

CHAPTER TWO: “FIRST NIGHTS AND CARNIVAL LIGHTS”

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The rest of the night came and went in flashes. Later, Cletus would akin it to a night of heavy whisky drinking, where he remembered bits and pieces, but not the whole evening. Lord knew he'd done that more times than he could count. In Buzzard Creek, there wasn't much to do besides drink and screw; and, since Momma was suckling a young'un, the latter was out of the question.

What he *did* remember, however, was enough. He recalled his frail-looking, buck-naked attacker carrying him through the woods. In brief glances, he saw Jo carrying Donnie. At the time, he found it odd; Jo weighed maybe one hundred and ten pounds soaking wet while Donnie was a hefty man who weighed in at over two hundred pounds. But, at the same time, Jo carrying Donnie seemed a totally natural thing.

He remembered the man who'd attacked him talking, telling Jo: “If you drain them any further, they will die.”

Jo told the stranger that she couldn't possibly kill her sweet Donnie.

“Fuck him,” the stranger said.

Cletus let out a soft chuckle at that. He'd fucked Jo himself — more than once, especially when he was brewing moonshine out in the holler and Jo came out to drink — and he pictured Donnie humping away on top of the old girl. *Tie a board to your ass*, Cletus thought as he chuckled louder, *it's the only way you're going to keep from falling in.*

“What the fuck you laughing at?” Jo asked.

Cletus couldn't recall later if he told her or not. He supposed he said something witty, but he couldn't be certain. There were so many things that were vague about that night.

The one thing he did remember clearly was what happened in the cave. There were so many caves in the rocky bluffs surrounding Buzzard Creek that no one person knew them all. He had explored hundreds of them in his youth, but there were probably thousands. The bluff was practically a sponge; the receding glaciers from the ice age had left their mark on the land. Not much had changed since dinosaurs had roamed the planet. Southern Illinois had managed to retain most of its beauty; People were more interested in developing properties closer to St. Louis, Chicago or Indianapolis. The city slickers liked to come down here and hunt but, otherwise, southern Illinois didn't mean a hill of beans to them.

Cletus recalled looking up into the face of his attacker. The man carried Cletus effortlessly, holding him in front of him like he might a serving tray with a mess of Momma's vittles on it. Cletus didn't find that odd, either; nor did he question the fact that he was still stark raving naked.

“Who are you?” Cletus whispered.

The man looked down at Cletus. “I am the angel of your re-birth,” he told him. “Call me ‘Father’.”

Cletus nodded, thinking to himself that it was the most natural thing in the world to have a naked man carry you through the woods. Especially one that wanted you to call him “Father”.

They seemed to walk forever through the woods and Cletus became intently aware of another man walking behind Father. He tried to look back, have a gander at the man, but it was too dark and he couldn't see him clearly. He felt groggy. Once again, the sensation was like being drunk. He'd drifted off to sleep more than once on the front porch of his house on a cool autumn night, a bottle of moonshine in his hand. He wondered if this was all just a dream and he would wake up on the porch, his head throbbing from too much liquor.

But, when he looked up into the face of Father, he realized that he would never dream about being carried through the woods by a

naked man. Least, he didn't think so. He wasn't wired that way. Cletus drifted in and out of consciousness. He knew this because, when there was a clear spot amongst the trees, the moon had moved.

"It's over here," he heard a voice say. He turned and got a good look at the man he hadn't been able to see before. He was a handsome man and Cletus found himself thinking that he'd been kidnapped by homosexuals. His daddy had always warned him to stay away from their type. "Don't need a size nine asshole," his father said. "Rather be constipated." Cletus had laughed at that; he thought his old man could be funny at times, albeit in a cynical sort of way. Coming from southern Illinois, he thought nothing of the bigotry implied in the comment. To him, it was as natural as skinning a possum.

They carried them into the mouth of a cave. The cave was lit poorly by a series of candles that lined the wall. Cletus looked around him and saw that it was one of the larger caves in the bluff. The room had to be ten feet wide by fifteen or so feet long. The ceiling was low, though, and Father had to stoop a bit to keep from hitting his head.

"This is the best you could find?" Father said in an irritated tone.

"Yes sir," the young man said. "I didn't have much time.... and the other caves I found had signs of human occupancy."

Father let out another disapproving grunt.

