



# CREATURE OF THE UNKNOWN



JOHN MICHAEL PATRICK

# Creature of the Unknown

John M. Patrick



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I would like to acknowledge the help of Lieutenant Russell Pederson, of the Washoe County Sheriff's Department in Nevada. He provided me with great insight on how the police and sheriff's department perform certain functions of their profession. I am grateful to him. I also dedicate this book to one of my closest and best friends, Peggy Varner, who gave me the inspiration and encouragement to pursue my dream of becoming a published author. It was she who told me you can achieve anything when you put your heart and mind into it.



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# Chapter One

The town of Clover was a tranquil and caring community in Bradford County, California, along the Oregon border. Its population of about seven thousand and fifty people enjoyed very little crime, and the people knew each other well. When crimes occurred, they were usually misdemeanors like drunkenness and disturbing the peace. Yet, on a cool summer night, in early August 1973, this town awoke from its complacency when a killing spree ensued unlike any town or city in the United States would ever endure.

Joe Brooks was a stocky man of five feet, eight inches. He was the commanding officer of Clover Police Department. As chief of police, Joe spent thirty-two years of his life as a dedicated law-enforcement officer, doing whatever it took to protect his citizens. His best officer, Detective Mark Hughes, was a fifteen-year veteran. He was more slender than Joe was, with a four-inch height advantage.

Both men hailed from the City of San Francisco. Having witnessed the worst treatment humanity dished out: rapes, robberies, and vicious murders, they figured moving to a small town could ease the burden of having to handle the chaos big cities had to put up with. They could not imagine how wrong their intuition was. There was nothing that could prepare them for what they were about to encounter in what would become the most baffling and bizarre murder case ever to confront a police department in the history of crime. It would definitely confuse local, state, and federal authorities for weeks to come.

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A stretch of hilly terrain, called the Sycamore Hills, passed through the town, stringing along a portion of the Pacific coastline where vacationers annually attended the one-week extravaganza known as the summer festival. It brought in hundreds of thousands of dollars. It was a gala event the people of Clover always looked forward to, meeting people from all walks of life, mingling with them, and welcoming them into their tiny community. The night sky air, although cool, was free of clouds. A full moon shined brightly with a galaxy of stars sprinkling the evening air. The chilly forecast was in the works as temperatures were expected to hover in the high sixties. Weather in northern California can get a little unpredictable, so nobody really knew what to expect in terms of the weather when the festival hit town.

Everything seemed to be going smoothly on this August evening until something so out of the ordinary occurred, ultimately changing the course of daily living.

In one of the most secluded sections in Clover—an area where neighbors were not around the corner like in other residential areas—stood a small, two-story wood and brick house. Fred and Darlene Henderson and their two sons, Joel and Bob, six and seven years old respectively, enjoyed what was expected to be a nice, peaceful family gathering. Fred worked in a lumber mill. He was a big man, standing over six feet tall, weighing about two hundred and forty pounds. He had just finished a long day of work when he sat down to read the newspaper, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, in his reclining vinyl chair. His two sons, Joel and Bob, were playing with some of their toys and colored in their books as an old movie played on the television. His wife Darlene, a thirty-five-year-old blonde, worked as a part-time waitress from eight to noon at the Pink Rose Café, Monday through Friday, then turned into the typical homemaker in the afternoon. She did the housework, laundry, prepared her husband's breakfast in the morning, and did all the usual chores a wife does in this day and age around the house.

The family had a late dinner. Darlene cleaned the kitchen, and she was putting her finishing touches on straightening the kitchen UP. She listened intently to the forecast on the radio that sat next to their chocolate-colored refrigerator.

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“This is Ike ‘Pappas’ Mitchell talking to you on the WQCW radio station along the Pacific Coast Radio Network. The weather forecast for the Pacific Northwest and much of northern California for tonight and tomorrow will be a bit on the chilly side with temperatures striking around sixty-nine degrees, maybe hitting the low seventies, with winds blowing at ten to fifteen miles per hour. However, there will be clear skies and sunshine for tomorrow. Temperatures will hover in these areas for three to four days before they jump back to the mid-eighties to lower nineties with high humidity for the next couple of weeks...”

“Temperatures and the humidity will go up just in time. That is perfect weather for the summer festival.” That was all the forecast Darlene wanted to hear.

“I know people who work outside don’t like this weather, but if they want this festival to bring in money, they will just have to bear with it. Of course, that’s easy for me to say, since I don’t work outside either.” Darlene muttered as she completed her kitchen and household duties for the day.

In the meantime, Fred’s hazel eyes glanced between from the television set while he watched a 1960’s black and white movie on television, and reading a three-page article in the Chronicle, concerning the Watergate burglary scandal possibly involving the Nixon Administration.

“Goddammit.”

“What’s wrong, Dad?”

“Reading a story about the president, Joel. You wouldn’t understand.”

“It must be bad.”

“It could be, son. It could be. That’s all we need, to have the President of the United States involved in a break-in.”

Darlene walked to the bottom of the small staircase leading to the family room. She wiped her dish-panned hands covered with soapsuds on her apron, and she asked her husband, “Fred, can you please bring some logs in? Temperatures are expected to dip near the forties and fifties tonight.”

“Yeah,” he answered.

Fred closed the front-page section, gently putting the paper on the floor. He pulled the lever on the side of his chair, unlocking the

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leg rest. He got up, telling his sons, “Don’t get those crayons on the carpet.”

“We won’t, Dad.”

Fred walked down the small set of stairs and to the kitchen. He opened the closet in the hallway, removing a navy blue, wind-breaker jacket. One arm, then the other slipped through the sleeves. He journeyed to the cabinet underneath the sink and opened one of the doors where two flashlights sat upright. Fred grabbed one of the lights, moving the power switch to on.

