

Shadows of Lives Once Lived

By: Jeffrey S. Holland

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There was a strange, steamy feeling in the air that night. Until that morning, it had not rained for over two weeks. The clouds moved quickly across the sky as a second storm approached. It was the time of year when it gets so hot that it storms nearly every time it rains.

The wind blew through the trees, and the sound of a banging shutter echoed through the night as it beat against an old abandoned house. Pulled around back was an old, white 1950's model pickup truck that had seen better days. Joe and Cyrus laughed as they heckled a young black boy who was lying against the back wall of the house. He had his hands tied behind his back. His fear showed as they hovered over him in the beam of the truck's one working headlight.

Cyrus crouched next to Roland, "I thought I told you, just this morning, to stay away from Cindy. And then, the very same day, I go driving by the dairy bar and see you sitting at a table with her. Now what am I going to do about that? How am I going to make you learn, boy, that you ain't gonna do whatever you *feel* like?"

Joe added, "Maybe we should just take care of him once and for all. Why, we could just bury him *alive* right here! I got a shovel in the back of the truck. Maybe that'd teach 'em a lesson!"

Joe and Cyrus were prime examples of the racism that ran so rampant in this neck of the woods. They grew up in the heart of the Deep South and had been brought up with the myth that a white man is better than a black man.

Joe had on a dirty white tank top, blue jeans, and boots. He looked like he had not bathed, nor combed his hair, in about a week. His gut hung over his belt, and anyone could plainly see he was drunk more than sober most of the time. He was the epitome of "white trash," and Cyrus was runner up. The two shared the same mindset, and on more than one occasion they had been accused of sharing the same brain, which was why they were such good buddies.

Cyrus wore an old, beat up cap that looked like it had been used as fish bait. It had the name of some tobacco company on it, but nobody had been able to make out what it had said for years. He wore blue jeans, sneakers, and an old T-shirt that had faded to the point that the writing on it was also illegible. His breath was bad, and by judging from the looks of his teeth, there was no wonder.

His grotesque, evil grin was scarier than anything Roland had ever seen. Roland trembled with fear as Joe walked around to the back of the pickup and whipped out a shovel.

Joe cackled, "Yep. Nobody would ever find 'em out here. This old house used to belong to my uncle, and he's dead. Nobody ever comes around here no more."

Cyrus laughed, "Yeah, I guess that's the only way he's ever going to learn his lesson, huh?"

Roland just knew this would be his end. Being one of the few black people who lived in the entire town, he had feared meeting a horrible fate such as this. It was a fear he had his entire life. In a way, he was kind of glad to get it over with. At least he wouldn't have to live in fear anymore, but, nevertheless, he was still scared speechless.

On the other hand, Cyrus and Joe had no intention of *actually* doing it. They just wanted to scare him to the point of 'keeping him in his place' as their parents and grandparents had trained them to do. Whether they felt this was a duty that had been handed down to them by their ancestors or they were just so insecure that they *had* to do it to convince themselves that they were the dominant race, they got a sick satisfaction from it. And there was nothing they would rather do on a Friday night than get drunk and pick on some poor black kid who was minding his own business. They ignorantly perceived it to be completely innocent and the most fun a guy could have.

Joe walked over to a spot that was about half-way between the back of the house and the tree line of the woods that lie behind the house. He jammed the shovel into the dirt. It easily penetrated the ground that had been softened by the rain earlier in the day. Thunder echoed in the distance, but this time it was louder, indicating that the storm was growing stronger and closer. Never knowing when enough was enough, Joe said in a mocking voice, "Yeah, this looks like a good spot, right here."

Cyrus heckled Roland even more. "You have any last requests? How about if we tell Cindy that you ran away because you couldn't stand the sight of her? How would you like that?"

Almost in a state of shock, Roland no longer seemed fazed by anything that Joe and Cyrus said.

As Joe continued to dig, he hit something hard and began prodding at it with his shovel. "Hey, Cyrus! Come here. I hit something."

Cyrus turned and looked at Joe, "What is it?"

Joe said, "I don't know. Maybe it's some kinda buried treasure."

"Nah, probably just a water line or something."

"This place didn't have running water!" Joe retorted.

Cyrus ran over and they both started digging with their hands to see what Joe had hit.

Roland began to regain his composure. He looked over and saw the two hicks digging in the muddy dirt with their hands. He thought he might be able to sneak away while they were distracted. He tried to stand up, but it was not easy with his hands tied behind him. As he finally got to his feet, Joe remarked, "Dang! Look at that!"

Cyrus and Joe began digging more rapidly, not noticing Roland edging his way, quietly, toward the side of the house.

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Ray Watson sat at his desk inside the Sheriff's Office, which was located inside the county courthouse. He was rocked back in his chair reading the local newspaper—his feet propped on the desk. He had just taken a sip of his morning coffee when Danny, one of his deputies, entered the office.

Danny was a strapping young lad with reddish-blond hair. He was taller than Ray. His broad shoulders and large chest filled his uniform. Ray had always considered Danny to be the most dependable of his deputies, and Danny was always eager to learn as much as he could from Ray. So they had a mutual respect for one another.

Ray was in his thirties, and was about ten years older than Danny. He had a mustache and goatee that went well with his dark hair. He was of average weight and height, and he probably would not stand out in a crowd except for his sheriff's uniform.

Motioning towards the newspaper's headline with his head, Danny said, "Well, today's the big day!" Across the front page in bold words read, "**Tomorrow's Halloween Festival To Receive National Attention.**"

Ray nodded about the comment as he lowered the paper, "Hey there, Danny! How's the world treating you this morning?"

Danny, in his usually chipper mood, said, "Did you hear yet? Johnny Walker stumbled across three bodies buried out at the old Mackey place this morning while he was hunting!"

Ray put his feet on the floor, sat straight up in his chair, and tossed the newspaper aside. "*Human graves?*" he said with a concerned look.

The deputy answered, "Yep! Well, one of them *at least*. His coon dog dug up half a corpse before he caught up to him. He said he didn't realize what it was at first, and when he did he just about messed his pants. He said there's two more graves beside that one that he didn't disturb."

Ray tossed the newspaper aside and quickly got to his feet. "We better get out there!"

When they arrived at the old house, Ray noticed that there were tire tracks in the yard. He told Danny, who was driving, not to pull into the yard. He didn't want to disturb any evidence that might help them figure out what had happened. Danny parked on the side of the road in front of the old homestead.

"Call in anybody you can," Ray said. "We're going to have to block off this entire property as a crime scene." He sighed deeply. "I have a feeling this is going to be a long day."

They both made a few phone calls and radio dispatches before working their way to the back of the property, being careful not to disturb any tracks that might have been left. As they rounded the back corner of the house, they saw the old pickup truck. They inspected it and called in the tag number over the radio. Ray observed that the battery was dead. He wondered if it was because one of the doors had been left open. After checking, he determined that the headlights had also been left on. The driver's side fender was dented to the point that it was touching the tire. The damage was so severe that it had caused the white paint to flake away, revealing the original color that the truck had once been.

Ray knelt down to inspect the tire. He shouted to Danny, "This fender was dented while the truck was parked here. If it had been driven after the dent, the tire would be worn down. You wouldn't be able to drive very far like that without the tire going flat."

When Danny didn't reply, Ray looked up to see him crouched beside three spots where the soil had been disturbed about thirty feet in front of the truck. When Ray stood, he could see a half-buried corpse of a male Caucasian in one of the places. He could tell where Johnny Walker's hunting dog had dug, and it had revealed the head of the corpse.

As Danny brushed away the dirt around the corpse's face, he said, "I recognize this one. I pulled him over only last week for reckless driving."

Just then, a report came back over the radio, "Ray, that truck belongs to Joe Mackey, and he has two

outstanding traffic tickets."

Danny looked from the corpse to Ray. "I guess he don't no more."

The rest of the day passed slowly. Uncovering the bodies was a very tedious process. The bodies from the first two shallow graves were removed, put into body bags, and sent to the morgue. The second body that was exhumed had been identified as Cyrus Scott.

Both boys' families had been notified and asked to go to the morgue to identify the bodies. However, Joe's family came to the crime scene instead of the morgue. They created such a ruckus that they had to be taken to the police station, where they were questioned about whether they knew anything about Joe's recent activities. Once they had calmed down, they were taken to the morgue, where they positively identified Joe's body. By that time, Cyrus' family had positively identified his body as well.

In the meantime, a forensics team had been carefully unearthing the third body. Throughout the day, about twenty people had arrived to process the site; sheriff's deputies, state forensics examiners, medical examiners, and several reporters from the local newspaper.

There were a lot of shoe prints found at the scene. Two sets of prints were quickly determined to belong to Joe and Cyrus. A third set of prints were found, and molds were made for further analysis. The only tire prints found on the site belonged to Joe's truck, as expected.

Ray sat in his car eating the lunch his secretary had brought when he noticed Chester Stubbs, the mayor, with his arm around one of the newspaper reporters persuasively whispering something in his ear. Ray watched for a moment longer until Danny came around the house and motioned for him to come over. Ray stuffed the last bite of his sandwich into his mouth and climbed out of the car. As he approached Danny, the excited deputy said, "Ok! Get ready for a shock!"

