

The MARX Beasts

RICHARD W. KELLY

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Young Adult

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THANK YOU

Thanks to all the paranormal researchers that I have followed over the years. From Coast to Coast AM to Ancient Aliens to Contact in the Desert, I am grateful for all the research and open minds.

Prologue

Ron stood behind the little desk with his lawyer. He was in the only suit he owned which was recently purchased by his father. He was nervous, his whole life could depend on the upcoming trial.

“Ron Downing?” The judge said sitting in his tall desk in the courtroom.

“Yes, your honor?” Ron said as he was trained.

“How do you plead to crime of involuntary manslaughter?” The words sounded incredibly harsh.

Ron looked at his lawyer who nodded to him to do what he was told. “No contest your honor.”

The judge looked at the man in his late twenties. Then he looked at the defendant’s father, Max Downing, the wealthiest man in Missouri and the leading donor to his retention election as a judge. He then looked at the prosecutors table which was empty. The prosecutor did not even bother to show up. He knew why, they all knew the kid was getting off somehow. He cleared his throat and started to speak.

“Ronald Downing. I accept your plea of no contest and am going to offer you deferred adjudication of this crime.” He thought how many people had to be involved to make this happen. It was imperative the crime he was charged for eligible for adjudication. He could not be tried

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for a DUI or intoxicated manslaughter or murder. It had to specifically be involuntary manslaughter.

“Discovery has shown that you are a first-time offender. Your blood alcohol levels were barely over the limit. And the victim was in the middle of the street wearing dark clothes at night. I don’t believe this accident should ruin the rest of your life.” He thought to himself, ‘or else your father may make sure I don’t retain my chair’.

“Deferred adjudication will mean there is no trial, no conviction and an opportunity to expunge it from your record after the term. You must follow the criteria I set in order to adjudicate the crime. There will be a term of three years where you cannot be convicted of a violent crime. You cannot be convicted of being accessory to a violent crime. You must hold a job for the three years or be have proof of looking for one. You must serve five hundred hours of community service and attend AA meetings regularly. If you are involved in a violent crime in any way before November of 2008, you will be back here and likely facing ten years to life. Do you understand?”

“I do.” Ron said the words softly. Even though he was getting off the hook, it felt like he was having the pressure of his family and community placed squarely on his shoulders.

“Adjourned!” The judge said as he hit the gavel on the desk. He stood up and quickly left the courtroom feeling sick for how much he bent his morals.

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The lawyer shook Ron's hand vigorously. "Damn lucky. You have no idea. We had no chance on that case."

Ron stood there in shock. He had not considered that he deserved to be in jail. That he should have lost the case. It was a whirlwind to which his father gave him a pat on the back and headed home.

For the next couple of years Ron worked as a security guard for his father's company. He did his community service working at an animal shelter on the weekends. And he kept his nose clean. No drinking, no nothing.

Then his world hit another hurricane of events. His father's company was investigated by the FTC. Max Downing was found to be the head of a massive embezzlement scheme inside of his own company that defrauded its customers and its stock holders. The last time Ron saw his father it was on TV waving off the reporters so he could go home and end his life before the chaos of the real world did it for him.

Ron was left with little money, no skills, and a reputation that was attached to a criminal that bankrupted thousands of people. He managed to find an apartment and another security job at small building in downtown Kansas City. All he had to do was keep out of trouble for just a few more months.

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Chapter 1

Ron looked at the glass door that separated him from the only people that kept him from being totally alone at that time of night. He still had a few drags on his cigarette. He loved the habit too much to throw it out before he was done. It was one of those realizations that he would one day quit and not have that elusive hit of dopamine that came with feeding the addiction. Everyone at the office had quit. Hell, most of America had quit. It was becoming a strange remnant of the past where grown adults were choosing to breath poisoned air at a huge expense in both life and money.

It was nearly four in the morning. The street lights lit up the sidewalks on the downtown street. Not that there was much going on in downtown Kansas City in the early mornings. In fact, he had not seen a person since he stepped out to have a smoke break. His black Civic was one of two cars that were within sight. His was small and discreet. It was able to blend in anywhere which was contrasted with the white moving van parked behind it that had the words, Dusk 'til Dawn AM, painted in block letters growing in size as the words led to the bottom of the van as if it was a part of the

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Star Wars opening credits and the name was going to scroll away into the infinite above.

Ron looked at his watch. It was two minutes until the hour when the radio show, inside the building before him, would come to its nightly conclusion. Ron knew very little of the show even though it was in his building. Dusk 'til Dawn AM was a nightly radio broadcast syndicated across the country and much of the world through a new age company called TerraDome Media. It reported on the odd and the insane. Programs ran the gamut from aliens, bigfoot, life after death, psychics, time travel, weather manipulation, and anything that fell under the banner of conspiracy. Ron mostly associated the show with urban legends and fantasies, but it kept his security duty from being completely lonely since the host and producer were in the building every night from midnight to four AM.

