

*O'Heavenly Murder*

By

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## INTRODUCTION

What a remarkable time, 1956, to be living in the town of 'Saint Cloud' in Barron County; that is to say, if you were a homicidal fiend; but indeed, not so good if you were among those modest inhabitants who fell prey to such evildoers.

Saint Cloud can be found in the northwest expanse of Oklahoma, known as the 'Pan Handle' which borders the four states of Colorado, Texas, Kansas and New Mexico. The meager community is right off highway 56, and is home to some two hundred and ninety-nine hard workin' souls; the majority of which have fallen on tough times, or so they believed.

Yet, most of the town's upper crust--those individuals who give themselves way too much prominence--is mighty anxious concerning little Stacy 'Lollypop' Steimel; who is just scarcely eighteen, and comes from the wrong side of the tracks--if you catch my drift--and just happens to be with child.

It goes without saying, many Christian folks were off-put by the fact she came to be knocked-up, out-of-wedlock, and that Stacy won't name the little cuss who caused this dire

circumstance; which is probably a good thing, since the residents around here would surely beat the bejesus out of him, if they knew of his identity.

Just between you and me, it was that Bobby Taylor boy; a good-for-nothin' out-and- out scoundrel if there ever was one. Wouldn't surprise me at all to see his picture one day down at the post office; hangin' up on the FBI's top-ten most wanted bulletin board, yes sir to be sure.

But what seems to be upsetting the Christian community leaders more, is that with her baby's birth, the town of Saint Cloud will hit the big three hundredth mark; something that hasn't been achieved in over twenty-five years. Their concern is that it will be her baby that finally gets them to that glorious milestone, and that everyone will know her little darling is a 'bastard.'

Now, it may seem strange, but there could be a savin' grace on the horizon--as some holy rollers see it, or what I affectionately call the town snobs--as old man Dietzel, who is ninety-six, is knockin' on deaths door as we speak. Should he kick-the-bucket before Stacy has her little 'bastard' then the

town census would still be two hundred and ninety-nine, when the so-called blessed event comes 'round. I'd like to be able to say with certainty that no one is prayin' for old man Dietzel's death; but that would surely be a lie.

So now, with that little bit said, let's get to the heart of the matter, shall we. They never imagined things could be any worse off, until the murders brought forth the nightmarish fear that would soon engulf the once complacent and friendly little township. All kinds of eerie goings-on would be comin' out the woodwork; séance's, ghosts, dark spirits, mediums, aliens, walk-ins, zombies and all manner of bizarre things that go against good Christian tolerances.

Well, on the flip side of that coin, those who accept as true, those who call themselves 'New Agers' and whatnot, will most likely see what emerges as simply nothin' more than life lessons occurring unsurprisingly in accordance with universal laws, or some such gibberish. I myself am stickin' to the bible no matter how much those so-called 'Enlightened Seekers' say it's full of horse-hockey; when their time comes on judgment day, it won't be old Saint Peter who answers their knock at the

pearly gates; but surely indeed, it will be none other than Satan himself.

Now then, the pale-blue skies shine mind-numbingly over the parched landscape in this quiet province of our great republic. The dusty flat prairies afford one the ability to see far enough into the dreary distance; where nothin' of any eminence stands out; other than some cows and horses scattered around the seared remnants of arid wheat and hay fields. Most folks hereabouts are not too highly accomplished when it comes to schooling; with the exception of a few who hold important titles in the forlorn municipality.

Never see an average feller wearin' a fancy coat nor tie; mainly simple fare such as dog-eared straw hats, tattered T-shirts, faded knee-patched denims and leather high-top work boots. Women wear light, drab-colored dresses which come a tad down past their knees; never 'god forbid' see one wearin' pants of any make or kind, and only the local harlots wear demon inspired red lipstick, flashy makeup and nail varnish; those Jezebel's who are stalked late at night by the horny,

sweaty men of dire character who seek out the taverns of ill repute.

For the most part, Saint Cloud is running a good ten years behind the rest of the country, that is, when it comes to new fads and the like. Elvis Presley may be on his way to bein' a big sensation; but here, nary a teenager has heard of this fine fellow. No bobbysoxer's swooning over his hip-swinging gyrations in this backwoods little community. No colored folk here 'bout's neither. Not one soul in Saint Cloud could ever make the claim they met one in person, no siree.

Simple and cheap old-styled colonial one story homes with their faded, decrepit white picket fences; with even older homes still sporting the rust covered wrought-iron fences, and the old pale-white outhouses; to be found lined alongside the sandy paved lanes, with the exception of a few ostentatious homes of the more affluent.

Down on Main Street, where street lamps abound, the buildings of purpose can be found--Dalton Main Bank, Jefferson Davis Memorial Library, J.K. Peterman Post Office, and the Saint Cloud Municipal Complex--which houses the

Mayor's Office, Coroner's Office and Cold Storage Unit, Police Department and Jail--the Bozeman Café, Mueller's Drugstore, Zeeks Barber Shop, and Milly's Dress Shop among others--the roads there are a bit better maintained, and kept free of sand and blowin' tumbleweed; well, most of the time anyway, unlike the rest of the town.

No movin' picture shows; have to drive to Millersburg, some 22 miles away for that kind of high-toned showbiz. Yet most folks don't go anyway; can't afford the gas, nor the price of an afternoon matinee. Have only three insignificant grocery stores and one large one called Franklin's Market; but most have all the basics needed to sustain life of the common man; booze, cigarettes, German-bacon, taters and baked beans; among other palatable edibles. Phillips 66 station is the largest serving the local community, and it does sport three main gas pumps and one smaller diesel pump with 'full service' at all times. The other station, Shell, is only half its size, but still does a brisk business.

The old Lumber Mill is located only about seven and a half miles outside of town; yet, looks like it may be heading for

hard times as out-of-state competition is tryin' to move in. The Saint Cloud Area School building--which hosts all grades-- is only a stone's throw from main street, and was once the home of the 'Steinmann's Sewing Machine Factory' before it finally succumbed to financial difficulties back in 1932; a victim of the great depression no less.

The local ancestry of this simple town is mainly English, German and Irish; in that order. Most folks are employed through the lumber mill, ranchin', farmin', and the like; while the others simply work for the fore mentioned businesses and going concerns of town life.

Fear was about to clench its ugly grip on this sleepy hamlet, as on that first fateful day of May 13th, 1956; the first ghastly murder would come to full light and the town folk's reaction would run the gauntlet from simple blather to finger pointin' and suspicion of anyone who weren't a resident, or considered a good Christian.

I'm truly not sure why some folks get so worked up about dyin' since it's such an expected and common thing. Yet, some folks just love to run around all scared and fearful and worryin'



about every little thing; just a sad way to live your life if you ask me. Such was the mindset of the townsfolk of Saint Cloud; that is, before the quick sting of death came forth to wreak havoc on the ruthless and virtuous alike.

## CHAPTER ONE

A peculiar pulsation moved ominously through the séance room, where only a single red-bulb brought forth enough light to make out the partakers of such a gathering. An eerie chill embraced the seven members of this special group of seekers, as they scrutinized intently the smoke-like mist that steadily rose up from beneath the floor in the midpoint of the circle they had fashioned.

Straining to see into the darkness, Beauregard Camp, who simply went by Beau, was not focusing on the mist, but was more interested in observing the Medium who was conducting tonight's séance, Miss Stella O'Rourke. His black pupils were wide as he stared across the circle to where she was sitting. Observing her demeanor, he could tell she was in a profound state of deep trance.

The vapor became more prominent as it started to form into the image of a tall man. It was a solid materialization. The genteel figure taking shape was clad in a soft, full length royal-blue robe, matched by a blue turban containing a single white

diamond just above his forehead. A glitter of tiny multi-colored gems entwined designs of brilliant sparkling colors throughout his apparel. Beau's attention now turned; he sat in stunned silence as the illuminated entity began to speak to the group.

“Peace unto all who are gathered here at present. I come with a message of love, hope and blessings. Prepare yourselves for the greatest fulfillment as you progress through this physical life in which you now dwell; I challenge you to seek a more positive personal identity.”

The majestic voice of this energy being was penetrating and unwavering as it filled the small basement. As Beau listened, his breathing became shallow and he became aware that his hands--which were astride his lap--were growing numb.

“You were born of mankind, an individual, and you shall live your life as an individual, and whether you accept it or not, you shall enter the Unseen World as an individual; required to answer, not to God, but to your true higher self for the individual acts you performed while in the physical body. You, and you alone, are the final judge and jury of the acts you

bring forth while expressing your chosen lessons, and of the use of your free-will while incarnate.”

The small group sat mesmerized as the Energy Being continued with its message.

"In the world beyond I am known as 'SAZARRA' and I am the Master Teacher for the one known to you as Miss Stella. It is very rare for one such as I to bring forth the following information; yet I chose to come forth at this time as a special courtesy to Miss Stella. One might call it a reward or prize for her altruistic and benevolent service to mankind, here in this physical world you reside in."

The group was all nodding in the affirmative as they too knew her to be so thoughtful, kind and sharing with what little she had in the material sense.

"For those who may not be aware, as her Master Teacher, it is I, and I alone, who has the final say in the physical life of the one known to you as Miss Stella.”

Fifty-three-year-old Stella O'Rourke was a very outgoing lass of Irish descent, who did everything with a dash of unselfish pure love mixed in. Her now deceased parents were

Roman Catholic by birth, but never truly practiced the faith. Once a year to mass was all they felt obliged to forgo. Young Stella knew she was different from most other children at an early age. Seeing and speaking to her departed grandparents seemed all so natural to her, yet Nancy, her younger sister seemed to be the so-called ordinary child. Stella's parents never paid much notice to her ramblings as they seen them to be; so they never discouraged the young girl when it came to her psychic sensibilities; but they clearly showed more attention to 'normal' Nancy.

Stella, this never married, above average gal, showered praise and blessings wherever she ventured and with whomever she encountered. Fiery red shoulder length hair made her emerald green eyes sparkle even at her age. Tall, for a woman standing five feet nine inches, made her seem regal, and she still sported a lean trim figure with a slight paunch; nothing like her sister Nancy; who at five foot, if that, sported brown hair and brown eyes, a pointy nose, and was wide and rounded. Looking at the two sister's side by side, one would think they were just friends and not related by blood.

Stella loved attending the 4-H Club gatherings and the annual fair. The flowers and animals were her favorite parts; not to mention the adorable people she encountered. She was living life to its fullest, and loved helping all who came to her with their personal problems.

SAZARRA continued, "The gift I bring to this assemblage here tonight is that of a 'Past or Future' life reading. You will each be given the choice to have a past lifetime, or a future lifetime discussed as you so desire, therefore let us proceed. Who at this time would like to go first?"

Never the shy one, Beatrice Reid shot right in, "Me, me, oh me, please!" She was waving her hand in the air like a little girl in a classroom who needed to go pee-pee. The others sat quietly and let her go first, as Ruth Anderson and Mary Achtenberg both shook their heads in mock disbelief at her childlike antics.

Beatrice just turned thirty-four and had been employed at the Jefferson Davis Memorial Library for the last nine years. She had green eyes splashed with hazel and was short, only a half-inch over five feet, yet weighed just a tad less than two

hundred pounds. Dark short-bobbed hair was her trick to appear slenderer, or so she believed; yet she was wrong in her thinking, for many townsfolk gossiped about her short bulky girth and unfashionable hairdo; doing so behind her back of course, to be more Christian-like about it. Dark-pink horned-rimmed thick glasses made her even more homely unfortunately; but she always seemed to have a wonderful disposition about life, as her kindness gushed forth splashing over everyone she encountered; whether they liked it or not. Her job at the library brought her boundless joy for there she found what she thought was her prince charming, Alan Wallace, her boss who she occasionally dated.

“Very good then,” SAZARRA commented, “Which will it be...a past life or a future life yet to be experienced?”

“Oh, a past life please,” Beatrice answered now more reserved in her manner as she saw through the red-light of the room the facial expressions Mary and Ruth were exchanging; which she didn’t appreciate, but was accustom to seeing; yet always pretending not to notice.

“Very well, your last incarnation into this world was in the southern area of what today would be called Manitoba...”

“Isn’t that somewhere in Mexico?” Ruth interrupted.

“No silly, it’s in Italy,” Mary responded self-assuredly; both women always trying to one-up the other.

Alan Wallace chimed in, “Sorry ladies, but it’s in Canada, just north of North Dakota or thereabouts.”

“Show off,” Beatrice said grinning as she loved the fact that he had knocked Ruth and Mary, those two busy-bodies as she saw them, down a peg.

SAZARRA now spoke, “Alright, if we can dispense with the hilarity, I wish to continue.”

The group now sat quietly giving their full attention to the materialized spirit as his quiet admonishment struck home.

“Yes Beatrice, Manitoba is in the region controlled by that nation of today known as Canada, but it wasn’t known by that name during the lifetime you spent there. As this is a past life dates can be given; you were born in the month of December, the 3rd day of that month in the year 1641. You lived to the age of seventy-seven returning to the Unseen World on the 3rd



day of December. You can calculate the mathematics to see the year of your death.”

Thinking quickly in her head Beatrice quickly said, “Was it 1720?”

Alan politely corrected her, “More like 1718 dear, and did you notice he said you were born, and died, on the very same month and day?”

“Oh yes, you’re right,” she said, “and no...I didn’t catch at all about my birth and death being the very same. Thank you for your kind observation,” she said winking at him; yet in the dull glow of the red-bulb he missed her wink entirely.

“Sorry to interrupt, but I’m just a bit curious about the December 3<sup>rd</sup> birth and death thing. Was it just a rare coincidence, or was there some special meaning attached to it?” Ellen asked.

Ellen Wellington was halfway into her ninetieth year at the time of this gathering; a short feisty woman of modest means who was a retired assistant principle from the Millersburg school system. Moving to Saint Cloud at age sixty-five to live

out her remaining years in tranquility; she would not live to see her ninety-first birthday.

“The significance for Beatrice,” SAZARRA began, “was that she chose to arrive and depart this plane of existence on the very same day and month; which had to do with strong astrological influences affecting her mental and emotional vibrations; not only in this lifetime, but in several of her previous ones as well. This is a pattern associated with this particular Energy Being itself; that of experiencing lifetimes with such an influence. Not all Energy Beings seek out, nor require, this type of influence for the lessons and experiences they wish to encounter in this physical realm of existence.”

“When you say ‘Energy Being’ you mean what?” Mary asked a bit confused.

Miss Stella, who was wavering in and out of trance, now spoke, “Dear one, an Energy Being is what we more commonly call here on earth the ‘Soul’ or ‘Spirit’ that resides within our physical body.”

“Oh...okay then...I thought that’s what it was, but I wasn’t absolutely sure. Thank you Miss Stella,” Mary said not really sure what she meant.

SAZARRA resumed, “Now Beatrice, many of your incarnations have been in areas of the earth where the climate is cold. This is why you are always feeling overly warm and seem to perspire easily in this life; you are more in harmony with cooler environments and this is the reason your past physical forms were prone to be on the stocky side.”

“Is that why I’m obese, because of the colder areas I’ve lived in before?” Beatrice inquired.

“That...yes, and there was one other rare lifetime in a desert type climate in which you starved to death; your subconscious mind recalls this and is now overcompensating for fear of starvation again. It is a holdover experience that you need to think deeper about in order to release it mentally and emotionally; so that your subconscious mind can stop influencing the profound affect it has on your current body contour.”

“I see...thank you,” she said.

“Now then, as I was saying, you were what would be called today French Canadian. Your name was Regina Amarillo and you were married to a fur trapper by the name of Jonathon Edwards; he was English. Together you bore five children; one girl and four boys. Only one boy lived to adulthood; the three other boys each died early on from disease, and the baby girl left of its own accord returning to the Unseen World. Your husband was away much of the time trapping beaver, but you were not afraid living in the wilderness. You had a strong connection to nature; a deep understanding of the ebb and flow of the wilds so to speak. You once had an encounter with a Native Indian in which you ended up killing him when he tried to raid your small stable. His intent was to steal your pack mule, but you thought he was there to rape you and kill your only living son; you were a tall and stout woman and you fought with the heart of a lion. This Indian was known to his tribe as a great warrior. After this encounter many in his tribe looked upon you as a respected warrior in your own right; they named you 'She Who Greets with Thunder.' Others were afraid of you and so you and your family were never bothered by

these people. You yourself did not trust the Indians and always kept a watchful eye on them, for they were encamped less than a mile from your cabin in the wilderness. Now, do you have a question at this time, if not, I will move on to the next person?"

"No...I'm good, thank you," Beatrice said.

"Ah, if I may...you said 'the baby girl left of its own accord returning to the Unseen World.' What does that mean exactly?" Ellen asked.

There were a few moments of silence before SAZARRA answered, "The new Soul, as you would call it, decided after being born that this lifetime would not be suitable to provide it with the lessons it had chosen to experience; so it simply withdrew itself from the physical body of the infant and returned to the Unseen World. Without an Energy Being, or that which you call the 'Soul' providing the necessary life force, the physical body simply stops functioning, or dies as you would term it. Many of your Doctors of today, not being able to find a medical reason for such a death, would simply label it a Crib Death; yet they would not readily understand

that the Energy Being can within the first two years of life, simply leave the body for whatever reason it chooses."

"That's very interesting," Ellen responded.

"Now then Beauregard, which do you prefer; past or future?" SAZARRA asked now moving things along.

"I would like to know about my next future existence please."

"When it is a future planned existence, dates may not always be given. This is so no unnecessary worry will be placed into your subconscious mind. I will give this example in order to make this statement clearer; if I were to say you were to be born in 1970 to start a new incarnation; your mind then would realize as the current year now is 1956, that as the year's advance and 1970 draws nearer, you would need to die in this life in order to be back in the Unseen World in time to be ready for your next life experience. Therefore, dates will not always be given so as not to cause worry or undue stress in your current life. Now just know that because you are being given this information of an upcoming lifetime, while you are in a physical form, you will recall what is told to you tonight

during that upcoming lifetime. For example, if I say in your next incarnation that a certain event will take place on a certain day, you will know in advance that it is going to happen; you will be expecting it to happen because you are being made aware of it now, while in the human form."

"I understand," Beau said as several of the group also gave acknowledgments.

"Now then, the future life that is planned comes from what is known in your plane of existence as the Akashic Records. In the Unseen World they are simply known as the 'Higher Hall of Records.' Now the next life that is planned for you will be very far in the future as you now count time. The name of your family will be 'Namuriel.' Your first name will be the same as it is now, except it will be spelled backwards; which is the normal way of things during that time and place. So it would be spelled 'Drageruaeb' yet still pronounced as 'Beauregard.' Your father's name will be 'Retlaw' and your mother's name will be 'Ennovy.' So by reversing the spelling you can see how they are pronounced. Your birth time will be 9:51pm on a Saturday evening and there will be no complications. Both

your mother and father are involved in scientific work for a large conglomerate which oversees several planetary environmental systems. You yourself will be raised mainly in a 'Training Association' to become part of the scientific community of the time. This type of childhood will be normal for those born of this future world. You will not be born on planet Earth, but another planet that is similar in structure. Those on Earth now would view you as an alien from another world, but in that far off time there will be friendly relations between your worlds. Your Soul would simply inhabit the body of an individual who was born of a race of beings who are not from Earth. These animations have bodies similar to humans, but are adapted for life on a different planetary system. You will not be plagued by animalistic-type emotions such as you have now; yet you will have feelings in order to associate with others of your species. You will be born into a race that is much more technologically and spiritually advanced than those of Earth will be at that distant futuristic time. Most of your short life, will be spent out in space aboard a space vessel designed for interplanetary travel involved in



communications; keeping those systems functioning properly. Your death will be instantaneous; that is to say, you will perish quickly and without any pain as your Soul, as you term it, will leave the body several seconds prior to the incident taking place. You will simply return to the Unseen World just as you will return to the Unseen World when your life here on this planet is finished. Do you have any questions?"

"Ah...I'll be an alien from outer space?" Beau asked a bit confused.

"All beings and creatures in this created illusion, or that which you call your Universe--in which your planet Earth resides--have been brought into existence by that which you term to be God. All come from the God Source and all return to the God Source. You are all one in the same; you are 'God' and god are 'You.' It will mean more to you once you have crossed over to the Unseen World, your true home. Your finite primitive mind has trouble grasping what your Soul already knows to be true. Think deeply about it if you so choose, but don't let it cause you great concern. All will be made clear upon your return home. Now then, anything else?"

“What will cause my death?”

“The small space craft you are piloting will be struck by a small meteor which will cause the craft to implode. This will not be an accident, but a planned event; one that you yourself programmed to occur in that incarnation, simply for the experience of that particular type of death and your need for a short life only. Any other questions?”

"No, thank you." Beau responded with much to think about later on.

“Now then Alan, which do you choose, past or future?”

“Future please.” Alan replied softly as he eagerly wondered what he would be doing in his next life.

Alan Wallace, age 37, was one of two supervisors at the library, and had been there for the past eleven years. A very cultured and sophisticated man; tall and slender with short blond hair which played into his wit and charming elegance. Soft blue eyes, partially hidden by his black framed glasses. He always seemed to catch the roving eyes of many a female patron at the library; yet unknown to anyone except to Ronald, the seventeen-year-old only son of Detective Dick Fairchild of

the police department, Alan and Ronny, as he preferred to be called, were both homosexual and having a very secretive love affair, even though Alan was twenty years his senior.

They met at the library and became close when Ronny needed Alan to help with an after school project. Ronny sensed a connection between the two, and was the bold one to first confide to Alan of his sexual orientation. As many can bear out, when true feelings arise, one thing always leads to another and thus the two became secret lovers.

In this time and place the only answer to homosexuality was death; so sayeth the Bible, so to hide his true identity, Alan occasionally dated Beatrice Reid to keep anyone from becoming suspicious. It was no easy task keeping Beatrice at bay for she was head-over-heels for Alan; she felt he was her true love immortal. She was very much into cheap romance novels and fantasized daily of their impending life together; she was, to say the least, in for a rude awakening.

## CHAPTER TWO

Beau Camp was married to Martha, his high school sweetheart as some called her; his second true love. His first true love though was Stella O'Rourke, the odd little girl he knew in grade school; the one who could talk to animals and believed in fairies and such things.

Standing five feet ten inches, Beau was slender of build with a slight potbelly. Weak, sickly and of pale skin was how many townsfolk saw him; yet he had a strange inner strength which wasn't apparent to most except Miss Stella. Sporting a thin mustache, short sandy colored hair; yet with a noticeable small bald spot on the back of his elongated head. Nose was large and protruding making his bony chin look even smaller than it actually was. Eyes oval, like an owl's and set close together. Teardrop moles dotted around his neckline with one lone mole protruding low on his left earlobe. His penchant for wearing blue suspenders didn't help improve his disheveled appearance to say the least; always wearing a plain light green

striped tie which never seemed appropriate with the dark-blue jacket, matching slacks and worn brown penny loafers.

Beau's forceful mother Maude, a tall horse of a woman didn't take well to Stella, nor to her mother Abigail, the gypsy fortune teller as she called her; may she rest in peace. Mother Maude did everything in her power, which was considerable to make sure Stella and Beau did not become too involved with each other; passionately or otherwise.

Maude took a liking to Martha who was basically a carbon copy of herself; heavy-handed, smug, and an ace at using guilt to get her way. Both women wore their dyed hair tightly pulled back into a bun giving them the outward show of upper-class snobs; wearing the same newer styled, over-the-knees long dresses with black low-heeled pointy-toed shoes. Some facial powder and no lipstick except on formal occasions; yet the powder only seemed to accentuate the peach fuzz around their upper lips and chin areas.

Poor Beau didn't have much of a say in things; just went along with whatever he was told by these two overbearing women who dominated his lowly existence.

They decided when it was time to marry, what house to buy and what line of work Beau should take up. Beau was to follow in his father's footsteps and work in the life insurance business; even though he dreamed of being a farmer. The outdoors and fresh air made him feel alive, yet he was weak natured and easily bullied so insurance became his livelihood.

His father, Marvin Camp--of which Beau was a carbon copy right down to the blue suspenders--was a quiet, unassuming man who did what his wife compellingly suggested. Not much of a role model for young Beau; the two hardly had much to say to each other as Beau was a mama's boy through and through. If his father did disapprove, he did not show it for fear of his wife's fury, for she made no bones about her son coming first in her eyes.

After the death of his father--who some townsfolk said died young just to get away from his appalling wife--Beau took over the running of the insurance business; with the supervision of his mother and wife of course.

When his mother passed away four years later, he was devastated; for he hated her for controlling his life, yet truly

loved her more than he realized. The loss threw him into a profound depression from which his wife checked him into a sanitarium over in Millersburg, but Beau did not stay the full time before declaring himself cured. His brief time there caused a mental change within him that wasn't apparent on the surface; at least not at first, yet it would soon rear its horrific head.

## CHAPTER THREE

SAZARRA started right in with Alan's future life reading, "In your next incarnation you will be of the female sex." That statement brought on a few giggles from Ruth and Mary, "France will be the country of your birth. You will have several siblings of both sexes, but you will not be a close knit family. Your first name will be a common name, that of Emmanuelle and your family name will be Noel. You will not marry, but you will sire one child out of wedlock that you will name Jolene. There will be nothing noteworthy about this life except for the child you shall bring into the world. This child, Jolene, will be exceptional indeed. Through your love and guidance in her early years she shall move into the political arena, and one day hold a high office in the French government. She will be a tremendous stabilizing force at a time when the government becomes very unstable. Your main purpose in that lifetime, is to watch over and protect that special child that will ultimately save millions of her countrymen through her steadfast leadership. This Energy



Being and you have had many lifetimes together; some you were very close, and in others, you had little awareness of each other. That Energy Being is here now in this lifetime, but I shall not alert you to who they are, or what role they are playing. As this life of Emmanuelle Noel is laid out, you shall live to be sixty-three and your death will be due to liver failure."

"Why liver failure?" Alan asks quickly.

"You chose that disease yourself in order to experience it first hand; so that you could understand its value; the value you yourself place on what life truly means to you as an individual, and the subsequent loss thereof. You will be a heavy smoker of cheap tobacco, and will over-indulge in hard liquor after your daughter leaves to pursue her destiny. You will feel abandoned by the loss of her love, and your life will spiral downward. You will for a time use prostitution to support yourself. Do you have any further questions?"

"No...ah, thanks very much."

"Now then Mary, past or future?"

"Oh...I think I would like a past life please."

There were a few moments of silence and it seemed as if for a second or two SAZARRA was starting to fade back into a mist; but he seemed to solidify once again and then spoke, "In this country you now dwell in, there was a time of great upheaval during the early period of the 1860's. Do you know the period I am speaking of?"

"Yes indeed, the Civil War; North against the South." Stated Mary in her self-assured manner.

Mary Achtenberg, a fresh widower, no longer had her youthful golden hair, and her blue eyes were more pale than bright as she approached her sixty-sixth year. She was your typical housewife; running the house hold and raising their two children, who had long ago escaped their father.

Harold, her husband, had died just the year before; tanked-up on cheap wine, he crashed into a telephone pole and died of his injuries two days later. Rumored to beat his wife when inebriated, it was a blessing in disguise for all concerned as most people saw it.

Mary was Ruth Anderson's best friend and both loved to gossip about anything and everything; both holding high opinions of themselves indeed.

SAZARRA recommenced, "Yes, you were born on June the 17th in the year 1831. You were female and your family fought on the side of those calling themselves the Confederacy. Your father was well known and your home was in the state of Mississippi; yes, he did own slaves and his plantation was rich early on from cotton and later tobacco crops. Considered a fair Master by most, yet he could be heavy-handed if the need presented itself. You were the youngest of three girls. Your first name was Mayme. Your family name was McDonald; your married name would be Davenport. You were educated and well cared for due to your family's status and wealth. Many of your peers envied the life you led, and you were aware of this. You were married at age twenty-four; you were considered a late-bloomer and you were a spoiled little daddy's girl as your older sister's would attest. The middle of the conflict found you at age thirty-one; your home had been burned to the ground, your father and husband were both off

defending their beliefs in the southern traditions. You were living in squalid conditions when several deserters from those known to you as Yankees came upon you and your two older sisters; it was a Friday at 2:13pm on October the 7th, the year 1862 when you crossed over to the Unseen World. You and your sisters were, for a kinder way to say it, had been ravaged and then beaten to death by these ruthless and desperate men. Do you have a question?"

"And I chose that life?" Mary asked in true sincerity.

"Yes, you not only chose to experience such a life, you were looking forward to it. Several key lessons were learned during that past life that have now brought you to where you currently find yourself," SAZARRA explained with only love and kindness conveyed in his tranquil voice.

"Now then Ellen," SAZARRA said as he focused in on her, "past or future?"

"A past life please..."

## CHAPTER FOUR

A strange sensation came over Beau as he tried to pay attention to the words of the spirit guest. A low humming sound was now apparent to him, and seemed to be coming from inside his head. It became so intense, it completely blocked out all sound in the room. He became aware that he was gently swaying from side to side; within mere seconds he realized he had floated up and outside of his body. From this point he could see the rest of the sitters as he hovered above them. Feeling compelled, he soared onward through the ceiling out into the dry night air.

Time stood still, or so it seemed as he started to perceive sights and sounds of nocturnal life, as he glided effortlessly over the bright moonlit landscape. Echoes of crickets chirping drifted into his senses as he smiled at the sweet smell of dew covered greenery. Frogs croaked their love songs in anticipation of future couplings.

Without warning, screams pierced the night air; Beau was confused and uncertain what to do. A bright light appeared in

front of him; its powerful luminosity drew him in its direction. Pulling him into the light itself, he became suddenly engulfed in total darkness. Confused, a bit of dread crept through his person. As his eyes slowly adjusted to the blackness, he now made out the images of trees and landscapes which were so very much familiar to him. No longer at Miss Stella's home, he now found himself on the outskirts of town. What he saw next would thrust horror into his heart for the first time in his despondent pitiful life.

## CHAPTER FIVE

"You were born in the country of Spain," SAZARRA said to Ellen, "living in the area known as 'Teruel' during the time of the Inquisition within that country. The date of your birth was 1472. It was on a Wednesday at 5:44am. It was November the 11th. You were female and your name was Isabella; you were named after the Queen of Spain which was a common custom of the time. Your family name was Zambrano. You were from a large family, yet your family was not overly wealthy, but still was considered affluent. You had a pleasant childhood as far as it went, for it would be a short incarnation. At age thirteen, your father and another man of prominence had been arguing over the ownership of a piece of property for several months. This other man became so distraught with your father, that he reported to the authorities that you came to his barn and through witchcraft, you put a curse upon his milk-cows. The authorities took you into custody and they found a birthmark on your left shoulder, which they stated was the mark of a witch. Because you were

not considered a true heretic, the Catholic Church did not interfere with the local authority, nor did they question you directly. You were then tortured on a device similar in design to that used in England known as the Rack; your long brown hair was cut off and you were stripped of all clothing and stretched on this cruel device. During this torture you confessed to being a witch in order to stop the pain they were inflicting upon your tender flesh. You were imprisoned for eleven days after your admission to witchcraft. Your family was not allowed to see, nor speak to you during this time period. On the twelfth day you were stoned to death in a small public square. Your father then fearing for the safety of his remaining family, withdrew all claims to the disputed property."

Ellen muttered softly, "Oh my goodness."

"Are there any questions you wish to ask at this time?"

"Well...yes, was I sexually violated by those men who questioned and tortured me?" She asked.

There was a short pause before SAZARRA replied, "If I am understanding your question correctly, there was no sexual



mistreatment toward you; this was due to the Catholic Church having a representative present overseeing this ordeal. As I said, the Church did not interfere, yet they were observing quite intently what was taking place."

"Did I suffer greatly as I was being stoned?"

"No, as with the majority of deaths in this physical dimension, your 'Soul' as you term it, was removed from the body it was inhabiting moments before the pain was felt by the stones striking the body. Even when your 'Soul' or what some call your 'Spirit' is removed from your body, the body which is controlled by the physical brain is still alive, so to speak, and reacts to the pain and trauma it is experiencing; yet the true you, the Soul has already departed that body and feels no pain whatsoever. Your Master Teacher has already approved your release, and so other Energy Beings are then directed in assisting you in separating from that body. So when you see someone who 'seems' to be dying a horrendous and excruciating death; it is simply the physical body itself, which is reacting to whatever type of damage is being inflicted upon the body itself before it dies; screaming and crying out for help

for example. Now then, just know there are those Souls, a very small minority, who for reasons of their own choose not to leave the physical body while it is in its death throws, and they do wish to experience the pain and anguish the physical body is experiencing; so they remain inside that body and do not depart until it has ceased to function. Do you understand?"

"Ah, yes, thank you." Ellen seemed relieved at his response, yet she wasn't quite sure why; she didn't truly understand all of what he said, but she didn't want to appear unwise in front of the others.

"Now then Ruth, which do you prefer, a past or future lifetime?" SAZARRA asked.

"I'd like to know about a past life."

"Very well then, you were born in the year of 1173 on May the 2nd, your name was Daiki Fukuda and you were a male. You were born on one of the smaller southern islands that make up the nation of today called Japan. Your family business was fishing. You and your four younger brothers were raised in this culture; yet you found it distasteful and at age twenty-three you moved to the mainland, where you

operated a small business dealing in the butchering of domestic animals. It was not a very large going concern, yet it provided for your basic financial needs. Now at this time, let me explain something before I continue with your past life experience.

Many times an Energy Being, or Soul if you prefer, will join up with other like-minded Souls and plan out lifetimes that will intersect once they have incarnated into the physical world.

They do this in order to experience what cannot be experienced in the Unseen World. So these Souls agree to come together, for example, each taking on a particular role while in the human form, which will help them all grow spiritually. They are all a part of the same soul group. That is precisely what took place in your last lifetime Ruth. Daiki Fukuda was what would be termed a psychopath. He murdered five women during a four-year period before he was caught and hanged by a small group of outraged villagers..."

"I was a homicidal maniac?" Ruth gasped.

"Not a maniac, you did commit the murders of these other individuals, yet it was with their permission, in order for them to experience this type of death for their own spiritual

evolution. As a Soul, you wanted to experience what it was to commit murder, and they wanted to experience what it was to be murdered. Others in this soul group have since been born and used role-reversal; that is, they became the murderer and some others who had been murderers wished to then experience what it was like to be the victim of murder; like experiencing something from both sides of the coin, so-to-speak. In providing you with this information, you should think deeply about what I have just told you, concerning the impact it will have on your current lifetime. Do you have a question?"

"I can't believe I killed five women in that lifetime. Will God forgive me, or am I going to burn in Hell for eternity?" Ruth asked in a low anxious voice.

"That which you call God does not judge any of your incarnations; these lifetimes are simply lessons, you yourself, have chosen to experience in order to grow more enlightened spiritually; learning what it truly means to love unconditionally. God does not condemn you for the personal lessons you choose. You have an eternal Soul; these many

lifetimes you choose to experience simply help you to learn what unconditional love truly means to you as an individual entity. Your physical bodies will always be laid aside at the end of each life you choose to live; whether it's a long life or a short life; you chose it, not God. You incarnate in order to experience the negative side of life which cannot be experienced in the Unseen World. It's just an experience; why would our loving Creator punish you for seeking knowledge; positive and negative are simply equal sides of the same coin. Just know, there is no right and there is no wrong in this plane of existence. Fear not Ruth, for there is no such thing as a burning hell, nor is a fallen angel called Lucifer battling God for your Soul. These things only live in the mind of mankind. Do you understand?" SAZARRA asks while infusing love into the room.

“But in killing those women, I broke one of gods Ten Commandments; thou shalt not kill.” Ruth was having a hard time reconciling her bible beliefs to SAZARRA’s information.

“Just know, God, the ‘Source of all Life’ never gave to mankind a set of commandments to live by. Such

commandments would have negated your soul's use of free-will and limited your ability to create while in the human form. The Ten Commandments were put into the bible, as a control measure by the ruling religious authority of the time, in order to control the uneducated and superstitious masses.

"What you're saying doesn't seem to go along with what the bible says." Ruth responds still confused.

"One of the greatest things you have in each lifetime is your free-will to believe whatever you wish little one; no matter how true or false your beliefs may be. You speak of your Holy Book which was not written by God, but by mankind; just know, God did not sanction any religion upon the Earth. God is not Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Jewish, Baptist, Muslim, Buddhist, or of any other creed or dogma. All religions on this plane of existence were created by mankind, not by God. Yet, if your Holy Book serves your true needs and dispels your fears, then let it guide you throughout this single lifetime. If you find it no longer holds truth for you, then seek within yourself and follow another path, for all lead sooner or later to

where you seek to go; if not in this life, then the next and so it continues.”

Alan interrupts, “May I ask a question?”

SAZARRA answers, “Yes you may, and to the rest of you gathered here, feel free to speak up at any time with any questions you may have. Now then Alan, what do you wish to know?”

“Ah, concerning our free-will...how is that affected by Karma? I’ve read that when you do something bad or evil; then something bad or evil will happen to you in order to balance out what you did to someone else.”

“Permit me to use Ruth’s lifetime of Daiki Fukuda to explain. The Souls of those five women, who all agreed to be slain, gave their permission before coming into this physical world; just as Ruth’s true Soul agreed to slay them during that lifetime as the individual Fukuda. Because all agreed prior to these murders as lessons for their own enlightenment, Karma could not, and would not be invoked. Now, had Daiki Fukuda murdered another individual, using his free-will to do so; and, had that Soul not been a part of the original agreement to be

murdered, then Karma would now come into play. For stopping another's lifetime, which was not a planned event for that particular Soul, then the offending Soul would now be subject to 'cause and effect' or Karma, as many are now calling it."

"Thank you, I hadn't thought of it that way before," Alan said.

"It is now time for us to withdraw for the Medium's energy is starting to fade; may this gathering go in peace as you express the balance of your time here in this plane of existence."



## CHAPTER SIX

As Beau floated higher over the rural area that was familiar to him, Darnell's farm came into his view. Sonny Darnell owned pert near seventy acres of above-average farm land. A widower for the last three years; his wife Rosella finally succumbed to a long bout of tuberculosis.

Sonny, still a strong bull of a man for his advanced age of sixty-nine, found himself still working the life he loved so dearly. Tall, wiry and solid as a rock, he was still in decent shape; yet with no sons or daughters, for all having moved away seeking better lives for themselves. Slowly running out of steam, he now for the first time was contemplating selling off his lively hood and retiring. The loss of his best friend and true love Rosella had taken its toll of late, as loneliness had crept up on him.

Again, screams pierced the silence and jolted Beau into full mindfulness. His senses snapped into action with such force, that his mind whirled again in confusion. At that moment

through the darkness he recognized Johnny Hudson's old green pickup truck near the pasture fence.

Beau knew that Johnny is the younger brother of the Chief-of-Police, Frances Hudson. It made no sense to him why Johnny would be out here at this time of night. The only reason he could think of was to let his hounds chase wild animals all over the country side.

As he caught sight of Johnny, it looked like one of his dogs was tangled in a barbwire fence. Boy, old Johnny is mad at that mutt, he's beating the living daylights out of him. I'll bet it's that halfblind, redbone coon hound he found down at the bottoms last summer, was Beau's thinking.

Cupping his hands around his mouth he shouted, "That's enough! Hey Johnny, it's me, Beau! Leave that dog be! He's had all he can take! What're you tryin' to do, kill him?!"

Drawing closer, Beau suddenly realized as his eyes focused, that it wasn't a dog Johnny was assaulting; it was a woman. She was tangled in the barbwire fence and he was pounding her brains out with his huge fists. Beau was momentarily stunned,

but then felt compelled to intervene in the mayhem that was now playing out before his very eyes.

“Stop it! Stop it right now!” Finally realizing Johnny couldn’t see, nor hear him as he floated high above, he stopped yelling.

“Beau, wake up,” Miss Stella’s soft voice spoke to him as he now became aware he was back in her séance room.

“What happened?” Beau asked still a bit confused.

“You were entranced; your Soul left your body for a short time.” Miss Stella replied, “Are you alright dear?”

“Yes... well, I'm okay... I think I'm okay.”

Gradually he became fully conscious of the elated confusion going on in the basement. Everyone was talking at the same time. The small group was overjoyed about the materialization of SAZARRA who had communicated with them; but no one was openly talking about Beau's little outburst; at least not until later when he wasn't in earshot of their blathering ways; for all thought he was a bit off his rocker, especially after the death of his mother.

“Wasn’t he tall and so much wisdom...I’ll be up all night thinking about what he said to me.” Ruth remarked.

Mary said, “I can still feel his strong vibration in the room; simply marvelous.”

“This is an experience that I’ll never forget,” said Ellen. She had witnessed misty smoke like apparitions in séances before, but she had never seen a full materialization where the spirit appeared in a solid physical form like tonight. Beatrice and Alan just sat quietly listening to the others, as Beatrice had moved next to Alan and was now holding his hand.

The full shock of the inexplicable event that Beau had just experienced suddenly came into his consciousness. Still troubled, he decided to keep silent for now until he could speak privately with Miss Stella.

She closed her séance with an invocation, and ushered the group back upstairs to the kitchen for coffee and homemade sweet rolls.

Beau slowly sipped his coffee; as he thought the others would never leave. Growing impatient as they lingered; he never realized, until now, how monotonous their conversations

were after the conclusion of a séance. Poor Miss Stella, he thought, she puts up with this drivel every Monday night.

Mentally shutting out the prattle of the others, he started to mull over the evening's séance. Beau had sat calmly while Miss Stella opened with a prayer, 'We thank thee Heavenly Father for this time we come to share in your presence. We ask at this time that you continue to bless—'

Beau smiled as he remembered they all were seated in the darkened room; illuminated by the single red-bulb awaiting their expected phenomenon of their once a week assembly. That was the highlight of the week for the 'Monday Night Mystics' as they chose to call themselves. For the past three years they gathered for the purpose of spirit communication and physical phenomena; sometimes it ensued, other times, nothing came to pass.

A recent attendee, Beau had been drawn in for only the last three months. After the death of his mother, he thought meditation would relieve the deep sorrow and sadness that beleaguered him, for he was truly in his heart, still a mama's boy. Her death seven months earlier left him with a disturbing

feeling of worthlessness; an emptiness which needed to be filled, but with what, he had no inkling.

When he sat in Miss Stella's séance room, it gave him a sense of comfort and a profound inner peace. Frequently, since her passing, he heard her voice call to him. Yet now, for the preceding several weeks, her voice was growing faint, and yet another voice, the voice of a male was becoming more prominent. An influence that was more domineering and convincing than even that of his dead mother.

Beau daydreamed of the séance room; how the red-light and smell of the sweet incense as it drifted throughout the room made him feel tranquil. The seven wooden straight-backed chairs with their soft seat cushions filled the basement room in a ring pattern. The hand crocheted cloth, which covered a small table that stood next to Miss Stella's chair, and the magnetic cassette player for meditation music, which rested in the center of the table, all brought harmony into his heart.

Miss Stella had recently redecorated with light green cheap shag carpet, and new wallpaper which contained pink rosebuds

on a white background, which gave an ambiguous semblance of being in a pleasant garden.

Daydreaming was Beau's way of escaping the hokum of everyday life. Now he snapped back into the moment as the others said their goodbyes, and left Beau and Miss Stella alone at last. Breathlessly he began to describe to her what he had experienced during the séance. Interrupting him, she gently placed her hand in his, and led him to a table and two chairs which were located in a small parlor off to one side. This is where she performed her private readings for those who were so inclined to receive messages from the other side. The table contained a crystal ball covered with a white silk cloth and a small lamp. As they both sat down across from each other she uncovered her crystal. She now gazed intently into the inner depth of the murky purple crystal.

"Beau, the crystal ball has said 'murder.' Not one, but many. The woman you saw is just the first. Also, it shows that you must seek professional help for your emotional instability."

"What... your crystal ball says I'm crazy and I'll run amuck killing people?" He asked sarcastically.

"You need help Beau...when your mother passed, you never fully recovered emotionally from her death. Your mental collapse after that event caused us all immense worry." She spoke in a motherly way, "You know in your heart that you stopped your healing too soon."

Beau sat staring at the crystal ball. Miss Stella watched as he began cracking his knuckles; first his left and then his right hand. Shaking his head, he stood up and started to leave when he stopped suddenly, and turned to face her.

Speaking softly, "I remember almost forty years ago when we were in school. We walked to school every morning and returned home every afternoon together. It was the best time of my life. I'd watch as you entered your house to see that you made it safely inside. I thought we were friends. I even safeguarded you." Beau said as he drew a handkerchief from his left front pocket and wiped the tears that were now cascading down his pale cheeks.

"My first black eye was in the third grade, from a fight with Johnny Hudson, who was no more than a filthy little redneck. He called you and your mother 'witches.' And on the high



school hayride, I was thrown off the wagon by boys who teased you. They called you 'Spooky Stella' and again I defended your honor; but now I find out that you think I'm nuts and need professional help," he was now passing judgment on his one true love.

"No, I never said that, and I am very thankful that you shielded me and my family from those misguided people. But you must admit you did do wild things as a child. It was you who poured sand into the principles gas tank, and it was you that hid all the footballs before the big game. But I never said you were mad. A prankster, yes, and I answered your question with the aid of my crystal ball, and you did suffer a mental collapse after your mothers passing." She said covering her crystal with the silk cloth.

"If murder surrounds you Beau, you'll need professional help to deal effectively with it," she cautioned him.

Pondering what she had just said, "Thanks for your advice. I think I'll leave my car in your drive and I'll walk home if you don't mind. The night air will help clear my head. Anyway, I'm probably too unstable to drive," he smirked as he headed

for the door. She heard him say under his breath, "Professional help, what hogwash."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Frances Hudson started his career as a police officer at age twenty-three, and worked his way through the department to where he now holds the title of 'Chief-of-Police' in Saint Cloud. It's a small police department, with only two detectives and ten officers. At his present age of sixty-four, retiring next year has been very much on his mind. Through the last forty-one years of his law enforcement profession, he has seen many things; mostly routine, some odd, some things even a tad funny, but never a single murder. That would soon change.

Chief Hudson stood five feet eight inches and weighed one hundred sixty-five pounds on average. Sporting a thin white goatee, sideburns and a full head of long white hair--which he slicked back with a dab of petroleum jelly--gave him the look of a kindly old grandfather. Square-jawed with a high forehead just added to his wholesome first-rate looks, that is, for a gentleman of his age. Easy going, big hearted and uncomplicated made him the most respected and likeable lawman in town, always ready to help anyone in true need.

Ethel, who went by her middle name of Lynn, his high school sweetheart and cherished wife of only twelve years died abruptly; she was returning from a shopping trip in Millersburg, and was involved in a three car mishap on highway 56. The highway patrol report would state that she was following a pickup truck eastbound on the highway, when a westbound car crossed the center-line. The pickup truck driver swerved off the roadway into a ploughed-over field to keep from hitting the car head-on. Lynn Hudson also swerved off the roadway to avoid the car that was now in the wrong lane coming toward her. The pickup driver came to a halt about twenty yards from the roadway, but Lynn's car struck a telephone pole; she lived for four days before succumbing to her fatal injuries. The report also stated the elderly male driver who crossed the center-line had suffered a heart attack; even though he never struck either vehicle, he ended up in the field, and died waiting for help to arrive.

Devastated, Frances never fully recovered from the loss of his beautiful wife; he would remain a widower for the rest of his days, dedicating himself to his law enforcement career, and

his love of helping the underprivileged youth through the local chapter of the 4-H club, and Troop 27 of the Boy Scouts.

Then there was his younger half-brother Johnny, who always seemed to bring shame upon the Hudson family name; the black-sheep as it were.

Many felt a little sorry for Chief Hudson, due to the dark shadow his younger half-brother cast over the town of Saint Cloud. Frances tried his best to appease the town folks when it came to Johnny, but to no avail; he was just plain sinful and they all knew it.

Frances was the only child of Andrew and Dorothy Hudson. After nineteen years of marriage, his wife died from throat cancer, Andrew remarried a much younger woman by the name of Gretchen Lamont and they sired their only son, Johnny. Not long after Johnny's twentieth birthday, both Andrew and Gretchen died in a suspicious house fire late one Sunday night in Millersburg.

The fire and police investigations could not rule out foul play, but with no concrete evidence, it was finally ruled an accident. Many rumors swirled about town how it could have

been an accident; both Gretchen and Andrew were heavy smokers, but some laid blame at Johnny's doorstep.

Twice arrested for petty theft, vandalism and some other small crimes; he was no stranger when it came to breaking the laws of the land. Most folks who knew Andrew and Johnny, had heard the stories of them brawling when one or both had been drinking somewhat. No lost love between this father and son. Johnny openly criticized both his parents, for no matter what happened, his mother always took her husband's side, or so that's how Johnny always saw it to be.

Now, at age forty-four, Johnny over the years had gotten worse; he was a basic low-down, no-good, rotten scoundrel; liar, conman, thief, roughneck, and drunken evildoer. The Christians called him a disciple of the devil; but not to his face of course, as many were afraid of him and with good cause. Johnny, a large brute of a man; stood over six feet and weighed two hundred and fifteen pounds. His stone-cold stoic stare could make even the most confident of men look away after a few moments. Wickedness just seemed to ooze from his leathery sunburnt skin. Johnny's grey-blue eyes, shoulder

length oily dark hair and patchy matted beard, went perfectly with his unwashed patched-up clothes and faded torn black Stetson hat.

Johnny's main employ was rumored to be owner and operator of two taverns; one in Saint Cloud and the other in Millersburg. They attracted mainly the lower dregs of society because of the basic atmosphere of these sleazy joints; cheap booze, ladies of ill repute, gambling, back-door dealings and fist-fights galore. Many-a-townsfolk were waitin' and even prayin' for the day he would be jailed and get his fair comeuppance as it were; for surely god almighty would punish such an evil man.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

The warm soft days of summer in Saint Cloud, Oklahoma seemed to always bring forth pleasant evenings, or at least that's how some folks envisioned it; others felt it to be too hot and sticky for their taste. As Beau made his way home, he knew his wife Martha wouldn't be there. It was too early for the bingo games at the Union Hall to be finished. As he walked along the shadowy dark streets, he wondered if she thought he was batty too.

Born and raised in Saint Cloud, he was familiar with every house and building within the inconsequential community, as he came to view it. On his slow walk, he passed the Saint Cloud Area School; a dull and lifeless worn-out two-story old brick building; a shell of its former self back in the day. The very sight of the building caused an angry outburst from his subconscious mind, "You stink!" he yelled, "I'll never forgive you and I'll get even with you someday for all the terrible things you inflicted upon me."



Beau still harbored hostile feelings against his teacher; Mr. Elmer Baker, who once announced to his fifth grade class that the city had a population of less than sixty-seven dogs, and that the dog count was higher than Beau Camp's I.Q. He could still feel the emotional scar his classmate's laughter had left on his delicate psyche.

Crossing the street, he sat quietly for several minutes before he heard the male voice of his invisible friend, "What are you doing here in the dark?"

"I was just thinking, with all the opportunities in the world, I never dreamed I'd still be living in this crappy town."