"What is it?"

"That other body...well, it isn't much of a *body* anymore!"

Ray looked confused. "What are you talking about?"

Danny said, "Just look for yourself!"

Ray walked over to where the forensics team was working and looked down into the grave. "That one looks like it has been here longer than the others." Ray said.

"A lot longer!" Lou, the medical examiner, replied. "Unlike the other two, this body was buried much deeper and is obviously much further along in the decomposition process. Only the skeleton remains. It's complete, but in pieces. The skull is in very good shape, though." He pointed to the small piece of bone jutting out directly above where the nose would have been. "You see how the nasal aperture is short and wide?"

Ray shrugged, "Uh, yeah. I guess."

"It suggests to me that the victim was a black man."

"You can tell just from that?"

"Well, that and the shape of his teeth and upper palate," Lou said. "He also has a wide mastoid process," he said as he pointed to a bony projection at the base of the skull behind the jaw, near where the skull connected to the vertebrae.

"So what do you make of all this? Do you think the same person buried all three people?" Ray asked.

"My gut says 'no,' but it's hard to say," Lou replied.

After a long day of processing the crime scene, Ray left a couple of deputies at the property for the night to keep watch. The remains of all three bodies were sent to a lab to be examined. Lou was so intrigued that he said he planned to work through the night. He usually only got to examine car wreck fatalities or maybe a work related accident down at the mill. He told Ray that he hoped to have some leads for him the following day.

The next morning, Ray arrived at the office early and called the lab.

Lou said, "I was able to determine that Joe and Cyrus died around two weeks ago. Testing shows that the third set of remains, the black male, has probably been buried there for about thirty years...give or take. He was probably in his mid-twenties when he died. There wasn't enough left to I.D. him. There might be dental records, but I wouldn't hold my breath. I'm going to fax you over my impression, and I'll drop off the full autopsy reports later today."

Ray thanked him and hung up the phone. He was so lost in thought that he hardly noticed when Danny walked in.

“Uh huh. I recognize that look.” Danny said.

“What look?”

“That look where you’re revisiting the crime scene in your head.”

Ray shrugged, “I’m just waiting for Lou’s autopsy reports. He’s faxing them over.”

Ray told Danny what Lou had told him, and they each took turns looking over the reports as quickly as the fax machine spit them out. Finally, it beeped, indicating that the last page had come through.

Ray passed the last page to Danny and said, “The best that I can figure is that somebody has been killing people for over thirty years. Why else would they have been buried in such close proximity? But why start killing again after getting away with it for thirty years?”

“Hey! Did anyone ever dust the truck for prints?” Danny asked.

Ray nodded, “Yeah. The only fingerprints they found belonged to Joe and Cyrus, but they sprayed it with Luminol last night, and there had apparently been large amounts of blood in the truck bed at some point, because they said it lit up like a Christmas tree. Forensics said that no human could have lost that much blood and lived.”

“So you think the bodies were taken out there in the truck?”

“No. That’s the strange thing about it. There wasn’t any actual blood found on the truck. Someone would’ve had to clean the truck. From all the filth in the back, it’s obvious it was old blood. Besides, it’d be easier just to ditch the truck.”

“Well, it *has* rained since then. Maybe the rain washed the blood away.” Danny said.

“Yeah. But runoff water would’ve still left some blood residue behind. So, it had either been scrubbed, or it was old blood. That’s the thing about Luminol. It only detects that there was blood there sometime, but it doesn’t tell you when, or what kind even. It could have been there years ago, and it might have been hog or cow blood, for all we know. Oh, and they found some tools in the back of the truck as well.” Ray stopped talking and seemed to be processing information in his head.

Danny excitedly said, “What if we’re dealing with a serial killer here? It’s almost like the truck was left there because the killer wanted someone to discover all three bodies. Maybe they disturbed the first grave just so we would find it!”

Ray held up his index finger, as to non-verbally communicate for Danny to hold that thought, and said, “The tools—there wasn’t a shovel! Do you know if anyone ever located a shovel yesterday?”

“Not that I’m aware of,” Danny answered.

“Well, let’s look for that missing shovel. I have a feeling that it’s an important clue.”

“Ok, Boss!” Danny said as he left the room.

Ray picked up the stack of autopsy report papers to look them over again. He found something very interesting in the report that had not noticed before and that Lou had failed to mention on the phone. Nearly every bone in Joe and Cyrus’ bodies had been broken. It was almost like they had been crushed by something very large. Ray wondered what could have caused that kind of trauma to two boys of their size.

This was the strangest case Ray could ever recall investigating, and he couldn’t stop going over every detail in his head. He also had a tendency of talking to himself whenever he was trying to solve a problem and no one else was around.

“Thirty years ago! Ok...let me think. Let’s say the killer was in his late teens when he killed the first victim. If the same person killed Joe and Cyrus, he’d have to be *at least* in his late forties,” Ray said to himself.

Just then, there was a tap at Ray’s office door, and it immediately opened. Chester Stubbs’ leaned in with a big smile. Ray couldn’t help but notice the wide gap between his front two teeth. “Hey, Ray! You have a minute?”

Ray replied, “Sure thing, Mr. Mayor!”

Chester stepped into the room. He was a short, round, elderly man and was wearing a white shirt with black slacks which were being supported by suspenders. He had jaws like a bulldog, and the thinning hair that remained had been dyed a dark brown and was slicked straight back. He held a straw hat in his left hand, and extended his right hand to Ray.

Ray stood up and shook his hand.

“I heard you’ve got yourself an interesting case. I hope this won’t give our pleasant little town any bad press. Bill, down at the Chamber of Commerce, has been working up some publicity for our big annual Halloween festival, and we’ve got folks coming out from two of the major news networks to cover it today.” He leaned in closer, “You know, if things go well, they said we might be able to get Willard Scott to come out next year.”

Ray smiled, "That's great! I guess our little town is finally getting its fifteen seconds."

The mayor's smile faded. He put his arm around Ray and said in a serious voice, "Listen. We need to keep this investigation you're working on as quiet as possible...*at least* until the media leaves. If they get wind of this, especially considering the mysterious circumstances of the crime, it will be *bad* publicity...and that won't be good for *anybody*. You know what I mean?"

Ray nodded, "Sure. We'll try to keep the investigation as quiet as possible."

"Good! It's just...we want to be known for our southern hospitality...not for the crimes of some deranged lunatic. And, more specifically, we want tourists to stop off in our quaint little shops to spend their money...not just point at the exit ramp sign as they pass by on the Interstate and say, 'Hey, that's where all those murders happened.'"

Ray nodded again. "You're right. I understand what you're saying. We'll try to keep it low-key."

Chester's big, fake politician smile returned, "Thank you, Ray! I knew I could count on you!" he said, as he headed back out the door. "Now you have yourself a good day! Oh! And have a Happy Halloween!"

Ray returned the sentiments, "You too!"

Another hour had passed when Danny's voice came across the radio. "Hey, Sheriff?"

Ray grabbed the microphone. "Go ahead!"

"We located a shovel on the side of the road, in the bushes, about a quarter-mile away from the crime scene."

"Great! I think that might be the missing piece of the puzzle. Bring it in, and let's dust it for fingerprints."

"Way ahead of you, Boss! I'm at the lab now. If there's any prints, we should know in a few minutes," Danny replied.

A few minutes passed, and Danny walked into the office. He asked, "Do you want the good news, or the bad news, first?"

"I think I'm in the mood for some good news," Ray replied.

"Ok. We were able to pull two fingerprints from the shovel, both matching the same person."

Ray smiled, "Great! And the bad news?"

"Unfortunately, that person is only sixteen-years-old, so he wasn't *even alive* when the first body was buried."

"Sixteen, huh? Hmm. I didn't see that one coming." Ray stroked his goatee while he processed this new information and tried to fit it together with the rest of the details. "So who is this kid?"

"A black kid named Roland Miller."

"Well, I guess Lou might be right. It *is* possible that we're looking at two different sets of murders. It still seems like too big of a coincidence to me, though. But why were they all buried together?"

Around lunch time, Ray and Danny made a visit to the Miller residence. A white woman in her late fifties came to the door.

Danny said, "I'm not sure we're in the right place. We're looking for the Miller residence."

"Yes. I'm Beatrice Miller," the lady said. "Is there something I can help you with?"

Danny said, "Oh. Well...we're looking for a Roland Miller."

"Yes, he lives here. Is there something wrong?" the lady replied with a worried look.

Ray said, "No Ma'am. At least we hope not. We just need to talk to him about a case we're working on."

"We were under the impression that Roland was black." Danny said.

"Oh, he is," Beatrice replied with a nervous laugh. "We adopted him about ten years ago. His real parents were killed in a car wreck."

She opened the door and escorted them into the living room. She went to get Roland, and a minute later, she returned with him.

Ray studied Roland as he entered the room. He was a tall, skinny boy. Ray leaned over and whispered to Danny, "Look at this kid. There's no way he could have taken on to two big guys like Joe and Cyrus."

"Maybe he's an accomplice to whoever did it," Danny whispered back.

