

TOP COUNTY CASE CLOSED

By K. N. Messier

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Cover design by Nancy

First published on March 28th, 2018

ISBN:

978-0-9992029-3-7

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DEDICATION

To Simon Moreau, who was a lifelong friend and left this earth far too early. Love ya, buddy.

And to Carrie Baker, who just plain puts up with me! Or I, her. Not sure which! But love you anyway.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	THE DRIVE	1
2	OLD BUDDY	8
3	HOME	17
4	POLICE STATION	23
5	DINER	35
6	OLD LOG MILL	41
7	THE SMALLY HOUSE	54
8	NEXT MORNING	63
9	THE CALL	75
10	DOUBLE TROUBLE	91
11	UNEXPECTED VISIT	102
12	RED HANDED	120
13	NEW DAY	132
14	THE SEARCH	145
15	YERKES' HOUSE	159
16	NEW GAME PIECE	174
17	AMBUSH	192
18	SURPRISE	207
19	SHOWDOWN	230
20	NEW BEGINNINGS	244

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank a special friend who sat at my feet by the woodstove for endless nights as I brought Top County to life. My loving four-legged friend Maple.

I would also like to thank Austin Robinson – owner of Pothole Press – who has burned the midnight oil working tirelessly on editing TOP COUNTY, which by all means was no easy feat. Page by page, he brought this novel to life. Without Austin, you would not be reading this now. I'm proud to call him my friend.

And a huge thanks to Jamie Santamore – owner of Wicked Carnival Productions. I want to thank him for allowing me to work with him and ghostwrite for his project Sins of Man: Rise of Mortis. I wish Jamie the best in all of his upcoming projects.

Finally, I want to thank the great state of Maine. “The way life should be.” A wonderful place to live and visit, as well as home to a few famous authors. One of them has the greatest horror genre mind ever – can you guess who?

1

THE DRIVE

Sheriff Patrick Johnson was heading up Route 95 North in Maine during a severe thunderstorm. Although pelted with heavy rain and wind, the sheriff was not thinking about the storm; he was thinking about the last case he was on in the small town of Sandy Creek, Maine. *Sins of Man* he labeled it, and he was glad it was behind him. Now he was focusing on the task at hand: being the new sheriff of Top County.

Top County was a large track of land in Northern Maine. This county was too far north for the Maine State Police to patrol, making it pretty much ungoverned. Due to this circumstance, the county only had a sheriff's department with a dispatcher and room for two deputies whose main job was to patrol the

vast amount of land, ranging 6,828 square miles, including the water ways. The magnitude of this jurisdiction made Top County the largest county east of the Rockies. The Top County Sheriff's Department mainly worked the populated areas, while the Department of Environmental Protection worked the outskirts. The DEP called on the sheriff's department to investigate all criminal matters not under the DEP's jurisdiction. This was where Sheriff Johnson was born, so he knew patrolling these parts was no cake walk.

Johnson grew up in Top County and left when he was 18 years old to join the Marines. A bit of a rebel in his teenage years, Johnson remembered getting into a lot of mischief. That's why when he joined the Marines, his father was hopeful they would knock some sense into his thick head. However, his father also knew that meant he was losing help on his potato farm, something that made him unhappy.

That was many years ago. Sheriff Johnson was now in his mid-50s – 53 to be exact. He learned a lot from the Marines. He excelled at everything he engaged in and he climbed in rank swiftly. However, he left the Marines after 10 years, heeding the advice of his mentor, Joe Gordon, who convinced him to join the

Federal Marshals. Now, Johnson was one of the highest ranking federal field marshals, surpassing the rank of Gordon. In fact, Johnson was pushing through this storm in order to see Gordon before continuing north to Top County.

Joe Gordon was the Commander of the Maine State Police, located in Bangor, as well as a federal marshal. Both Johnson and Gordon worked undercover for the Federal Marshals, so when Johnson was given a higher rank than Gordon, it put a small wedge between their friendship. Nevertheless, they remained friends, but decided to take different paths. Johnson went undercover as the new sheriff in small towns filled with corruption, dedicated to breaking up corruption rings to restore order before moving on. Sandy Creek was the last small town he worked in, making it a special place in his mind. There, he uncovered many senseless killings that took place. Luckily, that was all behind him now.

Gordon's role was similar to that of Johnson's. He became an undercover high ranking commander of the Maine State Police in order to uncover any corruption within the state, as well as the political field.

This upcoming meeting between the two was strictly business, as it's been a few years

since they've seen or spoken to each other. Sheriff Johnson was wondering how the meeting might go seeing how they would be working together again. *Boy, the rain sure is coming down hard*, Johnson thought to himself as his wipers struggled to keep up with the heavy rain on his truck's windshield. As his faithful companion, Johnson's truck served many purposes: it was his office, his crime lab, his patrol vehicle, and what he drove during recreational activities. For now, it acted as his protection against the storm, gliding along Route 95 at 55 miles per hour due to the low visibility of the road. *WHOOSH*. Suddenly, a souped-up new style black Mustang went flying by Johnson's truck, which made Johnson think he was going backwards.

Johnson was startled, but he managed to get a few letters of the license plate before reaching down to turn on his police lights. He stopped short of turning them on and thought, *Why bother? I'll never catch him safely in this rain*. He decided to let the Mustang go. He wrote the three letters of the plate he happened to catch down on his window pad SMT. About 15 miles later, Johnson saw hazy flashing red lights through the rain, which made him believe that the Mustang that blew by him earlier may have wrecked and required attention. He stopped

behind the vehicle and approached it. It was a Subaru Forester with New Hampshire plates – not the Mustang he expected.

A female passenger of the Subaru got out and frantically ran to Johnson's driver-side window. Johnson rolled down his window while she yelled, "SOME CRAZY FOOL RAN US OFF THE ROAD AND CAUSED US TO GET A FLAT TIRE! MY HUSBAND CAN'T GET THE TIRE OFF TO CHANGE IT! CAN YOU PLEASE HELP US?!"