"Well, I wouldn't stay here too long. You do realize the school has placed a curse on you?"

"My god, I need to get the hell away from here!" Beau said leaping to his feet and racing across the street to safety. After making his way to Main Street, he spied the town drunk, Ed Stein, "There he is, another of the town's outstanding pillars of the community," Beau mockingly said to his invisible friend.

"I never believed the stories that Ed was born on the municipal

building steps; but winter or summer, day or night, Ed is always drunk and slumped over in the same spot," he chuckled.

"Interesting," his unrevealed friend said.

Ed noticed him coming his way and called out, "Hey Beau, you got any spare change for an old war hero?"

Stopping in his tracks, he hesitated for a moment, "You were never a war hero, and you weren't even in the service."

"Come over here and sit a spell. I'll tell you about the time I boxed the heavyweight champ of Barron County," Ed rambled on. "I gave him the beatin' of his life, yes sir, I surely did."

Oh boy, just what I need. I've heard this story a hundred times he thought. Ed was still rambling on about his imagined exploits when Beau noticed headlights coming their way. As the vehicle approached, it dawned on him it was Johnny Hudson in his old pale-green Ford pickup truck. As the truck came closer, goose bumps popped out on his forearms, and a spine-chilling sensation of dread spread throughout his entire body. Johnny continued past the two, eyeing them for only a moment and then continued on his way.

Perhaps Miss Stella is right he thought; wondering if he was going nutty, or if something really abnormal was wrong with him.

"Yes sir, the doctors worked on the champ until daylight..." Ed was still talking his nonsense.

Beau took advantage of the opportunity to excuse himself when Ed paused to swat at a mosquito on his forearm. As he continued to walk the tree lined streets toward his home; just another five blocks later, he heard the persistent yapping of a familiar dog coming from Johnny's house.

Staying in the shadows, he crept ever so carefully, stopping at the corner to assess the situation. Johnny's place was an old rundown dump as most folks would attest. Broken glass, boarded up windows, and beer cans all over his yard. Piles of this-an-that everywhere. Johnny had a ninety-five pound black and tan German shepherd named 'Razor.' The dog's unrelenting barking, from the rear of the house aroused Beau's inner suspicion that something eerie was undeniably in the works.

The lights were off inside the house and Johnny's truck was parked at the curb. Beau watched from his hiding spot as the front door suddenly opened, and Johnny emerged carrying a large trash bag that looked half-full. Tossing it into the back of his pickup, he gave a quick look see and then slid in the front driver's seat. As he quickly sped off, something fell from the back of the truck.

Beau watched the truck turn the corner. As the engine faded and the dog stopped howling, he listened for any unusual sounds and saw no movement in the general vicinity. Very curious about what had fallen from the truck, he quietly moseyed toward the object that lay in the street.

Hesitating, he now heard the truck engine again as the sound was now getting louder. He ran to the object for a hurried look. Surprised to be sure as he picked up a bloody boot, for it was still sticky with moist blood. Dropping the boot, he returned to the safety of the shadows. The truck stopped near the boot and Johnny jumped out. Closely examining it, he then tossed it into the bed of his truck. After

glancing around to see if he was being observed, and satisfied he wasn't, he wiped both hands on his pants.

Then without thinking, Beau wiped his hands across the front of his shirt to clean the blood from his own sticky hands. Still skulking in the shadows, he watched as the truck speedily vanished out of sight again. Once again the engine faded away and he felt safe standing in the shadows.

Suddenly, his self-confidence was shattered as a burst of excitement in the tree limbs above him frightened him, launching him into a full dead run. A few minutes later he arrived home out of breath, stopped and sat on his porch steps. Thinking back, he felt sure the boot that fell from the truck, was the same boot that Johnny was wearing in his out-of-body experience, or was his mind just filling in the blanks, he couldn't be sure.

"I'd like to know what was inside that plastic bag," he muttered aloud. Unlocking the front door, he entered his house. The lights were off and the windows were closed, so he knew his wife wasn't home from bingo yet. She always opened two windows, one on each side of the house for circulation.

Walking through the house, he noticed the scent of perfume. Its pleasant aroma brought a heartening smile to his face. After his mother's death, Beau and his wife had moved into her home; a three bedroom, full basement, red brick, with a one car standalone garage built new back in nineteen thirty-nine. It was a nice improvement over their small two-bedroom house.

Opening the refrigerator, he removed the jar of strawberry jam. Placing it next to the bread and peanut butter on the kitchen counter top. Martha loved a snack before going to bed, so he made a sandwich for her and wrapped it in brown wax paper and placed it on the kitchen table, next to a large empty glass knowing full well, she would have a cold glass of milk with her sandwich. Plus, if she didn't win anything at the bingo hall, she'd be less likely to take it out on him, if she ate something, or so he hoped.

After a hurried shower, Beau slipped into his sporty pajamas; the dark blue ones with the white stripes that she gave him for his last birthday. Oddly, he thought they looked like something the convicts wore, who worked along the roadway chain-gangs. Turning off the bedroom light, he climbed into

his firm twin bed; as he and his wife each had their own. It had been over five years since they had any relations of a sexual nature.

"Beau, are you asleep?" his unseen friend asked.

"No...not yet."

"I stopped by to bestow an honorary title on you."

"Wow, this is exciting. What kind of title are you giving me?" Beau asked as he sat up.

"As of now, you shall be known as the 'Admiral' of my sailing vessel. It has a full crew of monkeys to serve you," the voice whispered.

"Thank you, but who are you? What's your name and title?" Beau asked in a somber tone.

"I am of the highest order of Archangel's," said the dark spirit, "but you may address me as 'Leonard.' I shall be your guide and mentor for the remainder of your life. For now, I want you to go to sleep, for tomorrow you will have a very busy day indeed." Leonard's lies would become Beau's truth; how easily weak men can be swayed into destructive behavior

by dark spirits who are trapped between this realm and the next.

“Where are you . . . what do you look like?” Beau asked sheepishly.

“You need not see me to know I am there for you. My voice is distinctive and can only be heard by you. See how special you and I are?”

There came a rustling sound from the trees outside his bedroom window. Beau took immediate notice, "Wait a second, what's that chattering noise I hear outside in the trees?"

"I left your monkey crew here to safeguard you while you snooze."

"Is that what I heard in the trees when I was walking home?"

"Yes, you ran so fast you almost lost them. You mustn't run from them again; it will hurt their little feelings." Leonard admonished his charge graciously.

"Wow, thanks again, I'm the luckiest guy in this whole stinking town," Beau giggled.



Snuggling under the covers, he smiled as he listened to the monkey's chattering away as he imagined them leaping from one limb to another; all the while keeping a sharp lookout.

## CHAPTER NINE

Thomas Miller was the lead detective at the Saint Cloud police department. A rather tall and brawny man of fifty-four, who had a stout roman nose with a slight balding forehead, putted golf balls in his side yard. His quiet disposition only served to highlight his overall honorable respect he received from the townsfolk. Enjoying this early morning pleasure as it seemed, he could never find the time to spend a morning, or afternoon for that matter at the big city golf course in Millersburg, and he cherished his large yard and comfortable home they lived in.

It was built in the early 1920's by the Deep Vein Mining Company for its top executive. Years later, after the mining company closed down its operations and moved on, it was sold off with the rest of the land and buildings. Its two stories and three bedrooms suited him and his wife Nancy just fine.

Nancy Miller was a foot shorter than her husband, and about twenty-five pounds heavier than when they married so many years ago. She was very self-conscious of her weight, and her

husband learned over the years, never to raise the subject unless he was prepared to spend time in the proverbial doghouse.

Wavy-brown hair with strands of gray, now very apparent, worn mainly short, never touching her shoulders was her basic style. Now in her mid-fifties, her once sharp eyesight seemed to be getting a little worse each year, but for reasons of vanity, she refused to get glasses. The sparkle they once commanded, had now faded from her brown eyes over the years, as well as her general disposition.

As the older model 1949 Ford black-and-white police cruiser came to a stop in front of his house, he made an unpleasant expression and frowned. After nineteen years on the police force, he recognized the sound of the old eight-cylinder engine, and the last dying cough it crooned out when the engine was cut off.

Rookie Officer Sherry Hendrix, in her new tailored uniform with navy blue pants, powder blue shirt, black patent leather shoes, and starched cap squared on her head had been sent to deliver a message.

Spying Det. Miller, she strutted to the side yard and stood at attention. "Sorry to break up your game sir. The Chief wanted you notified about a murder of a woman at the North Side Park. She's been identified as Martha Camp, the wife of Beau Camp, the insurance agent. Her husband hasn't been notified yet. The Chief wants us to find and tell him sir," Sherry said in her practiced voice.

"Okay, it'll take me a minute or so to get ready," he said as he lit up a Camel cigarette. "Wait in the car and I'll be out shortly."

With a snappy hand salute, she pivoted and marched to the police cruiser.

Sherry Hendrix was born in Millersburg some twenty-two years ago, and moved here with her father at an early age. From a young age, she was fascinated with anything and everything to do with police work.

Shoulder length light-blond hair, with soft emerald green eyes that seemed to dance around the boundaries of her charming face. Standing five feet six inches, and unnaturally

strong and athletic, she was also quick to react to any situation confronting her; a shrewd and clever mind to be sure.

A child of divorce, she lived with her father, Lester who worked as the butcher at the Franklin Market.

Sherry adored her father and was too young to remember her mother, whose whereabouts are unknown since the divorce. There had been rumors of abuse inside the home, but no inquiries were ever conducted or complaints filed with any jurisdictional authority. In those days' people minded their own business, and kept family matters to themselves.

Yet, as many people know, things of that nature can fester until they spill over into the light of day. Sherry was beautiful and caring on the outside, but anger was seething just beneath the surface; anger over her mother's diary, which she had discovered packed away in their basement. Time would tell if she could control it, or it would control her; for her frame of mind concerning her mother ran deep; so many unanswered questions, so many repressed feelings she had to contend with. The day would come, when those feelings would erupt and

make themselves known; anger would then rule the day and night for this little princess.

## CHAPTER TEN

"What's she doing here?" Nancy huffed with her hands set squarely on her rotund hips.

"She informed me about a homicide," Thomas, as his wife called him, answered leaning his putter in the left back corner of the hall closet.

"What's wrong with the telephone... why didn't she just phone you? Did she personally have to drive all the way here to tell you?" her voice became brassier as she followed him to the upstairs bedroom. "I want to know what's going on?" she now demanded.

"Aw, come off it. Just because Sherry is young and nice looking, you don't have to get your dander up every time you see her," he grumbled as he brushed past her.

Opening his closet door, he removed his short sleeve white cotton shirt, a pair of charcoal grey pants and a red and white striped tie. Laying them all on his bed, he stooped down and felt around under the bed for his black laced work shoes that were in need of a good brushing. Then he opened the top

dresser drawer and removed a pair of thin black cotton socks; preferring thinner socks to the thicker ones which made his feet sweat and burn. On top of the dresser was a midsized ashtray, in which he now placed his unfinished Camel joining with several other half-smoked cigarette butts.

As he began to change his clothes, Nancy spied a pimple on his right shoulder as he pulled off his T-shirt. She approached her husband who was sitting on the edge of the bed, “You’ve got a pimple with puss on your back so let me take care of it.” She went into the bathroom and retrieved a couple sheets of toilet paper from the roll sitting on the back of the commode.

“I don’t have time for this,” he said knowing full well she was going to pop it, and sop up the ensuing puss and blood no matter what he said. Sitting motionless he braced himself for the slight pain as she positioned herself behind him. As she squeezed the pimple between her thumbs, sure enough it gave way and she wiped up the small mess with the toilet paper. When it popped, he gave a slight flinch and then relaxed, for he had been through this experience many times. He always thought how odd it was for her to pop his pimples, but it



seemed to give her some unknown inner pleasure he felt. She threw the paper into the commode, and flushed it down as she watched the swirling water disappear momentarily.

Not missing a beat, Nancy started right back in where she left off; still breathing down his neck as she slammed the bathroom door, "Lately, every time I see her you're not far behind," she sneered as she folded her arms across her chest and stared directly at him.

"Call your sister Stella, and ask her if I'm two-timing you. The only interest I have in Officer Hendrix is that she learns her job, and learns it well. I'm her training officer for this month and that's all. Thank God next week she's going on the night shift," he said as he shoved his .38 caliber Smith and Wesson revolver in its holster. "Maybe then you'll give me some peace."

"She's a hussy and everyone knows it. That's how she got on the police force." Nancy pointed out.

"We'll discuss it later. I have to go; Martha Camp was found murdered this morning," he now decided to inform her.

"Why...I know her," she said now wringing her hands nervously, "that poor woman had everything to live for. She just went back with her crazy husband. She almost divorced him you know. This is a real heartbreak. Did her husband do it?" she asked feigning shock and disbelief, even though she only just barely knew the woman, and had little regard for her at that.

Thomas pulled the top drawer of his dresser open again, and after moving socks and handkerchiefs around he turned to her, "Have you seen my pocket watch?"

"No, I haven't. Why don't you ask officer yum-yum if she's seen it? You spend more time with her than you do with me," she bristled already forgetting her question about Beau being his wife's killer.

Rolling his eyes, he buttoned his shirt collar, and placed his tie around his neck and fashioned it into a Windsor knot. He liked the larger knot, even though it wasn't as popular as it once was. Lifting his navy knit sport coat off its wooden hanger, he slipped it on. Thomas never wore a hat, being a bit prideful of his wavy, sandy colored short hair which seemed to go well

with his green eyes and clean shaven appearance; even though his hairline was receding with each advancing year, which didn't set well with him. He was not looking forward to his golden years.

Reaching out, he cradled her face in his hands, "Give me a smooch goodbye and stay off the telephone please. Let me solve this case by myself." His soft kiss and gentle embrace reassured her, for now anyway; as he opened the side door and stepped outside knowing full well she'd be on the telephone, blabbing to everyone she knew about Martha Camp's murder before he reached the police station.

Detective Miller opened the passenger's door and plopped down into the cruiser, as Officer Hendrix sat and revved the engine. She sped fearlessly to the North Side Park crime scene. Behind the wheel she was a demon. Miller in the past had cautioned her to slow down, but to no avail. She turned into the North Side Park's parking lot and braked hard to a stop. She expected him to make a comment, but he remained silent.

Already on the scene were Detective Dick Fairchild, and several other uniformed officers. Fairchild served in the air

force for four years as a military police officer. Settling in Saint Cloud, he thought a small town would be the best place to raise his only son, Ronald. Mary Beth, his wife, passed a few minutes after giving birth some seventeen years ago.

Ronald, and his police officer career were the only important things he placed any real value on in his life.

Dick was a very serious and rather strict father, but the love for his son ran deep within his inner core. One of those fathers who wouldn't hesitate to trade his life for his son's.

Det. Fairchild didn't smoke, drink hard liquor, nor did he use unlawful drugs or seek out the company of lewd woman. Standing over six feet with strong square shoulders and a chin to match; he kept himself in great physical condition. Dark black hair, with only a few gray hairs apparent, fashioned in the military crew-cut style, with deep set blue eyes.

Ronald, who only answered to Ronny, was simply a younger physical version of his dad, except he was two inches shorter; yet they were complete opposites when it came to their personalities. The father being strong minded and a domineering force to say the least, and the son being carefree,

independent and seen by many as kind to the elderly and animals, playful, and even a bit rebellious; which mirrored his mother's temperament undeniably for those who remembered her early on. Dick saw in his son the same qualities which first drew him to his beloved wife.

The area was roped off and one officer was busy taking photographs of the victim, and the surrounding area. Det. Fairchild nodded to Det. Miller as he approached. "She was beaten to death with a claw-hammer; it was found next to her body with blood all over it," he seemed to be reading from his notes.

After surveying the scene, Miller called Hendrix to come closer, "Describe the victim and her clothing."

She stepped closer and studied the bloody corpse. "Brown hair pulled into a bun style. You can see her grey roots, so it must be dyed," she noted. Bending over she observed the victims face. "She has little makeup on; just some facial powder and no lipstick. She has a silver-banded wristwatch on her left wrist, and an imitation-pearl necklace around her neck and a small diamond wedding ring."

“How do you know her necklace is fake?” Miller asked.

Looking her superior in the eyes, “A woman can always tell sir.”

Not sure how to respond, “Ah, alright then, please proceed.”

"She has on a long brown dress, and matching short heeled dress shoes and looks to be in her early to mid-fifties. Her weight looks between a hundred and forty to one hundred and sixty pounds or thereabouts. There are multiple bloody indents in her face, neck and head areas; I'd say they came from the hammer sir."

Det. Fairchild stood listening to her summation; as she finished he rolled his eyes and walked away shaking his head.

"Is anything missing?" Det. Miller asked.

"I don't see her purse sir,"

“How do you know she even had a purse?”

“Most women her age never go anywhere without their purse.”

"Is this a sex crime?"

"No, I don't think so, her dress isn't pulled up as if someone tried to get at her." She answered.

"What about robbery?"

"Her purse is missing, but she has other valuables on her person; her rings and whatnot. I'll say no to robbery."

"When you amateurs finish your training, I'd like to complete my investigation," Det. Fairchild said sarcastically as he returned to their side.

"Before we go, I'd like for you to search this area and the parking lot. See if you can locate her purse," Miller instructed Hendrix.

She stood at attention, "Sir, the Chief wants us to inform the victim's husband."

"Alright, after you check the area, we'll give him the bad news," he said as he drew out the last Camel from the pack. Pulling his watch from his pocket and checking the time, he slowly walked to the police cruiser and studied the park. Det. Miller boosted himself up on its front right fender and sat staring at the trees as he recalled the fond memories of his childhood.

Playing on the swings, the wonderful picnics with his parents and hiding from the other kids while playing hide-and-

go-seek. They were allowed to make as much noise as they wanted, because the park was isolated from nearby residents.

Officer Hendrix returned to the car and climbed inside as Det. Miller joined her. She made good time crossing town while he sat, still daydreaming of younger and happier times.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Sunday was a time of showing respect for God, and the Church; for over eighty percent of the inhabitants in this hamlet were of the Catholic faith. Father Lonigan was the parish priest who guided his flock with love and a steady hand. Not more than thirty years-of-age, he stood six feet, five inches, yet only weighed one hundred and fifty-nine pounds if that. Lanky, just barely describes this gentle giant with the short flaming red hair and white alabaster shin covered in orange freckles.

But pay heed, he was no novice when it came to church doctrine; for he knew his bible front to back and then some, as it were. All who knew Father Samuel Lonigan had great respect for this peaceful man-of-god; born and raised amongst them, no unkind word was ever raised against him. Not even the Baptists, nor the non-church goers had a cross word to say about this young man, for he helped all in the community, no matter what their lot in life was, or what faith they chose; for as he saw it, all are Gods children and live by his loving grace.

The church was grandiose and well maintained; even in hard times the faithful saw to their house of worship. Two large steeples rose some forty feet at the main entrance, where two large oak doors guarded the entrance to this oblong-shaped old papal-style church. It could hold one hundred and forty sinners; wooden bench-seats covered in thick red-fabric, and every catholic icon covered in gold-leaf showing the power and elegance of Holy Mother Church.

This Sunday was like any other Sunday. At the end of the Mass Father Lonigan would enter the confessional, and those seeking forgiveness would venture forth. Ruth Anderson entered, made the sign of the cross and sat down holding her purse tightly in her lap; contemplating for a moment as she wasn't sure how much she should confess too. After a short silence she spoke.

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. My last confession was last Sunday. I...I...spoke ill of my neighbor across the street, Daisy Cohen, because her small dog keeps crapping...sorry, I mean...it keeps going to the bathroom in my rose bushes, and when the dirty little

varmint...ah, sorry, I mean when her dog ‘Arnold,’ goes to the bathroom, he digs up my roses, and leaves holes all over my rose-bed. And just yesterday I stepped in dog poop, again, for the umpteenth-time. I asked her to keep him in the house or on a leash when he’s outside, but she just ignores me. And only a Baptist would be dumb enough to name their dog after their dead husband, can you believe it?” Ruth was rambling on in her usual manner.

“Father Lonigan spoke softly, yet sternly, “Let’s stay on point, and remember, it’s not up to us to judge others, no matter what they might name their pet. Please continue.”

“Ah, yes, you’re right Father, I’m also sorry I called her a...dumbass. I’m sorry I spoke ill of her to my friends, and I should have more patience and understanding I guess...I mean...I know I should have more understanding and patience. And I’m sorry I hit Arnold with a broom when I caught him messing around my trash cans.” Ruth now sat silent.

“Is there anything else?” Father Lonigan asked with simple love and sincerity in his voice.

“No Father.” Came her meek reply.

“I want you to say two Hail-Mary’s, and one Our Father’s, and I think it would be a nice gesture on your part to give some of your roses to the widow Cohen?”

“What?!” Ruth was momentarily caught off guard, but quickly regained her composure. “Uh, well...I’ll think about it.”

Father Lonigan knew Ruth had a good heart underneath her rough and somewhat prejudiced exterior, “If you make this goodwill act of contrition, it just might bring about a new friendship.”

“Oh for heaven’s sake, alright, alright, I’ll do it.” She said with some trepidation in her voice as she fled the confessional; yet she was a woman of her word.

Ruth Anderson was sixty-six and was a retired second-grade school teacher. For reasons only known to her, she never married, nor had children. She was roughly five-foot four-inches tall and was heavy set. White hair pulled into a bun was her everyday style, and she did not believe in coloring it. She always wore thin white gloves when out and about.

Mable Zeeks was next, she referred to Father Lonigan as ‘Father goody-two-shoes’ when he wasn’t around. She entered and crossed herself. After the standard opening she came straight to the point, “I’ve said some very bad things about those Satan Worshippers who call themselves the ‘Monday Night Mystics,’ and I’m not sorry, not one bit! They should all burn in hell and God is with me on this, so don’t try and tell me otherwise Father. You know I’m right, and the church should do something about them practicing their witchcraft; sacrificing animals when there’s a full-moon. Its sacrilege, you should...”

Father Lonigan has listened to this same diatribe for several years now with great patience, and once again he politely interrupted her, “Now my child, we have discussed the notion of ‘live and let live’ on other occasions. Have you been praying for them to see the true light of our savior Jesus Christ?”

“Yes, I have been praying; praying they all die and burn in hell! Which is what God wants for them!” She yelled as she

stormed out of the confessional as usual, and as always,  
madder than a wet hen.

Father Lonigan said a prayer for her, which was his usual way of dealing with the over-zealous as he saw her to be. He prayed that one day her heart would open, and be filled with everlasting love for all of mankind; or he'd settle for Mable to at least find some tolerance of those who lived in Saint Cloud.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

Beau Camp opened the front door with a cheery smile on his face, and then seemed surprised to see the two officers. "I thought it was my wife, she's always losing her key," he said as he opened the door wider. "Come in, I'm expecting her home any minute now." Beau motioned for them to enter. "She played bingo last night. When the games run long, she stays at her girlfriend's house."

"Beau, we have some bad news I'm afraid." Det. Miller began.

Making their way to the couch, they all sat down. Staring at the floor like a child who had been caught swiping cookies from the cookie jar; Beau sensed something wasn't right and started cracking his knuckles.

Miller adjusted his tie and tugged at his collar before he spoke, for he had never had to relay this type of news before. "Your wife Martha was slain last night. Her body was found at the North Side Park early this morning."

Beau fell forward and collapsed onto the carpet. Officer Hendrix rushed to help him but was stopped by Det. Miller. "He'll be okay, let him be," he whispered. She stepped back and watched him as he lay face down on the floor.

After several minutes, he sat up and rubbed his forehead. "I'm alright," he mumbled, "You gave me quite a shock. I thought you said my wife was murdered..."

"Yes...I did. Are you sure you'll be okay? We'll drive you over to see Doc Otis if you'd like," Det. Miller offered.

"Ah...no, it's not necessary...how did it happen?" Beau asked as the news slowly started to sink in.

"We won't know until the autopsy report and our investigation is completed. It looks like she may have been beaten to death with a hammer. Do you feel up to answering a few questions?"

"What? Ah...I guess so. I'm still light headed, but I'll be okay. Did you say it happened at Darnell's farm?" Beau asked.

The two officers exchanged glances. "No, I said the North Side Park. Was your wife at Darnell's farm last night?" Miller inquired.



"I'm not sure. She left here to go play bingo and never came home."

"When was the last time you saw her?" Miller asked.

"After supper I helped her with the dishes. She changed clothes and went out. She said that she was feeling lucky and not to wait up," he answered.

"What time did she leave the house?" Miller asked.

"It was around six, I think."

"The bingo hall doesn't open until eight. Why'd she leave so early?"

"She always walked to her friend's house and rode with her to the hall."

"What's her friend's name?" Officer Hendrix asked him as she continued to write down his statements.

"Terri Helms," Beau responded.

"How long has this been her routine?" she continued.

Beau thought for a moment as he still sat on the floor.

"She's been riding with Terri for about two months, every Monday night."

"When she was out, what did you do on Monday nights?"

Det. Miller asked.

"Recently I've been attending Miss Stella's séances." The officers again glanced at one another as he continued, "I thought it'd help me relax after mother died. I had problems with my nerves. Miss Stella starts her séance at seven o'clock every Monday night," he said.

"At what time is the séance over?" Officer Hendrix asked as she turned her notebook page over.

"It's over by eight most of the time, but we sit and visit in her kitchen for a while, drinking coffee and chit-chatting. I always have decaf."

"Why'd you ask if your wife was at Darnell's farm?" Hendrix asked.

Beau got up from the floor and sat on the couch. Leaning forward he started cracking his knuckles as he finally looked at Det. Miller. "I know you're aware of Miss Stella's psychic powers, and I know you're married to her sister, Nancy. That's why I'm comfortable in telling you about this," he stated, still cracking his knuckles. "Last night at the séance, I had an out-

of-body experience in which I witnessed a man kicking a woman that was tangled up in a fence at Sonny Darnell's farm." The two officers sat in silence as he continued, "I saw Johnny Hudson stomping her. When I mentioned it to Miss Stella, she consulted her crystal ball. She said she saw more murders and I was in danger," he spoke softly.

"So you saw Johnny Hudson kill a woman in your dream, is that correct?" Sherry asked as she was still making notes.

"No, not in a dream...it was an 'out-of-body' experience." He said in a defensive tone.

"Did you recognize the woman?" Miller asked.

"No, no I didn't."

Sherry continues, "So you're outside of your body and you just happen to be walking by Sonny's farm and..."

"I wasn't walking; I was floating high overhead when I saw Johnny kill someone." Beau's voice was clearly agitated now.

"Someone?" Sherry repeats, "Now you're not sure if it was a man or a woman, is that what you're saying?"

"Stop trying to twist my words! You're trying to make me sound nuts! I'm not nuts!"

Miller interrupts, "Beau, no one is accusing you of being crazy, so just simmer down, alright?"

"Well, okay, but you tell Miss Snooty here to stop messing with me than." His eyes narrowed as he stared at Officer Hendrix.

As Miller motioned for her to sit back, he decided to change the discussion and head it into another, less upsetting direction.

"Have you fully recovered from your mother's passing?"

"Ah...yes." Beau replied softly nodding his head.

"Do you think the death of your wife could bring on another breakdown?" Miller asked as he studied his facial expressions and tried to observe his body language.

"No...well maybe...well no, I don't think so...oh who knows," Beau said shaking his head first from side-to-side, then up-and-down, then shrugging his shoulders as he ran his fingers nervously through his hair.

"Do you still hear your mother's voice?" Miller asked.

"No...not anymore, I'm hearing a man's voice now. He's a lot stronger than mother, and he prevents her from bothering me." He then inhaled a deep breath and puffed his chest out,

and with a smirk on his face, "He told me his name, and I have to laugh because he calls me the Admiral. Isn't that funny?" Beau giggled and again ran his fingers nervously through his hair.

"Yes, that's funny alright. Do you remember what your wife was wearing when she went out last night?" Miller decided he'd try and placate him as he fished for more information.

"Let me think about that. I'll get back with you later on her clothes."

"Did you notice if she carried her purse?" Officer Hendrix queried.

"Oh, yes... she's as bad as the Queen of England. She takes her purse everywhere she goes. She'd die if she didn't have her purse," Beau answered scratching his left forearm.

"May I use your bathroom? I had a gallon of coffee this morning and it's running right through me," Officer Hendrix politely asked.

"Sure, go through the kitchen, it's the door on the left," he said pointing.

Entering the bathroom, she looked into the medicine cabinet and then raised the lid on the dirty clothes hamper. Lying on top was Beau's blood stained shirt, the one that he wiped his hands on after touching the bloody boot in the street. She laid the shirt aside and sorted through the rest of the hamper. She found nothing else that was suspicious. Returning to the living room with the blood stained shirt, she handed it to Det. Miller.

"Oh...that's the shirt I had on last night at Miss Stella's," Beau blurted out, "On my way home I found a bloody boot in the street, and I got sticky blood on my hands. I wiped them on my shirt, but don't worry, I know how to remove blood from clothes. You soak them in hydrogen peroxide," he added and started cracking his knuckles again.

"How long have you been cracking your knuckles?" Officer Hendrix asked.

Beau held his hands out in front of him and examined them. Looking at Det. Miller, "What's wrong with her? I've never cracked my knuckles in my life. Is she trying to start trouble again?" he said with a skeptical eye on her.

Miller ignored his question, "I understand you and your wife had separated for a time, and that you recently got back together. Would that be an accurate statement?"

"Yes, for a short time she left me, but she came back. She said that she was in love with someone else." He said sheepishly.

"It didn't work out for her?" Miller inquired with no negative overtones in his voice.

"I guess not." Beau answered cracking his knuckles. He began to have a nervous tic; his right cheek began to twitch uncontrollably.

"Who was the other man, if you don't mind saying?" Officer Hendrix asked.

"I don't know, she never told me. I was just happy that she came back to me."

"Do you own a gun?" Miller probed as he pulled a pack of Camels from his shirt pocket.

"Nope, I don't, and please, don't smoke in here." He said dryly.

"We'll take your shirt with us, and later today someone will drive you to the coroner's office to identify your wife's body."

Miller said putting the pack of cigarettes back as they prepared to leave.

"Hey thanks, but you don't have to clean my shirt. I'll soak it myself." Beau said reaching for it.

"That's okay, we'll take good care of it," Miller said turning away from Beau. They excused themselves and left. They slipped into the cruiser. Miller drew a Camel from his shirt pocket and lit up as he surveyed the time on his pocket watch. Sherry entertained him with another hair-raisin' ride across town.

When they stopped in front of the Municipal Building Det. Miller got out. "Take the cruiser to the gas station and air up the back left tire, its low."

"Yes sir, right away sir," she responded as she sped away.

Det. Miller put Beau's bloody shirt on his desk before going to see the Chief. As he entered Chief Hudson's office, the Chief waved his hand for silence as he continued to listen on his telephone, "You're certain she's dead? Don't touch



anything. Keep everyone out of the crime scene area. We'll be there right away. What'd you say your name ...hello...damn, he hung up. Miller, gather your men and equipment. Another dead woman just turned up."

"You're joking, who?" Det. Miller was surprised.

"It looks like some woman tangled with a bull at Darnell's farm and was gored to death," the Chief said.

Miller gave the Chief a bewildered stare, "Did you say, Darnell's farm?"

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“Police department, what’s your problem?” Buddy Wilson the dispatcher asked in his down home small town sarcastic voice.

Buddy was thirty-three and your average likeable fellow for the most part. Never married, yet still taking care of his mother was why most folks saw him as a devoted mama’s boy.

Short and pudgy, with thinning black hair and yellow stained teeth, which didn’t help matters much when it came to the ladies. Plus, he seemed to have a peculiar smell about him; not much of a bather, so it would appear. Yet he did have a magnificent sense of humor, to be sure.

“This is Mable Zeeks, I want to report a catnapping,” she said in an obviously distressed tone of voice.

“Mrs. Zeeks, I’m sorry to be the one to tell you this, but it’s not against the law for your cat to take a nap; but should your furry little friend get itself stuck up in a big ol’ persimmon tree, why I’d be more than delighted to call out the volunteer

firemen to help you get it down,” he said knowing full well it would rile her up.

Mable was married to Nigel Zeeks who was the owner and operator of ‘Zeeks Barber Shop’ on Main Street. Nigel was a good natured gentleman of sixty-two, same age as his wife. Squat and weighty with only tufts of grey hair over his long ears. Always clean shaven and neat in appearance nevertheless, and nary seen without his solid ivory pipe which he smoked his cherry-blend tobacco.

Mable on the other hand was just the complete opposite. Lean and a foot taller than he, with the disposition of a rattle snake; always poised to strike. Dyed black hair which made her blue eyes look dark gray. They never had children, it was rumored Mable had female problems of an unknown nature. She never held a job, just another housewife, as so many were expected to be in those days. She was known throughout the township as ‘Mad-Dog-Mable’ and many a joke were forthcoming, but only spoken behind her back for fear of her unrelenting wrath.

“Listen up dumbass! I know who you are, you little tub of dog crap. The little gray aliens have taken Mandrake! You put the Chief on the phone right now or I’ll have your job!” She yelled into the phone with her screeching barn owl voice.

“Please hold while I attempt to locate the Chief.” Buddy said undaunted by her insult and threat, as he seemed to enjoy tormenting her.

“You damn well better...” Buddy pushed the hold button as Mad-Dog-Mable was in mid-sentence knowing full well she’d most likely pop-a-vein, or so he wished. Laughing for several minutes as he pretended to search for the Chief, he finally buzzed the Chief’s desk.

“Yes?” Chief Hudson’s pleasant voice came through the receiver.

“It’s Buddy sir, Mad-Dog-Mable is on line one, and she’s hopping mad.”

“Oh good grief, so what’s her complaint this time?” Chief Hudson has had many strange calls from Mable Zeeks over the years. So there’s not much she can say that would surprise him; everything from trash cans levitating high into the air and

then crashing to the ground, to naked leprechaun's chasing her cat up into trees and so forth.

“Well sir, it would seem a little green Martian has kidnapped her cat.” Buddy chuckled softly after announcing the catnapping.

“Very well then, I'll handle it. And by the way Buddy, in the future please don't refer to Mrs. Zeeks as 'Mad-Dog-Mable' nor do I appreciate the giggling in the background. Is that clear?” Chief Hudson had called Mable 'Mad-Dog' on many occasions, but he never did it while on duty; and he didn't appreciate anyone else doing so either.

Buddy picked up immediately on the Chiefs professional tone and knew to stop his horseplay, “Yes sir, I do rightly apologize.”

Chief Hudson answered the phone as Buddy transferred the call to his desk. “This is Chief Hudson, so Mable, what's all the fuss about?”

Mable launched into her frightful attack at once, “I've been waiting on this line for fifteen minutes, and thank the good

Lord it wasn't an emergency or I'd surely be dead by now, no thanks to you and your keystone-cops!"

"Mrs. Zeeks, please stop and take a breath. Now tell me what happened to your cat?"

After a brief pause, "I was sitting in my porch swing and Mandrake was..."

"Mrs. Zeeks?" The Chief politely interrupted.

"What!?" She said miffed that he had the audacity to interrupt her.

"Who is this Mandrake person?" In true sincerity he asked.

"Are you kidding?! Mandrake is my cat for god's sake!" Her voice was strained with exasperation.

"I'm sorry, I thought your cat's name was 'Peaches' or something like..."

"What's the matter with you people down there, Peaches died over two years ago. For Christ's sake, why can't you idiots stay on top of things? Everyone knows my cat's name is Mandrake! Can we move on now Chief Hudson, or am I going too fast for you?! And you were not my first choice for Chief-of-Police, just so you know!"

“Sorry I interrupted you Mrs. Zeeks, you were saying...”

The Chief held his left hand to his forehead as a slight headache was now making its presence felt.

“As I said, I was sitting on my porch swing, it was around five in the evening last night when all of a sudden this tiny spaceship appeared. It was hovering only ten feet or thereabouts over my back yard. It was silver and oval shaped and had a bubble on top. It was only about fifteen feet around and maybe seven feet high. There was a little gray alien sitting in the bubble...”

“Did you say gray alien? I thought it was a green Martian?”

The Chief interjected; he too enjoyed yanking-her-chain from time to time.

“Gray! Gray for heaven’s sake! What in god’s name is wrong with you nim-rods?!” She screamed into the phone.

“Oh, sorry, please continue.” His little grin momentarily paused the ever increasing headache that was steadily progressing.

“As I was saying before you so rudely interrupted me; the spaceship landed and the gray alien, yes, gray alien got out and

grabbed Mandrake. I ran in the house and grabbed my big broom, and chased after him trying to swat him so he'd drop Mandrake, but the little runt was just too quick for me. I was just so upset that I passed out. I've been unconscious until just a short bit ago when I awoke. I found poor Mandrake crying his little heart out. The alien had brought him back and dumped him in one of my big trash cans; he was so mortified." She now feigned a pitiful, helpless voice for effect.

"Mrs. Zeeks, have you been sampling your home-made wine again? You remember the last time you..."

"You know I stopped making my watermelon-wine! I swear I don't know why I bothered to even call you incompetent people!" She slammed the phone down on the receiver with a thud.

The Chief sat quietly as he rummaged through his desk drawers looking for some headache powder; for he knew full well he'd be hearing more on the subject of Mandrake, and the little silver spacecraft from Mad-Dog-Mable. As far as he was concerned it was all just so ridiculous.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Mary had convinced herself something bad was going to happen, and she needed to discuss it with her best friend.

Dialing, she waited patiently for Ruth to answer.

“Hello.”

“It’s me, have you got a few minutes to talk?”

“Why, yes dear, I’ve nothing special planned for today, what’s on your mind sweetie?”

Mary wasn’t sure how to say it, so she just jumped right in, “Do you recall last Monday night what SAZARRA told you about your lifetime in Japan?”

“Well, certainly I do, well...at least most of it, why?” Ruth was a bit perplexed.

“So you remember when SAZARRA talked about the flip-side of the coin thing?”

“Yes, I do...why?”

“If you killed those women in that lifetime to experience what it feels like to be a murderer, does that mean you are now,

in this lifetime going to experience the other side of the coin?”

Mary asked.

“Oh dear, I never thought of that. You think I’ll be a victim this time around? Is that what you’re getting at?” Ruth’s mind was now racing, as it connected the dots.

“I don’t know, is it possible SAZARRA was giving you a warning?” Mary questioned, since she hadn’t truly understood all that SAZARRA spoke about that night, but didn’t want to appear foolish in front of the other Monday Night Mystics.

“I don’t know, maybe, maybe not, who knows.” Ruth said not sure of anything now.

“Maybe we should call Miss Stella and book a reading. She might be able to give us a clearer understanding of what he said.” Mary proposed.

“Ah, yes, that’s a good idea, and I was going to call you later, but since you’re on the line now, there was something I wanted to tell you about dear.”

“What is it?” Mary asked as her curiosity now presented itself.

“For the last two nights,” Ruth began, “I have had the same dream about you. I wasn’t sure if I should say anything or not, but now I feel you should know. I see you walking down a quiet road which has a field of wheat on one side, and on the other side there is a dark forest. As you are walking along, a Demon possessed man run’s out of the forest and attack’s you; but as this happens the clouds above you part, and I see an Angel come down from heaven who battles the Demon. The Angel wins and the defeated Demon runs back to the shadows of the dark woods. Both nights, I awoke crying and trembling. I’m not sure why I’m dreaming this. It scares me a little I must admit.”

“Oh my gosh, I don’t know what to say. I think we both need a reading from Miss Stella to sort all this out.”

“You’re so right dear. You want me to call her?” Ruth asks.

“If you wish, just let me know when and I’ll come over and we’ll ride together, is that okay?”

“Oh, I’d like that. No sense us girls taking any chances, not with this supernatural business hanging over our heads. I’ll call now and ring you right back, bye.” Ruth hung up.

Miss Stella told Ruth she'd be glad to read for them, but she was just going to spend the week over in Millersburg with a sick friend. But just as soon as she got back, she'd be delighted to meet up with them. Said she'd call when she got back to arrange a time suitable to all concerned.

Ruth relayed the message to Mary, both felt a little better, but decided to keep an eye out for anything suspicious. Better safe than sorry as the saying goes.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Officer Hendrix turned off the highway onto the gravel lane that ran alongside the pasture. She slowly drove to the gruesome crime scene.

Miller and Hendrix silently surveyed the area. The body of a woman was tangled in the barbwire fencing that enclosed the pasture. A dark red and white spotted bull inside the fence watched them with a menacing snort, and pawed the ground with his front right hoof.

The limp and battered body was covered with dried blood. It left little doubt that she was dead. At first sight, she resembled a large tan sack of potatoes that had been draped over the strands of wire. As another uniformed officer approached, Miller instructed the patrolman to locate the farm owner, and ask him to remove his bull from the field.

Officer Hendrix moved closer to Det. Miller and whispered, "This scene is exactly as Beau Camp described it."

Noting her subdued demeanor, he quietly said, "Yes, it is. Write a description of the victim as best you can. You're good with detail."

The large bull moved closer to the fence and eyed them; snorting and pawing the dirt which sent a cloud of dust flying through the air.

"That old boy's got a nasty temper sir. Will you need the wire cutters to untangle her from the barbwire?" Hendrix asked.

Miller inhaled a deep breath as he lit up a Camel. Blowing the smoke up into the air, he observed the scene for a short spell as he pondered the situation before him. "I don't think so, just some thick workmen's gloves should do." he finally answered.

"Why would she try to climb through the fence in the first place sir?" Miller didn't respond, "Was she trying to get away from someone, or maybe she was alone and had car trouble and decided to walk across the pasture to find help? I didn't notice a car on our way in sir. If she was in a car it could be farther down the lane."

Glancing down the gravel road, "Yes, it could be. This is used by Darnell to reach a field on the back side of his farm. The road dead ends on the other side of that wooded area. When we finish here make a search of that area," he instructed her.

They both turned in the direction of the roadway when they heard the sound of the tractor approaching.

"Speak of the Devil and he shall appear," She said stiffly.

Sonny Darnell stopped and jumped down. "Don't try to hold me responsible for that lady's death," he said excitedly. "My property is posted. She was crazy to climb through the fence with the bull..."

Det. Miller interrupted, "Hold it down. Just move the bull out of the field please!"

"Have you got a court order to come on my property and order me around?" Sonny demanded with his usual smugness.

Miller shot him a look, "We don't need a court order, just move the damn bull!" Det. Miller eyeballed him as he carefully worked his way through the gate, and entered the pasture mumbling and making wild hand gestures.

"Hey Sonny," he called as he stepped closer to the fence, "check and see if there's blood on his horns or around his head or front hooves!" He said lighting up another Camel.

The menacing bull showed no signs of aggression as it ambled over to Sonny. The bull remained quiet as its horns and hoofs were examined.

"This bull is as clean as a hound's tooth," Sonny boasted as a train whistle could be heard in the far off distance.

"Thanks," Det. Miller said as he observed him lead the bull across the pasture. They slowly headed for an adjoining gate which opened into another field; much like a boy and his faithful dog meandering along on a sunlit afternoon.

"Here comes the coroner now sir. I hope he slows down. Look at the dust he's stirring up," Hendrix said hurrying off the roadway to keep from being covered by the dust storm approaching.

The coroner, Earl Schulz--a fifty-three-year-old chain-smoking alcoholic--stopped behind the police car. "Hey Miller, have you identified the victim yet?" he asked as he advanced for a closer look at the wire entangled body.



Det. Miller removed his handkerchief from his hip pocket and covered his mouth and nose. "No, not yet. We had some problems to deal with first. Had to wait for Darnell to move his bull, and now we have to wait for the dust to settle," he coughed, "I hope your dust doesn't cover any tire tracks or footprints; and stay back until we finish."

"Tire tracks? Are you sayin' Darnell's bull drove a car here to attack the girl?" Earl grinned foolishly as he forced an awkward laugh.

"No smartass, I wanted the tracks preserved because I don't think the bull killed her. She looks to have been beaten, not gored."

Earl grunted, shook his head and returned to the black hearse he arrived in, as his official van was broken down and the funeral home lent him its car, "Call me when you're ready," he said as he unfolded a copy of the 'Saint Cloud Gazette' and leaned against the rear of the hearse.

Mr. Darnell finished securing the gate as Det. Miller told one of the patrolmen to take some photos of the body and surrounding area.

"Put your gloves on," he spoke now to Officer Hendrix, "The bulls out of the way, so let's get started. Go around to the other side." Together they worked for twenty minutes untangling the victim from the barbwire so they could get a better look at her.

"I'll be damned," Miller said as he pulled the blood streaked hair from the victim's face, "its Terri."

"Who sir?" Hendrix grimaced as she looked upon the disturbing face.

"Terri Helms...ah, tell Earl he can take the body now."

"Yes sir." Suddenly, she jumped as a black-scronger swooped low overhead and squawked loudly. Thinking to herself how she would have loved to shoot that damn crow and stuff it.

Night was coming on fast, so they returned to headquarters; where Det. Miller spent the rest of the evening doing paperwork. The phone rang on Det. Miller's desk. Nancy asked him if he was coming home tonight. Judging by her tone, he knew she was miffed. Slipping his pocket watch out, he realized the late hour, then glanced out the window and

peered into the darkness. "I'll be home in a few minutes."

Turning the desk lamp off, he started to leave when Det.

Fairchild entered.

"I want a word with you Thomas," he said with a throaty bawl to his brazen voice.

"What's on your mind?"

"It's that bumbling trainee of yours. Keep her as far from me as you can. She screwed up evidence at the North Side Park crime scene."

"What are you talking about?"

"She picked up the bloody hammer without gloves on. Then she said she didn't remember where she exactly found it in relation to the body. Somewhere in the grass she thought. How can I run an investigation with her moving evidence around, and not knowing where it came from? That woman is a menace. Keep her away from me. Is that clear?" he yammered.

"Sure, I'll have a talk with her, it shouldn't happen again."

"It better not, or I'll file an official complaint against her and you with the Chief."

"The Chief has left for the day. Let's go to his house and settle this right now!" Miller countered as he was getting fed-up with Dick's 'nobody is as good as me' routine.

"Uh...that's not necessary, but if she meddles in anymore of my cases, I'll have you both on the carpet," he spat out as he stormed from the office.

As Miller passed the dispatcher on his way out. Buddy said, "I don't care what anyone says, I think Sherry's a cracker-jack of an officer."

Det. Miller turned, gave a wink and a smile, and whispered, "Me too."

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### DOUBLE HOMICIDE STRIKES QUIET TOWNSHIP

Authorities are investigating the murder of Terri Helms, who's bruised and bloody body was found at Sonny Darnell's farm; and the murder of Martha Camp, whose blood soaked body was discovered at the North Side Park.

The Police Department said they have nothing to report at this time; owing to their ongoing explorations of the two grisly murders.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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Jonah McGregor is a young Irish lad of twenty, with short brown hair and a pimply complexion; rather tall and gangly. Always interested in the workings of the homegrown civic

administration, which led him into journalism at an early age.

Most folks around these parts who encountered Jonah just plain seen him as peculiar.

Nothing much ever happens in Saint Cloud; other than the usual 4-H stuff, the local bingo, barn dance, Boy Scout outings, hayrides and whatnot; yet this was a dream come true for the eager young Jonah, for he was now in hog heaven. Finally, something to write about which had substance to it. Something that made people sit up and take notice for sure. A pugnacious little bulldog when given a nice juicy bone, so to speak; his innate enthusiasm knew no bounds as his fellow citizens were soon to discover.

Jonah would undeniably have much more to write about in the coming weeks; as the death-toll of this sleepy homestead would surely surge.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Stacy Steimel waddled through the door of Mueller's Drug store. She looked as though she had swallowed a whole watermelon. The baby was due anytime now. Herbert now noticed her and left the main counter to offer her his assistance. Helping her to the soda counter, he lifted as she pulled her awkward self onto a stool.

"Thanks Mr. Mueller, I sure do appreciate your kindness." She said scooting her hips around trying to find a more comfortable position, yet it wasn't to be.

"Still havin' stomach cramps? Need some bi-carb?" He put forth.

"No, no problems right there sir. But..." She hesitated to answer his simple query as her cheeks blushed a darker shade of red.

Herbert scratched his head as he weren't sure what the problem might be, but Hazel came to the rescue. His wife whispered in his ear, "Did you not see the way she's sitting?"

“What?” He still wasn’t getting it as he scratched his forehead.

“Go get the poor girl some ointment, she’s having hemorrhoid itch, you silly willy.”

“Oh...oh, ah, yes dear, right away. You’re right, how silly of me.” Making haste he went behind the main counter.

Stacy looked up, “Thank you Mrs. Mueller, I just didn’t feel right about askin’ for you-know-what.” She was blushing again.

“Never you mind dearie, us women know how to look after one another,” she gave the young lass a soft hug and a motherly kiss on the forehead, “and tell your mother thanks for the blueberry pie she sent over last week, it was just delicious.”

Herbert appeared with the ointment he had placed in a small brown paper sack, “Here you go Ms. Stacy.”

Stacy pulled out a small coin purse that at first glance looked torn and had seen better days indeed, “How much do...”



“Oh, heavens no dear, put that away. There’s no charge.”

Hazel said, which triggered another hug and kiss, which gave Stacy a feeling of self-assurance that she did matter.

She had long brown hair parted in the middle, soft brown eyes and a good helping of pimples on her face. Yet, she had a simple beauty about her, more so than the other girls around town her age. Slim of figure-- that is up until nine months ago-- creamy skin and weighed no more than a hundred pounds, if that.

Many-a-townsfolk made her out to be nothing more than a cheap gallivanting whore; but nothing could be further from the truth. The only boy she had ever been with sexually was Bobby Taylor. His boyish charm swept her right into his arms, and that eventually led them to the old Nelson farm, where Bobby deflowered the innocent young lass.

As with so many rural young girls; for her it was her first true love, for him it was just another notch in his belt. Bobby had given her the nickname of ‘Lollypop’ because he said he liked to lick her all over.

No sooner had she figured out she was with child, yep, you guessed it, Bobby dropped her like a hot tater. Told anyone who'd listen, that Stacy had slept with over six different boys that he knew of, maybe more; lying came easy to him.

Truth was, she was living with her mother who took in wash, did house cleaning and did cookin' for some of the more well-to-do folks. Stacy had two younger sisters. Her father had died several years back while workin' for Sonny Darnell. He was in the barn puttin' up hay bales when old man Darnell rode in on his tractor and struck him. Never had a chance they say. Sonny told the authorities that comin' out of the sunlight into the dark barn, he never saw him standing there. It was ruled an accident.

Times can be hard, but people do what they got to do, to survive. And that's what the widow Steimel and family did, pulled themselves together working any and all odd jobs to scratch out a living; even if the so-called good folks of Saint Cloud said they came from the wrong side of the tracks.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Det. Miller arrived early at the police department and is surprised to see Chief Hudson is already there. Tapping lightly on the door frame, as the Chief's door was ajar, he gets a hand gesture to enter from the Chief.

"So Frances, what brings you here so early?" Miller inquires as he sits down.

Chief Hudson looks up as he closes and lays the files down. "I'd say the same thing that brought you in early; trying to figure out these two confounded murders. Who would want to beat poor Martha Camp to death, and with a claw-hammer of all things?"

