

A Place of Dying

A Novel

Debut Dagger Entry 2941 Words

CHAPTER 1

1

From The Journal of Aggression and Social Psychology;

ERUPTION: The Case Study Of Social Collapse In Lakeville -
Small Town America: Its Causes And Effects, by Harvey P.
Crawford (Peak Press: 2010), P.41:

..As has been stated, the comparison between the town
of Lakeville with that of an active volcano is, indeed, a
valid one. Like a volcano, Lakeville had explosive forces
building beneath its surface: Prejudice, ignorance and
jealousy all played their part in the social collapse.

As Freud pointed out, people in search of an enemy
will build their hostile feelings on a foundation of
truth. This "truth" can be derived from casual rivalries,
personal resentments, deep-seated bigotry or a distortion
of a long remembered injustice.

The men at "Karl's Bar" were already in search of
someone to blame for the murder of thirteen-year-old Timmy

Havelock, whose body was discovered the previous morning. However, their hostility had a remarkably short gestation period. Responsibility can be equated to the aggrieved resident and businessman, Chuck Lockwood.

There can be no question that it was Lockwood who allowed the volcano to erupt; his long held injustice against Sheriff Cobb was the key factor in his affecting the psychology of the men of Lakeville.

It should be clarified that Lockwood was not seen to be capable of murder; his behaviour was consistent with the "MANIPULATOR" personality.

Yet, three years since the episode, the murderer of the Havelock boy remains unsolved, and "The Lakeville Incident" has become one of the many cold-cases left to gather dust among the FBI's files. Investigations have been hampered by the reluctance of the people of Lakeville to cooperate with authorities or the press.

So the question remains: why would an entire town suppress the identity of a child murderer and abuser?

There can only be two answers. One: fear of reprisals, or two: guilt.

2

Just after noon, Sheriff Roy Cobbs pulled his Crown Victoria interceptor off the dirt road. He parked by the ambulance then grabbed his shades from the console, heaved, himself out and trudged down the bank. He ducked under the yellow crime scene tape, and felt the blood drain from his face.

On the drive out of town, he had stared fixedly ahead of him. In the eight years he and Jill had lived in Lakeville, he had yet to use either the lights or siren for official duty. Technically he was breaching protocol by driving dark and silent. Today, however, he needed the silence, but more than that, he had needed the hope. Now, it was replaced by dread.

Five hours ago, Roy had seen Timmy Havelock cycling up Grace Avenue, tossing papers across the front lawns. And now his body was lying face-up, his head towards the lake; the water rippling gently around his ears. Roy looked down.

At his feet, he saw a bug scuttle out from between the boy's buttocks. Timmy Havelock had been thirteen. About five feet six, slim with healthy tanned skin and dark brown hair, a fringe that swung across his right eye. Now Timmy was a cold, greyish-blue colour. It was, Roy thought, the colour of stone.

What had happened to the boy in these few short hours? And why did Roy feel so damn guilty about it? After all, he had no way of foreseeing the murder.

Roy glanced at the officers examining the bike resting against the tree, its front wheel turned out, a leather jacket hung round the front of the handlebars. Now the bike was evidence at its owner's murder scene. Roy glanced about for the boy's clothes. Missing. He

knew that was a bad sign. Roy had seen enough sex crimes back in New York. Mementos. It meant someone had begun a collection. He could not be blamed for Timmy's death, but the safety of the other children began to weigh him down. Even in a town this small, they could not guarantee twenty-four hour surveillance.

He ducked back under the tape, filled his lungs with air. Deputy Parker sauntered over. Roy's shoulders tensed as he glared at the mirrored shades of the young deputy. He'd always been mistrustful of people who wore mirrored glasses. Why did he look so satisfied with himself all the damn time?

"Parker," he said, in what he hoped was a neutral tone.

"Reckon he's been dead 'bout three hours, Sheriff."

"They found his clothes?"

"Uh-uh. Buck naked when we found him. You take a look yet?"

Roy looked away, didn't answer. "Who discovered him, Devin?"

"Truck driver. You know, that Stokes fella? Got a statement back there in the Vic. You want me to go fetch it for you?"

Roy held up a hand, "Later. He still here?"

"Had a delivery to make."

"You telling me you let him go? You know where he went, right?"

Parker grinned, held up his hands, "There's no problem, now, Sheriff. I told him not to leave town until you say so, or else."

"What the heck was he doing out here, anyway?"

"Said he'd been on the road all through the night; stopped here to grab a bite to eat. Lost his appetite when he found the corpse."

"You know where he's staying?"

"Not exactly."

"'Not exactly'? What does that mean, Devin?"

"Won't be hard to miss him with that eight wheeler of his. Big thing, ain't it. Could hide a couple of station wagons in it, easy."

"Has Doc Teely examined the body yet?"

Parker nodded, and pointed up towards a blue pickup. The tailgate was open and a small, round, elderly man sat, drinking coffee from a thermos.

