In the prison hierarchy, he was considered someone or something loathsome and repugnant: a child killer. Leopold was released on parole in 1958 and died some years later. Now they had returned with a vengeance to reprise their grisly act over and over again. Someone needed to stop them before more boys were killed by these monsters. Maybe a monster could only be killed by another monster and that was exactly what I had in mind. Walt, The Boogeyman, had some ideas about how to send two incarnate doppelgangers back to Hell where they belonged.

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It was a clear, cold Valentine's Day in 1978 as my diary reminded. It was one of my balaclava days that I always looked forward to. I'd taken a few days leave from the job to try to sort things out in my head about Leopold and Loeb; specifically how to kill them, if that were possible. As I walked through the park near the high school, I saw them ahead of me. Other than my first sighting of them returning to the prison, I'd never seen the wraiths out and about. I thought that very strange and it worried me. What were they up to? It was late afternoon and school had let out shortly before. I watched the students pass by, as did Leopold and Loeb. It seemed to me they took special interest in the boys. I continued to observe them until they vanished in the blink of my eye.

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My comings and goings were still being scrutinized by the police. I had to provide blood and hair samples along with my fingerprints at their firm request. I figured, if I kept cooperating, they wouldn't arbitrarily arrest me. Now their snooping was bordering on harassment, maybe going over the border at times. My house had been covertly entered several times and personal items moved about to let me know that they knew where I lived. It was all a bit of psychological warfare to keep the pressure up so I'd confess to crimes I didn't commit. The cops also became more aggressive in the surveillance of my movements to the point where it was no longer discrete, only overly obvious and annoying. It was more of their pressure tactics at play. I called 911 a couple of times to report a suspicious car with two sinister, swarthy men inside tailing my every move. I had to be careful not to piss them off too much or I'd land in jail for making false police reports or worse: murdering two teenagers.

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My interactions with the spirits of Leopold and Loeb became more frequent over the following year. They sensed my presence and I theirs. It was as if there was a mutual curiosity, or perhaps attraction, between the living and the dead that couldn't be denied. Their spirit forms were easily recognizable to me and maybe my hideous face somehow, and in some strange way, piqued their interest in me. Still, a very odd bond had developed among the three of us. They were stoic, seemingly sad figures that restlessly roamed the prison at night. I'd long ago gotten over my fear of the wraiths. They never appeared as ghoulish monsters trying to frighten me. To

the contrary, they were apparitions that looked the same as when they lived, nothing spooky or scary, just ordinary in appearance. I couldn't ever lose sight of the fact they were sociopathic killers who would kill again if given the chance.

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I didn't plan to give them another chance. They had to be stopped before another innocent child died. My mind, spirit and soul had been consumed by the incarnations of two young murderers who wanted nothing more than to continue their depraved acts. I believed I was chosen by a higher power as the instrument to stop their terrorizing.

Over a period of several months, I collected everything I could lay my hands on: photos clipped from back issues of Look and Life magazines, old newspaper stories and even a piece of the shirt he wore during his murder. The last item cost me dearly, although it came with a letter of authenticity and that was important. The memorabilia grew in number to the point I believed I had enough to set the trap. It was one that would send Leopold and Loeb back to Hell where they belonged. I only hoped it would work. Otherwise, I might be their next victim.

I kept Bobby Franks collection of remembrances in my locker at work and would surreptitiously remove them from time-to-time to rehearse my plan. I was painstakingly building a shrine to pay homage to Bobby's memory: one sure to attract the attention of the two wraiths. It was a farfetched theory, but everything about the surreal happenings at Stateville was unreal. I had to patiently wait my turn to be posted to Death Row.

It took another three months of waiting before I was assigned the graveyard shift on the Row. I was now ready to execute my plan. I placed different items of Bobby's memorabilia in the Electrocutation Chamber at the far end of the Row. I was the only warder on duty and the few inmates didn't pay much attention to the cardboard boxes I carried in and out each night. I lit candles around pictures of Bobby and the news articles of his murder to lure Leopold and Loeb into the chamber. I kept up this routine for several days before they appeared on the Row. I could see them clearly and vice versa, I suspected. Instead of the sad, forlorn looks on their faces, they showed a certain puzzlement, curiosity and awareness I hadn't noticed before.

This cat and mouse game continued for days. They showed up for a few minutes and walked the Row without purpose or so it seemed. When they showed themselves, I'd walk to the chamber's viewing room and they followed. As they did, their faces became more animated, almost smiling the closer they got to the chamber itself. There was a sense of recognition in their eyes, a gleaming that couldn't be denied as they looked at the remembrances of Bobby from long ago.

Tonight I was ready and it was time to play my trump card. I carefully placed the piece of blood flecked shirt along with all of the others items in the chamber and waited. As hoped, the wraiths appeared and were immediately drawn into the chamber. I noticed Leopold reach out to Bobby's shirt and then I hit the switch. The overhead lights dimmed and smoke filled the chamber to the point where I couldn't see inside. I'd jury-rigged the voltage of the chair to its maximum output believing the powerful, electrical vortex created would somehow cause a disruption to their energized, spirit forms. I'd also placed sheets of heavy gauge, wire mesh on the floor and plugged those into the power distribution box for added effect. I theorized the massive, reinforced walls might slow them from quickly exiting the chamber and escaping my trap. Maybe even a few seconds longer would be enough time to cause them to move on to the other side where they could no longer kill in this world. When the smoke cleared, they were gone!

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It had been about a week since I killed the two wraiths. Perhaps killed wasn't the best choice of word in describing what had happened. But it was close enough for me. I was feeling pretty good about myself for a change and maybe my nightmares would subside and allow me a good night's sleep. I'd done something noble for once in my life and I was proud of the fact. It was at that precise moment in my thoughts I saw them fast approaching me from the far end of the catwalk. But it couldn't be! They were dead and I saw them die in the chamber. Oh, but they were real alright and from the contorted, angry looks on their faces, I was about to die at their hands.

I quickly turned a corridor and waited. I was going on the attack and not be taken down easily. As the pair rounded the corner, I repeatedly struck them with my oak baton over and over

again to the point they no longer resisted my blows. Leopold and Loeb were human after all given the amount of blood they shed over the concrete floor of the cellblock. The last thing I remembered was being grabbed from behind and wrestled to the floor. My over-the-top rage passed and everything then went to black.

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No one believed a word I'd said during the hearing. I patiently and truthfully explained to the judge about doppelgangers, the pervasive evil existing at Stateville, the fact Leopold and Loeb had murdered the two Joliet boys and other strange happenings I'd experienced over the years. I didn't harm anyone as the authorities claimed. I was simply putting to rest two incarnated, murderous souls. I didn't attack my fellow warders as accused since there weren't any warders, only Leopold and Loeb. I wondered if my monstrous face played a role in having me committed. Perhaps so, but I wasn't crazy; not by a long shot because I alone knew the truth.

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My new home in Chester, Illinois was a maximum security hospital for the criminally insane. There was no better, politically correct way of saying it was an insane asylum. I lived in a locked cell almost identical in size of those at Stateville. The hospital was primarily used to care for forensic patients who had been found not guilty by reason of insanity. Here we were called *patients*, not convicts, since none of us had been sentenced to a correctional facility. It was more of the inane, bureaucratic techno-speak which I so despised. Patients were required by Illinois law to remain confined in the hospital for a set period of time. In my case, the word *indefinite* was stamped all over my file. Our caretakers were not guards or warders; they were called *security therapy aides*. Could you believe such nonsense? And they thought I was crazy! To borrow from Gertrude Stein: "A rose is a rose is a rose."

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I'm almost finished writing a most exhaustive history of the Stateville Correctional Center. Pride of authorship aside, I think it's a good read. I'm on the last chapter, but not sure how my own story will end. In the meantime, I've had company to pass the endless days of solitary confinement since I was still occasionally haunted by my best, new friends: Messrs. Leopold and Loeb. They continued to live out their supernatural lives to kill again. I continued to

live out my physical existence of endless days in an Illinois nuthouse. It didn't seem fair, but life rarely was to me. No one believed my story about deranged doppelgangers roaming the streets of Joliet looking for their next victim. Ironically, I was the certifiably, deranged one and I had the court paperwork to prove it!

## Big Jim Morgan's Thrills & Chills

Drac's head had been bashed to such an extent he was barely recognizable. He was Zack's first born and the one he adored more than any of his other children. He'd just turned ten when his mutilated body was discovered lying on the floor in the back of Zack's camper. Now the puppet's black tux and redlined cape lay in tatters, shredded beyond repair. Count Dracula was no more and Zack was devastated by his passing.

As he later explained to me, he'd lovingly crafted Drac's creepy, paper-Mache head out of yellowed, obits pages taken from back issues of *The Chicago Tribune* he'd swiped from a local library. He then reinforced the head with chicken wire to give it better form and substance. Next he applied thin layers of vellum to finish the creature's striking, gruesome face, carefully shaping and molding the pieces into place until he was pleased with his handiwork. Paints and costuming followed until artistic perfection. Zach excelled in creating ghoulish hand puppets for his thrice daily performances at Morgan's sideshow of the weird and bizarre.

Zack admitted his sense of sardonic humor was a little off beat, but nonetheless he enjoyed the dark side of human nature, the more morbid the better. He said it suited his spooky, off-putting persona as the Puppet Master of the Macabre.

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Zackary Woolsey was a carny through and through. He'd spent his adult life traversing the country to places decided by Big Jim Morgan, the owner of Morgan's Thrills & Chills Amusements. As a child, Zack's father worked the midways of some of the largest carnivals of the time. His dad usually worked as a shill because he was so damn good in the role: one blessed with an uncanny knack to easily spot the marks among the townies. Like all workers, he was expected to do other jobs as well. In his father's case, that could mean operating the Wheel, Flying Jenny or rollercoaster as a ride jock or working as a roustie putting up and taking down tents and rides. His mom worked odd jobs in the towns they visited to help support the family. She homeschooled Zack, but he believed the carnival, with its quirky, insightful people, was the best education one could receive; certainly the lessons in human behavior and psychology. It was



the carnival's gypsy life that so appealed to him. This had been Zack's world and home. He never wanted to leave.

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Zack talked to his puppets more than he did with his friends and colleagues working the carny for Big Jim. That struck some people as odd, but the carny was home to many freaks and oddballs who generally got along well with each other. A high tolerance for quirkiness among the performers was the hallmark among those who made a career out of this lowbrow form of entertainment. Zack was still considered by his coworkers to be at the far end of a spectrum of what might be considered normal. He was a carnival kid who was fully accepted in the community by his peers despite his aloofness and solitariness. He simply didn't mix and mingle well with others. Maybe he was just shy, some thought. Maybe he was just downright crazy, others suggested. Regardless, he was one of them to the core of his being.