Fred continued back to the family room, switching on the outside light that lit up the patio, gazebo, and portions of the backyard. The sliding glass door rolled to the full open position. His sneakers began to squeak while exiting the house. The patio was made up of large blocks of granite with railroad ties and rose bushes, giving the back of the house a portrait landscape. The gazebo was structured with oak, one of the hardest woods used in construction.

“She wasn’t kidding; it is getting chilly out here,” Fred said using the fifteen-foot-long beam of light as his guidance to cut through the dark corners to the backyard where the woodpile was stacked.

Fred took his casual time getting to the woodpile, as he usually did, unaware that two large, white and circular, beady eyes watched him from inside the trees. A mist of breath spewed forth with a small growl that grumbled deep within. Huffing and puffing emitted from this unknown being hiding behind the foliage. Once Henderson got to the woodpile, he pointed the light at the scattered logs in disgust. They were strewn all over the place.

“Son of a bitch. Those damn boys. If I’ve told them once, I’ve told them a thousand times to put the logs back when they get done playing with them. I guess I’ll have a little talk with them when I get back in.”

Holding the light in one hand, the man of the house started re-stacking the logs one by one. While doing so, the anonymous subject quietly crept closer to the unsuspecting man.

Sensing that someone or something was watching him, Fred stopped rebuilding the pile and straightened up. He aimed the

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light, shooting it directly into the darkness of the forest. All was peaceful, or so it seemed, for he saw nothing moving about.

*Wonder what that was?* he thought, believing it was some small animal or the wind, Fred paid no more attention to it and resumed his job of restacking the woodpile.

Gaining more and more ground, two powerful and muscular arms, covered by thick, black, coarse hair, spread the branches and leaves apart that obscured its vision of the hard-working man.

The creature was only about twenty feet away now. It was grinding its white, jagged teeth... as it hungered for human flesh and blood.

Fred completed his tedious job of reorganizing the woodpile. He picked up four logs, filling his arms, and was prepared to make his way back to the house, with the flashlight sitting on top of the pile, when he heard a crackling sound close by, coming from behind him. He stopped and turned.

“Who’s out there?” he called, shining the light in the trees. He saw nothing and got no reply. He heard it again. Instead of calling out, Henderson took a few steps into the thick brush of the forest. Suddenly, an arm rammed into his throat, clutching and jerking Fred’s head in a violent motion of near decapitation. As he was being lifted, he looked down and saw the menacing face of a strange creature peering up at him. Its eyes bulged outward at the defenseless man; the teeth dripped with saliva. Desperately trying to free himself from the clutches of possible death, Fred Henderson swung both arms and legs wildly, while using the flashlight as a weapon, striking the animal several times about the head and shoulders. He was slowly running out of oxygen, and that prevented any attempts of screaming for help. The viselike grip employed around the neck and throat area collapsed his lungs and windpipe. Blood started oozing from the corners of the victim’s mouth as Henderson was undergoing a torturous and painful death. Blood flowed down his chin and chest. The finishing touches were applied to ensure the man’s death. In one sweep of its powerful, hairy arm, the bewildered man’s head was violently smashed against a tree. Blood sprayed in every direction, leaving a large stain high on the tree’s bark. Some of the blood dripped in miniature rivers. The corpse fell to earth with a hard thump. The

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body was dragged along the ground by the neck, leaving a thin trail of blood.

Darlene was in the midst of reading a woman's magazine that arrived in the mail on Tuesday. She viewed some colored pictures of lingerie when the thought of Fred being gone longer than usual suddenly hit her.

"What is taking him so long to bring those logs in?" she said, glancing at the clock hanging on the wall over the fireplace. "I'd better go see what's taking your father so long," she told her sons. "Clean your toys up. It's time to get ready for bed."

"But, Mom," Bob tried pleading with his mother.

"No buts. I'm going to check on your father. I want this mess cleaned up by the time I get back. Then you go upstairs and get in your pajamas. Understand?"

"Yeah!" the boys answered in unison and begrudgingly.

Darlene repeated Fred's steps, going to the hall closet for a light jacket. She then went to the kitchen, grabbing the other flashlight from under the sink.

"I'll be right back. Remember what I said."

Darlene took the same path Fred did to the pile of wood. Leaving the house by way of the sliding door off the family room, Darlene called for Fred as she walked through the patio to the backyard where their sons' swing set was and to the woodpile her suddenly deceased husband had finished reconstructing.

"Fred...Fred...where are you?" Darlene called out coming to the logs. Fred's name was announced several times. "Well... shit... where in hell can he be?" the concerned housewife said quietly. Darlene was mystified as to why her calls for Fred went unanswered.

Darlene saw nothing unusual. The wood was piled up. She saw some footprints made by Fred. "Damn, where could he have gone? This is ridiculous."

Darlene followed Fred's footprints into the woods when they stopped abruptly to the logs scattered about deeper into the woods. Where Fred's footprints ended, two extremely large footprints came up. They were twice as large as Fred's and certainly much bigger than the average person's feet. She focused on the fact that the prints were not made by shoes, and they were point-

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ing towards the house, then reversing its course, pointing to the forest. Spots dotted the ground about a foot beyond the prints.

Darlene squatted down to touch the dark spots. She touched it with a fingertip and tasted it. "Sweet Jesus. This is blood." Darlene was petrified by her shocking discovery.

She took a couple of steps towards the clearing. The beam revealed more giant footprints followed by a path of the thin blood trail. "What in the name of God is going on here?"