He took one last long drag of his cigarette, the burning embers lighting his face in the darkened street where his hat had sheltered him from the lights above. He flicked the butt out into the street accidentally hitting the white van sending sparks flying in all directions as if the show was getting a round of fireworks. Ron laughed at the idea and thought to himself, "If any show deserved fireworks it isn't the crazyfest inside." He put one hand into his black puffy jacket, adjusted his black non-descript ballcap and pressed the call button next to the door.

The reply was not instantaneous. He watched the seconds tick off his watch when a voice on the little box

chimed in mere seconds after the hour passed. A small nasally voice came over the speaker with a hint of fear behind it, “Ron that you?” The voice of Ben asked in his perpetually nervous state.

Ron cleared his throat and pressed the button again, “Coming back in from my smoke break.” Protocol was if there were less than five people in the building that they communicate any time the door would unlock.

The nasally voice returned, “Thank you Ron.”

Another voice behind it came through a bit quiet, but the professionally trained radio intonation was unmistakable. “Goodnight and sleep soundly, if you can.” The host Don Keyes said ending his show. “And next time he is going to buzz us he should be listening so it doesn’t end up on air again.” Don was obviously perturbed. “Just like that caller tonight with all the background noise and talking. Can you please screen the calls to at least know I can hear someone over the background noise on the line?”

Ben started to apologize, “Sorry Don. I will be sure,” The box made a small clicking sound signifying the end of the conversation.

Ron fumbled with his ID card he needed to unlock the door. He looked at the glass door lost in thought, not really taking in what was happening around him. He missed the reflection of the shadowy person slowly creeping up behind him. Without any realization of what was happening he was on the receiving end of a pistol whipping.

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Ron opened his eyes almost having to force his lids apart. His body wanted to remain in its unconscious state, but something was making him wake up. He could not recall why he was asleep. He moved his hands around searching his surroundings expecting to find sheets and a loose pillow, but instead he felt the cold rough pavement of the sidewalk. The concrete scratched at his hands reminding him he was not in bed.

Everything rushed back to him. He was outside on a smoke break. He had used the call box to let the radio guys know that he was coming back into the building. He sat up rubbing the back of his head which sent electric twinges through his body as he found the sore spot on his head caused by the butt of the pistol that struck him. It had swollen to small knot, but there was no gash or blood.

He pulled his hand away as the spot was sore. “Did I pass out?” He verbally asked himself. But, the realization that the door to the building was wide open with obvious damage to its hinges told him there was someone who did this. He reached down to his side and realized his gun was gone.

He got to his feet trying to find an explanation for what he was experiencing. He had been the overnight security for the building for the few months. There was nothing inside that he thought anyone would want. Maybe some of the medical files at one of the psychologist offices?

He pushed himself to his feet trying to prepare himself to go inside. His heart was beating uncomfortably

fast. He instinctively reached for his badge to scan into the building, but his it was missing.

His mind started to piece together that the attacker took his gun and badge giving them easy access to the building. Ron assumed it was random hoodlums. There was no real money inside the building, not anything that could not be beaten by knocking off a gas station instead.

Walking over the threshold of the door he looked back to his watch, five thirty AM. He had a bad feeling about his current situation.

He stumbled still in pain from the attack. Nothing looked out of place. The receptionist desk, where he spent most of his nights, was as it normally was. No signs of any type of vandalism or destruction.

Knowing that someone attacked him and damaged the door, he immediately went for the phone. He glanced at the monitors. There was one that pointed at the lobby and another just outside the elevators on each floor. Nothing looked odd. He picked up the phone and started to call 911.

The emergency attendant asked for his emergency.

He responded slowly and clearly. "There was a break in at the Fillmore building or the KNAU radio station in downtown Kansas City, the Missouri side."

The man on the other side of the line responded, "We will send police. Do you know what time this happened? Was anyone there?"

The words echoed in Ron's ear. He realized that the radio guys were in the building and should have left by then.

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They would have found him on the sidewalk if they had gone home. Suddenly he panicked. Where were they? Had they been kidnapped or tied up and left alone? He dropped the phone and sprinted his way to the elevators.

He pressed the button and watched the digital numbers to the right of the circular light slowly drop from four, to three, to two. The man from 911 repeatedly asked, "Are you there? What is your name? Police are on their way." But Ron was too focused on what happened to go back to the phone.

The elevator dinged and Ron boarded. He pressed four and let the sight of the lobby fade into his mind as the doors closed. It was a slow and calming ride. He knew there was something at the top that was going to be bad, but he did not know how bad. There was something in the back of his mind that told him this maybe it. This may be his last few moments of sanity before it hit the fan. But for some reason it calmed him.

The doors opened to another normal business floor. He stepped out of the elevator and started walking down the hallway. So early on a Saturday there was still no one in the building. He probably would not see anyone until at least ten when the few psychologists and counselors would come in for the weekend duty. Most the other businesses would not return until Monday.

Half way down the hallway, Ron saw broken glass. As he approached the studio, the scene became clear. The studio was a mess. Blood and glass were everywhere. His

body tried to tense up, his mind wanted to shut down, but he needed to find Don and Ben.