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Zack still mourned Drac's death like a loving father should. He didn't know who or why someone killed him in such a vicious, savage way. Someone who held a grudge? Someone bent on closing down his act? Someone who was jealous of his talents? Zack didn't know, but his other puppets were whispering questions that he couldn't truthfully answer. Brussius, the Spawn of Satan, asked if there would be more puppet deaths and if Zack could protect them? The worry and anxiety level was high among his troupe. Brussius was a favorite who scared the bejesus out of the audiences with his demonic countenance and frightening demeanor. His shtick was to warn mankind of the end of days coming to the plains of Megiddo, urging humans to choose wisely between the light and the dark forces before the war to end all wars called Armageddon.

Others as well expressed their concerns. Chira, the she-wolf, mentioned similar worries for her safety and that of her fellow puppets. Zack did his best to reassure them they were all safe with him, but he still had doubts that he didn't bother to mention. The truth was he simply didn't know what to expect. His children's voices rumbling through his head only confused his thoughts as he tried to sort out this most puzzling event in his mind: Drac's death and its possible consequences for Zack going forward. Had someone learned of his harmless mind games

involving brutal deaths? He pondered the possible answers and couldn't make sense of any of them.

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I signed on with Big Jim straight out of college. Morgan's was encamped in a farmer's field on the far north side DeKalb, Illinois. DeKalb was best known for its corn seed and the place where barbed wire was invented, perhaps one more thing too. It was home to my alma mater: Northern Illinois University. I had always been drawn to a carnival's shabby glitz and gritty glamour and Morgan's didn't disappoint in those respects. I wasn't sure why they attracted me so much, but they did ever since I was a kid and been hooked ever since. I never wanted to run away from home to join the circus, but I didn't want to pass up a chance to be a carny and satisfy my wanderlust and excitement for adventure. I wanted to wait awhile before I had to grow up and jog the mind dulling, nine to five treadmill like my fellow classmates.

My name is Sven Larsen, a fourth generation Swede, who was raised as an only child on a small dairy farm about twenty or so miles west of DeKalb. In the Swedish communities in northern Illinois, there were many Sven's and I was just one more. Lars was another popular name. Thankfully, my parents didn't name me Lars. I always thought that particular pairing of names would have been too Scandihoovian even for them.

My first gig for Big Jim was as a 24-Hour Man or Jumper traveling ahead to the next lot and posting arrow signs directing traffic to the carnival site. I'd also place posters in storefront windows and tack handbills to telephone poles and the like. It was simply the carny way of advertising. The job didn't pay much, about on par with what I could make with my BA degree in Psychology, except I got free meals and a bed to boot. So maybe it was a better deal after all. That was my first job as an honest-to-goodness carny and many more would follow over the next couple of years as I moved upward in Big Jim's eclectic family.

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It was show time and Zack handled the first performance of the day as best he could under the circumstances without Drac. He had been the master of ceremonies for Zack's sideshow act in the Puppet Master of the Macabre. Now Zack had to improvise by selecting

Magda, The Crone of Transylvania, as the new MC and changing the script to integrate her new role in the telling of spooky stories. She cackled with delight and waggled her broomstick as she narrated two Grimm's fairy tales, albeit altered, darker renderings with more gruesome details to pump up the horror a notch or two for the audience. Rumpelstiltskin was a ghoulish character, more monster than human in appearance. Snow White was still beautiful, but the dwarfs resembled scary looking trolls. Zack had chosen well and Magda was a big hit with the children of Podunk or whatever town the carnival might be in at the moment. Zack didn't remember anything, except for what he'd done the night before. He remembered that particular play very clearly and savored the action over and over again in his mind. Those delicious memories and the fond thoughts of his beloved children were what mattered in his life.

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Three hots and a cot: that's what the floaters who moved from one carny to another called Big Jim's proffered bunkhouse sleeping quarters and meal chits in the backyard of the lot. It was part of the benefits package that went along with the job, in addition to a little walking around money. The money could last awhile if you knew the right grifts, as I quickly learned. My favorite one was to put together a Michigan Bankroll with a ten dollar bill wrapped around a wad of singles. I would go into a fast food joint and flash the bundle so the cashier could easily see it, often laying down a ten spot on the counter in plain view. As the cashier got my order, I replaced the ten with a one dollar bill in the same spot. Often I'd get change for a ten. Those few extra dollars helped stretch my poke.

My meeting and subsequent befriending of Zackary Woolsey began when I was assigned as the lecturer for The Baby Show, an odditorium, located directly across from his puppet stage on Sideshow Alley. For a dollar per rube, patrons could enter the tent and view stillborn babies and aborted fetuses, some with umbilical cords still attached, displayed in large, glass bottles filled with formaldehyde. We insiders called it the Pickled Punk Show. Little did the gullible realize that most of the jars contained nothing more than bouncers, rubberized reproductions of the real things. That helped keep the authorities off our backs with their pesky laws and regulations. The show's main attraction was the Devil Baby: a gaffed exhibit, ostensibly a freak, featuring hooped feet, horns, fangs and claws. It was constructed to appear mummified or

otherwise aged to give it authenticity. The Devil Baby was the centerpiece of the show and the one the townies found most disgusting and exciting. They sometimes lost their lunch or dinner peering at the faux creature. Unfortunately for me, I had to clean up their messes afterwards.

I approached Zack after one of his shows and sincerely complimented him on the performance and especially on the beautiful workmanship that went into his puppets. They were works of art or so it seemed to me. His mastery of manipulating the puppets in a choreographed sequence of moves, all the while telling a story, was simply amazing. I envied his ability to create the various characters from scratch and make them perform as perfectly as they did. The voices were equally impressive, switching seamlessly from falsetto to basso profundo to precisely match each puppet's lines. The range of his intonation was absolutely amazing. He was a master puppeteer in all respects and I told him so. Although pleased, he bemoaned the fact that he was limited in his ability to do more with his hand puppets since he only had two hands to operate them. I took the opening to offer my help, at least on a part time basis. He readily accepted and that's how I joined Zack, the Puppet Master of the Macabre. Our relationship would only get more complicated and bizarre over time.

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Life at the carnival continued at a usual, hectic pace. The one day shows were particularly brutal on everyone. Bring everything down and set it up in the next town and then do it all over again. These were sixteen hour days with early morning lot calls for every member of the troupe. No one was exempt from the punishing schedule. We all looked forward to a longer stand where we could settle back into a more normal routine, staying at least a week in one location before moving on once again.

On those rare occasions we had some downtime, I'd draw the awnings and help Zack with his puppet show. He'd created a collection of twenty or so and each was a work of art. He tutored me in the manipulation of the live-hand puppets saying that his hand puppets were his family and no one else could work them. Live-hand puppets were larger than the hand variety and required two people to operate them. This was the type of puppeteer Zack wanted me to be since it would increase the breadth and range of his storytelling. I found Zack's comment about his family strange, but I didn't object since I was getting a free education in this art form. I just

believed he was a bit eccentric, even more so when he spoke to his children as if I wasn't present. All the carnies knew he was a loner and recluse, but never suspected he was much more than an ordinary puppeteer.

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Alison's body had been found a couple of days after Big Jim's carnival had torn down and jumped DeKalb for the next town. Reportedly, she was a beautiful, twenty year old sophomore at the same school from where I graduated. Her disappearance from her dorm room at Douglas Hall was reported to the police by her roommate. Her partially clothed body was discovered in a cornfield by the farmer who owned the patch. The location was only a quarter of a mile from her dorm and the cops theorized she'd been forcibly taken to the spot, tortured and then strangled to death with her own panties. Burn marks from lit cigarettes dotted her face and neck. She hadn't been sexually assaulted, but the authorities were puzzled about her disfigurement, wondering about the underlying, psychological motive for the vicious act.

I first heard of her death from Jimbo, the A&S Man. He was the age and scale operator just off the main arch who guessed the ages and weights of the chumps. I was reading the midway with my head down looking for a ground score of lost change or other valuables. I'd gotten into this habit some time ago and it occasionally paid off with a piece of jewelry or, if I was really lucky, a fiver. He said the police had been asking questions around the lot about Alison's murder given that the carnival had recently showed there. I was surprised the cops hadn't questioned me since I was a NIU grad who'd lived in DeKalb before joining Big Jim. Alison's investigation went nowhere and she soon faded from my thoughts.

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Every trouper who worked a full season had a unique handle. Mine was Svengali, a play on my given name. It made sense to the other carnies. Zack's was Woolly Bully, a play on his surname and popular 60's song by Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs. My handle was abbreviated to just Golly and Zack's was shortened to Woolly. That was simply how we addressed each other on the lot. No one used their real names for purposes of anonymity. Perhaps they were running

from cops, creditors and/or ex-wives. Nonetheless, it was a longstanding, carnival tradition. So Golly and Wooly it would be until we parted ways.

I sometimes dated townie girls who I'd met at The Baby Show. Surprisingly, female suckers outnumbered males about two to one. I wasn't sure why, perhaps it was a maternal thing that drew them to the show. I'd hook-up with them for a one night stand and maybe more if I was really lucky. Wooly let me know that he wasn't pleased with the dating because it took me away from his tutelage and my practice sessions with the puppets. He was like a jealous, petulant lover and I resented his peevishness. But I did pare back my dating to spend more time learning his craft. I really enjoyed working the puppets and I had to admit that Wooly was a patient, first-rate teacher. One morning, he mentioned I was almost ready for my first performance. I was pleased, but I'd already performed once to my satisfaction. Hopefully, there would be an encore to follow.

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We were operating a Sunday Schooler, a toned-downed, less raunchy show in Kokomo, Indiana on an April morning when it happened. An F-2 twister from the southwest popped-up out of nowhere and cut a swath of destruction as it slowly moved through the city. The sky had been overcast, but otherwise the weather was calm, perhaps too calm thinking back on the event. Just before we saw it, the sky turned a weird, greenish-gray color. We didn't have time to secure the tents, banners or much of anything else before we took shelter. Fortunately, we were closed to the public. It was the beginning of the tornado season and it was the one thing that frightened all of us.

It was over in just a few minutes, but what the blow down left behind on the lot was devastating. The arcade tent housing the coin-operated games was a complete loss. Big Eli, the Ferris wheel, had tilted to one side and its stanchions had been uprooted in the process. Tent canvasses had been ripped and lifted off their anchors. The large, colorful Bally Cloth ones with text and drawings suffered the most. Our living lot behind the show was damaged as well. The sucker netting separating the two sites was completely gone. A stretch of lineup concession booths, located close to the arch, were blown apart as well. The only good news was no one had

been killed or injured. That was a miracle in itself and we rejoiced in our luck despite the property damage. It took us six long days working a soft lot to put the layout back together. Big Jim's commercial liability insurance covered most of the repairs, even the sundry fees from the blank days when we were closed for business. His legal mender would later go back and suck the last bit of moola out of the insurance company. That was the way Big Jim operated, a tough taskmaster in some respects, but otherwise a decent and fair boss.