"Sounds like it might be a personal grudge, since she was bludgeoned to death in such a savage way. Seems somebody wanted her to suffer for what she done to them, I reckon? I don't know much about that fancy psychology stuff; but someone was pretty fired up to use a hammer on her."

"She have any enemies you know of?" The Chief asked leaning back in his chair.

“Nope, no one who’d want to do that to her; but she was seen by most as an uppity socialite. Looking down her nose at the average gentry is how I’d say most thought her to be. Not too many will miss her I’m sad to say.”

“True, she never had a kind word to say about most folks, me included.” Frances chuckled.

Miller smiled at his remark, for he too wasn’t on Martha’s list of so-called friends, “As it stands now, Earl says all he can tell from her autopsy is that she was killed sometime between 7pm and 9pm, and that she was struck with the bloody hammer that was found at the crime scene. Said she was hit some thirty times or thereabouts. Most likely he said the first blows were from behind, so someone came up behind her in the dark and laid into her, hot and heavy. Earl said the first several hits were enough to kill her; the rest were added for god knows what reason. No witnesses have been found or forthcoming so far. Martha was reported to be going over to Terri Helms place. Beau said they then rode together to the bingo hall. No one knows why she went to the park. Ellen Wellington found

the body the next morning when she took Bubbles for his morning constitution.”

“Bubbles?” The Chief asked with an odd expression on his tired face.

“Her little cocker spaniel” Miller said amusingly.

“For heaven’s sake,” The Chief said rolling his eyes before continuing, “Well, any fingerprints on the hammer?”

“Well, yes and no. Earl didn’t find any prints except Officer Hendrix’s. Now, before you ask, Dick told me she picked up the hammer at the crime scene without gloves on and he gave her what-for. But she is still learning and as you know, we all made mistakes when we were young and just learnin’ the ropes.”

Frances laughed, “Boy, I can remember some of the dumbest things I did during my training days. I actually locked me and my training officer out of the squad car, and we were some five miles from the station. He chewed my butt as we walked all the way back to the station to get the other set of spare keys. I was so humiliated. I must have apologized fifty times.”

Both men were now breaking up with laughter.

“So, anything else to report?” Chief Hudson continued as the two old friends settled down.

“Well, to be honest, we haven’t a clue who would want her dead, nor why.”

“What about her husband, that goofy Beau, think he did her in? He’s missing a few marbles, if you get my drift?”

Miller paused for a moment as if pondering the likelihood that Beau murdered his wife, “Well, no, I don’t think he killed his wife. Deep down I feel he truly loves her, as much as any man could love a woman like that. No, I just don’t see it being him. She didn’t have all that much life insurance coverage, even though he sells it. Only four thousand, not so much to commit murder for.”

“So unless someone confesses, we got squat; that’s what you’re telling me?”

Miller simply nodded in the affirmative.

“Okay, so what about Terri Helms murder, anything there?”

The Chief sat forward resting his elbows on the desktop as he positioned his chin in his hands.

“Earl said she was also murdered sometime between 7pm and 9pm. That’s as close as he can narrow it down. Said from the bruises and broken bones, someone used their fists and what looks like shoes or more likely boots to beat and stomp her to death. Earl said there were a lot of cuts from the barbwire, but not enough to kill her. The blows to her head were most likely the cause of death. Said she died at Darnell’s farm. Fairchild said the only tire tracks in the area seem to come from a pickup truck, but that Sonny Darnell owns a pickup himself. Dick said there were no witnesses so far, and that the body was found early the next morning when Sonny was out feeding his livestock.”

“You think whoever killed Martha could have also killed Terri?” The Chief asked.

“Well, it’s possible, with the two-hour timeline, maybe someone could have killed one and had time to find and kill the other; but I just don’t see it. I think we have two killers here.”

“All these years without a serious crime to speak of, and then ‘wham,’ two at the same time. I just don’t know what’s

happening anymore in this country of ours.” The Chief said as he seemed to be staring right through Det. Miller.

“Frances?” Miller spoke softly to bring him back to the present.

The Chief now dropped his hands as he leaned back, “Sorry, I don’t know where I went.”

“In the Terri Helms case, there is an eyewitness of sorts.” Miller was hesitant to bring up Beau’s out-of-body malarkey, as he saw it.

“Really, who is it?”

“Well, Beau Camp said he was over at Miss Stella’s where the Monday Night Mystics were having a séance, and he had an out-of-body experience where he saw your brother, Johnny stomping Terri Helms while she was tangled up in the barbwire...”

“What?! That peckerwood said what?!” The Chief’s nostrils flared as his words blasted forth.

“Believe me, I didn’t want to say anything, but he says...” Again Miller was interrupted by the Chief’s outburst.



“I don’t care what that lunatic said, and I don’t want to hear another word about my brother! Johnny’s no saint, but he ain’t no killer either! That’s it! You understand Thomas?!” He hollered.

Miller knew there was nothing more to say to the Chief on the subject of his brother and Beau’s out-of-body sighting. “Yes sir.” Standing, Miller departed as a large throbbing vein appeared on the Chief’s flushed forehead. He’d wait a spell before broaching the subject again for he knew in his gut something didn’t feel quite right.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Strolling hand-in-hand through the North Side Park; Beatrice and Alan were sharing a quiet moment. Alan was reflecting on the last few days' events at the library and Beatrice was smiling as she fanaticized about weddings and such things. Settling on a small bench, they kissed and cuddled as seemingly lovers do.

Over by a small pond, Ronny Fairchild and Bobby Taylor were having a go at each other; yet it was more of a wrestling match than fisticuffs. Beatrice saw it first and pointed, as Alan yelled for the two lads to cease and desist before one or both suffered serious injury.

As the encounter still continued, Alan charged toward the two teens with Beatrice bouncing up behind him. Forcing his way between the two, Alan separated them and turning toward Bobby, he let go with a straight-right cross that struck Bobby with such force, it spun him half-way around as it propelled him to the ground. Alan than turned to Ronny and asked if he was okay.

Bobby regained his bearing as he stood; yet turned and fled the park as Alan wheeled around and drew back ready to deliver another blow. Beatrice stopped his assault as she shouted his name in disbelief and horror; for she had never seen this dark side of the man she knew to be kind and gentle.

Alan turned, not to Beatrice, but to Ronny, “Are you okay? Did he hurt you?”

Ronny looked at Beatrice, then turned to Alan, “Sure, I’m fine. Don’t worry about it.” He said brushing the dust and dirt from his shirt and jeans.

“So why did that Taylor boy attack you?” Alan inquired as Beatrice now placed her hand back in his.

“He didn’t attack me, I jumped him. He owes me some money and I was tired of him making excuses about not paying me back. No big deal.”

“Well then, he deserves what he got.” Alan said nodding his head.

“I need to go before my dad gets home.” Ronny turned and took off running, yet looked back for a moment at the couple and shook his head.

Beatrice was now half facing Alan, “What was that all about?”

“What?” Alan said now puzzled by her odd stare.

“You hit that poor Taylor boy. You could have really hurt him. You were going to hit him again if I hadn’t yelled. Why were you so concerned about Ronny?”

“Now stop it. You’re being silly. Let’s go, it’s getting late.” Alan started off and Beatrice held on to his hand as they left the park. This was the first time she felt uneasy with his strange behavior toward Ronny.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

“Why, hello Ruth, it’s so good of you to call.” Mary just loved to chew-the-fat with her. It was the highlight of her day.

“Have you seen today’s gazette?” She said in a hurried, almost out of breath voice.

“Well, no dear, not yet. Why? Have they postponed the 4-H Club events again? That Mayor Carver is such a...”

“Martha Camp is dead!” Ruth screeched.

“What? Oh my god, did she die in her sleep, the poor thing. Does Beau know?” Her voice remained steady, since she was no friend of Martha’s.

“No, no, she was murdered!”

“What?! Murdered! Who would do such a thing?! Did Beau do it?! You know he ain’t...”

Ruth could hardly contain herself, “No, Nancy said Thomas said they don’t think Beau did it, but they don’t have any suspects yet. Could have been anybody!” The excitement in her voice was loud, yet slowly dying down.

“You know, Martha and Mad-Dog-Mable had several run-ins not so long ago, you think she could have killed poor Martha?” Mary asked.

“Maybe...maybe Martha and Sam were messin’ around and Beau found out...”

“Sam? Sam who?” Ruth interrupted.

“Sam Franklin...he runs the Franklin...”

Ruth cuts her off again, “Yes, yes, I remember now, Franklin’s grocery, down on...”

“Maybe Berta, Sam’s wife found out and she killed Martha?” Mary interjects.

“No, Berta’s been sneakin’ around with Buddy Wilson, the dispatcher, remember? So I don’t think she’d care who Sam was messin’ with.” Ruth reiterates from last week’s gossip session.

“So? How was she murdered? Was she shot?” Mary eagerly asks.

“Oh no, Nancy said she was beatin’ to death with a hammer; blood everywhere, and said Officer Hendrix fainted at the crime scene, and fell on top of Martha Camps dead body.

Had blood all over her fancy pressed uniform.” Ruth loved to embellish, just a tad, to make things more interesting as she saw it.

“I don’t know why they don’t just fire her, she’s the worst officer on the…”

“You know, Nancy said she’s been flirting with Thomas and Dick; and god knows who else?”

“Why, I’ll be, she’s nothin’ more than a no good tramp,” Mary crossed herself, “They should run her out-of-town on a rail.”

“Guess who else was murdered last night?” You could hear the anticipation in her voice.

“My god, two murders!” Mary was now engulfed with this disturbing news.

“Yes, Terri Helms was killed out at Sonny Darnell’s farm. They found her dead body wrapped in barbwire near Sonny’s prize bull. The police don’t have a clue who killed her.” Ruth said with a gleam in her eyes.

“Wasn’t she a stripper? Didn’t she work at O’Malley’s tavern?” Mary questioned.

“I don’t know, maybe. You know she came from the wrong side of the tracks; she was no stranger to booze and lustful men, I know that for a fact.” Ruth announced unquestionably.

There was a knock at Ruth’s door, “Oh, I gotta go, the postman is at my front door, I’ll call you later, alright?”

“Oh sure, bye.” Mary no sooner hung up when she picked up the telephone and dialed Ellen Wellington’s number.

After almost eleven full rings, Ellen answered, “Hello?”

“Ellen, its Mary.”

“Mary? Mary who?” Poor Ellen was showing the signs of her old age, but rightly so at age ninety.

“Mary Achtenberg, from down the street.”

“Oh...why, yes indeed, Mary. How are you dear, is everything alright?”

“I just spoke with Ruth, have you seen the Saint Cloud Gazette today?” Mary asked.

“No, I don’t think I have, is there something in it about me?”

“No dear, but Martha Camp was murdered last night over at the North Side Park. She was beatin’ to death with a baseball



bat...blood and brains everywhere! They don't know who did it yet, but Nancy, Thomas Miller's wife said it could have been Sherry Hendrix. She's been having a love affair with Beau Camp.

"Oh my goodness, are you sure? Sherry seems like such a good girl. She helped me with my groceries just last week." Ellen was confusing Sherry with Beatrice Reid; who did in fact help her last week when she was coming out of Franklin's Market.

"They also found Terri Helms murdered, she got tangled up over at Darnell's farm in his barbwire fence, and his prize bull horned her to death."

"Are you sure it was the bull?" Ellen asked a bit shaken.

"Yes, they said Earl Schulz said so and he's never wrong."

Mary noted.

"That poor woman, are they going to put Sonny's bull down? It won a lot of 1<sup>st</sup> place ribbons at the last 4-H fair. That would surely be a shame; but after what it did, I guess they have no choice in the matter." Ellen began to cry softly.

“I just wanted you to know, I’ll call tomorrow. You take care of yourself and if you need anything Ellen, just call, okay?”

“Thank you so much Mary, I truly appreciate your friendship, bye-bye.” Ellen said hanging up the phone. She stopped crying and went into her bathroom to freshen up. Returning to her couch, she picked up and dialed Hazel Mueller who she considered a good friend and neighbor. Hazel had helped the elderly woman many, many times over the years with her medications at the drug store; not to mention sending Herbert over to mow her lawn.

Herbert picked up, “Yes?”

“Is Hazel there, this is Ellen Wellington calling.”

Hazel’s husband recognized Ellen’s voice right off, “Yes ma’am, she’s here, please hold on why I go fetch her for you.”

Laying the phone down, he found his wife in the kitchen finishing up the lunch dishes.

“Drying her hands on her pink and white stripped apron, she picked up the receiver, “Ellen, it’s good to hear from you, is

everything alright? Do you need anything sweetie?” Her voice was pleasant and reassuring.

“I’m fine dear, thank you for asking. Have you heard the news; Terri Helms and Martha Camp are dead?” She said without any great fanfare.

“Ah, are you sure dear? Who said they were dead?” Hazel asked knowing Ellen could get things confused at times.

“It’s in the Saint Cloud Gazette, Martha was beaten to death with a baseball bat. Her killer hit her so hard one of her eyes popped right out of her skull. It was just terrible. They found her bloody body in the park. The police think Beau did it out of jealousy; because Martha and Buddy Wilson were having a secret love affair.” Ellen rattled off her recollections of what she thought Mary had passed on to her. What she couldn’t remember, she simply filled in the gaps as it were. When it comes to gossip, anything goes.

“Well for Pete’s sake, have they arrested Beau?” Hazel asked now a bit shocked.

“I’m not sure, I think he’s on the lamb, but I’m sure he’ll be apprehended soon enough. Folks around here won’t stand for it.” Ellen said with authority in her feeble voice.

“What of Terri Helms? Was she with Martha? Were they killed together? Did Beau kill’em both?” Hazel was now fired-up and rattling on herself.

“Oh dear, I don’t know, Terri was killed out at Darnell’s farm by his prize bull. She may have been running from Beau and got caught up in the barbwire fence, and that’s when the bull gored her to death, the poor thing.” Ellen began to cry again.

“I better let Herbert know, just in case we see him lurking around. Are you alright, do you want us to come get you? You can stay here if you wish, you’ll be safe; Herbert has a double-barreled shotgun?”

“I’m fine dear, I’ll go lock all my doors and then I need a little nap.” Ellen said fanning herself with one of the hand-held fans from the little Baptist church she attends. It had a picture of Jesus sitting next to a flock of sheep on one side.

“Alright then, I’ll call later to see how you’re doing.” Hazel couldn’t wait to tell her husband the news.

“Thank you Hazel, you’re very kind.” Ellen sat a moment after hanging up to catch her breath before checking the doors. She was a bit dizzy as her heart fluttered for a few minutes, but she finally settled down. News was spreading fast through the little township.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

Two weeks later, there was still nothing new concerning the murder investigations. The locals were gossiping and speculating about ‘who’ and ‘why’ these things happened in a quiet community such as Saint Cloud.

Mary Achtenberg was just comin’ up to the back door of her modest little one-bedroom home. It was only mid-afternoon and a very bright, sunny day. She was sweating a bit as the walk from Milly’s Dress Shop was some twelve blocks from her home. Even as an older person, she knew the benefits of a daily brisk walk; which seemed to keep her joints from swellin’ up from too much inactivity.

Mary had bought an inexpensive white dress with a floral pattern of pink and yellow daisies. It was her hope and desire the new dress would make her look thinner, and more importantly, younger; yet mother nature new better--for wrinkles are wrinkles, and old is old.

As she fumbled with her house keys; her mind was so engaged with her newfangled purchase, she didn’t even notice

the man who was now creeping up from behind her. Wearing an old brown ball cap pulled down low over his forehead, and with a large dark blue handkerchief wrapped around his face, one could scarcely see much more than his ears and dark brown eyes.

The brazen man grabbed Mary just as she finished turning the key in the lock and pulled on the door knob. Wrapping his right arm around her neck in a submissive choke hold, he started to push her struggling, elderly body with his left hand. Mary was now trying to scream, but was unable to do so as her attacker tightened his choke hold around her frail neck. Exhaustion overtook her quickly as he finally forced her through the doorway into her kitchen.

Mary was surprised when the man released his skintight grip from her neck as she fell forward and downward to her knees. Turning to see where he was, she was taken aback to see her attacker was now doing battle with a taller, blond-haired man. As the two men grappled and brawled; the attacker's ball cap and handkerchief were ripped off. As Mary's blond-haired defender chased her assailant out the

kitchen door and down the alleyway behind her home; she realized she knew the man as Bobby Taylor; yet she had never laid eyes on the other fellow before.

Regaining her composure and after closing and locking the kitchen door, she made her way into the living room where her black rotary telephone sat on the far end table. Dialing the police department phone number made her less afraid as Buddy Wilson's reassuring voice came on the line. Describing the terrible events that had just taken place, she waited patiently for help to arrive; even though she was trembling uncontrollably.

Det. Miller flipped his cigarette out the black-and-whites window as he, and Officer Hendrix responded immediately to Buddy's radio call. They did a quick drive through of the alleyway to make sure no one was still in the area.

Officer Hendrix tried the front door finding it locked, she knocked loudly and called out, "Mary Achtenberg, its Det. Miller and Officer Hendrix! Can you come open the door for us?!"



She opened the door holding a cold washcloth to her neck, and motioned for them to come in and have a seat. Sherry got out her notepad and pencil in anticipation of jotting down her official report notes.

Det. Miller started the questioning, “Mary, Buddy told us Bobby Taylor assaulted you. Do you need us to drive you over to Doc Pearlman’s office? He can make sure you’re okay.”

“No, I don’t need the Doctor for now, I took some headache powder a few minutes ago while I was waiting for you to arrive. Nothing broken I dare say, but there’s going to be some bruising around my neck come tomorrow.” She uttered through her strained voice.

Hendrix chimed in, “Buddy said you told him Bobby Taylor was wearin’ a dark colored hat and a blue handkerchief around his face. Would that be a correct statement?”

“Yes, and it was a dark-brown baseball cap. Both are laying on my kitchen floor. I wouldn’t have recognized him if the blond-haired man hadn’t pulled it off during their fight.” Mary said adjusting the cold cloth to the other side of her throbbing neck.

“We’ll take those items when we leave. So you don’t recollect ever seeing the blond haired man before today?”

Sherry continued.

“No, never seen him, but I’m sure glad he came along. God knows what that dirty hoodlum was going to do to me.”

“You sure you don’t want us to drive you over to Doc’s office?” Miller asked again.

“I’ll be fine, just you go get that Taylor boy and lock him up.”

“Yes ma’am, we will,” Sherry promised as the two headed out in pursuit of Bobby Taylor and the blond-haired mystery man.

News of Mary’s assault spread over the telephone wires like a prairie fire. Many townfolk went lookin for that no-good scoundrel, Bobby Taylor. Wouldn’t be long before he’d be spotted, and his whereabouts reported to law enforcement.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Bozeman Café, which was owned and operated by Gerald and Cindy Bozeman, was humming with all kinds of gossip concerning the murders of Martha Camp and Terri Helms; not to mention the Bobby Taylor assault on Mary Achtenberg.

The simple café could accommodate some sixty people if need be; nevertheless, it usually sported only ten to fifteen through the week for lunch and dinner hours, respectfully. Saturday evening being the big-crowd night where up to pert-near fifty customers would descend to eat, play cards and have a merry-old-time indeed. Of course, closed on Sunday's out of respect for the Lord's Day of rest, as were most businesses.

Artless walls displayed only the local photographs of families and friends alike; with first, second, and third ribbon awards from the area school events which entailed track, baseball, and football; and let us not fail to mention the 4-H prize winner's achievements.

Other such items of triumph were small plastic trophies announcing the topnotch winners of such events as watermelon seed spitting, horseshoes, cow roping, horse races, and things of that general nature; all proudly exhibited for all to gaze upon while satisfying their hunger pangs, and their need to socialize.

All-in-all it was a pleasant little establishment; where one could feast on plain cuisine such as meatloaf and gravy, chicken fried steak and home cooked grits; and all at a reasonable price to boot.

Sitting at the far end of the café were Nigel and Mable Zeeks who were enjoying their lunch, or at least, Nigel was trying to enjoy his.

“You know it’s those damn aliens that killed Terri Helms. They were probably after old man Darnell’s bull and she got in the way. You know they mutilate animals all the time around these parts,” Mable whispered to her husband.

Nigel had warned her about talking openly about such things; for fear the authorities would come and lock her up in the nuthouse. “Hush now, don’t go gettin’ yourself all riled up. Like I said before, not everyone believes in such things dear.”

“Oh, they believe all right, they’re just scared to speak up. Just a bunch of frightened sheep. Just do what they’re told to do. It’s pathetic if you ask me.”

“Now sugarplum, please, let’s just finish up and head home. No sense making waves; especially since the poor sheep couldn’t care less about what we have to say on the subject of spacemen,” he said trying to pacify her.

“Whatever you say dear, but you know I’m right.” Nigel was the only person alive who Mable trusted; all others could chew tobacco and die as far as she was concerned.

“Father Lonigan stopped by the barber shop earlier, and asked if we were planning on attending Martha Camp’s funeral next week. I told him we’d be there. She was a fine woman, and a good wife to Beau.” Nigel commented softly as he wasn’t sure how Mable would respond.

“Are you kidding me? That woman never had a kind word to say about me, you, or anybody else for that matter.” Mable was starting to get riled-up as usual.

“Now sugarplum...” Nigel saw several of the other diners glancing their way; whispering and pointing, he was now

becoming a tad fretful. Over the years he'd developed stomach problems; which Doc Otis Pearlman, now fifty-five, potbellied and half-bald, jokingly said could only be cured by a swift divorce from you-know-who.

“Don't ‘sugarplum’ me. You know it was her nutty husband who killed her; and she probably deserved it.”

“For heaven's sake dear, Beau didn't kill his wife, and Martha wasn't a bad person. Many folks here bouts loved her very much. Martha never spoke to you because you didn't speak to her. Now isn't that spot-on sugarplum?” Continuing to whisper in hopes she would settle down a bit as his stomach was starting to gurgle; yet it was not to be.

“Beau Camp's ‘cheese-done-slid-off-his-cracker’ a long time ago, and everybody knows it! I can't believe they haven't locked that crazy bastard up by now; and Martha Camp never gave you the time-of-day, so stop talkin' her up! Just another high-toned snob lookin down-her-nose like Beau's dead mother did!” She yelled. Mad-Dog-Mable was very truculent with her opinions; yet, as more often than not; she could dish it out with gusto, but could not take it in kind.

Buddy Wilson was sitting at the short, eleven-stooled counter, and like the others he could not help but overhear Mable's little diatribe concerning the Camp's. Winking at Cindy Bozeman, who was topping off his cup of coffee, "Old Mad-Dog-Mable is at it again."

"She's all bark and no bite, so I don't pay her no heed," Cindy said with a big toothy-grin, "and don't you be tryin' to get a rise outta her either, you hear me Buddy?" She pointed and wiggled her finger right in his chubby face, "And stop tellin' everybody about her 'catnapping by the little-green-men' story, it's not even that funny."

"Yes ma'am, I hear ya." Replying with a huge grin of his own.

Just two tables over from the Zeeks sat the Mueller's; Herbert, and his charming wife Hazel. They close the Drug store every day for one hour, so they can come and enjoy a leisurely meal; that is, except on those occasions when the Zeeks show up. No eye contact, eating quickly and making a bee-line for the exit, was their way of avoiding Mad-Dog-Mable and her nauseating temperament. It was displeasing

enough to have to wait on her at their Drug Store; so they were motivated, to say the least, to dodge her if at all possible when out and about in the community.

Doc Otis opened the door to enter, when he recognized Mad-Dog-Mable's voice, he momentarily froze in his tracks. Quick thinking on his part saved the day as he turned around, and made a hasty retreat, almost running smack-dab into Ruth Anderson who had just come up behind him. Excusing himself, he fled the café as though he'd just robbed the place.

Doc Otis came to Oklahoma some twenty-seven years ago, from a small town in Mississippi named 'Boonville.' On his way to Dover, Nevada to visit relatives, Doc was just passin' by Saint Cloud when his car blew a radiator hose; which he was told would take several days to receive the parts and make repairs.

During that time, he met a waitress named Bonne Sue Greenfield, and he was so smitten, he stayed and set up shop. Otis and Bonne Sue were wed just four months later. For seventeen and a half years they lived a fairytale life, or so that's how Otis tells the story.



There were a few bumps in the road along the way; two miscarriages early on, but that never stopped them from tryin' for children. Yet they were not to be blessed with any; and their life together was still fulfilling right up to the day Bonne Sue suffered a massive stroke. She lived for thirteen days then suffered another stroke which ended her life. Within the month, Doc took up self-medicator himself with Vodka; it's been a demon on his back ever since.

Ruth wasn't sure what to make of Doc's antics, until she herself entered and spotted Mable. She made her way to the counter and quietly sat down. Cindy Bozeman saw her come in and retrieved the covered dinner plate of fried chicken, green beans, and fried taters she had prepared a few minutes earlier.

"I hope Mary enjoys the chicken, I made it the way she likes, not too crispy," Cindy said handing the covered plate over to Ruth.

"Oh, I'm sure she will. Poor dear, her neck is still sore from that Taylor boy bout. How much do I owe you?" Ruth said unsnapping her little tan change purse with its folded up money and assorted coins.

“Never you mind; you just tell Mary; me and Gerald are prayin’ for her speedy recovery, and we hope they catch that no good Taylor boy soon.”

“Thank you for your kindness, I know it means a lot to poor Mary how folks have been stoppin’ by with food and the like.” Ruth started on her way out...

“Look at that Nigel,” Mable said turning and pointing at Ruth, “sheep...nothin’ but scared sheep around here I tell ya.”

Ruth didn’t stop to engage Mable; for she had already experienced the wrath of Mable on several other occasions, and since she didn’t fare so well during those encounters, she didn’t even look back as she fled the café. Wasn’t long before the Zeeks finished; Nigel headed back to the solace of the Barber Shop and Mable headed for home.

After they exited the café, Buddy said in his most somber, yet comical voice, “God help the poor man or beast who crosses her path.” Pretending to cross himself; Cindy just rolled her eyes and went on about her business, trying to ignore his antics.

Gerald and Cindy were both thirty-five, born and raised in Saint Cloud. They had lots of family and friends hereabouts. All faithful and loyal Catholics to be sure. They had been running the café for only the last four years. It was called ‘Harry’s Eatery’ before they purchased it from the elderly Donaldson’s; who sold out and headed for California or so the story goes.

Berta Franklin rolled in and parked herself on an adjacent stool next to Buddy, a man she knew intimately. Berta was the wife of Sam Franklin who was the owner of Franklin’s Market. Berta was thirty-seven years old and a plump, sassy woman with dark auburn hair that hung to her shoulders, and sported two inch bangs. Not her real hair color, but it did make her look very appealing to Buddy.

Sam Franklin, who just turned forty a month ago, was of medium build and stood five foot ten inches. Hardly ever seen without his special-ordered red baseball cap, which he used to conceal his rather large bald spot on the back of his narrow head—had a penchant for dallying with the local harlot’s, that is, until that fateful night his wife found out.

The Franklin's were separated; especially since divorce was a no-no for so-called good Catholic's. Father Lonigan had tried to reconcile the two; but Berta couldn't get over the fact that Sam had cheated on her with one of Johnny Hudson's whores, who worked out of Mike O'Malley's tavern; some speculatin' it was Terri Helms and none other. The story goes; Berta found out and hit Sam with an iron skillet, nearly killing him. If not for Doc Pearlman, Sam might have gotten a visit from the undertaker. So, no reunion is expected anytime soon in the foreseeable distance.

Now staying with a close female friend, Berta see's Buddy on the sly. Good Catholic or not, a woman still has her needs, and Buddy, for now, knows how to satisfy those needs. Most folks know about them meeting on the sly, but to be polite, they pretend otherwise. Yet, most feel Berta could do oh so much better than Buddy, but, then again, who knows what virtues a woman sees in such a grubby little man.

Later, after sundown, the town appeared peaceable and silent. Folks settled in for the evening as the night sky filled with millions of twinkling starlight's. All would be as it should

on this uneventful evening; no bogymen were lurking about seeking mayhem, or so the fearful prayed.

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### POLICE BAFFLED SAYS MAYOR CARVER

Mayor Carver said the police were following up on clues found at the crime scenes of Martha Camp and Terri Helms; yet was unable to say what clues had been found. It is unknown at this time whether the police are withholding information from the Mayor, or if they are simply incompetent and just trying to keep the local community from panicking.

Further developments will be reported promptly by this newspaper.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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Fifty-nine and broad shouldered, Brent Carver had been Mayor for the last eighteen years; always running unopposed in

every election. Not because he was the perfect man for the job; more like, nobody else wanted to fool with the low-paid position.

A towering figure of a man; more to do with his weight of over three hundred pounds, than his height, which was still impressive at six-foot two-inches. Hazel-green eyes, full head of soft-whitish-gray hair cut short and parted on the right side. Lots and lots of liver spots dotted his large forehead and hands; a very substantial drinker without a doubt. Doc Otis said he'd be mighty surprised if Carver made it to age sixty-five; of course, Doc never had the mettle to say it to his face, and him bein known to pull a cork or two himself.

Mayor Carver stormed into Chief Hudson's office and slammed his copy of the Saint Cloud Gazette on his desk, "Have you read today's Gazette? That little snake took everything I said and twisted it into this pack of lies!"

Chief Hudson looked at the small newspaper, and then leaned back in his chair as he calmly folded his hands in his lap, "Now Brent, did I not warn you before about talking to the press?"

“Well, yes, but my god Frances, that little whipper-snapper changed what I said into this heap of bullshit. I’ve got a good mind to go over there and give that little snot a good old fashion talkin’ to!” he roared pacing back and forth in front of Chief Hudson’s desk.

“Now, now, what did I just say? You go over there, and that little half-wit Jonah will just make more headlines out of whatever you say. You just need to relax and settle down now. Folks around here know the score. Just let us do our job; and once we get the culprits, all will be back to normal again. Just stop giving interviews and you’ll come out smellin’ like a bushel of roses; trust me on this, okay?”

“Stupid little bastard, I’d like to put my foot up his skinny little ass, that’s what I’d like to do!” he barked as he stormed out of the Chiefs office.

Chief Hudson just shook his head in disbelief as his old friend took flight. Some people just let anger get the better of themselves, he thought.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Buddy was reading a Superman comic; daydreaming of saving damsel's in distress while the whole world cheered and called out his name. The ringing from the telephone snapped him back into reality, "Police department."

"Get some black-and-white's over to the Nelson farm; I just saw that Taylor boy not more than fifteen minutes ago lurking around in back of the old barn!" She yelled into the telephone.

Buddy recognized Mable's voice right off, "Now settle down and tell me again where you saw Bobby Taylor?"

The old Nelson farm was just a stone's throw outside of town. Mable had been driving back from Millersburg when she spotted the little fiend. The Nelson farm had been abandoned back in the late thirty's; the Nelson's lost everything in the ensuing depression and old man Nelson hung himself in the barn's hayloft as a result; the Dalton Bank later foreclosed, but never could find any new takers as the 'haunted' rumors got passed around. The old house, barn, and small stable had fallen into ruins. Most folks said old man

Nelson's ghost was still there; yet seemed a good place to hide out for someone on the lamb.

“Jesus H. Christ, are you deaf, or just plain dimwitted? I said I just saw him over at the old Nelson's place, back behind the barn... get some men over there before he skedaddles!” She shrieked.

“Okay Mrs. Zeeks, I'll send some officers right now.” Buddy saw Det. Miller in his office teaching Officer Hendrix how to properly fill out a parking ticket. After interrupting, he relayed Mable's message and the two headed out quick time.

Sherry pulled away from the curb and floored it as she next flipped on the siren and the big red single-flash light on its rooftop. Miller had just lit a Camel and puffed on it as he braced himself for another of Sherry's hair raisin rides. Once they got out of the main part of town, Miller turned off the siren and red-light.

“Why'd you do that sir?” Sherry asked as they sped down the gravel dusty road not far from their destination.

“No sense alerting Taylor we're coming.”

“Oh... good thinking sir,” she replied as she began to slow down; the old cruiser was starting to fishtail in the loose gravel a bit.

Det. Miller had Officer Hendrix pull into the long narrow half-gravel, half-dirt lane that led up to the old decrepit house. As they exited the black-and-white they heard a noise which sounded like an old creaky wooden door. It came from the direction of the barn which was about two hundred and fifty feet behind the house.

They gradually made their way over to the right side of the mid-sized red-faded barn. Miller spoke quietly, “I’m going to enter through the front; you go around back in case he tries to run, you understand?”

“Yes sir, I do.” She whispered and nodded her head in the affirmative.

Miller turned and started to make his way to the front set of double-wooden barn doors. Sherry drew her police issued baton and firmly held it with both hands as she had been trained to do; then slowly made her way to the only door located on the backside of the old structure.

Grasping the corroded latch, he slowly tried to disengage one side of the double barn doors, but it let out a loud squeal as it finally gave way under his strength. Bobby Taylor heard it and leaped to his feet; as he had been sitting on an old tractor tire, resting and contemplating his next move.

Bolting through the rear door, Bobby Taylor ran smackdab into Officer Hendrix. She was standing astride the door ready for action. She struck Bobby just above his knees with her full force; Babe Ruth couldn't have swung it any harder.

Miller stepped through the front door and waited several seconds for his eyes to adjust to the darkness of the barn. Totally unaware that Taylor had already fled, he slowly scanned the darkened areas searching for his prey.

Excruciating pain now gripped Bobby's legs as he was now propelled forward, chest-first into the dirt. Reacting quickly, he tried to thrust himself upward, but was struck with another heavy blow to his upper back. Sherry was relentless with her attack; she released a series of devastating strikes all over his flinching, twisting body. Bobby finally screamed out; begging

her to stop her assault as the unbearable pain of her blows registered home.

Miller now spied the partially opened rear door; moving toward it he now heard the commotion that was in progress out behind the barn. Racing to the door, he couldn't believe what was taking place, "Stop it! Stop it right now! Sherry?!" Miller finally grabbed her and shook her hard.

Dropping her baton, she now realized she was out-of-control; yet, she immediately regained her composure. "I'm so sorry sir, I...don't know...what happened...I..."

Miller picked up her baton and handed it to her, "Are you okay, did he hurt you," he said looking her up and down.

"Uh, no sir...I'm good." Replacing her baton in its holder, she smoothed out her uniform, and tucked in her shirt tail. Now standing at attention she remained silent as Det. Miller attended to Bobby Taylor.

"Please don't hit me anymore...please." Bobby pleaded with his arms still covering his head.

“It’s Detective Miller Bobby,” he said squatting down and trying to pull his arms away so he could see him. “You’re okay, just relax. Can you sit up?”

Bobby slowly turned, and tried to sit up as Miller assisted him to a sitting position. As Bobby looked at Officer Hendrix he bellowed, “You didn’t have to hit me like that! I would have given up!”

Miller slapped Bobby across the face, “Settle down right now! You know better than to run from the law!” He shouted to take control of Bobby.

Bobby was taken aback by Miller’s slap. Miller stood up, “Alright, let’s get you on your feet...can you make it to our squad-car?”

With help from Det. Miller, Bobby was assisted to the black-and-white as Sherry followed behind the two men, with one hand on her baton, and the other on her holstered revolver. Miller helped him into the back seat.

Sherry drove as Miller road in the back with the Taylor boy. Their first stop was at Doc Pearlman’s office. Doc said no broken bones, but said a few ribs might be fractured, so he

wrapped a strong bandage around Bobby's chest. Said he needed rest and several days to mend, and that there would be lots of bruising; but nothing life threatening at this point in time.

Their next stop was the jail, where Bobby was booked-in for assaulting Mary Achtenberg at her home. After placing him in his cell, Officer Hendrix went to Det. Millers office; he told her to report to him, when she was done processing the Taylor boy.

Det. Miller's door was standing wide open as she approached. Knocking as he looked up, he motioned for her to enter and sit.

As Miller sat back in his squeaky office chair, "So, Officer Hendrix, just what the hell were you thinking when you beat-the-hell out of that suspect?!" Roaring as his face flashed red.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Answering the telephone, Ruth Anderson was pleased to hear her old friend's voice on the other end, "So, how are you holding up? Is your neck doing better? Are we still going shopping this Friday?"

Mary new Ruth so well indeed; she waited patiently as Ruth rattled off her questions not stopping to take a breath, "Well dear, I'm doing just fine at the moment. My neck is still a little stiff; most of the bruising has just about disappeared, so I'm glad of that. I was gettin' tired of wearin a scarf around my neck. People can be so rude with their staring you know."

"Oh yes, I know what you mean." Ruth chimed in.

"As for Friday, I'm looking forward to our little shopping trip to Millersburg. I can't recall the last time I was there, can you?"

"Well, no, not right off I can't remember. Seems like a coons age since we've been over there. We're doin' lunch at that elegant little eatery, where the waiters all wear those fancy little bowties, aren't we?" Ruth put forth.



“You bet your bottom dollar sister, I’ve been lookin’ forward to this little adventure for a good spell now. I truly can’t wait.” Mary gushed, “Oh, did I tell you that Buddy Wilson called me, and said they needed me to come down to the police station?”

“Oh my, did he say what for?”

“Yeah...said they needed a formal statement about what happened when that Taylor boy grabbed me. I told Buddy I’d be down later tomorrow afternoon.”

“That Buddy Wilson, you know that low-life is still having his way with Berta, Sam’s wife.” Ruth was waiting for her chance to get in some juicy gossip.

Mary was more than happy to oblige her, “Oh yes, I know. Did you hear he gave her a yeast infection, on account of he rarely takes a bath?”

“What?!” Ruth feigned astonishment; even though she had already heard this rumor from Hazel Mueller last night, when she was picking up her pinworm medicine at the drug store. She wasn’t quite sure how she became infected; but, with the little white worms crawling inside her intestines; and as anyone

who has had pinworms knows, they crawl out of your anus at night to lay their eggs, nothing is worse than anal itch. Yet, a good dose of little purple pills, prescribed by old Doc Otis, turns the little suckers, yes, you guessed it, purple. Within a few days, all is said and done for those little invaders, for death is imminently at hand. Of course, a good dish of raw cabbage gets the same results.

Mary continued, “And I saw her comin’ out of Doc’s office last Tuesday, I bet she’s knocked-up.”

“Holy Mother, Mary, and Joseph!” That was something Ruth hadn’t heard, “What do you suppose Sam will do if he finds out?!” She could hardly contain her excitement over such jaw-dropping news.

“Most likely be another murder, I reckon.” Mary was the queen of gossip, or so she thought.

“Oh my god, Berta’s playin’ with fire. Well Mary, I’ll let you get some rest now, you take care of yourself and I’ll see you Friday.” She couldn’t wait to start burning up the phone lines, callin’ everyone she knew with this juicy new tidbit of information.

“Okay dear, I’ll see ya soon.” Mary hung up the telephone and grinned; she looked like the proverbial cat who ate the canary, or, would that little tall-tale be the omen that comes back to bite her in her proverbial ass? Only time would tell, as the sayin’ goes.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Miller leaned forward as his chair squeaked again, still red faced, he stared straight at Sherry, “Well, I’m waiting Officer Hendrix,” he used her official title due to the seriousness of her offense, as he seen it to be.

“Sir, I truly don’t know what came over me.” She stood at attention in front of his desk.

“Officer Hendrix, you mean to stand there, and tell your Superior Officer that you damn near beat a suspect to death, and you have no idea why?! What kind of bullshit are you trying to peddle here?!” Miller was beside himself with anger.

“I’m sorry sir,” was all she could muster in a low voice.

“Well then, here’s what I have to say, you are suspended for two days without pay. During those two days, I want you to think hard about what you did. You embarrassed the department, you embarrassed yourself, and most of all you embarrassed me!” he howled.

For a moment, Sherry started to tear-up, but quickly regained her bearing, “As I said, I’m sorry for my misconduct. May I be excused sir?”

“Yes, get out...before I...just, get outta my sight.” Miller said pointing at the door; Sherry turned and strutted out of the office.

Miller, now resting his face in his hands, felt remorse at what he just did, yet hoped in the long run, it would make her a better officer; one he could ultimately be proud of. Later, he would make his way to the Chief’s office, and apprise him of what had occurred between Bobby Taylor and Officer Hendrix; and the punishment he had invoked. Miller knew the Chief would back him up on his decision of a two-day suspension without pay.

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### BOBBY TAYLOR ARRESTED FOR ASSAULT

Police arrested Bobby Taylor for assaulting Mary Achtenberg as she tried to enter her home last Tuesday afternoon. Taylor was caught a few days later hiding out at the old abandoned Nelson farm, thanks to the diligent tipoff by Mable Zeeks. Detective Thomas Miller and Officer Sherry Hendrix made the collar.

Police are not saying what the suspects' motive was in assaulting his victim; more likely, the police don't have a clue as to what actually occurred, would be this reporters' presumption. More will be revealed as the facts of the case come to light.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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Chief Hudson storms into Det. Miller's office waving the Saint Cloud Gazette wildly in the air, "Have you seen this?! Clueless! Clueless! What is that little brat's problem?! Who the hell does he think he is, Chet Huntley?! Why the nerve of that goofy little moron; saying we don't have a clue as to what's going on!"

"Now Frances, don't have a cow, just remember, freedom of the press you know." Miller chuckled.

"Why, people who read this malarkey are going to think we're a bunch of knuckleheads!" he barked as he threw the Gazette into Miller's wastepaper basket.

"Well, I don't know what to tell you, and as a matter of fact, I'm just getting ready to go interrogate Bobby Taylor in just a few minutes."

Calming down a bit, Chief Hudson wiped his brow with his white handkerchief, "Oh...I know you're doing your best. It just burns my butt that Jonah keeps reporting such horse-hockey. I didn't mean to come in here yelling like some wild Indian. Please forgive me Thomas."

“Say no more, I totally understand where you’re comin’  
from. He gets me riled up a might at times.”

The two men smiled at each other as only old friends could.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Berta Franklin sashayed into Milly's dress shop; she normally doesn't purchase anything, just stops in for the latest gossip, "So, anything new around here?"

Margaret Milly was a thirty-two-year-old spinster, who had run the dress shop for seven years now. Of average height and looks, a little on the lean side. Brown short hair with matching eyes. Came from Peacock, New Mexico with her younger sister, Alma. Tragedy struck just three weeks after the two sisters set up the dress shop; Alma was found dead in the rear of the store early one morning. Earl Schulz conducted an autopsy; the results came back that an artery popped due to a brain aneurysm.

Margaret stays to herself most of the time, but she can be found every Sunday afternoon back of the church where the cemetery is located. Always fresh flowers on Alma's gravestone; people rumored there was more to the story than was being told, such as they weren't truly sisters at all, but

nevertheless, Margaret was slowly welcomed into the community.

She was one of the few in town who spoke openly to Berta about her and Buddy Wilson. “Nothing new, unless you’re talking about how Buddy put you in the family way.”

Berta stopped looking at dresses and wheeled around to face her, “What did you say?”

“You heard me right; so...what you gonna call it if it’s a boy, Buddy Junior?” She chuckled.

“Who said I’m with child?!” She shrieked as she blushed crimson.

“If it’s a girl, you could call it Budetta.” Now Margaret gave out a gaudy belly-laugh followed by a series of chuckles and giggles.

“That’s not funny! Who told you I’m pregnant?! Stop laughing at me! I mean it Margaret; you better stop it right now!” She stood defiant with her hands on her hips.

The more infuriated Berta grew, the funnier it became for Margaret. She was hysterical with laughter to the point she had trouble catching her breath.

Berta could take no more, “Screw you Margaret! I hope you choke to death on a chicken bone!” She bellowed as she stormed off, slamming the door hard behind her. Margaret had tears streaming down her face; but suddenly stopped when she realized, she had wet herself.

Only several minutes had passed before Berta reappeared, and was clearly in an improved frame of mind; as she popped her head through the door, “Can I come in?”

“Oh, don’t be silly, get in here. I haven’t laughed that hard in over a year. Berta honey, you really gotta stop bein’ so thin-skinned over what other folks say about you and Buddy. Learn to roll with the punches doll. Who cares what other folk’s think; they’re just a bunch of gossipin’ naysayers.” Margaret stated flat-out as she was using a towel to dry herself.

Berta entered and smiled, “When you’re right, your right. To hell with those ingrates.”

“So tell me now, what’s it like making whoopee with ol’ Buddy?” She asked.

“What...you really want to know?” Berta asked looking her straight in the eyes.

“Sure, you know, I’m just curious.”

“Well, I will tell you this much, he can sure ‘peel-an-apple’ if ya know what I mean.” Now both ladies broke out laughing.

A few moments later, Berta just couldn’t let it go, “Really Margaret, who told you I was knocked-up?”

Margaret busted out in hysterics once more, and was gonna need another change of undies, to be sure.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Bobby Taylor was removed from his small seven by ten cell, handcuffed, and escorted to the interrogation room where Det. Miller was already waiting. The room was painted a simple light gray, with an elongated faded wooden table, accompanied by two wooden chairs, which sat opposite each other across the table, and had obviously seen better days. There was a small electric-fan atop a scratched-up dull-white file cabinet in the far corner.

Bobby was seated after his cuffs were removed at Miller's request; the attending officer stepped outside and closed the door. Now the two men faced each other as Miller thumbed through a file with Mary Achtenberg's name on it. As Bobby fidgeted in his chair, Miller patiently read over the evidential statements and officer notes contained in the file.

Looking up slowly, Miller's eyes narrowed as he glared at Bobby; whose innate response was to humbly look down; like a small child being chastised for some unspeakable transgression.

“So Bobby, what have you to say for yourself?” Miller began, speaking in a relaxed, comfortable voice.

Bobby tuned right into the tone of his words and immediately became less afraid. “I didn’t want to hurt her; it wasn’t my idea to attack her. It was him; he made me do it.”

“Him, and just who might this ‘him’ be? Was it the blond-haired man?” Det. Miller asked patiently.

“No, the voice in my head; he said to go there and force her into the house. I didn’t want to do it, he made me do it. I’m not lying, I swear, it was all his idea. He wouldn’t leave me along. He just kept at me until I couldn’t stand it any longer; I swear I’m telling you the truth.” Bobby rattled on.

“Settle down now, it’s going to be okay, just tell me who it was you’re talking about? What voice told you to assault Mary Achtenberg? Was it God’s voice you heard?”

“No, no, no...it was...something like Lee...or Leo...something, I don’t remember, he only said his name once, it was a man’s voice, he told me to do it.” Bobby was trembling and turning paler by the minute.

“So this male voice told you to attack Mary; why her?”

“I don’t know why, he just told me when to go and to wait for her behind her house. He said he’d tell me more after I got her inside the house.”

Miller studied Bobby’s facial expressions, wondering if he was insane or just delusional, “Are you in contact with this voice right now?”

“No, I haven’t heard from him since I got caught.” Bobby was now sweating profusely.

Miller was now thinking about what Beau Camp had said about a male voice that had spoken to him, “So you’re saying you don’t have a clue what this voice wanted you to do to Mary Achtenberg? Were you thinking of robbing her?”

“I don’t know what I was supposed to do... the voice hadn’t told me yet. That guy jumped me before I could find out.”

“Who was the man who jumped you?” Miller continued.

“I don’t know; I never saw him around here before. I figured he must’ve been new in town.”

“Bobby, Bobby, Bobby... you expect me to believe you grabbed Mary, and you have no helluva idea why? And some guy you claim not to know, fought with you to save her? Don’t

feed me this crap son. You think I was born yesterday? You better fess up to what you were really gonna do, or you're lookin' at some hard time in the slammer; you hear me boy?" Miller was staring straight into Bobby's bloodshot eyes.

"I swear to Jesus that what I'm sayin' is the god's honest truth sir." Bobby's pleading didn't faze Miller; he'd heard it all before from better liar's than him.

"Officer!" Miller had Bobby taken back to his cell; figuring he'd let him sweat for a while and bring him back tomorrow morning for round two of his questioning. Since Sherry gave him such a beating, he figured he'd let her have a crack at him.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Cindy just poured a second cup of coffee for Buddy, who was at his usual spot at the counter, when Miss Stella came into the diner. Miss Stella enjoyed her daily afternoon visit to the Bozeman Café. Cindy kept a special order of herbal tea just for her.

“Well, good afternoon. I’ll set the kettle on for ya.” Cindy said as Miss Stella approached the two.

Buddy and Stella were friendly, but not close. He enjoyed yanking her chain from time-to-time concerning her so-called special gift. “Why Miss Stella, it’s so nice to see you again.”

Miss Stella was a very patient person and knew all too well how Buddy liked to play his little sarcastic mind games. “It’s nice to see you too.”

Buddy turned his head toward Cindy and gave a little wink. He then turned to face Stella and held out his right hand with the palm turned up. “Do you read palms Miss Stella?”

“Now Buddy, you know very well I don’t read palms.” She said ever so politely.

Buddy looked at Cindy with a big smile showing his yellow stained teeth. He winked again as Cindy shook her head at his antics.

Miss Stella startled Buddy when she reached out and cupped his right hand between her hands. His head snapped back as he looked at her face. She closed her eyes and took in a deep breath and slowly released it. Her voice was low and steady, “I see you standing in a golden field of wheat with the sun upon your face. Yet, coming toward you I see a storm moving very fast. You turn to run for cover, but it is too late, the dark swirling storm overtakes you. It wants you to feel its anger.” As she opened her eyes she let go of his hand.

Buddy glanced at Cindy, then back to Stella. “And just what is that gibberish supposed to mean, may I ask?”

“Some of the messages I receive are just symbolic; but if you would like more information you might stop by tomorrow and I’d be glad to see what more we can get from my crystal-ball.” She looked at Cindy and gave her own wink.

Buddy rolled his eyes, “Yeah, I know this little game. I pay you, what do you call it...a love donation and my dead grandma comes and tells me I’m...”

Buddy flinched as Cindy leaned over the counter and smacked him on the shoulder. “Dag-nab-it Buddy Wilson, don’t you dare make fun of Miss Stella’s gift!” She barked.

He was in hog heaven; so pleased he’d gotten such a rile out of them, or so he thought. Miss Stella simply pointed toward her favorite table in the back corner as Cindy nodded, “I’ll bring your tea right out dear.”

“Finish your coffee and then it’s time to go smartass.”  
Cindy said pointing her finger right at his nose.

Buddy gave her a mock ‘yes ma’am’ as he left his ten-cents on the counter and strolled out not looking back toward Miss Stella, yet he was grinning from ear-to-ear.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

The following day, Det. Miller reported to work early. Still somewhat upset with Officer Hendrix, he made certain he drove his own car, and rode by himself, which made his wife very happy; even though she wasn't the reason why he did so.

Sitting at his desk, he pondered over the crime files and lost track of time. A soft knock on his door announced Chief Hudson's appearance.

"When did you get in?" Miller asked.

"Just a few minutes ago," the Chief said sipping coffee from his favorite blue mug. "Is Earl's report on Terri Helms done yet?"

"I don't know; I've been busy with this Bobby Taylor stuff."

"I'll walk to Earl's office and find out if he's finished," he said backing out of the doorway. Twenty minutes later the Chief returned carrying two folders.