He walked through the broken glass door to see two bodies on the floor slightly under the control panel, both with obvious gunshot wounds to the head. Ron's emotions shut down while his gag reflex tried to go into overtime. He managed to calm his stomach and suddenly, he was in a surreal place that had no sentiment attached to it.

The scene was gruesome, the faces were no longer discernable after the carnage the gun had wrought. But Ron knew there were only two people in the building just an hour and a half before, the host of Dusk 'til Dawn AM, Don Keyes and his producer Ben.

Ron continued walking into the room looking at what felt like a fictional scene. It was akin to a dream where nothing made any logical sense to him.

The computers and phones were smashed to bits. Pieces of the technology were strewn about the studio mixing with the glass and bloody remnants. He knelt down to look at the body. Ben was a small man, probably under five five and less than one thirty. He had bruising on his arms that was coming to a deep purple. He also had a bloodied bat near his body. He shivered as the reality barely registered in his mind. But the shock of everything kept him in his strange state.

He looked over at Don, the older fuller man, just a few feet away. His body looked to have fallen from his seat at the microphone. No bruising on him, no weapons. Just a

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man who was likely shot at short-range giving no fight. He shook his head at the pointless loss of life, just the thought that a man like Don Keyes could be around making an influence on people for decades for it all to be brought to an end in just a moment, made his head swim.

He stepped by the control panel to the corner of the room where he saw the one thing that forced him back to the real world. His badge and ID were lying next to Don's murdered body along with his gun. The plastic ID and silver polish of the gun were splattered in blood since the victims are shot at such a close proximity.

He grabbed his belongings and surveyed the room one more time. It was suddenly obvious someone wanted it to look like he was the gunman. He did not know why someone would frame him, but he only had a few seconds to decide what to do.

The words of the judge rang in his ear, "If you are involved in a violent crime in any way before November of 2008, you will be back here and likely facing ten years to life." He knew it was wrong to run. He knew that he would be breaking the law and be chased down by the police as a suspect in a double murder. But maybe if he ran the real killer would be caught before he was. Running from the police might be a crime but it was not a violent one. He understood in his mind that if he ran, there was a chance he did not spend the next decade in jail. If he did not, it was guaranteed.

He put his gun in his holster, his badge in his pocket and headed back towards the elevators. Afraid he might be

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met with the cops he just had sent to the building he took the stairs and quickly descended the four floors.

His mind was racing with options. He did not know who did it. He was only partially sure of what happened, but he did know that his gun and ID were left by the two dead bodies. Two people that he knew and therefore someone could find a motivation for him to have killed them. He had seen enough television to know that just being in the area made him a prime suspect. And his history would come back to haunt him.

He got the bottom of the stairs and slowly opened the door. No sign of any police yet. He jogged down the hallway to the receptionist's desk. He had no need to run. The killer would be caught on the video surveillance.

He clicked the eject button on the VCR attached to the monitors, but nothing came out. The slot was empty. He tore open the drawers where they kept the cassette tapes. But the tape for that morning, April fifth was missing. His panic returned. The video was gone, he had no alibi and his weapon was used.

The decision was made and Ronald Downing sprinted out of the building and down the street leaving his car and his freedom in jeopardy.

Chapter 2

Detective Michelson stood in the center of the radio studio trying to imagine the scuffle that took place. The older man was obviously the radio host. The detective was unfamiliar with the show that he was on, but he sat at the chair with the big fancy microphone. Or at least he at one time sat there, now slumped on the floor near said chair. The man did not look like he even tried to get up, he must have been shot while still sitting in his seat.

All the computers and technology had been destroyed. He wondered if the show was still on the air. That would likely provide a lot of clues. He looked over to his left where the smaller man lay. His arm was badly bruised and he had a bloodied metal baseball bat near his body. He hoped it had blood of the assailant, but it did not seem likely. He doubted the scrawny man that lay next to it could swing it hard enough to stop anyone in front of him. He would not know until his forensics team investigated, but he guessed the blood was from the victim as well.

He pulled out his notepad and took some notes just to be able to remember the details of the crime scene in case he would need to show up in court. It was a common practice, he only had to testify on a crime scene twice, but the first time went so badly that he took notes at every one since. He knelt down by the host of the show looking at what was

left of him. He could tell from the greying hair and the liver spots that he was likely up there in age. It was hard to tell from the rest of the body. Cadavers had a tendency to let skin sag and make people appear much older than they were.

He looked across the room imagining someone coming in and drawing the pistol and shooting the host as they quickly walked up on him. Then turning to the other man. A sound guy maybe? He started to move towards the smaller man who grabbed the bat and swung. The shooter caught the man's arm and then shot him in the head. After the corpse fell to the ground, he grabbed the bat and took a swing at his lifeless victim.

Michelson nodded to himself thinking that must be what happened. It was a game he often played where he would imagine the crime and then wait for the forensic team to tell him what actually happened. He rarely was even close.

A short fat cop entered the room with a couple of young forensic detectives in hoodies and jeans. The short fat cop walked up to Michelson, "Hi, I'm detective Florence. I'm in homicide Kan Kan. Guessing you're Kay Moe?" His voice was low and had a pig type snort that fit in between every few syllables.