Ray asked Roland, "Do you know Joe Mackey or Cyrus Scott?"

"Yes. They went to my school." Roland answered nervously.

"I noticed that you said, 'went' to your school. Why did you say it in the past tense like that?" Ray asked.

Roland shrugged, "I don't know. I think maybe they dropped out or something."

Roland's adopted father, Jack Miller, walked quietly into the room and sat on the couch next to Beatrice.

Danny acknowledged his presence by nodding his head, as if to greet him. However, Jack seemed to prefer not to be acknowledged. Danny didn't think much about it since a lot of people are simply nervous around law

enforcement.

Ray continued, "Joe and Cyrus were both killed a couple of weeks ago. Do you know anything about their deaths? Anything *at all* would help us out a lot."

Roland started to shake, "If I were to tell you what happened, you wouldn't believe me."

His mother looked shocked that he would know anything about it. Mr. Miller also had a baffled look on his face, but remained quiet.

Danny assured him, "Roland, whatever you tell us, we *will* believe you, as long as you're telling the *truth*. We just need to know the facts so we can decide *what* to believe."

Roland said, "You have to understand where *I'm* coming from, though. I'm the only black kid in my school, and I get picked on enough as it is. If I tell you, I'm probably going to get killed or something."

Ray said, "If anyone bothers you, we'll arrest *them*. We'll give you police protection if necessary. We really need to know what happened that night. Were you there?"

"Yes, I was there."

"Do you know how they died? Or who killed them?"

"It's more like *what* killed them."

Ray looked curious. "What do you mean?"

Roland looked down and started to tell the whole story. "Well, you see, that morning I was at school..."

Danny interrupted, "Ok. Now exactly which morning was this?"

"Friday. I think it was the 17th."

Danny was taking notes in the little notepad that he had retrieved from his shirt pocket.

Roland continued, "Anyway, I was at school, and at lunch I was sitting with a couple of guys who are usually pretty cool to me. Cindy walked by and said something—I don't remember what. Anyway, I asked her if she wanted to sit with us. She said she did and went to go get in the lunch line. I guess Cyrus and Joe were behind me and heard us talking or something, because they came over and told me to stop trying to get myself a white girl. I told them that Cindy was just my friend, but they just kept on. They said that I wasn't supposed to be friends with no white girl. They were always bullying me."

Ray asked, "Now who is this Cindy girl?"

Roland pointed out the window. "Cindy Fields. She lives down the street."

Danny said, "I know Cindy. I went to high school with her mother. Cindy's a nice girl."

Roland nodded, "Yeah, she is." He continued giving details of the account. "So that night I was walking to the dairy bar and when I walked past her house, she saw me and wanted to go too. We sat out in front of the dairy bar, at the picnic table, and ate. She went back home ahead of me because I was going to go by Doogan's. Mom wanted me to pick up some milk and bread." He looked over at his adoptive parents who were giving him all their attention. "I wanted to hurry because it was fixin' to storm. Anyway, while I was grabbing the milk, Joe and Cyrus pulled up and got some gas. When they came inside to pay, I ended up behind them at the register, and they kept staring at me. I got kinda scared, but I just tried to ignore them. Then they left. So I paid and started to go back home, but when I went around the side of the store, they jumped me. Cyrus grabbed me, and Joe tied my hands behind my back and put tape over my mouth. Then they threw me in the back of their truck."

Ray looked at Roland's parents. Mr. Miller didn't say a word, but just sat quietly. Mrs. Miller gripped her husband's arm as she listened to Roland giving the details. "Then they drove me out to this old abandoned house..."

Roland continued to tell how Joe and Cyrus tormented him, and how they got distracted by something, and how he saw an opportunity to escape.

Roland was shaking. "...so they were both digging with their hands, and Joe started pulling out *bones*. I was going to sneak off, but when I saw it was bones they was digging up, I got so scared I just froze. I couldn't move. I thought that they must've *really* buried other people there too. That's the last thing I remember before that thing came out of the woods and *killed* them."

Ray and Danny looked at each other and back to Roland.

"Thing? What *thing*? What killed them?" Ray asked.

Roland tried to calm himself. "I don't know. It was mostly just a shadow."

Ray tried to clarify, "What do you mean? Do you mean it was too dark outside to make out any features?"

"No," Roland answered. "I mean that it was just *a shadow*. I could see *through* it. It didn't *have* features."

They all sat there in silence for a moment. Then Ray sighed, as if they had just reached a dead end in this

investigation.

Danny, not quite as skeptical as Ray, was intrigued. "Tell us more about this shadow figure. *How* did it kill them? What shape did it have?"

Roland tried to recall, "I'll have to think, because I've been trying hard to forget it. It was shaped kinda like a human, but it could stretch out of shape like your shadow does when you're moving." He demonstrated what he meant by using the lamp next to the chair he was sitting in. "It came out of the woods and picked Joe up by the face and threw him across the yard, and slammed him against the side of the house. Then it reached out and grabbed Cyrus. He was making a run for the truck, and it just slammed him into the truck's fender real hard. They were both lying there unconscious, and I was too scared to move, so I just stood really still. Then it picked them up one by one and crushed them as if it was wading up a piece of paper! I've never seen anything like it!"

Roland was really trembling and had tears in his eyes, but Danny pressed him to go on anyway, "What happened then?"

"Well, that thing just disappeared. It didn't *go* anywhere. It just vanished into thin air. I didn't know what to do. I was so scared that I was kinda wishing that it had just killed me too. Then it started raining really hard, and I was all tied up and wet. I'm not even sure how I got untied, or what point it started raining. I think it was around the same time that thing vanished."

"You *do* know that this story doesn't sound very believable, don't you?" Ray asked.

Roland nodded, wiping tears away from his eyes.

"Why didn't you tell anybody any of this before?" Ray persisted.

"Well you just said it...because nobody would believe me! I was scared I'd get blamed for killing 'em. I was all confused and stuff, but I knew that if people in these parts even knew that I was there when those white boys died, they'd string me up."

Ray asked, "So who buried Joe and Cyrus?"

"Well, when I finally got loose I decided I better bury them to hide the bodies. I'm not even sure why. I guess I figured nobody would blame me for them dying if they couldn't find them. I was scared to death and kept looking over my shoulder to see if that thing was going to come back. It took me a while, but it wasn't too hard since the ground was wet. I ran back home and threw the shovel in the ditch on the side of the road."

Roland seemed a little relieved to be able to tell someone about it. Everyone sat quietly for a moment, nobody knowing quite what to say. Eventually the silence was broken when Roland concluded, "That's pretty much it. I know I sound like I'm crazy, but that's what happened. And I'll be honest, I was *glad* those boys was dead!...but I didn't kill 'em!"

Ray and Danny rose from the couch. Danny said, "Thank you, Roland. That gives us something to work with. Would you mind coming down to the station and filing a report?"

"No," Roland answered.

"And would you have any problem with taking a lie detector test?" Ray added.

He shook his head, "I don't have anything to hide. But I'm afraid that it won't work right and everyone will think I'm lying."

Ray assured him, "They are very reliable. Don't worry. If you're telling the truth, it will *prove* your innocence."

"Okay, I will then."

Beatrice showed them out, "We'll be down there right after lunch."

"That'll be fine." Ray said. He noticed that Jack was still sitting quietly on the couch.

As Ray and Danny walked to the car, Danny inquired, "What do you make of all of that?"

Ray shrugged, "I'm not sure. I *do* know that there's *no way* he could have killed them...not *alone*, anyway."

Danny said, "You have to admit...the kid's story *did* go along with the evidence." He pointed to a pair of sneakers on the porch that were covered in dried mud. "Speaking of evidence..."

After lunch, Roland's mother brought him to the sheriff's office and met with Jimmy, another deputy. Roland gave an official statement and took a lie detector test.

Meanwhile, Ray and Danny were going around town interviewing people who could corroborate Roland's story. Cindy verified that she had been at the dairy bar with Roland and that he had mentioned needing to stop by Doogan's store on the way home.

While Mr. Doogan told Danny that Joe and Cyrus had been at the store that night the same time as Roland, Ray explored the side alley beside the store. He noticed a milk jug. When he picked it up, he was surprised that it was so light. He had expected it to be full, since it was still sealed. Upon further inspection, he noticed a crack in the side of the jug. "It must have busted and leaked out when Roland dropped it," he said to himself. He looked down at the ground and, when he saw a moldy, wet loaf of bread, he realized that Roland had at least been telling the truth about the abduction.

When Ray and Danny returned to the station, the deputy that everyone called "Rebel" approached them. He said, "You were right. Those sneakers you brought in matched the third set of prints."

"Did they ever find any other prints out there?" Ray asked.

"Nope...except for Cyrus and Joe's."

Ray said, "See, that's what I don't get. Roland was there. But, unless he's some kind of Superman, there's no way he could have done it. So who *did*?"

"It was that *Shadow thing*!" Danny said.

Ray said, "Come on, Danny! You don't believe that, do you? I mean, just because everything else the kid told us was true, doesn't mean that he was telling the truth about how they were killed. We have to be realistic. He's covering for somebody."

Rebel said, "I don't know. It was pretty muddy out there. How come there's no other prints?"