The show must go on and it did when we opened a week after the tornado. It was my night to assist Wooly with a loose adaptation of *Rapunzel*. We'd worked together to manipulate the oversized puppet and practiced long and hard to put on a great show. I even had a small, voice part, a short line spoken in my normal voice. I'd enlisted Crock, The Gator Man, to spell me at The Baby Show. I really liked the guy as he was an affable, down to earth human being who'd been damned at birth with ichthyosis giving his skin a scaly, reptilian appearance. Crock was just one more freak and geek in a home that warmly welcomed them.

I admitted to being a little anxious since I didn't want to disappoint Wooly or myself. As I recalled, Rapunzel grows up to be the most beautiful child in the world with long golden hair or so the Brothers Grimm story went. When she reaches her twelfth year, the witch shuts her away in a tower with neither stairs nor door, only one room with one window. When the witch visits Rapunzel beneath the tower she calls out: "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your long hair so I may climb your stairs." Of course, Rapunzel does as commanded.

So far, Wooly's story pretty much hewed to the original version. Now a handsome prince rides by the tower and hears Rapunzel's lovely, ethereal singing and he was immediately smitten. He begged her to let down her hair so he could climb her stairs to see her beautiful visage. But when he reached the room and saw Rapunzel's face, he was repulsed. She was an old, ugly hag! It was something so horrible that he couldn't imagine her countenance in his worst nightmares. She then promptly pushed the prince out the window and he fell to his death. It turned out Repunzel was a seductive siren who lured men to her room and their doom. She loved the witch who was her surrogate mother and would never leave the tower without her permission: an obedient, good girl, but with a very wicked heart and perverted sense of humor. That was Wooly's twist on the story line. He'd constructed the castle tower out of plywood and cardboard

and it was a fabulous prop. I congratulated him on his work and storytelling and thanked him for letting me participate in this most macabre fairy tale. I was still amazed at his many talents and told him I could relate to his Rapunzel because I'd been raised by an evil witch as well.

As I looked out across the alley, I could see the teaser curtain to the Cootch Show. Despite the pitchman's spiel, the women's performances tonight would be rather tame, really mundane; no real skin, just flesh-colored tights to entice the male audience. It was a tease and nothing more. But the men still loved the performance despite being shortchanged on the flesh. Just perhaps in another time and place, they might have seen the real thing and indulged their fantasies, but not tonight. That wouldn't happen to their collective dismay because Big Jim had ordered the whole show to be operated on the up-and-up: no skin or prostitution, rigged games or other gaffs. The local cops had refused his juice so the show couldn't operate wide-open. The carnival's profits would have to suffer as a result. Big Jim would miss making his nut for awhile.

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The DeKalb detectives were back and this time with a vengeance. They'd compiled a short list of their potential suspects and Wooly and I were on their radar screen. Apparently, someone at the carny had tipped our names to the cops. I worried how Wooly would hold up under the pressure of an interrogation. He'd withdrawn further into himself or I should say selves since he would carry on lengthy conversations and interactions with his puppet family. Those exchanges didn't have anything to do with the plays, but rather other topics that popped into his head. Frighteningly, many of them involved violent rape scenarios where the puppets, i.e. Wooly, acted out dark, disturbing scenes. It seemed Wooly's mind was being split into different parts, sort of a multiple personality disorder as I recalled from studying the DSM-V as an undergrad. Perhaps he was suffering from post traumatic stress from the death of Drac. My professional diagnosis was that Wooly had gone bonkers. He was mentally impaired and vulnerable, a perfect patsy for the cops. The note he'd received only worsened his state of mind.

Wooly found the note one morning taped to the back of his small stage. The letters had been cut from the carny's various handbills and pasted on a single sheet of paper. It simply read: **We know what you are.** It was unsigned, which wasn't surprising. He showed it to me and



asked what was going on, first Drac's murder and now this. He was confused and scared and I continued to worry about his sanity. We discussed people who may have a grudge against Wooly for some slight or wronging in the past. He thought of a couple candidates, but couldn't believe they were responsible for the acts. He mentioned carny people were family and it would be like a brother or sister viciously turning on him. The first name he offered was Needles, the human pincushion, who operated a Bed of Nails joint down the alleyway. A few months back, Wooly had watched his show and then chatted with him afterwards. For reasons unknown, Needles badly dissed Wooly and treated him like a rube when Wooly asked how he'd done the trick. That was something very much against the unwritten, carny code of conduct; again it was a family thing. Sort of like saying "you don't bullshit a bullshitter." Perhaps Needles still harbored a beef. A second possibility was Madame Nina, the bearded lady who Wooly was romantically attracted to, but she didn't feel the same towards him. She finally told Wooly to quit hitting on her and that was that. I had a hard time understanding Wooly's love interest in a bearded lady. It didn't seem to fit with the person I knew, but I didn't argue the point. I told him that Needles might be the culprit, although I didn't believe it likely. A beef was usually settled by talking things out to square disputes rather than exacting revenge or resorting to violence. That was the way carnies handled heat among themselves.

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Our separate interrogations with the DeKalb cops were held at the Kokomo, Indiana Police Headquarters. I was asked the usual questions about my whereabouts at the time of her murder: Did I have an alibi? Did I know her? Did I attend classes with her? Had I ever visited Douglas Hall? Did I kill her? Would I consent to a polygraph exam? I agreed to take the exam. I suspected Wooly was being asked similar questions and wondered how he was holding up emotionally. I'd later learn he didn't do so well. Fortunately, I wasn't told not to leave town because our next jump was only a few days away.

Wooly told me he was flustered under police questioning. He said the two detectives did a Mutt and Jeff routine: the good cop and the bad cop. He wasn't sure what he'd told them, but said he didn't kill Alison. Wooly claimed they twisted his words and outright lied to him on occasion to elicit a confession. He was frightened of them and unsure if he could get through

another interrogation. He mentioned he'd taken valium and smoked a joint before reporting to the station and said his nerves were shot to hell: Drac, the note and now the cops.

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Heidi Caruthers was a lot lizard who operated a notch joint out of the backend of her beater minivan. Her burned-out van was found on the outskirts of Kokomo with her inside. She'd been known to the local police and had been busted a couple times for soliciting before she turned nineteen. The night of her murder she was working the backyard lot of the show and probably bribed someone for the privilege of parking there. It was a lucrative business if you were young, blond, pretty and willing to take risks. By all accounts, she met all the criteria. Her autopsy disclosed her face was dissolved by formic acid post mortem, but it was the crushing of her hyoid bone in her neck that was the presumptive cause of death. She'd been strangled. The subsequent burning of her body was an attempt to eliminate any forensic evidence left by her murderer. I learned that formic acid was used in leather production and in the processing of dyeing and finishing textiles. I'd seen a large bottle of it in Wooly's camper and now pondered about reporting the fact to the cops. He'd been my friend and I was torn about ratting him out.

When I asked Wooly about the bottle of formic acid, he said he used it from time-to-time to tan leather accessories as well as on the fabrics to create the puppet costumes. He mentioned that he must have used more than usual since the bottle was now two-thirds empty and he couldn't remember why he'd used such a large quantity. I knew, but he didn't have a clue why I asked him about it, now believing Wooly was guilty of the murders of two young women. Given his mental condition, he'd likely blocked out the horrific events: sort of self-induced, selective amnesia. I was also convinced he'd murdered Drac and wrote the note to himself while in an altered state of mind.

Big Jim Morgan was understandably upset with the police attention his carnival had been getting and urged every carny to report any relevant information to the cops. This was very bad for business and only invited more scrutiny of his performers (and his) sketchy operations. He relied on anonymity to grease the palms of the local authorities to make an honest buck. After Heidi Caruthers murder, attendance and gate receipts had fallen off. Big Jim couldn't wait to

jump to the next town and put all of this nastiness behind him. He rightly worried that his show could be embroiled in a scandal that might, just might, put him out of business. He'd worked too hard and long to let that happen. He was a pragmatic businessman when it came down to the bottom line and his carnival's financial viability. It was all about show business and not show art as Big Jim liked to remind. I was the one who saved his carnies from financial ruin and Jim's been indebted to me ever since. I was to be his savior and Wooly's Judas.

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I contacted the DeKalb detectives and Kokomo police after I received Big Jim's plea for cooperation. The two organizations had joined together to create a taskforce because of the strong similarities between the two murders and the belief someone at the carnival was responsible. I didn't enjoy the experience, but knew it had to be done to prevent future murders. Wooly needed to be stopped before he could kill again. It was a moral duty as I saw it and one I couldn't shirk no matter how much it pained me. I had no choice but to report what I knew and believed about Wooly and his crimes.

My story to the cops was pretty straightforward: Wooly was mentally unstable; he had a penchant for the macabre: he was at the sites of the two murders; he engaged in violent role playing with his puppets; and he had a bottle of formic acid in his little trailer with a large portion of it unaccounted for. It was all circumstantial evidence, but sufficient for an arrest warrant. Wooly was placed under arrest and again questioned, but this time more vigorously. The poor schmuck didn't bother to ask for a lawyer. It was a slam dunk situation for the cops. After relentless badgering, Wooly broke down and confessed what he'd done. He claimed he must have blocked out the events because he couldn't remember any specifics of the acts. He acknowledged what the police already knew: he was one very sick pup who needed help.

I visited Wooly in jail once before he was extradited back to Illinois to face the charge of aggravated murder in the death of Alison. He was confused and not particularly lucid which wasn't surprising given the circumstances. He'd been put through the ringer by the cops and it showed in his bloodshot eyes and haggard face. The phrase "deer in the headlights" came to mind when I looked at him. Wooly said he didn't understand what was going on and simply

wanted to go home to his children. I told him that wasn't possible now and maybe never. The best he could hope for was a judgment of insanity and I thought he had an excellent shot at avoiding the death penalty. Before I left, he asked if I would adopt his family and care for his children as he would. I readily agreed. It was the least I could do for my best friend and mentor. I wished him well.

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Wooly was such an easy mark to score and manipulate to my ends. Early on I pegged him as having a borderline personality disorder given his reclusive, almost paranoid behavior. He was emotionally unstable to begin with and my plan was to push him over the edge into madness. Looking back, the strategy worked well and much faster than I expected. I was the one who broke into Wooly's camper and murdered Drac after learning from other carnies he was Wooly's favorite puppet. I wrote the cryptic note to ratchet up the pressure on him and to keep him off balance. I anonymously tipped the police about Wooly and myself as persons of interest. I stole the formic acid and used it for good purpose. Oh, by the way, I murdered the two young women and disfigured their faces. All-in-all, I'd done well or so I thought.

We sociopaths have no compunctions about killing because we lack the so-called qualities of empathy and remorse. Pathological lying was another of our virtues. I didn't hesitate to submit to a polygraph test when asked by the cops. I knew what the outcome would be ahead of time. I passed with flying colors as the expression goes. Most importantly, I had successfully placed the blame for my crimes squarely on the shoulders of my good friend Wooly.