"Yep. Homicide Kansas City, Missouri side. I'm Michelson. Looks like we have some kind of crime of vengeance here. Do you know what show these guys ran?" He asked.

The forensic people started crawling around the scene tagging anything that looked like it could be evidence.

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They had numbered the different items including dust bunnies on the floor, the victims, shrapnel from the computers, the chair, the microphone... While the young man forensic specialist wrote down angles of the blood splatter across the victim's faces, the young woman measured the height of the chair the host had fallen from.

Florence watched the two professionals do their job. "It's amazing what they figure out from those small details."

"Yep." Michelson was uninterested in small talk. "The show?"

Florence rubbed the back of his neck. "It's called Dusk 'til Dawn, I think. It's a late-night show where they talk about aliens and the boogeyman. A bunch of truckers call in and tell ghost stories, or something like that. I listen occasionally when I'm on overnight patrol." He cleared his throat. "But I hear they are sending in feds for this one. Might not get too comfy working on this case."

"Fuck." Michelson muttered. He looked down into the eyes of the fat cop. "Until they tell me themselves, I'm leading this thing. Got a hold of the owner of the building? Or the manager? Or the security guard?"

Florence did not appreciate the sudden take charge attitude of his fellow detective even though he was used to a small rivalry between the Kansas cops and the Missouri cops. "I've done just about as much as you. But go ahead, have at it." He turned back to watching the young forensic detectives and refused to be the grunt for Michelson. Why should he listen to him, he was not even Kansas side.

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Michelson stormed out of the radio station headed to the reception area to see if he could find a phone number for the building manager.

Chapter 3

Ron ran between buildings and down back alleys listening to the fading sirens in the background. He was suddenly a wanted man, on the run. As an armed, trained security guard he felt that he had the slight upper hand over anyone else who was wanted by the cops, but his experience was less important than he thought.

His first thought was to run home and pick up the necessities, but he knew that was the wrong move. It all depended on how long it would take for the police to put together the puzzle of who he was. Sure, the crime scene no longer had his gun or ID badge, but he did call 911. He was also on duty at the scene of the crime. He was easily the main suspect in a double homicide. The police would spend no time before heading to his house. He could not return home at that point.

Regardless of how obvious it was becoming that he had fled the scene, he probably had a few minutes before they started tagging him in the NSA databases. If he was going to do anything through the system, make calls on his phone, pull money from his bank, check any of his social media, it was quickly becoming too late.

Just a couple blocks from the studio he found an ATM. He put in his card and withdrew all the money that was available. Three thousand dollars in cash. The wad of

fifties was thicker than he imagined. He stuffed it in his front right pocket. He tried to fold the debit card in half. He wanted to break it and toss it in the trash, but his paranoia was getting the better of him. After a few attempts at breaking the card, he had creased it pretty good. He tossed it in a nearby trash can.

He shed his puffy jacket, security vest, and his ball cap. If anyone was on the lookout for him, they would have those articles ingrained in their minds. Instead, he was running about town in black slacks and red undershirt that said “Frankie said relax” in big block letters.

Knowing he was not going home and would not contact anyone he knew. His next thoughts were how to get out of town. Realizing that the police sirens had faded so far into the background that he was in the clear, he sat down on a storm drain trying to come up with a plan of evasion.

Watching morning start to become day, cars became more frequent and the sun finally rose over the hills to the east, he pondered the different possibilities of getting out of town. His initial ideas were plane and car. The idea of a plane was too risky. He would have to go through TSA security and if the police had deduced that he had any involvement, he would likely be apprehended the second he got in the security line.

Car was a possibility, but not if he was renting. A rental would be put under his name and the toll tags would be traceable anytime he got near an NFC scanner. He would be trailed by cops within minutes of getting near a toll road.

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His mind was a blank. He could hitchhike or walk away from Kansas City, but he wanted to get far away from the crime scene if possible. He needed a better mode of transportation.

His mind scoured with ideas, hot air balloons, boats, teleportation. Nothing was a likely candidate. But then he heard the words from a famous movie rang in his ears. Planes, trains, and automobiles. Planes and cars were out, but maybe he could take a train.

He looked up to see that he was sitting in front of the convention center. The train station was a mile or so south of where he sat. All he had to accomplish was walking a dozen or so blocks without tipping off the police of his suspect status.

He got up and started walking. Everything suddenly became a nuisance to him. The chill in the air was brisker than he expected. Early April was a crapshoot for Kansas City. Sometimes the air was cold and bitter while other years the summer was creeping in. Ron shoved his hands in his pockets to avoid the chill.

He also became very aware of how much money he had in his pockets. The paranoia was just that, but he felt the eyes of every person he passed. The homeless in Kansas City had become a bit of an issue, but it was just a worry about finding food and housing for the unfortunate who lived on the streets. The idea that there was a rise in crime because of the issue was just imagination. But Ron still felt like he was on the verge of getting mugged.

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He walked at a quick pace. He kept his hands in his pockets pushing the money deep to the bottom of the small pouch. When someone would appear in his vicinity whether they were near him or across the street, he would look at them with poison in his eyes an animalistic trait to intimidate anyone and everyone that may be an issue.