Johnson told the woman to get out of the road and go to the passenger side of his truck. She did as instructed and climbed inside. She was an older woman – about late-60s – and in good shape. He looked at her and said, "Stay put. I'll be right back!"

Johnson grabbed his duster as he got out of his truck and put it on. He made his way to the broken-down vehicle. He approached it with caution, which was usual for federal marshals, and looked through the car windows intently. He saw a man holding his right hand who looked to be in pain. Johnson tapped on the window and said, "You O.K. in there?"

The man rolled his window down and said, "Sorry – I hurt my hand trying to get the lug nuts off my car." Johnson looked at the man's hand, which was bleeding but appeared to just

be scraped.

Johnson looked back at the man. “Okay. Come back to my truck. I have more room and an emergency first aid kit. We’ll fix you up, get your tire changed, and send you on your way.”

“Are you a State Trooper?” the man asked.

“No, sir. I’m a sheriff. And you are...”

“Ken. Ken Lavelle. You met my wife Barbra. We are from New Hampshire.”

“Yes, I know. I read your plate. Come on, Mr. Lavelle, sit in my backseat and I’ll fix you up.”

Mrs. Lavelle was fuming at the thought of the car that flew by, forcing them off the road and blowing a tire. She noticed something in the backseat of the sheriff’s large four-door truck. “Sheriff, is that a coffee maker?”

Johnson looked up from tending to Mr. Lavelle’s hand. “Why, yes. It is. It’s always on – do you want a cup?”

Mrs. Lavelle laughed. “You’re kidding, right?”

“Heck no!” Johnson exclaimed before grabbing a paper coffee cup and filling it up for her. “You guys relax and enjoy the coffee. I’ll go change your tire. I insist. The rain is coming down hard and you will be safer in here.”

Mr. and Mrs. Lavelle agreed to Johnson’s

generosity. Johnson hit a switch to turn on four bright spotlights that made the Subaru glow like daylight.

While Johnson was playing with the tire, he couldn't help but wonder about the idiot in the Mustang. After the tire was finished, he put away his tools and got back in his truck. They enjoyed some coffee and staying out of the rain before Johnson asked, "Did you happen to get the license plate number, by any chance?"

"Sorry, we didn't. But we do know it was a loud black car," answered Mrs. Lavelle.

"That's fine. Thank you. Okay! You two can get on your way. Please drive careful."

They both thanked Johnson and prepared for their drive. Johnson cleaned his hands, poured another cup of coffee, and headed back up what seemed to be a deserted highway, thanks to the rain.

2

OLD BUDDY

Sheriff Johnson pulled into the Bangor State Police Headquarters and laughed to himself. *Yep, parking lot full. Have to park half a mile away from the door. Gotta love the rain,* he thought to himself. He entered through the main entrance and walked up to the desk.

“Hey, Sergeant! I’m here to-”

“Is this an emergency, sir?” the sergeant interrupted.

Taken aback, Johnson replied, “No, not at all.”

“Then go take a seat and I-”

“It is official business I have with Commander Gordon. He’s expecting me,” Johnson stated, figuring it was his turn to interrupt.

“Name?”

“Sheriff Patrick Johnson.”

The sergeant looked up at Johnson. “Of Sandy Creek?”

“Yes, that’s me. Or should I say it was me. I’m the new sheriff of Top County now.”

“I heard you resigned from Sandy Creek to take over the sheriff position, considering the last one committed suicide.”

“That’s enough!” bellowed a stern voice from a distant doorway. There stood a tall man. “Pat! Come on in, old buddy!”

Johnson gave the sergeant a look and walked into a sprawling plush office. He looked around and smirked, “You always did like the finer things in life, Joe.”

They shook hands before Gordon let out a hearty laugh and said, “And you never liked to spend money. I see you still have that old truck of yours! I watched you pull in.”

“Nothing wrong with her! The old girl does everything I need her to do.”

“Ah, Pat, old buddy. You will never change. Have a seat. You need coffee or a little snort of the good stuff?”

“Coffee is fine, Joe. I still have a long way to drive and want to get there by nighttime. By the way, I have a hard time believing Sheriff Taylor committed suicide.”

“Pat, my boy, it was a shock to all of us that

knew him. But things change – men change – and he was hitting the bottle pretty hard. Something was bothering him. Who knows what, but it finally caught up with him. It's as simple as that. I would know – I went up there two days ago. The same day it happened. I looked at everything, processed the crime scene where he went off the road, and even checked any open cases he had pending. And nothing! I mean nothing stuck out or looked suspicious! Pat, it's a senseless tragedy, but it's valid and the case is closed! Tell me, my boy, why do you want to go up to Top County anyway? I know you were born there, but God O' Mighty, it's just a few small towns stuck out in the middle of nowhere. The crime is nothing but a few speeders, out-of-town drunks, and some domestics. Nothing will peak your interest for long!"

"Well, Joe, you may be right, but I look forward to a little break. I want to get my parents' old farm and house up-and-running again! Maybe get some hammock time!"

Gordon laughed at that. "Okay, my boy, have fun being bored!"

Johnson finished his coffee before saying, "Joe, I better get going. Do you have the report on Sheriff Taylor's accident?"

"Yes – it's right here. It's a copy, so you

can keep it.”

“Thanks, Joe.” Johnson put on his duster, shook Gordon’s hand, and walked toward the door. He stopped, turned around, and gave Gordon a puzzled look.

“What is it, boy?” Gordon questioned, having seen the look before.

Johnson looked Gordon in the eye and said, “You called it a crime scene.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You said you processed the crime scene. The crime scene?”

“Pat, that was just a slip of the tongue, my boy. Just a simple slip of the tongue.”

“Yeah, I guess so.” Johnson turned toward the door, and then back to Gordon. “Joe, why did you investigate Sheriff Taylor’s death? Why not just let his deputy do it?”

“Because he was a good man and I knew he was a friend of yours. I wanted to make sure everything was on the up-and-up because you’re my friend, as well. I didn’t want a news frenzy. Plus, Deputy Yerkes requested an outside investigation.”