There was a dinner table set up in the middle of the room and Father walked over to the table and dropped Cletus on to it.

"Do you have everything prepared?" Father asked.

"Yes sir," the young man said. He pointed and Cletus's eyes followed the end of his finger. Someone had built two wooden boxes. From where he lay, Cletus could see that the boxes had been filled with dirt.

"Very well then," Father said. "Go back to the bus and wait."

"Yes sir," the young man replied. Cletus watched as he walked out of the cave and disappeared into the night.

Father looked at Jo. She had leaned Donnie up against the far wall of the cave. "You care for this.... man?" Father asked her.

Jo nodded.

“What fools mortal men are,” Father replied, “to love such a thing as you.”

If Jo took offense, she didn't say so. Instead, she walked up to Father and kissed him passionately. Cletus watched, bewildered, as Father lifted her by the rear. He could see the man's stiff Johnson as Jo slid onto it. He was hung like a mule, Cletus thought. He watched as Father and Jo made the monster with two backs, Father standing there as Jo pumped herself into him. Cletus would swear later, when he thought back on it, that Father and Jo had done it for over an hour, Father standing there stoically as Jo rode him.

He was one long-winded son of a bitch, Cletus thought.

Or, maybe, he had just drifted in and out of consciousness. He couldn't be certain. What he could be certain of was this: when Father reached his special moment, he let out a howl that filled the cave. He opened his mouth wider than Cletus thought a human being should be capable of opening it, revealing a row of sharp fangs.

He sank those fangs into Jo.

Jo quivered on Father's penis as he drained her of blood.

Done with her, he threw her aside as easily as he might have thrown a pillow.

“Jo?” Donnie said.

Father turned to him. “You love her?” Father asked.

“Yes,” replied Donnie.

“Fool,” Father said with a sneer. Then, if it were possible, something like compassion crossed the man's face. “She is dead,” he said. “But you can revive her.... do you wish to revive her?”

“Yes,” Donnie replied.

“Come here, then.”

Donnie obeyed. He walked to Father and stood before him. Father looked at Donnie. There was no compassion in his eyes then, nor understand. The momentary lapse was over. Anything remotely human in him had died centuries ago.

“Are you ready?” Father asked.

Donnie nodded. “Yes.”

It happened so quickly that Cletus would later think Donnie's heart had magically jumped out of his chest and into Father's hands by itself. Father jabbed forward with a karate slice that would have

done Bruce Lee proud. His hand slid through Donnie's chest like it was Jell-o. He grabbed Donnie's heart and pulled it out.

It was still beating in Father's hand when Donnie — a look of bewilderment on his face — stared at Father.

"What the...?" Donnie said, but he didn't finish that statement.

He crumpled to the floor of the cave.

Father took the heart and placed it over Jo's mouth. He squeezed it and blood flowed out the severed veins and arteries. The blood dribbled into Jo's mouth until it overflowed and poured down her cheeks.

At first, nothing seemed to happen. Then, the blood drained down her throat. She let out a huge burp that echoed throughout the cave and sent thin rivulets of blood flowing down the side of her cheek. Her tongue darted out and captured a fair portion of what she had expelled as Father fed her own husband's blood.

In a moment, when she had strength, she reached out and grabbed the heart. She took it into her hands like she might an ear of corn and sank her teeth into the still warm meat.

She slurped the remaining blood from the heart, then tossed it aside.

Cletus was so intent on what Jo was doing that he didn't see Father walking up to him until he stood over him. "You have a choice to make," Father told him. "If I leave you as you are, you will die and be reborn like me." He turned and looked toward Donnie. "Or I can spare you that fate like I have your friend." He ran his hand along Cletus's chest plate. "The choice is yours. Make it.... now." Cletus looked over at Jo. She had risen from the floor and walked over to Donnie. She bent and picked up his dead body like it was a doll. She looked toward Cletus. There was a tear in her eye.

At that moment, the only thing Cletus could think of was Momma.

"I want to live," Cletus said.

Father grinned. "You will regret that decision," he told him. "One could hardly call this *"life"*."

Then, without another word, he dropped to Cletus's throat, sank his fangs into him, and sucked away the last of Cletus's mortal life.

As blackness took him, Cletus didn't realize it would be the last

time he would see the sun.