"What'd Earl have to say?" Miller inquired.

"I think his drinking is starting to get at him. He keeps saying he already gave us the reports, that poor man. Someone should talk with him about tapering off. He just kept insisting, so I just grabbed the reports off his desk and bolted outta there. Those cut open dead bodies just give me the heebie-jeebies. You were right about the bull not killing Terri Helms at Darnell's place. A strange thing, her purse is missing, but as you saw she still had her earrings, wrist watch, and several rings on. We did learn that Terri Helms is twenty-six and separated from her husband. She was beaten and received injuries around her head, face, neck, chest and lower body. Her left arm was broken, and she received a hard blow near her lower spine," he read aloud from the report. "The probable cause of death is blunt-force-trauma. Also she was ripped up from the barbwire, with gashes and cuts all over her body. There were many cuts on her back, like she had been thrown against the fence several times. Earl wanted to know if you and Officer Hendrix, might have caused some of those injuries when you removed her body from the fence. He says you were in a foul mood at the crime scene."

"Does that jerk think we grabbed her by the ankles, and yanked on her until she came loose?!" Det. Miller exploded. The stress of recent events was now becoming apparent.

"Simmer down, I think he's still smarting from the lecture you gave him for stirring up dust on the lane," the Chief laughed. "Want to see the autopsy photographs?"

"Sure," he said taking a deep breath as he took the folder from him.

"I heard her husband is somewhere out on the east coast; run a check on him. He goes by Gary Helms and drives a semi-truck for some South Carolina company, I think. Here's Martha Camp's autopsy report, be sure Fairchild gets to see these reports. You know how he gets when he's left in the dark."

"What's her report say?" Miller said reaching for the file.

"Hammer definitely was the murder weapon used. Also, there's no evidence of sexual disturbance, you know, rape or whatnot."

"These two deaths are completely different; except for the missing purses. Another strange thing, they're friends and both were heading for the bingo hall." Miller imparted.

The Chief grunted and stared at the telephone; wishing he could place the muffled voice that reported the Terri Helm's incident. The more he thought about it, the more uncertain he was that it was a man's voice. Glancing over at Det. Miller, "Any ideas?"

Miller slowly lit a cigarette, "Nope."

"Well, keep me informed if something shows up." The Chief said as he ambled back toward his office.

Miller decided it was time for lunch. Walking out into the narrow hallway toward the main exit, he found Sherry Hendrix, who had just returned from her suspension practicing her fast draw, and aiming at the water cooler.

"Yes sir, just getting a drink, sir," she said uncomfortably as she snapped to attention and holstered her revolver; knowing full well she was already on thin ice.

"If the water cooler gives you any trouble, put the cuffs on it and lock it in a cell," he laughed as he passed on by. Det.

Miller was not one to hold a grudge, or stay mad for any length of time. Sherry now felt reassured by his hallway banter, and knew she was back in his good graces; yet nothing lasts forever, as she would soon find out.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Buddy was now using the new way the Chief wanted the telephone to be answered, since several complaints had been forthcoming, “Saint Cloud police department, this is Buddy Wilson, how may I help you?” He had written the phrase on a slip of paper so he could remember it correctly.

“I need to speak to the Chief right now!” Mable yelled into the phone.

Buddy rolled his eyes as he drew in a quick breath, “I’m sorry Mrs. Zeeks, but the Chief is out of the office right now on official business,” he said lying through his stained teeth. The Chief told Buddy how to handle any future calls from Mad-Dog-Mable, as he didn’t want to be bothered with her tomfooleries anymore.

“My god, just who is in charge down there?!” She thundered.

“Please tell me what has happened Mrs. Zeeks.” Buddy sighed as he leaned back in his chair.

“The gray aliens have taken Mandrake! I just know they are planning to kill him and cut him open to look at his innards! You have to do something right now before it’s too late!” she shouted pleadingly.

“Mrs. Zeeks, I’m going to dispatch three black-and-white’s right now to search for Mandrake. As soon as we have anything to report, I’ll call you, so stay near your telephone, okay?” This was the Chief’s new plan on dealing with her.

“Oh, thank you so much, you should be the Chief-of-Police. Chief Hudson doesn’t know his butt from his elbow.” She hung up and finally felt someone cared about her poor helpless Mandrake.

As Buddy hung up, he leaned back in his chair; he placed his hands behind his head as a most devilish smile now graced his chubby face.

Nigel who was resting in his easy chair, “So sugarplum, what did they have to say this time?”

“Buddy said they were sending out three police cars to search the neighborhood right now.”

He knew better, but wasn't about to rock the boat, he had felt her sting many a time early on in their marriage, "Well, good to hear."

## CHAPTER THIRTY

Det. Miller daydreamed while Officer Hendrix tried to stay under the speed limit. She braked hard as she parked at the curb in front of Beau Camp's house. Miller popped a Camel in his mouth and lit up. After inhaling deeply, he slowly departed the cruiser and as the smoke blew forth from his nostrils, he pulled his trousers up a notch or so. The wild ride over had worked them down a tad as Sherry's tire-squealing turns kept him busy trying to keep from sliding all over the front seat.

They stepped onto the front porch of the well maintained home as Sherry knocked several times. Footsteps were heard approaching inside the house; as the door opened revealing Beau, he observed them but didn't speak.

"The Chief wants you to come to the station for further questions," Det. Miller said noticing how Beau had calmed down from his earlier interview.

"I'm having coffee and cookies; will you join me while I get ready?" Beau finally spoke.

"That sounds nice," Officer Hendrix replied as Miller flashed her a surprised look. They both sat on the sofa as Beau vanished into the kitchen. They listened as he seemed to be whispering to someone in the other room, and then suddenly reappeared with a tray.

"Would you like cream or sugar?" he politely asked.

"Black will be fine for me," Det. Miller responded.

"A little cream for me please," Officer Hendrix said with a disarming smile.

"Who were you talking with in the kitchen?" Hendrix asked.

"No one... there's no one here but me," he said handing out their cups of coffee. "Go see for yourself if you don't believe me. Seriously, go look."

Officer Hendrix quickly moved into the kitchen and examined it closely. Beau was right, she thought, no one was there. Returning, she sat in an oversized chair next to a window as she flashed Miller a look and shrugged her shoulders.

Det. Miller sipped his coffee and noticed a change in Beau's facial expression. Obviously he was upset that Hendrix had walked into his kitchen like she did.

Beau cocked his head to one side as if listening to someone, "That bitch thinks you're a liar. Did you see her strut in there? Who does she think she is, of all the nerve?" His voice said.

Anger started to overtake him as he sat quietly in his recliner. "These people are evil. Get out of here. Run for your life. Run to the police department for safety." The voice whispered.

Bolting from the recliner, he threw his cup of coffee at Officer Hendrix. The hot liquid splashed on her neck and chest, while the cup smashed against the wall behind her. Crashing through the front screen door, Beau hauled ass up the street.

After a few moments of sheer surprise, Sherry leapt to her feet and gave chase. Det. Miller grabbed for the telephone knocking over the end table it was on. Buddy Wilson was alerted that Beau Camp had wiggled-out, and was on the run.

After running outside, Miller saw the two about seven blocks down. Revving up the black and white he now joined the chase. His U-turn in the middle of the roadway caused the car to jump the curb and skid into the yard of Mable and Nigel Zeeks. Running over Mable's prize winning rose bushes, "Son-of-a-bitch!" he cussed out loud because he knew he was gonna hear about it later. Regaining control, he steered back onto the street and floored it. The cruiser roared as loose gravel and dust flew in its wake.

After he was informed by dispatch; Chief Hudson ran down the hallway toward the front doors of the building. Rushing past three startled city workers, he reached for the door handle just as the door flew open, and Beau stormed through it. Crashing into each other which sent them both sprawling across the floor.

The startled city workers deserted the hallway in record time, and disappeared into the men's restroom seeking a safe haven. Beau jumped to his feet and broke into a dead run heading straight for the men's restroom. Officer Hendrix now

burst through the door and tripped over Chief Hudson who was trying to stand up, sending them both to the floor.

Beau's sudden appearance into the men's washroom sent all three of the city workers scrambling out in fright. They ran smackdab into Officer Hendrix; who was trying to help the Chief to his feet. All then tumbled and fell upon one another; it looked like a segment of the Three Stooges. Getting to their feet, the workers fled the building running across the street.

Det. Miller, who had lost sight of Sherry and Beau a few blocks back, now observed the city workers racing across the street; he slammed on the brakes and slid to a halt. He charged into the building as the Chief and Hendrix were just entering the restroom.

Beau was inside the last stall, and had braced himself up against the flimsy door. Hearing his heavy breathing from their grueling chase; Hendrix pulled her revolver, and aimed it at the stall door. Miller entered and signaled her to holster her weapon and step back. She looked at Chief Hudson, who nodded in approval at Miller's signal.



"Who's out there?" Beau yelled, "I can hear you, and I know you're there!"

"This is Chief Hudson; I'm with Det. Miller and Officer Hendrix."

After a moment of silence Beau softly said, "Is anyone else out there... any evil spirits?"

"No, come on out. Nothing evil is here," the Chief responded.

He opened the stall door and gradually stepped out; looking in all directions for signs of malicious demons. After satisfying himself no evil lurked about, he turned around and placed his hands behind his back; for he knew what was coming next, or so he thought.

Det. Miller handcuffed Beau, then he and Officer Hendrix escorted him to a holding cell. Sherry now excused herself to go powder-her-nose as it were; she needed to get herself ship-shape once again, since she was sweating profusely and her hair was a disaster she felt. Not to mention the coffee stain on her blouse.

Det. Miller met Chief Hudson in his office a short time later. Glancing out the window, "I'd better move the patrol car before Sherry puts a ticket on it," he said as they both laughed. Once outside, Miller lit up a Camel and noted the time on his pocket watch before going back inside.

Chief Hudson sat at his desk and rubbed his right elbow trying to sooth the pain after being knocked down and trampled. The Chief ran his hand over his head feeling for lumps as Miller entered, "This has to be the craziest thing that ever happened to me while on duty. If one more person had mauled me in the hallway, I'd have pulled my gun and started shooting," he roared with laughter.

"It looks like a size fourteen shoe print on your forehead," Miller said pointing before doubling over with laughter.

"Yes, I remember when that happened. I think it was deliberate. Those city workers could've missed me if they had wanted to. Let's take a break, have some lunch, and then you send someone to pick up Beau from his cell, and we'll all have a nice little chat."

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

As the ‘Monday Night Mystics’ settle in for their weekly séance; all are present except Beau. Miss Stella opens with a prayer of love and healing. The session begins with a fifteen-minute meditation; to attune their vibrations to each other, and to their surroundings in anticipation of those from the Unseen World; who would be communicating with them shortly.

Miss Stella works with her regular guide who goes by the name of Dr. Lyndall Rice; who communicates with her through the abilities of clairvoyance and clairaudience. The title of doctor in this case refers to the spirit kind, not the medical kind. As the group finishes their mediation, Miss Stella has already established the connection to her guide.

“Very well then, I know many have questions, so let’s get started. Mary my dear, would you like to start us off with a question?” She asked knowing in advance she would surely have questions concerning her assault by Bobby Taylor last week. She closed her eyes and waited for Mary to begin.

“Yes, I sure would. My question concerns that Taylor boy who pounced on me last week. Was his true motive just to rob me?” Mary inquired as she stared almost unblinkingly at Miss Stella.

“My guide says his intentions went much further than simple robbery.” She conveyed in her soft reassuring voice.

“Oh...so was he going to molest me?”

After a short pause Miss Stella answered, “No, my guide said that was not part of his plan.”

“Was he going to murder me?” Mary asked now holding her hands over her heart.

Miss Stella gave a gentle, yet straightforward response, “Yes, my guide says murder was his ultimate intention, but that it was not his idea to do so.”

“Whose idea was it then?” Mary asked a bit surprised.

“My guide says, for your understanding, there is a ‘dark spirit’ that is using its influence on weak minded individuals in this small community. This dark spirit once walked the earth many centuries past. In that lifetime, it practiced sorcery and black magic. Upon its death, it refused to return to the Unseen

World. It now uses these weak minded people to carry out its evil acts of lawlessness.”

“May the Saints preserve us?” Mary crossed herself.

Miss Stella said in a stronger tone of voice. “Do you have another question Mary or shall I move on to Ellen?”

Mary hurriedly rattled on as if she might lose her chance to ask another question, “Yes, I do have another question, if you don’t mind. I would like to know who that young blond-haired man was who came to my rescue? No one seems to know who he is or where he came from. Nobody remembers seeing him around town before that night, nor has anyone seen him since. I just felt the Christian thing to do is properly thank him for saving me from such a terrible fate.”

Miss Stella took in a deep breath and slowly released it. Her mind was being given a lot of information from her guide concerning the answer she was about to communicate to Mary.

“Let me start by explaining that everyone, each soul, before they are born into this physical world, have what could be called an outline of what should occur during that chosen

lifetime. This outline contains experiences and lessons that your soul needs for its personal growth and advancement.”

Mary interjects, “Who decides what lessons I’m to learn here on Earth?”

“You, yourself, plan out what you wish to experience and then go before a small, select assembly of higher beings. They review your requests and advise you on what you are truly capable of handling, as they see it, in that life you have proposed for your spiritual development. So you and your higher spiritual advisors both agree and things are put into motion from there. Okay so far?”

“Ah...yes, please continue,” Mary spoke softly as though she was a child speaking to an adult.

“Very well then, just know that there are souls who come to this plane of existence to experience such things as rape, disease, war, sickness, murder and the like. Things that may be viewed as negative; yet each thing of such a nature can teach unconditional love through many forms and many degrees of awareness. So do not judge others for what may seem like an evil or bad thing they do, or that they have done to them; for it

truly may be something they wished to experience. That of being the victim or the attacker. Sometimes souls wish to experience a negative thing from both sides. To be the attacker in one life and to be the victim in the next; like two sides of a coin as SAZARRA spoke of. Only here in the physical world can a soul experience such things as physical, mental and emotional torture or death first hand. Are you with me so far?"

Mary wasn't completely sure, but didn't want to seem less informed than the rest of the group, so she modestly said, "Yes, please go on."

"Alright then, let me now say, each person who is alive on this planet right now has a spirit companion who watches over them and helps them with their chosen lessons. Many people call them by many names; Angel, spirit companion, Archangel, or refer to Jesus or certain Saints or Mother Mary and the like. It doesn't truly matter what you call them, they will assist you whenever you call. That is their assignment, to help you grow spiritually. So as you go forth in your lifetime, they will guide you towards the lessons you chose to experience. Now, just know, you do have free-will to alter your chosen outline. If

you do go off course, your spirit companion will still try to place those lessons you chose, before being born, in your path so to speak. Now, free-will also will allow other souls who are in the human form to stray from their chosen path. This is what happened to you concerning Bobby Taylor last week.”

Mary asks, “How so?”

“My guide says it was not in your programmed outline for you to experience being murdered. It was not a lesson you chose, nor needed to experience; so it was not allowed to take place.” Miss Stella took in a deep breath and slowly expelled it.

“That seems to make some sense, but I still don’t know who that blond-haired man was who saved me?” Mary said a bit tense.

“My guide says the man you saw was what is known as a ‘walk-in’ from the Unseen World.”

“What does that mean, a walk-in?” Mary now has no clue what Miss Stella is talking about, neither did the others present.

“Most of the time, your spirit companion who oversees your life will not interfere in it because you have free-will. Only if



it concerns death or certain other events will they intervene, if the event is going to stop you from having the opportunity to learn or experience your lessons. Now if you call out or mentally ask for help, or pray for assistance, then your spirit companion comes forth to assist you with whatever your problem might be. Now then, my guide says the man who came to your rescue was not of this Earth. Once your spirit companion felt the change in your vibration he tuned in, so to speak, to see what was happening with you. Since it was not a chosen lesson for you to experience murder in this lifetime, your companion called upon a higher being to intervene. That higher being then empowered another being to penetrate into this world and stop the attack. Once the attack was halted, the walk-in as they are called simply returned to the Unseen World. That is why he was not known or seen before the event, and why no one could locate him after the event. Do you understand now?"

"Well, yes, but I'm going to think on it some more later, if that's alright?" Mary whispered.

“Yes dear, that would be fine. Later on if you have more questions just come and we’ll discuss them.” Miss Stella said in her easygoing countenance as she now continued, “Ellen, what question would you like to ask this evening?”

“I would like to know what is the cause of my arthritis and what can I do to remedy it?”

“My guide says this is a simple issue, but that they are all simple though, aren’t they? What he means by that is; there are no complex answers, the difficulty is often finding the motivation or energy to move down the path which we see as inviting. But at the present time you are not interested in changing from your current mindset, or state of being as it were. Therein is the root cause of your arthritis.”

Ellen hesitates for a moment before speaking, “I’m not sure I understand what you just said.”

“My guide says, that the love they have for you, for your world and for all of creation should allow you to see the greater good of this entire place and your impact and purpose you have here. You are always doing great work and the growth you crave is not absent because of some fault in your past, or some

impassable hurdle in your present. It is important to relieve yourself from guilt and energy of the past; it was not meant as a punishment, or to be a heavy weight on your mind. If you approach them and carry them negatively, they will impact every fiber of your being.”

The room was silent with only the negligible sounds of breathing from the group coming forth as Ellen spoke, “I’m so sorry Miss Stella, but I really don’t know what all that means.”

“Let me see if my guide can say it in a different way.”

There was a short pause and then Miss Stella began, “Your arthritis is currently stemming from self-hatred and your inability to love yourself. Because your Soul is living inside a human form, your self-hatred and feelings of undeserved love are manifesting themselves throughout your body as arthritis. It is important for you to release these feelings. Acknowledge what has or has not happened in your life, but do not see life as positive and negative. As an energy being there is no right, there is no wrong, there is simply lessons and experiences. Attach no positive or negative feelings to those events you, yourself chose. Life is not a punishment; it is about love and

developing one's self to a higher enlightened place than previously. It is important to never give up. What you may not see is the ripples that spread out all around you; the impact in 'seen' and 'unseen' places that you are having at all times. It is not important to have grand works that impact millions of life forms. You may impact one life; that life may present to you your greatest challenge, but the seed you plant may change several lifetimes of experiences for others in a very dramatic way. Is that much clearer now?"

"Oh yes, now I understand. Thank you." Ellen felt relief at now knowing she could now forgive herself and release all the regrets, anger and fear she was holding onto from past encounters with her family and so-called friends.

Miss Stella took in another deep breath preparing for the next question. "Now then Alan, what would you like to ask tonight?"

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Released from the holding cell, Beau is escorted to the Chief's office. Det. Miller points to a chair as he enters.

"Did you know that cell has mice running around on the floor?" he complained, "And I counted two blue tail lizards climbing up the wall."

"We're interested in the death of a young lady at Darnell's farm," Miller said.

Beau's pale face turned a shade lighter as he stared at Det. Miller.

"I'd like for you to tell the Chief what you talked to me about earlier. Tell it in your own words and leave nothing out."

Chief Hudson sat quietly while he played with a pencil, tapping it on top of his desk.

Beau's left eye began to twitch uncontrollably as he cracked his knuckles. Turning to look at the Chief, "I heard someone screaming so I looked closer and saw your step-brother,

Johnny. He was kicking someone that was caught in a barbed wire fence at Darnell's farm. That's all I remember."

The Chief opened his desk drawer and dropped his pencil inside and closed it. "When you heard the screams and saw Johnny, where were you?"

Beau looked at Det. Miller who nodded his head, "Well, physically, I was at Miss Stella's house. Spiritually, I was soaring overhead, watching Johnny," he explained.

Chief Hudson looked at Det. Miller and rolled his eyes as he leaned back in his chair, clearly not buying a word of Beau's story.

"Tell us about the bloody boot," Det. Miller prompted him.

"I don't remember if it was the right or the left boot. Does it matter?" Beau asked.

"Tell us what you remember...where did you find it?" Det. Miller urged him on.

"I found it in the middle of the street. It fell from Johnny's truck as he raced away. He turned around and came back. He almost caught me looking at it. It happened in front of Johnny's house. He had a large trash bag, and it looked half

full," Beau said while he nervously ran his fingers through his hair.

"Do you float about often?" the Chief asked in a spiteful tone.

"No, it was the first time and I really enjoyed it. I'd like to do it again," Beau smiled and now ran both hands through his hair.

"Is something wrong with your hair?" Det. Miller asked.

"It feels like...it's full of bugs and they're crawling around."

Becoming outwardly annoyed the Chief changed the subject, "You don't seem to be very upset about your wife's murder."

"Oh...yes...but that happened several years ago didn't it?"

The Chief looked at Miller and toss up his hands, "Take him back to his holding cell. Find Officer Hendrix and take her with you to pick up my brother and bring him here," he ordered.

"Hey, wait a minute. Would you guys be interested in the name of my invisible friend? He talks to me all the time now," Beau said.

"Sure, what's his name?" Det. Miller asked as the Chief shook his head in disbelief.

"He said to call him 'Leonard.' Isn't that great?" Beau seemed to be on cloud nine.

"Get him outta here," the Chief said pointing toward the door, for he had no sympathy for him whatsoever.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Alan had been patiently awaiting his turn, and now that he had been asked by Miss Stella, he was ready with his question, “Well, since we keep talking about Souls, can I get a definition of what a Soul is from your guide?”

“Very well then,” she said taking in a deep breath and slowly releasing it, “He says Souls, for our understanding, are basic energy creations, as God, the ‘Source of all Life,’ is infinite energy. This energy is simply that part of God that connects all living things to each other, and therefore to God. God created energy beings, or Souls as we call them, in order to experience that which he created on an emotional level. As Souls, we grow and experience the knowledge of god, who then in turn experiences through us, his creations. God gave his soul creations the limited ability to create and the free will to lead ourselves into the experience of the negative and positive aspects that exist in physical life. He says, Souls can experience the negative side of life, whereas God cannot. So God experiences the negative, as we term it, through his

creations. Therefore, as Souls, we grow and experience God through many lifetimes, not only for God, but for our own individual advancement. Whether you are in the human form, or back in the Unseen World, you are seeking to grow more God-like in your own right. He wants us to remember, your true form is pure energy, all things are energy, you will always maintain your individuality as long as you so desire; yet, you are part of a larger grouping of energy beings. This connection we all have to God. As you combine your energy to this larger energy group, Gods energy expands and continues to grow.”

“Ah, thank you for that definition. May I ask a more personal question?”

Miss Stella softly responds, “Yes Alan, you may.”

“Where I work, there have been budget problems and so several people were let go to ease the library’s money concerns. As a result of that, my boss has been putting more and more pressure on me to do the work of three people. The stress of that has been causing me to have problems sleeping, stomachaches and migraine headaches. I would be very open and grateful for any guidance you could offer at this time.”

As Miss Stella closed her eyes, Dr. Rice was already sending her his message for Alan. “My guide says there are other jobs that aren’t so mentally, emotionally and physically taxing that you could seek out. You have education and skills that others do not. You will go where your mind goes. See the position you truly want; there is a more fulfilling opportunity if you break from your old routine. Go before yourself and ask what do you, wish to do, see it being done. Do not wait for the universe to create it; create it for yourself. Create with your mind what you wish to manifest. This method is for all things, not only for your job, but also your health. Heal yourself with your mind. You have the ability within yourself to place your hands on your body and direct energy with your mind. This is not simply your own energy recycling; this is universal energy, that which exists all around you. Your body will use it, your body will convert it from a neutral energy into that which will be used for your benefit, for your highest good. You can take an active role in your healing; instead of hoping for some outside remedy or pill that will only temporarily mask the symptoms of your health concerns. Your mind can produce the

true lasting results you seek in bringing about true healing. Dr. Rice says this applies to everyone on this plane of existence, all have this ability. For now, Alan, he says rest, be comfortable in your own skin.”

“Thank you.” Alan said as his mind was whirling with the information he had been given. It had been month’s sense he felt hopeful that he could escape the dark hole he felt he was trapped within.

Beatrice had sat quietly as she listened intently to Alan, as he opened up with what was going on in his work life. She couldn’t understand why he hadn’t confided to her about his job stress and his health concerns; since, after all, she was his fiancé. Surely he could have confided his fears to her since they both work at the library she thought. She too had the same fears and had told him about it; yet he told her not to worry, and reassured her things were getting better. Now she felt he had lied to her; but why she thought. Was he trying to protect her in some fashion, or did he just not care enough about her and her love for him. Did he truly love her she now wondered?

“Beatrice, would you like to ask a question,” Miss Stella asked as she still sat with her eyes closed.

After a few moments of silence Beatrice responded, “No. No question tonight.” Came her cold reply.

Miss Stella opened her eyes and peered through the dim red-lit room toward Beatrice. “Are you sure dear?”

“I have nothing to ask.” Beatrice was short and to the point. Her mood had gone from fun-loving too gloomy, and Miss Stella picked up on her inner confusion and the anger that was growing within her.

“Very well then, Ruth, do you have a question?” Miss Stella inquired.

“My daughter over in Millersburg, her name is Julie, has a little ten-year-old named Samantha, my granddaughter. We just call her Sammy for short. Sammy has been having night-terrors after going to bed and Julie wanted me to ask about their cause and how to stop them.” Ruth specified rather forthrightly.

Miss Stella sat speechless for almost three full minutes, which to the silent group seemed much longer. Just as Alan

was about to ask if all was okay, Miss Stella spoke. She had lost her connection to her guide, Dr. Rice, because she was picking up on Beatrice's erratic vibration; but she put it out of her mind and the connection was then re-established. "Now then Ruth, my guide is saying that little Samantha experiences what he is calling night-tremors, not night-terrors, in her sleep because of concern over her family. There is much worry and grieving by her over the actions within the family, and the energy experienced therein. Much should be done to create a more harmonious, peaceful and loving environment. He is speaking of the parents there. They are fussing and arguing over bills and other such things. Though they may not feel she is fully capable of understanding the complex intricacies of the world around her; there is indeed much taking place that she sees and is aware of, even subconsciously. Samantha experiences these things because she is living in it with the rest of her family. There is no other outlet for this conflict she observes and experiences. There are no outside forces at work here; that cannot be stopped by reasoning within the family to create peace and a balanced environment. Elimination of

certain aspects that are not part of anyone's highest good should be acted upon. The parents must work in harmony to solve their overall life problems. Not only for the child's sake, but for their wellbeing also. Know what is important. Share time and love with Samantha directly. No passive enjoyment from her; assist her and guide her now. Do not worry or point fingers that they have been neglectful in any way up to this point. This is merely a byproduct of learning that much has taken place for their development in the future. Samantha will continue to experience these night-tremors until the energy in the family is calmed, centered and focused. If the family does not make these improvements, there will be a wearing down of her mind, and therefore having it become accustomed to this negative energy which can have dire consequences on her later life. Constant conflict can spoil the energy field of a person and have harmful effects on future relationships and interactions with others. Do you understand Ruth?"

"Yes, I do. I'll let my daughter know what needs to be done. Thank you so very much. Ah, since Beatrice didn't want to ask her question, might I ask one more? That's if it's

alright with your guide and all?” Ruth turns to Beatrice, “You don’t mind, do you Beatrice?”

Beatrice responded simply, “No, go ahead.”

Miss Stella took in a deep breath and as usual let it out slowly. “My guide said it would be alright for you to ask another question Ruth.”

“My daughter Julie said she went to her doctor two weeks ago and told him how she was mentally and physically tired and run down. He examined her and said she was suffering from stress and depression. She said he gave her some pills that are supposed to take care of her depression; but she said the pills make her thoughts muddled and she can’t seem to focus on important things anymore. Is all the problems with her husband and fighting over not having enough money causing her stress and depression?”

“My guide says depression, like stress, is an action of the physical mind, which is attempting to rid itself of actions or a set of feelings that do not agree with the true inner spirit of that individual. Depression or anxiety are some of the ways in which the physical body tries to cope with those negative



actions or thoughts the mind is repeatedly engaging in. These are caused by negative actions that are against the individuals' true and higher self. Change must be made in order for her depression to move away, for her to move out of it. There is no pill that will bring on this change; there must be physical, mental, and emotional change by her. There must be changes to her beliefs and views that she holds of herself. There is no reason for her to feel less welcome with others, or to herself because she feels depressed. If she is depressed by her past or current actions, this is a time to learn from those actions. If she is unable to cope with those actions, then it is time for her to move beyond them and make changes to undue those negative actions from ever taking place again in her future. Do you follow what my guide is saying so far Ruth?"

"I think so" She understood most but not all.

Miss Stella continued as Dr. Rice sent more information to her, "Depression, he says, should be seen as another motivation for change, but many people are comfortable to sit in it because society has the mentality that a pill will fix their life; though their mind and body cannot be fixed or healed by a pill, they

simply need true change from within to find their true path once again. There is no reason to be concerned of not measuring up to others expectations; not your family, nor your friends. Whatever your chosen lessons may be for this lifetime, your experiencing a depression at any time can be due to the result that you are not coping with something that is outwardly inappropriate for you, and you do nothing, repeatedly, to bring a positive change to the situation. My guide says change, change, change from within is what is needed. Not by your doctor, not by a therapist, not by your friends or family, not by wishing for a better job, not by wishing your wife or husband would show you love and affection, not by wishing for the moon and stars. Change must be made from within, it must be a change for your higher self and worthy of your time. Accomplish something in your life that is in line with your true beliefs; something that helps you as an individual to grow spiritually, and helps make the world a better place for all. My guide says to think on what has been given. It is now time to close.”

“Thank you, I will give this some serious thought and then tell my daughter about this message.” Ruth acknowledged.

The small gathering now bowed their heads as Miss Stella closed with her usual invocation.

“Dear Supreme Creator, the source of all life, open our eyes that we may see. Open our ears that we may hear. Open our hearts that we may feel your unconditional love. Let us be a channel of your divine truth and infinite wisdom for those who seek spiritual guidance in their lives. Let your desire manifest through us in helping those who seek inner peace and comfort. So be it.”

They now turned on the lights and made their way upstairs to the kitchen for coffee and small talk. Miss Stella had prepared and baked a cherry pie from scratch, which the group would indeed enjoy; all except Beatrice who excused herself and left early. Alan for the first time took notice that something wasn't quite right about how Beatrice was acting, but he didn't want to pursue it, for fear it would put him in an awkward situation concerning his sexuality and his deception of love for Beatrice.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

As Ed Stein, the official town drunk—so named by the good Christians—cast an eyeball on Doc Otis who was heading into O'Malley's Bar; he knew it would be the perfect opportunity to mooch a free drink or two, seeing how Doc hated to drink alone. Ed parked himself on the wobbly stool next to Doc at the makeshift bar.

Doc smiled as he now became aware of his thirsty friend, "Mike, my fine fellow, would you be so kind as to set my friend here up with something cold and tasty."

Mike O'Malley complied with Doc's request; seeing how Doc was his number one customer. Come rain, dust storm, or sunshine...Doc never missed his evening sustenance. Ed, when sober enough, would join his benefactor several times a week at this dilapidated watering hole. He would drink to his heart's desire as Doc expounded on the virtues of everyday life; and the subsequent problems therein.

On this night there just so happened to be Johnny Hudson present, and having a heated discussion, no less, with his

associate Mike O'Malley, who he was in cahoots with. Nether Doc nor Ed paid any heed to the two men behind the bar until their voices over shadowed their own.

“You heard me! Just do it!” Johnny bellowed at Mike.

As Mike quietly replied, “You have me word, I’ll see to it. No need to pop your cork, to be sure Laddy.”

Doc stopped in mid-sentence, as the short outburst drew his attention to the two fellows; Johnny Hudson turned and gave him a menacing glare as he ogled the inebriated gent. Doc, knowing full well what Johnny was capable of, turned to Ed, “It’s getting late my dear friend, so I must say my farewell and be on my way.”

Ed was so plastered he didn’t have the slightest clue what had transpired. Grinning, he mumbled something incoherent as Doc made his way out the door into the humid dark night. Moments later, Ed, as was his custom, would fall off his stool and be summarily dragged outside by Mike O'Malley to sleep it off by the trash cans near the street.

Unbeknownst to poor Ed Stein, his unfulfilled life would soon end; he would be headed for his place amongst the fluffy-

white clouds, and the never ending golden harp music of the chubby angels. Notwithstanding, there might still be a saving grace come his way, for when you think someone's number is up, that's when the unexpected appears on the horizon and something miraculous occurs to change everything. Only time would tell what awaited our befuddled, yet friendly town drunk.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Beatrice called Alan, and he agreed to meet her at the Mueller Drug Store to share a chocolate malt, and then go for a walk in the park. Not many townfolk ventured into the North Side Park since the murder of Martha Camp; but as always, life moves forward, whether good or bad, it marches onward.

Hazel was tending to the soda fountain as her beloved Herbert was filling a prescription for Ruth over at the main counter. Beatrice arrived early, as was her custom, and sat down on the red-plastic topped swivel stool in front of Hazel.

“So dear, what can I get ya?” Hazel asked with a heartwarming smile.

“Oh, nothing just yet, I’m waiting for someone,” she quietly replied.

“Yes indeed, I’m sure your fella will be here soon dearie,” she said grinning and even offered up a sly wink; for Beatrice and Alan had been seen many a time hand-in-hand strolling along the avenues of downtown Saint Cloud.

Beatrice just replied with a slight smile as she spun around to keep an eye on the front entrance.

Herbert handed Ruth her blood-pressure medicine, “Now remember to take one pill each morning with plenty of water.”

“I’m not a child Herb; I’ve been taking these things for over fifteen years now, and you always say the same damn thing every time I come to pick them up.” Sassy and direct as always.

“Now, you know why I say the same thing each time, because you keep forgetting to take them, each and every day, like you’re supposed to. That’s why I have to constantly preach at you,” he said shaking his long slender finger at her.

Ruth glared at Herbert for a few moments, as his words echoed throughout the entire store attracting quick looks from Hazel and Beatrice; who just as quickly looked away, so as not to embarrass Ruth, as she did glance their way to see if they heard Herbert’s reproach of her forgetfulness.

Not one to pass up a chance to gossip, “So Herb, you think it was that dirty Bobby Taylor boy who knocked-up Stacy Steime!”



“Wouldn’t surprise me at all if he was. Both Bobby and Stacy have been seen sneaking off into the woods you know; and nether one has a lick-a-sense.” Herbert loved to gossip as much as any woman in town.

Ruth continued, “You know, since the murders, most Christian folks are a might happier that her little ‘bastard’ won’t make the three hundredth mark and...”

“Herbert Mueller! If you don’t have anything better to do, then I’ll be more than happy to come over there, and find something for you to do! You hear me!” Hazel yelled across the room.

Startled, Herbert turned around and started pretending to stack items on the small shelves located behind him; as Ruth froze momentarily, not sure what to do until she heard the small bell above the door jiggle and jangle as Alan entered. That was her queue to make a hasty retreat, which she did.

Beatrice gave a short wave to draw Alan over. Both now sitting side-by-side, she hooked her arm around his and rested her head ever-so-gently on his shoulder.

Hazel gave them a few moments before asking if they were ready for their usual. With both nodding in agreement, she whipped up their chocolate malt, with two straws, and positioned it between the two lovebirds, which is how she envisioned them to be. They were only half-way through their malt when Hazel decided it was time for conversation.

“Well, what do you think they should do with that Taylor boy? I think that good-for-nothing deadbeat should get the electric-chair for what he done to poor Mary, don’t you feel that way too?” Hazel asked.

Herbert stopped stacking and turned, placed his hands on his hips and stared at his wife; who moments ago chastised him for what she was now doing. Hazel acknowledged his stare and simply waved him off as she waited for their replies. Herbert just shook his head and smiled; for he knew his wife oh-so-well, she too loved to hear juicy chatter.

Beatrice shook her head in agreement as she kept on sucking down the malt. Alan stopped, wiped his lips with a napkin and studied Mrs. Mueller’s face for a moment before answering, “I think what Bobby Taylor did was reprehensible;

but I think getting the electric chair would be a miscarriage of justice. Better to let a jury of his peers decide such a thing is what I feel should take place.”

“Well, putting aside your fancy talk, I still think the little varmint should get the chair, and I bet Mary would agree with me on this,” she said wiping down the timeworn green countertop.

Alan decided not to push the issue; too many feelings were involved he felt, so he made small talk with Beatrice for a while before saying their goodbyes to the Mueller’s. Off they went, hand-in-hand heading for the park; but they hadn’t gone nary a block when Beatrice decided she could wait no longer to talk with Alan privately.

Pulling him to a stop, she turned and faced him, “Why didn’t you tell me you were having trouble sleeping?”

Alan studied her face as he desperately searched his mind for an answer that would calm her fears, and keep his bogus relationship intact, “I’m so sorry I didn’t say anything, I just didn’t want you to worry. I know you’re as stressed and concerned as I am.”

She felt it was time to just come right out and ask.

Wrapping her arms around his waist as she looked up into his eyes, “Just tell me the truth Alan. Do you love me?”

Panic flashed over Alan’s entire body; it felt as though someone had just poured a bucket full of ice-water down his back. Sickness in his stomach started to rise to his throat as he responded to her ominous question of his true feelings for her. “Yes,” he heard himself whisper softly as he stared down at her face, which now erupted into joyous tears.

Placing his arms around her and squeezing her as tightly as she was now squeezing him; dread like he had never felt before now took hold of his mind for the humongous lie he had just uttered.

How would he ever face up to such a betrayal as this, he thought; for surely the time might come when his sexual orientation might come to the light of day, and he would be exposed for the lying scoundrel he truly had become.

That day of reckoning, to be sure, would come to pass for Alan Wallace sooner than expected; for there would be, without a doubt, a heart broken and a homicide. For the old

saying is true undeniably; hell hath no fury like a woman  
scorned.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Det. Miller and Officer Hendrix located Johnny Hudson at home and escorted him to police headquarters without any major problems; but Det. Miller noticed that Johnny sat in the back seat glaring at Officer Hendrix as they rode in the black-and-white.

As they entered the Chief's office, he was talking on the phone. As he hung up, "That was Mable Zeeks. She wants an apology from you, or she's gonna call Jonah McGregor at the Gazette and tell them you were drunk when you ran through her yard, and destroyed some of her prize rosebushes."

"Christ, I'll call her later." Miller moaned and shook his head as he pulled out his pack of Camels.

The Chief now standing, "Officer Hendrix, drive your cruiser to the garage, and have them air up your back tire. I noticed it was low. It's probably the valve stem."

"Yes sir," she replied and saluted him, then strutted from the office.

"Sit over here Johnny," the Chief said pointing to a chair near his desk.

"I'm sure you've heard about the two deaths. We're investigating all the leads we have received; your name was mentioned in connection with one of these crimes." Miller stated.

Johnny sat down and crossed his legs with a bored expression on his face. Det. Miller noticed his new western style boots.

"In order to help us clear this matter up, tell us what you did on last Monday evening?" Frances said to his half-brother.

Jumping to his feet, "What the hell's going on?! I'm your brother and you're trying to railroad me! What kind of crap is this?! I'm not saying a damn word! Whoever said I'm involved told you a crock of lies!"

"Shut up and sit down!" Frances barked, "Get control of yourself. Stop hem-hawing around and tell us your whereabouts Monday night."

"You said one of the crimes, which one?" Johnny growled.

"We'll ask the questions," Miller interjected.

Johnny looked at Det. Miller and bellowed, "You're lucky you're a cop, or I'd give you a knuckle sandwich!"

Miller blasted back as he leaned forward and doubled up his fists, "You name the time and place big boy! I'll stomp your mangy ass into the dirt!"

"Stop it, both of you, just stop it!" The Chief boomed, "Now both of you simmer down. Johnny, if you're innocent, you have nothing to worry about. So start talkin' before I lock you in a cell."

"I was at Mike O'Malley's bar from five to around eleven...I had some beers and shot some pool. I left and went home to bed." Johnny mumbled.

"Did you go home alone?" Det. Miller asked.

"That's right, all by myself," Johnny said as sweat was beading up on his forehead.

"You didn't leave the tavern at any time before eleven o'clock?" the Chief asked.

"That's right, just ask Mike, he'll tell ya I was there the whole time."

"When did you last see Terri Helms?" the Chief asked.



"Who? I don't know any Terri Helms," he said lying straight faced through his wretched teeth.

"We have a witness who said he saw you beating Terri Helms at Darnell's farm." Det. Miller was trying to rattle Johnny into a confession.

"That's a lot of bullshit! If your witness was there, then he's the one that beat her, not me!" Johnny shouted. This wasn't his first run in with the law; it would take quite a bit to trip him up on his alibi.

The room became silent as the three men sat and stared at one another. Finally, Det. Miller said, "Nice looking boots you're wearing. They look new. Did you just buy them?"

Johnny glanced at his boots, "Sure, I picked them up over in Millersburg. They were on sale, so what's it to ya?" Johnny growled.

"Where are your old boots?" Det. Miller asked.

"We have enough information for now," the Chief suddenly interjected. Miller glanced at the Chief not sure what was happening.

"Okay, you can go," the Chief said as he called for an officer to drive Johnny back home.

The Chief waited for Johnny to leave before speaking to his old friend. "I've made arrangements for Beau Camp to be examined by a psychiatrist. We don't have anything to really hold him on for now, so release him."

Miller just sat quiet, not sure what just happened. He lit up a Camel as he finally got up.

"Wait a minute Thomas," the Chief said, "next month is my birthday, I'll be sixty-five and I've decided it's time to retire."

"They won't let you work until the end of the year?" He asked.

"I didn't ask, but I was assured by the Mayor that you'd be promoted to Chief, and Fairchild would be promoted to lead detective."

"You sure this is what you want?" You could hear the sincerity in Miller's voice.

"Yes, I'm certain. My mind isn't as sharp as it once was, so it's time."

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

An hour had passed; Buddy knocked as he entered the Chief's office, "Beau Camp just phoned and said he found some evidence on his kitchen table when he arrived home."

"What evidence?"

"Wouldn't say."

"Have an officer run over there and pick it up, whatever it is," the Chief said.

Officer Hendrix stopped the cruiser in front of Beau's home. She started up the walkway and stopped, she heard the hissing sound, she swung around, and eyed the back tire of the cruiser. It was half flat. It must be a nail she thought, and strutted on to the front door.

Beau jerked the door open just as she was about to knock. He held his finger to his lips and shushed her to be silent. "It's in the kitchen, two of them. Get your gun ready. I'm scared to death," he whispered.

She drew her revolver and motioned him to back out of the way, and in a crouched position, she eased her way through the

living room to the kitchen. She stopped outside the door, listened, then swiftly stepped into the room with her gun pointed and aimed in front of her. To her surprise the kitchen was empty, except for two purses that sat on the kitchen table.

Beau rushed in behind her yelling, "Shoot! Shoot! Kill them both! They're evil!"

Officer Hendrix quickly aimed her gun at Beau and ordered him into a corner of the kitchen. He stood in the corner facing her and slid down the wall into a squatting position. She examined the purses and discovered that one belonged to Beau's wife. The other had identification in it proving that it was Terri Helm's purse.

"How did these purses get here?" She demanded.

"I don't know, they weren't here when you and Miller chased me down to the police station; but they were here when I came back from the station." Beau said in a flustered voice.

"I'll take these to headquarters and give them to Det. Fairchild. He'll know what to do with them," Officer Hendrix said, "you can get up now."

As she departed she thought, he's nuttier than a Christmas  
fruit-cake.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Father Lonigan was at his desk, working on his sermon in the rear office of the church; which was named St. Joseph's. The church was quiet and empty, or so he thought. The sound that filtered its way to his open office door, reminded him of cats having a sexual encounter—that of muffled cries.

Curiosity finally got the better of him as he made his way up to the main area. To his surprise, there sat Hazel Mueller in the first pew, her hands cupped over her face and crying with such heaving force, she was having trouble catching her breath.

Sitting next to her, she pulled her hands away from her face as he put one arm around her drooping shoulder's and the other, he started patting her leg softly to comfort her.

Her handkerchief was almost completely drenched from the tears and mucus, so the good father offered his handkerchief—which he had only used once earlier in the day. He folded it so she wouldn't notice it right off.

“Hazel,” he said ever so gently, “why all the tears, dear one?”

“Oh Father, I...I...killed him,” She blurted out as the flood gates opened once again, “I didn’t...I didn’t know what... what to do, so I...I buried him in my back yard.”

A look of shock came over Samuel as she said this, “Oh my goodness, who did you kill?”

“Will I burn in hell Father?” Her whaling had subsided a good bit as she waited for his holy reply.

“Hazel, I need you to tell me who it was you killed, please dear?” Father Lonigan was usually very secure and could handle the ups and downs of the average person’s religious life; but murder was something altogether new to him. Never before had he faced such a situation. Death and dying come with the job title, as he knew full well, but never had anyone confessed to him of committing such a ghastly deed.

She blew her nose several times as the good father waited patiently for her answer, “It was Mandrake, he ran in front of my car and I couldn’t help it. I ran right over his head. I panicked, so I picked him up by his tail and put him in my trunk. Later that day, I got my garden spade and buried him at the end of my rose bushes in the back yard. I’m so sorry, can

god ever forgive me?” The dam broke once again with tears and mucus gushing forth.

Father Lonigan was taken aback for a moment, “Mandrake...Mable Zeeks cat?” A sigh of relief washed over him.

“Yes, the very one.” She was now calming a bit waiting for the good father’s reassurance that she wasn’t going to burn in hell.

Samuel now had the undeniable urge to laugh out loud, but remaining in full control as he fully realized how this event had such a profound effect on poor Hazel, “Dear one, God will not punish you for the accidental death of Mandrake; rest assured your soul is still going to heaven.” What he didn’t say was that God would not punish her, but Mad-Dog-Mable would make her life a living hell once she finds out.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Buddy Wilson dialed the Chief's home number, hoping he wouldn't answer; but that wasn't in the cards for the unfortunate dispatcher.

"Hello...who's there?"

"Sir, its Buddy."

"Buddy? Buddy who?" The Chief didn't recall knowing anyone named Buddy; his mind struggled to place the name.

"Buddy Wilson, the dispatcher at the police department sir." Buddy shook his head in disbelief at the Chiefs senility.

"Oh...yes, yes...Buddy Wilson, the dispatcher. Well my good man, how may I be of service?"

Buddy wasn't quite sure the Chief still knew who he was, but he relayed the information anyway, "I'm sorry to be the one to break this news to you sir, but the jailer just called and said Bobby Taylor has escaped. They're not sure how he got out of his cell, but they are investigating it right now. I've already sent some black-and-white's out searching for him. They're not sure how long he's been missing, but they'll let

you know as soon as they can figure it out sir.” Sweat was forming on his brow as he waited for the Chiefs wrath to present itself.

“Thank you so much Bobby, please advise detectives Miller and Fairchild that Buddy has escaped...”

“Ah, sir, Bobby Taylor has escaped, I’m...Buddy Wilson...the dispatcher,” he explained in a slow voice.

“Why, yes indeed, so you are, and what a fine job you’re doing. You know, when I was just a young lad, my mother told me once, ‘Women wear underwear to keep things up, and men wear underwear to keep things down.’ Well, keep up the good work, my dear fellow.” Chief Hudson hung up the telephone.

Buddy wiped his brow with a napkin as he too hung up. Poor man, he’s going to end up in the loony bin, he thought; yet, he called the detectives as ordered. Buddy took it upon himself to call Mayor Carver and make him aware of the latest event; just in case Jonah got wind of it, he didn’t want the Mayor getting blindsided by the skinny little reporter before he had a chance to prepare himself.

Word was already spreading fast, as calls started pouring into the station about Taylor being seen all over the countryside. Folks were petrified; well, some were. To tell the truth, most didn't really care one way or the other.

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### TAYLOR ESCAPES : POLICE DUMBFOUNDED

The escape of Bobby Taylor has the local citizenry locking their doors at night. The Police Department has fumbled the ball once again, as this reporter sees it. Mayor Carver and Chief Hudson are trying to reassure the public that Taylor will soon be behind bars once again; but can the public put their trust in the same department that allowed Taylor to escape in the first place? Only time will tell.

Mayor Carver has also announced a reward of \$300 dollars for any information leading to the capture and arrest of Martha Camp's killer. No reward is offered at this time for the killer of Terri Helms.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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Dick Fairchild walked casually into the Chief's office carrying a copy of the gazette, and sat down across from him with an immense smirk on his taut face, "So boss, you think I'd get the 'chair' if I beat that skinny, dimwitted McGregor kid to death with my bare fists?"

"All I can say Dick, is get in line. If they found Jonah dead tomorrow, half the police force and even the Mayor, I dare say, would be suspects, to be sure." Both men fell into thunderous laughter at the sublime thought of Jonah McGregor's demise.

## CHAPTER FORTY

Nancy met her husband at the door with cullers in her freshly washed hair. She had her lime-green pajamas on which definitely did not go well with her pink house-slippers; but fashion was not her intent, comfort was. "Are you alone, or is your shadow waiting in the car? Let me smell your breath," she said trying to lean closer to him.

"I've had a rough day, lay off the third degree and stop picking on Officer Hendrix. She'll soon be on night patrol and working with someone else. That should make you happy."

"I'll believe it when I see it." Nancy smirked as she made a big point of rolling her eyes in mock disbelief.

Tossing his tie on the dresser and removing his shirt he slowly sat and began to unlace his shoes. He stopped and leaned back in his chair, "Something strange happened this afternoon that has me puzzled..."

"Something about the case?" Nancy asked as she poured some jelly-beans out of a glass jar into the palm of her left hand.

"Yes, we had Johnny Hudson in the office for questioning and just as we started to find things out, the Chief stopped the inquiry. It seemed to me he was protecting him. I don't know if it was because they are related or the Chief knows something and is hiding it?"

"My father told me years ago that Hudson bunch was no good. Said they'd steal pennies off a dead man's eyes," she said popping a jelly-bean in her mouth.

"I'm going to shower and hit the sack, goodnight dear," he said leaning forward to place a soft kiss on her forehead, which brought an encouraging smile to her weary face; if only for a few seconds.

## CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

As Buddy was walking home after work, he noticed a white 1953 Mercury Coup parked right in front of his home. Buddy no sooner arrived at the walkway that led up to his front door, when a man got out of the parked car. Buddy froze momentarily as he now recognized the gentleman. It was none other than Sam Franklin. Regaining his senses, Buddy turned to run for the safety of his home, but froze once again as Sam yelled.

“Don’t you dare run from me, you fat little asshole!” Sam’s strong words flashed deep into Buddy’s flesh causing his knee’s to weaken and his upper body to tremble.

Buddy felt as though he might faint, yet he slowly turned to face Sam, “I...I...I...”

Sam came around the front of the car and grabbed Buddy by his arms; he shook him violently--as a dog might shake a rag-doll. Buddy was so scared he didn’t realize he had wet himself.



As the frightening assault stopped, Sam looked down into Buddy's watery eyes and roared, "You go near my wife again, I'll kill you with my bare hands, you hear me boy!"

Buddy couldn't speak through the intense fear he was experiencing; he was completely defenseless.