Ray rolled his eyes. "Great! You too?"

Jimmy came by with some papers in his hand. He was putting on his jacket and passed the papers to Danny as he continued towards the door. "Here you go! I'm going to lunch. Oh, and you might want to have someone check that lie detector. It's either not working right or that kid witnessed some freaky stuff. I asked him everything you asked me to, and he passed with flying colors."

Danny looked to Ray, "What was that you were saying?"

Ray didn't respond. He was completely mystified.

Danny prodded further, "See! It's the shadow thing!"

Ray said "So let's say that this *shadow-thing* is real. Did it kill the first victim too...thirty years ago? I still feel that these murders are all connected in some way. I just think there's more to this case—something we're not seeing."

"Then let's go back out there and look around again!" Danny suggested.

While Rebel and Jimmy headed to lunch, Ray and Danny returned to the crime scene. There had not been any suspicious activities reported by those keeping watch the night before. The scene was now protected by nothing more than yellow "DO NOT CROSS – CRIME SCENE" tape.

Even though Ray didn't believe in ghosts, he had an uneasy feeling about going back out there by himself. He wasn't sure why. Maybe it was because it was Halloween and it would be getting dark soon. On the other hand, Danny, hoping to see something spooky, was happy to accompany him.

When they arrived at the property, they started towards the back of the property. Feeling like they had been looking at things too closely, Ray stopped at the back corner of the house and scanned the property in an attempt to get the big picture. He stood motionless for several minutes, carefully surveying the property. There were three holes where the bodies had been dug up, flag markers that the forensics team had left behind, and tire tracks left by the truck, which had now been towed to the impound yard.

Beginning to think that going back out there was a waste of time, Ray started back to the car, when it suddenly occurred to him that nobody had ever checked out the *inside* of the house. It had been boarded up for nearly twenty years, so there was really no reason to believe that there would be any clues to the recent murders on the inside of the house. But what about the other murder from thirty years ago? It was probably a long shot, but Ray figured it couldn't hurt to check it out, just in case.

Ray walked up on the front porch. The words "KEEP OUT" were spray painted across one of the boards that was nailed to the door frame. Ray noticed that the board in the middle of the doorway had rotted over the years, and he gave it a firm kick, splitting it into two pieces. He pried each splintered fragment loose, one at a time. Then he wrenched one end of another board loose and swung it down out of the way. This created a hole just large enough for him to climb through.

As he wriggled through to the other side, he could see how dirty the old house was. There was no furniture of any kind in the room, and layers of dust covered the old wooden floor. He got to his feet and cautiously walked

towards the back room, which had probably been the bedroom.

It was apparent that no one had been there for years. He walked over to the window and looked out. He saw Danny near the three holes half-way between the house and the woods where the bodies had been exhumed. "There's nothing here," he said to himself.

Deciding that he had wasted enough time, he turned to leave. When he took a step, he noticed a loose floor board. He backed up and tested the board again. This time the board slapped up dust. He squatted down only to discover an inconspicuous trapdoor in the floor.

He lifted the door to reveal a small compartment. His eyes widened as he realized that there was still something hidden there after all these years. Inside the hole was a metal box and something wrapped in an old paper bag.

He reached into the hole and retrieved the items. First he opened the bag. Inside, he found some white cloth that had yellowed due to age. As he unfolded the material, he discerned that it was an old gown.

He reached into the bag again and pulled out another piece of cloth. It appeared at first glance to be an old pillow case. When he checked to see if there was anything inside he noticed two round holes cut in it. Ray grimaced. He suddenly realized what he had found. He picked the old gown back up to inspect it more closely and discovered a Ku Klux Klan symbol

Ray was stunned at first. He wasn't naïve that this kind of stuff went on around these parts. The town was, after all, what is referred to as a "sundown town."

Decades ago, many towns in the south posted signs at the edge of their town limits warning black people not to be caught there after dark, and there were many documented cases where black individuals had been harassed, and even killed, as a result. Over the years, these "sundown towns" gradually faded out, changing with the times.

However, there were still a few towns that still had the reputation of being borderline "sundown towns," and Ray realized that this was one of them. But he had never had to deal with the KKK before, and he hadn't heard of any local activity in years; definitely not since he had been sheriff. People had grown less prejudiced over the years, but he knew there was still a lot of racial tension in the area.

He retrieved the metal box from the floor compartment and opened it. There was an old twenty-five dollar savings bond, thirty dollars in old bills, and two mildewed photographs. There were three men in the first photo, and he thought one of them looked familiar, but he couldn't quite place him. He did not recognize the others. The second photo was of the same three men, and there was a fourth man who was unidentifiable due to a smudge over his face. On the wall behind the four men was a banner that read Ku Klux Klan.

Ray looked at the old costume again. He was starting to think that maybe the newer bodies being buried alongside the older remains *was* just a strange coincidence. After all, if George Mackey, the owner of the house, had been in the KKK, maybe he had killed the black man and buried him in his yard thirty years ago...then Cyrus and Joe just happened to dig it up.

But how had *they* died? This shadow-man story still wasn't enough evidence for Ray to put in his report and consider the case to be closed.

Ray gathered together the new evidence and stood up to leave when he noticed something strange. There was a knothole in the floor of the secret compartment. Ray wasn't sure what he was seeing and bent down for a better look. It almost looked like a human eye. The more he looked at it, the more eerie it was. He put his finger out to examine the knot hole, trying to determine what it was he was seeing. Then, he saw it *blink*. It *was* an eye, and it blinked!

Ray threw the stuff down and grabbed his gun as he scrambled to get to his feet. He also grabbed his police radio from his belt and pressed the transmit button, "Danny! There's someone under the floor of the house!"

Outside, Danny heard Ray's transmission and began running towards the house, retrieving his gun from its holster along the way. Seeing that there was no entrance to the crawlspace on the back side of the house, he continued searching the perimeter for an access panel. After making almost a complete circle around the house, he saw a heavy board propped against its base with a concrete cinder block. He pushed the block out of the way, kicked the board aside, and peered into the black hole beneath the house. It was too dark to see anything.

Still aiming his gun into the hole, he grabbed the flashlight from his belt with his other hand. He slowly scanned the crawlspace, but all he could see was dirt. There was no way anyone could have gotten out from under there without him seeing them.

He heard Ray come across on the radio again, "Danny? Did you copy?"

Danny scanned the area with his flashlight once again, and satisfied that there was nobody under there, he holstered his gun. "Copy that. I looked. There's nobody under the house."

Ray's voice came back, "Then *who* is looking at me through this hole in the floor?"

Danny had never heard Ray sound so nervous. He began scanning underneath the house again.

Inside the house, Ray had his gun drawn and pointed at the eye looking up at him. He had not seen it blink anymore, but it continued to gaze at him from the knothole in the floor.

Danny replied over the radio, "Well, there's nothing under here but dirt. Weird, though. You can't tell it from the outside, but somebody's dug it out so that there's enough room to walk around under here... Wait a second! I see something. Stand by!"

Ray ran to the front door and climbed back through, with his gun still drawn. He reached the crawlspace access and looked inside to see Danny humped over and working his way towards the middle of the house. He grabbed his flashlight and turned it on before squatting down and going through the hole. As he stepped down onto the dug-out dirt floor, Danny said, "Hey! Look at this!"

Ray moved over to the center of the dirt room beside Danny. There were two rusty chains dangling from the floor boards with shackles at the end. When he reached up to touch it an icy cold breeze blew past them which made them both shiver. Ray spun around with his flashlight to see where the breeze had come from and saw something that looked like a wooden box mounted beneath the floor. "That must be the compartment beneath the floor." He moved over to examine it more closely. There was a knothole in the center, with a round, white object in it.

"What is that?" Danny said as he reached up and pushed the round white sphere up through the hole. The object disappeared, and they both heard something that sounded like a marble rolling on the wood above their heads.

"There's a hidden compartment underneath the floor. I found some interesting stuff in it. Then I saw..."

The sound stopped suddenly, and Danny finished Ray's sentence, "...an eye!"

There was now an eye looking down at them through the hole.

They both jumped back. Focusing both of their flashlights on the hole, they studied the mysterious eye with its fixed stare for several seconds before taking off running. They took turns scrambling through the crawlspace exit and hurried back to the front of the house.

As much as they both dreaded it, they went back inside the house. Inside, the items that Ray had were still lying on the floor where he had dropped them.

Ray edged over to the hidden compartment and looked inside. This time there was not an eye looking at him through the knothole. Instead, there was a shiny, white sphere that had settled in the hole. If it had been any smaller at all, it would have fallen through. Ray reached down into the hole to retrieve it, which proved more difficult than he expected, since it was down inside the knothole.

He had a difficult time getting a grip on it to pull it out, and after spending a couple of minutes trying, Danny said, "Let me try."

He pulled the gum he had been chewing out of his mouth, stuck it to the object, and raised it up out of the knothole. He turned the item in his hand to see that it was an eyeball. He immediately dropped it, and it fell to the floor. They both jumped back as it rolled past them. Then it came to a stop with its lifeless gaze fixed on them.

Ray began to laugh. "It's a glass eye."

Danny cringed. "Eww! Creepy!"