##

Momma called Sheriff Graff when Cletus didn't come home. It wasn't uncommon for Cletus to go out drinking with Donnie Gould or one of his other buddies. But, Momma had made all the phone calls around Buzzard Creek and the surrounding vicinity to see if anyone had seen Cletus. She'd been lied to by Cletus's drinking buddies before and she considered herself something of an astute detective when it came to the intonation and inflection in their voices. Half dozen or so drinking buddies later; she ascertained that they were all telling the truth.

They hadn't seen Cletus.

So, she'd sent Jr. down to the barn that morning to see if Cletus had dove into his stash of moonshine down there and fallen asleep. When Jr. came back and reported that he wasn't there, Momma became worried.

She waited until late afternoon, hoping that Cletus would come stumbling home with some lame-assed excuse.... but, he didn't.

Then, she called Sheriff Graff.

Mark Graff had always been sweet on her and, to be honest, she regretted not linking up with him instead of Cletus. Mark was upwardly mobile. He was Buzzard County sheriff and, rumor had it, next year he was going to run for office up in Carbondale. Lord only knew where that would take him. Certainly, farther than some run-down old shack that smelled of baby shit and poverty.

"I'll be right out, Mrs. Cuthbert," Mark had said on the phone. He always called her "Mrs. Cuthbert" now that she was married. She wanted to tell him he didn't have to call her that, but she knew he thought it would be inappropriate.

Still, when he rolled up to the house, her standing at the screen door with the baby in her hand, she felt more than just a pang or remorse for the way things had turned out.

Mark got out of the patrol car and walked toward her. He'd been a tall drink of water of a man in his youth, but time and sitting in a patrol car had thickened him up through the middle. There was a bit

of a roll hanging over his belt now — “The dickie-do disease”, Cletus had always called it. His gut hung out farther than his dickie-do — and she had to chuckle a bit. Even a dumb ass like Cletus could make a funny once in a while.

“Mrs. Cuthbert,” Sheriff Graff said, his blue eyes still looking like a million miles of smooth ocean.

“Sheriff,” she replied, trying to keep it as impersonal as possible. The baby grabbed her teat and started sucking on it through the thin fabric of the dress she wore. Her nipple went erect.

She looked at Graff.

He was looking at the nipple.

His eye caught her gaze, and he blushed.

“It’s all right,” she said. “It’s baby’s feeding time.”

Sheriff Graff was speechless as Momma unbuttoned her blouse and, without a second thought, pulled her breast out. Almost instantly, the child latched on and started sucking.

“I think I’ll go look for your husband,” Sheriff Graff said. He turned his head, blushing.

Momma smiled. She pulled her other breast out and walked up to Graff. “There’s another one,” she told him. “If you’re thirsty.” Graff couldn’t help but look at her engorged breast. She’d always been well endowed upstairs, but the breast was probably twice its normal size. There was a thin dribble of milk oozing from the nipple. It was so full; it looked like it might explode.

“I’m sorry,” Graff said as he looked away.

“I’m not,” Momma told him. “I should have married a good man like you, instead of a no-account like Cletus.”

Graff had nothing to say about that. He thought Cletus was a dumb ass yokel, just like everyone else did. His drunken debauchery and stupidity were legendary around Buzzard Creek but, for the most part, Cletus’s antics weren’t dangerous to anyone but himself.

“I’ll find your husband,” Graff said. Then, he walked away and got in his squad car.

As he was pulled out, he looked back. She still had her breast out, dangling.

“Damn,” he muttered as he drove away.

Cletus awoke.

The cave had gone dark — Father had extinguished all the candles, apparently — but Cletus could see clearly. It was like he was wearing a pair of Emmitt Carter's night vision goggles or something. Emmitt, an avid survivalist, lived just North of Buzzard Creek in a run-down shack in the woods. He and Cletus got together every couple of months or so to shoot the shit and catch up on old times, and to drink whatever new batch of moonshine Emmitt had conjured up.

I need to go see him, Cletus thought as he looked around the cave. *He ain't never gonna believe this shit!*

For that matter, Cletus didn't believe it. He thought that, maybe, he'd partaken of some of the good hill-grown marijuana Emmitt was also prone to produce, or some of that new-fangled Meth shit that people made out of fertilizer. He was just dumb enough to give that kind of crap a try.