The wind blew in his face leaving a chill on his skin. He trudged down Wyandotte Street with the humongous Lowes hotel across the four lanes of non-existent traffic. The valets were already gathered in the circular drive of the hotel waiting on the rich business people and their rented cars. Ron caught what he thought was a dirty look from one of the valets. He tried to catch a glimpse of the man without being obvious. Another valet laughed out loud.

‘Are they mocking me?’ He thought to himself. He knew the murderer was somewhere in the vicinity and he was probably being watched by them. The thought boiled his anger up past his worries.

As he made his way to the train station, he tried to think of what he already knew. There was nothing out of the ordinary for his shift. It was a late night in an area of downtown that had no night life. He was outside smoking. When he called in to let the guys know he was on his way back in Ben sounded nervous. Did he know something? Probably not, he always sounded nervous. He was attacked from behind. Then while he was out Ben and Don were shot. The computers and phone system were destroyed so if there was something on the computer it was no longer there. The

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security footage was removed from the premises so there was no proof of anyone entering. Ron had already called letting himself in, so the man probably walked up to the radio studio without alerting his victims until it was too late. And his gun and ID were left next to the victims in some apparent attempt to frame him for the murders.

There was blood on the baseball bat near the producer's body. Hopefully that was from an attack on the intruder. That could be some basic DNA evidence. That would likely be his best friend for the investigation.

Downing pressed the button on the pole to get the little walking man to light up and allow him to cross. His mind continued to think through the morning. Maybe the security system was hooked up to a network. He replaced the tapes every night, but he did not know how the system worked. He just did what he was trained to do. A lot of the new security systems were uploading their videos to a server or database in the building. Maybe the security system was not as old as he thought it was. There could be video stored outside of the old VHS tapes he found. He hoped that one of those two routes would clear his name.

He returned his mind to the crime itself. Why did it happen at all? Someone was upset with the host and producer. Maybe they said something on air they weren't supposed to. Maybe one of them owed someone some money. Or maybe it was deeper and more complicated. A radio show about crazy conspiracies being the victim of a

conspiracy was pretty coincidental. If the show had a life after that, the April fifth episode would become legend.

Suddenly he had images running through his head of cops tracking him down. Finding his location, tracking his movements and identifying aliases he would use. The thoughts made him feel like a tracked animal. It was sad and disgusting. His life over the last few hours had become the world of the movies. Every time he took a moment to think about his future his gut sunk with the inanity of it.

He realized as he came up upon the train station, he needed some kind of plan. He knew that he was going to be a prime suspect. He knew that the police would be after him. He also knew he could not spend his life on the run. He needed to come up with some kind of proof he was innocent. He did not have much to go on, but he had to defy the odds. It was the only way he saw any future for him outside of prison. His best bet was the security footage. Otherwise, he would have to find out what he could about Don and Ben. What the hell kind of trouble did they land themselves in. No, what kind of trouble did they land him in.

Ron crossed over twenty-second street with little issue as it was still early in the morning for the weekend so the traffic had still yet to fully emerge. Just a few steps through the parking lot and then onto the freight bridge they used to hand truck pallets of supplies to the businesses inside Union Station. The bridge was old and had a steel roof with wood slats on the sides. It felt a bit like being encased by pallets which seemed appropriate.

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The old remnant of how things used to be done made Ron smirk. He loved the idea that there were still some activities that were so ingrained that they never changed with the times.

As he crossed into the court yard from the bridge there was a strange mix of new and old. The buildings right in front were steel and glass with angular architecture as if to point out how modern the quaint old city of Kansas City could be. But then behind it was the untouched Union Station. A classic building with the old off-white concrete, columns framed the windows and doors. It almost felt like there should be gargoyles and stained glass accompanying its nearly one hundred-year-old façade.

He walked through the doors and straight to the ticket counter. He had not put much thought into where he was going, just to get on the move. He was trying to stay hidden and the ancient form of cross-country transportation was the best way to do it.

“How can I help you?” The old man behind the counter asked not looking up from his magazine.

“I need a ticket.” Ron said looking up at the sign above hoping it would list of a bunch of destinations, but it did not.

The man’s voice was monotone and had a nerdy science teacher type of speaking cadence all covered in his old age. “Well, that would make sense seeing how I am selling tickets. Where do you want to go?”

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He panicked and responded with the only city that had entered his mind, "Houston." It was the place he would have called home if he moved in with his mother after his parents divorced. Instead, it was a city he never once visited.

He paused not wanting to give anything away. He needed a plausible reason to head there. "Astros are in Houston, right?"

The man clicked some buttons on an ancient looking typewriter device. "Houston is space city. Or it was back in the heyday of the Apollo program. The baseball team tried to honor that heritage."

Ron nodded hoping to get his ticket and time when he might expect the train. "When is the train?"