Darlene wasn't sure what to think. She didn't know if that was Fred's blood or if it was from an animal. All she knew was Fred was missing with huge footprints and blood in the area he was supposed to be at. She didn't want to speculate on his fate, so she decided to do some investigating on her own.

Darlene Henderson proceeded to stalk the tracks and blood trail into the dark forest of the Sycamore Hills. She got to a trail indicating that something or someone was dragged. She called again, "Fred, where are you? Are you all right, honey? Please answer me!"

Her feminine voice attracted the attention of the unfriendly visitor that had suddenly intruded on their lives.

From a safe distance, the creature eyed with great anticipation the precarious woman as she walked cautiously in her death trap. While Darlene walked farther, the creature's massive, hairy body maneuvered in a big circle, like a vulture would do in the sky, circling around its prey, in an attempt to strike with surprise and from behind her.

"Snap!" The breaking of a branch alerted Darlene to shoot the ray of light at some trees bunched together.

"Is that you, Fred?" When no answer came, she yelled again, "Who in the hell is out here?" The thought of someone playing a cruel joke on her also crossed her mind.

Darlene waited for a couple of seconds to see if she heard anything else. Though it seemed everything was okay, her instincts, as crazy as it may sound, told her to keep pushing inward, luring her closer and closer to the monolithic beast. The strange creature pursued the increasingly nervous woman by circling around while, at the same time, closing ranks on her. It came across the path Darlene took to enter the woods, thus barricading any possible escape

route between Darlene and the safe sanctuary of her home. Darlene shot the light at the ground and saw a blood trail that thickened enormously. Her eyes widened in horror. Her light caught a glimpse of a foot with the pant cuffs partially torn. Whomever body this foot belonged to was buried. Darlene timidly removed the ground debris covering the body, when she revealed the leg and torn pants nurturing more blood. She further exposed the corpse until it was completely unearthed.

There was the horror of her husband, Fred, lying in a miniature lake of blood. Trembling in fright, Darlene Henderson stepped back. She covered her mouth with her left hand as short bursts of hysteria came out. She held the flashlight in her right hand with its beam fluttering in every direction. "Oh, my God!" she whispered. Then, she began shuddering at the hideous sight of Fred lying dead and tattered before her. Veins tightened within her body while the blood rushed through it. She was finally able to work up the strength to scream with the feeling of terror tearing through her lungs, bellowing out a nightmarish cry for help.

Her fixation on Fred's mangled corpse jolted her back, only to be stopped in her tracks. With her left hand, the terrified young woman reached back and touched her hair, which prickled the skin on her hand. She slowly turned around. Her ghostly gaze and beam of light elevated to the point when she saw two round, angry eyes and those sinister, jagged, white, fang-like teeth staring deathly at her.

Just as she yelled a horrible scream, the animal seized Darlene in the same manner it snatched Fred—by the throat and neck. She was yanked up like a sack of potatoes. Mightily as she tried, Darlene's chances of crying out for help were thwarted. Her windpipe was being crushed as if the creature's grip was an oversized vise. She fought like a warrior. She beat it over again and again about the head and upper torso, but the beast felt no ill effects. The majestic creature with muscles resembling those of the Greek God Hercules wasn't hurt in the slightest.

Out of the house came Bob and Joel, running to respond to the screams they thought were coming from their mother. They were right.

"Mom, where are you?"

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Though they heard no response from their mother, they did see some light being swung wildly around back in the trees. They initiated their entrance into the woods when they were taken aback—stopping as though they ran into an invisible brick wall. The two boys stood still like statues, as if their feet were frozen to the ground. The boys ran back and saw something that would put any child, even an adult, into dramatic trauma. Even though they only caught quick, short glimpses of it, as the light swung back and forth the boys watched in horror while an animal of some kind manhandled their mother, squeezed her life in front of her sons' eyes.

the scene of the creature killing their mother while she frantically fought for her life caused her sons to freeze in their tracks. Bob and Joel just stood in horror as the butchery was perpetuated on their mother. Whatever it was, it stood on two feet, covered with black hair, and looked similar to a muscle-bound, overgrown gorilla. Bob and Joel darted for the house, screaming with every breath their lungs could muster, leaving their mother at the mercy of her attacker.

The creature killed Darlene in exactly the same way it killed Fred Henderson: Her head was smashed into a tree, then she was body-slammed to the ground before being dragged into the treachery of the forest.

With the nearest neighbor living about a block away, Bob and Joel Henderson had to fend for themselves with no help on its way anytime soon. The boys locked every door in the house, and hoped this was a nightmare that would end once morning came.

As quick as the macabre of murder started, it ended.

At home all was quiet. The feeling of insecurity remained for the horrified six and seven-year-old boys living at 729 Oceanview Drive. They knew if the animal came after them, there was nothing to stop it from doing to them what it did to their mother. They could only wait in hiding for morning to come and the sun to shine, and that their silent cries for help would alert someone.

## Chapter Two

On Thursday morning, the heavenly body of the sun rose above Clover and the beautiful scenery of the Sycamore Hills. It generated a bright, yellowish glow into the clear, blue sky, casting magnificent shadows across the thousand acres of wooden timberland.

The weather was as predicted, a bit on the cool side in the early morning hours. Parents prepared for another day on the job. Birds sang happy songs, helping bring a cheerful beginning to the day.

A quarter to eight struck when a metallic-green 1968 Ford Station wagon with plastic wood siding rolled down Oceanview Drive. The tires produced a crispy noise when they rolled along the freshly paved blacktop road. Contaminants spewed out of the car's exhaust into the air as it drove over a curb, up the driveway of the Hendersons' place, and stopped alongside Fred's brown, Chevy, pickup truck he normally drove to work in.