Johnson processed Gordon’s words for a moment. “Sounds right to me. Good call for the deputy.”

“Drive safe, Pat. If you have any questions, I’m just a phone call away.”

Johnson gave Gordon a nod and walked out of the office, toward the lobby. He walked over to the sergeant's desk and said, "Have a good shift, Sergeant!"

"Sheriff! Who was this Sheriff Taylor anyways?" asked the sergeant. "He must have been pretty important to get Commander Gordon to fly up to Top County to investigate."

"Just an old friend, is all," replied Johnson.

"Ah, that's why the call went straight to Gordon's office!"

Johnson gave the same puzzled look as before. "So Deputy Yerkes called Gordon directly?"

"I have no idea who called him, but he sure did rush out of here."

"Do you know what time that was?"

"Yes, I do. We keep time records of all incoming and outgoing personal and professional calls. Let's see... it was at 1600. Why? Is that important?"

"No, not at all. I was just wondering how fast the arrival time was," Johnson stated before thanking the sergeant and making a note of his name tag. *Sergeant Mallon*. Johnson headed to his truck.

When Johnson stepped outside, it was no longer raining and the sky was clearing up. He

hoped he could make up some lost time and get to Top County before night fall. He looked at his watch and noted it was four in the afternoon. He jumped into his truck and headed north.

Johnson was anxious to get to Top County. He hated unfinished business and wanted to put Sheriff Taylor's case to rest so he could settle into his new life. He couldn't help but wonder what the condition of the old homestead he grew up in was. His parents willed him a massive farm house with over 12 rooms and one large barn with several smaller ones spread out over 1,400 acres of land. There was even a half-mile long driveway. It had been years since he last saw the place.

Johnson's mind quickly drifted back to Sheriff Taylor. He thought about how he was able to get the job for Sheriff Taylor and his wife Mrs. Taylor. It was a dream retirement job for them after the hustle-and-bustle of being a cop and living in New York City for over 20 years. New York was no piece of cake to work in as a detective in the homicide division, so two years earlier when Johnson's childhood buddy Simon gave him the call about going back to Top County to fill the sheriff position, Johnson passed it along to Taylor.

Johnson chuckled to himself at the

memory of Mrs. Taylor yelling in the background of the phone conversation. "HE'LL TAKE IT! HE'LL TAKE IT!"

Damn, they were both so happy to move up north and buy that log cabin on 15 acres of land, Johnson thought to himself. What the hell happened in two years? What went so terribly wrong that Sheriff Taylor turned to drinking and eventually committed suicide? It doesn't make sense.

Johnson took an exit off of Route 95, leading him straight into Top County. He took in all of the beautiful yet rugged landscape and noted that not too much had changed. He was on the last stretch of road before entering the first town – a long downward descent with a view of a welcome sign. His mind filled with memories as he pulled up to the Top County Sheriff's Department, which was attached to the town hall. He looked at his watch. 8pm. He wrote it down in his little notepad and did the math. *Let's see: the sergeant said Gordon left at 1600, which is 4pm. That's the same time I left. It's now 8pm. That's four hours of driving.*

Before he could finish his thought, Johnson saw the little diner across the street was still open. He decided to get a bite to eat instead of heading into his office.

Johnson walked over to the diner and couldn't believe that it had the same name as it

did when he was a kid. *I'll be darned – it's still Grub & Stuff.* Just as Johnson reached for the diner's door, the open sign turned off. "You've got to be kidding me!" Johnson yelled to the old man inside.

The man turned around and saw Johnson. He unlocked the door and asked, "Can I help you?"

"I see you closed down early, but I was just looking for some dinner to go if you have anything," Johnson answered.

The old man grumbled, "Come on in. I can fix you some soup, chicken, and a buttered roll to go."

"Thank you, sir! I really appreciate it!"

"How many?" snarled the old man.

"Excuse me, sir?"

"Chicken. How many pieces?"

"Oh, four would be nice. And a couple of rolls, too, please!"

While Johnson was waiting, he looked around the diner at all of the old pictures on the walls. He saw one that he remembered. It was of him and his father years ago, delivering potatoes to the diner. Johnson was just a young child. He began to get emotional and reached up to touch the picture.

Suddenly the old man came out from the back. "Here you go, Sheriff."

Johnson spun around to face the old man.
“How did you know...”

“Son, I never forget good people. Your dad was the most honest, hardworking man I ever knew. You should be proud.”

“I am. You knew my dad?”

The old man burst out in a hearty laugh. “Sheriff, I’m the old man in the picture! Right there!” he said as he pointed to a third figure in the photograph. “That’s right – it’s me. Hell, I was old then.”

Johnson looked at him with amazement. “You’re Mr. Hammond? You must be 100 years old by now!”

The old man laughed again before saying, “No, boy. I’m only 92 now. Hush on out of here. I want to close up and go home. We will talk another time.” He handed Johnson a heavy bag full of food and said, “It’s free tonight. Now scoot.”

Johnson nodded his thanks and headed back out to his truck.

3

HOME

Johnson pulled into his long driveway and was partially blinded by the truck headlights shining off the mailbox sporting his last name, minus the “JOH.” He laughed to himself, *Guess I’m Patrick Nson now!* He was tired from his long trip, but a flood of memories entered his mind and kept him awake. The big red barn came into focus through the overgrown tree limbs bouncing off his mirrors, making the driveway appear like more of a trail than anything. Then the sprawling farm house came into view. It was a welcome sight even though the rag-tag paint condition was in need of serious repair. Johnson saw a pickup in the yard and a light glowing out of the bulkhead that led to the basement. *What do you know – Mr. Auld must be here!*

Mr. Auld was the oldest of Johnson's closest friends and a neighbor who lived down the road. He was the town's fix-it man and made a good living doing odd jobs for people, among other things. Johnson hired him to get the electricity, water, and heat turned back on before he got there so the place would at least be livable until he could start refurbishing and remodeling it.