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I needed to quickly get out of DeKalb before the police discovered Alison's body and put out a dragnet to snare suspects. Joining Big Jim Morgan's Thrills and Chills Amusements was the perfect opportunity to escape. It had worked well, but I expected the cops might eventually be able to place me at the scene of the crime through the use of some forensic mumbo jumbo. I needed a plausible scapegoat and Wooly was the perfect candidate for the job. Alison was my second victim having killed another young woman about a year before in Sycamore, Illinois and been questioned by the cops and released for lack of evidence. I'd bashed her face in with a

Louisville Slugger until it turned to messy pulp. The ceaseless battering of her head finally dissipated my fury and I felt normal again. It took the coroner about a week to identify her. I couldn't take the chance they'd come after me again.

It was my rage that got me into trouble. When it reached the boiling point I had to release it by killing attractive, young women who reminded me of my mother. Oh, mommy dearest, what a miserable cunt you were. I didn't even bother attending her funeral some years ago since I didn't mourn her passing in the slightest. Good riddance to bad rubbish. The bitch deserved to die a painful, horrible death. Thankfully, that happened as the cancer slowly ate away at her once beautiful body. But it was her dark, cold soul that I so well remembered as a child.

My mom, Greta Larsen, was gorgeous; a classic Swedish woman with a petite body, blue eyes and blonde hair. She was a looker as the word was used back then. She was a slut as the word is used now. She and my dad married straight out of high school and I was born a year or so later. I was to be their only child. My father inherited the dairy farm from his parents. His life revolved around the cows. My mom's life revolved around the randy farm hands. Thinking back, I wasn't sure who sired me.

It started when I was about four years old or that was the age I remembered her first servicing the farmhands. My loving mother locked me in the bedroom closet while giving a quickie to one of the workers who lingered awhile after lunch while my dad and the other hands returned to the milking barn. I could hear the grunting, moans and disgusting exclamations from their rutting even when I held my hands over my ears. I could still hear them today in my mind. At first, I thought someone was hurting my mother, but learned later the truth of the matter. I was confused and conflicted about what was happening on the other side of the door. She'd forgotten the old door had a skeleton keyhole and I watched her sexual escapades and cuckolding of my father. I came to learn my mom wasn't being punished, but rather pleased by the man in bed with her. After each tryst, she would beat my butt with a wire coat hanger until it welted to remind me not tell my father about our little secret. Her duplicity and fucking continued for another couple of years until I went to kindergarten when she would no longer have a coconspirator or witness around to tattle on her. My dad was completely oblivious of her extracurricular activities and just as well because I think it would have killed him. He was truly

in love with her. On the other hand, she was truly in love with young, stiff dicks and there were no dearth of them on our farm.

As a result of the physical scars and emotional trauma as a child, I grew up to be a bona fide, over-the-top misogynist. I hated women, especially good looking ones with yellow hair. My rage would wax and wane for reasons I didn't understand. Something or someone acted as a trigger and I'd boil over with irrepressible anger. It was then I felt the urge, the need to kill and obliterate the faces of my victims. With practice, I was getting better and better at disfiguring and killing my mother. As she'd say over and over again about my homework, "Sven, practice makes perfect." I didn't plan to disappoint her and looked forward to my next adventure.

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Big Jim was very appreciative of me removing a bothersome thorn from his side: Wooly and the negative publicity for the carnival following his arrest. Ironically, the press coverage drew more patrons than it turned away. Always the showman, Jim built a new joint featuring Wooly and his murderous exploits as a serial killer of young women. It was a flashy, lurid display in every respect and the rubes loved it. As for me, I was rewarded by taking over Wooly's show. I'd gotten pretty good with the puppets, although it would be a one man show with Wooly gone. No matter, I was confident I could do it and do it well. Eventually, I'd have to hire and train an assistant, but there was no hurry.

I was no longer Golly, but back to Svengali, the Master of the Macabre and Puppeteer Extraordinaire! I moved Wooly's operation to a larger, more prominent venue along the alley of freaks and geeks. The spot was next door to the anatomical wonder sideshow. Performers would do stunts such as "the man without a stomach" act where a freak pulled in his gut until the backbone showed or pulling themselves through a coat hanger or tennis racket or other India Rubber Man tricks. It was a solid attraction and I'd get the overflow of Lookie Lou's for my joint.

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It was to be my first performance using Wooly's children. I practiced by fitting a puppet over each hand to get a feel for them. I did get a feel, actually a weird, tingling sensation each time I put them on. Perhaps some of Wooly's karma or spirit or whatever remained. Regardless, I was happy to be finally working them.

The first and last performance of the day began well. I had a good size crowd in the tent and looked forward to the take. About halfway through my gig, it suddenly happened. It started with the tingling sensation, but quickly turned into something much more to my amazement and shock. Instead of following my *Hansel and Gretel* script, the puppets moved of their own volition, repeatedly punching me hard in the face. I tried to remove them, but couldn't since they had compressed their costume sleeves around both of my arms like long, blood pressure cuffs. They squeezed and squeezed some more until I lost all sensation between my wrists and elbows. They were vise-like grips on my forearms and I couldn't shake them loose. The puppets had extraordinary strength and the more I fought them the harder they squeezed until my blood pressure shot up and exploded through my brain. I died of a stroke on the spot. However, it wasn't all bad news since it turned out to be one hell of a curtain call. With Big Jim, it was always about the entertainment value of an act and I'd put on a great show! For once, the suckers got their money's worth and then some at Big Jim Morgan's Thrills & Chills Amusements.

Wooly's children believed in retribution and they now had avenged their father's honor. As a dutiful son, I'd done the same for my father.

## **The Sad Tale of Klowntown**

Cuddles and Jimbo had been ambushed and murdered by the Haters' bounty hunters before they had a chance to defend themselves.

The professional, amateur and wannabe clowns along with their families had begun gathering at Klowntown shortly after the outbreak of the pandemic of 2016. It would be four more years of bloodshed before America regained its collective sanity. No one was safe from the "The Phobia" which had spread quickly from coast-to-coast in a matter of a few months and then moved abroad to affect others. Many people were immune from its malevolent influence and almost as many people not. Over time, a sizable number of clowns had migrated to Klowntown for mutual protection; as a safe-haven from the hysteria which now ran rampant across much of the country.

The two clowns, with wives and children in tow, had been traveling to Baraboo, Wisconsin seeking sanctuary at Klowntown. They'd almost made it to the city limits before their minivan was intercepted by the bounty hunters and forced off the road. Both clowns were roughly pulled from their vehicle and forced to kneel before the Haters' agents of death. Each was dispatched with a single bullet to the back of the head while their families watched in horror.



Their ears were cut off and taken as trophies and proofs of kills. A few of the more crazed, mercenary hunters would string them together and wear them as necklaces. The clowns' remains were then soaked with gasoline and set alight. Their wives and children were made to watch the gruesome ritual, one repeated throughout the country many times. It was an all-out war on clowns and the Haters' relentless rage would continue until the entire clown population was exterminated once and for all time. That was the Haters' stated mission: eliminate all clowns and make sure no one would dare to take up their profession. So far, their plan was working well.

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It began innocently enough with kids and some adults dressing up as clowns and scaring the citizenry by lurking around wooded areas and near playgrounds, just long enough for children to glimpse them and run in terror to report the sightings to their parents. It was a funny head game for these ersatz clowns. It turned out to be deadly for the real ones. Like many things, the pranking fad spread from West to East to the point the authorities started cracking down on the pranksters when they could catch them. Ordinances were enacted banning clown costumes and face makeup with relatively stiff fines imposed, especially at Halloween. However, the ban backfired on the authorities and the incidences of pranks grew exponentially. More and more imposter clowns were now taunting the police and many of the pranks had become more threatening and malicious rather than good-natured spoofing. It seemed, at least to many Americans, that defiance of the clown laws was fast becoming a popular, civil disobedience movement.

The 2016 clown sightings, as they were called, involved sightings of people dressed as evil clowns in incongruous settings, such as near forests and schools. Many incidents were reported in the United States and subsequently in other Western countries as well as the Far East. The sightings were first reported in South Carolina when a nine-year-old boy told his mother that two males dressed as clowns tried to lure him into the woods. By mid-October 2016, the sightings had been reported in nearly all U.S. states, nine out of thirteen provinces and territories of Canada, and eighteen other countries.

Prior to the spate of incidents in 2016, numerous sightings of people dressed as clowns in odd circumstances had occurred throughout the world since 2013. The proliferation of videos

and images of these precursor sightings spread through social media posts and viral sharing of the content.

While some of the 2016 incidents appeared to be wholly unsubstantiated or lacked evidence of criminal activity, a few led to arrests. Some people were cited or arrested for making violent threats to schools, and some incidents involved robberies and assaults on both children and adults.

In mid-October, in the wake of hundreds of clown sightings in the United States and Canada, the phenomenon had spread from North America to Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Latin America. The sightings had become a worldwide nuisance and, to some, a menace.

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Those infected with The Phobia weren't amused by the clown sighting phenomenon one bit. To the contrary, it only emboldened them to lash out at the professional clowns who made their livings by entertaining the young and old alike. Why some people took out their fear in violent acts and others not remained a mystery. Some pundits theorized it was a latent, deep-seated psychological fear and the clown sightings had triggered a fight or flight syndrome for a large segment of the population already predisposed to hating clowns. However, that supposition was merely speculation and the cause was never fully explained to anyone's satisfaction. Nonetheless, there was an overall ambivalence towards clowns and an ongoing dialogue among the citizens as to whether they were good or evil people. The sentiment was never clear-cut and always a bit confusing and contentious when it came to clowns those days.

Clownery was an old, respectable profession with a long history of iconic characters. Emmett Kelly, aka Weary Willie, was one very prominent clown and his legacy was among the first casualties of the vicious conflict. His bronze bust on permanent display in the rotunda of the state capitol of Missouri went missing. Next, the Emmett Kelly Museum in Sedona, Missouri had to board up its windows and close its doors due to falling attendance as well as threats to its staff. Professional clowns suffered greatly by being fired by circuses, carnivals and funfairs across the country. No reasonable, caring parent would now hire a clown for a backyard birthday party those days. That was only asking for trouble.

A grassroots campaign had taken shape and organized itself into a powerful, national movement. Its official name was People Opposed to Clowning, but more commonly called the Haters. The Haters employed a sophisticated public relations strategy to persuade everyone that clowns were evil, spooky people who needed to be eradicated for the public's safety. The Haters hired bounty hunters, better known as headhunters, to track down and kill clowns at \$5,000 per head. It was apparent that a small, but growing number of law enforcement officers looked the other way when such atrocities were committed. The hunters were very efficient in eliminating scattered, isolated pockets of clowns. They were as yet untested in carrying out larger search and destroy operations. That was the dire situation facing the remaining clown holdouts gathered in Baraboo.