With no response, Sam's anger drew back his right fist and punched Buddy right square in the face. That blow propelled him backward onto the ground, and then Sam spit on him. Making his way around the car, Sam slammed the car door and burned rubber leaving smoke and dust in his wake as he sped off.

Buddy would recover from this horrendous physical and emotional assault; but would never again approach Berta, nor go near Franklin's Market. Needless to say, he would stay clear of Sam.

## CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Officer Hendrix and Det. Miller arrived on the outskirts of town where the O'Malley's Bar was situated. They needed to verify Johnny Hudson's alibi concerning the Terri Helms murder.

Mike O'Malley, age forty-one, was your typical Irishman; loud, abrasive and loved his whiskey. Not much over five-foot seven-inches; but quick to draw a knife from his right boot if trouble presented itself. Green eyes and light brown wavy hair, with mutton-chop sideburns a tad darker. Somewhat heavy and hairy all over; looked like he could have come from a family of Chimpanzees definitely. Always had a peculiar smell; like day old sardines. Bathing, by far, wasn't his forte by no stretch of the imagination.

O'Malley's Bar was no more than an old, shotgun-style house, with the insides ripped out to make room for a makeshift bar, and some old scratched and wobbly wooden tables, with matching chairs to boot. Smoke stained walls, peeling wallpaper, and only five ceiling lightbulbs yielding

their dull sheen throughout. Stained carpet with portions worn completely through to the wood beneath.

Liquor was watered down mostly; except for the good stuff supplied to those who played their illegal card games in the back room. Only one billiard table; which was old, stained with beer, and seemed to lean due to one leg being a touch shorter than the other three.

If your taste ran more toward the ‘ladies-of-the-evening,’ that could be arranged; as Mike kept an old worn mattress down in the basement. Most men frequenting this establishment would forgo the basement; after seeing the elderly whore who Mike provided for such entertainment.

She could be seen each night sitting at the end of the dilapidated bar, sitting on a makeshift stool of two-apple crates, one atop the other. Some said the appalling elderly woman was none other than Mike’s own Mother, so the story goes; said she had to earn her keep or be booted out to beg for pennies on the street.

No matter, only the truly hard up ever dared pay the one-dollar fee. But, it must be said, that more than a few eyebrows

were raised one late summer's evening several years back; when a drunken old man ventured forth to the lower region of the old bar. Upon emerging back into the shadowy lit barroom, it was said he seemed to be of good cheer and very satisfied. Right behind him, it was noted, that the elderly whore seemed pleased herself and gave a huge smile; just after popping her false teeth back into her mouth.

Some rumored the true owner of the bar was none other than Johnny Hudson himself; yet, Johnny denied any business association with his close friend Mike.

Mike O'Malley met the two officers at the entrance, "Well, top-of-the-mornin' to ya; if it ain't Saint Cloud's finest; may the saints kiss the very ground you walk upon."

O'Malley had several run-ins with the law, and made no bones about telling everyone what a bunch of lowlife scumbags he felt they were. Of course, he never ventured his opinion to anyone in the department personally.

"Let's talk outside, I don't want me bar gettin' a bad reputation from the likes of you." The irritation in his voice,

and choice of words was more than evident as to his feelings for Det. Miller.

Hendrix looked at Miller as they backed out of the doorway, and made their way over by the black-and-white. O'Malley followed without further utterance.

"So Mike," Miller used his first name knowing it would irk O'Malley, "what might you know concerning the murder of Terri Helms?"

"And just why should I know of that? I barely knew the lass." Mike was in no mood to help the police, as he just lied about knowing Terri Helms. It was known, in hard times past, Terri would tend bar, and on rare occasions, accompany a patron or two to the basement.

"I thought, since you run a bar, you might have overheard something from one of your patrons?" Miller continued.

"Nary a word have I heard uttered about that poor lass." Mike crossed himself, even though he hadn't set foot in a Catholic church since he was a child.

Hendrix didn't appreciate his religious mockery. She was growing impatient with his unacceptable attitude toward them

and the deceased, “Look here buster,” she said pointing her index finger at his rather red and bulbous nose, “I’ve had just...”

Miller placed his hand on top of hers and gently guided it down, “Officer Hendrix, I’ll handle this.” He said reengaging O’Malley, “So tell me Mike, you remember the night Terri Helms was murdered?”

“Well now, I do read, don’t ya know...so of course I remember that night, very well indeed, thank you very much. If my recollection serves me true, I was here, tending bar, all night long.”

“So, do you recall seeing Johnny Hudson that night?” Miller inquired.

“Why, yes indeed, he was here the whole night, don’t ya know, drinkin’ and playin’ the old jukebox, yes sir dearie.” O’Malley’s big grin struck a sour cord with Sherry.

Miller knew she was starting to hit her boiling point; he turned his head and made eye contact with her. She looked into his eyes; as if seeking permission to stomp O’Malley’s

butt into sawdust. Miller shook his head; Sherry looked down as she followed his Que.

“I’ll need you to come down to the station and make out a statement to that effect. You’ll be required to sign it as well; you understand Mike?”

“I’d be happy to grace your good station with my presence, old man. You can expect me tomorrow, to be sure.” O’Malley turned and strutted back inside.

“Oh sir, he made my blood boil, that nasty son-of-a-bitch.” Sherry vented.

“If you plan on making a career out of police work, you really need to work on your temper, you understand what I’m saying?”

“Ah, yes sir, I understand.”

Miller paused for a moment to study her facial and body language; he didn’t care for what he observed, and rightly so, for her temper would soon rear its ugly head once more; but with dire consequences.

## CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

Beau arrived at the psychiatrist's office thirty minutes early. Opening the door, he wandered in. As he looked around the waiting room, it struck him odd that no one else was there. The smell of the new dark brown carpet caught his attention.

Removing a fishing magazine from the small, short round table in the middle of the room; it had no cover yet he didn't seem to notice as he sat down to wait. A strange feeling that Leonard was lurking close by crept over him.

"Hello Admiral," Leonard whispered. "What are you doing here?"

Holding his magazine in front of his face, "Chief Hudson ordered me to be here for evaluation. I don't know why." Beau answered.

"Be on guard. Remember the last time that they tried to put you away. The difference this time is, I'm here to help you. Now, listen to me, don't tell the doctor anything. Remember to be on guard. Don't fall for his tricks," Leonard cautioned.



"Okay, I'll be ready for whatever he comes up with. I know they're out to get me."

Dr. Steven Letterman, a board certified psychiatrist sat in a black leather padded chair behind his new desk made of cherry wood. Of average height and weight for a man of thirty-seven, his half-glasses partially covered his blue eyes. Clean shaven with brown short straight hair. No jacket, just a white, short sleeve shirt and thin dark blue tie which matched his slacks.

At the appointed time the office door opened and Dr. Letterman motioned for Beau to come in. Beau surveyed the office as the doctor asked him to sit. He recognized it as the office he was in the last time he was here, after the death of his mother, but the doctor was different.

"Good morning Mr. Camp, I'm Dr. Letterman, I'm sorry to hear about your wife Martha. She was a lovely woman they tell me. How do you feel now that she's gone?" he started right in with his session.

"Be careful what you say," Leonard whispered.

"Don't worry about me. I'm on top of this. He can't fool me," Beau mumbled.

"I'm sorry, I didn't quite hear what you said. May I call you Beau?" the doctor asked.

"I was talking to my advisor, and yes, you may address me as Beau. My advisor cautioned me about you. He's wise to your tricks, so don't try to fool him or me," he crowed.

"May I ask who your advisor is? By what name do you call him?"

"He said that I should call him Leonard."

"That's interesting," Dr. Letterman commented as he now started to take down some quick notes, "Do you know today's date?"

"Have you got a memory problem? I'm here and you're here. This must be the right day," Beau said angrily while cracking his knuckles.

"Do you know who our current president is?" Letterman continued his standard line of questions.

"Uh, yes, it's that guy that likes to fish. I can't think of his name. I didn't vote for him, so I don't care who he is. I know he's doing a lousy job."

"How long has Leonard been speaking to you?"

"It's none of your business. Leonard warned me about your ways of prying information from me only to use it against me later," Beau snapped.

"Have you ever seen this Leonard?"

"Oh no you don't, you can't fool me. I know what you're up to. I wouldn't tell you if I did see him. I'll tell you this, and you can write it down. Leonard is the leader of the monkey crew and they live on a three mast sailing vessel with square mainsails on all the masts. What'd you think of that? Very impressive...right?" Beau said pointing at the doctor.

"Nice going, you've got him on the run. Keep him on the defensive," Beau smiled when he heard this praise from Leonard.

"I want to thank you for coming in. This has been very interesting. You may leave now Mr. Camp," Dr. Letterman said in a soft reassuring tone as he was still scribbling very fast in his notebook.

"Let's get out of here, we got him fooled," Leonard snorted.

## CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

Father Lonigan read from the good book as the mourners stood with stooped heads by the gravesite where Martha Camp would momentarily be laid to rest. The good Father spoke concerning the loss of such a person and how it would surely have a profound effect upon the community.

Mayor Carver and Chief Hudson each gave illustrious benedictions; touching on how Martha had touched so many of the townsfolks with her good deeds, and charity work for the less fortunate. Both men would later laugh over the lies they told about Martha; for she never made any attempt to aid the poor; nor provided any of her time assisting any kind of charity, unless it benefited her personally.

All-in-all, Father Lonigan gave her a splendid sendoff as Beau Camp's crying and hysterics would attest. There was a modest turnout; mainly those who professed themselves to being the most devout of Christians. Her casket was of mahogany, with six brass handles adorning the shiny, polished vessel she would spend eternity within.

One hour after Martha Camp was interned six feet under, the funeral for Terri Helms was held. She was laid to rest in the rear section of the cemetery; a place reserved for the indigent. There were no mourners, no relatives, no friends, no good-hearted Christians there to send her on her way toward the pearly-gates.

Father Lonigan none-the-less spoke from the good book, even though it wasn't clear if she was Catholic or not, he crossed himself as the grave-diggers lowered her cheap, wooden-framed, unlined coffin into the hot, dry dirt. Amen.

## CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

Ruth and Mary stopped to pick up Ellen on their way to Miss Stella's home. The Monday Night Mystics were in for a treat as Miss Stella's cousin, Dexter Alexander, was driving over from Millersburg to channel his guide Constantine.

Dexter was a small, sinewy, pale skinned individual with blondish short hair and one green eye and one blue eye, which no one seemed to know how that happened, including Dexter. Just barely twenty-five, yet he had professed to be psychic from an early age.

At only seven he could see aura's around people, and knew whether they were healthy or unhealthy by the colors emanating from them. He saw the souls of the so-called dead who wandered the earth from the age of eleven. At seventeen he fell into a trance state and started channeling Constantine, who told him he was, one of two guides, who have come to work with him in this lifetime. Constantine proclaimed he came from another dimension and has never been in the human form. Alalya, Dexter's other guide, comes to him as a long

golden haired woman whose last lifetime on earth was in Atlantis, or so she lays claim.

As the ladies arrived, Miss Stella greeted them at the door, and told them Beatrice and Alan had already arrived, and were in the basement with Dexter. She ushered them downstairs so they could get things rolling. Greetings and pleasantries were exchanged, and then Miss Stella explained how Dexter and his guide worked.

“Now than, I want to explain, Dexter’s guide Constantine, who will be coming through tonight, does not do questions. He brings forth a topic that he feels is needed for those in the bodily form. It will seem as though his message will be like that of a professor giving a lecture. He simply gives the information and then he departs. Then, as Dexter says, it’s up to you to do whatever you wish with the information Constantine provides. Everyone understand? Do not ask, for he will not answer, okay?”

The small group all acknowledge with ‘yes’ all around; even if some didn’t truly like the ‘no questions asked’ policy of Constantine.

Miss Stella opened with the Lord's Prayer and then continued, "Very well then, I'll turn this evening over to Dexter. Are you ready dear?" She asked as she turned off the last lamp emanating white light. It took only seconds for their eyes to adjust to the glow of the red-bulb, which hardly cast a shadow upon the walls.

Dexter was a very shy person, and that's why he liked the fact that he would simply allow Constantine to place him in a deep level of trance, and then use his body, mainly his vocal cords, to speak to those present. He once noted, concerning being in a trace state, that it was like simply taking a nap; when he awoke, Constantine had finished his discourse on whatever he chose to talk about and he had no knowledge of what came out of his mouth.

"Yes, I'm ready to begin." With those words uttered, Dexter's head tilted slowly down as his chin came to rest upon his chest. A full minute went by as the group waited patiently for their guest speaker to come forth.

"I am Constantine, and I will speak this night on the subject of Easter's true meaning. The one known to you as Jesus, that



Energy Being that lived the life of Jesus, cannot be contacted.

This information comes from the true account of Jesus regarding the nature of Easter. Easter is a time of reflection. The time of rebirth. There were many holidays that before this day, events leading up to it were shared by millions. It is a time of rebirth, a time of changing, a time for celebrating the spring as nature comes into active being, freeing itself from its apparent dormant state. The time for Jesus was not that of rising from the dead, there are many accounts of this. He was not dead. There were illnesses of the time, he was not susceptible to many of these, but would infrequently succumb to one. Easter is rebirth. This should be shared with you and others as though it was the New Year. Many seek out the New Year as their purpose for starting fresh and beginning anew, Easter, and the energy associated with it through various religious holidays is more powerful for new beginnings than any other day. It is shared with many and shared on many dates. Typically, May 1<sup>st</sup>, and the week leading up to it; the energy is the strongest. This is energy associated with past acts and intentions of those who focus on this time. Even in the

modern Easter there are many representations of various religious traditions. It is not a time to segregate. Start new and fresh. The savior Jesus was not an immortal man; he was a mortal man who was sent to deliver messages, and show diverse populations the message of peace and love, and that, all that we seek externally is available internally. Energy beings, in the human form, are very literally, a representation of the universe. They can create, they literally impact the universe and are creators of the world; the actions, and the physical and non-physical that takes place within it. Jesus was not in a mysterious tomb only to be risen from the dead. He was to be moved to another location for medical treatment. It is important to know that recordings in the bible, those that have not been altered; many are physical and accurate depictions of that which occurred; but there is much that has been destroyed and abolished for the sake of control. There was much added to include hate and segregation. This was not in the true spirit of Jesus. This was not in a unifying and loving tone. These are not the messages that he would have wanted shared. It was his world to spread unity through honesty and caring between

people no matter their station in life, no matter their money or position or education or sickness or health. Those who attempted to show their importance through only money, and their greed; these are not true things, these are not necessary things. These are not the willing gifts of the righteous who pursue their highest works. This coming Easter it is time to move beyond what is shared in a biblical text and honor the true feelings in your heart. Start yourself as a blank slate as you awaken, allow all that is near you to enter your mind and consider it a beneficial possibility before all else. Consider it carefully. Before passing judgment, determine how this idea, situation, determine how it directly impacts your life and your heart and your mission. There is much judgment on topics that do not impact but a few beings on your plane, yet many will use this as a weapon for disaster among people. Include in your thinking one opposing thought per day. Examine this opposing thought to your thinking. If you consider it to be valid at present, determine what bearing it has on your true being. Determine what must be done so that it cannot impact you. Determine why it does. If it does not alter your true path,

release it from your being. It is not for you to pass judgment, nor carry judgment in your heart that is unnecessary. This is carrying unnecessary hatred. Honor those ideas and beliefs which are truly yours, which you feel truly impact your life, that which can change it positively. Share them, live fully in them; but be forever open to change. If you change nothing, consider yourself open to change. Open to the new, you are not a book, you are an open journal that is open and willing to receive information on your blank pages. After reflection, if the page does not speak to you, tear out this page. If the page is for you, keep it with you, turn the page and experience more. At no time is it impossible to remove or add information. You are an open and growing being. You are living through various points, periods, and timeframes of education throughout life. Do not maintain rigid thinking that you may have acquired at a younger age; open yourself to the vast possibilities. The reasons for many of these to manifest later in life is that you are typically less frightful, less worried, and have less concern for the status quo; often these may be through a series of events which have torn down the walls of what you know, and it now

makes the being more accepting of new ideas. This does not mean you shall willingly take on ideas and impressions of anyone you are with, as if you are a puppet to be controlled. You are merely experiencing new possibilities that were before closed. No judgment in your heart. See beings and the world as an opportunity for learning. Learn their perspective. Learn their purpose. Learn and be open. Be inquisitive. The more you are open to other beings, the more you will grow within your own being. I am finished with this subject. This is Constantine.”

The group sat in silence, not sure what to think of the information Dexter’s guide just expounded upon concerning Easter. Dexter slowly raised his head up and opened his eyes.

“Ah, you may turn on the lights, he’s done for now.”

Dexter’s weak little voice squeaked out.

After turning on only one lamp, so as to give their eyes time to adjust, Miss Stella gave her usual closing prayer before they went upstairs for this week’s treat of carrot cake and coffee. The regulars of the Monday Night Mystics would surely be discussing and debating what Constantine had spoken of this

night for weeks to come; as some didn't completely understand and others didn't agree with what he had to say about Jesus.

## CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

Dick Fairchild was sitting in his older model light-blue Nash Rambler, which just happened to be parked in front of Zeeks Barber Shop. Off duty, he had decided it was time for a hair-cut; but first, he wanted to finish reading the Saint Cloud Gazette, just to make sure Jonah McGregor hadn't published any articles concerning the police department or any of its officers.

The day was pleasant enough as he sat behind the steering-wheel. There was a steady breeze wafting through the rolled down windows; he sat with his left arm propped up on the driver's side door, steadying his newspaper.

Glancing up momentarily, he spied Mad-Dog-Mable strolling down the dusty sidewalk, coming straight toward him. Mumbling softly to himself, "Dear god, not today."

Mable walked right up to his car and leaned over, "Well, if it ain't Detective Dick Fairchild, I haven't seen you, out and about, for several weeks now. So Dick," The very tone she

used when uttering his first name infuriated him beyond belief, “what are you doing here?”

Looking up slowly as he now peered into her bloodshot eyes, “Now Mrs. Zeeks, you know full well I come here for a haircut every two weeks like clockwork.” He envisioned himself climbing out of his automobile and punching her squarely in the jaw.

“What’s with the big grin?” She asked smugly.

Back to reality, he quickly withdrew the smirk from his face, “Oh, nothing in particular. I’m just a happy-go-lucky kinda guy I guess.”

“I’ll just bet you are.” One could taste the haughtiness in her voice as she stared into his face. There was no love lost between these two; both were of the same temperament; aggressive and domineering.

Knowing her love for her cat—which he figured she loved more than her husband—he couldn’t pass up the opportunity to get in a wisecrack, “Tell me Mrs. Zeeks, is it true what the Monday Night Mystics say about you?”



Placing her hands squarely on her hips, “And just what did those Devil worshippers have to say, pray tell?”

“That you’re a Witch, and you dance naked around your persimmon tree during the full moon, and that you cast a spell on poor Mandrake that made him disappear?” Fairchild said with a straight face.

“Don’t think you can rile me up, Dick Fairchild, with that line of bullshit! Those spook chasers don’t have the guts to say something like that, and you know it, buster!”

Fairchild broke out into uncontrollable laughter.

“So smartass, what was your boy Ronny doing over at Alan Wallace’s house late last Friday night? I bet you didn’t even know he slipped out. Some detective you are; your kid’s out lurking around past midnight, and you don’t have a clue about it.” She shot back hoping to anger him as he tried to get her goat.

That struck a nerve, he was very protective of his only child, and of all the people to spring this on him; he was pissed. Dick started the Rambler, threw it in gear and sped off. Mable stood

with her arms crossed, watching his hasty departure, delighted in the fact she had gotten the better of him.

By the time Dick arrived home he had regained his composure; now he decided not to confront his son, but instead, he'd shadow him on his next midnight excursion and see what he was up to. Dick felt somewhat betrayed; but had to make sure Mad-Dog-Mable wasn't making it all up just to bust his chops.

## CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

Beau stirred and sat on the side of his bed. Scratching his head, he rubbed his eyes as he stood. Shuffling into the kitchen still dressed in his pajamas and floppy house shoes, he plugged in the coffee pot.

"Did you sleep well?" Leonard asked.

"I had another headache last night. I didn't sleep well. I felt like little bugs were crawling all over my body," Beau said scratching at his arms.

Pulling the comic page from the Gazette, he suddenly turned his attention to the front of the house. There came a knock at the door. Then a short pause before several more rapid-fire unyielding knocks came forth. Folding the paper, he laid the comics on the table and then tip-toed to the front window and peeked out. He smiled as he recognized her, so he went to the door.

"Why, if it ain't Officer Hendrix of the Saint Cloud police department, what brings you out this cheery morning?"

"Good morning Mr. Camp," She said holding the envelope in front of him. "I have a legal paper to serve on you."

"You need insurance today?" Beau asked her.

Sherry gave an odd look before continuing, "Not today sir, I stopped to give you this summons."

"Okay, thanks." Beau said taking the document and then without warning closed the door. Beau went and sat on the sofa as he studied over the summons before he picked up the telephone. Calling the family attorney who had been a close friend of his mothers, he agreed to see Beau and look over the court document. A meeting was set for two o'clock the next day to discuss the summons.

"Leonard, is this summons bad news?" Beau asked.

"Have you ever seen one that wasn't?"

"Something has been on my mind of late, who put those two purses in my house? They frightened me somethin' terrible."

"That was just a little joke I played on the police." Leonard laughed.

"A joke?"

“For my personal amusement. Those inept dummies will spend the rest of their pathetic lives trying to figure out who put them there and why. That will give me great satisfaction watching them puzzle over something that has no meaning whatsoever. Ignorant humans, always trying to give some kind of meaning to things, even when there is no meaning to be had.” Leonard broke into hilarity at his inside joke.

## CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

It had been pert-near three weeks since Buddy Wilson had graced the Bozeman Café with his ungodly presence. After his unfortunate encounter with Sam, which resulted in a broken nose and two black eyes, all from one punch; yet, after two visits to Doc Otis, he was pretty much back to his old sarcastic self. Well, physically that is, emotionally, he still had some healing to do.

Quietly, he made his way over to his favorite stool as Gerald and Cindy approached. Cindy poured him a cup of coffee as they decided to have a bit of fun at his expense for a change; it was time for his comeuppance, they felt.

It was already old news around town that Sam had confronted Buddy at his home, wherein he gave him a beat-down and scared the living daylights outta him. Berta forgave and reunited with Sam after she heard how he fought so bravely for her, the two never to be separated again. Well, that is, until Sam's next transgression comes to light.

“So Buddy,” Cindy said, “looks like Miss Stella was right on the money. Did that big ol’ stormy Sam show you his anger?” Gerald and Cindy broke into hysterical laughter.

Buddy’s face lit up bright red, “That’s not funny! Not funny at all! He could have killed me!” He screeched as he fled the café. The Bozeman’s could hardly contain themselves.

Cindy yelled after him, “Buddy, you all come back now when those dark storm clouds clear up, ya hear!” That brought on even more fits of laughter between the Bozeman’s.

## CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

Wheeling into the parking lot, Beau arrived at the attorney's office. The small waiting room had only one person sitting in it, the office receptionist. She buzzed and was told to send Beau right in.

As Beau opened the door to the main office, attorney E.P. Jacobs motioned for him to come in. Handing the summons over, he waited for the lawyer to speak as he made himself comfortable.

Jacobs read over the document for several minutes, "The court over in Millersburg received the psychiatrists' recommendation and it says you have what's called delusions of reference; which it says are symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia."

Beau sat and listened. Nervously, he began to crack his knuckles and then run his fingers through his hair, but he didn't speak.

"The psychiatrist recommended that you be committed into a sanitarium for a thirty-day assessment, and the judge has



agreed. You are to report there next Monday. Failure to do so will result in arrest, and you'll be taken by force to the sanitarium." Jacobs paraphrased.

"Okay, so I'll go, how bad can it be?" Beau shifted in his chair and turned to face the attorney, "Do they have a harbor and a boat dock at the sanitarium?"

"Uh, well...I'm not sure...I've never been there before."

"How will I get my ship in there?! It won't sail on dry land! It has to have a harbor and a lovely port!" Beau shouted.

Taken aback momentarily, Jacobs quickly recovered from Beau's outburst, "Uh, why, ah yes... most sanitariums do have large harbors, now that I think about it. You'll see after you arrive there."

"I'm not sure I believe you," Beau said pointing his finger at the lawyer.

"It's in the back of the building. You can't see it from the road, but its back there alright. You can sail your ship all over the place after you get settled and receive treatment," he said trying to sound convincing.

"If I find out you lied to me, I'll send my crew of monkeys after you. They'll rip you to pieces," Beau threatened nonchalantly, "and I'll bet you don't know why I have an all monkey crew, do you?"

"Why no, I don't," the lawyer said looking nervously around the office.

Puffing his chest out proudly, "They can climb up the rigging faster and more gingerly than anyone else. You never thought of that did you?"

"Ah...yes, you're absolutely right. I would never have thought of that." Jacobs was very on edge now; he'd never been with anyone who was clearly off-their-nut before.

"I've got a lot of packing to do. I want to make sure my gear is stowed away proper and trim, so I'm going to leave now," Beau said as he tugged at his eyebrows and smoothed his hair back with both hands.

Jacobs finally relaxed as Beau left his office. My god, he thought, he needs to be locked up in the loony bin, the sooner the better.

## CHAPTER FIFTY

Milly's Dress Shop wasn't doing the business Margaret had hoped. There had been dry spells before, but these last few months had surpassed that mark. She was busy trying to think of something new she could do to lure folks back into her store when Berta Franklin dropped in.

"So, I guess you heard about me and Sam gettin' back together by now."

Margaret smiled, "Why, yes indeed, I did hear that, and I heard Sam scared the bejesus outta old Buddy. Is that part true?"

"That would be gospel, sure fire enough. Sam laid down the law and Buddy run with his tail tight between his hairy little legs," Both ladies broke out in guffaws and giggles.

After the hilarity of the moment subsided, Berta spoke, "I hear tell Mad-Dog-Mable's cat got kidnapped again by the little green men." That set them off once more with horselaughs galore.

“Now ifin’ they’d only take her; wouldn’t that surely be a spectacular day of celebratin’ all over town.” Margaret chimed in.

“Oh god yes, I’d pop a cork for that blessed event,”  
Hysterical laughter and coughing abounded.

“But honey, after ten minutes of being with her, those poor little green men would be fallen all over themselves tryin’ to kick her outta their spaceship.” That was it; Berta wet herself first and Margaret was a close second. Their flushed faces and facial expressions reveled to each, what the other had done, and then they cut loose once again, full force with tears streaming down their cheeks, and let us not forget the pee running down their legs.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

No more than three days had passed at the sanitarium over in Millersburg, and Beau was already suspicious of the attendants and staff. He knew they were watching him. Also, very upset with E.P. Jacobs, for there was no boat dock as he had assured him there was. His daydreams would revolve around swift revenge heaped upon his family attorney.

This place is turning into a prison he thought. That good for nothin' Chief Hudson. Leonard told him the Chief and his low-down half-brother Johnny were going to frame him for Terri Helms murder. That's too much for any man to stomach.

"I knew the Chief was rotten to the core the first time I met him. Isn't that right Leonard?" Beau said jerking at his eyebrows; they were bothering him more today than usual. "When I get outta here, I'll pay that lying Chief a little visit he won't soon forget. Thanks Leonard for keeping me posted on all the news," he said pleased.

Twice a year the high school orchestra played a musical program for the staff and patients at the Pinewood Sanitarium

in Millersburg. The event for this afternoon was scheduled to commence just after lunch.

Beau sensed the excitement in everyone. He watched from his heavy screened window as a van loaded with equipment and two buses arrived. The students carried their instruments inside to the auditorium.

Leonard now spoke, "This might be your ticket out of here. You'll have to be careful, because you know how close they watch you. Come on, let's go to the show."

The orchestra, dressed in the school's red and silver uniforms played twelve selections ranging from polkas to marches. Beau sat calmly through the entire program. Applauding with gusto at its finale. The staff gave instructions for the patients to return to their rooms. The students began to move their equipment to the van and Beau listened as Leonard whispered, "This is the moment we've been waiting for."

The band director had laid his jacket on the chair next to Beau. "Put it on quickly," Leonard instructed, "Hurry, pick up a music stand and walk out with the group of students."

Making his way from the building without being discovered. Beau placed the music stand in the van. Glancing around, he saw that no one noticed him, so he slowly walked into a grove of trees near a parking lot and vanished.

Snickering, Beau said, "A professional magician couldn't have disappeared as fast as we did. Come on Leonard, we must hurry while it's still daylight."

Giggling and laughing as he rushed through the grove, his monkey crew could now be heard as they leaped from one branch to another; chattering wildly as they scampered through the trees.

To conceal himself, he ran in a crouched position as darkness came on; then running down an embankment at top speed, he stumbled as he reached the bottom and fell over a steel railroad track hitting the ground hard.

"Get up stupid and watch where you're going!" Leonard shouted at him.

Beau heard the monkey crew laughing at him and was embarrassed, he felt ashamed for falling. Brushing himself off

as he stood, he looked up and down the tracks, "I don't know which way to go?!" he cried out.

"Go to your left. It'll lead you back home," Leonard snapped.

Beau walked down the middle of the tracks as exhaustion came on, yet was determined to escape. "They'll never catch me now, I'm free."



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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### BEAU CAMP ESCAPES MILLERSBURG SANITARIUM

Saint Cloud police have been alerted that Beau Camp may be heading back home per the Millersburg P.D. With the mishandled events of late; this reporter is sure Mr. Camp will be able to elude capture by the Saint Cloud P.D. with ease. It will be up to the courageous citizens of this small hamlet to affect his capture. All citizens are advised to lock their homes, and keep a keen eye out. Notify the police of any suspicious activity and maybe they can be of some assistance, or maybe not. Time will tell if the Saint Cloud P.D. can step up to the crime wave that has hit our small town.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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After seeing the Gazette, Miller and Fairchild knew they'd better go see the Chief before he had a coronary. No sooner had they entered his office they found him reading the Gazette; his face was beet red.

Thomas spoke first, "Now Frances, before you blow your..."

"Crime wave! What the hell is wrong with that little snott-nosed punk? And to say we can't even catch a nut like Beau Camp! Why, I'll close down that damn silly newspaper! You bet your bottom dollar, that's just what I'll do! And that damn sanitarium, what the hell is going on over there? Have the lunatics taken over the goddamn nuthouse?! My god it's outrageous!"

His ranting and raving didn't have any effect upon Dick, because he was already in total agreement with the Chief. But, the calm levelheadedness of Thomas would prevail this day.

"Frances," Thomas said as he and Dick sat down, "you know you can't shut down the news service. It would be illegal, not to mention the fact it would make us look like we

had something to hide. We just need to keep our wits about us and in time, we'll clear all this up."

Dick chimed in now, "Let's go get that little jerk and lock him in a cell for 24 hours and see if that don't knock the wind out of his sails."

"Yes, I like that idea, can we?" Frances responded with a big smile.

"No, no we can't do that, as Det. Fairchild knows full well," Thomas said dryly as he gave a stern look toward Dick, letting him know he didn't appreciate his attempt at egging the Chief on.

Dick grinned, "Whatever."

"Well, damn it all to hell," the Chief slumped back in his chair.

"I'll go have a little chat with Jonah later today, and explain to him that how he portrays us in the Gazette, is causing the community to feel unsafe. Maybe he'll listen to reason, maybe not." Thomas said.

“Well, if that don’t work, let’s tie him up in a tater sack and drop his skinny ass in the creek.” Dick said with an evil smirk on his taunt face.

The Chief nodded, “Yes, I like that idea.”

Thomas rolled his eyes and then looked up at the ceiling, “Please, help us Lord, for we know not what we do,” All three men now broke out in fits of laughter.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

As Thomas sat quietly in his living room looking over the file of Martha Camp's murder—Nancy came in from the kitchen.

“Dinner will be ready soon,” she said sitting next to him.

As he glanced up, “Ah...what? I'm sorry dear, what did you say?” His mind was miles away trying to figure out who and why would someone want her dead.

“I said, dinner will be ready shortly,” she said placing her hand on his leg. “Put the file away, you're going to drive yourself nuts if you don't get some rest.”

“I must be missing something,” he said staring at the file.

“Look at me,” she softly spoke. “I need for you to pay some attention to me for a change.”

Turning to face her, “Okay, okay, I just need some...”

“It's not about what you need! It's about what 'we' as a couple need; and I need for you to relax and get some rest! You're going to make yourself sick and I won't have it!” she bellowed as her tone went from sweet to audacious.

Thomas put the file down on the wooden coffee table, which he had purchased several years back for her birthday. It was not a good birthday present for her, as any woman would agree; a coffee table does not convey love or affection.

“You’re right, I do need some rest,” he said slumping back in a more comfortable position on the couch.

Nancy leaned closer to him, locking her arm around his as she began to speak in a low, passive voice, “Martha’s funeral was very nice. A fair number of people came; don’t you think so?”

“Yes, I guess so,” he said as he replied in a soft, hazy manner.

“It was a shame no one attended Terri Helms funeral; she wasn’t such a bad person. Don’t you think she wasn’t a bad person?”

“Well, I really didn’t know her that well.” His eyelids were drooping as he was on the verge of dozing off.

“Stella said she saw in her crystal ball that there would be more murders; you think there will be more murders?”

“Well...I...surely...hope...not...for...” He drifted off to sleep.

As his head fell back against the couch, she shook his arm gently to keep him awake. “Do you think I’m as pretty as my sister?”

“Uh...what?” Trying to focus, he looked at her face.

“You heard what I said! You think I’m fat don’t you!” She screeched as she rose up from the couch and stormed off to their bedroom.

Startled, he sat straight up. He heard the door to their bedroom slam shut. Thomas thought to himself--what the hell did I do now? Maybe my mother was right after all; maybe Nancy wasn’t the right girl for me.

Now he tried to focus in on the large calendar, which hung on the kitchen wall near the refrigerator. Looking at the dates, he mumbled, “Well, it ain’t that time of month, so what’s her problem?” Making himself comfortable on the not-so-soft couch, he drifted off to sleep dreaming of better days to come, or so he prayed.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

Dexter Alexander came over from Millersburg once again to channel Constantine. The Monday Night Mystics were overjoyed at his arrival. Well, some were, some still didn't like the, no questions asked policy, of his guide.

Miss Stella started them off with a blessed opening prayer and then turned it over to Dexter and his guide.

"I am Constantine. I will be discussing this evening those entities known to you as Extraterrestrials. Much has been done to create an atmosphere that will have beings from off the planet received more readily. It is important that there be less doubt of the possibility; it is not important that all believe in sentient life, but the ability to conceive the potential for other life is important. There are those who have visions and experiences, and as soon as they look at these events more critically, to go about the process of examining them deeper, they will see that this is something they cannot dismiss as a random event. It will take a time of great upheaval before those known as aliens render themselves available in the



physical form and directly available on the steps of any government building. They have come in single and small numbers just to study humans as they walk among you. Many will say they come to harm the planet or to enslave humans, this is not true. Those who come to interact with this planet shall be peaceful and evolved, in order to share information for the improvement of all that inhabit this planet at the time they disclose themselves. There will never be a time when the Earth will be enslaved by outside beings. It is important to know that there is much done to create peaceful intervention so that no outside negative influence interferes with the Earth. After official contact is made with those on Earth, there will be a peace in the aftermath and they will help to usher in a new type of technology and new beliefs for those present. Just know there have been many instances of life throughout existence in this universe, and there have been many that have moved on or moved out of this universe or through it. Many should understand that there are movies depicting a wide variety of beings for entertainment purposes. There is not a wide variety, there are only a few, but there are variations, and there are

existences beyond that of your own in this same physical dimension. Though the Earth is a destructive planet and many aliens do not wish to interact with those in the human form, they are aware of you, yet many of you are not aware of them. I am finished with this subject. This is Constantine.”

Dexter raised his head up and opened his eyes. Miss Stella gave a wonderful closing prayer and then turned on one lamp.

Mary, rubbing her eyes now looked to Ruth, “So, does this mean Mad-Dog-Mable has been right all along about little green men?”

“Honey, I don’t know what to believe anymore.” Ruth whispered.

Miss Stella listened patiently, “All the guides ever ask of us is to keep an open mind, nothing more.”

They all headed upstairs for refreshments as usual, some had more questions than answers, but would surely be back next Monday night. Even if some wished secretly that Constantine wouldn’t show up.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

The home of the ‘Saint Cloud Gazette’ was nothing more than a small, one story building, which contained only three rooms and a small bathroom. There was the main office, which had a sign on the door ‘News Editor Clark Monroe’ and a second office that read, ‘Reporter J. McGregor’ while the third room contained a small, hand cranked printing press and supplies.

Det. Miller opened the front door and stepped into a very short hall, “Hello! Anybody here?!”

Jonah came out of the printing room, “Yes sir, I’m here. What can I do for you?”

“Well son, I’d like to speak to your boss, if I may?”

“I’m sorry sir, Mr. Monroe is in Connecticut at the moment. His mother was taken ill, so he left me in charge until he returns. He figured since nothing ever happens around here, it would be okay.”

“When do you expect him back?” Miller asked.

“Gosh, I don’t know. Mr. Monroe didn’t say how bad off his mother was, but since he went all that way to be with her, I figured it was pretty serious. Is there something I can help you with sir?” Jonah was wiping black ink from his hands with a small towel.

“Yes, there is. Some of the stuff you’re writing in the Gazette is starting to get some folks riled up.”

“I only report the factual news as it is relayed to me from those I interview sir.”

“No, some don’t see it that way Jonah. They feel you take what they say and then twist it around so you can sell more papers.”

“I cannot be held accountable if those I speak to are trying to hide the truth from the people. I must report the truth, no matter how much they do, or do not know. I have a responsibility to let the citizens know what is really going on behind the scenes.”

“Jonah, I’m not telling you not to print the truth, but are you sure you, of all people, know what the real truth is?”

“No sir, I will not be bullied by you or the Mayor into falsely reporting, all is fine and dandy, when it’s apparently not. No sir. I think it best that you leave now, please.”

Miller was taken aback for a moment at Jonah’s little speech, and maybe he was trying to influence Jonah. He felt a little proud that Jonah would indeed stand up for what he believed was right, no matter the consequences. It reminded him of when he was younger, and didn’t take crap from nobody.

“Alright then,” Miller turned and left without further comment.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

Chief Hudson had left work early to prune the bridal wreath shrubs in his front and side yards. Raking up the sprigs, he placed the branches into a pile, near the curb knowing the trash men would pick them up for him.

When he finished, he went inside the house, had a hot shower, climbed into fresh pajamas and sat in his favorite chair and started to read the Saint Cloud Gazette.

The Chief had lived in this five room house for over thirty years. It was modest, well maintained and located in an area of similar homes.

Like most law enforcement officers over the years, the Chief had developed a sixth sense. Suddenly a strange uneasiness came over him. Slowly he folded his paper and stood as the hour was very late. Turning around, he found himself facing an intruder holding a gun, and it was pointed straight at his chest. The intruder was dressed in a red and white band director's jacket, light blue hospital pajama bottoms and wearing only one brown slipper. He had the appearance of

someone who had been running through thick brush and low hanging tree limbs. More disturbing to the Chief was that he now recognized the man before him, and he had his service revolver.

"Chief Hudson, you remember me, I'm Beau Camp and I represent the International Monkey Ship Insurance Company. Please tell me sir, what would your friends and family do if you suddenly died?"

The Chief didn't answer; just stood motionless as he studied Beau's body language.

"Do you realize you work in a high risk occupation?"

"Put the gun down and we'll discuss your insurance," the Chief said playing for time, "It sounds interesting."

"Well then, allow me to set up a demonstration. Please sit here on this dining room chair," Beau said as he maneuvered the chair into the center of the living room.

"No sir, I'll stay where I am if you don't mind." Chief Hudson said in a pleasing manner trying not to incite Beau's delusional wrath.

"I said put your ass in this damn chair, and do it now!" Beau shouted.

Slowly the Chief crossed the room and sat down as ordered. Looking around he tried to seek out anything he might use as a weapon to defend himself.

"That's right, you just relax. Rest assured this gun is loaded as you very well know, and if it looks familiar, well it should, it's yours. Can you guess where I found it? On the shelf inside the back door," Beau laughed as he blinked his eyes rapidly several times.

"So, that's how you got in, through the back," the Chief noted, "Now listen to me Beau, put the gun down. You have no reason to feel threatened. You have no enemies here. This is my home and you're safe."

"Did you hear what he said Leonard?" Beau laughed.

"Yes, I heard. Tell the Chief to shut up," he whispered oh so sternly.

"Beau, listen to me for just one minute," the Chief pleaded as he now felt things were not going to turn out as he hoped.



"No, you just shut up, and put your hands behind your back, and don't move when I snap these handcuffs on your wrists. Don't worry, I won't press them too tight."

More laughter came forth as Beau clicked the handcuffs around the Chief's wrists. "There now, do they feel comfortable? Well they should, these are your cuffs, and they have your vibrations all over them. Boy, I'll bet they could tell some real horror stories...what, no comment? Good, tomorrow morning they'll have one more story to tell. Now Chief, sit still and don't move while I tie you to the chair with this clothesline. We certainly don't want you to fall out of your chair and accidentally break your neck," he snickered heartily with great amusement in his jittery voice.

"Wait just a minute Beau, I've got an idea. Let's go to your office and sign the insurance forms there. That way we'll get them in the mail faster," the Chief suggested.

Beau shook his head as he cracked his knuckles. Mumbling something about not trusting the mail, "The mailman has been spying on me."

He tied the Chief firmly to the chair and pulled the rope so tight that it cut into the Chiefs' skin in several places. The Chief tried to show no fear or pain; yet he was still hopeful of regaining control of the situation at hand.

"There now, all tight and snug...oh my goodness, you still have your house slippers on. Please, allow me to remove them. I lost one of mine running along the railroad tracks as I came into town. Now isn't that better? See, you can wiggle your toes," Beau giggled uncontrollably as he then kicked off his one slipper and put the Chief's house shoes on. "A little large for me, but they'll do."

"You'll not get away with this Beau," the Chief whispered.

"Stop calling me Beau! I'm the Admiral and I demand your respect! Damn you Chief Hudson, you tried to sink my ship! You're going to pay, like you've never paid before!" Beau screeched.

"Admiral," the Chief said, "please sit on the couch so we can work out any differences we might have. You don't want to harm me or anyone else for that matter."

"Chief Hudson, I must continue my demonstration of your insurance coverage. We don't have time for snacks or idle chit-chat. It's getting late and I'll need to be on my way soon. Oh, by the way, I discovered the light switch by the front door controls the receptacle near this fancy lamp of yours. How fancy is that? Now sit quietly like a good boy while I place this towel around your mouth. Be careful and don't swallow it."

Beau stepped back and studied the Chief. Proud of the job he had done in securely tying and gaging the old man; he shivered with anticipation at what was to come next. Making his way into the kitchen, he foraged for several items he'd soon be needing. Returning to the living room, he was now ready to continue his dastardly deed.

"Now if you can answer three questions correctly, I'll let you go free; you have my word as a gentleman on that. Your first question; what is today's date?"

As the Chief tried to answer, his voice was too muted by the towel-gag. Beau reached into the pocket of the band director's jacket and withdrew a silver-plated whistle.

"Sorry, wrong answer," he said and blew the whistle loudly.

"Second question; who's the President?"

The Chief didn't try to respond, he just stared at Beau in disbelief at what was happening.

"Times up." The whistle sounded again.

"Third question; at this time yesterday, what time was it?"

The Chief continued to stare as he now feared what Beau would do when he tired of his insane game he was playing.

"Nothing to say?" For the third and final time he blew the whistle. "You're really dumb, but I'm giving you double coverage anyway. As Admiral, top salesman, and agent in charge, I have the power to release this information to you. In case of fire, you're fully covered, and with this water-bucket I found underneath your kitchen sink, I'll give you triple coverage."

The Chief began to struggle as he poured cold water over his head.

"Oh, come on, sit still Chief. It's only water. You do want fire coverage don't you? Maybe the coverage isn't adequate. Okay, here's some more. I'll sprinkle extra water over your

head, down your back and a little splash in your lap. We must be certain we have you fully covered and also a little on your legs, yes, we mustn't forget your toes. We wouldn't want them uncovered. There now, you're fully covered. Don't you feel secure knowing my insurance company is looking out for your wellbeing?" he said putting the bucket down.

The Chief felt as helpless as a turtle that had been flipped over onto its back.

"Sir, by allowing me to come into your home to demonstrate our best policy, you've displayed a great deal of dignity and patience. Therefore, my company presents you with this twenty-foot extension cord I found under your kitchen sink. It's a gift selected especially for you. Allow me to demonstrate; see this end of the cord plugs into the receptacle. Yes, that's right, the one your lamp is plugged into," he said flipping the switch off by the door as he unplugged the lamp and plugged in the extension cord.

"Oh dear, someone has cut the other end of the cord. They also peeled the insulation off exposing the bare wires," he said cracking his knuckles.

"Oh well, you already have your shoes off. I'll just attach these two exposed wires onto your big toes," Beau said grabbing the Chief's left foot, and then his right, as he started wrapping and twisting the bare wires securely to both big toes.

"I hope it's not too tight. Here's some more water. I want you to feel that you're fully covered," he giggled as if he truly were an insane lunatic. "That's our motto, full coverage to the very end."

"Tell him about his half-brother Johnny," Leonard whispered.

"Ah, yes, we also have a little surprise for your dimwitted brother, but don't worry about him. Where he's going, I doubt you'll get to see him again," Beau sniggered. "So long Chief and may god bless you, you no good filthy sinner," he ran both hands through his greasy hair.

The Chief struggled and tried to chew the towel from his mouth. Jerking and twisting, he desperately tried to break free of his bondage.

Beau stepped into the doorway, as he reached back inside for the light switch, he smiled as he saw the Chief fiercely

struggling in vain to free himself. As he flipped the switch on; he watched the surge of electricity stiffen and shake his victims' wet body in uncontrollable waves of convulsions.

Beau had never felt so ecstatic and alive as he did now.

Overcome with sheer delight, he began to cry as he turned and walked off into the darkness.

Slowly strolling along smiling, Beau suddenly stopped, now remembering Miss Stella telling the Monday Night Mystics, that a person with psychic awareness, could witness the spirit floating out of the body of a dying person. For a moment, he was tempted to go back, but then he changed his mind, figuring it was already too late to witness the special event.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

On the other side of town, Dick Fairchild was busy shadowing his son Ronny, who had just slipped out his bedroom window a few minutes earlier; even though he was supposed to be sound asleep at this late hour.

Dick almost lost Ronny as he maneuvered through the darkness, but managed to stay with him to his secret rendezvous. Now his curiosity was truly piqued as his son approached the home of Alan Wallace.

On several occasions, Dick had interacted with Alan at the library, when he required assistance in locating books or materials pertaining to police work. Beyond that, there was nothing between the two men.

Ronny made his way around to the rear door and producing a key, entered Alan's modest little domicile; which came as a startling surprise to his father who was now observing him from behind a small tool shed in the same vicinity.

As his son entered and closed the door behind him—several moments passed when Dick now noticed a light had been



turned on. The light was coming through a side window with thin light blue curtains which were not completely closed.

As he surveyed the surrounding area, Dick now felt it was safe to approach and peer inside as to what might bring his son to Mr. Wallace's home at such an odd hour. Several minutes had already lapsed before he made his move to the outer rim of the two by three-foot window.

No voices could be heard as he strained to hear; taking one last look about, he leaned in and looked through the dirty glass. Utter shock struck him as if he had been stabbed in the chest. For the first time in his life, he froze, uncertain what to do. So many emotions were coursing through his mind and body, he just stood transfixed on the scene playing out before him, unable to look away.

Alan was totally naked and sitting on the edge of the bed facing the window which was only seven feet away. He was looking down at Ronny, who was kneeling between his legs, he too was naked except he was still wearing his black socks. Alan had his hands on Ronny's head--assisting him as it were--as it bobbed up and down repeatedly.

Dick finally turned from the harrowing spectacle as tears ran down his flushed cheeks. The last time he cried was when his wife, Mary Beth had just given birth to their son, Ronald Walter Fairchild, and then died so un-expectantly.

Regaining some of his senses, Dick wasn't sure how long he'd been standing there, he lost all track of time. Unable to stop himself, he gazed once more through the window; his son was now face down upon the bed with Alan straddling him from behind thrusting away.

Dick bolted from the sinful scene as a savage rage now grew inside his rigid abdomen. Running with clinched fists as fast as he could, he stumbled and fell, a dog started barking, he saw lights coming on. Not sure whose yard he was in, he jumped to his feet and ran nonstop back to his home.

Such a betrayal from his son, he had never before experienced, but he knew in his heart he still loved his son; even if he felt ashamed of him right now. Such a scandalous act; yet he could not exact punishment upon his son, for he knew in his heart that it was none other than Wallace, who had

seduced his innocent boy into being defiled in such a depraved manner.

Yet, that did not hold true for Alan; for him, Dick's vengeance would be forthcoming with a heavy hand; so sayeth the Bible as he understood it to be the word of god almighty.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

The telephone rang at police headquarters. As Buddy answered, a frantic woman's voice spoke rapidly about hearing a whistle and then seeing Beau Camp coming out of Chief Hudson's home, and that her husband went over to check and he said the Chief was dead. Buddy recognized Chief Hudson's next door neighbor, Mrs. Spencer and said he'd send units right away.

Buddy radioed the two black-and-whites on duty to respond immediately. Then he telephoned Det. Miller's residence and was told to call Det. Fairchild and have him meet him there. Buddy got no answer at the Fairchild residence, so he decided to try again every fifteen minutes.

Miller parked behind one of the patrol cars in front of the house. Quickly surveying the scene as he entered, he noticed the faint smell of burnt flesh, yet couldn't place the odd scent. Bound, gagged; the Chief's lifeless body was a gruesome sight to behold. Miller noticed the extension cord with the bare wires secured to his blackened big toes. Tearing up, he tried to

hold himself together as he stared at his friend and mentor. It was going to be a long night indeed.

The police officer that arrived first on the scene saw Det. Miller and began to fill him in. After hearing his report, he asked, "Where's Det. Fairchild?"

"I'll radio in and see what I can find out," the Officer replied.

Det. Miller crossed the room and slumped into the Chief's recliner. He pulled his pocket watch out, glanced at the time, then reached into his jacket pocket and lit up a Camel. Gazing past the body on the floor, he tried to make sense of the evening. Closing his eyes, he sat quietly as Doc Pearlman who had just arrived checked over the corpse.

Earl Schulz now entered the front door just as Det. Miller started to choke on his cigarette smoke, which caused him to bolt upright in the recliner coughing and gagging for breath.

"That's a bad cough, you might want to quit," Earl noted as he assisted Doc with the Chief's body.

Wiping tears from his eyes as the coughing now was brought under control, Det. Miller stood.

"Well, as near as I can tell, he was electrocuted." Doc Otis deduced.

"I'll get my camera and film from the car," Det. Miller said making his way outside.

Det. Fairchild had finally been notified and came roaring to a stop. He jumped from his car and rushed over to Det. Miller.

"What's going on?"