They both laughed with relief.

Ray said, "Well, I guess that explains that!" He stopped laughing. "But I could've sworn that I saw it blink." "Blink?"

Ray shook off the thought. "I guess it was just my active imagination."

Danny looked at the other items on the floor. "What's that stuff?"

Ray showed him the Klan outfit and pictures.

"I wonder how much that savings bond would be worth now!" Danny mused.

"Probably not as much as this old, out-of-print currency. Well, let's bag this stuff as evidence and get back to the station," Ray said.

Danny looked at the pictures and pointed to one of the three men. "Hey! I recognize that guy! It's Jack Miller."

Ray looked at the pictures again. "I *knew* that guy looked familiar, but I couldn't place him."

Danny said, "Well, he's a lot younger here, but that's him all right."

Ray took one last look at the knothole before slamming shut the door to the compartment—once again concealing its presence beneath the floor. He looked around nervously as he gathered the newfound evidence and followed Danny back to patrol car.

Ray looked around the property one more time while Danny bagged the evidence. As they got back into the car, Danny asked, "Hey! Did George Mackey have a glass eye?"

Ray shrugged. "I don't know."

As he pulled out onto the road, Danny asked, "What's the deal with that dungeon beneath the house? Do you think the KKK used it for something?"

"I don't know. But maybe we can get forensics back out there and see if they can tell us anything. I have a feeling, there's a lot of stuff we missed."

Danny was looking at one of the photos. "I bet one of the other two guys in this picture is George Mackey."

Ray said, "You know what? Why don't we go back over to the Miller place and ask Jack about it—see what he has to say. He was awfully quiet earlier."

Danny nodded. "He sure was. I noticed it too."

When Ray and Danny drove up to the Miller house, they saw an ambulance pulling away. They quickly got out of the car, and Ray knocked on the door. Beatrice Miller came to the door. She had been crying and still had tears in her eyes.

"What happened?" Ray asked.

Beatrice dried her eyes. "Jackie had a heart attack!"

Ray said, "I'm sorry to hear that. Is he going to be alright?"

Mrs. Miller looked down as more tears flooded her eyes. "They weren't able to revive him. He's dead! He had been acting really strange ever since your visit this morning. He's been getting a little worse all along; but after the two of you left, he kept talking to people who weren't there, and saying 'they' were coming for him."

Danny said, "Who are 'they'?"

Beatrice said, "I don't know. He was talking crazy."

Ray pulled out the two pictures. "Look, Mrs. Miller! I know this isn't the best timing, but it would really help us out if you could answer a couple of questions for us. Are you up to it?"

Assuming that it was something concerning Roland, she said, "Yes, I suppose so."

He handed her the pictures. "Can you tell us if that's your husband in those pictures?"

She was caught off guard when she saw her late husband in the pictures, and her eyes watered up again. She could barely speak. "Yes. What's this about?"

Ray asked, "Do you know who the other men in the pictures are?"

"Those are the two guys he used to run around with when he was younger."

Danny pointed to one of the men in the picture. "Is that George Mackey?"

She nodded. "Yes, and the other one is Truman Weston."

Ray took the pictures back. "Thank you, Mrs. Miller. That's all we need to know for now. I'm really sorry about your husband."

Danny offered a sympathetic smile. "Yeah, me too."

She started back inside. "Thank you. Can I ask where you found those pictures?"

Ray hesitated before answering, "We found them out at the old Mackey place, where the bodies were found. We're trying to find someone who knew George Mackey so we can get some leads on the other body that was buried out there. Did you happen to know George?"

She shook her head. "No. I've just heard stories about him through Jackie."

"You wouldn't happen to know if he had a glass eye, would you?"

"I don't know. Jackie never mentioned anything about it, if he did."

Ray thanked her again. Then he and Danny left.

Back at the station, they looked up all the records they could find on George Mackey, Truman Weston, and Jack Miller. They learned that all three were now dead, even though Jack had only been dead for about an hour now. Ray told Danny, "I guess the only person left who we could talk to now is Truman Weston's widow."

Danny kept looking at the computer monitor. "Yeah, they'd have been married for almost forty years if he were still alive. Maybe she knew Mackey too."

As Ray got up and headed toward the door, he couldn't help but notice Danny looking out the window at everyone getting ready for the Halloween Festival outside on the county square. "You know what?" he said. "You

should go on to the festival. I won't be gone too long.”

Danny looked excited, “Are you sure? Because I don't mind...”

Ray smiled, “I'm sure. Go on ahead. I'll see you there.”

“Ok. I saw Leslie setting up the kissing booth. I'm going to see if she needs any help!” he said with a grin.

Ray chuckled to himself as he followed Danny out the door.

Ray squirmed on an old couch, trying to get comfortable. There was a broken spring poking him in his left buttock, and was trying to sit very still to avoid having to have a Tetanus shot later. Lorene Farmer, formerly Mrs. Weston, had remarried about three years ago. Her present husband was still at work.

She had just arrived home from work and was getting out of the car when Ray had pulled into her driveway. She had gone to the bedroom to change out of her work clothes, and he was thinking of what he was going to ask her. He pulled the photographs from his shirt pocket and looked at them.

When she came back in the room, Ray couldn't help but notice how much better she looked without the hair net and apron that she had on when he first saw her getting out of the car. He had recognized her as one of the ladies who worked in the deli at the supermarket. As a matter of fact, she had probably cooked the food that his secretary had picked up for Danny and him on Wednesday. He had to have respect for anyone who could cook like that.

She sat down in an old recliner. “So, what can I do for you?”

He handed her the pictures. “Can you tell me if that is Truman Weston in that picture?”

“Yes, and those other two are Jack Miller and George Mackey.”

“Did you know Joe Mackey and Cyrus Scott?”

She thought for a second. “Joe? He's George's nephew, isn't he?”

Ray kept a serious look. “He *was*. He and Cyrus were killed about two weeks ago. The thing that puzzles us most is that they were found at George Mackey's old place, and there was another set of remains found with them.”

“Goodness! So, who was the other one?”

He shrugged. “That's what we're still trying to find out. All we know is that he had been dead for about thirty years, and he was a black man.”

Her eyes shifted from him to the floor. “Oh. I see.”

He studied her nonverbal actions. “Did you know George well enough to know who this other person might be?”

She smiled nervously. “Yes. I can tell you. I guess now that Truman is dead, it won't really matter.” She paused for a moment, and looked into his eyes. “Listen, I'm willing to tell you everything that I know, as long as you can promise me that I won't be in any kind of trouble. I mean, the only thing I'm guilty of is keeping other people's secrets...things I found out about years later and had nothing to do with personally.”

Ray studied her face, and nodded in agreement, “Ok. I can make sure that you have immunity in exchange for your testimony.”

She looked at him for a long minute as she tried to determine if she could trust him, and then she began her tale. “As you probably know by now, Truman, George, and Jack used to run around together in their high school days.”

Ray nodded. “Yes. I've heard.”

“Well, this was after they had graduated. Truman and me had already gotten married. The other two boys were still single. George never *did* marry, which was best for everybody, I suppose. Anyway, they were all sitting around on the porch one night, and they had drunk a little too much. Well, this black man had got lost from the highway, you see. He was on the back road that went by George's house, and it was getting dark. Well, he drove by a couple more times, and George said they were going to have to ‘*teach him a lesson*’ for being out here after dark. When the man came back by a third time, they waved him down. He pulled over, and George asked him if he was lost. He said he was, and George said that he would draw him a map. The man got out of his car, and when he did, they all grabbed him.”

“So they killed him?”

She shook her head. “No. It wasn't exactly like that. They were just going to teach him a lesson. But after a while, Jack and Truman tried to get George to quit, but he wouldn't.”

Ray was on the edge of the couch now. “Quit *what*?”

“Well, he said, that they tied him to a chair, and, at first, they were just going to do degrading things to him. You know, stuff that didn't cause the man any *physical* harm. For example, Truman said he went across the road, out

in the pasture, and scooped up a big ol' cow patty, and they acted like they were going to force the man to eat it."

Ray grimaced, "Eat it?"

Lorene nodded, "Uh huh. You know...they would say stuff like, 'You are what you eat. So eat this, you piece of 'blankety-blank.'"

Ray grinned to show he appreciated her being lady enough to tell a censored version of the story.

She continued, "Then, George said he wanted to give the guy a little *jolt* and told Jack to go get his jumper cables out of his truck. Jack pulled his truck up to the house, hooked the jumper cables to his battery, and passed the other end to George through the window. The chair the man was tied to was one of those metal folding chairs. Truman said that, when Jack got back inside, George hooked the ground end of the cables to the chair, and, that way, he could just use the positive end of the cable to give the man a shock. He said it worked kinda like a cattle prod that way."

Ray's eyes widened, "Well, so far you've mentioned kidnapping, harassment, assault, torture..."

Lorene nodded, "I know. You're exactly right! And that's why, at that point, Jack and Truman were beginning to sober up enough that they decided to try and convince George to stop and let the man go. Truman said that George said that they had gone too far to let the man live, because he could identify them. Well, Truman and Jack wouldn't have any part in the man's murder, so they got scared and left. They even quit the Klan that night."