Johnson walked down the stairs, leading him to the basement through the outside bulkhead. "Hi, Mr. Auld!"

Mr. Auld jumped back and said in a state of surprise, "Jesus chicken shit, boy! You know how to take a few years off a man!"

"Sorry, Mr. Auld, I didn't mean to startle you."

"Bob. Call me Bob. Patrick, my boy, it's good to see you again! You look well," he said as he sucked down half a smoke before going into a coughing attack. "So," he said while hacking, "you're the," *cough*, "new sheriff in," *cough*, "town now?"

"Yes, sir, I am. How are you making out with the house, Bob?"

"Well, kid, I got most of the plumbing fixed. You have hot and cold running water in the kitchen, but just cold water in the first floor bathroom, and none in the other two yet. I just

got the heat on, but this old boiler is in bad shape. It might make the winter. Electricity is all good, but it could use an update. It all works except the old backup generator won't start. I brought you a cord of wood for the fireplace if the boiler goes down or for when you lose electricity, which happens a lot around these parts."

Johnson gave a hearty laugh. "I remember that well!"

Bob laughed with him. "Well, kid, I'll be back tomorrow to finish the plumbing and to give you my bill to date. Would you like any more firewood?"

"Yes, about six more cords, if you got it."

Bob looked happy for the business, "You bet, kid! I'll have it here by the end of the week. But now I'll say goodnight. These old bones aren't used to staying up this late."

Johnson walked Bob to his truck. "Have a good night, Bob. And thank you."

"You bet, kid! Welcome back."

Bob drove off and Johnson went into the house for the first time in 20 years. He looked around and thought, *Yikes! Time has not been good to this old house.* It was getting late, so Johnson sat on the chair at the kitchen table – the same chair he sat on growing up as a child. He cleared off a spot on the table and ate his food

from the diner. “Dang, that was some good eating,” he thought out loud. He proceeded to his father’s old study and was amazed to see everything still there, untouched by time. He picked up a picture of his mother and father as he sat in his father’s big lounge chair. He wiped off the dust from the picture and ran his fingers gently over the glass frame.

Suddenly, there was a faint knock on the kitchen door. The knock got louder as Johnson began to stir and wake up from his sleep.

“HEY! HEY KID! YOU IN THERE?” screamed the voice on the other side of the door.

Johnson recognized the voice as that of Bob’s. He looked at his watch and mumbled, “Are you kidding me? It’s 5am.” He got up and let Bob into the kitchen.

“Morning, kid! Were you sleeping?”

“Something like that... Bob, you sure are an early riser.”

Bob started to laugh, but went into a coughing attack instead. He handed Johnson a coffee cup and said, “Here, kid. I picked this up at the diner this morning. Figured you might need it.”

Johnson gave a look to Bob and said, “Well, you thought right!” He savored a few sips. “*Ah*, now that’s better.”

Bob handed Johnson a piece of paper with some numbers on it.

“What’s this?”

“It’s my bill to date. I like to keep things square and even as we go along, kid.”

Johnson looked at the paper. “\$150? Bob, this can’t be right.”

“Well, that’s the bill! And there’s no way I’m lowering it, so don’t try your city slicker shit on me, boy!” Bob said robustly.

“Lower?” Johnson said with confusion. “Bob, it’s too low for all the work you been doing around here!”

“Nonsense, kid! It gives an old lonely guy a purpose! I’m more than glad to do it.” He grabbed the paper out of Johnson’s hand and scabbled a new price down. “There, happy now?”

Johnson read the paper and laughed, “Okay, Bob. You win. \$155, it is. Cash or check?”

“Cash, my boy, cash.”

Johnson reached into his pockets and pulled out some crumpled up money and counted it. “Bob, here’s \$135. I’ll get you the other \$20 later.”

“Fine, fine, my boy,” Bob said as he grabbed the money. Then he mumbled, “I got work to do. See you later, kid.”

Johnson went into the kitchen and looked around. He was happy to see everything was still intact and all the furnishings were still in good shape. He took a quick look around at all of the updates the house needed. He jotted down a few things and plugged the refrigerator in. *Wow*, thought Johnson, *it started! Now to see if it gets cold!* He looked at the time and began to get ready for his meeting with his friend Simon Moreau at the station.

Johnson waved bye to Bob and headed out to the station. He got to the end of his driveway just in time to see a black Mustang go roaring past. “I’ll be damned! It’s my highway buddy! I’ll check on you later – I have business to attend to right now,” Johnson mumbled to himself.

He pulled up to the Top County Sheriff’s Department. He looked straight at Mayberry – a small building attached to the side of town hall – and chuckled. “It’s aged, but it’s well kept.”

4

POLICE STATION

“Hey, old buddy!” Johnson heard behind him. He spun around to see his old friend, Simon Moreau. Simon looked tall and rugged, showing signs of wear. He was still a very formidable man at 53 years old. Simon worked as the Top County Fire Marshal, meaning he was in tip-top shape. He was also the chairperson of the town committee.

“You old son of a bitch! You haven’t changed a bit. Except maybe a little uglier!” Johnson replied.

Simon laughed and fired back, “I see you still wear that want-to-be cowboy hat! And you still drive that beat up old truck! Don’t sheriffing pay enough?”

“Ha-ha. Don’t let the old girl fool you – she still gets the job done!”

They shook hands and said, “Good to see ya again” at the same time.

“Pat, I see your grip is as strong as ever,” Simon said.

“And you’re still tall!”

Simon’s face got serious. “Wish it was under better terms, my friend.”

Johnson’s face switched to its typical curious state. “Better terms? Do you mean because of the passing of Sheriff Taylor?”

“Pat, it’s more than that. There is some weird shit happening around here lately.”

“I figured something was up because you pushed awfully hard to get me to take the sheriff position. Why don’t you start at the beginning?”

“Okay, Pat. I do not believe Sheriff Taylor committed suicide. I can’t tell you why I feel this way – I just do. For one, why was the fire station and rescue called in after the state police? They were on scene 20 minutes before we even got the call, according to the police dispatch logs. That seems odd, very odd, to me.”