Det. Miller handed him the camera, "The Chief is dead; he's inside with Doc and Earl."

Fairchild could see Miller was not capable of dealing with his old friend's death, so he took charge for now. Officer Hendrix now arrived with her siren blaring and strobe light flashing. She turned off her siren as she braked hard. Misjudging how much stopping space she needed, she slid right into Chief Hudson's mailbox, knocking it several feet into his front yard.

Miller shook his head, but couldn't bring himself to admonish her for the little mishap. Lighting another Camel, he took in a long drag, and then blew the smoke up into the air.

He watched for a moment as the warm sultry breeze slowly sent it toward the house.

She leapt from her vehicle and strutted over to Det. Miller, "Sorry sir. Is it really true? Is the Chief really dead sir?"

"Yes, and Det. Fairchild is already inside the house. Go check in with him." She did as she was told; for she knew now was not the time to cause problems after looking into his watery eyes.

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### CHIEF HUDSON MURDERED BY ELECTROCUTION

Chief Frances Hudson was murdered last night. Det. Dick Fairchild has been assigned to head up the investigation. Witnesses report that Beau Camp was seen fleeing the residence minutes before Chief Hudson's body was discovered. Saint Cloud P.D. has every available officer out looking for Mr. Camp. Anyone seeing him, call the police department immediately.

With the murder of Frances Hudson; the death toll now climbs to three. Who will be next?

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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## CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

Just inside the door of Zeeks Barber Shop; Herbert Mueller and Gerald Bozeman were playing checkers. Nigel had Sonny Darnell trapped in his old worn brown leather barber chair, trying to trim up what was left of his thinning hair.

“If you don’t stop squirmin’ around so much, I swear I’m gonna tie ya down,” Nigel mockingly threatened as he tried to finish Sonny’s haircut.

“Well, for Pete’s sake, stop gougin’ me with your fancy clippers and I’ll sit still. I truly declare, I never seen another man whose hands shake as bad as yours.” Sonny moaned as he winked at the others. A few chuckles could be heard under the ruckus the electric clippers made.

“It’s your move.” Gerald said.

“No, I just moved there,” Herbert pointed at one of his red checker’s.

“Oh, well then, let me see,” Jumping two of Herbert’s checkers, “King me.”

“Wait just a darn minute. That checker wasn’t there, it was there,” Herbert said pointing at the board, “Stop cheating and take it back.”

“What the Sam Hell are you talkin’ bout, that was a fair move and you know it!” Gerald roared.

Sonny threw his two cents in, “Watch him Herbert, he pulled some slick moves on me last week.”

“Oh, is that right?” Herbert questioned contemptuously.

“Don’t believe nothin’ that ol’ farmer says, he’s full of sheep dip.” Gerald snorted.

They all busted out in back-slappin’ hilarity. They enjoyed each other’s company immensely and trying to one-up each other was their favorite pastime. Some of their happiest memories came from the barber shop.

“You gents goin’ to Chief Hudson’s funeral next week?” Nigel inquired on a more serious note.

“You bet your bottom dollar on it. Frances was more than the Chief-of-Police; he was a true friend.” Sonny bragged.

“That’s true, he’d give ya the shirt off his back if need be,” You could hear the pride in Herbert’s words.

Gerald agreed, “Yes sir, yes sir indeed. A true gentleman of the highest caliber.”

Herbert decided it was time to fire things up a bit, “So, Nigel, I hear tell little green men stole your cat again.”

All those good ol’ boys broke out in deafening hysterics; true knee slappin’ laughter of the first order.

When they finally settled down, Nigel spoke first, “That darn cat has caused me more trouble than you fellers could ever know. This last time Mandrake went missin’ Mable stood out in the back yard every evening for two whole weeks yellin’ ‘here kitty-kitty, here kitty-kitty, mommy loves you Mandrake.’ Liked to drove me mad. If those little aliens do have him, and mind you, I didn’t say I believe in’em...I pray to god they don’t bring him back.”

Laughter all around erupted once again.

“So, I take it you never seen a silver space ship, nor any little spacemen runnin’ about?” Herbert asked.

“No sir, not even one.” Nigel replied.

“Sonny, how ‘bout you. You ever see flying saucers or Martians out at your farm?” Gerald asks.

“Bull feathers and horse hockey I say, there ain’t no such a thing. That’s all I got to say on the matter.” He folded his arms across his chest as if to end the subject.

Nigel was now working on Sonny’s neck line, “For heaven’s sake, will you stop movin’ around.”

“So tell me Herbert, what’d you do if Beau Camp went walkin’ past here right now?” Gerald queried.

“Ah, I don’t rightly know to be honest. He never done me or Hazel no harm. Always seemed friendly enough. Sold us some good insurance.”

“What about you Nigel, what’d you reckon you’d do?” Gerald asked.

“Well sir, I must admit, I barely knew the man. Mable didn’t care for him and she told him so to his face one day when he approached her in Franklin’s Market. I don’t think he was playin’ with a full deck, if you know what I mean. But if he went wanderin’ by right now, I think out of respect for Frances, I’d call the law.”

“Sonny?”

“I’d get my double barreled 12-guage and blow that murderin’ son’s-a-bitch to kingdom come. That’s what he’d get for killin’ my friend, Frances. Then I’d dig a deep hole in my back yard and shove his bloody body in head first and plant some daisies on top. That way, each year I could sit on my back porch and watch the daisies bloom. That’s all I got to say on the matter.”

The others just stared first at Sonny, then at each other. Finally, Gerald said, “I sure do hope I never get on your bad side.”

They all broke out once again in uncontrollable, side-splitting stitches. Yet, it was planted in the dark recesses of their minds; just how much of what Sonny said was just him blowin’ hard, and how much was truly serious. Only time would tell.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

Det. Miller had pulled himself together, at least for now, he worked out a search map. Two-man teams would check their assigned areas for Beau Camp. If found, they were not to approach him until they radioed and waited for back-up officers to arrive; he gave stern orders to that effect, anyone disobeying would be placed on immediate suspension without pay.

Miller assigned Officer Hendrix and Det. Fairchild to check throughout the main downtown area. It would be a good opportunity for them to get used to working together he felt. They would not be happy with his decision, but would comply.

Splitting the rest of the city in half, he sent one team of officers to cover the west and north areas, and the other team to cover the south and east areas; since manpower was severely limited. The third and last team would check outside the city limits, checking with ranchers and farmers. He would remain at the police station with Buddy to await any news.

Not taking any chances, Miller had all teams take extra cartridges for their .38 caliber Smith and Wesson model 64 revolvers; plus, each team was to have one 12-gauge pump shotgun with them. If Beau Camp put up any fight at all, he told his teams not to take any chances—shoot to kill was his order; it was time to regain control.

Many townsfolk were scared; locking their doors, afraid now to be out after dark. Citizens now feared strangers, and even some were now watching what their neighbors were doing.

Paranoia was setting in and Miller felt it had to be stopped before innocent people started taking the law into their own hands; for that would only lead to utter lawlessness and chaos. That he could not, and would not tolerate.

Some officers were very surprised at his command, for most had never even drawn their revolvers in the line of duty before, but now, shoot to kill? Most of the officers were unsure if they could do that. Writing parking and speeding tickets was all they had ever handled; yet, if Det. Miller, who they all held in

high regard, so ordered it, then it was indeed an order that must be obeyed.



## CHAPTER SIXTY

As Hazel spun the dial on the rotary telephone, she nervously watched out the window; several times from early morning to mid-afternoon she had seen the black-and-whites racing past her home in their search for Beau Camp.

Several rings later Ruth answered, "Hello."

"I just can't believe Chief Hudson is dead."

Ruth recognized her voice, "Yes, I know what you mean. Such a good man, and to die like that; fried like an egg. My goodness, what's the world comin' too."

"Have you seen all the police cars racing about?" Hazel now inquired.

"Well dear, if you look closely, you'll see it's the same car. There's only one, but it sure is racing all over the place, I'll give you that." Ruth explained.

"How do you know it's the same one?" Hazel asked, for she surely wanted to know there were lots of police out, not just one.

“Next time you see it drive past, look at the back and you’ll see one big number on the trunk; number 9. That police car has been down my street at least three times in the last five hours.” Ruth explained.

“Oh my gosh, here comes a police car...” She leaned close to her window to get a better look, “For heaven’s sake, you’re right, it has a big 9 on it.” Hazel’s voice betrayed her feelings and Ruth picked up on it with her womanly intuition; now she sensed her fear.

“Now Honey, don’t be alarmed, the police will have Beau Camp in custody before you know it. Besides, he never had a harsh word to say about you or Herbert, and that’s the god’s honest truth.” She said with a forceful tone, which she hoped would help ease Hazel’s distress over the whole situation.

“I sure do hope you’re right,” Hazel answered in a pleasant, yet frightful voice.

Ruth felt it was time to redirect her thoughts to something more humorous, “You hear about Mable’s cat, Mandrake, being kidnapped and dissected by the little gray Martians?”

“I have to go.” Hazel hung up quickly. She hadn’t told anyone except Father Lonigan about running over Mandrake, not even Herbert. She couldn’t take the chance if she told anyone, that it wouldn’t get back to Mad-Dog-Mable.

“Hello? Hazel...you still on the line dear?” Ruth looked at her phone then hung up. She guessed her friend was still too upset over the Chief Hudson and Beau Camp mess. Later, she would take her and Herbert some of her home-made chili and visit with them a spell she thought.

Ruth dialed Mary’s number, “Hello?”

“I was just talking to poor Hazel; she is very upset over Chief Hudson’s death.”

“The poor thing, she always wore her heart on her sleeve. Every little thing causes her heartache.”

“You really think Beau could murder someone?” Ruth asked.

“You know as well as I, that he’s loony-toons. People like that are capable of doing most anything if they have a mind to.” Mary stated it as if it were a fact and written in a book somewhere.

“So, you hear about Mad-Dog-Mable’s cat got skinned alive by the naked leprechaun’s?” Ruth said changing the subject for what she felt was more important gossip.

“Leprechaun’s? I heard it was the gray Martian’s who were conducting unholy sexual experiments on Mandrake,” Mary said a tad confused, “Who said it was naked leprechauns?”

“Why, I spoke to Ellen, and she said she got it straight from Cindy. Said her husband Gerald heard Nigel say so down at the barber shop. Said Mable was beside herself with grief over the blood thirsty leprechaun’s who had skinned Mandrake while he was still alive. Who said it was the Martian’s?” Ruth asked puzzled.

“Why, Beatrice said she ran into Sonny Darnell not a block from Zeeks Barber shop, and he told her it was little gray Martian’s, and that he heard it straight from Nigel’s own lips. He swore hand-to-god she said.” Mary countered.

“Those silly men are nothin’ but a bunch of fools. They wouldn’t know the truth if it jumped up and bit’em on their derriere.” Both ladies laughed.

One man's truth is another man's lie; yet, one woman's  
gossip will always be another woman's truth. So be it.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

Mayor Carver called an emergency meeting. Present in his office were Det. Miller, Det. Fairchild, Coroner Earl Schulz and Doctor Otis Pearlman. The meeting's agenda was to discuss the murders of Chief Hudson, Teri Helms and Martha Camp.

They were all seated in a half-circle facing the Mayor's desk. "So gentlemen, I think you already have an idea why I called this meeting. We need to get a handle on things, and right quick. People are running scared. I've heard talk of people saying they are going to pack up and leave if something isn't done. This we can't have. So let's see if we can't sort things out today. Thomas, where are we at pertaining to the investigations?"

Thomas cleared his throat as he wished he could lite up a Camel; but knowing the Mayor's distaste for tobacco, he would forgo that simple pleasure for now, "Well, as far as the Terri Helms murder, we have no suspects, other than Beau Camp's out-of-body experience, where he claims to have seen Johnny

Hudson beating an unknown woman, who just so happened to be caught up in barbwire fence at Sonny Darnell's farm. But Johnny's alibi for the night of the murder checks out. That is, if you can trust the word of Mike O'Malley."

"You think Beau could have killed Terri Helms and concocted that out-of-body story to point the finger at Johnny?" Brent asked.

"Well, anything's possible. Beau said at the time of the murder, he was at Miss Stella's home. They were having their Monday night séance, he claimed." Miller stated.

"They?" Brent asked.

"They call themselves the 'Monday Night Mystics' and there are seven of them; Mary Achtenberg, Ruth Anderson, Alan Wallace, Beatrice Reid, Beau Camp, Ellen Wellington, and of course, Stella O'Rourke. They meet..."

"Let me guess, every Monday night." Brent said sarcastically. The others snickered at the Mayor's comment, that is, all but Thomas who made no response out of family loyalty for his sister-in-law, Miss Stella.

Brent noticed Thomas didn't snicker at his interruption and now making the connection felt a little uncomfortable, "Sorry Thomas," he said in a low voice, "please continue with your summation."

Thomas didn't take offense and proceeded, "They confirmed he was present, but afterward, it would have been pretty hard for him to have located Terri and drove her to Darnell's place to kill her within the time frame noted by Earl."

"Earl chimed in, "That's true... the autopsy put the time of death between 7pm and 9pm, that's also the same timespan for Martha Camp."

"I don't think, even with a two-hour window of opportunity, the same person could have killed them both. Has to be two separate killers' in my opinion." Dick now joined the conversation.

"Is that what you think Thomas?" Brent asked.

Thomas looked at Fairchild, and then back to the Mayor, "Yes, it is."

"So Earl, what was the official cause of death for the Helms woman?" Brent asked.



“Blows to the head, neck and body; from the imprints, I’d say someone forceful, powerful, who used their fists and one or both boots to pummel and stomp her to death. The other abrasions and cuts were minor.”

Thomas now interjected, “When me and Officer Hendrix spoke to Beau at his home, Sherry excused herself to use his bathroom. She discovered a shirt with blood on it in his bathroom. Beau stated it was from a bloody boot that fell off the back of Johnny Hudson’s pick-up truck. He was on his way home when this incident occurred. But when Johnny turned his truck around and headed back, Beau left the boot in the street and hide in the shadows as Johnny stopped and retrieved the boot and left. So we don’t have the boot, only a shirt owned by Beau with blood on it.”

“So? Is it Terri Helms blood on his shirt?” Brent asked impatiently.

“I sent it off to the SCB to see what they could make of it. Haven’t heard a thing from them so far, but I did check and it’s a match for the same blood-type.” Earl commented.

Brent looked at Thomas with a puzzled look on his face and Thomas knew the Mayor didn't have a clue what Earl was referring to, "The SCB is the State Crime Bureau, which is a division of the Department of Public Safety. They have a small field office and lab in Millersburg."

Not to look foolish, Brent stated, "I know who the SCB is for god's sake. So, Beau had blood on his shirt... where's that leave us?"

"For now, it's just another loose end we haven't been able to tie down." Dick said.

"What about the two purses found on Beau's kitchen table? How'd they get there? You sure he ain't the killer here?" Brent was clearly growing irritated.

Miller responded, "When we questioned Beau, we did a search of his home and no purses were there. After he was later released, within a short time of arriving home, he called and Officer Hendrix responded immediately and there they were, side by side on the kitchen counter top."

“The only prints found on the purses besides the victims were those of Officer Hendrix.” Dick didn’t want to miss his chance at making her look inept.

Brent took the bait, “Why were her prints on the purses?”

Thomas shot Dick a very displeasing look, “Officer Hendrix is still in training, and in the excitement of the moment she forgot to put gloves on.”

Brent shook his head as he rolled his eyes, “Alright, so, what about Martha Camp’s murder?”

Dick took over, “She was found by Ellen Wellington early in the morning at the North Side Park. The murder weapon was a claw-hammer that was found near the body. No other evidence was found at the scene. You want to tell the rest Earl?”

“Sure, ah, she had been hit over thirty times. First few blows were from behind; those killed her right off. The others were just thrown in for good measure I suppose. She was definitely killed at the park where her body was found.”

“Any print’s on the hammer?” Brent queried.

Thomas gave a sigh as he answered, “The only prints on the hammer were from Officer Hendrix, who picked it up...”

“Let me guess, without gloves on.” Brent said dryly.

“Yes.”

“This may sound stupid; any chance Officer Hendrix is the killer here?” Brent asks half-heartedly.

Thomas answered, “No, just a rookie’s mistake.” Thomas was glad Dick didn’t jump in with his two-cents.

“So...no witnesses...well, that is, other than crazy Beau Camp. No finger prints, no blood results. What a mess.”

Brent said as he leaned forward in his chair. Resting his elbows on his desk he raised his hands to his face and rubbed his tired eyes.

“The good news is...” Dick began.

Looking up, “There’s good news?” Brent asks.

“Chief Hudson was definitely killed by Beau Camp. His finger prints are all over the house and on everything inside it. Plus, we have the neighbors who saw him fleeing the scene just seconds before the Chief’s body was discovered.”

Once again Earl speaks up, “That’s true, and the autopsy show’s he died just a few minutes before Beau was seen running from the house.”

“Doc, anything to add?” Brent asks.

“Nope, nothin’ to add, except of course, they’re officially dead.”

Everyone just stared at Doc after his unnecessary statement of what they already knew.

After a few moments, Brent says sarcastically, “Why, thank you Doc for clearin’ that up for us. I was truly wonderin’ if they were just ‘plain’ dead, or if they were ‘officially’ dead.”

Laughter broke out as Doc’s face blushed, for he didn’t think his comment was that off the mark.

Brent asked, “So, how much longer before we catch the little devil?”

“It’s just a matter of time. We’ve got everyone out lookin’ for him.” Thomas said.

“I know you’re all doing your best, but we just got to do better. I’m getting all kinds of call’s wanting to know why Saint Cloud is no longer a safe place to live. You know most

folks won't let their kids go to school. The park's empty, people are afraid to go there saying it's haunted with Martha's ghost. Businesses are calling to complain because folks are afraid to go shopping or to go eat out. I'm at my wit's end.”

Brent said as he cupped his hands over his face.

Thomas and Dick just looked at Brent, not knowing what to say to restore his faith in them. Thomas stood up, followed by Dick, Doc Otis and Earl. Quietly, they left his office.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO

All makes and models of city, county, and even state police cars were parked up and down the main boulevard, leading all the way to St. Joseph's church. Chief Frances Hudson would be laid to rest this very afternoon.

Not only had the majority of the Saint Cloud residents turned out for his funeral; nearly sixty officers from all over the state arrived in their pressed and starched official uniforms, to pay homage and give their final salutes to a man they revered as a hero. Many were personal and professional acquaintances of Frances Hudson throughout the years.

Father Lonigan would deliver such a proud and thoughtful eulogy to his honored memory; nary a dry eye to be found among the near two-hundred souls who turned out to say their last goodbyes, to such an outstanding and forthright man.

The various police departments formed a twenty-one-gun salute for their fallen comrade. The Saint Cloud volunteer fire department only had one fire truck; but it would sound its siren

with great pride in honor of the Chief-of-Police; for he had served as a volunteer fireman for nearly seventeen years.

Now, as his cedar-and-oak casket with gold-plated handles was lowered into the cool earth, a lone trumpeter played taps. A great sadness engulfed the large gathering; yet, for some mourners, sadness quickly turned to anger and thoughts of revenge.

Groups of unruly men would later prowl the streets in search of Beau Camp; that desperado who had taken the life of Chief-of-Police Frances Eugene Hudson.



## CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

Thomas had fallen asleep in his recliner as it had been a very long day; the ringing telephone now startled him.

Answering in time to keep Nancy from waking was his goal as he hurriedly reached for it, "Yes?"

"Hello? Thomas? This is Brent Carver. I've called a meeting for tomorrow morning at eleven in my office. It concerns you and the police department. I'm counting on you being there."

"Sure, I'll be there."

"Thank you." Brent hung up.

Miller slowly climbed the stairs to the bedroom and found his wife in bed sound asleep. Well, at least I won't have to put up with her third degree, he thought. He accidentally dropped one of his shoes on the floor making a loud thump.

Nancy stirred and mumbled, "Did you let the cat out?"

"We don't have a cat," he softly said.

"Is the phone ringing?" She slurred.

"No dear, go back to sleep."

## CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

The sudden raps on her front door startled Mary; getting up from her sofa, she peeked out her front window curtains to see who was standing at her door. As she recognized the person, she unlocked and opened it, “My god, you scared the daylight’s outta me banging on my door like that. Hurry up, get in so I can lock the door,” She said a bit flustered.

“Well for heaven’s sake, give me a chance to get in before you close the door on me,” Ruth whined.

“Come sit by me.” Mary took her by the arm as she almost dragged her to the sofa.

“Alright, alright...I’m coming. Don’t pull my arm off.” Ruth said as Mary all but threw her onto the sofa, “What’s gotten you so spooked?”

“I’m sorry dear, but all this murder and death stuff has me a tad on edge I’m afraid. I’m so glad you stopped by, I truly am.” Mary seemed anxious; yet was calming down now that her best friend had arrived.

“Hey, everything is going to be fine. No one is going to mess with us, I’ve got a knife in my purse,” Ruth said producing a rather large steak knife, “So don’t you get yourself all worked up dear. Anyone shows up here uninvited is gonna be damn sorry indeed,” She said slashing it back and forth through the air.

“Oh my goodness, well, okay than. If you say so, I believe you. Can you stay tonight?” Mary was still a bit unnerved as it were.

Ruth patted her knee, “I’d be happy to stay over as long as you need me sweetie.”

## CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

Ten minutes till eleven, Det. Miller arrived at the Mayor's office. Entering the building by the side entrance, he found Brent Carver in his office studying several forms. Sitting down he waited for him to finish.

Brent glanced at Thomas and then back to the forms. Handing the forms to him, "The city council met in an emergency session this morning at nine and decided you should finish Chief Hudson's term. If you have a reason why you'd rather not, I'd understand, but I hope you'll finish the rest of his term," he said, "and if you decide to take the position, you'll be a shoo-in for the office when it's time to officially appoint a new Chief-of-Police. Please, I need to know your answer as soon as possible."

"Thank you for the consideration. It'd be an honor to fill the Chief's vacancy. It won't be easy to fill his shoes, but I'll do my best," came his modest reply.

The two men stand and shake hands as the Mayor continues, "This change is effective as of right now. We'll be at your office at one o'clock to make it official."

"Yes sir."

The new Chief walked down the hall to his office. Sitting at his old desk for the last time he thought; this is not how I saw myself becoming the Chief.

Not twenty minutes had passed when Det. Fairchild came in with a smile on his face, "Congratulations, I hear you're the new Chief."

"How'd you find out so fast?" he asked surprised.

"Grapevine, its spreading fast."

"I'd like you to take over as the lead detective, would that be a problem for you?" Chief Miller asked.

"It would be my pleasure to serve under you. But, when it comes time at the end of the year to fill the vacancy permanently, I'm going to give you a run for your money, if you catch my drift." Fairchild said grinning.

"I wouldn't expect anything less." Miller now grinned.

"So, any news about Beau Camp's whereabouts?" Chief Miller asked.

"None, not even one sighting of that fruitcake."

"I know you don't want to hear this, but I need you to take Officer Hendrix under your wing and train her. Make her the best she can be." Miller braced himself for Fairchild's reply.

"My god...I don't know if I can deal with her ineptness. She picked up the bloody hammer at the North Side Park murder without gloves on, and walked around like she was on an Easter egg hunt; and when she picked up the purses at Beau Camp's house, she had her finger prints all over them, even inside..."

"Dick, please do this for me, alright? Please?" Miller tried a different tactic with his old nemesis. They were not friends, so to speak, yet each did hold great respect for the others abilities when it came to police work.

"Thomas, you owe me big-time," Dick said pointing at him with a big grin on his square jawed face.

"Thanks." Thomas replied nodding his head in agreement.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX

The red Chevy pickup had three men crammed in the front seat, and seven more riding in the flatbed with the tailgate down. Armed to the teeth with rifles, shotguns, and revolvers of all calibers, they drove around hoping to find Beau Camp; most were liquored up.

One vigilante even brought a long rope with a noose tied at one end, and figured there were plenty of tall trees should they find that low-down dirty skunk. Two more pickups, loaded with desperate men, were also out searching the countryside for that murderous villain.

Calls came in to the police station concerning the public's safety with armed, drunken men marauding all over the city streets. Chief Miller now had Buddy radio all police units, to seek out and find these pickups and send the offending bunch back to their homes. Any one refusing to comply was to be disarmed and arrested on the spot. Chief Miller had the full support of the Mayor; lawlessness would not stand per Brent Carver, not in his town.

It would take four, two-man black-and-whites, nearly two hours to finally corral these vigilantes and force them to disband. Peace would finally return to Saint Cloud, if only for a short while.



## CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN

“So,” Nancy said, arms crossed, looking up at her husband as she stood toe-to-toe with him, “you accepted the Chief-of-Police job?”

“Yes I did,” he said as he backed up a half-step, “you know I’ve always had my mind set on taking over after Frances retired, and now that...”

“Oh, so I’ve always known this, have I? That’s really funny, since you never once spoke to me about your career goals. Not once. You’re probably mistaking me for your chirpy-little girlfriend.” She huffed.

Thomas new where this was heading, “Look honey, I’ve got a lot on my mind with all that’s going on. Can you please not start your yammering about...”

“Yammering! Well, god forbid you spend more than two seconds talking with your wife! Pardon me all to hell!” She shouted as she stormed off to their bedroom.

Thomas waited for it; Nancy slammed the bedroom door so hard, one of the pictures hanging in the hallway fell to the floor

cracking the glass in the frame. Sitting down, he quietly stared out the window, wondering why their world was spinning out of control.

All he knew was, he was getting so tired of his wife's craziness. He'd never seen her so jealous before. It was as if some malicious spirit was controlling her he thought, or more likely, she was going through the 'change-of-life' he had heard Doc Otis speak of. Whichever, he thought as he lit up a smoke, something had better change, and soon.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT

Officer Hendrix radioed the police station from her black-and-white, “Unit 5 to dispatch?” She waited a full minute, “Unit 5 to dispatch?” After another minute, “Buddy! Answer the radio! It’s important!” She yelled into the mike.

He was leaning back in his chair with his feet propped up on his desk. Engulfed in one of his comic books, he had the base radio turned down on a low setting. Hearing his name shouted, he now sat up and turned up the volume. Not sure who called, he simply said, “Go ahead for dispatch.”

It made her mad at how unprofessional Buddy was, not to mention his unsightly appearance. She found him to be a disgrace to the department, and had reported him to Det. Miller; yet, no formal action was forthcoming.

“This is Unit 5, I’m at Earl Schulz’s home, notify Chief Miller and Det. Fairchild they need to come quick; and send some more black-and-white’s out here right away. Do you copy dispatch?” Her voice was professional and direct.

“Sherry? Is that you?” Buddy asks.

Officer Hendrix now lost her patience with him and was not going to be professional, “Buddy, you stupid imbecile, send the detectives and more officer’s out to Earl’s home right now, he’s been murdered!” She thundered into her mike.

“Earl’s dead?”

Sherry was now beside herself with anger, “Damnit Buddy, just do what I said!” Her voice echoed through the base radio.

“Okay, no need to get riled up like that Unit 5, and you should really watch your potty-mouth when talkin’ on the police radio. It’s unprofessional you know; but help is on the way, you can rest assured when ol’ Buddy is on the job, yes siree.” Alerting everyone from the Chief on down to respond.

Sherry gritted her teeth as she shook her head at his buffoonery. She had already dropped her radio mike onto the front seat of her cruiser, and headed back into Earl’s house, before Buddy delivered his little speech on suitable radio etiquette.

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### CORONOR EARL SCHULZ MURDERED

Saint Cloud P.D. are refusing to release any details of the Earl Schulz murder at this time. When asked if Beau Camp was involved, this reporter was ordered out of the police station by Detective Dick Fairchild, and was told should this reporter return, he would be jailed. This reporter is convinced, that if Chief Hudson knew of this unprofessional treatment of the free press by the Saint Cloud P.D., he would surely turn over in his grave. The death count now stands at 4.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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Fairchild stormed into Miller's office and slamming the Gazette on his desk, he then repeatedly poked the paper with

his index finger, "Chief Hudson would roll over in his grave! That asshole had the audacity to put that in print!"

"Now, now, just take a breath, and please, for god's sake, sit down before you go off halfcocked and get yourself into trouble."

Fairchild sat, "I swear I'm gonna pummel that..."

"Don't tell me what you're gonna do, I might have to jail you for it," Miller smiled.

"I don't know why I let that kid get to me. That bullshit he peddles just sends me off the deep end every time. That little bozo better hope I never run across him in a dark alley, that's all I got to say," now he grinned.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE

The day before Earl's murder, Ellen had called and asked Nancy if she had time to take her to Franklin's Market, so she could pick up a few items to hold her over until the end of the week. Nancy was glad to do it as she was bored with ironing her husbands' shirts.

After finishing with Ellen, and dropping her and her groceries off, she made her way back home. She didn't feel like finishing up the ironing, so she went for a walk down Main Street. One of her simpler pleasures was to window shop as she strolled along the boulevard.

After eyeing a pretty frock in Milly's dress shop window for several minutes, she continued down the sidewalk. Just up ahead, outside of Bozeman's Café, she now spotted a police cruiser parked in front. Wondering who it might be, she picked up her pace to get a closer look.

Peering through the large plate-glass window by the entrance door, she halted as her eyes now focused in on Sherry and Thomas sitting at a corner table in the rear. Jealousy now

overtook her, as Thomas reached across the table and patted Sherry's hand. She turned and stormed off enraged by such a spectacle, and in broad daylight no less. Her mind raced with all types of false assumption's now, as she headed for home.

“Order anything you like, my treat,” Miller said.

“Thank you sir.”

“I know it hasn't been easy working with Det. Fairchild, and I wanted to express my gratitude. You have held your temper in check, and have shown you can remain calm even under stressful situations,” he said reaching over and patting her hand.

Sherry beamed with pride at his comments, “Thank you sir. I have been doing my very best. I feel there are times when Det. Fairchild deliberately tries to push my button, but I think he does it trying to make me a better officer. So I maintain control over my temper.”

“And it shows, keep up the good work. So, what would you like to order? Like I said, it's on me,” he said very pleased that Dick and her were working together, which was taking some of the stress off his back.



## CHAPTER SEVENTY

Officer Hendrix was standing on Earl's porch as she heard the siren's coming her way. She stepped off the porch as Chief Miller and Det. Fairchild pulled up to the curb, as they rode together. Three more black-and-whites had just arrived several minutes before them.

Miller and Fairchild came up the small walkway toward Hendrix. Miller spoke first, "Earl inside?"

"Yes sir."

Fairchild told one officer to go around back of the house and make sure no one comes or goes. He stationed a second officer at the front porch and told a third to keep traffic flowing past the house; no stopping to gawk as it were, even though no one was usually up at this late hour.

Miller, Fairchild and Hendrix now entered the house. Earl Schulz was lying on his back, eyes open, in his living room. There were two bullet holes to his forehead and his pants and underwear had been pulled down around his ankles, exposing his groin area. Both testicles and his penis had been cut off and

placed between his knees on the floor. A bloody kitchen knife was lying near the top of his head.

Fairchild looked straight at Hendrix, “Tell me, did you touch or move anything? I mean anything at all.” His voice was stern and unwavering, but not condescending.

“No sir. I did not touch anything.” She said looking him straight in the eye.

Miller now took over the questioning of Officer Hendrix, “How did you know Earl was dead?”

She wet her lips as she remained standing at attention, “I was on patrol and I noticed Mr. Schulz front door was standing wide open. I found that to be suspicious with all that has been happening lately. So I stopped and went to the doorway. I looked in but saw nothing, so I knocked loudly and hollered ‘Police’ with no answer. As I entered his living room I saw him on the floor. I saw the two gunshot wounds to his head and saw the bloody knife just before I noticed his private parts had been removed. I ran to my cruiser and radioed dispatch. I then returned to the front porch to wait for assistance.”

“So, you did not reenter the house?” Fairchild now asked.

“That is correct sir.”

“You’re sure you didn’t...”

“I think Officer Hendrix has answered that question, don’t you Det. Fairchild?” Miller said flashing him a firm look, “Thank you Officer Hendrix, you may go outside and assist the other officers,” Fairchild just shook his head and remained silent.

She pivoted, and strutted outside as ordered, and felt good about Chief Miller cutting Det. Fairchild off at the knees on her behalf, or at least, that’s how she saw it to be.

Doc Otis now sauntered through the doorway into the living room as he was directed by the officer at the front door. “Well, well, well, what have we here?” he says kneeling by the body.

Fairchild and Miller look at each other and roll their eyes at how flippant Doc is over the gruesome murder of their friend.

Doc stands up, but then wavers a mite and sits down on the couch. Dick leans over to whisper in Thomas’ ear, “He’s plastered.” Thomas nods in agreement.

“So Doc, what’s your official ruling on this?” Fairchild asks.

“What?” Otis seems to be having trouble focusing.

“I said! What’s your...!”

“Please, don’t yell, I had a few drinks last night. My head hurts somethin’ fierce.” Doc whimpered in a low voice as he held his throbbing head.

Miller now asked softly, “We need you to state for the record that this is a murder, Doc.”

“Oh, yes, indeed, it is a homicide. Ah, could one of your nice officers take me home? I feel a mite nauseated.”

“Dick, would you be so kind?” Thomas asked with a slight grin.

Fairchild groaned, then took Doc by the arm and pulled him off the couch to a standing position. Assisting him to the front door he complied with Chief Miller’s request and had him driven home.

Fairchild returned to the living room where he and Miller now decided to search the rest of the house. Nothing would stand out as they went room to room. All seemed normal and nothing seemed to have been disturbed or out of place.

“No sign of a break in, but then again, Earl never locked his doors.” Fairchild noted.

Miller added, “So it would have been easy access for the murderer.”

After photographs, prints and tagging the bloody knife, it would be up to them to remove the body, and take it to the basement storage unit in the municipal building, where there was limited freezer storage for stiffs.

Once a new coroner had been assigned, he could do an autopsy and retrieve the bullets for examination over at the SCB lab. Just a matter of time before they would know whose gun had been used, leading them to their killer.

## CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE

Mayor Carver pulled a few strings with some of his cronies over in Millersburg, and had secured a new coroner by the name of Troy Van Horn to replace Earl Schulz.

Troy was thirty-eight and divorced. Standing only five-feet-five inches, he had short sandy-blond hair, blue eyes and was very light-skinned. A rather pleasant faced man with a short forehead and a cleft chin. Sporting a thin mustache, a shade darker than his hair, gave him a more academic appearance; which was exactly the look he wanted. He was of average build with a small scar on his left forearm.

Arriving in two days, Mayor Carver had already secured him a small rental house; which just happened to be owned by the Mayor. Troy had accepted the new position and had been informed of the recent murders. He was just delighted to get out of Millersburg; owing to the fact his ex-wife was making things very difficult for him there.

A fresh start is what he felt was needed and this job offer fit the bill perfectly. Yet, time would tell if he would regret

making such a hasty decision to come to Saint Cloud; for some evildoers, it matters not who becomes their next victim.

## CHAPTER SEVENTY-TWO

Picking up the ringing telephone, "Hello," Ruth answered as she had just finished putting away the groceries she bought over at Franklin's Market.

"Have you heard, Earl was murdered," Ellen spoke rapidly.

"Why no, who said he was murdered?"

"I just read it in the Gazette, haven't you seen yours yet?"

"No, that little snot who delivers it, threw it on the roof again, that stupid kid. I called over there to complain, but nobody ever answer's the darn telephone."

Ellen continued, "Well it said Earl Schulz was murdered, but it don't say how."

"Thanks for letting me know dear,"

"You take care now."

Ellen immediately called Beatrice next to see if she had heard the news, as Ruth called Mary; the grapevine was in full swing burning up the lines.



## CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE

“I’m sorry to call so late, but there’s been another murder,” Buddy said waiting for Chief Miller to respond.

Miller yawned as he sat up in bed and reached over to switch on the small lamp, “You’re kidding... who is it?”

“All I know is Mike O’Malley called just several minutes ago and said he was at Johnny Hudson’s home, and that he had been murdered. I dispatched two units and called you.”

“Alright, ah... call Det. Fairchild and uh... Doc Otis and tell them to meet me there.” Miller hung up and rubbed his forehead as he finally got out of bed. Looking to Nancy, she was sound asleep and had a soft snore going. That woman could sleep through an atom bomb he mused.

Picking up the telephone, he dialed the station now that he was thinking more clearly. After Buddy answered, “It’s Chief Miller, have an officer swing by and pick me up.”

“I’m on it, anything else?” Buddy asked.

“No, thanks Buddy.”

Miller no sooner dressed and sat down in the living room, he heard the roar of one of the old Ford Cruiser's pulling up. They made their way to the crime scene within a few minutes. Miller saw Officer Hendrix standing watch at the front of the house as they arrived.

Det. Fairchild was already on the scene and had posted officers, one in front and one in back of the house. Doc Otis had not arrived yet, so Fairchild radioed dispatch to send an officer to fetch him; knowing full well he was most likely drunk. But, his services would be required since the new coroner wasn't due to arrive until late afternoon this very day.

Fairchild had put Mike O'Malley in the back of one of the black-and-whites parked on the street, so they could question him later.

Thomas nodded to Sherry as he entered and located Fairchild in the living room.

"So," Miller began, "what have you got so...?" he stopped dead in his tracks. Now surveying the body that was laying in the middle of the living room; he observed the two bullet holes to his forehead, pants pulled down, bloody kitchen knife, and

pecker and balls cut off and laid in a neat little pile between his knees.

Fairchild glanced over, “Just swap Johnny’s body for Earl’s and you’ve got the same, exact, crime scene.”

“Earl was just killed two days ago. What in god’s name is going on around here?” Miller said lighting up a Camel. He drew the smoke deep into his lungs, and slowly let it out through his nostrils in little puffs.

“I wish I had a clue.” Was all Fairchild could muster up.

Officer Hendrix now emerged hauling in Doc Otis who was indeed tanked to the gills. She by-passed Det. Fairchild and went straight to Chief Miller. “Where should I put him sir?”

Fairchild took notice of her insolence, as he saw it, and said as he pointed toward the sofa, “Just sit him over there.”

Hendrix looked to Miller, and he nodded his approval, which, of course, irked Fairchild. Dropping the Doc on the sofa, she pivoted and strutted out like she was cock-of-the-walk, which just added to his loathing of her.

Chief Miller faced Det. Fairchild and looked him in the eye, “I want you and Officer Hendrix to investigate these two

murders together. You feel she isn't up to your standard, then you teach her the 'Fairchild' method of crime solving. But you will work with her, not against her. Am I making myself very clear Dick?" His words were somber, yet very direct.

Fairchild stared for several moments, taking to heart what he just said, "You're the boss Thomas." He now turned to walk away, then suddenly stopped and turned to face his old friend, "At least for now anyway," he said with a big cheesy grin.

Miller couldn't help but smile at his little jab. Both men now converged on the sofa. Doc was simply staring at the floor.

"Doc? Doc, up here." Fairchild said trying to get him to look up.

Miller sat down next to him and softly spoke, "Doc, we just need you to officially pronounce Johnny dead, can you do that for us?"

Doc mumbled something incoherent and then slumped over onto Chief Miller.

“Well, you heard the man, Johnny is officially deceased,” Miller said shaking his head as he pushed Doc back to a sitting position.

“Sounds good to me, let’s get this show on the road.”

Fairchild said smacking his palms together.

Miller went to the front door, “Officer Hendrix, would you be so kind as to retrieve our good friend Mike O’Malley, and escort him into the kitchen. Det. Fairchild and I would like to speak with him.” Miller smiled pleasantly.

Hendrix was not sure what was up with the kind words and smile, yet nevertheless did as instructed, “Yes sir, right away sir.”

Several minutes passed before Mike O’Malley and Officer Hendrix entered the kitchen. Det. Fairchild and Chief Miller were both seated on one side of the wobbly small wooden table; which was covered with beer and food stains, several empty beer bottles and the like. They had set a chair opposite of them for their little chat.

“Please Mike, sit,” Miller said pointing.

“Officer Hendrix, on your way out, take Doc Otis back home.” Fairchild said with a dismissive tone as he looked her way.

“Yes sir,” Sherry turned and pivoted without showing any emotional sign that she took offense; yet, deep down her blood was starting to boil, it was only a matter of time before she would snap.

As Miller retrieved a pack of Camel’s from his shirt pocket, Mike pulled one of his own from behind his ear. Both lit up as Fairchild just shook his head.

“Let me just say sorry for your loss, I know you and Johnny were close.” Miller made the little statement in hopes it would bridge the gap between the two men. Especially since they had crossed swords in the past as it were.

“Mike wasn’t that naive, “What questions do ya have, I have a business that ain’t gonna run itself, Laddy.”

“Alright, just tell me in your own words what happened,” Miller began his questioning.

“My own words? Whose other words would I dare speak?”

Fairchild was already growing tired of O'Malley's bullshit, as he saw it to be, "Hey! Start talkin' Bud; we ain't got all night!" Dick's bite was much worse than his bark, and Mike knew it.

Mike put his cigarette out on the dirty table, "Johnny called to the bar, said meet him later. After I closed, I came here. Was about 1am. Imagine my surprise when I found the front door wide open. My Laddy never left his humble cottage unlocked. I knew right off somethin' was amiss, as sure as I'm sittin' here before ya now."

Fairchild continued, "We didn't find any doors or windows broken through, and you say he always keep everything secured, then..."

Miller cut in, "Looks like he knew the person, and possibly let them in not knowing their intentions."

"Johnny have any enemies... well, I know he had enemies, but were there any who would be bold enough to kill him?" Miller asked.

“My Laddy never uttered an unkind word. He was the town’s hero, may the saints preserve us, one and...” Mike was taken aback at Fairchild’s response to his contrived lying.

Fairchild slammed his fist down so hard, the table nearly cracked, “I’ve had enough of that Irish blarney bullshit!” Jumping to his feet, fists doubled up, Fairchild leaned across the table; O’Malley lurched backward and put his arms up as if to shield his face.

Miller stayed seated, but raised his right hand between the two men who were still partly separated by the wooden table, “Alright! Let’s settle down right now! Mike, you knock off the nonsense, or I’ll let Det. Fairchild have a go at you! You hear me?!”

“Yes, sorry boss, it won’t happen again, my word on me father’s grave.” He said lowering his arms as Fairchild sat back down.

“So?” Miller said.

“Johnny raised many a ruckus with most townsfolk, but nary a one who would be so bold, as to slash his manhood from



him like that; may god rest his devilish soul.” Mike crossed himself.

“So, after you discovered the body, what did you do?” Fairchild asked.

“I called that dimwit, Buddy Wilson; what a fool of a man he rightly is, truth be told, I had to repeat more than once what I found, I did indeed. Man is a...”

“Alright, so then you waited for Officer’s to arrive?” Miller asked.

“No sir. One of your very own was comin’ into the cottage as I finished talkin’ to that imbecilic dispatcher.”

“Did you recognize the officer?” Fairchild asked.

“Surely, the pretty lass who fetched me in here, but a moment ago. A bit stuffy that one, but nice to look at, yes.”

Mike said with an enormous smirk.

Fairchild leaned across the table as he glared at O’Malley.

“No disrespectin’ the lass mind you.” Mike said easing back in his chair.

“Did you touch anything inside the house?” Miller continued.

“I’ve been comin’ here many years, to be sure, so yes constable, I’ve handled quite a few things here and there.”

Miller looked to Fairchild, “You have anything further to ask?”

“Not right now.” Fairchild responded as both stood up.

“Alright Mike, you can take off. If we have more questions, we know where to find you.” Miller said as he lit up.

O’Malley made a beeline for his truck out front. He’d had enough of them for one night. Thomas and Dick both felt Mike didn’t really show that much emotion for his so-called friend. They felt he was probably relieved Johnny was dead; now he could run things his own way for a change.

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### JOHNNY HUDSON MURDERED

Saint Cloud P.D. said his body was found early yesterday morning. The police are investigating, but so far have no leads or suspects in his death. This reporter believes Johnny Hudson will not be missed by the majority of the citizenry; and truth be told, many will most assuredly celebrate his untimely demise.

This brings the death count to 5.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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“Nigel, come quick,” Mable hollered as she just picked up the Gazette off the porch and brought it inside.

“What’s up sugarplum?” he said coming into the living room.

“God does answer prayers after all!” she shouted with a most jubilant tone, as she began hopping and skipping around the living room.

Nigel just stared, as he hadn’t seen her this happy since she won a ‘1st place ribbon’ last year for her white roses; unfortunately, they were the very same roses Thomas ran over just a month ago while chasing Beau.

“That mangy son-of-a-bitch has finally got what he deserves,” she handed the paper to him.

“Well I declare...Johnny Hudson, someone finally punched his ticket. Well imagine that, the angels will surely be singing in heaven tonight.”

“Where he’s going, there won’t be any harp music playing. He’s gonna burn in hell for eternity, you can bet your bottom dollar on it.”

“You’re probably right dear.”

“Yes I’m goddamn right!” She pranced off into the kitchen singing to herself, as Nigel sat on the sofa happy, that she was happy for a change.

## CHAPTER SEVENTY-FOUR

The majority of the small group were already seated around an oblong oak table in Mayor Carver's conference room, just off to the side of his main office. Chief Miller, Doc Pearlman, Det. Fairchild, and the new coroner, Troy Van Horn were already present as Mayor Carver entered and sat down.

"I called this meeting gentlemen, to introduce you officially to the new coroner, Todd Van Horn. Some of..."

"Brent, that would be Troy, not Todd," Thomas spoke up.

"Yes indeed, yes indeed, you're so right. Thank you for correcting me. Now as I was saying, Troy Van Horn is our new coroner, as some of you already know, since he's already started working on some of the murders. For those who don't know, he comes to us by way of Millersburg. I have it on good authority he will do a fine job for us. So please make him feel welcome in our quaint little town."

"That was a nice little speech, you runnin' for office again?" Thomas said as he and the others couldn't restrain their chuckles.

“That’s a good one Thomas,” the Mayor said, “I think I’d better turn the meeting over to our new coroner now.”

“Thank you. I’ve spent the last few days doing autopsies on Earl Schulz and Johnny Hudson. I’d like to discuss Earl Schulz first, if that’s okay with everyone?”

“We don’t stand on any ceremony here Troy, so just tell us what you found.” Dick said straight out. The new coroner would soon grasp, Dick wasn’t one to hem-and-haw around; straight to the point was his motto.

“Yes, very well then. As for Mr. Schulz, he was shot twice in the frontal lobe. I removed both slugs, which were .38 caliber bullets. I sent them off to the lab in Millersburg. The knife found at the scene was used to sever his genitals. The blade matched the wounds to that area perfectly. As for Mr. Hudson, I found the same to be true for him. I removed two slugs from his head, and the knife at the scene was used on his genital area. These two murders are basically identical in how they were carried out. I’m only speculating, but I would say for now, both men were killed by the same individual. Does

anyone have a question for me at this time? If so, I'll do my best to answer."

Miller asks, "Were the genitals cut off before or after they were shot?"

"My findings indicate they were removed after they were murdered."

"Thomas, you think Beau Camp killed these two? He killed Frances, and he's still runnin' loose." Brent asked.

"It's possible, but not very likely. Frances was electrocuted, not shot and... well, you know," Thomas said, "Troy, what do you think?" Thomas inquired seeking another opinion.

"I'd have to agree with you. Frances Hudson's body was already buried before I arrived, yet I did go over the notes, autopsy report and photographs that were in Mr. Schulz's files. That would lead me to believe his murderer was not the same man who killed these two men."

Dick now decides to join in, "Tell me Troy, have you discovered anything new on the murders of Martha Camp and Terri Helms?"

“Sorry, but I haven’t had a chance to review their files yet. I was concentrating on the two latest murders. But just as soon as I can, I’ll take a look and see if anything stands out.”

“You do that.” Dick says, sounding a little condescending.

The Mayor starts to speak when his secretary partially opens the door and pop’s her head in, “Sorry boss, but there’s a call for Mr. Van Horn from the Millersburg crime lab. They said it was urgent. I can send it to your desk phone if you like?”

“Why yes, that would be fine. Troy, you can go on out and take your call. We’ll be here when you’re done.”

The friends made small talk as they waited patiently for Troy’s return, that is, all but Dick who was not use to being idle or sedentary. He was now pacing around the table; he was on his fourteenth lap when Troy returned.

“Good news I hope?” Brent asked as all were eagerly hoping for a much needed break in these two investigations.

“Well, the good news is that the gun used to kill Johnny Hudson and Earl Schulz are one in the same. Both were killed with a .38 caliber Smith and Wesson revolver. The bad news



is, they traced the ownership of the weapon to Chief Frances Hudson of the Saint Cloud police department.”

“What?” Brent asked in amazement.

“Are they sure?” Thomas asked.

“They said it was a positive result on all four rounds.” Troy replied.

“When Chief Hudson’s body was removed from his home and taken to the storage area; who took possession of his badge and gun?” Dick asks, looking directly at Thomas.

“I was just about to ask you the same thing.” Thomas states.

Brent interjects, “So, his police revolver was left at his home, which means...?”

“Which means, someone went in and stole it, and now they are using it to commit murders, which for now, can’t be traced back to them, unfortunately.” Thomas says.

“Back too square one, I presume?” Troy asks.

All now sat quietly as they pondered who could have taken Frances’ gun; when they took it, why kill Earl Schulz, a good citizen. They didn’t much care that Johnny had been

murdered; for him it was more, do it, then, why not, do it. So many questions and nary an answer to be found.

## CHAPTER SEVENTY-FIVE

Police cruisers were buzzing up and down the streets of Saint Cloud. Beau wasn't sure where to hide out, until Leonard told him to make his way to the old Nelson farm. Beau and his monkey crew used the cover of darkness to conceal their whereabouts, as they proceeded cautiously to their secret destination.

Once Beau arrived, he went into the dark barn as his monkey crew took up look-out positions, so as to alert the Admiral to any police or nosy locals who might come snooping round. Tired from running all night, Beau fell into a deep sleep which lasted until mid-morning.

“Wake up,” Leonard whispered ever so gently.

His eyes opened immediately, “Are the police here?” Looking in all directions as he stood.

“You're safe for now Admiral, but I have some rather disturbing news.” Leonard spoke tenderly, as if speaking to a child.

“What is the bad news?”

“It’s just a matter of time before the authorities catch you, and when they do, they are going to put you in the electric chair and fry your brains to a crisp. That’s no way for a man of your stature to die, is it?” Leonard asked.

“No, no it’s not, you’re right.”

“Therefore, I think you should take your own life. That would be the heroic thing to do when faced with such a situation as this. That way you can cross over and be with me, and together we can rule side-by-side.” Leonard’s lie was very convincing to someone like Beau, who was emotionally and mentally muddled.

“How do I...”

“Admiral, my dear friend, climb the ladder to the hayloft above you; there you will find your pathway that will bring you to me.”

Locating the wooden ladder, he ascended to the top. There, before him, stood his monkey crew, all standing at attention. Just beyond them, he spied a hangman’s noose dangling from one of the rafters. Under it was a small round barrel that had

been set upright. This was the same noose and barrel old man Nelson used way-back-when to free himself from his miseries.