Ray pointed out, "But, if they knew what George was planning to do, and they didn't tell the authorities, then they were still accomplices."

Lorene nodded, "Exactly! Which is why they all went to their graves with the secret."

"So, did George ever tell them *how* he killed the man?"

"No. George got really mad at Jack and Truman for running off. He had been the one who inducted them into the KKK. They were really disturbed by the whole thing, and they tried to avoid George as much as they could and quit the Klan altogether. But Truman said he *figured* that George *hung* the man, because when George was taunting him, he kept telling him that 'we hang negros out in these parts.' Of course, he used the other 'n' word."

Ray said, "You know, Mrs. Farmer...the fact that you knew about the murders and kept it a secret would technically make *you* an accomplice also."

She put her hand over her mouth. "But you promised that I wouldn't be in any trouble if I told you what I knew."

"Well...you're telling me now. Just make sure, in the future, if you hear of any murders, you come and tell me," he said with a wink.

She let out a sigh of relief, "Absolutely! Thank you so much!"

Ray said, "Well, thank you for finally telling me this. It explains a lot."

Lorene asked, "Is Jack going to be in any trouble?"

"Oh, you don't know? I figured you had already heard...you working at the deli, and it being such a small town and all."

"Heard what?"

"Jack died this morning," Ray answered.

"Oh my Goodness! Then it was true!" she said with a shiver.

Ray's interest piqued. "What was true?"

She got a chill and rubbed her arms. "The curse. You see, it was *exactly* thirty years ago today that George killed that man! You know how I said that Truman and Jack never really wanted anything to do with George after that. Well, years later, Truman saw George out somewhere...a flea market, I think. George told him that the man he killed was haunting him and wouldn't let him sleep at night. Truman thought that he just meant it metaphorically speaking or something. But the weird thing was that George had been in the Klan *before* all that happened...and he had probably tormented many blacks, and none of that every bothered him. But, for some reason, this one got to him so bad that, a few years later, he quit the KKK too. Then, exactly ten years from that Halloween night that he killed that man, George was killed. His front door had been kicked in, and it looked like someone had tortured him. They found his body hanging from a tree in the woods behind his house."

Ray said, "I do remember something about that, now that you mention it. I was just a kid at the time, but I remember hearing people talking about it down at Doogan's store."

"There *was* a lot of talk around town about it," she said. "As a matter of fact, that's pretty much when the Klan dissolved in these parts. The local chapter was starting to die out anyway, but that seemed to have been the straw that broke the camel's back."

“Well, that’s a good thing,” Ray said.

“Yes. Truman had always said that he thought George’s death had somewhat of a poetic justice about it. Anyway...where was I going with all of this?” She thought to herself for a second. “Oh yeah! So when Truman heard about George being found hung, he told Jack, and they both got really spooked. But the years went by, and just about the time that everybody had pretty much forgotten about it...Bam! Truman died, exactly ten years from that Halloween day when George died!”

Ray was astonished, “Are you kidding me?”

“Not at all! You know...I thought I heard that old gate out front squeak, and I thought, ‘Oh, Truman must be home early from work,’ because I had looked at the clock and it was just two-thirty, and he never got home that early. After a minute or two, I looked out and the gate was open but nobody was there. Later I was told that at exactly two-thirty, Truman had been killed at work. And do you want to know how he was killed?”

Ray nodded eagerly.

“He worked down at the fertilizer plant, you know, and a big ol’ dump truck was backing up, and it dumped its entire load right on top of him. Some said he was just standing in the wrong place at the wrong time, but some others who saw it happen told me it was like he was trying to move out of the way but some kind of invisible force was stopping him...holding him in place. And do you know what that truck dumped on him?”

Ray shook his head. “No. What?”

“Manure! Truman was buried *alive* in *manure*!” she said dramatically.

Ray immediately got goose bumps while, at the same time, trying not to snicker. He realized that it was her late husband that she was talking about, but considering the comical way in which he died, along with the seriousness in how she relayed the story, it just struck him as amusing.

Suppressing a laugh, he said, “So let me get this straight. We’re assuming that George tortured and hung the man, and he was found tortured and hung himself. Then Truman was killed by manure, and he had been the one who taunted the man with a cow patty. And it all happened in exactly ten year intervals, to the day.”

Mrs. Farmer nodded. She had been serious throughout the entire story, never cracking a smile.

Ray, remembering that it was Halloween, was beginning to wonder if she was just messing with him and asked, “Mrs. Farmer, Are you pulling my leg?”

She looked him straight in the eye. “I am dead serious! And do you want to know *why* Jack adopted that black boy?”

“Sure.”

“Well, at the funeral home, at Truman’s funeral, Jack wanted to know how it happened. I told him, and he lost it. He was so torn up, he had to leave before the funeral even started. I always thought that he adopted that black boy because he thought it would make things right. But I guess it didn’t. You know...eventually, he started acting really senile. I noticed that he mumbled to himself a lot. And, now, exactly ten years after Truman died, I guess the curse, or whatever, finally got him too. So, how *did* he die?”

Ray looked up at her. “We’re not exactly sure yet. They think it was a heart attack.”

She looked kind of surprised. “Hmmm... That’s odd.”

He got up to leave. “Thank you! You don’t know how much I appreciate you for telling me all of this. I tell you what...when I find out how Jack died, I’ll let you know.”

She grinned. “Thank you. I would like that. You have a nice day now. I’ll be seeing you tonight at the festival I suppose.”

He smiled. “Yeah, I’ll be there.”

He was starting to go out the door when Mrs. Farmer said, “Oh yeah! Truman did mention one more thing about that night.”

“What was that?”

“Truman said that, as he and Jack were leaving, the Klan leader’s truck pulled into George’s yard, and he said he ‘knew what that meant.’ Truman and Jack got into an argument with this man, whoever he was, and they quit the Klan that night, right there. Did I already mention that? Anyway, after that, he kept telling me that if a man in a Blue and White two-tone pickup truck was to pull up in the yard, not to answer the door. As far as I know, nobody like that ever came around trying to start any trouble, though.”

Ray said, “Well, thank you again.” Then he left.

Back at the courthouse, Danny and Jimmy approached Ray as he got out of his car. Ray filled them in with the details that Truman's widow had given him. They were both captivated as Ray told the tale. Then, Jimmy went back to security detail for the festival while Ray and Danny went inside to try and confirm the details of how George Mackey and Truman Weston had died. It took them about half an hour of going through records and files to verify that she had been telling the truth about how they died, as well as the dates that they died.

As Danny and Ray started to leave to attend the festival, which would be starting soon, the fax machine began receiving a transmission. Ray picked up the first page that had printed and said, "Wow! That was fast!"

Danny asked, "What is it?"

"It's the autopsy report for Jack Miller." As Ray looked over it, he could feel the hair stand up on the back of his neck. "It says that Jack died from electrical shock."

"Electric shock? I thought he had a heart attack!" Danny said.

"Well, it says that Truman *did* have a heart attack, but that wasn't what killed him. When the EMS arrived and tried to shock his heart back into rhythm with the defibrillator, there was a malfunction, and the defibrillator apparently electrocuted him. It says the EMS responder had reported the mishap."

Danny said, "So, Jack was the one who hooked the jumper cables to his truck when they were shocking the victim, and now he's dead because someone hooked some cables to him? You have to admit, Ray—that's a pretty big coincidence!"

Ray picked up the phone, "You go on to the festival. I'm going to make a phone call."

Danny left, while Ray called Lou. Even though it was past five o'clock, he hoped he would still be at his office. Fortunately, he had not left for the day, and Ray was able to ask him more specific details about the circumstances leading to Mr. Miller's death. Before ending the call, Ray asked him, "Does this kind of thing happen often?"

Lou replied, "Never. You'd have a better chance of having lightning strike you while being attacked by a shark. It's really strange! I mean, this guy's insides were burned to a crisp! A defibrillator shouldn't even have the kind of power to do that!"

Ray suggested, "Maybe it was some kind of power surge?"

"Nope. It's a portable unit, running off of a battery."

Ray thanked Lou and put down the phone. A chill came over him. "I'm starting to believe it really was a ghost," he said to himself.

He turned around and was startled to see that the mayor, Chester Stubbs, was standing behind him. "Ray, can I talk to you?"

"Sure, Mister Mayor!"

"You know, people on the street are talking about the bodies that were found, and now everyone is spreading some wild tale that *evil spirits* are responsible."

Ray sighed. "That Jimmy! I shouldn't have told him anything. I forgot that he can't keep a secret."

Chester put his arm around Ray. "Listen! The media's ears are perking up. Need I remind you that our little town's Halloween festival is gaining national attention? Let's not be made out to be a bunch of dumb hicks."

Ray nodded sheepishly. "I did promise to keep this low-key, and I goofed. I apologize."

Chester smiled, "It's ok, Ray. There's no real harm done...yet. Now, there's some reporters outside who want to interview you, and I'd appreciate it if you'd tell them that there's not even a case open. Tell them that all of this nonsense is just a prank—a rumor that some of the local high school kids started."

Ray's smile faded. "You want me to lie?"

"Just until the press is gone," Chester suggested.