The old man did not pay any attention to the question, "They wore rainbows, the color of exploding stars, supernovas, galaxies coming into existence. They really celebrated America. But now they are falling apart. Just like NASA. Now we launch from Russia as if they won the cold war. American ingenuity hasn't launched a rocket in over ten years." He continued to type random letters in the black wide box. "And even their rainbow uniforms are now taken over by the gays. They say it is pride and wear rainbow underwear and prance around in parades."

Ron was not used to dealing with prejudice people. Once upon a time he heard those kinds of views of the gay community, but now it was reserved for elderly who could not keep moving with the times. He really just wanted to get on a train and away from the scene of the crime. "I know

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man. Everything seems to be shit nowadays. When is that train coming? And how much?”

The man seemed to pop back to reality. “Sorry sir. Yes, the Astros are in Houston. Did you want coach or first-class seating with a bed?” He stopped absentmindedly tapping the keys on his machine.

Ron tried to calculate how much it might cost. A plane ticket would be about two hundred, first class probably close to six hundred. “I think I’d like a bed.”

The man squinted down at the machine trying to read something on the small paper that was sticking out the top. “That would be fifteen hundred dollars.”

Ron almost choked. “Oh shit.” If he was throwing money around like that, he would not make it a week. He would just travel a few hundred miles and then give himself up so he did not end up on the street. “Sorry, I guess I will have to deal with a coach seat.”

“Of course.” The man ripped the paper out of the machine and started typing away again. “Could have told me the first time.” He mumbled loudly, unconcerned about the customer hearing him. It took another minute before he looked back up, “That would be five hundred and thirty-two dollars.”

“Jesus. I could fly first class with that.” The response was almost reflexive. Ron did not like parting with large amounts of money. His paychecks were not designed for those types of expenses.

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The old man started up again. “Yep. Once upon a time flying was not an option. People lined up to take the train. It was almost as if the great minds of the world were putting their brains on display. Travelers marveled at the speed and luxury with which they would be able to move about. Many people never travelling more than a few dozen miles away from their home would take a once in a lifetime trip on a train and see the countryside. But then those planes came about and the America that could relax in luxury and see the sights suddenly had to get to places quickly.”

Ron rolled his eyes as he tried to count out five hundred forty dollars hoping it would end the man’s rant. He tried to interject, “And when might the train get here?”

The man continued as he took the money from the man on the run. “You see, all this now, now, now stuff has ruined our America. Everyone wants everything right now. They can’t sit back and enjoy what we have, the journey to get there, and the anticipation. Today it’s just I want, I want, I want. If we were still in the cold war, I bet we would lose sight of the fight and just hand over freedom to those damn commies.” He handed Ron back some change and a ticket for the train. “So many things were better back in the day. I even remember when we had a real team here in Kansas City. The good old green and yellow back before those pansy baby blue uniforms of the Royals.”

Ron waved and thanked the man who continued his rant to the empty space that was left in front of him. He looked at the ticket. It said 1 seat, coach car, departing Kanas

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City on April fifth at eleven fifteen AM. Arriving Houston Texas on April seventh at one forty-five PM. He looked at the ticket a second time.

The fifty-hour travel time shocked him. He could easily drive in less time. And for so much less. But trying to stay undetected, the train seemed to be the only option. The security for planes and cruises had increased exponentially since September eleventh almost seven years before. Even rental cars required an amazing amount of documentation. But the archaic transportation of a passenger train seemed to be the only thing that avoided the wrath of congress after one of the biggest terror attacks on American soil leaving so many dead.

The thought of death brought back the images of the morning. Don and Ben were gone and he was just slowing down enough to start to let any of it sink in. That is why he had to keep pressing forward. He repeated to himself, 'security footage and learn about the radio guys.'

He wandered off to a corner of the giant station where he could hide away while he waited for the train.

Chapter 4

The train could not have arrived at a better time. The sirens from just a few blocks away seemed to get louder and louder in Ron's ears. Almost like a monster slowly coming after him. He felt the presence of the cops inching closer to his location. He needed to get out of there as quickly as possible.

When the train arrived, Ron felt like he was in an old timey film. The massive beast of a vehicle came slowly into the station the wheels squealed against the steel tracks and the deep horn blasted its warning to stay away.

Too eager to get on, Ron Downing made his way over to the wide doors that were opening up. As soon as there was enough space he tried to step aboard with his ticket in hand, but the attendant in the white shirt and blue vest held up his hand, "Let us deboard first please." The man had a very official sounding voice.

Ron took a few steps back trying to blend in, but his old red undershirt did not let him remain inconspicuous. There were only a couple of passengers waiting to board and surprisingly enough, there were more getting off the train. The idea that someone's destination was Kansas City baffled the longtime resident, but it was not his biggest problem, just something to keep his mind off the sirens that still felt like they were coming ever closer.

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Ron watched the people getting off the train. An old woman with her grandson, probably. There was a family. A couple of men in suits. Kansas City was not the hub for business, could these men be there because of the murder? Coming in to check that the bothersome host had been dealt with? Ron shook his head to come back to reality. There was no criminal in the country that was going to travel any significant distance in a train to get an update when there was email and text readily available.