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Baraboo had been home to the Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus for several decades in the early 1900's. It was still home to Circus World, a full-fledged circus that catered to tourists visiting the Wisconsin Dells. Given the city's long, historical relationship with circuses, the Klowntown settlers were warmly welcomed by the townspeople. There was a soft spot in their hearts for clowns and circuses. While the nearly four thousand immigrants stressed Baraboo's municipal services, there was no tension or acrimony whatsoever between the newcomers and the townies. The authorities protected the clowns and their families from outsiders, most especially the headhunters from Hate. The clowns felt relatively safe in these circumstances, but were at risk when they ventured outside the city limits. That was something rarely done now since the Haters watched all vehicles entering and leaving Baraboo.

The hunters had developed an extensive bio data file on the clowns and were on constant lookout for members of their ilk. The clowns lived under a siege mentality, but had no other choice except to accept their common circumstances: all due to practicing the profession they loved. Ironically, they were considered lepers carrying a plague by many Americans. However, it was the Haters and their sympathizers who were afflicted with the medical condition called coulrophobia: a visceral, irrational fear and loathing of clowns. They were the true carriers of absolute hatred. Those so afflicted, in turn, spread the virulent phobia to other, like-minded people with whom they came into contact. The persecution of clowns grew accordingly.

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Mister Chuckles was the titular head of Klowntown, largely a ceremonial position, but one respected by his peers. He presided at council meetings and was the go-to guy who handled disputes and problems within the community. He'd been the head clown with Ringling Bros. for almost twenty-five years before being unceremoniously let go by the circus. His boss simply told him his presence was bad for business. Chuck was also the spokesperson for their settlement and maintained liaison with the Baraboo officials on matters of mutual interest. One of his duties entailed coordinating self-defense efforts for his community. The clown legacy and culture had to be maintained at all costs or otherwise it faced extinction. That simply was unthinkable in Chuck's mind since clownery in one form or another had existed for several millennia. He firmly believed the tradition must survive for future generations to enjoy. It was an imperative he couldn't ignore. There was just too much at stake to let that happen. The very viability of the clowning tradition was at risk of being erased forever. A rich legacy as famous entertainers would be reduced to merely a curious footnote in the history books to be read by future generations of children who would never enjoy this form of amusement.

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Mister Chuckles called to order the weekly meeting of the council. All members were fully costumed as required by protocol. After the pledge of allegiance, the membership solemnly recited the oath of the Clowns of America:

*"We are the ambassadors of joy and amusement. We promise to uphold the clowning traditions and values to entertain the young and old alike to the best of our ability, so help us God."*

That was followed by a rousing cheer and then things quickly settled down to business. Tonight's agenda consisted of committee reports and Twisted Sister was the first to speak.

"So where do I start?" she rhetorically asked at her opening.

"How about at the beginning," someone shouted and the audience laughed at the obvious retort.

Sister may have blushed at the chiding remark, but if she did, it didn't show through her grease painted face. Besides, it was all good natured fun, simply a bit of clowning around. As the council's historian, she was responsible for chronicling the happenings in Klowntown.

"We've had five newbie families arrive this week and they're put up at the recreation center until we can find them permanent quarters. They've already started the orientation process and they look to be a good bunch of people as best as I can tell. Perhaps Lady Jingles of Welcoming and Welfare can add to my comments."

"I can," Jingles spoke up. "They seem like honest-to-goodness clown folk to me, but Baggy Britches is still vetting their bona fides to make sure we haven't accepted a fifth columnist or spy into our community."

"While I have the mic, I should mention the schooling situation. Klowntown Elementary is up and running and now fully staffed with qualified teachers and aides. Our older children have been integrated into the Baraboo high schools and there have only been a few problems reported between the townies and the clown kids. Overall, things are going well on the education front. Blessed be to God!"

Baggy Britches spoke next. He was in charge of the Intelligence and Security Operations Committee for Klowntown. He was an experienced operative who'd retired as a special agent of the U.S. State Department's Diplomatic Security Service before turning to his first love: the circus.

"So far the newbies look legit, but we are still checking them out. It takes time to vet them and our resources are limited," he explained. "We rely on old trade magazines, word of mouth, internet searches, library sources and sometimes sympathizers outside Baraboo to verify clown credentials. It's a painstaking exercise and it's still no guarantee they are genuine entertainers, but it's the best system we have to work with. The Baraboo police have been cooperative by conducting criminal record checks for us, but it needs to be careful not to draw attention to itself by conducting unauthorized searches. That would shut down its access to the national law enforcement database."

Baggy Britches paused to catch his breath and took a quick spritz from his seltzer bottle before continuing his spiel.

“I do have a bit of good news about our brethren living overseas. As best I can determine, The Phobia seems to be less severe there than here. Why, I’m not sure. Perhaps they live with a more rational, intelligent population of peoples or maybe just markedly different cultures which are more tolerant of clowns. There have been only a few instances of people attacking clowns abroad, although my sources claim that working engagements are getting more difficult to come by as a result of the hysteria. I wonder if they are in an early stage of what we’ve gone through here in the United States. Will their situation deteriorate over time like ours did to the point they are hunted down like rabid animals? We’ll have to wait and see what happens.”

A voice rose up with a question from the back of the room. It was from Crusty, a dour clown who’d stolen his name from a character on The Simpson’s show. That fact alone turned off many of his fellow clowns for his lack of originality. Crusty had worked middling carnies his whole career and his colleagues thought his act was second-rate at best. He was a loner and malcontent, but still welcomed at Klowntown despite his off-putting personality and demeanor. He was a difficult clown to deal with and his question confirmed the fact. It was a loaded one and meant to be disruptive rather than constructive.

“So Baggy, whatcha doing to protect us these days?” he snidely inquired. “Caught any Haters inside our gates lately? Any barbarians or quislings identified among us?” Crusty snickered and sat down waiting for a reply.

A cacophony of loud honks was heard from many bulb horns indicating that most of the attendees didn’t like the questions and Crusty’s intent to get into a verbal brawl.

Baggy Britches didn’t take well to the baiting, but gave a tempered, stock reply that each clown had heard before, from his security briefings to new arrivals to pap at events like this. He didn’t plan to engage with Crusty on the topics so he hewed to his vanilla script of the security situation.

“Crusty, thanks for asking,” he politely and disingenuously replied. “The situation hasn’t changed much from last week’s briefing so I’ll have to bore you once more with my answer. The

county sheriff's office and Baraboo police have been extremely sympathetic to our plight. Without their protection, Klowntown wouldn't exist. We continue to beef up security measures in the community working closely with our law enforcement partners. I won't discuss the specifics in this meeting for obvious reasons. It's best we adhere to the need-to-know principle for our collective safety."

"Loose lips sink ships, huh. I thought as much. You simply don't want to share what you're doing with the little people of Klowntown, right?" Crusty blurted out.

"No, that's not the reason. It's about being able to conduct our operations with some degree of secrecy because we know there are a few Hater sympathizers living in Baraboo. There's no reason to advertise what we're doing to protect ourselves. That doesn't make sense to me."

Several huzzahs went up from the audience which neatly concluded Baggy's report and the meeting.

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Mike Adams had been infected with the clown disease at age five while attending a backyard birthday party for a neighbor kid hosted by a clown; not an ordinary clown, but a creepy one named Mr. Rimples or Rumples, he couldn't remember which and didn't bother to try. He ran screaming to his mother's arms and from that day forward he never wanted to see another clown again. He was emotionally scarred and scared for life and probably suffered from post traumatic stress disorder, but couldn't admit it to himself. His hatred, fear and loathing of clowns knew no bounds and that was why he was chosen by the POC to spearhead the militia and headhunter operations throughout the eastern part of the United States.

As the council in Baraboo was meeting, so too was Mike's war cabinet as he called his command and control operation outside Sarasota, Florida. Sarasota was the location of a small enemy camp and Mike was planning to overrun it and eliminate the clowns who still resided there. Many clowns refused to leave what had been the traditional winter home of circuses and carnivals for several generations. Some clowns went into hiding elsewhere, some migrated to Baraboo, but others chose to stay and take their chances with the future.

In addition to regular militia, Mike's team consisted of brutal, coldblooded murderers, the scum of the earth who were only motivated by the money they could earn from headhunting and other extracurricular duties that Mike assigned them from time-to-time. Funding the operation was effortless since the POC had many contributors to support its eradication program. There was no dearth of rabid Haters who wanted nothing more than to wipe clowns off the face of the Earth, no matter the cost or how long it took.

"What's the head count for the past week?" Mike inquired of his staff assembled at the large table inside his makeshift headquarters.

"Twenty-two killed in three southern states boss," one of his lieutenants promptly answered with the latest stats.

"Not good enough! We still need to ramp-up the kills another couple of notches. But as all of you are aware, it's Sarasota with clown holdouts and our next big target. Killing them off one by one, here and there is fine, but Sarasota still has a couple of hundred clowns residing there. We need to regroup our resources there to mount a major campaign to root them out and annihilate them. There's big money to be made with the cleansing operation. Put out the word and have the hunters and militiamen report to me for new duties."

"Bill, what's the latest skinny on the whereabouts of Mister Chuckles? Still holed up in Klowntown like the coward he is? If he had any balls, he'd meet me mano-a-mano."

"Yes sir. Sorry to say he hasn't ventured outside of Baraboo according to our informants. If he does, he's dead meat. We have a cordon of watchers surrounding the city and it would be suicidal for him to leave his sanctuary. I suspect he knows that too."

Mike thought so as well. Chuck wasn't stupid or careless because he understood the consequences of a foolish misstep. He'd be a hard catch for the Haters. Unfortunately for Chuck, the organization didn't have a catch and release policy.

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Chuck's kids, Willie and Amy, again begged their father to let them join Baggy Britches defense force for Klowntown. They were both teenagers who'd been brought up as circus kids.



The circus's life force flowed through their veins and they wanted nothing more than to be professional clowns like their dad. This time he relented and told them they could volunteer only a few hours a week as long as it didn't disrupt their schooling. Chuck was proud of his children and he was their sole caregiver since his wife died after a long bout with cancer. They were growing up and he was amazed at how mature they were for sixteen and fourteen year olds. He loved them both very much and constantly worried about their future.

Chuck learned of the gruesome event through the clown grapevine which was still very active among his peers. His old friend and sometimes partner, Doink, had been run to ground by the hunters in a small Louisiana town. The townsfolk who witnessed his takedown demanded the hunters hang Doink rather than shoot him and burn his body. So hanging it was to be with Doink forced to dress in full regalia and face paint for the amusement of the crowd of morbid onlookers. The inane, backward people left Doink's body hanging from a tree branch in the town square as a warning to others who might contemplate plying the clown trade. No one was arrested or prosecuted for the crime.