Out stepped a lady in her mid-sixties wearing a pink, ankle-length, flowery dress and a pink sweater. Kathy Garfield was a close friend of the Henderson family. She took great pleasure in watching Bob and Joel when their parents worked. She and her late husband, Dennis, who was killed seven years ago in a terrible automobile accident, never had children. She arrived every weekday morning to care for the boys, whom she considered as her

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nephews, although there was no blood relationship between them. Bob and Joel reciprocated by looking at Kathy as their aunt they never knew.

“Why is Fred’s car still here? I thought he would be at work by now. He must be sick,” Kathy said quietly to herself.

She was ready to take a step on the concrete sidewalk going to the porch when she noticed two papers, *The Clover Sentinel* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, still lying on the lawn, rolled and tied by string.

“How strange—their newspapers are still lying on the lawn. I’ll bring them in and save them a trip out here,” she thought. She went to the screened door, and rang the doorbell once. She waited for fifteen seconds, then rang it again. When nobody answered, she rang it a third time, but she didn’t wait as long and used the silver door knocker to get someone to come to the door. When she did, the door creaked open.

The brown-haired woman stuck her head in and called, “Fred...Darlene...” Kathy waited for them to greet her. “Anyone here? It’s me...Kathy. Bob, Joel...can you hear me?” She walked the main hallway separating the dining and living rooms with prudence. The dining room was, in turn, separated from the family room by a wall covered with paneling.

“Hello. Is there anyone here?” she asked, entering the kitchen. It was unusually clean, with no one sitting at the table for breakfast as they routinely do at this time. “Where in the world is everyone?”

She looked around the corner into the family room and a Bugs Bunny cartoon was playing on television. The newspaper from the day before was still neatly folded near Fred’s chair. And the lights still burned.

“They couldn’t still be asleep, could they?”

Kathy ran upstairs to see if the family overslept. She was shocked to see the beds were made. Apparently, they were never slept in. She was getting worried. She went back downstairs to the first floor, to the family room, then to the kitchen. She noticed the sliding glass door was ajar. The signs were disturbing. There was no break-in. Kathy closed the door.

“Jesus Christ. Where can they be?”

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She rushed to the phone near the open doorway between the kitchen and dining rooms. Kathy hastily yanked the receiver off its hook and expediently called the police.

“Clover Police...Officer Washington.”

“I need you to send someone over, right away.”

“Okay, ma’am. Just try and be calm.” Washington heard the hysterical nature in the woman’s voice. “Tell me what the problem is.” Washington had pen and paper in hand to jot the information down.

“I want to make a missing person’s report.”

“All right, ma’am. What are the name or names?”

“Fred and Darlene Henderson and their two sons, Bob and Joel.”

“What’s the address?”

“Seven-twenty-nine Oceanview Drive. Please send someone over, quick.”

Washington heard the woman crying. “What is your name, ma’am?”

“Kathy Garfield.”

“Mrs. Garfield, hold tight, ma’am, and we’ll have someone over there immediately.”

Kathy hung the phone up. She went outside, in front, waiting for the police to arrive.

Sergeant Jack Cummings announced assignments for the day at roll call. “Okay, people, the chief has an announcement he wants to make, so listen up. All yours, chief.”

“Thank you,” Chief Brooks said with his detectives Mark Hughes and Captain John Jacobs standing behind their superior officer. “People, as you all know, Sunday starts the summer festival...”

Brooks was interrupted by a knock on the door.

“I’m sorry to bother you, chief.”

“That’s okay. What do you have?”

“We received a missing person’s report. Actually, sir, it deals with four people—a whole family,” Officer Washington reported to his chief.

“What?”

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“I’m afraid so, sir.”

“Terrific!” Brooks expressed sarcastically. This was certainly one thing the police chief didn’t need to hear with an upcoming gala event fast approaching.

“John and Dan, you two take it. You’ll be filled in later. Report in as soon as you find anything.”

“Yes, sir.” Captain John Jacobs and Lieutenant Dan Lewis took the information from Washington and rushed from the station for seven-twenty-nine Oceanview Drive.

“Who are we going to be talking to?” Lewis asked his partner while riding to the Henderson house.

“Kathy Garfield.”

“This has to put the chief on edge with that festival coming up this weekend.”

“You can bet your ass it is,” Lieutenant Lewis said bitterly. “Furthermore, I need a chance to eat yet.”

“We can stop to get a bite after responding the call.

“Good. I’m famished.”

Their gray patrol car, with the words ‘Clover Police Department’ painted on the sides, pushed hard through town. Trees symbolizing the Sycamore Hills were laid out in the foreground on both sides of the vehicle.

With its siren blaring and lights flashing, the car burned at forty-five in a twenty-five mile-per-hour speed zone through various neighborhoods until they hit the one where the Hendersons lived.

“What’s that street name again?”

Lieutenant Lewis read the name, “Seven-twenty-nine Oceanview Drive.”

“Here we are. Oceanview Drive.” Jacobs turned onto the street in question. They saw a woman in a pink dress frantically waving her arms. “That must be the place.”

Captain Jacobs pulled the car over to the curb with Kathy running to them.

“Good morning, ma’am. You called us about a missing person’s report?”

“Yes! I’m Kathy Garfield. I’m a friend of the family.”

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While going inside, Lieutenant Lewis took notes of Kathy's explanations.

"...I used the knocker on the door, and that's when the door opened."

"What time was this?"

"Quarter to eight. I figured they got a late start when I saw their papers on the lawn. They would never leave their paper on the lawn, no matter how late they were to get to work. They're usually having breakfast by the time I get here."

"Then what happened?" Jacobs asked.