But, he knew the sensation he felt was not a hangover, either via alcohol, dope or some other narcotic. No, this was something he had never experienced before. In a way, he felt more alive than he had ever felt. It was only then, as he lay there in the silence of the cave, that he realized his heart wasn't beating.

I'm dead, he thought. *Dead and done gone to Hell.*

It made sense. Jo and Donnie were here with him, and if there ever was a couple destined for the pit of Hell, it was those two. Jo for her whoring ways; Donnie for being the drunken, thievin' son of a bitch who loved her.

Hell.... or at least Purgatory.

Cletus slowly staggered to his feet and looked about the cave. He looked over at Jo and Donnie. Donnie lay on his back on the soft dirt floor and Jo lay across his chest. They looked as if they'd just made the monster with two backs and were sleeping it off.

"Wake up," Cletus said. "We got to go home."

Jo stirred slowly. As she rose off of Donnie's chest, Cletus saw that there was a big, red, bloody hole there. He thought he'd dreamed the whole thing.

Jo looked at Cletus. “They done killed my Donnie,” she told him. She reached out and held Donnie’s face in her hands. “I loved him, you know?”

Cletus could do nothing but nod his head to that. Jo was the town slut but, he supposed, she had actually loved the man.... just as Cletus actually loved Momma. Still, he’d dipped his wick in more than one town whore. It was only naturally, he reckoned. Instinctive. Something that had transcended time and space since the caveman days. “Monogamy was something created by the church to make men and women ashamed of screwing”, his Dad had told him once.

Cletus watched as Jo kissed the corpse of her dead husband. Then, ever so slowly, her head dropped to his chest and started to lick up the dried blood. She dug her face into the opening in Donnie’s chest and lapped at the blood inside like dog drinking water on a hot summer day.

A second later, Cletus caught the scent of the blood. It was the sweetest aroma he had ever smelled. Like honey to a bee. He realized that he was hungry — ravenously so.

He dropped to his knees beside Donnie, but Jo raised her head out of the opening and hissed at him. “Get your own,” she told him. “*He’s mine!*”

Cletus leered at her a moment, wanting nothing more than to knock the two-timing whore up side the head and drink Donnie’s coagulated blood, but didn’t. Something inside him told him that Donnie was his buddy and it was wrong to drink his blood. Jo, his wife, had no such qualm, it seemed. But, then, she never really had, had she?

“Whatever,” Cletus said as he stood.

He turned and walked away from Jo and Donnie. He stepped out into the night and looked at the full moon in the sky. It glowed, and there was a reddish aura surrounding it. As a matter of fact, everything around him had an aura to it. He realized that things would be different for him from now on, and he didn’t mind it.

He looked at the trees and saw a squirrel standing on a limb. It had a nut in its hand, but it was looking directly at Cletus.

Cletus stared at the squirrel.

It stared back.

Cletus could hear its heart pumping. He could smell the thing: the stench of its fur, the nut it held in its hand, even the scent of the shit still caked to its asshole. He could smell everything.

He stared at the squirrel. It did not move. In a moment, he realized that it could not move. He had it under his power.

“Come here, little feller.” He motioned for the squirrel to come to him and, to his surprise, it dropped the nut and started toward him. He watched as it dropped out of the tree and onto the ground in front of him.

“That’s a good boy,” he said, smiling. “A very good boy.”

Then, he floated gracefully to the ground, grabbed the squirrel in both hands, and sank his teeth into its abdomen. His fangs pierced its stomach and he drank. He reared his head back and looked to the sky as he sucked the sweet, warm blood from its body. The squirrel fidgeted a few times, its legs spasmed as Cletus drained it. It went limp in his hands.

A few seconds later, Cletus purged the squirrel of blood.

He licked his lips as he threw the carcass to the ground.

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Sheriff Graff pulled up to the carnival tent just past 9 p.m. The sun had gone down less than an hour ago, and the bright carnival lights filled the night sky for miles. The carnival had set up camp in what could be called downtown Buzzard Creek. It was in the middle of the city limits, for sure, but it was only an open field just east of the old General Store.

Neighborhood ruffians, of whom there was a surprising quantity, considering the population of Buzzard Creek, had taken to using the old general store as a hangout. Graff had busted up more than one party in the structure and the place had been used once or twice as a Meth lab. It wasn’t hard to tell the Meth users, though. Even in southern Illinois, most people had their front teeth. Manus George, whose father, Ed George, had been a high school football star, was one of the known problem makers in town. And, he was missing his front teeth. It didn’t take a detective to figure out that old’ Manus

was rotting his teeth out with Meth whenever and wherever he could get the stuff.