Chuck's heart was heavy when he heard the news about Doink's death, especially about the degrading, humiliating circumstances of his dying at the hands of a lynch mob. Doink was the only clown Chuck personally knew who had been killed by the hunters. The other clown deaths were simply names in a newspaper or on the internet. They were all reprehensible killings, but Doink's was even worse. It was like the KKK lynchings of long ago and it made him ashamed to be an American who still believed in the nation's values involving life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These days it seemed to him it was all about the pursuit of clowns and nothing more. Chuck now began to question his leadership role at Klowntown. He was no longer sure if he was up for the job where many people depended on his guidance and support as well as protection. The responsibilities seemed overwhelming. He was conflicted as what he should go. Maybe resign his position on the council, perhaps so.

*It had been almost three years since Doink and I had worked the center ring together at Barnum & Bailey's show in Milwaukee. I remembered his Dog & Pony skit very well. It was a hit with the audience and a favorite among the clown acts. The dog would take the pony's reins in its mouth and ceremoniously parade the animal around the ring. At various points, the dog would stop in front of the bleachers and drop the leads. The pony would then fold its front legs*

*and kneel in front of the crowd all the while shaking its head as if to say hello to the patrons. The kids in particular loved the act. I loved Doink and would greatly miss my good friend.*

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The Haters invasion of Sarasota was lightning fast and brutal in its house-to-house execution. It was like a Nazi blitzkrieg that spared no one. Like all street combat, there were civilian casualties, just collateral damage which couldn't be avoided, at least according to the Haters' propaganda machine. The local law enforcement authorities turned a blind eye to the carnage which ensued. No one was held accountable for the horrific crimes. America had finally gone totally lawless and insane!

The headhunter teams had done their homework well by identifying friend from foe and prosecuting attacks on known clown residences in the city. One by one, they sealed off streets around clown houses and conducted search and destroy missions at each one. Barricaded doors were easily breached with battering rams and small order explosives. The hunters moved swiftly from one location to another, referring to their lists of those to be executed. It was a meticulously planned operation and they'd done their due diligence to perfection. The clowns didn't have a chance. It was a bloodbath of great proportion and a terrible blow to all people who believed in clownery. It was a time of anarchy when constitutional rights were largely ignored and chaos seemed to reign in America.

The survivors of the first wave of assaults made a final, desperate stand at The House of John. In the Venetian dialect, it was called *Ca'd'Zan* and located on Sarasota's seafont. It was the fabulous mansion of John Ringling, one of the five brothers who successfully operated the "Greatest Show on Earth" for many years. Built like a fortress, its forty-one rooms offered some protection against the onslaught. The Haters' siege lasted almost two days as they methodically cleared each room, killing all occupants including the noncombatant women and children. Apparently the Haters' strategy had now shifted to murdering the progeny of clowns as well.

There wasn't a ground swell of sympathy or outrage after the massacre that left nearly 180 clowns and their family members dead. Many more were wounded and later dispatched. The cleansing operation of Sarasota was a huge success, at least in the eyes of the Haters and their fellow travelers.

There were some perfunctory news articles condemning the atrocity, but little more. It was if clowns were now considered subhuman beings and somehow deserving of the death penalty for simply practicing a profession they loved. It was a tragedy that would only get worse before it got better. The really bad times were about to begin. The federal government half-heartily stepped in to declare the POC domestic terrorists, but it had little real effect on the organization's single-minded drive to put an end to clowns forever. American sentiment overwhelmingly wanted the clown population to be eradicated and the POC was its instrument to make that happen.

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The news of the Sarasota Massacre immediately reached the outpost of Klowntown. Its people were appalled as to what happened and had great difficulty believing such a thing was possible in the United States of America, the land of the free and brave. It was unthinkable, but it was true and that put everyone on edge, believing the stronghold of Klowntown might be next on the Haters hit list. That was a reasonable assumption and concern since the community remained the last bastion of clown freedom against the ceaseless onslaught of the Haters wrath.

Chuck called an emergency session of the council since everyone was asking about the implications of the massacre for each of them and the very existence of Klowntown. It was to be a raucous, emotional meeting because people were frightened and rightfully so. There was to be no sugarcoating of the implications at tonight's meeting. The community's very survival was now at stake and people wanted to know what to do to protect themselves and their families against an expected attack by the Haters. Chuck was on the spot to make things right or at least tamp down the fears. That was the best he could do under the circumstances since there was no silver bullet, no quick fix to improve their lot and make things better.

There was no agenda for the meeting, just a free for all with questions and answers. Crusty grabbed the microphone and asked the first question.

“So Chuck, what are we going to do in light of the massacre? Turn tail and run? I vote to hold our ground and defend Klowntown, as best we can. It may turn out to be our Alamo, but at least we can put up a good fight to defend our honor and our families against what will likely be

another slaughter of innocents. I'm tired of running and I think others are too. So what's it going to be? Stay or get the hell out of Dodge while we still have the chance?"

Crusty, for a change, had pretty much summed up the questions. They were the same things others in the audience wanted answers to. What do we do now? What are our options?

Chuck answered the questions as best he could: knowing there were no good answers.

"Crusty, for once, I think you've pretty well laid out the issues by your questions. Congratulations, I didn't believe you could do that without challenging the council's authority with your contentious, stupid bickering about our policies." Chuck had had enough of Crusty's divisive crap. Surprisingly, Crusty stayed silent for once.

"The short answer is I don't know since there are many possibilities we need to discuss tonight. Here's an easy answer to one of your questions. Any clown and his or her family may leave Klowntown whenever they wish. There's no obligation to stay. That's always been the council's position. We believe in democratic principles and anyone who desires to leave can do so without regrets or recriminations with our blessing. We wish them well."

"Canada might be a good bet," Chuck continued. "The Phobia appears to be much less virulent there. If Canada can tolerate the French Canadiens, it can certainly put up with a few more clowns," he joked. However his politically incorrect slight didn't get any laughs. He now wished he hadn't said it, but quickly transitioned to his next statement.

"Seriously, Canada seems to be a good option for those wishing to leave our community. The Canadian government has offered refugee status to anyone who can prove he or she is a clown, much like the Vietnam era draft dodgers who were granted sanctuary. So for those considering Canada, gather up all of your clown documentation before you leave. You will need it to establish your bona fides for entry."

"Also, we need an ex-filtration plan to safely leave Baraboo without being caught by the headhunters. Baggy Britches, can you draw one up for us?" Baggy nodded in the affirmative. "Ok, good," Chuck relied in turn.

“Your other questions are more problematic. What to do if we stay and defend our values and our people. That seems to be a straightforward proposition as well. We’d likely have to take up arms to protect ourselves. I can’t imagine any of us simply passively accepting what the Haters have in mind for us. It’s almost a ‘damned if you do and damned if you don’t’ sort of conundrum. I believe the odds of surviving an all-out attack are low given the manpower and momentum generated by the Haters. We would be the underdogs in any fight and it would likely be a fight to the death because we very well know our fate if we surrender.”

There were murmurs of assent and sounds of crying from the large audience.

“What about stockpiling supplies?” someone asked. “For those of us who plan to stay put, it seems to me we should start doing that now.”

“Yes, I think that’s a smart, prudent move given our circumstances,” Chuck replied. “We’ll draw up a notional list of things you will likely need to survive an attack and get it to you as soon as possible. Baggy, can you put that on your to-do list as well?”

Baggy waived his hand in acknowledgement. He then got up and announced that Chief Hensley had agreed to deputize another twenty clowns and loan the Klowntown cops a dozen Remington 870 pump shotguns with a box of shells for each. That brought cheers from the audience. Klowntown and its residents were not going down without a fight!

“Are there any other questions or issues?” Chuck asked. There were none and the meeting was adjourned.

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In response to Sarasota, the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division formed a taskforce to counter the persecution of the clowns. It was headed by Aubrey Morrison, a retired FBI agent who’d first cut his teeth on the African-American civil rights violations of the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. Now in his early seventies, his goal was to disrupt and neutralize the Haters as a formidable organization that advocated violence and murdered clowns at will. He fully understood that not all local law enforcement officers could be trusted to assist his efforts since many were infected with the phobia and likely disinterested in helping at best or sabotaging his efforts at worst. He needed to be careful in selecting his confidants and informants. Even his

former FBI colleagues couldn't be counted on for the same reason. It was too late for Sarasota, but Aubrey vowed to himself the same wouldn't happen to Baraboo.

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It was dusk when Amy and Willie spotted two bogies through their binoculars approaching the outer perimeter of Klowntown. They were pulling a short watcher-shift and their job was to alert the Command Center in Baggy's house of any unusual activity. Hunter probes of the outskirts of the community were becoming more frequent. The hunters were looking for weak spots in the defenses of the community which could later be exploited during an attack. Willie called the Center's base station on the rudimentary Walkie-Talkie network and reported the event. Since the system wasn't encrypted, they used circus slang to talk around subjects, but still get their message across. The method of communication was far from foolproof and secure, but it was the best they could do since they didn't speak any Navajo. So they would report "a deuce of candy butchers with itchy feet was in the house." That roughly translated into two intruders were moving towards the perimeter. But it was enough to make their point clear enough.

The Center would likely send a team of armed clown constables or perhaps notify the sheriff's office and request assistance. Clown cops were trained, sworn law enforcement officers who augmented the Baraboo police force. That gave Klowntown a certain degree of autonomy in policing its own.

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Clown families left the community in dribs and drabs so as not to call attention to the migration of people leaving the safety of Baraboo. They were secreted in delivery trucks and semi vehicles under the watchful eyes of friendly sheriff's deputies who would loosely trail them until they left Sauk County where their jurisdiction ended. So far, the hunters hadn't stopped and searched the vehicles. But the clowns believed it was only a matter of time before the headhunters would get wise to the ploy and start stopping and searching. That would likely happen only after the vehicles passed the county line. Baraboo served as the railhead for the Canadian Underground Railroad that quickly established routes into Canada. Sympathetic station

masters along the way housed and fed the clowns until they reached their ultimate destination north of the border.

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Crusty easily drove past the hunters' surveillance vehicles parked on the side of the main road leading to Interstate 45 and out of Baraboo. He waived to them and they waived back in return. Crusty had a date tonight with Mike Adams, his boss and paymaster. Crusty had betrayed his calling and his few friends and many neighbors in Klowntown. He'd turned to the dark side of the conflict and was the mole who fed Adams with useful information about his community's operations, personalities and, most especially, its defense plans against an anticipated attack by the Haters.

Adams had moved his headquarters to a small town just north of Madison, Wisconsin. That's where Crusty was headed to report to Adams and collect his \$10,000 in hard earned, blood money. It was all so easy Crusty thought. The rubes didn't have a clue what he'd been up to and he wanted to maintain the status quo awhile longer until he earned enough to retire somewhere, anywhere except Klowntown. Jeez, what a name! Must his life always revolve around clowning? He thought not and couldn't wait to leave it behind and start anew. Although this time, it was to be with enough money to carry him through old age and then some. That was his goal and he was getting close to achieving it. Crusty didn't care in the least that he was being paid with thirty pieces of silver.