“I don’t know why, but I will look into it. It could be because a police officer was killed and they wanted to secure the scene. How did you get to look at the police dispatch log?”

“I asked Betty.”

“Betty? The police dispatcher?”

“Yes, Pat. She is good people and was very upset over Sheriff Taylor’s sudden death.”

“Anything else, Simon?”

“Yes. My department has had a rash of unexplained fires in old, abandoned barns and buildings that are way out in the woods. These structures are pretty much forgotten by the locals. The strange thing is that the fires are set to completely destroy any signs of accelerant being used, along with anything that was inside the buildings.”

“In other words, it’s not kids playing with matches?”

“Exactly.”

“Okay, Simon. Does anyone else know about how you feel?”

“No, I kept it to myself until you got here. I figured you would want it that way.”

“Okay, let’s try and keep it that way for now.”

“You got it, Pat. Well, we should head in before the welcoming committee shows up.”

Just then, a familiar engine sound came roaring by. A black Mustang came into view. “Hmm, a souped-up Mustang is rare in these parts. Who owns it?”

Simon shrugged. “I have no idea, but I’ve seen it around a few times. Why?”

“No reason – I just think it’s odd.”

Johnson and Simon walked into the town hall, proceeded down a hallway to the third door on the right, and walked in. There were two desks facing each other and a small jail cell on the side of the door. Johnson thought to himself, *You got to be kidding.*

Simon must have noticed Johnson’s eyes because he said, “What do you think, Pat?”

“I have seen bigger broom closets than this station.”

Simon chuckled and walked around a corner to unlock another door to a much bigger room. There was a large mahogany desk full of clutter: pictures of Sheriff Taylor and his wife, a thermos, a coffee cup, and scattered files. Also in the room were books on the bookshelf, Sheriff Taylor’s spare uniform, and other personal items.

Simon looked at Johnson. “Looks like he’s coming right back, doesn’t it?”

Johnson nodded.

“Pat, it’s untouched just like you asked. Been locked since the day he died.”

“I’m glad you called me when you were at the accident scene so we could preserve the only pieces of evidence we might have,” Johnson responded

“I knew something wasn’t right. Anyways,

I changed the locks like you asked and didn't touch anything. But let me tell you – boy, did it piss off Deputy Yerkes. Betty understood, but Yerkes went wild. At least the council has the final say in things when it comes to the absence of the sheriff.”

“Speaking of Deputy Yerkes, where is he?”

“Out on patrol. He knows a replacement sheriff is coming in today and he isn't too happy about that. He thinks the job should have gone to him.”

Johnson looked down at Sheriff Taylor's desk and asked, “Any reason why he should not have gotten the job? He is acting sheriff right now, right?”

“Yes, Pat. But he is young and wet behind the ears. Of course he knows everything, but he has only been in law enforcement for three years.”

Johnson laughed. “Yeah, I know the type. Did Commander Gordon come down to the station when he showed up to look into Taylor's accident?”

“No. He flew into the accident scene and talked with the state trooper who was already on the scene.”

“And what time was that, about?”

“I noted the time in my log book. It was 6:15pm on the dot. Why?”

“Never mind that for now, Simon. Tell me what time the accident took place.”

“Taylor radio’d in for help at exactly 4:30pm, according to Betty. Why? What’s with needing all these times? What are you thinking?”

“Nothing. Nothing at all. Just trying to get a time frame of how things unfolded. That’s all there is to it, Simon. Tell me, why is the station in the town hall? What happened to the side building where it used to be?”

“Roof leaked really bad one night and when the workers came to look at it, they said the walls were full of asbestos. The town didn’t want to spend the money to clean it out and redo the station.”

Johnson just gave his typical look and mumbled, “Wonderful.”

An older, well-kept woman walked into the office and paused for a moment. Her eyes started to tear up.

Johnson looked at her and said to Simon, “I don’t believe I’ve had the pleasure of meeting your friend.”

“Please excuse me – I have not been in this office since... since...” she started to say.

Simon jumped in with, “Now, now Betty, it’s okay. I know you and Sheriff Taylor were good friends, but I would like you to meet a

very good friend of mine. Top County's new sheriff, Patrick Johnson. Pat, meet your-" Simon paused. "-well... everything. Betty does it all around here. From dispatching to processing and everything in between."

Johnson walked over and shook Betty's hand. "Sorry about the loss of your friend. I know you liked him very much and he liked you just as much. Every time I talked with him, he mentioned how wonderful you are, Betty. He was a very good friend to me, as well. I hope you can give me a chance to fill his shoes, and I hope you stay on as the dispatcher because I'm going to need all of the help I can get. I can't think of a better person than you, Betty."

Betty was relieved by the gentleness and calmness of Johnson's voice. With tear-filled eyes, she said, "Oh, yes! I want to stay on! I love this job and Sheriff Taylor always said you were- are, I should say, a good man. I'm sure you will be a great sheriff. He told me when he moves on, you would more than likely be his replacement - he just never told me how ruggedly handsome you are. Boy, I wish I was younger," Betty said with a grin.

Johnson said, "Well, Betty, I do believe you made me blush."

They all laughed. Betty jumped to her work

mode and said, "Okay, fellas, I'm gonna let you talk. I'll go get the coffee on and check on Deputy Yerkes"

"Pat, that was very nice how you calmed Betty. She really is good people and an asset to Top County."

"Thank you. What's Betty's last name?"

"Truman. Betty Ann Truman."

Johnson looked surprised. "Do you mean Frank Truman's daughter?"

"That's correct. As you know, after the Trumans' divorce, Betty moved with Mrs. Truman to Connecticut."

"Yes, I think I remember that. I was just around 10 or 11."

"Well, jump ahead a few years after you left for your stint in the military: Betty moved back after she found her mother dead of a prescription overdose. She figured there was no reason to stay in Connecticut. Plus, Mr. Truman needed the help for his logging operation. *Shhh*, here she comes."

Johnson nodded.