Once he noticed that no one else was getting off the train he made his way back to the attendant that had rejected him the first time. “Come on up here.” He said with a smile, his white teeth shining past his well-tanned skin.

Ron stepped up the folding staircase handing the man his ticket. “Aren’t you supposed to say all aboard?” He tried to bring some laughter.

“Oh right. Sure.” The man cleared his throat, “All aboard!” He barked with the emphasis you typically only hear from southerners when they decide to scream a yeehaw around some yankees.

Ron gave a sheepish smile not meaning to have put the man in an uncomfortable moment.

The attendant read the ticket. “This is for a one way to Houston Texas. That is a three-segment trip. You’ll switch trains in St. Louis and then again in San Antonio.” He looked around the ground. “Luggage sir?”

Ron waited for the ticket to be returned to him, “I don’t have any.” He rubbed his neck knowing that was an odd thing to say.

“No luggage? All the way to Texas over two days?” The attendant gave him the side eye. “Guessing you need out of town quickly.”

“No. I just wanted to see the sights. I don’t really need,” Ron stumbled over his words.

The man patted Ron on the shoulder, “I’m just making conversation.” He said in a hushed tone. “Relax...” He said with a soothing hiss and patted Ron on the chest just above his ‘Frankie said relax’ shirt. “You can sit anywhere in the coach or quiet cars.” He handed the ticket back.

Ron made his way into the train. He could feel the blood rushing to his face. The pressure was too much for him. He called himself a security guard but, once he was in the hot seat he crumbled like a common criminal. He could not secure anything. The worst part was he was not hiding much, no actual crime other than disrupting a crime scene and running from authorities.

Then he thought about his two dead co-workers. Maybe they were not the closest people to him, but he talked to them nearly every night. He was there to protect them and the building from intruders. But he failed. He had to clear his name and get some kind of closure for Ben and Don. He smiled to himself feeling like he was doing the right thing even if he was pushing the boundaries of legality. At least it was what he told himself.

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Ron had entered the train near the front. He walked through the first-class car. He eyed all the passengers already in their seats. He was used to air travel where ninety percent of the time everyone on the plane was headed to the same destination that seeing a preloaded train made him feel like he was invading their world.

The passengers in the first-class car were mostly older. Not the fancy types in first-class airfare that want nothing more than to be left alone with their book. Aboard the train it was more couples in their senior years, a few single travelers and the one-off young couple. It was a different feeling, much lighter and happier.

Reaching the end of the car he had to press a button that released the door where he entered a small steel room that connected the train cars. It was almost like an airlock in a space station. Once through he had to press another button to be let into the sleeper car.

He did not get to people watch in the sleeper car. There was just a hallway against the side of the train. He walked down the narrow path with windows looking out over the boarding platform to his right and cheap flimsy looking doors leading to rooms with beds to his left.

The platform still had a few people milling around. He watched the couple of attendants asking the random people if they were joining the train. It was more likely, sweeping up the homeless off the platform and back into the station.

Richard W. Kelly

At the end of the hall another airlock. Inside the airlock Ron could again hear the sirens. The police were on his tail. He hoped they were going to get out of there before anyone questioned the train staff. There was a sign on the window as he entered the next car, “Quiet Car”. He instinctively switched to a library mentality. If he wanted to speak, he knew it would be in hushed whispers. There were a few people in the car mostly sleeping. There were two seats on each side. They looked to be comfortable and wider than an airplane. But unlike the first-class car, there was no armrest between the chairs. Strangers sitting shoulder to shoulder with nowhere to put their arm. It was a strange look. It made Ron feel that whoever he would be sitting next to, he needed to be the slightest bit intimate with.

As he walked through the car, he hunched over looking out the window again. Most of the attendants had returned to the train and very few souls were left on the boarding platform. There was an abandoned luggage carrier and some trash making it feel like he was leaving behind nothing but a ghost town.

Back into the airlock. The door slid open at the press of the button. He stepped inside the silver room with less protection from the outside air when Ron was startled almost off his feet. The train horn let out a quick blast preparing everyone for departure. He pressed the next button sliding the door open to the coach car where he would be sitting.

A voice over the speaker rang out through the cars, “We are about to depart. You are free to roam about the train

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cars, but many passengers find sitting during the first few minutes to be more enjoyable experience. Thank you for taking the train.”

Ron laughed at the idea that he was on a train. The more he learned about it the less he understood why anyone would be using one. The coach car was the fullest of the cars he had been in. Over half the seats were taken, but only a few of the passengers were having to share the un-arm-rested chairs together. There were very few spots left with two open chairs, but Ron found one near the end of the of the car just before the next airlock. He slid into the chair and looked out the window at the departing Union Station. He had walked so far that he was almost past the platform itself. As the train moved and they left Kansas City behind he could see back near the station two police officers standing on the platform. They were pointing at the train and talking to a little old man. A very old man, the man who had sold Ron the ticket.

He suddenly felt very appreciative of the annoying station employee and his ranting ways. He had a good inclination that if the old man did not meander in his words that those police may have caught the train before it left, but as it was, Ron was leaving them behind. He sat back in his chair and imagined the conversation between the police and the tickets salesman.