Standing tall as he walked past his monkey-crew, he stepped up onto the small wooden barrel and grabbed hold of the rope. Placing the noose around his neck, he slowly pulled it tighter.

Beau thought for a moment, he wanted to say something inspirational before stepping off the barrel, yet nothing of great consequence came to him.

“Admiral, we’re all waiting.” Leonard whispered.

Beau finally spoke, “Stella, I love you, you will always be in my heart.” Then stepping forward, he pushed the barrel over. It rolled several feet before stopping. Beau’s neck did not break as he thought it would.

During the fourteen minutes before he succumbed to death’s final embrace; his lungs hungered for oxygen, which forced him to pull and struggle fiercely against the noose. Finally, the kicking and twisting subsided as his spirit departed the lifeless body.

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### BEAUREGARD CAMP FOUND HANGED

Beau Camp committed suicide at the old abandoned Nelson farm per Saint Cloud P.D. His limp body had been discovered by officers who had been searching for him. Murder has been ruled out per Troy Van Horn, the new town coroner. Police are not commenting on whether Beau Camp was involved with the murders of Earl Schulz or Johnny Hudson. This latest episode brings the death count to 6.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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## CHAPTER SEVENTY-SIX

Pulling up in front of his house, Miller was dog tired as it had been another long day with little to show for it. Only good news of late, was Beau Camp's suicide, which brought to a close one murder investigation; only four more to go he thought.

The hour was late, so he tried to be as quiet as possible. No since waking Nancy, she would only read him the riot act he figured. Flipping on the kitchen light as he entered, it was at that moment he saw it—propped up against the salt and pepper shakers on the kitchen table. Christ, he thought, now what?

Pulling a chair back, he sat and picked up the single page note and began to read:

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Thomas

I have had enough. I can't take it anymore. You can have your little whore. I hope one day she does to you, what you have done to me. The shame you have brought on me is more than any woman could stand. I have packed my things and moved

in with Stella. Don't call or come by, I won't answer. I want a divorce.

Nancy

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Stunned at first, he wasn't sure what he felt. Simply too tired to deal with it right now; he was physically, mentally and emotionally drained. Maybe she would come to her senses, he thought, after spending some time with her sister. But knowing her as he did, maybe not.

Forcing himself to get up, he made his way to their bedroom and plopped down on his bed. It was all he could do to kick his shoes off before he fell into a profound slumber.



## CHAPTER SEVENTY-SEVEN

Sonny and Gerald were engaged in a rousing match of checkers as Herbert strolled into Zeeks barber shop. Nigel gave the barber chair a half turn as Herbert stepped up, and then plopped himself down.

“So, just a little off the top, and maybe touch up the rest a little?” Nigel asked retrieving his clippers and black comb from the nearby counter.

“That’d be just fine,” Herbert said as he assisted Nigel in placing the cover sheet over his chest and legs.

“Now don’t think for a minute you can pull that malarkey over on me, as you do Herbert.” Sonny said pointing at Gerald.

“I’m sure I have no idea what your talkin’ bout,” Gerald grinned.

“You know darn well what I’m talkin’ bout. Each time I look off you fiddle with the checker’s.” Sonny stated straight off.

Herbert chimed in, “That’s the truth, he’s always pulling somethin’ fishy when your head’s turned, yes siree.”

Nigel cut in, "If you boys can't play nice, I'll just have to put the checker board up." He laughed, which set the others to laughing as well.

"You know, as far as I'm concerned, Johnny Hudson got what was comin' to him." Gerald put his thoughts right out in the open for all to see.

"Maybe so, but I'd be careful who you go tellin' that to. Old Mike O'Malley just might not see it that way and give you a fat lip, to be sure." Sonny warns his friend.

"I'm no fan of Johnny, but that business of chopping off his tally-whacker and his giblets, that was a bit much for any man to have to endure." Nigel imparted as he looked to the others.

"That was done after the fact, according to the new coroner. I overheard him at the diner discussing it with Buddy." Gerald spoke up.

"Now Earl, he was a good man, and I'd better not hear anyone say different." Sonny puffed up his chest as the words hung in the air for a few moments.

The others nodded in agreement at their friend's statement. Earl Schulz was respected and most folks hereabouts only had kind words to say about the man.

"Say, did you fellers hear Nancy moved out and wants a divorce from Thomas?" Herbert dropped that little nugget right in their laps.

"What? Say it ain't so. You better not be pullin' our leg Herbert," Nigel's facial look was one of astonishment.

"No siree, Nancy moved in with her sister Stella." Herbert announced.

"Who told you Nancy left and wants a divorce?" Gerald asks not sure what to believe.

"Margaret and Ellen were jaw-jackin' about running into Nancy and Stella down at the dress shop, and Nancy told them two busybodies all about it, and said she didn't care who knew it neither." Herbert said flat out.

"Why, I just can't believe it, they always seemed to have such a strong marriage. Sure, they had their problems like most folks, but divorce? I just can't believe it." Sonny said scratching his chin.

“Well, I also heard Thomas was foolin’ around with his trainee, Sherry Hendrix.” Herbert baited the others.

“Oh my god, no wonder Nancy want’s out of their marriage. You know, once an older man gets the taste of a younger woman, they can’t never have the same feelin’s they once had for their wife, no sir.” Gerald said.

“That’s a darn shame, yes, a darn shame indeed. Poor Thomas, Nancy will most likely get one of those high-toned lawyer’s from over in Millersburg. They don’t take any prisoners; they go right for a man’s throat.” Nigel said.

“He’ll be lucky to end up with the clothes on his back, what a pity,” Herbert said shaking his head.

## CHAPTER SEVENTY-EIGHT

No one came forth to claim and put six feet under the remains of Johnny Hudson. Mike O'Malley finally stepped-up to the plate, as it were, and took the body of his so-called friend and partner, to Millersburg to be buried on an old piece of property he owned. He thought it best, for he didn't want the locals digging him up and doin' god-knows-what to his remains. No fancy coffin, no cross or headstone would mark his grave. It simply came down to—no one cared.

Earl Schulz received a nice funeral from the Lutheran Church in Millersburg. He had been a member on and off over the years. The town agreed to pay for his burial due to his outstanding service to the good citizens of Saint Cloud. Two buses came over from Millersburg and picked up all those who wanted to attend his service. Courtesy of the Lutheran Church.

Father Lonigan was not allowed to give Beau Camp a Catholic service, due to the fact he committed a mortal sin by killing himself, not to mention the fact he was an insane murderer. He would not be interned next to his wife Martha;

who had been laid to rest next to her father and mother. The plot that had been reserved for him would be given to a Catholic of good standing. With no service nor fanfare, his body would be turned over to the state and later cremated, which was what was done with the indigent and those without family. The Dalton Bank would take over the house and auction it off to the highest bidder; including any furniture and personal contents located inside the home.

No matter what might befall a man, woman, or child; the one constant is that life moves on, never ending for the living; yet, stopping only when death comes knocking at your door. So be it.

## CHAPTER SEVENTY-NINE

The sign in Mueller's Drug Store window read, 'Jelly-Beans \$.75 Cents ½ pound' which caught Mary and Ruth's attention as they were out for a quiet stroll.

Hazel spotted the two ladies and opened the door, "That's right, a half-pound for only six-bits, get'em before they're all gone."

"Can't beat that deal, let's go." Mary said leading the way.

"Hazel, we each want a half-pound of those sweet beans." Ruth put forth as they all headed over to the soda counter, where a large glass container sat on top filled to the brim with jelly-beans.

As Herbert was behind the counter, he produced two brown-paper sacks and used a cup to scoop out the sweets. Filling each sack with way more than a half pound, he grinned as the ladies giggled like little school girls.

"Oh Herbert, I'm not sure I can even carry this," Mary said pulling her sack closer.

“If it’s too much for ya, I’ll be glad to tak’em off your hands,” Ruth laughed.

Mary pulled her sack even closer, “Oh no you don’t, you just keep your paws off mine.” She now chuckled.

Hazel was ready for a bit of gossip, “You girls met the new coroner yet?”

“No, I haven’t.” Ruth spoke up.

“Me neither.” Mary said.

“His name is Troy Van Horn, and he’s not bad to look at, but I heard he only took this job to get away from his ex-wife.” Hazel rattled off.

“Well I’ll be.” Mary said

“Yeah, my friend Betty over in Millersburg said she knew the file clerk at the courthouse, and he told her, the divorce papers said Troy Van Horn was known to pull a heavy cork and then whip his wife with a razor-strap,” Hazel was laying it on thick; of course, most was just pure embellishment on her part.

Herbert couldn’t believe his ears, “Oh good grief, that’s not what Betty said. She said...”



Hazel cut him off, “This don’t concern you. Go find something to do, or I’ll find something for you, you hear me?”

She pointed toward the main counter, as Herbert turned and slowly walked away, head down and mumbling to himself.

“Go on,” Ruth said.

“Her lawyer took him to the cleaners; she got the house, custody of their two children and even his new Buick. That’s why he arrived here on a bus. If it weren’t for this job, he’d be living on the streets with old Ed Stein; then we’d have two town drunks.”

“Well, all I got to say is, any man who’d do that to his wife, no matter what problems they had in their marriage, deserves to be tarred-and-feathered and run outta town on a rail, that’s my thinking.” Mary put her two-cents out there for all to hear.

“Your darn tootin, that bastard,” Ruth popped off.

Hazel was in hog heaven, “My friend Betty also said, it was known all over town that Troy couldn’t ‘fly the high eagle’ if you know what I mean, because of all the drinkin’ he was doing.”

“What?” Mary said not sure what she was hinting at.

Ruth rolled her eyes as she patted her leg, “He couldn’t get his pecker hard sweetie.”

“Oh.” Mary blushed.

“I just don’t know what gets into these men nowadays, thinking they can do whatever they want. It’s just down right sinful.” Hazel said as they all nodded their heads in agreement.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY

Miller noticed a thin, middle-aged man coming straight toward him.

"Are you Chief Miller?"

"Yes sir, I am," he said wondering who he was as they shook hands.

"I'm Lester Hendrix, Sherry's father. She's told me all about you. Says you're a fine man. Says you taught her a lot about police business and all. I just wanted to thank you for being so helpful and kind. She's had a hard life."

"Ah, thank you. I want you to know I think highly of your daughter. She's doing a fine job on the police force." Miller said a little taken aback with all the high praise.

"That's nice to hear. I raised her by myself after her mother and I divorced. It wasn't easy, I knew very little about child rearing. Sherry was four when her mother left. She more or less raised herself. I did what I could for her."

"From what I've seen, you did a very good job."

"Well, the only thing I taught my daughter was taxidermy; it's been my life long hobby." Lester said.

Chief Miller's eyes widened when he heard his remark about taxidermy.

"She's almost as good at preparing skins as I am."

"I didn't know she could do that," the Chief replied.

"Oh yes. Not long after the divorce, I moved us over here. Sherry's room is filled with birds and other small animals. She can make an animal skin appear lifelike. Funny though, she seems to enjoy trapping and killing them, more than cleaning and tanning the hides and all. I usually end up having to do that part." Glancing at his wristwatch, Lester excused himself, "I'd like to stay and talk some more but I'm afraid I must be leaving. I have to meet a friend and I don't want to keep him waiting."

"It was nice to meet you sir," Chief Miller exclaimed in earnest. Miller's mind was now in full throttle as he tried to piece together Sherry's penchant for killing animals and the murders of late. Half of him said 'no way, it was his imagination getting the better of him' while the other half said,

‘maybe there is a connection between the two.’ He’d spend some time thinking about it before mentioning it to any one; no sense in yellin’ fire, if there ain’t no smoke, he reckoned.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY-ONE

Knowing the old Nelson farm was haunted, the two boy's, twelve-year-old Jimmy and his fourteen-year-old friend Jacob, rode their bikes slowly past the house heading toward the barn. They were curious about the hayloft where Beau Camp's body had been discovered a short time ago.

Daring each other, as young boys are prone to do, to climb to the upper loft to see if the hangman's rope was still there, or whether the police had taken it down. Jacob, showing his young friend he wasn't scared of no dead man's ghost, entered the dark barn and finally made his way to the ladder.

Midway up, he stopped as his nerve was shrinking. Looking down at his younger companion, he half decided to climb back down.

"You chicken? You got a yellow-streak down your back?" Jimmy taunted him.

"I ain't chicken," Jacob said, now determined to go all the way to prove it.

Reaching the top, he stood up, a bit hunched over as he now surveyed the hayloft. Not sure where the rope was supposed to be, he took several steps toward the darker end when, he stopped dead in his tracks and froze. Something in the darkness moved, or so he thought, he couldn't be sure as he was now afraid to venture any further.

“Jacob?!” His young friend hollered up after him.

Hearing his name yelled spooked the boy; it also unnerved the barn owl that was perched on the main beam behind the boy. It took flight as it gave out a screech which caused Jacob to bolt forward.

The sudden squawk and wing flapping of the owl as it departed the barn sent Jimmy running outside for his bike. Jacob stumbled in the darkness and almost fell, but thankfully caught hold of an object which kept him from going completely down.

Steadying himself, he now took a closer look at what he had grabbed hold of; looked to be an old straw-filled scarecrow dangling from a rope he thought. His black pupils widened as

he now tried to see if it was indeed the hangman's noose they had come searching for.

Jimmy was pert-near home as he was almost out-of-breath from peddling so fast. His heart was racing as the adrenalin surged through his thin framed body. Only thing that stopped him from making it was the pothole he struck, which sent him flying over his handle-bars. Dust flew as he landed hard.

Officer Hendrix out on routine patrol, which was ordered by Det. Fairchild, saw the mishap and pulled up. She got out and approached the boy, "Are you okay?"

Jimmy had the wind knocked out of him and couldn't yet speak.

Kneeling down, she sat him up and told him to take short, little breath's until he could suck in more air. It was just a few minutes more and Jimmy would be talkin' up a storm telling her about the Nelson barn, his friend and the fright he got.

Jacob meanwhile, had found a small barrel and rolled it over to the scarecrow in hopes of freeing it from the noose, so he could take the hangman's rope for himself. Hoisting himself up, he now set to feeling around the noose to see where the



knot was located, so he could loosen it and let the scarecrow drop away.

Officer Hendrix now pulled the barn doors wide open flooding the dark barn with sunlight. Jacob turned quickly to see what was happening; his pupils quickly contracted as his eyes were inundated with the overwhelming brightness now pouring in.

“Jacob? This is the police, where you at boy?” Hendrix said letting her eyes adjust.

“I’m up here!” he shouted down.

Hendrix had no sooner started toward the ladder when Jacob let out a scream, the likes she had never, ever heard before. Stopping, she pulled her service revolver and had it at the ready. “Jacob, are you okay?! Tell me what’s wrong?! Answer me!”

Jacob almost fell out of the loft as he scurried down the ladder and started runnin’ for the door. His eyes were wild; his mouth was open, but no sounds were forthcoming.

Hendrix grabbed the boy as he tried to run past her; she shook him hard, “What’s wrong?! Tell me!” She commanded.

Jacob couldn't speak, he just pointed toward the loft as his whole body trembled from sheer terror, causing him to wet himself.

Releasing the boy, he ran for his bike. Hendrix now listened for any sound or movement of any kind coming from the loft. She leveled her gun toward the loft as she now started to climb. Reaching the top rung of the ladder, she slowly peeked over and now saw what the boy had mistook for a scarecrow. It was Bobby Taylor's wilting dead body.

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### BOBBY TAYLOR FOUND DEAD

Once again the old Nelson farm is the site of yet another gruesome death. Coroner Troy Van Horn has determined Taylor's death was an act of suicide. No evidence of foul play per the Saint Cloud P.D. was found. His body was discovered hanging in the hayloft by two local boys. The death count is now at 7.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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## CHAPTER EIGHTY-TWO

Sherry greeted the Chief as she entered his office with a small stuffed hummingbird. “Here’s something to keep you company sir.”

“Ah, yes, well thank you so much. I have just the place to display it. Did I mention your father came to see me the other day? It was the first time we ever met. He’s a very likeable fellow.”

“Yes, I know. He told me.” She said proudly.

“I didn’t know you were somewhat of a taxidermist? He said you’re almost as good at preparing skins as he is. Said you can make an animal skin appear almost lifelike. Now I can see for myself, this hummingbird looks like it’s ready to fly away,” Miller said.

“Oh, yes, daddy started teaching me before I could talk,” she beamed.

“I was wondering, does your dad shoot all the animals before stuffing them?”

“Sometimes he does, most of the time he traps them alive, then allows me to put them down.”

“Put down?”

“You know, kill’em.”

“How do you kill them?”

“It depends on the size of the animal. For small critters I just wring their necks and for larger ones, I shoot them in the head.”

“What kind of gun do you use?” he asked.

“A single-shot .22 rifle,” She answered with a puzzled look on her face.

“I’ll bet you have a lot of stuffed animals around your house?”

She now curiously observed his facial expression, not sure where he was going with his questions, “Yes, we do.”

“Your father said you were very proficient at killing the animals he had trapped.”

“I was more of the tomboy type. I didn’t play with dolls. I didn’t care for them at all. I enjoyed the discipline of the hunt.

Stalking my prey and waiting patiently for the right time to strike.” She said brashly.

“I see.” Miller said as he stroked his chin.

“Do you see? Do you really see? When I was growing up my father told me something that I shall never forget. He was trying to explain to me how to deal with physically powerful men, since I was just a girl. The old saying goes, ‘The bigger they are, the harder they fall.’ My father told me, ‘The bigger they are, the harder you hit’em.’ I live by my father’s words.” She now studied his body language. Her intuition told her he was putting two-and-two together, and that, she couldn’t allow, at least, not until her mission was finished.

“Ah, well yes, certainly. Good words to live by. Ah, thank you again for the hummingbird.” Miller had a gut feeling something was very wrong, but just couldn’t put his finger on it. He actually felt somewhat uncomfortable around her now.

Sherry turned and strutted out the office door. Both would be watching each other more closely now; but who would be the cat, and who would be the mouse?

## CHAPTER EIGHTY-THREE

“Yes, this is Troy, the new coroner, would it be possible to have a word with Chief Miller please?”

Buddy had already met Troy, but since he didn't recognize his voice when he answered, he decided it wasn't noteworthy to mention it now, “Why, yes indeed, let me patch you through to his desk phone, hold on a second.”

“I told you, no more calls from Mad-Dog-Mable about her damn rose bushes. Just tell her...”

Troy broke in, “Sorry to disturb you Chief, it's Troy.”

Thomas was momentarily caught off guard, “Troy, please forgive me for what I just said about...”

“No apology needed Chief, I just had a run in with her the other day...my god what a mouth on that...”

“She can surely be a handful. So, what can I do for you Troy?”

“Well sir, I know this is going to sound bad, especially since I'm the new coroner; but the body of Bobby Taylor is missing. I've searched everywhere.”

“You’re right, that is bad news. You think someone could have broken in and stolen his body?”

“Anything’s possible, but as you may or may not be aware, this area of the building is never locked. So...”

“So it would be very easy to get in and out, day or night. Alright, I’ll have an officer come over to make an official search before we do anything else.”

Okay, thank you.” Troy wasn’t sure how the Mayor, his boss, would take the news; but he did know, he was in for a lot of ribbing from his fellow co-workers.



## CHAPTER EIGHTY-FOUR

Now that Chief Hudson was dead, Buddy figured he could answer the telephone however he wished, “Police department.”

Mable Zeeks yelled into the phone so loud he almost dropped the phone, “My god, I just saw Bobby Taylor walking around at the old Nelson farm! Get some officer’s over there right now!”

“Mrs. Zeeks, I’m sorry to inform you of this, but Bobby Taylor is dead. He killed...”

Mad-Dog-Mable continued her verbal assault, “You dunce, I know he hung himself you...”

Buddy now interrupted her, he figured tit-for-tat; “Are you saying Bobby’s ghost is walking around in broad daylight?” he said yanking-her-chain.

“He’s not a ghost, you simpleton, he’s a Zombie! Get some goddamn officers over there before we’re all skinned and eaten alive!” She shrieked.

Buddy knew she was loony-toons, but she seemed to be getting worse. So he decided before she was too far gone, he’d

have some fun with her, “I’m sorry Mrs. Zeeks, but all of our officers are busy right now over at the North Side Park.”

“What the hell could possibly be more important than a Zombie on the loose?!”

“Well ma’am, our officers are trying to break up a very dangerous fight between the gray Aliens and the green Martians.” Putting his hand over his mouth, so as not to bust-a-gut laughing into the receiver.

“What?!”

“I’m sorry, but I have to hang up now. I need to keep this line open should the officers call in.” Knowing full well Mad-Dog-Mable would probably stroke-out, or so he hoped, he now daydreamed about attending her funeral in Hell; yet he felt she’d never be allowed in, for fear she might take over the place. Buddy was now beside himself with laughter.

Officer Hendrix had just been walking down the hallway and stopped to eavesdrop on his conversation. From what she could hear, she figured Buddy was as nuts as Mable was.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY-FIVE

The sunrise that morning was very comforting to Mayor Carver. It took his mind off all the murders, at least for a short spell. With his own police department unable to solve the murders, which he knew were causing great concern for the townsfolk, he felt he had no choice but to bring in outside assistance.

Wishing, as it were, that Chief Miller and Det. Fairchild would be one-hundred percent behind his decision to call in the Oklahoma State Crime Bureau. That's why he had Buddy telephone both men for a meeting at 9am sharp in his office.

Dick was just entering the building as Thomas walked up behind him, "So, you got a call too?" Thomas asked.

"Why, yes I did as a matter of fact. So what's this all about? Buddy said he didn't have a clue why the Mayor wants to see us."

"I don't know, but I reckon we'll find out shortly."

Entering his office, Brent motioned for them to sit. "I know you're both needed elsewhere, so let me get straight to the

point. I'm going to call in the SCB to help you solve these murders. Now, this is not to say you haven't done an excellent job so far, but let's face facts... your department has no experience dealing with a homicide, much less dealing with five. Therefore, I would like to hear what you think about calling in the SCB."

Thomas began, "I see your point, and I don't take any offense at what you just said. I guess we could use all the help we can get, so I guess I agree, let's call in the state boys and see what they come up with."

"Dick, what have you to say?" Brent asks, hoping for a unanimous decision all around.

"I think calling in the SCB will make us look stupid in the public's eye. They'll figure we're just a bunch of keystone cops, only good for issuing parking tickets and arresting the local drunks. No sir, I think it's a bad idea and you should give us more time to solve these murders ourselves. That's what I think."

Brent studied on their responses a few moments before making his final decision, "I'm sorry you feel that way Dick,

but I will be making the call, asking for the SCB to send one of their agents to come help us out of this ungodly mess.”

Dick stood, turned and walked out of the Mayor’s office in a huff. Brent just stared as Thomas now spoke, “No one likes to admit they can’t complete the task at hand, but it’s a wise man who knows when to seek help. Make the call.” Standing, he gave Brent the thumbs up, which made him feel a touch better about his bringing in another department.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY-SIX

Sleeping soundly in his bedroom--as it was way past midnight--Alan didn't hear the back door slowly open. The key turning in the lock also made only the slightest of sound. Alan was one of only a handful of townfolk who locked their doors; most never found any call for it. The giveaway came as the weight of the individual walking across the kitchen floor, pressed down on the old wooden planks, which brought forth their song of cracking and popping with each step.

With his bedroom door open, which was his custom, Alan was laying on his right side facing the window, which was opposite the door; he now stirred, yet only half-awake as he now felt something was amiss. Listening, he now recognized the oh-so-familiar sound.

Creeping steadily up to the open door, the man stopped just inches away to listen and survey the scene.

Alan was now thinking it must be Ronny, for he is the only one who has a key, and he had snuck in before to surprise him

with sex. A pleasant smile came over his face as he started to roll over in anticipation of his young lover's touch.

Peering through the darkness, he was shocked as he recognized the shadowy figure now standing at the end of his bed, "Beau? Beau Camp...I...I thought...you're dead...aren't you?"

The ghostly figure spoke these words before vanishing back into the darkness, "Run Alan, flee this place, for death stalks you. You have been warned."

"What?" Alan said as he reached over and turned on a small lamp on his night table. Beau was gone, or had he even been there at all, as Alan now wondered if it had all been a dream, or even a nightmare possibly. Laying there, he stared at the ceiling for almost fifteen minutes or so trying to understand what had just happened.

Charging quickly through the doorway, Alan flinched momentarily due to the sudden assault by Dick Fairchild, who had been waiting just outside his bedroom door. Alan did not put up much resistance due to his mild mannered nature; not to mention he was fear stricken to the very bone.

The strong and muscular Dick controlled him with little effort as he flipped his naked body face down on the bed. Pinning Alan's arms to his sides as he straddled him, Dick let loose with a plethora of rage induced profanity as he secured his hands around his victim's neck.

Whimpering was Alan's only response as he felt Dick's hands squeezing ever more tightly, as his wrath slowly choked the very life from him. The lack of oxygen now forced Alan to struggle against his assailant; but, too little, too late, as the expression goes. Dick continued to strangle and swear at Alan's lifeless body for almost twenty minutes before breaking off his murderous attack. Evil would triumph over Good this eerie night.

Regaining his self-control, Dick now continued with his well thought out plan. Carrying Alan's limp body out to the tool shed, where he had already made a makeshift hangman's noose, he laid Alan's nude body down and tightened the noose around his red and slightly swollen neck. Retrieving a chair from his kitchen table set, he placed it just a few feet from where his lifeless body now lay. Pulling Alan's body up off



the floor toward the top beam of the shed would be no easy feat; yet Dick was more than up to the challenge as the adrenaline was still surging through his veins.

Once in place, Alan's body swung freely. Leaving, Dick placed the typed suicide note on the kitchen table where it would be easily discovered. He left the front and rear doors unlocked.

Dick surmised that when Alan didn't show up at the library in the morning, Beatrice would surely call, and with no answer, would come out to investigate. All that was left to do, was go home, sneak back in and go to bed. After Ronny left for school, he'd replace Alan's house key he found hidden in his son's room. A perfect murder Dick thought; or was it?

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### MAYOR CARVER ADMITS DEFEAT

The Mayor is calling in the 'State Crime Bureau' due to the incompetence of the local police department. Chief Miller and Det. Fairchild both refused to make any comments to this reporter. One can only speculate that the people of this city agree with the Mayor; how safe are we if our very own cannot protect us.

On a side note: Saint Cloud P.D. reported three freshmen students from the High School will receive proper punishment from the Principle, for stealing and hiding the corpse of Bobby Taylor. The boys were turned in by one of their mother's when she made the gruesome discovery in her basement freezer.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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Mayor Carver arrived at his office and made his way to his desk. He now picked up a copy of the Saint Cloud Gazette that had been left for him by Chief Miller earlier that very morning. On top of the newspaper was a small note from Miller which simply said, 'Take a deep breath.' Not sure what that meant, he picked up the Gazette.

Miller spied the Mayor passing his doorway. He stuck his head partway out to have a look-see as the Mayor entered his office just a few doors down. Stealthily, he crept over to Fairchild's office, and without knocking he entered. Dick was seated at his desk.

Looking up as his door slowly opened, Dick leaned back in his chair as Thomas came into view, "May I help you Chief?"

Miller pressed his finger to his lips signaling him to stay silent. As he sat down, Dick now scrutinized the gigantic devilish grin across Thomas' face.

Seconds went by and Dick could stand no more of this childish game, "What's going on Thomas?"

“Just wait, you’re gonna love this.” Miller could hardly contain himself.

The Mayor’s eyes bulged as he read the headline; then focused on the story. As he finished reading, he calmly folded the paper and placed it neatly on his desk. Standing, he made his way over and closed his office door, as he turned back toward his desk he cut loose, “That goddamn, cock-sucking, limp-dicked, skinny bastard...!!!” The Mayor’s triad echoed down the corridor, even with his door shut.

Thomas was now busting-a-gut and slapping his knee in hilarity.

Dick shook his head, “You put the Gazette on his desk, didn’t you?”

That question brought on more hysterical laughter from Thomas.

“Why, you sneaky little...” Dick couldn’t contain himself now, he joined his colleague in outrageous laughter.

As they tried to settle down, they would only be re-ignited as the Mayor could still be heard bellowing obscenities.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY-SEVEN

A scream pierced the noiseless morning like a bolt of lightning striking a tree. Ellen Wellington nearly jumped straight up off her sofa as the scream echoed through her living room. Collecting herself, she went to the side window and gasped as she drew her pink-hanky to her lips; she saw Beatrice next door in the back yard of Alan Wallace's place.

The door to the tool shed was wide open and Beatrice was kneeling before it, crying hysterically. Her calls to Beatrice went unanswered which set her off to call the police.

After her call to Buddy, she wrapped her shawl around her delicate shoulders and made her way over to Beatrice; who by this time had fainted dead away. Stooping to see if she was still among the living; she now observed Alan's naked body gently swaying from side to side. The shock had the same effect on her as she passed out falling on top of Beatrice. As her limp elderly body collapsed, she slipped off to one side. There lay the two ladies, side by side.

The first officer on the scene was ol' lead-foot herself, Sherry Hendrix. She had almost struck two mailboxes as she double-timed it; when Buddy's radio call went out over the air saying there was a disturbance at the rear of the Wallace home.

Hendrix raced around to the backside of the house with her revolver drawn. Seeing the two women down, her first thought was that they had been killed. Slowly she approached looking in all directions for their assailant. Stopping suddenly, she heard a moan, looking down, she now observed Ellen was trying to sit up.

Hendrix knelt beside her as she helped her to sit up, "Mrs. Wellington, what happened here?"

Ellen could only point as she started to sob. Hendrix now looked up and saw Alan's lifeless body inside the shed; she did not flinch, but seemed to be studying it in an odd manner. It was a horrible sight to behold for most who encountered it, for others it would seem bizarre, yet for her, it held a certain fascination.

Sirens could be heard now as other black-and-whites were now arriving. Beatrice, who was still unconscious, would be

carried to a car and driven over to Doc Pearlman's office. He would determine she was in a state of deep shock and would be taken to Barron Memorial Hospital over in Millersburg.

Det. Fairchild was now on the scene, but did not enter the house as he wanted someone else to discover the typed suicide note he had planted in the kitchen. "Officer Hendrix, put your gloves on and check inside the house. See if there's anything that can tell us what transpired here."

"Yes sir, right away sir." She wasn't sure how to take his request; figuring she'd be the last one he'd want to assist him. She had heard Buddy say Miller told him to work with her or else. So maybe he was going to teach her the ropes after all; but her womanly intuition told her otherwise.

No sooner had she entered the back door, she discovered the note neatly laying on the kitchen table. She did not touch it knowing Fairchild would surely make a big thing out of her messing with evidence. "Sir!" Her strong voice carried straight to Fairchild's ears.

"What is it?" He said heading toward the house.

"I've found something...possibly a suicide note I think."

Putting on his gloves as he entered, he picked it up carefully and looking at Hendrix, “Here,” he said handing it to her.

“Read aloud what it says, then tag it for evidence.”

“Yes sir,” she unfolded the note, “I know my death will come as a shock to many, especially to my love Beatrice, yet I feel I cannot go on hiding the dark secret that resides deep inside of me. I have fathered a bastard child, out-of-wedlock with a prostitute in another city. It was a moment of weakness. The shame is more than I can bare. Beatrice, you are my one and only true love. I’m sorry I dishonored and destroyed any future we might have had together. Please pray for me. Yours forever more, Alan.”

Troy Van Horn had been checking over the body while Fairchild and Hendrix were in the house. He made an initial evaluation of what he observed, and then went in search of Det. Fairchild.

Entering just moments after Sherry had finished reading the note, “From what I see so far, it’s a suicide, and I see no signs of foul play. I’ll know more once I get the body back and do an autopsy, but no homicide here.”



“Yes, we were just examining the suicide note Officer Hendrix found here on the table.” Fairchild said giving her all the credit.

“Oh, well then, that’s seems to close this case from my perspective, that is, if the autopsy doesn’t show anything amiss.” Troy says.

“I’ll have some officers’ help you get the body down and load it in your van if you wish?” Fairchild offers.

“That would be a very big help, thank you so much.” Troy said heading back to the shed.

Fairchild looked to Hendrix, “Can you assist Troy?”

“Yes sir, I’ll round up more officers right now.” She saluted Det. Fairchild and strutted out.

Dick couldn’t believe how well it was all working out. Next, he had to let his son find out and hope he didn’t go off the deep end. Only time would tell if he pulled off the perfect murder, or if something would cause it all to unravel.

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### ALAN WALLACE FOUND HANGED

Alan Wallace was found by Beatrice Reid; she was reported to be his fiancée. She had to be hospitalized over in Millersburg due to the morbid scene. Mr. Wallace's body was discovered in the tool shed behind his home. His death was ruled to be a suicide per Saint Cloud Coroner, Troy Van Horn.

A suicide note was found, but police are refusing to release its contents for public consumption. Only a select few were allowed to view its contents. Mr. Wallace will surely be missed by many, but most are asking themselves 'why' since he had everything to live for. The death count now stands at 8.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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## CHAPTER EIGHTY-EIGHT

Over at Zeeks Barber Shop, Nigel and Sonny were involved in a sudden death match of championship checkers. They were both tied at six games each. This would decide once and for all who the 'King of Checkers' was at the barber shop.

Gerald and Herbert had already been eliminated from their four-man tournament; yet they were enthusiastically watching the final match, when Doc Otis wondered in and pulled up a chair.

"You boys hear about Alan Wallace?" Doc asked.

"What? He finally going to make an honest woman outta Beatrice?" Gerald grinned.

"No sir, regrettably, he killed himself last night. Poor Beatrice was unfortunately the one who found him. I had to sedate her, then had her taken over to Barron Memorial in Millersburg, the poor thing." Doc said sadly.

"How'd he do it?" Herbert asks somewhat shocked.

"Hung himself in his tool shed...he was naked as a jay-bird."

“Naked, why naked?” Nigel enquired.

“People do strange things when they take their own life.”

Doc answers.

“Did Alan leave a note sayin’ why he did, what he did?”

Sonny now joins in.

“There was a note found inside the house, I didn’t get to see it, but I heard Officer Hendrix telling another officer that it said, Alan got a prostitute in another unnamed town pregnant and out of shame he killed himself. Now, don’t go tellin’ nobody, the police want to keep that under wraps.” Doc said.

Nigel responds, “Oh no, we won’t say a word, right boys?”

The others all nod and agree to remain silent; at least until Doc departs, then they’re all going to tell their wives, friends and anyone else who happens by, as is the way of small town life.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY-NINE

Time passed slowly for Beatrice. Now back home from the hospital, she had several unanswered questions she wanted to address with the police about Alan's so-called suicide. Chief Miller had let her read the suicide note. Making her way to the station, she was sent to Det. Fairchild's office, as he was listed as the officer of record for the Wallace suicide.

Fairchild met her in the hallway and they exchanged pleasantries as he escorted her into his office. Closing the door behind him, he made his way around his desk as both sat down, "Can I get you anything to drink? Coffee? A glass of water perhaps?"

"No sir, I'm good." Beatrice seemed tired and was clearly nervous.

"I just wish to say how sorry all of us here at the department are. Alan was a fine man." Fairchild said as he put on his deceptive act of pretending to care.

"Thank you. Everyone has been so supportive; I am very grateful."

“Now then, what brings you here today?”

“Well sir, there are just some things that don’t add up.” She pulled a small piece of paper from her purse.

“Such as?” Fairchild asked, not sure what she was up to.

“I just don’t believe it.” She blurted out through bloodshot watery-eyes.

Handing her his handkerchief, “Don’t believe what?”

“Alan never typed out notes or letters, he always did those by hand. His hand writing was very stylish and beautiful. Where did he get the typewriter, he didn’t keep one in the house? The note wasn’t even signed, and I don’t for one minute believe the story about the child and prostitute in another city. Something like that, I’m sure he would have told me. We were going to get married. I just can’t believe it.” She rattled on.

“Now Ms. Reid, how well do we really know someone these days? I’m just speculating here, but if Alan had been planning his own death, he had plenty of opportunity to type his note at the library where he worked. As for the child and prostitute, we have no way of verifying at this time whether

there is truth to his story or not. Maybe he was truly ashamed as his note said. I don't know. What I do know is, Troy Van Horn, the coroner, examined the scene, and performed an autopsy and determined it was a simple case of suicide.”

“But why would he take all his clothes off? Why would he want to be found naked? How many suicides have you investigated that the person took off all their clothes?”

“I'm sorry Ms. Reid, I honestly don't know what to tell you. People who are about to take their own life usually aren't thinking clearly; they are distraught emotionally, and people like that do all sorts of crazy things.”

“Alan wasn't crazy!” She barked.

“I didn't mean to imply he was, I was merely trying to explain to...”

“Why were his front and back doors not locked? He was a stickler for securing his doors and windows. He never left his doors unlocked, never.” The dam now broke; she was balling her eyes out as mucus and tears were gushing forth.

Fairchild just stared as the love she felt for Alan poured out in heavy cries and short, choppy breathes. Heaving at times as

if she was about to vomit, he finally stood and came around his desk. Placing his hand on her shoulder in a gesture of mock sympathy--for deep inside he had only hatred and contempt for the dead man who violated his only flesh and blood--he gave her his insincere support.

As she finally started to settle down, Fairchild asked, "Would you like me to call Doc Otis, or I could even have an officer drive you to his office if you'd like?" His offer wasn't for her wellbeing, he just wanted her out of his office, as he was now tired of having to continue this charade.

"No, no, I'll be fine. I'm just so upset by what's happened...uh, let me be on my way, I just need some rest. I'm just so tired, I know...uh, well, I'll be going now," She stood and ambled out without saying another word.

Fairchild returned to his desk and picked up the Saint Cloud Gazette; he started to read as if nothing had transpired. Tonight, he would sleep like a little baby nestled safely in the bosom of his mother's arms.



## CHAPTER NINETY

News spread fast about Alan's suicide. Over at the Bozeman Café Buddy was at his usual stool at the counter trying to get a rise out of Cindy.

"You know, when they found Alan swinging in his tool shed, he was nude, nary a stitch on. Except for one sock, a white one." Buddy said looking for a response from her.

Cindy stopped wiping the counter top, "Who said he was wearin' a sock? I never heard nobody say that."

"You know, the sock wasn't on his foot, it was higher up they said." Buddy now snickered at his off color humor.

"Buddy, you should be ashamed. The poor man's dead for Christ sake. Have some respect." She scolded him.

"Now, now, I have a lot of respect for him. They said the sock was covering his you-know-what, and that it was a very, very long sock, if you know-what-I-mean?" He grinned from ear-to-ear.

"Buddy Wilson, I mean it," she said pointing her finger in his face, "one more nasty remark like that and I'll put your ass

out on the curb. You hear me?” Cindy didn’t take kind to anyone speaking ill of the dead.

“Sorry, I was just playin’ around. I’ll behave if I can have a slice of that cherry pie over there on the counter.”

Cindy didn’t respond to his fake apology, but she did serve him a nice big piece of pie. She figured if he had something to put in his mouth, he’d be quiet for a spell.

Mable and Nigel were over at their usual spot, and couldn’t help overhearing Buddy and Cindy discussing Alan’s death.

“You know, Alan once made me pay a fine for an overdue book, can you believe that nonsense.” Mable said.

“I seem to recall you saying something about that sugarplum. Didn’t that happen over a year ago?” Nigel remembered exactly when it happened, as Mad-Dog- Mable blew it up into a federal case as he recalled. She called Alan’s boss and complained excessively until the five cent charge was cancelled.

“Who cares when it happened, I’m just saying that was the kind of man he was. Trying to lord his manly power over a

helpless woman who simply forgot to bring back one little book on time.” She bitched.

“Well sugarplum, that’s all water-under-the-bridge now that he’s passed on to greater glory.”

“Greater glory? He’s going to burn in hell with all the other sinners!” She thundered.

Nigel’s stomach was now starting to act up, “Yes dear, you’re probably right.”

“You’re damn tootin’ I’m right.” Mable glared at her husband.

Nigel decided to change the subject, “That poor Beatrice, losing her fiancé like that. Must truly be awful to find the love of your life hanging from a noose. How truly sad.”

“How truly sad? Are you kidding? It’s her fault he killed himself. She wasn’t woman enough to keep him satisfied in bed. That’s what’s sad.” She rattled off without any remorse in her voice.

“Please don’t talk like that. Beatrice is a very nice girl, and she loved Alan very much.” Nigel tried to play to her sympathy.

“If you’re finished, we need to get home. I’ve had enough of your goody-goody talk about that sinner and his pitiful fiancé.” She said getting up and heading for the door.

Nigel, even though he wasn’t completely done with his meal, knew better than to dilly-dally, or there would be hell to pay at home later. He ran after her like a little puppy.

Cindy had overheard everything Mable said about Alan and Beatrice, and it didn’t sit well with her, “One of these days, I’m gonna slap that woman’s teeth right outta her big mouth,” she said gritting her own teeth, “I don’t see how Nigel puts up with her bullshit.”

Buddy retorts, “They say, there’s a fine line between love and fear my dear lady, and Nigel may have found love early on in his marriage, but he most definitely has now entered the fear stage.”

## CHAPTER NINETY-ONE

A slight breeze was stirring her bedroom curtains. On such a dark night, one could see the twinkling of starlight's as they leisurely moved across the Oklahoma skyline. Beatrice was having another sleepless night, missing her Alan deeply as she prayed for understanding on what had happened, and why.

Dozing off, as she did from time-to-time, something in the darkness caused her to wake. Sitting up, she now saw the figure of a man standing at the foot of her bed. She instinctively pulled the covers up to cover her modesty; yet, she was surprised she felt no fear as the intruder stood still and made no move toward her.

“Who are you...what do you want?” She spoke unafraid.

“I have come for closure; for I am unable to move beyond this worldly realm until righteousness has been obtained.”

“Oh my god...Alan?!” The sudden recognition of his voice made her screech.

“I am but a shadow, but my soul cries out for justice.” He said with strong emotion in his steady voice.

“Why my love did you kill yourself, I need the truth?” She pleaded as tears now rolled down her plump cheeks.

There was a long moment of silence before he spoke, “I was murdered.”

“Murdered?! Who did it?!” She cried out.

No answer was forthcoming as Alan’s ghostly form simply vanished into the shadows.

“Alan! Please! Don’t leave me again!” After a few moments, “Alan...?” Her voice trailed off as she buried her face into her hands and wept uncontrollably.

## CHAPTER NINETY-TWO

Knock, knock, knock was heard from the middle-aged gentleman who was standing outside the Mayor's office door. Randall Buckwald, more commonly known by his fellow agents as 'Ace,' had been assigned to help the Saint Cloud police department.

Ace had been at the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety, working for the State Crime Bureau division for nearly twenty years. Solving nearly ninety-seven percent of all homicide cases assigned to him.

Standing an even six foot with broad shoulders, he sported a thick brown mustache which curled at the ends. Long brown hair touched his collar and was parted on the right side. Dark blue eyes set far apart, with bushy eyebrows gave him the look of a confident and authoritative gent.

He wore a tan Stetson 'cowboy' hat, tan sports coat with matching slacks, white button-down short-sleeve shirt, and a traditional thin black necktie that matched his 'Texas' styled boots. His colt .45 caliber pistol was carried in a shoulder

holster under his left arm, and his shiny silver badge with the bold letter's 'SCB' hung on his belt.

Hearing the knock, Mayor Carver called out, "Come on in." Especially since Buddy had called to let him know he arrived a few minutes ago.

Entering, he removed his hat as the Mayor approached, shaking hands he bid him sit as he returned to his chair. "I've called for Chief Miller to join us, he should..."

Miller entered, shook hands and pulled a side chair up near the Mayor's desk. "So, what have I missed?"

"Oh, nothing, Mr. Buckwald just got here himself."

"Please gentlemen, call me 'Ace' and what should I call you boys?"

Miller smiled, "Informal is fine by me, call me Miller." He didn't feel comfortable enough yet letting a stranger call him by his first name, and he couldn't get over the fact that 'Ace' reminded him of the Lone Ranger, which brought a slight grin to his thin lips.



“You can call me Brent, Carver, Mayor Carver or whatever you like. Just as long as you don’t call me late to supper,” He laughed as he patted his big pot-belly.

“Okay then, Miller and Brent it is,” Ace stated with a big smirk.

“If you don’t mind Miller, I’d like to look over the case files before we discuss anything of importance. I’d like to get my own take on things, if you know what I mean.”

“Sounds good to me. If you don’t have anything further Brent, I’ll take him to my office and let him get started then.” Miller said.

“Oh no, go...do whatever it is you do Ace. We’ll cross paths again.” Brent commented as all stood.

Once in the hallway Miller pulled out his pack of Camels and offered Ace one, but he politely declined as he pulled out a pack of Pall Malls. Both grinned as they lit up.

Brent closed the door to his private office as he had a nap scheduled for about this very time of day.

## CHAPTER NINETY-THREE

Fairchild spotted Beatrice standing in the hallway next to his office door. He gave a slight moan and rolled his eyes; yet as he came closer he managed a bogus smile, “Good morning Ms. Reid, and what brings you here so bright and early?”

“I have new information about Alan’s death; he was murdered,” she said excitedly.

For a moment he had a surprised look come over his face as her news caught him off guard, but he steadied himself, knowing if her news involved him, surely she would have gone to the Chief. Fairchild opened his office door and motioned for her to enter and sit.

Making his way to his seat he asked, “This new information, what would that be exactly?”

“Alan’s ghost came to me last night and he said he was murdered, so you see he didn’t commit suicide. You need to start an investigation so you can catch his killer.”

“I know it’s been very hard on you these last few weeks, but I’m sorry to say I can’t change my report based on what you

just told me. No one is going to believe, in your current state of mind, that you saw his ghost. It sounds more like you are just having a hard time letting go, and I understand...”

“I swear to god he was in my bedroom last night. He told me he was murdered. I’m not making this up, and I’m not distraught, he...”

“Uh, very well then, who did Alan’s ghost say killed him?” Fairchild wasn’t sure if he should follow this line of questioning or not, since it might open an ugly can-of-worms for him, so to speak.

“Well, he didn’t say who killed him, only that he was murdered and didn’t commit suicide. I swear I’m telling you the truth.” She was becoming frustrated at his non-belief with her new information.

Fairchild felt a sense of relief wash over him as she stated Alan’s so-called ghost did not finger him as his murderer, “I’m sorry Ms. Reid, but I’m not changing my report. To tell the truth, most folks around here just don’t believe in spooks or ghosts or such things. I think what you need is to get some rest and over time...”

“You’re not going to do anything about his murder?”

“Look, he wasn’t murdered, he killed himself. The coroner’s report proves it, as does our investigation. Just let it go. Move on with your...”

“If you won’t do your job, then I guess I’ll have to find his killer myself.” She folded her arms over her chest as if offering up a challenge.

“And just how will you go about that young lady?”  
Fairchild’s patience was growing very thin.

“Why, I’ll call Miss Stella and have her guide tell me who did it, yes, that’s just what I’ll do. I’ll get a reading and then we’ll know who killed Alan.” She stood and left his office in a huff.

Fairchild just stared as his mind raced. He wasn’t about to let her stir up trouble; especially if it would result in him going to the electric chair. She was acting very distraught, and should she commit suicide, most folks would simply say it was out of grief over the loss of her true love, he thought. If nothing better came to mind, he would give serious thought to plotting her demise, and the sooner the better he felt.

## CHAPTER NINETY-FOUR

Ever since Alan's death, Ronny Fairchild had become brooding and quick to temper. The loss of his friend and lover was weighing heavy on his mind. Trusting no one with his secret, he was having trouble dealing with such a profound loss.

Reports of fighting at school, fast and reckless driving and the like, were soon to reach his father. Asking what was wrong only caused greater tension between the two.

Dick knew there would be emotional fallout for his son, but hadn't counted on how deep Ronny's love for Alan truly was. Try as he might, Dick couldn't let on he knew of his son's sexual orientation; hoping he would grow out of it and find a nice girl to date, and settle down with someday.

What a parent wants for their child, never seems to be what the child wants for themselves. Such is the destiny of mankind.

## CHAPTER NINETY-FIVE

The house was dark and lifeless since Nancy packed up and moved to her sister's. Thomas sat in his soft velvet-covered chair staring at the wall. His thoughts were all about how much he missed his wife, and wished things hadn't turned out so badly for them.

Sipping on his fifth glass of red wine, and daydreaming of good days past, he became melancholy. Taking another sip, his eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep. The stress was beginning to take its toll on his health.

His eyes widened, as he now heard the old spring-loaded kitchen door at the rear of his house open and then close. As his heart soared, he couldn't contain himself, "Nancy?! Nancy darling?!" He leaned forward, as if to stand up, but stopped when she walked into the living room and turned on the ceiling light. It took a few moments for his eyes to adjust to the sudden flash of illumination.

Stunned, to say the very least, was his first reaction as she pointed the revolver at him. Gently sitting on the sofa which

was only a few feet from him, she sighed and shook her head slowly.

Leaning back, he now regrouped and steadied himself, “Could you really shoot me? After all...”

Bang!

## CHAPTER NINETY-SIX

Agent Buckwald decided, after looking over the case files, to start by investigating the Martha Camp murder first. To get a feel for it, he stopped and took a walk around the North Side Park. Nothing noteworthy popped out, so he decided to speak with the person who found her body, Ellen Wellington.

That turned out to be a bust. After only fifteen minutes with Ellen, he determined she had no clue what was going on around her. He was surprise at how well she could function with her level of dementia, which is what he thought she suffered from.

Venturing next into the barber shop, whereupon, he heard multiple stories about little green men, suicides, gray aliens, bumbling cops, Monday Night Mystics, shootings, unwed teenagers, assaults, zombies, and all manner of odd manifestations. Another dead end as far as he was concerned, for he put no stock in all the gossip, nor the paranormal mumbo-jumbo as he saw it to be.



Ace fared no better at Mueller's Drug Store or Bozeman's café; same stories, all with different telling's, but the same oddities. Simple backward people believing in foolish superstitions, he assumed.

Ace had been witness to many things during his time at the SCB; but never had he seen so much craziness in such a small town. Finding nothing of any consequence to go on, concerning the death of Martha Camp, he now decided to recheck the files in case something was overlooked. Tomorrow, he'd go back to Chief Miller's office and review the files, again.

## CHAPTER NINETY-SEVEN

Miller's hands flew up in a defensive posture to protect his face, as the bullet ripped through the lamp that was atop the small table next to his chair. She wanted his attention, and now she had it. Unaware, the blast from the revolver wouldn't go unnoticed by the next door neighbor.

"Don't say a word, unless you're ready to meet your maker." Sherry said calmly, "I knew it would only be a matter of time before you figured out, that it was me who killed Earl Schulz and Johnny Hudson. And I'll let you in on a little secret, I'm gonna shoot Dick Fairchild next and cut his pecker and balls off, just as I did the other two. Then, I'll have avenged my mother you see."

Miller slowly lowered his hands to his lap and remained quiet as ordered. He knew she was too tightly wrapped to reason with at this point. She had a story to tell, so he was gonna let her get it out, in hopes it would bring her back nearer to sanity.