Betty entered the office. "Sheriff, how do you take your coffee?"

"Four creams, Betty. And please call me Pat."

"Okay, Pat, I will. Unless it's police business."

Johnson laughed. “Fair enough, Betty.”

“I got to get back to the fire station,” said Simon. “Pat, I’ll catch up with you later.”

Johnson and Betty said bye, and Simon left.

Johnson walked around Sheriff Taylor’s old office imagining it as his new office. He felt out of place. The first thing he noticed was that there was no booze anywhere to be found. Nothing was out of sorts, not even in the reports made right up until the day of his death. *Hardly the sign of a drunk whose life was crumbling around him*, Johnson thought to himself.

Then Betty burst through the door with Johnson’s coffee and some boxes. “Where do you want to start packing?”

“Just set my coffee and the boxes down on my desk. I need to ask you a question that might upset you. But I have no choice. Did Sheriff Taylor drink?”

Betty looked at Johnson with that don’t-fuck-with-my-friend look and quipped, “Yes, a very little at home. To help him sleep. He loved his wife and I’m afraid they may have been having troubles. It was hard for him to sleep, so he had a small amount of whiskey to relax at night.” Then with force, she said, “And NEVER, EVER on the job.”

Johnson decided not to push the issue any

further. “Thank you, Betty. Please close the door on your way out. I would like to go through the office before we start packing his stuff up.”

Betty was quick to say, “I understand. I’ll be at my desk if you need me.” As Betty was closing the door, she said in a quiet voice, “Thank you, Pat.”

“For what, Betty?”

“Believing in him.”

Johnson nodded, then heard a loud rumble coming from outside. He looked out of the window to see the black Mustang driving really slow past the town hall, revving the engine. Johnson thought, *Sounds good – a lot more engine than any money around here could buy. My little black Mustang, I will see you soon – you can bet on that.*

Johnson took a seat at his new desk and looked around. “Okay, buddy, talk to me. What did you leave for me as a clue,” he said aloud. He reached for his coffee cup and spun it around to reach the handle, understanding that Betty placed it that way on the desk because she was facing the other direction. He then looked at Sheriff Taylor’s coffee cup, which was half-full with the handle facing away from him. Johnson got an odd feeling and wondered, *Why would the handle be facing away from him?* He smelled the coffee for any hint of

booze. *None. That's a good start.* He decided to bag the cup so he could dust it for prints later.

He noticed a lot of newspaper clippings from the time Taylor busted a king pin drug lord about 10 years ago in New Mexico when he was about to retire from the NYPD detective department. It was the last case he was working on and it brought him all the way down to that state. In fact, it was Taylor's direct testimony that put the drug lord away for life. The last clipping in the pile read, "DRUG LORD TORRINGTON DELL SENTENCED TO LIFE, PUT AWAY BY A RETIRING DETECTIVE FROM NEW YORK CITY, DETECTIVE ANDREW TAYLOR. DELL THREATENED REVENGE AGAINST TAYLOR AS HE WAS LED AWAY FROM THE COURT ROOM IN SHACKLES."

Johnson thought it was odd for the old clippings to be out. He decided it was something he should look into. He picked up the phone to call a friend in the marshal's office, but a little voice in his head told him to hang up. He got up and walked over to the door. He looked through the peep hole and saw a clear shot of both desks. He returned to his desk and muted his cell phone ringer. He called his cell phone with his desk phone, put

down the receiver, and walked back to the peep hole to see Betty notice the extension light glowing. She slowly picked up the receiver and put her hand over the mouth piece to listen. “Shit,” Johnson said aloud before he hung up his cell phone and watched as Betty looked right at the door.

Great. She’s either nosy or corrupt, thought Johnson. On second thought, *No, she’s pissed about Taylor’s passing and wants answers. Yeah, I’ll go with that one for now.* Johnson headed back to his desk and checked out the rest of the room. He found nothing out of the ordinary. He did a microphone sweep for electronic bugs – nothing. Johnson called in Betty to his office. “Betty, let’s box this stuff up, label it, and put it in the police holding area.”

Betty laughed. “That would be the broom closet.”

Johnson also laughed. “Okay, will it all fit?”

“Yes, it will fit. It’s a big broom closet.”

“Well then let’s get it done, Betty. I’m getting hungry!”

It took them about an hour to finish. After they were done, Johnson asked Betty, “You want anything from the diner?”

“No, Pat. I bring my own lunch. You go enjoy yourself,” Betty answered.

“Ten-four, Betty.”

5

DINER

Johnson walked across the street to Grub & Stuff. When he got through the door, he immediately noticed he was the center of attention. “Small towns,” he mumbled. He grabbed a seat at the end table that faces the door and sat down. The waitress walked over to Johnson. She looked to be about 40 years old, 5’5” tall, 135lbs, and had red hair.

“May I help you?” she asked.

Johnson gave her a smile and looked at her name tag. “Yes, you may, Tim.”

She gave him a dirty look. “It’s Timber! Not Tim.”

He gave her a smug look back and pointed at her name tag. “Well I’ll be damned! The ‘ber’ fell off!” he laughed. “I know the feeling.”

“Oh, and how’s that?!” she quipped back.

“A story for another time. I’m hungry!” Johnson replied. Timber handed him a menu and he handed it right back to her. “I’ll have two BLT’s with mayo and pepper. No salt. And a coffee, please!”

“Coming right up, cowboy.”

Johnson was reading the placemat when Timber came back with his coffee. “So, cowboy, you’re the new sheriff in town?”

“Yes, I am. How did you know?”

“Oh, a little birdie told me,” she said with a twinkle.

“Tim, do me a favor and tell Mr. Hammond that the chicken was fantastic.”

“Glad you liked it! Because I made it!”

“Well, it was mmmm-mmmmm good!”

Timber smiled and said, “Be back in a few with your BLT’s. Oh! Would you like a pickle and chips with that?”

Johnson nodded.

Suddenly there was a loud screeching sound from two chairs being pushed back. The culprits were two large men getting up from their table. They walked over to Johnson and one of them said, “So you’re the new sheriff in town, huh?”