Mike Adams greeted Crusty like a long lost brother. But nothing could be further from the truth since he detested clowns, even one who turned his coat for the Haters. They briefly embraced and then got down to business, but not before Crusty ordered a Spritzer Highball from room service. Chit chat between the two conspirators was kept to a minimum because Adams couldn't wait to show him the door. He would kill Crusty when he was no longer useful to the cause. No clown would survive his wrath, including Crusty. But for now Adams had to play nicey-nicey with his guest and number one informant inside Klowntown.

“So what's new Crusty?” Adams politely asked while gritting his teeth.

“Actually there are a couple of things. First, the clowns are stockpiling food, water, guns, ammunition and other supplies waiting for a siege, an attack on Klowntown. They are also drawing up a defense plan for the community since many people will stay rather than flee. They understand they will likely lose any battle with the Haters, but they also know what will happen if they surrender. So expect your force to suffer some casualties.”

Adams wasn't surprised. In fact, if he decided to take down the clowns head-on, he understood the dynamics and realities of war. But he'd not made that decision yet. He worried the local law enforcement authorities might put up a fight on behalf of the clowns. That would greatly complicate things, mainly from a public relations perspective. In Sarasota, similar authorities stood by and watched the slaughter. Truthfully, some of them cheered on his headhunters as they went about their work. That type of support wasn't likely to happen in Baraboo and the fallout from murdering police could be devastating to his organization, perhaps fatal if he weren't careful. Adams had already heard some rumblings from the left wing of the movement that things were moving too far and fast with the extermination program. They warned that another massacre like Sarasota could set them back in terms of public opinion, if not direct intervention by a federalized national guard. Adams knew the Feds were fickle, even though many were card carrying members of Hate. Many more quietly sympathized with the cause. But he had a mission to accomplish regardless of the weak-kneed members of his organization. Yet he fully understood the need for caution to avoid any negative blowback on him or his militia.

“What else do you have for me Crusty?” Adams inquired of the clown who was on his third Spritzer Highball.

“I think you'll find this one interesting,” Crusty spoke while slurring his words. “Some of the clowns are escaping town by hiding in cars and trucks driven by sympathizers. They then hook-up with an underground railroad which takes them to points in Canada. It's a pretty clever plan. If you want, I think I can get a schedule of the departures if the money's right. I've heard rumors to the effect there will be a mass departure of clown families, over a hundred people via an 18 wheeler convoy in the next few weeks. Look for Kroger and Meijer food haulers and you'll find your clowns.”



“Yeah, I’m very interested in that sort of information, so get back to me with the details soonest. I need to put together the logistics of an operations plan, so the sooner you can get the specifics, the sooner I can act. Thanks Crusty, I owe you one for that information.” The one in Adams mind was a single bullet to the back of Crusty’s head.

Adams had anticipated this type of escape might happen, but he didn’t believe the clowns would try to escape en masse. Perhaps one or two at a time might leave that way, but not in the numbers cited by Crusty. He’d focused most of his attention on an all-out assault on Klowntown. Maybe he could now kill two birds or clowns with one stone. He liked his idea to finish off the bulk of remaining clowns in the United States in one fell swoop or massive assault as the case might be. He had political aspirations and planned to use the assault as a springboard for high public office. He was convinced that other right-minded citizens would support his candidacy and bring him victory.

Adams handed over a thick envelope of hundred dollar bills and told Crusty to leave, but report back immediately if he learned of any new, significant information, especially when the convoy is scheduled to leave Baraboo. He needed to get busy to ready his audacious plan.

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Aubrey believed he’d selected someone well suited for the role. Ralph Connors was an accomplished African American actor in his Little Theatre group in Madison. Moreover, he was a lieutenant on the Wisconsin State Patrol and a trusted agent. Aubrey recruited him for what would likely be the performance of his life.

Jerry Willis almost made it back to his motel on the outskirts of Madison before his car was stopped by an alert, highway patrolman who noticed his car’s right taillight wasn’t working. Willis was a top lieutenant of Mike Adams and responsible for the logistical operations of the headhunters. Willis was surprised and confused about the stop and would become even more surprised and confused at what was about to happen. He was handcuffed and blindfolded and then placed into the backseat of an unmarked, police car. His protests were ignored by his captors and he arrived at his destination in complete silence. Jerry Willis hadn’t been kidnapped; he was now in protective custody. It was an extrajudicial action, but the matter wouldn’t be reported by anyone; most certainly not by Jerry Willis when they finished with him.

The room was bare except for a single overhead light and the wooden chair he was cuffed to for his safety. Willis gasped when his blindfold was removed and he saw a six foot six inch clown standing in front of him. The clown had creepy, ghoulish features and scared the hell out of Willis. So much so, he began to shake and wet his pants. That was only the beginning of his humiliation though.

“Mr. Willis,” the clown began. “Welcome to Klowntown. I know you’ve been curious about our little community for some time now. Well, here you are and I hope you enjoy your short visit with us.” The meeting wasn’t being held in Klowntown, but Willis didn’t know better.

As he spoke those words, Connors pushed the button on his switchblade knife and held its tip on Willis’s chin. His eyes widened and he pulled back his head from the knife’s sharp blade. Connors then proceeded to cut the buttons on the front of Jerry’s shirt to the point it fell open and exposed his hairy chest.

“What do you want?” he screamed in terror. “Why are you doing this?”

“We want to have a friendly chat with you and nothing more,” Connors replied. “Yes, just a friendly chat about the children you’ve molested over the years.”

“It seems you have a penchant, if that’s the right word, for prepubescent girls.”

Willis immediately slumped in his chair. That act, along with an extensive investigation of Willis’s background, confirmed he was a repeat pedophile who had been investigated several times by police, but released for lack of evidence.

“Jerry, do you know what they do to pedophiles in prison? Do you know what Hate would do to you if it learned of your dirty, little secret?”

Willis’s chin fell to his chest and he started crying. “What do you want?” he again asked through his sobs.

“We want your cooperation and you know what’s going to happen if you don’t cooperate,” Connors responded without the slightest hint of sympathy.

“So what does ‘cooperation’ specifically mean?”

“It means you’re going to provide us with the headhunters’ organizational chart, names, locations, etc. It means we want advance notice of its plans and intentions for operations against Klowntown. It means you give us any information we request. If you turn on us, you’ll certainly regret it for the rest of your miserable life.”

Willis simply nodded his head in agreement.

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Preparations in Klowntown went ahead at a hectic pace since much needed to be done in a short period of time. The windows to clown houses were boarded up, entry doors reinforced and emergency drills conducted, all in advance of the anticipated onslaught by the Haters’ dreaded hunters. Even if they didn’t attack soon, it was still good practice since it would happen sooner or later. They couldn’t afford to be unprepared or caught off guard for even a moment because their very lives were at stake. It was the uncertainty, a “them or us” mentality at play. Everyone was on edge and riding an emotional rollercoaster without knowing how the ride would end.

The Mayor of Baraboo and the Executive for Sauk County jointly submitted a formal request to the Governor of Wisconsin to send national guardsmen to Baraboo to protect Klowntown from an expected raid from the Hater militia. The request was promptly denied since the Governor was a closet Hater. She despised clowns in all of their forms and wanted nothing more than for the clowns disappear from Wisconsin, one way or another and she didn’t care which way.

Both local officials knew well there would be bloodshed if the Hate carried out an attack that had been rumored to happen soon. Not only clowns and headhunters would die, but innocent residents too, those who didn’t take sides in the conflict. That’s what worried the officials the most. Honest to goodness, God fearing taxpayers might end up as casualties. That wasn’t good for business or reelections. There was even some talk about evicting the clowns if they didn’t leave of their own volition. The officials realized that would mean a death sentence for thousands of people and they wrestled with their consciences over the dilemma. Ultimately, they decided to maintain the status quo and let the clowns continue to live in Klowntown despite the possible

consequences for the citizenry. Their better angels had come to the fore, but their chances for reelection had just gone to Hell.

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Aubrey's taskforce had already prevented two assassinations of clowns in Alabama and Illinois based on Willis's information. Willis also passed along the Haters' plan to attack and destroy Klowntown, but didn't yet know the date or details. In the meantime, Aubrey had been discussing with Connors possible law enforcement support for defending Baraboo and now close to finalizing a plan.

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Crusty had sent a secret message to Mike Adams with the date and time the grocery store trucks would leave Baraboo. He also provided the identities of the two routes they would use in transporting the clown families. Adams was pleased with the news and promised himself to dispatch Crusty quickly and efficiently so he wouldn't suffer. That was the least he could do for the guy who'd been a valuable asset to his organization.

Adams had devised a two-pronged strategy to attack and destroy the clowns. He would use his headhunters to intercept the trucks and kill the occupants. He made it clear he wanted no survivors. That meant the truck drivers, clowns, women and children would be butchered on the spot. As another message of his terror campaign, he ordered all of the bodies to be nailed to wooden crosses affixed to trees along the roads so they could be clearly seen by passersby: a clear warning to others that practicing clownery didn't pay. It was just more of his quirky, macabre sense of humor.

A second tranche of hunters would storm Klowntown at the same time and set it ablaze. As people fled their homes, they'd be shot down one by one like rabid dogs which they were. No one was to be spared. It was no time to show human kindness since clowns were a vile, subhuman species that needed to be eradicated for the betterment of the country. It was an important civic duty and little more. May God bless America and the Haters plan for the successful outcome of their ultimate objective of saving the country once and for all from the blight of the insidious practice of clownery in American.

He'd worked out virtually all of the logistical details of the operation in his head. He briefed his two teams on what each was expected to accomplish. Adams estimated that the entire operation could successfully be completed in five hours, tops. Close coordination was required and each team commander had the authority to communicate directly with the other. He expected nothing less than a flawless execution and a decisive, clear victory for the Haters. Nothing short of that goal would be tolerated. His commanders understood his meaning: no screw-ups or they'd be summarily dispatched as well. *If the public thought Sarasota was a bloodbath, wait to see what I do to Klowntown*, Adams spoke to himself. Armageddon was about to arrive at the doorsteps of Baraboo, Wisconsin and no one could stop it. It was an inevitable and immutable fact. The winner in the final battle between good and evil would soon be decided. Adams was a winner and he could already taste victory.

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The battle of Klowntown began promptly at 10 am on a beautiful fall day in October of 2020. The attack came as no surprise to either the residents of Baraboo or Klowntown since everyone in Sauk County had been on high alert for the past ten days awaiting the momentous event. A handful of trusted officials of both communities had learned of the time and date beforehand. That was critical to their defense plan and would result in saving many residents their lives.