"I looked through the house, saw the television and lights were still on. I went upstairs to see if they were still asleep, but their beds were made. Then I came back downstairs to the family room when I noticed the sliding glass door was slightly opened. That's when I called you."

"Mrs. Garfield, what brought you here in the first place?"

"Darlene works as a waitress at the Pink Rose Café. I watch their boys, Bob and Joel, until she comes home from work. Every morning we talk awhile, about an hour, while drinking coffee. That's why I was here—to watch their kids."

"What does Mr. Henderson do?"

"He works at the lumber mill. You don't think anything bad happened to them, do you?"

"Ma'am, we don't want to speculate on what may have happened to them. If anything did, we'll find out and who is responsible. You said the front door and sliding glass door were opened?"

"Yes! Not much, but they were opened. That is one thing Fred and Darlene were very conscientious about. I don't ever recall them leaving their doors open like that."

"Did you touch it?"

"Yes...why?"

"Mrs. Garfield, if there was an intruder, they may have used that door, or the front door to gain entry. There is that possibility you may have smudged any fingerprints that might be on it."

"Damn, I never thought about that. I just wanted to get it."

"It happens all the time. Don't worry."

"John!"

"Yeah."

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“Come here for a moment, would you?”

Captain Jacobs went over to see what Lieutenant Lewis wanted.

“Yeah, what is it?”

“There is no forced entry.”

“I’ll check the front door.”

“Okay.”

Lewis went to make a quick check of the front door. Thirty seconds later, he returned to report to his senior officer.

“What did you find out?”

“No forced entry by that door either.”

“Isn’t there any possibility that they went somewhere nearby and let the door open by mistake?”

“No. I don’t think so. They’d have told me. They always call me whenever there’s a change of plans.”

“We need a description of each person.”

“I can give you a picture of them.”

“That will be even better.”

Kathy took the family portrait off the mantle of the fireplace. “This was taken a year ago when we all went to the summer festival.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Garfield. This will be of great help,” Captain Jacobs said and took the family portrait from Kathy. As the picture exchanged hands, whimpering noises could be heard.

“What is that?”

“What is what?” Jacobs turned around to face Lewis. There were more whimpering noises. “Did you hear that?”

“Yeah. It sounds like crying,” Lieutenant Lewis responded.

The police and Kathy looked around in an effort to pinpoint the location of the crying.

“It’s coming from in there.” Kathy zoomed in on the sounds. “They are coming from the utility closet.”

The three moved cautiously to the utility closet where Darlene stored her cleaning supplies. Kathy opened the door. They saw Bob and Joel Henderson huddled together, shaking, and clinging to each other.

“Bob...Joel...my God. What happened here? Why are you hiding in this closet?”

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The boys didn't answer, although they tried to. They were in a hypnotic state as if they were forced not to speak. Their faces were very pale.

"Help me carry them to the couch."

Captain Jacobs carried Joel, and Lieutenant Lewis carried Bob. The boys sat upright on the couch with Jacobs kneeling down on one knee. He looked both of them right in the face.

"Joel, can you hear me?"

Joel's face was blank. He stared right at the fireplace.

"Son, can you hear me? Can you talk to me?"

While Joel could not talk, Bob was trying to speak.

"Bob, can you tell me what happened here last night?"

Bob's eyes shifted towards Captain Jacobs. His lips cracked as though he wanted to talk.

"That's good, son. What is it you want to tell me?"

"Wooo..." Bob dragged it out.

"Wooo...what, son? Please speak to me so we can find your parents."

"Wood."

"Wood?" Jacobs asked Bob as the boy nodded. "Wood...what wood, son?"

"Wood," Bob repeated.

"Captain Jacobs, he said 'wood?'"

"Yes, ma'am."

"That must mean the woodpile. They play there at times."

"Is 'woodpile' what you mean, Bob? Is there anything there?"

Bob nodded again.

"Whatever happened here has caused these boys to shiver up like old, dried-up leaves. It's okay, son. You and your brother are safe now," Jacobs reassured them.

"Mrs. Garfield, can you bring a couple of blankets for these boys?"

"Sure!"

Kathy rushed to the linen closet, taking out a couple of gray, wool blankets. Bob and Joel were placed at each end of the couch, covered with the blankets, and laid down. Their eyes were still open.

"I can't understand what could have happened."

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“Whatever happened, these boys are scared to death,” Lieutenant Lewis said.

“Mrs. Garfield, can you take them to the hospital?” Captain Jacobs asked. “Hopefully, we can talk to them later while they’re there.”

“Sure.”

“Dan, help Mrs. Garfield take the boys to the car. I’ll take a look outside at the woodpile, and you can check in here. Meet me in the back when you’re done.”

“Right.”

Lewis helped Kathy bring Bob and Joel Henderson to her car. She backed up and headed for Mercy Hospital. Lieutenant Lewis looked around inside the house. Every area of accessibility was checked for any type of forcible entry. There were none. The doors that were open were the front and back sliding glass doors. Lieutenant Lewis went to the woodpile and very quickly heard his name.

“What did you find?” Lewis asked, arriving at the scene.

“Look up the tree.”

“Son-of-a-bitch,” Lewis said, taking his hat off. “Blood and... what is this? Brain matter?”

“Yeah. Same thing with this one.”

“How could anyone get their heads bashed in way up there? I mean that blood stain has to be a good nine feet high. Look, there are two thick trails of blood going deeper into the woods.”

“Dan, you follow that trail, I’ll follow this one,” Jacobs said with his sidearm exposed, ready to shoot if necessary. Lewis went the other way with his revolver drawn.