“Don’t look like much of a sheriff, Willy,” said the other one.

“Why Wally, I think you’re right.” They

both laughed.

Johnson looked down at his placemat and wasn't amused, but he hid it well. "May I help you two with something?"

"Yeah, you an old drunk like that old geezer Taylor was?"

Johnson glanced around the diner and could tell the people were uneasy with these two. He knew he had to refrain from going overboard. He got up slowly, put his head between theirs and whispered, "No, I'm a fucking trigger-happy nut job that does not appreciate when two fucktards try to ruin my lunch."

He sat back down and pulled his gun out enough so only the two men could see it.

They backed off and Wally said, "Come on, Willy, let's get out of here."

As they left, Timber brought over Johnson's lunch and asked, "Friends of yours, Sheriff?"

"Nope, not yet," he replied.

"So, cowboy, you find a place to stay yet?"

"Yes, I'm all set! I'm moving back into my old house – the Johnson Farm."

Timber looked puzzled. "That's been empty for years. Are the deceased Johnsons your parents?"

Johnson stood up, threw a \$20 bill on the

table, and nodded. Then he said, "Can you box this, please?"

Timber could see he was slightly agitated by her question. "Yes, I'll be right back." She walked to the back and returned with his food all ready to go. "Here you go, cowboy."

While Johnson was walking toward the door, a couple of patrons said, "Welcome home, Sheriff!"

He nodded back to them and then heard Timber shout, "HEY! YOU GOT A FIRST NAME?"

Johnson paused for a second, turned around, and walked out while saying, "YEAH, IT'S PATRICK."

After he left, Mr. Hammond came out from the back of the diner and said, "Timber, I've seen that look before."

"What look might that be, Mel?" asked Timber with a glow.

An elderly couple known as the Tuttle looked up. Mrs. Tuttle smiled and said, "Timber, that's the same look I gave Mr. Tuttle the first time I laid eyes on him. That was 55 years ago."

Timber bunched up and let out an *aaarrgghh* before saying, "I got dishes to do."

Back at the station, Johnson was asking Betty about the whereabouts of Deputy

Yerkes. "I would like to meet and speak with him."

"Sheriff, he's on patrol up north. Would you like me to call him back to the station?"

"No, just relay that I want him in the office at 8am tomorrow. Do you know anything about where my police radio for my truck might be?"

"No, sir, but I will get right on it!"

"Thanks, Betty. I'm heading out. I have a few things to do. Just call my cell phone if you need to reach me. Other than that, I will see you tomorrow."

"Will do, Sheriff. See you later!"

Johnson headed out toward his house while eating his BLT's. He caught himself thinking about Timber. They were good thoughts – the kind that made him wonder if she was single. He laughed to himself and thought, *First day in town and already smitten*. He pulled into his driveway carefully, maneuvering the steering wheel to avoid knocking off his mirrors with the overgrown trees. *Dang, I got to get them cut soon*.

He parked his truck and took a little walk around the once-manicured yard. Now it looked like a wild hayfield that time forgot about. He pried open the door that used to be the one to the garage, where everything got

fixed. He remembered how much time he spent in there back in the day. He was amazed that everything was still in place – not a single tool missing!

“Mr. Auld sure is a good neighbor,” Johnson said aloud. He closed the door and headed to the house to see it in the daylight and make a battle plan on its rehab.

He found himself drifting back in thought to the diner and that pretty little redhead. *Boy, she sure looked good*, he thought to himself. Then he snapped back to the task at hand: housework. He cleared a spot on the living room table so he could at least have a place to eat. He grabbed a Narragansett beer out of the fridge, cracked it open, and sat at the table before quickly drifting off in thought again.

Suddenly Johnson’s cell phone rang. “Hello, Sheriff Johnson!” said the voice on the other end. It sounded like a very excited Betty.

“May I help you?”

“It’s Betty! Deputy Yerkes is requesting backup at the old log mill off of Old Log Mill Road. Do you know where that is?”

“Yes, it’s off of Timber Wood Road.”

“Yes! Ten-four and code one, Sheriff.”

“On my way. And Betty – any word on my radio and scanner?”

“Not yet, sir. But I’m on it.”

6

OLD LOG MILL

Sheriff Johnson made record time to the old log mill. *Shit*, he thought to himself, *this place was creepy when I was a kid, but now it's downright scary*. He saw Deputy Yerkes' patrol vehicle and pulled up next to it. He did a quick scan of the area, saw nothing alarming, and got out of his truck to check out Yerkes' vehicle. He saw the key still in the ignition. *That's odd. Better call Betty.*

“Hello?”

“Hey, Betty! It's Pat.”

“Is everything alright?!” she asked hurriedly.

“Yes, Betty – so good so far. Now shush and listen. Text me Yerkes' cell phone number immediately. But, Betty, do not attempt to contact Yerkes. I'll explain later. Ten-four?”

“Ten-four, Sheriff. Text is on its way.”

Johnson received the text and entered Yerkes’ contact information into his phone. He made sure his ringer was turned off as he headed into the main entrance of the mill.

The mill had been abandoned for many years, and time was beginning to win along with mother nature. He spotted the administration building and headed for it. When he got to the door, he noticed it had been pushed open recently. He could tell because the old ceiling tiles that fell behind the closed door had been pushed back by the opening of the door.

Johnson knew nothing about Deputy Yerkes, except for what he was told from Simon, which wasn’t much. Other than that, he only knew about Yerkes’ report on Sheriff Taylor’s death. His head was filled with what-ifs and *Why meet out here?*

Johnson yelled, “DEPUTY YERKES! IT’S SHERIFF JOHNSON!” But nothing – no response.

Johnson proceeded further into the building and yelled out for Yerkes three more times. “Okay, plan B,” he said to himself. He took out his phone and called Yerkes. He listened for a ringtone. He eventually heard something coming from another part of the

mill. He made his way there cautiously until he heard the ringing stop. A voicemail picked up on his end of the line, keeping Johnson on full alert. All of his senses kicked in that something was wrong.