"Doc said he'd been...interfered with," whispered Parker, as Roy made to leave.

Roy gave the deputy a good long look over his shoulder, then turned away, and tried to keep his voice level. He felt his face flush. "Goddamnit, Parker. That's Jerry's boy you're talking about. Now you

remember that. And stop chewing that gum. You look like a damn horse."

Parker shrugged. He flipped up his cap. "Just saying is all, Sheriff," he muttered.

Doc Teely was perched on the tail-gate of his blue Toyota pickup. A ridiculously big vehicle for such a small man, Roy had always thought. Teely handed Roy a mug with the Jolly Roger on the front and the legend Pirates of the Caribbean - Disneyland, Cal. along the edge. Roy took it and let Teely pour in the coffee.

"You want that Irished up a mite, Sheriff?"

"I'm on duty, Pete," Roy said with a pained sigh.

"Gotcha."

"At crime scene."

"I hear you."

"With Goofy as a deputy. Course I want it Irished."

Teely chuckled and handed over a whisky flask from his jacket.

"Thanks."

"Begora."

Roy downed half the mug. "Budge up there."

Teely shuffled along the back-gate, screwing the cap on the thermos.

Roy pulled his shades off and pinched the bridge of his nose, let out a sigh.

"Ready for it?" asked Teely, looking at the sunlight ripple on the lake.

"Hell, no, I'm not ready for it," Roy said, contemptuously.

Roy handed back the flask. Teely waved it away, "No, you hang on to that. You're going to need it with everything you've got ahead of you."

"You deliver him?"

"Delivered him, delivered his mom, too. God almighty, I don't envy you that house call, Roy."

"Thirteen. Shit-shit-shit. How the hell does thirteen happen in a town this size, Pete? New York was a thirteen place. Why does it feel worse out here?"

"How many of those kids back east did you know by name?"

"I suppose, maybe...none."

"Exactly. Can tell you this, though. Won't take long for it to boil over. Always worse in a town this small. Which it's apt to before long. You're not dealing with New Yorkers now. Whole different nest of birds. These folks are going to get scared so fast they won't know their own names. Most of them don't know where they keep their own front door key."

"Eight years and I'm still the new boy in town, did you know that? I can hear it in their voices."

"That doesn't mean anything. Unless you're born here, you'll always be the new boy."

"You were born here, right?"

"Just. Though it was a close thing. Parents emigrated from County Cork."

"Well, I'm glad someone's got my back."

Teely patted him on the arm. "If you straighten this out, it'll be Roy's Bar we'll be toasting you in."

"So how long until I've got mothers lined up outside?"

"Oh, plenty of time. I'd say...you got a good week before that happens."

"That's all I get for eight years? One week?"

"That eight years—that was your probationary period, Roy. Now its time to clock in and get to it."

"This isn't CSI, Pete. Real life doesn't work that fast. It takes months, years sometimes to close a case. Sometimes never."

"It's not just a murder you have to worry about. Small towns keep their secrets under a thin veil. It doesn't take much to tear that open."

"Do you have to be so damned optimistic all the time?"

"Ever played Chinese Whispers? Before you know it you've got accusations, old arguments...Memory's a subject thing."

"Quit trying to dazzle me with words, will you?
NYPD never trained us for that."

"People remember things the way they want them.
They'll start looking around, playing the blame game."

"You're exaggerating."

"Is that so?"

They watched the boy being laid in the black body
bag. The zipper swept over the small face and was gone.

"It's how the good Lord made us. We were cursed
with a sense of imagination. Dangerous thing. Damned
fool thing, if you ask me."

"I saw him this morning."

"Doesn't make it your fault. Unless your psychic."

"Cause of death?"

"Drowned. Had his face pushed down in the shallow."

"That how you found him?"

"Legs together, arms stretched out. Terrified the
hell out of me. Arranging him like that."

The two men stood up, Teely took the flask from Roy,
and slammed shut the gate.

"Come round 'bout eight. I should be done with the
little fella by then."

They watched the body-bag being slid into the
ambulance.

Roy furrowed his brow. "Pete, you serious about what
you said? How bad do you think it can get?"

Teely jangled his key-ring, opened the driver's door. "You know how many men have guns in this town?"

"All of them?"

Teely shrugged apologetically. "See you tonight."

Roy watched the pickup pull onto the road and head back into town. He felt empty.

At the lake's edge, they had finished with the bike.

With a heavy heart, Roy made for his own car.

The news would spread fast. He wanted Jerry and Pam to hear it from him.

3

Pam and Jerry Havelock were living in a different world. One in which Timmy was alive, probably out playing. He still had the summer vacation ahead of him. He still had his homework in his bag—where it would stay until the last week before the new term. In their world, they were still parents. And Tuesday, July 10, was a date of no significance. Now Roy was about to pull them into a different, much darker world. They'd thank him for coming, but he knew that part of them would resent him till their dying day, also.