Captain Jacobs kept following the blood trail when it suddenly ended. Jacobs stopped as Lieutenant Lewis kept going, following his trail farther along. There was a hump with what appeared to be a toe sticking out.

“Is this a toe sticking out?” Jacobs asked himself.

Captain Jacobs bent down, revealing the leg, the lower extremities, and finally the entire body. His eyes bulged. “Sweet Jesus,” Jacobs yelled. “Dan! Get over here. You have to see this.” He reached for his radio. “This is Captain Jacobs.”

“Go ahead, John.”

## John M. Patrick

“We have a ten-eighty-two. We need backup units at seven-twenty-nine Oceanview Drive.” His voice went on high alert. “We have a ten eighty-two. We need backup units at seven-twenty-nine Oceanview Drive. Notify the chief and Detective Hughes. Tell them they need to get here immediately. And get hold of an ambulance.”

“That’s a ten-four.”

A ten-eighty-two was the code for a dead body.

“What?” Lieutenant Lewis was frozen. “Holyyy...shittt...is that him? Is that Henderson?”

“Yeah. That’s him. Find out anything?”

“No, I was following that trail when you yelled.”

Jacobs joined Lewis following the second trail when it too, ended abruptly. This time Lieutenant Lewis knelt down uncovering the remains of yet another body. It was that of a woman.

“That has to be Mrs. Henderson.”

“It’s them all right.”

Jacobs went on the radio again. “Dispatch, this is Captain Jacobs, we have another ten eighty-two at the same location. Request another ambulance.”

“Affirmative, John. Another ambulance will be dispatched to your location.”

The Bradford County Crime Scene Unit was called in, as were extra patrol cars, two ambulances, and an unmarked car, which crowded the street in front of the Hendersons’ residence. The county crime scene unit assisted both the sheriff’s department and the local police. Yellow police tape roped off the property as a crowd began building up. The police asked curious onlookers questions, if they’d heard or seen anything. They were asked about the dead couple as well.

Since Mark Hughes was a seasoned police detective, bringing with him his experience from San Francisco, he provided valuable assistance to the criminalists to investigate the murders. They were identified with the initials CSI, for Crime Scene Investigation.

Despite many years of public service as cops, Chief Brooks and Detective Hughes had never seen anything like what was staring them right in the eyes from the shallow graves.

## Creature of the Unknown

Two ambulances arrived at the scene to haul the bodies of Fred and Darlene Henderson away.

“It certainly seems like there are any number of ways Henderson and his wife were killed,” Kyle Mortenson, the senior criminalist said. “Who in the hell could have done this to another human being is your sixty-four-thousand-dollar question. Chief, Detective, your analysis?”

“No clue. Never in all my years as a cop have I seen anything hideous as this.”

“It looks as if he was put through a slaughterhouse. Sorry about the analogy.”

“No reason to apologize, Dan. It’s appropriate.”

Criminalists took samples of just about everything: blood and hair, molten casts of the footprints that were found near the bodies, blood trails, and the trees that had the large spots of blood and brain matter on them. Fingerprints were taken from inside the house as well, off the front and sliding glass doors, since those were found opened by Kathy and the police. Photographs of the murder scene were taken, including the doorknob from the front door and the handle of the sliding glass door. Several pictures of the deceased were also taken.

As evidence was collected, one member of the crime unit examined the footprints, the distance between them, and the depth of them, and the large bloodstain on the tree.

“Captain Jacobs, can you hand me that long branch near your right foot?”

“Sure,” Captain Jacobs said, handing the branch to Kyle Mortenson. Jacobs took his notepad and pencil to take notes.

“You see something, Kyle?”

“Something very strange, chief, and I’ll let you know in a few moments.”

Mortenson dipped one end down until it reached the bottom of one of footprints. “About two-and-half-inches deep.” Mortenson then measured the length. “The foot is about two feet in length. The ball of the foot measures about seven inches wide. Captain Jacobs, would you move your right foot?”

“Yeah.” Jacobs moved his right foot. It could hardly be seen in ground that was completely dry.

John M. Patrick

“That’s what I was afraid of.”

“Would you tell us where it is you are going with this?” Detective Hughes asked.

“Sure. I know this might be hard to understand, so bear with me.” Mortenson started explaining his findings using his hands and arms. “When a person walks, the heel is not dug in as deep. It is at the same level with the rest of the print because the body is not exerting or putting as much weight into the step. When someone is running, the heel marks are deeper because that is part of the foot that hits the ground first, digging deeper into it. This tells us the perpetrator was walking. Watch what happens when I walk along one of these strides.”

“It took you two steps to equal one of these.”

“That’s right, detective. These strides are about five feet in distance. It takes the average person two strides to make up that distance, two and half to three feet, to be approximate. Since the average person, assuming it is a man, is about five feet, nine or ten inches tall, this would mean the murderer would have to be about...” Mortenson hesitated slightly.

“...the height of the person would have to be about what, Kyle? Spit it out.” Chief Brooks demanded an answer while interrupting the senior criminalist.

“The height of this person would have to be about nine feet tall. Now look at the place where Captain Jacobs removed his right foot. What do you see?”

“You can’t. It’s hardly noticeable.”

“That’s right, chief. Captain Jacobs’ footprint is barely visible. You weigh about one-hundred and eighty pounds, Captain?”

“Give or take five pounds.”

Chief Brooks stepped forward. “Mortenson, what are you trying to say?”

“Our killer has to weigh in the eight hundred to one thousand pounds range.”

“Come again.” Captain Jacobs scowled. “I hate to tell you this, but there is nobody on this planet that is that big.”

“I know.”

“Are you saying an animal killed these people, Mortenson?”