“Would you like to know why those three must die? You may answer.” Her voice remained calm and steady, even though it was without question her mind was bent.

With her permission given, Miller did respond, “Yes, I would like to know the reason why.”

“When I was just a little girl, my mother divorced my father. Not because he hurt her, or abused her or me, but because she could no longer stand his touch. She shut herself off from us, just as she shut off her feelings for herself. She was damaged goods you see.”

“May I ask why she felt that way, if it’s not too personal a question?”

“No, no it’s not too personal,” she said, “I found my mother’s diary in an old suitcase in our basement when I was fifteen. My mother was only twenty when she had me. Our little family lived on the outskirts of Millersburg, but just two years later, three young men, who were drunk and looking for a good time, from Saint Cloud, would drive over and run across my mother who was walking home from a neighbors. They got a lot drunker and took my mother by force to an apple orchard

and took turns raping her. Yes, I'm sure in their minds it was just some innocent fun, but it wasn't to my mother. She wrote it all down in her diary. The fear, the shame, the confusion, the emotional trauma; for you see, Dick Fairchild told her, if she went to the police he'd kill not only her, but her husband and her daughter, yours truly. My mother felt in her heart the only way was to divorce my father and leave us, so we'd be safe. She never told my father about the rape or the reason why she had to go. Just up and left us. I hated her for what she done, that is, until I found her diary. I still haven't told my father about it. So you see, that's why I saved Dick Fairchild for last; he was the ringleader." Sherry's wicked smile said volumes toward her self-righteous revenge against these three evildoers.

Miller knew better than to try and placate her or pretend sympathy for her mother's plight. She would see right through such a ruse, he thought. "So, where does that leave us?"

"Knowing your need for justice, I'm thinking there would be no way to make any kind of deal with you. You're not the type to simply look the other way I'm afraid. I really do want to thank you, for all your help and support while I've been with

the department. And I just want you to know I will be more than happy to say a few kind words at your funeral.” She slowly pointed the revolver at his head.

Appearing behind her, he spoke with force, “Sherry, put the gun down right now!”

Startled, she turned around to see who was there, “What the hell!”

Miller took the opportunity to leap from his chair and tackled her on the sofa. His reflexes and strength were weakened by all the wine he had consumed earlier; but he was fighting for his very life and as his adrenalin surged forth, he became a fierce warrior as he tried to pull the revolver from her grasp.

Sherry was young, strong and athletic; she too fought with the ferocity of a tiger, for she still had unfinished business. She wrestled Miller off the sofa onto the floor as both struggled to gain the upper hand. Sherry was just too strong for the weakened older man; so he did what he thought he'd never do, he punched her, a woman, squarely on the jaw. That was all that was needed; she reeled back momentarily dazed by the

short punch. To his surprise, she did not fully release the gun, so he twisted the barrel toward her chest and squeezed the trigger. The muzzle flash and resulting explosion sent both several feet into the opposite direction. The revolver landed on the floor between them. Thomas was in no hurry to pick up the gun as he saw Sherry's motionless body face down on the floor. The bullet had ripped through her chest and exited out her back. Miller couldn't believe the size hole the bullet had made as it left her body.

Standing, he now faced the man who had appeared behind Sherry. Had his words not startled her, Miller would not have had a chance. "I must say Frances; I don't believe in ghosts. Well, at least I didn't use to away. I do want to thank you for saving my life."

"I always liked you Thomas, you're a good hearted man, and God protects the virtuous." With that, Frances Hudson vanished into thin air.

Thinking ahead, he decided not to mention Frances' ghost being there, he felt no one would believe it, and they might even put him in the loony bin. So, after calling Buddy at the

station to send out the troops, he simply said he got the better of Officer Hendrix during their struggle, and that was that.

Also, he decided against telling of the diary, the rapes, and all the rest. The story was, Sherry Hendrix was just plain nuts and went off the deep end, no reason why she did what she did. Time to let the past, stay in the past, he reasoned. Case closed.

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SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

CHIEF SHOOTS OFFICER HENDRIX DEAD

As reported by Chief Miller, Officer Sherry Hendrix admitted to killing Earl Schulz and Johnny Hudson just before trying to kill him. One bullet ended the life of a cold blooded killer, as this reporter sees it. She was suffering from mental trauma per Doc Pearlman; which left untreated, he said, can lead to severe and dire consequences, as we have all been witness to of late. The death toll now stands at 9.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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## CHAPTER NINETY-EIGHT

Hopping up on his favorite stool, Buddy smiled as Cindy turned around and poured his coffee.

“Why don’t you ever buy something? How about a nice piece of a pumpkin pie, freshly baked just yesterday?” Gerald asked.

“No thanks, my mother is a very fine cook.”

“When you gonna cut the apron strings, you little mama’s boy?” Cindy was tryin’ to get a rise outta him.

“All the good lookin’ ladies are taken,” Buddy chuckled.

“Yeah, like that’s the problem.” Gerald said sarcastically.

Cindy gave her husband a cross look, yet agreed totally with his remark.

“I ran into Mad-Dog-Mable this morning down at the hardware store. She was buying a dog collar and a leash.”

Buddy put forth.

Cindy frowned, “Why, she’s always been a cat person, why would she want a dog?”

Gerald shook his head, "I haven't even seen it yet, but I already feel sorry for the poor critter."

Cindy elbowed her husband, "That's not funny."

"I wasn't bein funny," he and Buddy hooted.

"Do you know what kind of dog she's getting?" Cindy asked.

"Well, I saw it sittin' in her car when she was inside buying the collar and leash. It was short, had a potbelly, and slightly bald on top of its head."

"My god, sounds like the poor thing is in pretty bad shape. Where'd she get it?" Cindy inquired.

"I don't rightly know, but I do know what name she calls it by." Buddy said as he sipped his coffee.

"Well? Don't just sit there with that stupid grin on your face, what's the dog's name, for Christ sake," Gerald said growing annoyed.

"She calls it, Nigel." Both men he-hawed with great zeal.

Cindy looked at Gerald, "That's not funny!" She pulled her apron off and threw it at Buddy as she stormed off to the supply room and slammed the door.

“You’re in for it now, I’d run if I were you.” Gerald said half-serious.

“Naw, she’ll settle down in a bit,” he went back to sipping his coffee, still chuckling to himself.

Hearing the door to the supply room open, Gerald went around the counter and headed for the rear of the café. Knowing his wife so well, he knew she would not let Buddy’s little joke stand, without some kind of reprisal.

Cindy came back with a bucket full of water and right as Buddy turned to look her way, she threw it right in his face. The force of the splash almost knocked him off his stool.

“What the hell Cindy! This ain’t funny!” Water was runnin’ down him, plumb to the floor, as he now stood in a puddle of water.

Cindy nearly wet herself as Gerald and herself doubled over with hysterical guffaws.

Soaked to the bone, Buddy headed for the door, sloshing all the way. “This is bullshit!” He yelled as he left the premises, feeling embarrassed and humiliated.

## CHAPTER NINETY-NINE

Nancy kissed her sister on the cheek as she was heading over to Millersburg to spend the night with a sick friend. Stella walked her to the front door and grabbed her in a big bear hug. Then softly kissed her on the forehead.

“What’s this all about?” Nancy asked, for Stella usually didn’t show this level of affection toward her.

“I want you to know how much I truly adored having you as my sister in this lifetime.” Stella smiled.

“Uh, okay. I love you too Sis. I’ll see you tomorrow, okay?” She wasn’t sure what brought that little episode on, but it made her feel good inside to know how Stella truly felt about her.

“Tomorrow and forever more.”

Nancy went to her automobile and just as she was about to get in, she blew a little kiss to her sister, who was watching her from the doorway. Pretending to catch her love kiss, she placed it over her heart as she waved goodbye. This gesture made Nancy’s eyes tear up as she drove slowly away.

Miss Stella now went into her private side room to meditate. She was preparing herself for a late visitor who would be there in an hour or so, just after sundown. They were destined to meet on this very night, it had been prearranged before they entered this physical world.

The sunset was most awe-inspiring on this fated evening, as her unannounced visitor tiptoed through her house, after entering an open rear bedroom window. Slowly searching for her in the darkness, he now saw the light emanating from the room where she gave her private readings. Nary was a sound made by the ominous intruder, for he had shed his shoes in order to surprise his envisioned victim, and was wearing gloves to hide his true identity from the prying eyes of law enforcement.

Miss Stella was sitting in one of two chairs, with her back toward the open door. She was meditating, or as her trespasser saw it; napping as an older person was prone to do. Slowly, very slowly he moved within two feet of her. The claw-hammer in his right hand calculatingly ascended high overhead as he positioned himself to make the first strike, the crucial

blow as he saw it, was indeed the one that would render her dead.

She spoke just as the hammer was about to descend, “Dick Fairchild, I’ve been waiting for you.”

Fairchild froze, stunned to hear her speak his name. She stood and turned to face him as he now lowered the hammer to his side as he quickly snapped out of his stupor.

“Tell me Stella, how did you know it was me?” He sheepishly grinned.

“My guide, Dr. Rice told me over a month ago this was my chosen way of departing this life. So, you are no surprise to me, it is simply time for me to return to the Unseen World and resume my life there.”

Fairchild studied her for a moment, not sure what she was babbling about, but he came to deal with a problem, and deal with it he would, “Well, let me not keep you then from your holy appointment,” he said once more raising the hammer high above his head.

“Let me help you Dick,” she said. Lowering herself to a kneeling position, with her back to him, she brought her hands

together for praying, "Our father, who art in heaven..." she began reciting the lord's prayer. As she came to the part, "as I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no..."

Before she said the word 'evil,' the claw-hammer found its mark. The first strike hit with such force, the hammer penetrated through her hair, skin and skull-plate. Her body was slammed to the floor, with the hammer buried several inches into the back of her cranium. Dick had to pin her head down with his left foot in order to wrench the hammer free from her skull. Wasting no time, he then applied the other twenty-nine blows so as to mirror the Martha Camp murder; thus drawing away any suspicions from himself.

With the deed done, he put on his shoes and slipped out the rear door into the peaceful night. Unafraid as he walked through the darkness, for he was the personification of pure evil that lurks within the dark shadows; and behold, for no one crossing his path, churchgoer or sinner, would be safe from his lethal madness.

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SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE  
STELLA O'ROURKE SLAIN

So-called local psychic never saw it coming! Miss O'Rourke was found murdered in the same manner as Martha Camp. Coroner Troy Van Horn told this reporter she received over thirty hammer blows to the head and neck areas. Saint Cloud P.D. and the State Crime Bureau are investigating, or so they claim.

Nancy Miller, the bereaved sister, and soon-to-be ex-wife of Chief Miller, had to be sedated and transported to the hospital over in Millersburg per Doc Pearlman. She suffered a complete mental breakdown after returning home and finding her sister murdered in such a horrific manner.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

Death count now 10.

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## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED

“That’s right, died right there in Doc’s office,” Ruth said.

“Oh my goodness, that’s so sad. But Ellen was ninety after all, so she had a good long life,” Mary added, “but how did she die again?”

“She wasn’t feelin’ well, so she went over to Doc’s place, but had to wait in his outer office, as Doc was doin’ physicals for the high school baseball team. She was sittin’ next to one of the young boys when he called out, and said she had simply slumped over on him. Doc came out and checked, said she died of a heart attack, right then and there, in his office of all places. Doc called the coroner and both agreed her heart gave out due to old age.” Ruth explained.

“Well bless her soul, she will surely be missed. Have you heard anything about a funeral or service?”

“No, I haven’t dear. She wasn’t Catholic, and now that I think on it, she never attended any church hereabouts as far as I can recollect. Do you know what faith she was?” Ruth inquired.

“I don’t have a clue, maybe Father Lonigan might know something about her religious preference. Why don’t you come pick me up and we’ll go pay him an evening visit, would that be alright with you?” Mary asked.

“Sure, but I don’t want to be out after dark.”

“Oh no, me either. Especially after what happened to poor Miss Stella the other day.” Mary said sadly.

“I hope they catch who ever done it, and hang’em in the nearest tree, may her blessed soul rest in heavenly peace.”

“Dear, she didn’t believe in heaven or hell, she once told me so.” Mary noted.

“Yes, but, you know what I meant.”

“Yes, I do and Amen.” She crossed herself.

“When is Miss Stella’s funeral?” Ruth asked.

“I heard from Hazel that she had a document that said she didn’t want no service, and wanted to be cremated.”

“So Nancy is going to take care of all that?” Ruth asks.

“No, Hazel said her relative over in Millersburg was seeing to it; that Dexter Alexander. Remember, he came and his guide spoke to us at one of our Monday night séances. I don’t

recall his guide's name, but he was a very nice young man.”

Mary commented.

“Oh yes, now I remember. Yes, he was very nice indeed. I sure do hope Nancy and Thomas get back together someday.

It's just so sad to see them apart.”

Mary was now growing concerned over the lateness of the hour, “We better get going.”

“Yes, you're so right...okay then sweetie, I'll be right over in two-shakes of a cat's tail and off we'll go.”

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### ELLEN WELLINGTON DEAD

Doc Pearlman, with the assistance of the coroner determined she died of natural causes associated with old age. Mrs. Wellington died just eleven days short of her ninety-first birthday. She was the second oldest citizen in Saint Cloud. Mr. Dietzel still holds the title at age ninety-six; even though it's been said, he could go at any moment. The death count has now climbed to 11.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED ONE

Chief Miller, Mayor Carver, Troy Van Horn, Det. Fairchild, Doc Pearlman, and SCB agent Ace Buckwald were all in the Mayor's side conference room, gathered together to discuss the latest findings surrounding the murders of late.

“So gents, we don't stand much on ceremony here, so just say what's on your mind,” Brent started them off on their journey of discovery.

After lighting-up a Pall Mall, Ace jumped right in, “Well, I've been pokin' around some, asking questions and whatnot, but the locals around these parts don't much like talkin' to outsiders it would seem. So I've run up against a brick wall of sorts,” he said blowing several small smoke rings into the air.

Brent turned his nose up and fanned the smoke away from his face.

Ace took note, “Sorry,” he said rubbing it out on the bottom of his boot.

“Quite alright,” Brent said.

Miller now responded to Ace, "I was afraid that might happen. Might I suggest you take myself or Det. Fairchild along the next time you venture out among the townsfolk?"

"That's mighty neighborly, I just might do that." Ace said.

Dick didn't care for Ace at all, and made it perfectly clear he didn't, "Well, speaking for myself, I have enough to take care of right now, so if you need someone to hold your hand Ace, you just call on the Chief," he said staring straight at Ace.

Ace didn't answer, for the feeling was mutual, he just stared back at Fairchild. The tension in the room was thick and unfriendly; so to break off the pissing contest, as Miller saw it, he now interjected, "Alright, let's stay focused. As most of you know, Sherry Hendrix admitted to killing Earl Schulz and Johnny Hudson, on that unfortunate night when she forced my hand. So I say at least we can close the books on two murders."

"I always knew something wasn't right about her. I could feel it in my bones," Fairchild stated as he looked at Miller.

“Water under the bridge, anybody else have something to say?” Brent now spoke, hoping to avoid a war-of-words breaking out between Dick and Thomas.

“Ah, I compared the Martha Camp murder file that Mr. Schulz had made up, to my findings on the murder of Stella O’Rourke and they seem almost identical. That is, concerning the method and the type of weapon used. The only difference is the locations of the bodies. Martha Camp was killed at the park, and Stella O’Rourke was killed in her home,” Troy clarified, “Both claw-hammers had no prints on them, except for those of Officer Hendrix, and she was according to the file ruled out as a suspect.”

“Anybody ever check to see who recently bought two claw-hammers?” Ace asked.

Fairchild flashed red, “We small town boys may not have all that fancy training that the SCB has, but we do know how to conduct a proper investigation. So to answer your question Ace, no one in Saint Cloud has bought a hammer in over a year, much less two. And yes, I did check with both hardware stores in Millersburg, and they have sold over thirteen

hammers similar to the ones used here. But they have no way of tellin' who bought'em or when," Fairchild seemed to be looking for a fight.

"Let's not get off point, we're all professionals here. Anyone else have something noteworthy?" Brent asked as he rubbed his forehead. He was now growing tired of the small-mindedness displayed by his lead detective.

"If I may," Ace began, as he decided to overlook Fairchild's remarks, "I'd just like to say, after looking over the file of Terri Helms; that the statements made by the now deceased Beaugard Camp concerning his, well, out-of-body episode, just may be factual. Therefore, I suggest we close that case out with the supposition that Johnny Hudson was her killer."

"There is no factual evidence Johnny killed Terri Helms." Fairchild put forth.

Miller looked to Ace, as he ignored what Dick just said, "You believe in such things as out-of-body, psychics, ghosts and all that occult stuff?" He wasn't going to mention Frances' ghost, but was curious about Ace's thoughts on the matter.



“This is just utter nonsense!” Dick yelled as he now stormed out slamming the door behind him.

Brent was glad to see him go, but Doc and Troy didn’t know what to think, so they remained silent.

As the group all relaxed, Ace answered the Chief’s query, “Let me just say this, I never put no stock in such things as ghosts, nor fortune tellers and little green men from Mars. That is, up until about a year and a half ago. To make a long story short, seven young girls had been kidnapped, molested and then murdered over in Martin County. No leads, no witnesses, no nothin’ to follow up on. The SCB and local law enforcement tried for three years to solve this crime spree and failed miserably. Then, out of the blue, one of the local cops said he heard of a young man by the name of Dexter Alexander, who lived down in Millersburg. Said he helped some father find his two lost boys using some kind of ‘special gift’ he called it. Weren’t nothin’ but bullshit as far as I was concerned, but with nothin’ else to try, my superior chose me of all people, to go down and see what this kid had to say. So I went, told this kid the facts of the case and as sure as I’m sittin’

here, that kid closed his eyes and said he saw a middle-aged man pulling a young girl into a barn, and gave me an address. Said she was there right now, tied up in the barn, but that I'd better hurry, for he was out behind the old barn sharpening a small hatchet. Well sir, I didn't believe a word of it. Such bullshit. But I didn't get a mile down the road as I was heading back, when a strong feeling came over me, and I swear I heard a voice say, 'Make the call.' I don't mind sayin' it scared me, so much so, I pulled into the next service station and called on a pay telephone to my boss. Told him what that Alexander kid had said, and he sent the cavalry out, full force. Sure enough, the little girl was there and that murderin bastard was out back of the barn as he said. So you ask if I believe; maybe, maybe not, but that kid hit the nail right on the head, that's for certain."

Miller wasn't sure, but he thought he remembered Nancy and Stella talking a year or so ago about their cousin who was psychic, a young boy they called little Dex. He figured since Dexter is not a very common name hereabouts, little Dex had

to be Dexter Alexander. He was now of a mind to pay this young man a visit in the very near future.

Brent now said, “Okay then, all in favor of saying Johnny Hudson killed Terri Helms, raise your right hand so I can get a clear count.”

Ace raised his hand first, most likely because he proposed it. Brent shot his hand straight up. Miller raised his hand, figuring; what-the-hell. Troy and Doc looked at the others, then at each other. Doc shrugged his shoulders and raised his hand. Troy followed Doc’s lead.

Brent smiled, “Very good than, five for yes, and Dick abstains. Now we’re getting somewhere. So, Johnny Hudson killed Terri Helms, Beau Camp killed Frances Hudson, Sherry Hendrix killed Earl Schulz and Johnny Hudson, Thomas killed Sherry...uh, in self-defense of course, I didn’t mean to imply...”

Miller smiled, “I know what you meant, please continue.”

“Ah, yes, where was I?” Brent asked.

Doc spoke up, “You were listing off the dead, my good man.” Doc was hoping the meeting would end soon; as he had

a rather important meeting of his own to attend to, down at O'Malley's Tavern.

“Oh, yes indeed, ah, let's see now, yes, there was Alan Wallace, Beau Camp and Bobby Taylor all committed suicide. Dear Ellen Wellington passed away of natural causes; and by the way, her relatives are coming over to get the body sometime tomorrow Troy. They want her planted next to the rest of her kinfolk over in Millersburg.”

“The body's ready for pickup.” Troy noted.

“Good. Well now, that just leaves the Martha Camp and Stella O'Rourke murders to be solved.”

Ace now interjected, “At this point, I'd just like to say, you fellers seem to have a handle on what's been happening here, so if you don't need my services anymore, I have quite a bit to do back home. And just let me say, concerning those last two murders, sometimes you just can't solve every crime, just something to think about.”

Brent looked to the Chief, “Thomas, what are your thoughts?”

“If Ace needs to get home, that’s fine by me, I’m sure Dick won’t mind,” he said with a little smirk, “We’ll still keep looking for their killer; but no matter what happens, solved or unsolved, one thing is for sure, life keeps movin’ on.”

“So true, so very true,” Troy adds thinking of his own personal situation.

“I say we’ve done some very fine work here today gentlemen,” Brent announced.

“I’ll drink to that,” Doc croons.

The others broke into heavy laughter, followed by the Mayor announcing the meeting was hereby officially adjourned.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED TWO

Greetings and pleasantries were exchanged as Beatrice entered through Dexter's front door. She was a few minutes early, for the reading she had scheduled last week, with him and his guide, Alalya. She felt so physically and emotionally drained of late; with Alan's death, and then the murder of Miss Stella. It was all just so overwhelming to her to say the very least.

Dexter led her into a private room, offering her a seat where he conducted his readings. Its furnishings were simple fare; three straight-backed wooden chairs forming a triangle in the center of a twelve by fourteen-foot carpeted room. There was no window present, it had been paneled over. There were two lamps sitting on a round-topped table in the corner. One with a regular white-bulb, the other with a red-bulb. Also, on the table sat a magnetic tape recorder for those who wanted to make sure they didn't forget anything that was said.

He told her she owed no money for the reading, but she insisted and handed him a ten-dollar bill. Dexter thanked her

and then he prepared himself for the arrival of Alalya, by turning off the white-bulb lamp and turning on the red-bulb lamp. Closing his eyes, he relaxed and started breathing slowly. Deeper and deeper he went into a trance state.

“I am Alalya, and I shall be communicating tonight. You may ask your questions when you feel comfortable doing so.”

“I’m Beatrice Reid, and I would like to ask about my fiancé who died awhile back.”

“Yes, I have looked into your life, and the lives of those who are, and have been, associated with you. What do you wish to ask at this time?”

“Alan came to me and said he didn’t commit suicide, but that he was murdered. Can you please tell me who killed him?”

“Because of events that are now playing out, that were planned long before certain energy beings were born into this world, it will not be possible to reveal who returned your loved one back to the Unseen World. Just know, that in a short time, all will be revealed to your satisfaction.” Alalya relayed the information with no emotion attached to her words.

“Oh, alright then...can you tell me if there was another woman in his life?” Beatrice asked timidly, not sure she could handle the truth.

“No, there was no other woman.” Alalya answered the question as it was put forth, and did not feel the need to elaborate further, unless asked to do so.

“Oh thank heavens, and that means he didn’t father a child out of wedlock?”

“This I can say; the suicide note found by the authorities was false. It did not come from the hand of the one you knew as Alan Wallace.”

“So the stuff about a prostitute, a child out of wedlock... it was all a lie?”

“Yes, a complete fabrication.”

“Will Alan come to see me again?”

“As the events play out, and final closure comes to pass, Alan Wallace will return to his true home that of the Unseen World, which all will one day return as well. But to answer your question as it was asked, no, he will not appear before you again in this lifetime.”



Beatrice now felt very tired, the sorrow weighed heavy on her soul; that she would not look upon his face just once more was too much to bare. “Thank you,” Was all she could put forth for now, as she felt she needed to go home and lay down. She was unaware that she was falling into a deep depression over the grief she felt over Alan’s death.

Dexter, now fully aware once again, saw the look on her face and decided not to ask how it went. “Would you like to stay and rest here? I have a spare bedroom you can...”

“No, I just need to go home. Thank you so much,” she stood and made her way to her automobile and departed.

Dexter mentally asked his guide, Alalya, to infuse her with energy and see her home safely.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED THREE

Doc Otis was kind enough and sober enough to bring Nancy Miller back to her sister's home, where she had been staying since she left her husband. Doc assured her they had taken Miss Stella's body to the cold storage, and they had cleaned the bloody carpet as best they could; including placing a medium-sized rug over the stained carpet.

Nancy was beside herself in grief, not to mention how lonely she had been since leaving Thomas. Many sleepless nights were coming her way as she would try and make sense of it all.

Stopping by, Beatrice would find that misery truly does love company, as she and Nancy both sat on her front porch swing and cried in unison. Nancy over Stella, and Beatrice over Alan.

Mable and Nigel just happened to be passing the O'Rourke home when they spotted the two women weeping uncontrollably.

Mable headed up the front walk with Nigel in tow; she turned and sat down on the edge of the porch, placed her hands over her face and began to sob. Beatrice and Nancy both stopped and looked at Mable, then to Nigel.

He said softly, "Ladies, your misfortune I'm afraid has brought up some unresolved emotions in my wife."

Beatrice asked, "Unresolved emotions for who?"

Nigel was a little embarrassed to say at first, "She weeps for Mandrake."

Nancy, Beatrice and Mable, all feeling vulnerable, touched in on each other's undeniable grief as boundless wails of emotional suffering and mental anguish poured out of their very souls.

As Nigel beholds, what he feels is an embarrassing spectacle, he turns his back to the ladies, puts his hands in his pockets and shakes his head as he mumbles under his breath, "Women."

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED FOUR

Dexter had met Ronny on two earlier occasions, when he was in Saint Cloud visiting Stella within the last year, or thereabouts. Ronny had secretly gone to Miss Stella for readings, but never told his father, because he said she was no more than a con artist, who took advantage of weak minded people.

As Dexter prepared himself, Ronny waited patiently for his guide Alalya to come through. As he fell into a deep trance, Ronny noticed his breathing became slow, almost labored at times.

“Greetings, I am called Alalya, I will be speaking this evening. Proceed when you are ready.”

“I’m Ronny Fairchild,” he was nervous and at first, sounded childish in his weak, trembling voice.

“Yes, I have your life plan before me. Be not afraid, and ask that which lays so heavy upon your mind, for you are entitled to have all your questions answered to the fullest

degree.” Her reassuring pleasant voice made him feel safe and loved on some higher level.

Summoning up the courage, “Why did my friend and lover, Alan Wallace take his own life?”

“Because you are of a higher order of Energy Being’s, this knowledge can be given to you. The one known to you as Alan Wallace did not commit suicide, he was murdered in accordance with his full and complete permission, as given before his arrival into this physical world. The ruse of self-inflicted death, was simply to cover up the true nature of his demise by the actual perpetrator.”

Ronny didn’t understand everything she said, “He was murdered?”

“Yes.”

“Who killed him?” he asked now with a strong and firm voice.

“As it was predetermined, he was slain by that individual who gave you physical life.”

A stunned look appeared on his boyish face, “My father? Why?”

“As it was written upon the stars, they were to meet, as two actors upon a stage, playing out their parts in the human drama called life. Each experiencing now, what the other had already experienced in a previous lifetime together.” Alalya lovingly expressed.

Ronny bolted from the darkened room as anger now overtook the young, impetuous lad. Racing toward his home city, he played out in his mind, over and over, scenarios of how he would confront his murderous patriarch.

Dexter’s guide gave this information, knowing it would set into motion the experience, that was pre-programmed by the one known as Dick Fairchild, prior to entering into this lifetime.

As Alalya withdrew from her position of over-shadowing Dexter, he now found himself sitting alone. Not sure what happened, he turned on the white-light lamp and went in search of Ronny. He found his front door standing wide open and noticed his vehicle was gone.

Closing the door, he wondered what Alalya had said that sent him off in such hast. He hoped it wasn’t anything too

serious, but after all, it was his life and he could live it however he wished.

So, as the time was nearing nine o'clock, he readied himself for bed, for he had another reading scheduled for tomorrow evening with Chief Miller. He told him it concerned official police business, so he was kinda excited, and hoped he would be able to sleep.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED FIVE

The big day had finally come; seven pounds, nine ounces and twenty-one inches long. Stacy Steimel was in labor less than two hours when she pushed the bundle of joy out in Doc Pearlman's office, it was a baby girl.

Baby looked nothin' like Bobby Taylor, Doc thought, but, at that time of life, no matter what the relatives might say, most don't favor either parent. Some newborns are downright homely as Doc can attest.

Stacy was asked, what name to put on the birth certificate as to the father? Bobby Taylor, came her reply, and by what name will the child be called? Loretta Steimel, after her saintly mother, god rest her soul.

As news reached the good Christians, they shouted with jubilation, for Stacy's little bastard was nowhere near the three hundred mark. A sigh of relief washed over the quaint little township; as for the first time, the murders were a good thing as some good churchgoers saw it. Look hard enough, and you



can always find a silver lining, as the good Father Lonigan  
always said.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED SIX

Buddy looked up from his comic book to see Ronny standing before him, “Sorry sport, your father hasn’t come in yet.”

“I need to see Chief Miller please,” his voice was heavy and unemotional.

Buddy had never seen him in such disarray before, Ronny always took pride in how he dressed and maintained himself. Buddy rang and spoke with the Chief who told him to send Ronny to his office.

Ronny slowly entered and sat. His head was down as he stared at the floor.

Miller took immediate note of his disposition as he lit up a Camel, “What can I help you with?”

Leveling his eyes as he drew his head up, he leaned back in the chair, tears were gently cascading down his cheeks, “I’m not sorry I shot him. He deserved it for what he done.”

With that admission, Miller now gave his full attention to Ronny, as he put the cigarette out in a green ash tray, “Son, who did you shoot?”

“My father.”

Taken aback, Miller regrouped, “Is he dead?”

“Yes, I put six rounds in him... he’s dead.” There was no emotion or remorse in his voice.

“Where is he right now?”

“Laying on the living room floor.”

“Where is the gun?”

“I let it fall to the floor.”

“Why kill your father?”

“Because he found out I’m a queer, as he calls them, and that I was secretly meeting Alan Wallace; we were lovers you see. So he killed Alan, and made it look like suicide. That’s why I killed the bastard who murdered my one true love.”

As he tried to process what Ronny had just said, he picked up his black desk phone and as Buddy answered, he informed him of Dick’s demise. His instructions were to send some

black-and-whites to the Fairchild residence immediately. Then he told him to notify Doc and Troy to meet him there.

“Ronny, I’m sorry, but you’ll have to come with me now,” Miller stood and walked over to Ronny who was now getting up. Miller took him by his right arm and unhurriedly led him down the hallway to the jail section. Placing Ronny in a holding cell until he could sort things out.

Thomas just couldn’t comprehend how a son could take the life of his own father, no matter the cause or reason behind it, yet he could identify with a father killing the man who molested his son.

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### SON KILLS FATHER OVER MURDERED LOVER

Ronald (Ronny) Fairchild killed his father, Detective Dick Fairchild late last night. Authorities reported he confronted and shot his father six times with his own revolver; over the death of his secret lover, Alan Wallace. Ronald stated that his father admitted murdering Wallace because he was a homosexual, and knew he had sodomized his only son. Ronald is in police custody and is facing the death penalty per Mayor Carver.

Beatrice Reid said it was a bold faced lie, and that Alan Wallace was not a homosexual, and was not having sexual relations with Ronny Fairchild.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

Death toll now stands at 12.

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## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED SEVEN

Thomas greeted the younger man with a strong and steady handshake, which Dexter was not accustomed to, “I just want to say how sorry I am for your loss. Miss Stella was truly unique... not that I ever went to her for a reading mind you, but she did give hope and guidance to many folks, or so I heard.” He wasn’t very good with the small talk, he just wanted to see if he could get some information and then head back to Saint Cloud.

Dexter was rubbing his hand, trying to get the blood circulating again after the powerful handshake Thomas had delivered, “Thank you, yes, she will be missed by many I’m afraid. Please, come in,” he said motioning for the Chief to sit, “would you like some tea?”

“No thank you, ah, would you have any coffee?”

“Sorry, only herb tea.”

“That’s alright, I’m good.” Thomas never saw the reason behind weak, watery tea. Coffee was a man’s drink he felt, it gave you strength and energy, as he saw it.

“Well, if you’re ready sir, we can go in and get started.”

Miller rose and followed him into his meditation room. Making himself as comfortable as one could, on a straight backed wooden chair, he waited patiently, not sure how to begin.

“My guide will be here soon and she will let you know when to start with your questions.”

“Uh, thank you.” Thomas felt uneasy sitting in the semi-dark with a lamp that only gave off a red glow. Seemed a bit spooky he thought. Not that he was afraid of ghosts, at least not now since Frances showed up and saved his life that is.

“I am Alalya, greetings from the great beyond. Please begin when you are ready to do so.”

Thomas cleared his throat, “I am a police officer and I would like to ask about some murders that have happened recently. Would that be possible?”

“Not all questions can be answered, and yet, you may still ask.”

“Alright, the recent murder of Stella O’Rourke, can anything be told about this murder?”

“The one you speak of is here now, and she wishes for you to know she is well and happy now that she is back in the Unseen World. She says to tell you, even though you may not understand, that her death was something she had planned to experience in that lifetime, long before she was born into it.”

Stella was right, he was not sure of her meaning, “Can she tell me who murdered her?” Miller continued to seek answers to his preconceived questions.

“She is saying it was Dick Fairchild, and he is here with us at this time. She wants you to know that they are good friends in the Unseen World.” Alalya passed on the information Stella put forth.

“Why would Dick murder you?” His confusion was growing.

“She says his earthly reason was to hide the fact that he had murdered another, and made it appear as a non-murder. She says his spiritual reason was due to an agreement between her and him, prior to incarnating into your physical world for the benefit of both beings.”



“Why would you want to experience him killing you in such a hideous manner?” Miller asked.

“She is saying, that they each were in a previous lifetime together, and in that life, she killed him. She was the killer, and he was the victim. In this last life, they reversed rolls. Now she says, for your limited understanding, they have experienced this from both sides of the coin. This has helped both to grow spiritually, she says. She asks that you do not judge her, or Dick for their actions while in the physical form.”

“This makes no sense at all.” Miller says shaking his head.

“This is Alalya, I will give you something to ponder during your remaining days, ‘there is no right, there is no wrong, there are only lessons and experiences for those in the human form.’ Think deeply on this, for it is the key that unlocks the mystery of ‘who am I, why am I here?’ as so many ask themselves in your created dimension.”

Confused, yes he was, but he still wanted answers, “Can you tell me who killed Martha Camp?” Miller decided to move on to new territory.

“No information can be provided on that individual at this point in time. There are others who are still playing out their programmed destiny, therefore if her killer was revealed, it would stop the other beings from experiencing, what was already approved before their births into this plane of existence.” Alalya explained, even though she knew he didn’t fully comprehend the information she had just delivered to him.

“Alright then, thank you.” Miller knew it would take him some time to sort all this out in his mind, so he figured he’d think on things for a while.

Alalya spoke, “There is another, who is here with us, that asks to communicate with you, if you so allow.”

“Yes, please,” If anyone had something to add, he was all for it, whether he understood it or not, he figured, what could it hurt to listen.

“She says when she was still alive in your world, she was called by the name ‘Ruth Anderson.’ She wants...”

“Wait a minute, Ruth isn’t dead.” Now he was thinking the jig-is-up. This is all a con job, but why? What does this kid

Dexter have to gain by it? Millers mind now raced with all sorts of thoughts concerning hoaxes and scams.

Alalya resumed, “She wants to alert you to the fact that she was murdered last night, and that her body has not yet been discovered. You can find her body in her bedroom.”

Miller was now flabbergasted, “Who killed Ruth?”

“The one who terminated Martha Camp’s existence, is the same individual who has ended Ruth’s existence, and he shall not be named at this time. It is now time to close, go in peace.”

Alalya said.

“Just one more quick...”

Dexter opened his eyes, “So, did you get...”

Miller stood, “Thanks kid, but I have to get back. Seems there’s a body that needs my attention.” He literally ran to his cruiser; wanting to make sure Ruth Anderson was really dead, and that all of this wasn’t just made up bullshit.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED EIGHT

Berta Franklin was the only customer at the Bozeman Café. She stopped in for a Pepsi and to gossip, “I just can’t believe it, Hazel and Herbert are closing down their drug store and moving to Millersburg next week. Herbert said he only had two customers last week, and none so far this week.”

“You want another one?” Cindy asked from across the counter.

“Might as well.” Berta said pulling a Pall Mall from her handbag.

Cindy popped the bottle-cap off and handed her another cold Pepsi, “You know, Nigel and Mad-Dog-Mable are also headin’ outta town.”

“What the hell... what’s Mable runnin’ for, the damn spooks and goblins are afraid of her nasty ass,” Berta chuckled as she lit up.

Cindy grinned, “Nigel said no business, so he’s gonna open a barber shop in Millersburg.”

“So how long can you hold out?” Berta’s tone became more serious.

“Well, Gerald thinks we should get out and go see what we can find in Millersburg. No one is gonna buy this place, that’s for dang sure. Just have to eat the loss and start over I guess. I’ll sure miss this place. Been a lot of good times here.” Cindy just looked off, as if in a daze of remembrance.

“Well, if that don’t beat all, I guess I should go have a talk with Sam about the Market. You just know those Millersburg folks are gonna start showin’ up over here sooner or later, looting all the empty homes and businesses. Hell, half the police force is dead, and the other half are makin’ plans to skedaddle, like all the rest. Only Chief Miller and Buddy are still down at the station, I hear tell.” Berta said heading out.

“Say hi to Sam for me.” Cindy gave a little wave.

“You got it sweetie.”

A few minutes later, the door swung open and the little bells at the top rang out. Making his way over to his usual spot, “So, what were you hens clucking about?” Buddy grinned.

Cindy studied his face, “You were waitin’ outside till Berta left, ain’t that right?” Now she grinned.

“What...no, I don’t know what you’re talkin’ bout,” his grin disappeared, “I just came for a cup of your delicious coffee.”

“Yeah,” she said reaching for a cup and saucer, “Berta said to tell you, Sam says hi.”

Buddy’s face flushed a little, “Please don’t start that Cindy, I’ve taken a lot of crap over that. I just want to move on.”

She poured his coffee, “Okay then, how long you plan on stayin’ around this dyin’ town?”

“I been over to Millersburg lookin’ for work, nothing at the police department, so, looks like whatever I can land, will hafta do for now, I reckon,” he blew and then took a sip, “Still make the best damn coffee for miles around, yes indeedy.”

“Whoever said, ‘change is always for the better’ didn’t live in Saint Cloud, that’s for dang sure,” she said shooing a fly away from her face.

“So very true.” Buddy said as the annoying fly now buzzed around his head.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED NINE

Entering through the unlocked front door, Chief Miller advanced to the bedroom where Ruth's body was lying face down on the floor. He now had his confirmation. Miller called Buddy to alert him to his so-called discovery.

As before, black-and-whites rolled with sirens blaring; which set the town once again into a fear engulf panic, as they wondered who had been murdered this time. Many could no longer stand the stress and were packing up to move, or had already left their homes. Fear now ruled this sleepy little community.

Doc would pronounce her officially dead, then head for his favorite watering hole to drown his ever increasing sorrow. Troy would declare she was murdered with a claw-hammer, found next to the body, just like the Martha Camp and Stella O'Rourke murders.

Miller had decided not to tell anyone he had been to Dexter Alexander's for a reading. He didn't want his reputation tarnished by admitting to something that clearly wasn't a

proven science, nor to be teased about spooks and boogeymen for his remaining years.

As far as Troy knew, Stella O'Rourke was killed by the same perpetrator as the other two, and Miller was okay with that. Still, he had a madman out there running loose, and would do everything humanly possible to bring him to justice.



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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### RUTH ANDERSON SLAUGHTERED AT HOME

Chief-of-Police, Thomas Miller, reported the bloodied body of Ruth Anderson, which was found in her bedroom. The coroner confirmed the murder weapon was a claw-hammer, just like the ones used on Martha Camp and Stella O'Rourke. No new leads have been found, as the police stumble over each other looking for clues. This reporter must say, the level of incompetence at the Saint Cloud P.D. is staggering.

Will you be next?

Story by: Jonah McGregor

Death count moves to 13.

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## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED TEN

Mary was beside herself with grief over the loss of her only true friend. She felt she would be unable in her current mental and emotional state, to wait for Ruth's funeral. She was already packing up and preparing to move to Millersburg, as she was scared to spend another night in this town.

She was taking only what she could carry in her older model dodge coup. The stress of the last weeks had caused her hair to start falling out, and hives were spreading over her shoulders and back. Doc Otis gave her some yellow ointment, but it didn't seem to be helping any.

Dread crept ever closer as she now picked up an uncontrollable trembling in her left hand. Every unexplainable noise set her into a sweating panic of nausea. Fleeing this haven of death was all she could think about as she speedily packed her automobile.

Later, just before dusk, as she roared out of Saint Cloud; she would not be alone as there would be a line of vehicles exiting this dying township, to be sure.

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### TOWN CURSED PER FATHER LONIGAN

Nearly two hundred residents have fled Saint Cloud in the last three months. Businesses are closing, people are fleeing for their very lives as Father Lonigan proclaims the town cursed.

Story by: Jonah McGregor

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Mayor Carver was enjoying a quiet morning in his office as he now unfolded the Gazette, “Holy shit,” he mumbled in a low voice.

No sooner had he read it, Father Lonigan came through his open door. “Brent, have you...”

“Father, father, father...” he said shaking his head, “so now you’re McGregor’s latest victim I see.” Brent smirked.

“Why, I never said this wonderful town of ours was cursed, all I said was...”

“You’re preaching to the choir, Padre. Now you know how me and Thomas feel. That little buffoon has taken every word we’ve said, and twisted it into a humongous pack of lies, yes siree.”

“Isn’t there anything you can do?” Father Lonigan asked in all sincerity.

“Freedom of the press, Father, freedom of the press. That little jackass can print whatever he likes. You going over to have a word with him?”

“No, I don’t want the church to be a part of this. No telling what he might write if I go and, god forbid, I lose my temper.”

“Sounds like a smart move, Father, just let it go.” Brent said interlocking his fingers and resting his hands on his big belly.

“How do you remain so claim over all the lies he’s said about you, if you don’t mind my asking?”

“Well Father, my friend here takes care of that for me,” he said pulling a bottle of ‘Jack Daniels’ from his lower desk drawer. Laughter poured out of the Mayor as Father Lonigan couldn’t contain himself and joined the merriment.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED ELEVEN

Chief Miller sat quietly at his desk, no closer to solving the Martha Camp or Ruth Anderson murders, when his desk phone began to jingle, “Yes Buddy?”

“Thomas?” The soft voice asked.

“Nancy? I miss you so much darling, please forgive...” he broke down and started to cry openly.

“No, don’t apologize, I’m the one at fault. I was...”

“Don’t say it, we both...” Thomas was wiping his tears from his face.

“I want to come home, please, can I...?” Nancy was crying as she now pleaded.

“Yes, yes, yes, I love you so...”

“I love you too,” she gushed, “I haven’t been able to sleep or ...”

“Me either, can I come get you?”

“Oh god, yes! I’ll be waiting Thomas! Please hurry!”

“I’m on my way baby!” Leaping to his feet, he raced out into the hallway, down and out the front entrance to his police

cruiser. Flipping on the red light and the siren, he burned rubber as he raced to reclaim his true love. Never again would he allow himself to place his needs above those of his one true love.

Mayor Carver just happened to be looking out his window, as Miller dashed to his patrol car, and blasted off with lights and sirens blaring, “For heaven’s sake, now who’s been murdered?” he said aloud as he crossed himself.

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## SAINT CLOUD GAZETTE

### REPORTER JONAH MCGREGOR FIRED

Due to the outcry from the Mayor, Chief of Police, and local Clergy, concerning Jonah McGregor's fraudulent mishandling of newsworthy events. An investigation of misconduct by the News Editor was forthcoming. It determined, after a close examination of his deficient journalistic methods, McGregor was indeed negligent in his reporting, and was summarily terminated from the Saint Cloud Gazette.

The Saint Cloud Gazette wishes to apologize to its readers for any content that was of an inappropriate nature.

Story by: Clark Monroe, News Editor

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Doc Otis sashayed through the open office door and plopped himself down right in front of Brent. With a huge smirk on his face, he dropped the Gazette on his desk and said, “Guess who’s back from Connecticut, and none too happy with what’s been printed in his paper while he was gone?”

Brent read the headline, “Halleluiah and Amen brother! That little pissant finally got what’s comin’ to him. Thank you Jesus!” He could hardly contain himself; it was the first good news he’d had in weeks.

“I thought you’d like that,” Doc said, making a big deal out of trying to wet his parched lips.

His old friend took the hint. Reaching into his lower drawer, he retrieved his nearly full bottle of Jack Daniels. Setting up two glasses, and after filling them to the brim, he pushed one over to Doc.

They clinked them together as Doc offered up a toast, “May Saint Cloud return to her former glory someday.”

“Here, here,” Brent added as they downed the first of several drinks.

“You know, I was always afraid that McGregor kid was gonna lay in to me next, in his silly paper.” Doc burped.

“You and me both...I was just waitin for that dopy yahoo to put a big headline about me bein ‘Mayor of Spooksville,’ or some such malarkey, yes siree, I truly was. Hey, let’s go see Clark and shake his hand for bootin’ that, no-good ninny right out the front door. You up for it Doc?”

“Is the bottle comin’ with us?”

“You darn tootin it is.” Brent laughed.

“Well, my good fellow, lead on.”

Off they went and even broke into song along the way, singin’ the only song they both knew the words too, ‘Jingle Bells,’ and it still bein early August.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED TWELVE

The streets of this quaint little settlement are now mostly silent, as death has walked among the frightened townfolks. Many have fled and many more are packing up to leave before the Grim Reaper comes knocking at their door.

Even the reassuring words of the Mayor, the Clergy, and even the Chief of Police, have not been able to stem the tide of fear, that runs rampant throughout this soon to be ghost town.

Beatrice Reid would be invited to move in with Mary Achtenberg over in Millersburg, and she would be so grateful for that invite. Never marrying, she would spend her remaining years yearning for her lost love, Alan Wallace.

On his way out of town, to start a small medical practice in Millersburg, Doc Otis would stop at the municipal building, where Ed Stein was slumped over on the steps, in his usual spot of course. Assisting him up, Doc would take him in and provide for his old drinking pal, as he was the only true friend Doc had.

Miller would land a detective's position with the Millersburg P.D. Nancy and Thomas would still have their ups and downs, but would never again split up.

Mayor Carver would go live with his younger brother in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Doc Otis' prediction that the Mayor wouldn't see his sixty-fifth birthday would come to pass.

Brent would fall ill just before his sixty-first birthday; hospitalized for three weeks, his liver failed due to complications from alcoholism.

Ronny Fairchild would be found guilty of 1st degree murder for the killing of his father. Sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole, he would not serve one day in prison. The day before he was to be transferred from the jail, his lifeless body would be found early that morning in his cell. Severely beaten to the point he was almost unrecognizable. It was rumored Dick Fairchild had many fellow officers who were angered by his death, especially by his own homosexual son. His death would be ruled a suicide, to the disbelief of the few still remaining.

Good Christian folks of Saint Cloud have now tasted the sting of battle between Good and Evil, and Evil has won the day. Their religious beliefs no longer can protect them from the forces of the damned. Like as not, Saint Cloud would summarily disappear, only to be remembered and forgotten as the passage of time sails over the horizon.

But wait, let us not forget the good Father Lonigan...

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED THIRTEEN

Father Lonigan was in his office practicing his sermon for tomorrow's church service, for those few who were still hanging on. As he was adding the finishing touches, he heard footsteps coming down the short hall. Looking up, Lester Hendrix now appeared in his doorway, carrying a small leather gym bag.

The good Father had stopped by Lester's home a few days after the death of his daughter, Sherry, at the hands of Chief Miller. He found Lester sobbing pitifully; they prayed together for the soul of Sherry to be allowed into heaven.

As her body was still in the custody of the Coroner, nothing had been said about a service or burial arrangements. Father Lonigan had spoken to the Bishop over in Millersburg, and was told, Sherry Hendrix's body would not be allowed to be interred in the church cemetery, nor there be a Catholic service. He wasn't sure how Lester was going to take this news.

Motioning for him to sit, "Lester, it's good to see you out and about. I was going to come by and pay you a visit on

Monday. Are things any better?" Samuel knew some people had been treating him as an outcast, while others were understanding and supportive, since it was made public that his only daughter was a murderer.

"Good sir, things have been settling down a bit. Most folks still don't know what to say to my face, I guess. When they see me comin' they turn away, or even cross the street to avoid me. But I don't hold that against nobody. Sherry done what she done, and now it's in the Lords hands." Lester crossed himself.

"With god, all things are truly possible. So Lester, what may I help you with today?" Samuel asked, figuring he might as well get it over with now. He had rehearsed a few days ago, what he would say, concerning what the Bishop had said about no funeral for his daughter through the Catholic Church.

"I know it's not the appropriate time or place, but would you be so kind as to hear my confession Father?" Lester had tears welling up in his tired eyes.

Samuel hadn't expected this. After a moment of reflection, he didn't feel comfortable with his request, but decided due to

recent events he'd make an exception this time, "Yes, I can hear your confession my son."

Lester began, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," he crossed himself, "my last confession was two months ago. At this time, I wish to confess that I killed Martha Camp and Ruth Anderson. I killed them with claw-hammers I bought in another state."

Father Lonigan sat in stunned silence, not sure if he should interrupt Lester, or let him finish his confession. His mind whirled as to whether he should protect the sanctity of church doctrine, or if he should try and get Lester to turn himself in to the authorities, or should he break the confessional vow and call the police himself.

Lester continued, "I was directed to kill these sinner's by one of god's archangels. He said I still have one more sinner to dispatch, before I will be allowed to enter the kingdom of heaven."

Father Lonigan was absolutely dumbfounded by his admission. Truly, he now felt, Lester must be insane to believe god would send an angel to direct him to kill these two so-



called sinners. That he was going to kill again in order to secure his place in heaven was just too much, “Lester, god doesn’t send... wait... stop, please dear god, no!”

Lester stood as he removed the claw-hammer that was concealed within the leather gym bag. With herculean force he unleashed, blow-after-blow, until Samuel’s limp body was prone upon his office floor.

Counting thirty blows exactly, he stepped back to admire his handy-work. Pleased, he knew he had finished his holy task and that the Archangel would be proud. Letting the hammer slide down through his bloody fingers to the floor, he now departed to return home where the Archangel said he would be waiting.

Arriving home only several minutes later, as he lived just eight blocks from St. Joseph’s, he went into his shed located behind his house, as the Archangel had instructed him to do once he had finished his mission.

Lester had already prepared everything beforehand. Willingly, he approached his self-made gallows. The noose was silently hanging above the chair he had positioned beneath

it. Balancing himself as he stepped up, he pulled the noose over his head and tightened it.

The Archangel now appeared before him, “Lester, I’m waiting for you to join me in heaven. What’s the holdup?”

“Oh great one, may I please know by what name you are called, before I step off?”

“You may call me...Leonard.”

THE END