The headhunters advance on the grocery trucks went smoothly at first. The hunters were tipped by their spotters when the four eighteen-wheelers pulled through the city limits of Baraboo and headed to the interstate to begin their journeys north. They passed several Wisconsin State Patrol cars as they narrowed the distance to their targets. No problem with the cops they thought, the officers were merely disinterested bystanders and observers of what was about to happen. The patrol cars lazily followed the dozen or so hunter vehicles and watched when the grocery trucks were brought to a halt by several, large trees felled across the road. As suspected, the hunters, in their frenzied zeal to attack and kill, didn't bother to wait until the truckers left the county. In hindsight, that turned out to be a mistake on their part. The hunters encircled the trucks like a pack of wolves smelling live prey. The grocery trucks couldn't move backward since the hunters had blocked their retreat with several of their vehicles. The fallen

trees couldn't be breached to offer an escape going forward. They'd been trapped and awaited their fate.

The hunters got out of their vehicles and walked to the tractor trailers while leveling their weapons on the driver and co-driver of each cab, warning them not to make a move or they'd be killed too. The drivers had no illusions as to what the hunters planned to do to them after the clown families were slaughtered.

As the hunters opened the trailers double doors, a fusillade of shotgun blasts met them straight on. The frontline of six county law enforcement officers and clown cops then dropped to their knees and a second standing line of six more shooters repeated the deafening and deadly volley of gunfire. The tactic was much like the British Army's firing line formations which were employed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to great effect.

As repeatedly practiced, the two six man teams in each of the trailers next took up defensive positions at the four corners of each rig and engaged the hunters in a fierce firefight before most of the hunters were killed or wounded. The State Patrol officers then swooped onto the scene, from both the north and south directions, and arrested those hunters trying to flee. They would be initially charged with the illegal possession and use of a firearm. Additional charges would be piled on later. The count of the dead or dying from the action topped thirty-six, and all hunters. Only two cops were wounded in the fray. Aubrey's plan, as executed by Ralph Conners, worked well.

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Baggy Britches didn't have time to celebrate the news from the tractor trailer operation since the enclave of Klowntown was presently under attack from two directions by the Haters forces. The clowns as well as few of the Baraboo residents had suffered casualties in a firefight for high ground just within the city limits. It was a strategic position that commanded a clear view of downtown Baraboo, but now served as Mike Adams' forward observation point to direct the battle. The clown outpost there had been overrun and those not killed were forced to retreat. The headhunters used ATVs and motorcycles with armed, pillion riders along with a few Hummers carrying rounds of extra ammunition to spearhead a coordinated, fast strike into the heart of the city from opposing directions. The strands of razor wire strung by the clowns across

key choke points slowed down the attack by decapitating or otherwise injuring some of the intruders before they had a chance to reach the inner city. But such victories were few and far between. The clowns were forced to regroup their forces to meet the changing battlefield landscape. Lines were shifting quickly and the clowns defenses were beginning to crumble.

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Lt. Colonel Frank McGregor was personally, professionally affronted and disgusted by the activities of the Haters. In his mind, the Haters pogrom of eradicating clowns was not only unconstitutional, but un-American too. McGregor was a true blue patriot and commander of the Wisconsin National Guard unit stationed at Camp McCoy in Sparta, Wisconsin, located some thirty-five miles north of Baraboo. He simply couldn't stand by and watch the clowns in Baraboo massacred. McGregor had grown up on a healthy diet of John Wayne, Wheaties and scouting. He knew what was right and what he must do. He also knew the possible consequences of his decision since the governor had turned down requests from several organizations to have the National Guard intercede in the siege of Klowntown. McGregor understood he'd be courts marshaled for what was about to happen, but he picked up the phone anyway and called his chief of staff.

“Saddle up the troops, Roy. We're heading to Baraboo.”

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The fighting wasn't going well for the clowns. They'd won a few skirmishes with the hunters, but the Haters forces were almost at the gates of Klowntown. The barbarians had to be kept outside the gates at all costs. Otherwise, many clowns and their families would die. Most of the cops participating in the hunter trap had returned to the city to bolster its defenses. That was good, but perhaps it was too little too late as the saying goes.

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Mike Adams was fuming, his body on fire, thinking of Crusty. He turned to his second in command and screamed:

“That miserable fucker sold us out and set us up to be mowed down at the truck convoy,” he venomously spat out the words. “He was a double agent whose allegiance to the clowns hadn’t changed one iota. A true-blue motherfucker and Benedict Arnold all rolled into one treacherous bastard. I can’t believe I fell for his scam. Oh, but wait until I find him quivering under his bedcovers. He won’t receive any sympathy from me. Oh no, I’ll slowly skin the sucker alive and happily watch him suffer. That’s the least he deserves for betraying us and our cause.”

Adams temper tantrum finally abated and he returned to look at his map. Overall, he thought the battle was going fairly well. He’d misjudged the ferocity of the clown resistance, but believed his strategy was working as planned, although at a slower pace than anticipated. No worry, it was the end result which mattered.

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The fires started throughout Baraboo at roughly the same time, all the nasty handiwork of the hunters. The Baraboo Fire Department, augmented by Sauk County brigades, did its best to keep them under control and from spreading. But it seemed to be an uphill, losing battle with Sisyphus leading the charge. As one blaze was extinguished, another would pop up to take its place. It reminded the firefighters of the Whack-a-Mole game, although with the consequences of losing much more serious.

One of the northern defenses of Klowntown was a hundred yard wide no man’s land with an outer and inner cyclone fence running about a half mile in length. Circus World had offered twenty of its big cats to prowl the enclosure and discourage anyone from entering. For the most part, it was working well which allowed the limited clown resources to be deployed elsewhere.

Firefights between the police and hunters were becoming more frequent as the day wore on. Some innocents got caught in the crossfire and were injured or killed. Saint Mary’s Hospital was getting overwhelmed with trauma admissions and made a desperate plea for blood donors. Many people answered the call.

The carnage continued to grind on until the arrival of Lt. Colonel McGregor’s cavalry at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour or four pm local time. When they heard the news, some of the clowns joked it might be Calvary instead. None looked forward to that event. Fortunately that wasn’t the case.



The guardsmen quickly took control of the situation using overwhelming numbers of troops equipped with the latest panoply of lethal weaponry. The headhunters were outgunned and outmatched and soon realized the situation was hopeless and began stealthily leaving Baraboo. Not Mike Adams though, he still had work to finish with a Crusty clown.

The Wisconsin State Patrol ordered all of the hunters vehicles to be towed to an impound lot for safekeeping and later searches for any incriminating evidence. Removing the vehicles would prevent the Haters from quickly leaving the area. The tow operators had a field day hauling one vehicle after another from where they'd been parked in a willy-nilly fashion on the outskirts of Baraboo.

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It was a tough, bloody battle until the guard arrived. That's when things turned to favor the clowns. The guard conducted mopping up operations of the remaining headhunters. Those who surrendered would be transported to Camp McCoy for processing and incarceration. The legalities would have to be addressed later by higher authorities. Those who didn't die in the corn and soybean fields of Baraboo would finally face justice.

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Mike Adams searched high and low for Crusty and finally found him holed up at the commissary at Klowntown along with several other residents who had taken shelter there. Adams wouldn't leave Klowntown without saying goodbye to his good pal Crusty, just a thoughtful, parting gesture to square the books between them. Crusty was dressed to the nines and had been waiting for his arrival. In this case, it meant Crusty was wearing a red, white and blue costume with camo greasepaint covering his face along with his signature red, bulbous nose and matted orange wig. Despite his bravado, Crusty was a confirmed pacifist who wanted nothing more than to bring joy and laughter to the world.

"Well well, what do we have here, a citizen-soldier clown?" Adams scoffed while barely able to control his seething rage. "It's time to stop your clowning once and for all. Do want to go easy or hard? It's your choice. You betrayed the cause and now you must pay the piper for your treachery," as he moved the stiletto back and force between his hands. "A bullet isn't good

enough for a traitor. No, this will be a nice piece of wet work, up close and very personal, my friend.”

As he spoke those words, Adams advanced towards Crusty. As he did, he immediately lost his footing and fell hard to the concrete floor. Crusty had strewn tiny ball bearings across the commissary’s floor making it difficult for anyone to maintain their balance. Crusty easily shuffled his oversized clown shoes to where Adams had fallen and gave him a one two punch with his trick boxing gloves that employed a spring activated scissor mechanism which delivered serious punches to Adams’ head. Dazed, he again fell to the floor, but when he tried to get up, Crusty squirted him directly in the eyes with a gag sunflower. The reservoir had been carefully filled with battery acid shortly before. Adams was temporarily blinded, but Crusty had always believed the guy hadn’t possessed any foresight or vision to begin with. He chuckled at his cheesy pun.

Adams was trussed up using several of Crusty’s silk scarves. As a last insult, Crusty sat on the stoop while waiting for the cops to arrive and haul Adams away.

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News of the victory spread like wildfire throughout the world and Klowntown was overwhelmed with tweets and letters congratulating the clowns. Crusty was declared a hero for his role as a double agent who was the key to the defense of Klowntown. He was now worshipped by tens of thousands of youngsters who now wanted to be clowns when they grew up. Crusty could now rest on his laurels or on his whoopee cushion as the case may be.

October 13<sup>th</sup> was declared Crusty the Clown Day, an official holiday in Sauk County when Crusty and the Battle of Klowntown were celebrated. Chuck had chosen well. He’d pitched Crusty on his plan to infiltrate the Haters to learn of their intentions and to supply disinformation to confuse and delay their attack. Crusty readily accepted the dangerous job and began by acting as a malcontented, standoffish character who often disrupted council meetings for the sheer pleasure of doing so. His reputation for being at odds with the council eventually reached Mike Adams ears and he was recruited by the Haters shortly thereafter. With Crusty insinuated into the enemy’s camp, Chuck’s game plan worked to a tee.

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Just like The Phobia first started, it abated in a matter of a few months following the battle. The scales had been removed from most of Americans eyes with reason and rationality again taking hold throughout the nation. It was if much of the population had woken from a bad dream. Sanity had been finally restored. There were still some hardcore Haters, but for the most part they went underground or stayed silent fearing for their safety.

The national leadership of the People Opposed to Clowns along with Mike Adams and his key lieutenants were extradited to the International Court of Criminal Justice in The Hague to stand trial for crimes against humanity. The U.S. administration was happy to turn them over to avoid a potentially sticky, tar baby of a political situation at home. Specifically, they were charged with genocide by profession, a new category of transnational crime now punishable under United Nations law.

It took several years for the clowns to reintegrate into mainstream American life, but it gradually happened over time. Clowns were being rehired and kids could now dream of following in their footsteps for generations to come. Bogus clown sightings had ceased to exist and the clownery tradition survived. One iconic piece of Americana had been resurrected to prosper once more.