## Creature of the Unknown

“Yeah, detective. I am. What makes this even more baffling is this animal walks on two feet.”

“Ohhh...now wait just one minute, Kyle. You’re a damn good criminalist. I admit that. But do you realize what you are saying?”

“Yes, chief...I do.”

“There isn’t an animal anywhere in the world that fits the description you’ve given.”

“I hate to say this, but there is now and it roams in your backyard.”

“Do you know how cockeyed that sounds?”

“Yes, and I am willing to put my reputation on the line saying that.”

“Then what kind of animal are we talking about here?”

“I don’t know, detective. You will need to talk to an expert...a zoologist. If anyone can determine what kind of a creature this is, it is a person in that field. I am going to make a molten cast out of this print and examine it very closely at the lab. We might get a better idea of what kind of animal this is by this print.”

“If, in fact, it is an animal.”

“I guarantee you no person made these prints. This was made by some type of unknown species of creature.”

Plaster-of-paris was carefully poured into the deep footprint. During this procedure, the task of lifting the mangled corpse of Fred Henderson into the body bag and onto the gurney was meticulous. After being loaded, it would be transported to the county morgue so an autopsy could be made to determine the cause of death, though there were a variety of ways Henderson and his wife could have been killed.

Henderson’s body was gradually loaded into the black body bag with his wife close behind when a frightening and ear-piercing scream echoed through the hills. Everyone froze in their tracks. The crowd that gathered in front of the Henderson home stood eerily silent. Nobody could move. Heads moved in all directions, trying to detect the direction of the scream.

When it fell quiet, not a soul could speak until Lieutenant Dan Lewis broke the silence. “What in the hell was that?” Lieutenant Lewis spouted nervously.

## John M. Patrick

“I have not a clue,” Mark Hughes replied. “Whatever it was, it sent a chill up and down my spine. Scared the crap out of me.”

“One thing is for sure. That was an animal. No person screams like that.”

“What kind of animal makes a cry like that? Certainly not one I’m familiar with.” The conversation went on as the ambulance attendants continued their job of loading Henderson’s ragged body into the bag.

“You think that scream is connected to this?”

“That, Lieutenant, you can bet your ass on,” Mortenson said. “Whatever made it, I sure don’t want to see what it looks like up close.”

“I know it has to be difficult loading this man’s body away, but could you guys hurry it up a little? I want to get everyone out of here as soon as I can. This place suddenly scared the living shit out of me.”

“We will, Chief, as soon as that cast is dried. And we have about ten minutes before we can remove it.”

Police kept the crowd at bay in front of the house while the crime scene investigators proceeded to process and tag the evidence.

It wasn’t long before a white Ford station wagon came into the picture. He was a reporter for the local newspaper, *The Clover Sentinel*. Jeff Gannon, a brown, curly-haired, slim man, sported a yellow shirt, tie, and tan suit. He took a case from the second seat and threw the strap over his shoulder. In this case was a camera. His black shoes clapped the concrete as he walked across the street towards the tiny group of people.

Police still questioned some of the residents when Gannon approached the yellow tape.

‘Police Line. Do Not Cross’ is what the yellow tape stated in black letters.

The Henderson home suddenly changed into a circus. A circus in which there were no kids or adults laughing and cheering. Murder was the main attraction, with blood and guts as the sideshow.

Traveling down the street from the other direction at twenty-five miles an hour was a metallic-green car speeding toward the house. It kept going at that speed when the horde of emergency

## Creature of the Unknown

vehicles flashing red and blue lights came into view behind the white station wagon driven by Gannon. Kathy Garfield jumped out and ran for the house with her bright flowery dress fluttering in the wind. She tried breaking through the police lines too but had to be restrained.

“I’m sorry, ma’am. No one is allowed beyond this point without authorization.”

“What happened, Officer?”

“The bodies of a man and woman were found in the woods in the back.”

“Oh my God. Who are they?”

“I couldn’t tell you. As far as I know, they haven’t been identified.”

“I might be able to help. I called the police to come here. I might be able to identify them. I am very good friends of the people who live here.”

“What is your name, ma’am?”

“Kathy Garfield.”

Her insistence paid off when Officer Pete Hargrove called the chief on the radio hooked to his shoulder.

“Go ahead, Pete.”

“Chief, there’s a woman by the name of Kathy Garfield standing up here. She says she is a friend of the family who lives here.”

Captain Jacobs interrupted Hargrove’s transmission.

“That’s her, chief. That’s the woman who made the call. Bring her back. Let’s see what she has to say.”

“Mr. Gannon is here too. Want me to bring him back?”

“Yeah. Might as well.” Brooks ended his communication with one of his officers. “Shit!”

“What’s wrong?”

“Mr. Gannon is here.”

“He didn’t waste any time getting here, did he?”

“That’s the way it always is, Mark. The media always seems to be poised on the spot to report something horrible more so than reporting good news.”

“Reporting on tragedies like murder helps them sell papers and possibly rank them a promotion.”

“You don’t really believe that, do you, chief?”

John M. Patrick

“Yeah, John, the way the press comes to report on these news items, I certainly do.”

“Do we really want Mrs. Garfield to see this? We made an identification through the photo.”

“Yes. I want someone who can state it for the record.”

The body of Fred Henderson had finally been placed in the body bag, zipped up, and strapped onto the gurney.

“Hold it, guys,” Brooks told the attendants. “We have someone coming back here to make a positive identification.”

Officer Hargrove escorted Kathy Garfield to Chief Brooks while Jeff Gannon stayed out of the picture until he found time to talk to the police.

“I understand you know the owners of this house.”