As he crossed the intersection, he considered delaying it for an hour or so. He could spare that. Then he heard the shouts and screams, the questions: why did you wait? What were you thinking? Then there was

the phone. The grapevine. His heart sank. No. It couldn't wait.

Why had he accepted this job? He had the pension, he was only thirty-five, and Jill had her teaching job. The truth was they had flattered him. The big cop from the big city. That and Sheriff Bedford seeing an out for early retirement.

Why the hell had he said yes?

The sky, blue and clear—when was it not?—curved away in all directions, nothing till the horizon. Sometimes Roy could feel as if he were merely playing at being Sheriff, in a studio back-lot, with occasional extras wandering down the sidewalks, disappearing into stores, following directions, speaking their lines. All for his benefit.

He turned off the main road. Maybe that wasn't too far from the truth.

...Probationary period...

The truth was he'd been hiding-out. Pretending he was still the same cop he'd been before...

Roy loosened his tie. He switched on the air-conditioning and turned the vents on him.

What if he wasn't up to the job? Who was going to bail him out this time? Damn, why couldn't he have just slunk away, kept a low profile?

He thought of Jill. How she had stuck by him. She enjoyed being the Sheriff's wife. God knew, she deserved it. She'd made new friends here, but had lost many old ones back home. He couldn't up roots again. He needed to prove himself here. He owed it to both of them, and others, too.

He thought of Ben.

Roy felt like a leach. When was the last time he'd written, visited, phoned?

Roy turned into Maple Street and pulled over outside the Havelock house. He cut the engine and stared through the windscreen. There was a basket-ball hoop above the garage door. He wondered how long they'd leave it there. The one Ben and he had used had remained long after each had moved on with their own lives. But this was different.

The afternoon sun glinted off the front windows of the Havelock place and the lawn-mower sitting at the corner of the front garden. The orange cable snaked its way through the uncut grass and round the side gate. As he stood on the porch, Roy felt like a stranger. A travelling salesman passing through a strange town, trying to get by. But, nonetheless, unwanted. An outsider.

He rang the bell, peered in through the window.
Then he turned and stared down at the lawn grown long.
The mower, abandoned, unused.

Shit.

He strolled to the gate, pushed it gently open. He saw Timmy swinging his leg over the saddle earlier that morning, wheeling his bike up the narrow side path, bobbing from foot to foot, then shooting out across the drive (like a motorbike? Didn't all boys do that?) and along the street for the final time in his too short life. Had he called to his parents before leaving? Did they have that to remember? Had they passed in the hallway on their way to the bathroom? How many times might that be replayed after today?

The side door leading to the kitchen lay open. Roy heard the faint sounds of a television coming from within; the applause of a studio audience seemed, somehow, ominous to him. Roy stepped cautiously inside, instinctively putting his hand to his holstered gun at his hip.

Almost without realising he had done so, his thumb pulled back the short leather strap that secured the pistol in the holster. When was the last time he'd pulled it? Could he actually remember? Months or Years?

He followed the sound of the TV chatter into the sitting-room. Pam was standing at the window with her back to him. Wisps of cigarette smoke streamed skyward.

Roy stepped into the room, the floorboard creaked under his foot. Pam turned slowly. Dark shadows framed her eyes.

"Oh, God, Pam. I wanted to get here before..."

She turned and stared out the window again. Roy noticed the telephone on the coffee table. The handset was lying to one side.

"I probably knew before you did, Roy."

"Where's Jerry? Does he know?"

She tapped the cigarette out the window, and took a deep breath. "He's out of town. Tried to phone his mobile, but he must be in a meeting." She sat down in the easy-chair. "Had to take the damn thing of the cradle. Wouldn't stop, you know?"

Roy sat down on the couch opposite, clasped his hands together. "I'll need to ask you some questions when you're up to it, Pam." She looked at him. "Not now, it can wait. Tomorrow, the day after." She tapped the cigarette on the ashtray. "How did you hear?"

"Karen at the general store phoned. Truck driver was in there, yakking away for the world to hear. All of them knew before I did." She stared out the window. "I

don't know how to feel about that. Don't think I can feel anything; never will."

"When does Jerry get back?"

"Expecting him back tonight."

"I'll send Jill round."

"No need."

"I think it's best."

She didn't answer, and Roy stood and walked to the door.

Behind him, Pam said, "I'm glad it's you, Roy."

"I'm sorry?"

"Guy Bedford was a doddering old man. Spent more time talking about fishing than anything else. Wouldn't have known where to start with something like this. Glad it's you." She took a drag of the cigarette. "You find the bastard who did it, Roy, 'kay? That's why you're here, you understand? I know—I know you don't believe in fate, but it don't matter. You..." Her voice trailed off.

Never make them promises, he had been taught. People remembered promises. And you had no way of keeping them.

Outside the house, Roy sank into the driver's seat, and pulled the door shut with a clunk. He looked through the windscreen to the street.

I'm glad it's you, Roy...

He gripped the wheel, clutching it like a life-preserver, and hated the sunshine.

It was like waiting for a bomb to drop.

/end