It came as no surprise to Graff that Manus and his usually bunch of losers were standing near the carnival tent.

Graff parked the patrol car and walked over to the cabal. “Manus,” he said, “thought you were in jail down at Tri-County?”

Manus sneered. His long, blonde hair reminded Graff of the boy’s mother’s hair. Laura Johnson had been the prom queen. Ed George had taken her to the prom, then lifted her dress afterwards and squirted the little bastard into her. *The better part of that boy went down the inside of his mother’s leg*, Graff thought.

The other three kids weren’t much better, either. There was Roland Jeffers whose dad worked as a truck driver and whose mother was almost as big a slut as Jo Gould; Tami Kirkpatrick, sixteen, who was still a pretty gal but she’d look like she was forty by the time she turned twenty, the boys were riding her and putting her away wet on a daily basis. It surprised him that she wasn’t knocked up yet. Her mother had probably put her on birth control pills, but he wasn’t sure Tami was smart enough to take them. *Maybe Mom’s grinding them up and putting them in her Cheerios?* Graff thought.

Then, there was the crème de la crème of the crowd, Rick McDaniels, who rivaled Cletus Cuthbert for dumbest son of a bitch in Buzzard Creek. Rick liked to run up and down the main street of Buzzard Creek stark naked. Graff couldn’t for the life of him figure out why — the boy had such a little pecker that it would take an electron microscope to find it. Most people just laughed at him as he ran down the street. Horace Steinblast wouldn’t even shoot at the boy — and he shot at everything. “Little fucker’s got enough problems,” Horace said when asked about the subject. “Dumber than a sack of hammers *and* the pecker God gave a mouse.” He would shake his head. “I’d shoot him, but it’d be to put him out of his misery.”

He grinned, then added: “Fuck him, let the little-dicked idiot live.” Then, he’d go back to shooting at phantom jackrabbits.

Graff acknowledged Rick and the others with a nod of his head.

“Any of you kids seen Cletus Cuthbert?” he asked.

Roland and Tami only shook their heads. Rick McDaniels, who always had some snide moment, said: “Ain’t he the one with the big titted wife?” A second later, he answered his own question. “Damn, I’d sure like to suck on those sonsabitches!” He grinned and laughed dumbly at his own wit.

Graff couldn’t help but replay the picture from earlier of Momma with her breasts hanging out. Rick McDaniels might be dumb but, in this instance, Graff had to agree with him.

“So, no one’s seen Cletus?”

“Nope,” said McDaniels. “Maybe he got lost between his wife’s tits? You look there yet?”

He let out a laugh that made Graff want to pull his service revolver, but he didn’t.

“You kids behave.... you hear?”

“Sure thing, Sheriff,” Tami said.

Graff gave her a momentary glance, thought to himself: *lucky little shitters, they’re probably both tapping that. Wonder which on’s gonna give her a venereal disease first?*

Don’t think like that, he thought. You’re here to uphold the law, not judge people.

Yeah, like they’re not judging you.

Then, he turned and walked into the carnival tent.

##

The inside of the carnival tent was abuzz with life. Everywhere Graff looked, he saw men and women assembling thing. Most of the people looked like your average circus/carnival fare — seedy and dirty. Mayor Kohl had forewarned him that there would be a carnival coming to town a mere two days ago. Graff and Kohl didn’t see eye to eye most of the time, and Graff thought Kohl was trying to intentionally undermine his chances of re-election come next fall. Graff’s minimal staff was already underpaid and overworked, and adding additional officers just wasn’t in the budget. So, the job of policing the carnival and the ruffians it would attract was squarely placed on Graff’s shoulders.

Graff walked up to a man who looked like he was on the third

day of a three day bender and asked: “Who’s in charge here?”

The man smiled, revealing a row of rotted teeth, and said: “Over there.” He pointed at a young man in the corner with a clipboard in his hands.

“Thanks.”

“No problem.”

The man turned back to his work and Graff crossed the grass floor. “You in charge here?” Graff asked the man. He was immediately taken aback by the young man’s striking good looks.

“Yes sir.” He offered a hand. “Name’s Lance. You must be Sheriff Graff?”