“Yes. Fred and Darlene Henderson and their sons...Bob and Joel. I have been a friend of theirs for fifteen years. I just took their sons to the hospital. . I didn't want to leave them alone. I wanted to stay with them but doctors said they wanted to run some tests and give them a thorough examination. They told me these tests would take most of the morning. So I decided to come back here while the doctors were treating them to see if I could be of any help. I'll be heading back to the hospital once my help is no longer needed. I hear you found a body of a man and woman out here.”

“Yes, ma'am, we did. We need you to identify the bodies if you can.”

“I'll try.”

“Good.”

“I want you to brace yourself because what you're going to see will be horrifying.”

Anxiety and nervousness squeezed Kathy's body as she rubbed her arms. She stared down at the gurney. She inhaled and exhaled large volumes of air to control her nerves.

“Ready, Mrs. Garfield?”

Kathy closed her eyes then opened, replying, “All set.”

“Okay, guys, unzip it.” The bag was slowly unzipped, exposing only the head.

Kathy quivered and trembled back. Her eyes ballooned as shock and disbelieving torture engulfed her tiny frame. She covered her mouth, then covered most of her face.

## Creature of the Unknown

“Zip it up and get it out of here.”

Soon after Henderson’s body was identified, Darlene Henderson was brought out of the heavy thicket.

“Mrs. Garfield, if you are up to it, we have another body for you to identify.”

“Yeah. I’m up to it.”

The second gurney stopped in front of the timid woman. Kathy prepared herself for what she expected to be another hideous sight. The head of Darlene Henderson was exposed. This time Kathy unleashed an uncontrollable scream, shaking feverishly and crying, nearly collapsing. Her gut-wrenching screams aroused everyone. Tears wetted part of the chief’s uniform when he grabbed Kathy, steering her away from the sickness of the befallen woman and pressed her head against his chest. Kathy then started pounding away at the police chief.

“Ohhh myyy Godddd.” Kathy’s cries were more subdued.

“I promise you, Mrs. Garfield, we will get those responsible for this. I assure you of that.”

Brooks directed Hargrove to take Kathy into the house and get her some water. Hargrove took the broken down woman into the house with his arm wrapped around her waist to support her.

“Take her away, guys. I think we can take that as positive identification.”

“Who wants to tell Mr. Gannon what may have killed these people?”

“We will. We’ll tell him we believe some animal killed these people and we won’t know for sure what kind until forensics completes their analysis of the evidence.”

Jeff Gannon overheard this while taking notes for his story. He stopped taking notes on the crime scene and the condition of the bodies and asked about the animal theory.

No introduction was needed for him. Gannon was seen, at times, as a controversial journalist, which created some animosity with the police about his reporting.

“It didn’t take you long to get your ass here, did it?” Brooks said to Gannon.

“Unfortunately bad news outranks good news when it comes to selling papers.”

John M. Patrick

“What did I say!”

“Do you and Detective Hughes have time to give me something?”

“Like?”

“How about this theory that an animal killed these people.”

“You heard about that?”

“Yes, I did, detective. So what can you tell me?”

“Since you heard about an animal possibly being responsible for these deaths, then you probably heard we won’t know anything else until the lab analyzes the evidence.”

“It sounds silly and outright illogical.”

“Mr. Gannon, ninety-nine percent of the time when a person is killed, it sounds illogical and silly. Wouldn’t you agree?”

“Yes. You want me to write that for the paper?”

“You can write whatever you want, just write the truth.”

“The truth is...?”

“What we just told you. We won’t know anything else until the lab analyzes the evidence.”

“This will be good. Outsiders will think we are insane up here.”

“That’s their problem, isn’t it?”

“Please don’t get snippy at me, detective. I just want a story.”

“I’m not getting snippy. I don’t care what anyone else thinks about what may have killed these people. If that’s how they feel, then so be it. If we decide it is necessary to change our story on this, we will—if and when we are proven wrong.”

“Point taken. When can I talk to you or the detective about what happened here?”

“As soon as we are done with the crime scene. However, you won’t get many answers. But if you still want to talk, we can talk,” Brooks answered quickly. “For now, take your notes and pictures and please stay out of everyone’s way, if you can.”

“That’s what I do best, chief.”

Brooks said under his breath, “Right.”

Brooks was given a report from the front. “Chief, we questioned everyone in front. Nobody saw or heard a thing.”

“They didn’t hear any screaming of any kind?”

## Creature of the Unknown

“No, sir. We came up shooting blanks. These people said it was real calm last night as far as they were concerned.”

“Well, I hate to tell them, it was anything but a calm and peaceful night here last night,” Brooks spouted. “This is just fucking great. Tell those people to go home. There’s no reason for them to hang around anymore.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Doesn’t look like we can do anything more here.”

“One thing, we need to see if any fingerprints they find inside the house belong to anyone outsiders.”

“Why, if Mortenson thinks an animal killed these people?”

“For all we know, John, these people may have been forced from their homes after allowing them in and taken outside when they came across this creature and it got a hold of them.”

Kyle Mortenson returned to see the chief and detective holding the molten cast of the footprint.

“I’m taking this back to the lab with me, chief. The blood and hair samples are already on their way. Hopefully, we’ll get something for you within the next two hours.”

“Thanks, Mort.”

“Sure.”

Mort was a popular nickname for Kyle Mortenson among the police and his colleagues. He had worked with law enforcement for twenty-five years as a top forensic scientist and crime scene investigator. His work had seldom been questioned. However, this case could prove to be his most difficult to date.

“Mark, let’s go talk to Mrs. Garfield. Finish up here as fast as you can, then hit the streets.”

The police and crime scene investigators continued working on the crime. Chief Brooks and Detective Hughes needed to pay a visit to Garfield in the house.

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