“Did you see this man get on the train?” One of the cops would say holding a picture of Ron Downing up to the man’s face.

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“Well, I see lots of folks come through here. I can’t say I saw this one, but perhaps it is because he is wearing such a fine suit in the picture. You know there was a time when every man wore a suit every time he left the house. It is a shame what has happened to America. Men outside in shorts and flip flops. It’s like the country is their backyard barbecue. You know we would never have beat the Russians if we had a bunch of men who didn’t respect themselves enough to dress properly trying to get to the moon.” The old man’s voice droned on in Ron’s mind.

He laughed at the imaginary conversation again thankful for the old man’s quirks.

The dead brown grasses and tall trees of the Midwest ran past the train as they headed east into the nothingness of Missouri. Not that it made much difference, to the west was the nothingness of Kansas. Ron wanted to let his troubles fade away and go to sleep as he would normally be off shift and winding down at this time of morning. But his body was still abuzz from the excitement of the day.

He closed his eyes and let the slight shift left and rights of the train maintaining its balance on the tracks, try to lull him away from reality. It did not work. He just sat there pretending to sleep for the first ten minutes of the ride.

He was tapped on the shoulder by a train attendant. Not the one he boarded with, but an older woman who wore the same white shirt and blue vest. She had a blue pillbox hat that made her look like she belonged in the old Hollywood. “Ticket sir?” She said in a voice that defied her age.

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He smiled at the grey hair that peeked out under the dark hat while he fetched his ticket from his right pant pocket. “Here you go.” He said handing the woman his boarding pass.

She looked at it and her face lit up with recognition. “Houston. Bernard told me about you. Mr. Relax, headed out of Kansas City in a hurry.” She handed him his ticket back with a soft whispered comment, “Don’t worry, you are safe with us.” She laughed at her joke as she moved on to the next passenger.

Ron’s heart dropped. He was thus far a terrible outlaw on the run.

Chapter 5

Michelson had spoken with Marvin the building manager who told him about the security system and Ron the night guard. He said Ron had clocked in that night but never clocked out which made Michelson feel like he was a prime suspect.

He was told the man was tall and slender, but avoided large groups. He did not like to socialize and did everything he could to just blend in. That made him much harder to hunt down. He did not have a lot of information on the man. He looked him up in the system. He was on deferred adjudication for involuntary manslaughter. That was a big charge to get adjudicated for. There must have been more to the story. Outside of that he had a couple of speeding tickets from five years before. The black Civic parked out front of the building was the one registered to him.

Michelson had put in a warrant to search the car, but Saturday mornings there were no judges available to grant his warrant. Instead, Michelson waited for the call from the courthouse and ran around town looking for people who may have seen something suspicious.

The side of town where the murders had occurred was pretty slow on Friday nights. The clubs were dozens of blocks away, there was no real housing outside of some of

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the homeless finding benches and bridges to sleep under. So, anyone who saw another person would be worth talking to.

He tried stopping by Ron Downings apartment, but just as he suspected, the man was not there. It would have been a surprise since his car was still on the street where he worked.

He had been to the bus station and the homeless shelter, but he did not know what he was looking for outside of the security guard. The only pictures he had of the man was a grainy computer image of his driver's license that was nearly six years old and the mugshot from his arrest after the manslaughter, but he was so disheveled he looked different from his license.

His next stop was the bus station. He thought he might take a look at the passengers on the train, but he got sidetracked when he asked the ticket salesman if he could ask him a few questions.

Michelson entered Union Station and made a bee line for the ticket counter. He approached the old man and asked, "Have you seen anyone strange around here? Someone who looked nervous or maybe was trying to get out of town quickly?"

The old man looked up and smiled. "I see a lot of folks around here. Most of them just kind of blend together. They look like random folks out on the beach for vacation. Everyone in shorts and t-shirts. It's like they all forgot how to dress for being out and about. Just more deterioration of our beloved country."

Richard W. Kelly

The detective slammed his hand on the counter, “Look old man. I don’t have all day. I just need to know if someone out of the ordinary came through.”

The old man came out from around the counter and pointed to the boarding platform. “When you say out of the ordinary. Are you saying strange like someone with purple hair or are you saying someone who is maybe from one of those backwards countries, can’t speak English?”

“I’m just saying someone that was trying to get out of town quickly and maybe they were nervous about something.” He was losing his temper but followed the man’s finger and walked with him out the doors of the station.

“Everyone I see is on their way out of town. Can’t say it is out of the ordinary. In fact, you are more out of the ordinary than any of them. You seem like you know what you want and how to dress. You are the type of young man we need in this country. Someone who can keep the damned commies at bay. Used to have a country full of men like you, but now they all are a bunch of weaklings.”

The detective realized the train was leaving and did not have time to look for suspicious people. He let the old man ramble on while he looked around at the clientele still in the train station. No one seemed out of place. And there was definitely no one who looked uncomfortable with a cop poking his nose around.

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He took out his notepad and made a couple of notes. If there was nothing left for him, he would head back to the station and see what the Kan Kan forensic team figured out.