"I can't do that. Besides, the local press already knows better."

Chester smiled, "I've already talked to the local newspapers. We don't need to worry about them." Chester's smile quickly turned to a frown. "Ray. You do realize that you're up for re-election in a couple of weeks. Right now you've got it wrapped up, but how's it going to look if you're going around trying to handcuff *ghosts*? Your opponents are going to laugh at you!"

Chester's politician smile returned. "You know what probably happened? Joe and Cyrus probably just got into a scuffle with each other, if you know what I mean." Chester gave Ray a knowing wink. "And this other fella you found out there isn't complaining, now is he? I think it'd be in your *best interest* if you would just be satisfied with not solving every ol' case that comes along. I'm *telling* you this as a *friend*. Now you just file that case away and don't look back at it, and start campaigning for your re-election next week. You gotta do what you gotta do to win. Don't let

people make a laughing stock out of you.”

Ray was growing agitated. “Look! We’re on to something here. And there’s a lot more to that other body we found out there. We’ve discovered so much in just one day! It’s my job to solve this case, and just because that ‘other fella’ *can’t* complain, doesn’t mean he don’t deserve the same justice as everyone else.”

Chester gave Ray a stern look, and headed towards the door. “Don’t say that I didn’t warn you when you’re out of a job!” And with that final warning, Chester left the courthouse.

Ray took a few minutes to cool down, so when he finally went outside, it was already dark. He saw reporters scattered about the county square conducting interviews, but despite what Chester had said, none of them seemed to be interested in him.

About the time he found Danny, Jimmy ran up to them and said, “Hey, Ray! Why are you having Horace Johnson testing the well water out at the Mackey place?”

All three shared the same confused look. “What are you talking about?” Ray asked.

“So you don’t know anything about it?”

“No.”

Danny piped in, “What’s that ol’ drunk up to?”

“I don’t know, but we better go find out,” Ray said. “Jimmy, you stay here and handle security at the festival. Danny and me will look into it.”

There was a strange, foggy mist hovering above the ground in the car’s high beams. Before reaching the house, Ray turned off the headlights and stealthily pulled over to the side of the road in front of the house.

Danny observed movement. “Someone’s in the back with a lantern.”

They quietly emerged from the car, each drawing his gun from his holster as they edged their way across the property. Ray motioned for Danny to come around the left side of the house, while he approached from the right side.

They could see a silhouette walking back and forth in front of the lantern that was on the ground. Ray saw the silhouette of a rifle in the man’s hand. He pulled his flashlight from his holster, lined it up beside the barrel of his pistol, and turned it on in the man’s face. “Freeze! Drop your weapon!”

The man literally jumped off of the ground, tossing the rifle as he threw his hands in the air. “It’s just me! Horace! Horace Johnson!” he said, trembling.

Danny turned his flashlight on as well, and they quickly converged on Horace; pistols at the ready. “Horace! What are you doing out here?” Ray shouted.

“Nothing! I was just testing this well water!”

Danny lowered his gun and examined the rifle on the ground with his flashlight. “Then why do you have a rifle?”

Horace didn’t answer, but the guilty look on his face spoke volumes. Finally he said, “Uh. You know...for protection. I’ve heard spooky stories about this place.”

Ray asked, “But why are you out here in the dark, on a Halloween night, testing well water?”

“I was just trying to make a little extra cash, you know, doing handyman work.”

“At night? Besides, this is a crime scene! Who hired you anyway?” Ray demanded.

Danny knelt down to examine Horace’s rifle and said, “Why the heck is your rifle so rusty. This thing looks like...” He paused mid-sentence, then slowly uttered “...like it’s been at the bottom of a well.”

Ray pointed his flashlight at the rifle and bent down to examine it. Horace took advantage of the distraction and darted towards the woods.

Danny jumped up to run after him, but Horace unexpectedly stopped in his tracks. Danny plowed into him, knocking them both to the ground.

Danny shouted, “Horace! What in the world!”

Horace sat on the ground, pointing towards the woods. “Look! What is that?!”

Ray sprang to his feet and turned to see about a dozen shadowy figures slowly emerging from the trees. Danny scrambled to get up also. Horace was too terrified to move.

As Danny found his footing, he and Ray asked the same thing that Horace had already asked. “What is that?” they inquired in unison.

The shadows did not move towards them but drifted throughout the yard, and each came to a stop in a different place. The three men remained motionless for several minutes, surveying the bone-chilling imagery.

Ray whispered to Danny, “How many do you count? I see twelve.”

“I think I see twelve too,” Danny whispered back.

“Look! Most of them are hovering in the area where the three bodies were found,”

“Do you reckon it’s their ghosts?” Danny asked.

Ray replied, “No. There’s too many...Unless...”

And, at that moment, the shadowy figures all dissipated like the smoke from a cigarette.

Danny bent over and retrieved his flashlight. “Let’s get out of here!”

Ray eagerly said, “No arguments from me! Grab all that stuff! C’mon, Horace!” Horace lay motionless on the ground. “Let’s go, Horace!” Ray repeated.

Danny knelt beside Horace and put his hand on his chest. “He’s fainted!” he said with a nervous chuckle.

Ray rolled his eyes and let out a sigh. He wasn’t sure if it was out of disgust or relief.

Danny picked up the rusty rifle and, realizing that there was an old burlap bag beside the hole to the well, snatched it up as well. “Yuck! What is this, a bag of sludge?”

“He must have retrieved it from the well also. Bring it. We’ll figure out what it is later.”

They each slipped an arm beneath Horace’s armpits, and dragged him to the police car along with the other items.

Back at the police station, Ray and Danny had on latex gloves and were carefully sorting through the contents of the dripping burlap sack. They had pulled out several wallets, each accompanied by I.D.s. Many had been protected enough by the wallets that they were actually fairly well preserved—legible even. A few, however, were too deteriorated to make out.

Horace began to moan from the jail cell. “He’s starting to come to,” Danny said. “He’s got some answering to do. You reckon he had anything to do with it?”

“How could he?” Ray replied. “He would’ve been two years old at the time. Somebody put him up to retrieving the evidence from the well.”

Horace held his head in his hands and mumbled, “What happened?”

“You fainted!” Danny said.

Suddenly remembering what happened, Horace sat straight up with his eyes wide open. “What were those things?!”

Ray said, “I don’t know, but I think they’re coming after you if you don’t tell us everything you know.”

Horace said, “I’m innocent! I didn’t have anything to do with whatever you’re implying.”

Danny said, “Tell that to those things out there.”

“No. You don’t understand. I just *found* that stuff while testing the well water,” Horace insisted.

“The well water you were hired to test at night?” Ray said sarcastically.

“That’s right!” Horace said with shifty eyes.

“But who *hired* you?” Ray demanded.

Horace said, “Look. I can’t tell you. Besides, I have the right to remain silent.”

Ray said, “Yeah, if you were under arrest, but you’re not.” He unlocked the door to the jail cell. “You’re free to go.”

Danny’s mouth fell open, “What?” Danny exclaimed. “Why are you letting him go?”

Ray gave Danny a double wink and said, “Because we don’t any reason to hold him.”

Danny suddenly understood that Ray had a plan. “Well, I guess you’re free to go then, Horace.” He sat down hard and crossed his arms, pretending to be disgusted.

When Horace left the building, Danny’s demeanor changed instantly. “So, what’s the plan, Boss?”

Ray moved to the window and watched Horace pushing his way through the crowded streets of the Halloween festival. “Get Jimmy on the radio. Tell him to locate Horace and follow him.”

A few minutes later, Ray and Danny were pushing their way through the herd of people in the streets. There were vendors selling roasted peanuts, lemonade, glow in the dark necklaces, as well as other snacks and novelties. As they excused their way through the funnel cakes line, they spotted Jimmy.

“Where’s Horace?” Danny asked.

“He got in the car with someone over there in that alley beside the bank, and they left together.” Jimmy said

over the noise of the crowd.

“Were you able to see who the driver was or get a tag number?” Ray asked, hopefully.

Jimmy winced, “Sorry, Ray! I was still about a block away by the time I located Horace in the crowd. I was too far behind. They left before I could catch up to them. I think the car was maroon, but I’m not even sure about that. It was dark.”

“It’s ok.” Ray assured him. “I have an idea of who put him up to it.” He assessed the crowd, and for the first time, he noticed all of the different attractions of the festival. People were dressed in Halloween costumes, there was a man sitting on a stool at an easel drawing caricatures of subjects who were willing to pay, and there was a classic car demonstration on the west side of the county square. His heart almost stopped when he saw a two-tone blue and white truck that had been restored. “Hey, Guys! Look!” Ray pointed at the truck.

Danny and Jimmy looked at each other and said together, “What?”

Ray said, “It’s something that Truman’s widow told me. She said the KKK leader had driven a blue and white, two-tone truck. You don’t suppose…”

The three quickly began maneuvering their way over to the car show. The doors of the truck were open to show off the restored interior. Ray examined the inside of the truck while Danny located its owner. In a couple of moments, Danny brought the owner over to Ray. The man was very friendly and cooperative, but it turned out that he was not from the area. He had driven over a thousand miles to enter it in the car show. It turned out that he was only the second owner of the truck and had purchased it from a man up north.