“That I am, Lance,” he replied. He looked about the carnival. “You guys are going to be in town for how long?”

Lance smiled. Unlike his worker, Lance’s teeth were perfect. For that matter, everything about the man was perfect. He was physical fit, his muscle shone through the thin fabric of his wife-beater t-shirt. He looked like he didn’t have an extra pound on him.

Graff hated him immediately.

“We’ll be in town till Sunday,” Lance told him. “The carnival will be Thursday, Friday and Saturday. We’ll tear down and head out of town before sunset on Sunday.”

Graff nodded. It was Tuesday now. They’d start drawing in a crowd on Thursday. He figured the real trouble — if there was going to be trouble — would begin once the carnival did. Manus George and his ilk would linger around the carnival beforehand, hoping to get in some trouble.

Graff looked about the large carnival tent. He couldn’t quite put a finger on it, but he felt in his soul that there was something bad coming.

Then, he saw the man. He was tall and thin, but that wasn’t what was out of the ordinary about him. What was strange was the fact that the man’s skin was white as a sheet. He was almost an albino.... and he was staring directly at them. Graff locked eyes with the man and, for a moment, he thought he felt the man inside his head. He couldn’t look. For that matter, he couldn’t move.

The man smiled.... and the feeling dissipated.

Graff looked back at Lance.

“Who’s that?” Graff asked.

Lance grinned wide. “That’s Mr. Blood.”

“Mr. Blood?” Graff gave Lance a quizzical glare. *Geez, he thought. I had a name like that, I’d change it.*

He looked back in the direction Mr. Blood was standing in...but he was gone.

“Where’d he go?”

Lance gave a slight laugh. “Mr. Blood is a busy man,” he told him. “I’m sure he’s off coordinating something or other.”

“And Mr. Blood runs the show here?”

“Yes sir,” Lance replied, smiling even wider. “You could say this carnival wouldn’t be the same without him.” Once again, he let out a little laugh.... except, this time, the laugh sent a shiver down Graff’s spine.

“I’d like to meet Mr. Blood,” Graff said.

“I’m afraid that’s probably not a good idea tonight,” Lance told him. He paused a moment and thought before he continued. “What with getting everything organized for the opening, you know? Mr. Blood can be a bit.... uh, testy.... at times. Trust me, I don’t think you want to be around him when he’s like that.”

Graff thought of Mr. Blood’s gaze. The man had looked at him like he was a pork chop. He wasn’t certain he wanted to meet Mr. Blood.

“Maybe some other time,” Graff said.

“I’m sure Mr. Blood will visit you before he leaves town,” Lance said, smiling. “As a matter of fact, I think you can count on it.”

The expression on the man’s face took Graff aback, but he said nothing about it. Instead, he merely gave Lance a nod and walked toward the entrance of the carnival.

At the entrance, he paused a moment and looked back. Lance was still standing there looking at him, a wide, Cheshire cat grin on his face. “You have a good night, Sheriff!” he shouted. “Sweet dreams! Mr. Blood will see you soon!”

Graff stared at the young man as he started to laugh hysterically. *What the hell?* Graff thought.

It was then that he realized all the workers had stopped and were looking in his direction....

...And all of them were laughing, too.

Graff soaked in the surreal situation for a moment, then turned and exited the carnival.

Once outside the carnival entrance, his pace quickened. Something told him to get the Hell away from there and get away from there fast. He hit the door and opened it, but paused before he got inside.

Something was sitting on the central post of the carnival tent.

In the darkness, it took him a moment to realize what it was.

It was a man.

It was Mr. Blood.

He was perched like a gargoyle upon the large gold ball at the top of the pole. He was hanging multi-colored triangular flags on the pole beneath him.

“How the Hell did he get up there?” Graff asked himself.

Just then, Mr. Blood looked toward him.

Graff couldn't look away as the man waved. It was a friendly wave, but there was something sinister implied in it. It was almost like Mr. Blood was toying with him, playing a game of cat and mouse.

The trance that had taken him over ended a moment later, and Graff slid into the patrol car. He started the engine. He looked back up at the top of the pole, but Mr. Blood was no longer there.

“What the Hell?” he whispered. “What the *Hell*?”

As he pulled away from the carnival, finding Cletus Cuthbert was the last thing on his mind.