Ray said, “Well, that’s a dead end.”

“That *was* a weird coincidence, though,” Danny said.

As they started to go back towards the south side of the square, Ray looked back at the truck one more time. “I wonder how many truck styles were offered in those colors. Maybe the truck we’re looking for would look similar to…” Ray abruptly stopped speaking. He observed the shape of the truck. “I think I just figured something out. I’ll be right back.” Then he turned and began running through the crowd.

They didn’t see Ray again for almost another hour. Finally, he reemerged with Ron Presley, who worked in the probate office in the courthouse. Ron was carrying a file in his hand.

Danny said, “Where have you been?”

“Following a hunch. Ron has been helping me with a little research.”

Just then, Chester Stubbs climbed onto the bandstand and approached the microphone. “It’s so good to see you all out tonight for our Fifteenth Annual Halloween Festival!” The microphone made a high-pitched squeal as it received feedback from the huge speakers positioned at opposite ends of the square. “We’d like to welcome the ladies and gentlemen from the national networks who came out to join us this year and share our local tradition with America!”

“C’mon. Let’s go,” Ray said to the two deputies.

“Go where?” Jimmy asked.

“There’s no time to explain right now. Just follow my lead.”

Ray stepped up onto the bandstand. The mayor, not understanding what exactly was happening, started to stutter. Quickly improvising his well-rehearsed speech, Chester said, “Look everyone. It’s our good friend and sheriff, Ray Watson. I guess he must have something he would like to share with us.”

With an unsure look, the mayor stepped aside to allow Ray the use of the microphone. Ray leaned into the mic and said, “Some of you may have heard that we have a strange case that we’ve been working on the last couple of days.” The mayor gave Ray a look of warning, but Ray continued anyway. “It’s Halloween, and there’s been talk of mysterious murders, ghosts and vengeful spirits. I cannot tell you all of the details, because the case is still ongoing. All I can tell you is that a bunch of people died just because of the color of their skin. And I can tell you that, in the end, the last of the perpetrators was caught, and justice was served.”

Everyone started murmuring and looking around. Mayor Stubbs looked as nervous as ever, and began backing away from Ray. He was just about to step down from the stage when Ray looked at his two deputies and said into the microphone, “Danny and Jimmy, could you please place Chester Stubbs under arrest?”

Before anyone’s mouth had time to fall open, Chester leaped from the bandstand and began running down the street. Both deputies began running after him. They caught up to him before he could even reach the street in front of the courthouse. The crowd watched in awe as Jimmy slammed Chester into a parked car. Danny immediately began cuffing him and reading him his Miranda rights.

Chester squirmed for a moment longer, before finally allowing his body to go limp on the hood of the car. “Just exactly *what* am I under arrest for?” he demanded.

Ray answered him through the microphone, “There’s no statute of limitations on murder, Chester.”

The deputies stood Chester up and turned him to face Ray, who was still standing on the bandstand. “You don’t have anything on me. What is this all about?” Chester said defiantly.

“I finally just put the pieces together.” The crowd had grown silent while watching the dramatic scene unfold. Ray spoke into the microphone, “Thirty years ago from this very night George Mackey murdered a black man who was lost on a country back road. Truman Weston’s widow told me that Truman had told her that he suspected the KKK leader back in 1967 had been an accomplice to the murder, and that person had driven a blue and white, two-tone truck, but we couldn’t figure out who that leader of the KKK was. The witnesses had all died mysterious deaths. We had a picture, but the face was fuzzy. Then, it hit me. We had that truck in our possession all along. It was Joe Mackey’s truck!”

Danny said, “Wait. Now I’m lost. Joe Mackey? He wasn’t old enough to...”

Ray smiled, “When we saw that truck at the car show, I realized that it was shaped a lot like Joe Mackey’s truck. Then, I remembered seeing blue paint on the fender, beneath the white paint that had chipped off. I got Ron to go back in the courthouse with me, and we did a little research.” Ray pulled the microphone out of the stand and moved towards Chester. “It turns out that you were the original owner of that truck. During the time that you owned the truck, it was wrecked once. You then had the truck repainted—all white—and you sold it to another man. Coincidentally, in time, that man sold the truck to Joe Mackey’s father, who then passed it down to Joe when he was old enough to drive. Suddenly, I realized why you were so adamant about me keeping this case quiet. You wanted me to ‘just forget about it’ because you didn’t want to get caught...not because the media was in town.”

Chester said, “You can’t prove anything?”

“Oh. I wouldn’t say that.” Ray assured him, “The forensic evidence proves that there were large amounts of blood in the bed of the truck at some point. Nobody could have lost that much blood and lived. In other words, someone used the truck to haul something dead in.”

Chester scoffed, “That could have been from livestock.”

Ray nodded, “This is true. But now we know that you were the leader of the KKK, and Truman’s widow can testify that he had confided in her that the KKK leader had participated in the murder of at least one black man. Since that victim was already at George Mackey’s place, there was no reason to transport his body in your truck. So my question is, just how many people have you killed?”

Chester stiffened up and said, “I understand that I have the right to remain silent.”

Ray nodded, “Yes. You do. It doesn’t matter, though. Eventually, it will all come to light—how you hired Horace to go out and retrieve the evidence you dumped down George’s old well all those years ago.”

Chester shook his head. “You’ll have a hard time proving it in court.”

“For some reason, I don’t think so. I’m sure ol’ Horace will be glad to testify in order to clear his own name. And, I’m betting that there are a lot more bodies out there that will match the I.D.s that you tried to get rid of in the well. And you know what? I’m also betting that at least one of those people died from a bullet that will match that gun Horace pulled out of the well.”

The county square was eerily silent as hundreds of people observed Chester standing silently—his hands cuffed behind his back. The defeated look on his face spoke volumes, and the crowd knew that everything Ray had said was accurate.

Jimmy and Danny escorted Chester to the jail. There were a few “boos” heard from the crowd and Chester was marched past the onlookers. Then, someone in the crowd started to clap. A few more joined in until everyone was applauding, whistling and cheering for Ray, who was still standing at the microphone on the stage.

“Thank you, everyone! The show is over, so please continue to enjoy the festivities. The night is still young.” He left the stage and went inside the courthouse.

* * * * *

Halloween 1998

Over the past year, K-9 units had been brought in and an extensive search of the Mackey place had been conducted. It turned out George and Chester had killed many people while in the Ku Klux Klan. Twelve more bodies had been discovered and exhumed. They were all African American males. Three were found with bullet slugs that

were matched to the rifle that Horace had pulled from the well.

With help from the I.D.s that were retrieved from the well, all of the victims were identified, except for the one found buried beside Joe and Cyrus. All of the victims had been missing for twenty-five years or longer, which meant that some of them had been killed after the man who had gotten lost on that Halloween night.

As a result, twelve missing person cases had been closed, and the families were grateful for the closure that it had provided. Ray was invited to be on a talk show to discuss the details of the unusual case and meet some of the victims' families. He was even able to return the glass eye to the family of that victim.

By determining the dates that the victims had gone missing, they were able to establish a timeline and pinpoint the dates that George and Chester had committed the crimes. Chester's trial was still ongoing, but the forensics evidence was overwhelming.

A year had passed, and the town was getting ready for the big Halloween festival once again. A county sheriff's car pulled up to the courthouse. Danny climbed out and walked into the station.

Ray walked out of his office. His hair wasn't the dark black that it had been a year ago. It was still black, but now it was noticeably streaked with gray.

Ray held up the newspaper in his hand for Danny to see. "Did you see this?" The headline read "**Will Stubbs Get Life Or The Chair?**"

Danny said, "Yeah. I saw it. Good article!"

Danny sat at his desk, and Ray walked over to the chair beside it and sat. "So have all the preparations been made for tonight?"

Danny said, "Yeah, we have the entire road closed and routed a detour through Frober's Holler."

Ray sighed. "Good. I want you to put Jimmy and Rebel at the roadblock with a car and a shotgun. I don't want any kids going out there to see the legendary haunted house on Halloween. The place has become somewhat of an urban legend!"

Danny smiled. "You sure you want to put Rebel on it, given his nickname and all?"

Ray looked at him seriously, "Yeah. Good point. Better put Chris out there instead."

"Okay, but I don't think you have to worry about any kids sneaking out there," Danny replied. "They're all scared to death of the place, even on normal days."

Ray felt goose bumps as he recalled what they had seen that night. "They have every right to be!"

Out at the Mackey place, Jimmy stood by himself, "Come on, Chris! What's taking you so long? This place gives me the heebie-jeebies!" It was cloudy and there was no moonlight. Blue lights cast eerie shadows across the old house and the surrounding trees with each rotation of the strobe lights on top of his police cruiser. He thought he saw something large and dark moving around out there, but it was probably just an optical illusion or his imagination. Then he heard something in the distance that sounded like an unearthly moan. He squinted, trying to see what it had made the noise.

He sensed someone approach him from behind—their chin just above his left shoulder. He could feel a warm breath as someone whispered in his ear, "You still don't know who I am." Terrified, he spun around to see who had spoken the words, but no one was there.