Johnson called Yerkes' cell again and listened. The ringer was louder, so he knew he was closer. The ringing stopped just as he came to a closed door. He looked at it, top to bottom. He saw spider webs, telling him that the door had not been opened in quite some time. *Either there's another way in, or it's a trap,* Johnson thought. *Ah, screw it.* Johnson kicked the door open with full force. The room was well-lit from all the windows on the back wall, but it was empty. Nothing but garbage. Johnson knew the ringing came from inside the room, so he assumed Yerkes was playing games.

He decided to call Yerkes again. It started ringing from inside the room. With a quick search, Johnson found the cell phone on the crud-covered floor. *Did Yerkes drop his phone by mistake?*

Johnson picked up the phone and crawled through a busted window opposed to the way he came. He had a hunch that it was the right way to go. He ended up in a small courtyard that seemed to once be a lunch area. He saw a

flashing light across the yard, so he walked toward it with his gun drawn. He saw a man lying on the ground motionless. The area seemed clear, and the body seemed to be that of Yerkes.

The man was bleeding from the back of his head. He was alive. Johnson looked at the wound and chalked it up to Yerkes taking a good hit to the noggin. A quick search of the man's wallet assured Johnson that this was the body of Deputy Yerkes. Johnson attempted to wake him up. Eventually, Yerkes started his journey back from la-la-land.

"Welcome back, Deputy. How many fingers am I holding up?"

Yerkes was still groggy. He whined out, "Four."

"Well, Deputy, that's right. Now come on! Let's get you to your feet so we can get out of here before it gets dark."

They made their way back to the vehicles. Yerkes seemed to be coming around good at this point. Johnson pulled a camping chair and first aid kit out from behind his truck. "Here, Deputy, take a seat while I tend to your wound."

Yerkes complied and Johnson cleaned him up and bandaged the wound. "There! How you feeling?"

“Not too bad. But I feel like I was hit with a 10lb hammer. I could use a coffee.”

“Coming right up!” Johnson went into the back of his truck and poured two coffees. He handed one to Yerkes.

“Wow, this is still hot. One hell of a thermos, Sheriff Johnson – I presume.”

“You presume right! And no thermos – I have a built-in coffee maker in my truck.”

Yerkes peaked in the truck. “I’ll be damned! You do!”

They both laughed before Johnson said, “Okay, time to get you to the hospital to have your head looked at.”

Yerkes jumped up. “Fuck that! I have had worse snowmobiling!”

“Sit back down and rest for a bit. Tell me what the hell you were doing out here and who slugged you.”

“So you’re the famous Sheriff Johnson, huh? Heard a lot about you. Pretty good cop from what I understand.”

“I do my job. That’s about it. Nothing more, nothing less. Now let’s get back to why you were out here. Can’t be routine patrol this far out.”

Yerkes took a sip of coffee. “No – not usually. But we have been having a rash of unexplained fires with abandoned, out-of-the-

way mills and barns lately. So I've been poking around this one a little."

"Yes, I heard about the fires from the fire chief. Go on."

"Well, I got here and noticed the door on the main entrance was pushed open. So I went to check it out. I went inside one of the rooms and from there I could see some activity below on the court. I worked my way closer and saw two fairly large men carrying a bag of some sort. So I decided to call Betty and ask if you were active as the sheriff yet. When she told me you were, I asked her to radio you to get you out here in a hurry. I snuck up on the men to get a closer look and find out if I know them. Then I heard a phone ring in the room. That's when I realized I dropped my cell phone. Then *WHAM!* That's all I remember until you showed up. All I can think of is when I turned to look at the room, someone clobbered me on my thick skull."

Johnson began to think, *Okay, so far everything fits.* "Any ideas on what happened after that?"

"No, sir. Other than that, I clearly interrupted something they were doing that they didn't want to get caught doing."

"They could have killed you, but they didn't. Which means they are not killers. Here's

your cell phone – I found it when I entered the same room as you. Look through it and see who called you.”

Yerkes took his phone and looked through his call list. “I have a few calls from a number with a 564 area code, and one from a restricted phone number. The restricted call was followed by the three local calls.”

“The 564 number is mine. Save it into your contact list. You ever get a restricted call before?”

“No. Never.”

“Hmm, that’s interesting. A restricted call right before someone knocks your noggin. You up to a little walk to see if we can find out what the two men were up to?”

“You bet! But can I get a coffee top-off first?”

“Sure thing, Deputy.” After pouring the coffee, Johnson accompanied Yerkes into the mill to see if they could find anything.

After a brief search, Johnson decided that Yerkes should have his head checked. They left the mill and headed to the hospital as a precautionary measure. Everything checked out – no concussion.

“Deputy, go home and get some rest. Take tomorrow off.”

“I’ll take you up on going home today, but

would rather work tomorrow.”

Johnson looked at the doctor, who gave him an *okay* nod. “Tell you what, if you feel up to it then I’ll see you at the station around 8am tomorrow. Go home and get some rest tonight and see how you feel in the morning.”

It was getting late for Top County. Everything pretty much closes around 8pm. Johnson took a dash over to the diner to see if he could get a few answers. He had a hunch about the incident at the old log mill and figured the diner would be a good place to start.

Just as Johnson grabbed the diner door, it opened. “Excuse me,” he said to the elderly couple exiting the diner.

The couple looked surprised and the man said, “Look, ma, it’s the Johnson kid all grown up!” She smiled as they walked away.

Johnson almost stepped into the diner when he heard the lady say, “Sonny?”

Johnson turned around to face her. “Yes, ma’am?”

“Be careful up here. It’s not the same.” She walked away.

Timber approached Johnson and said, “Oh, don’t pay her no mind. It’s not that bad, even though a few strange things have happened lately. Do you want dinner,

cowboy?”

“No, no. Just a coffee, Tim. And to ask you a few questions, if I can.”

“Sure thing! Have a seat and I’ll be right back with your coffee.”

Johnson took the same seat he had last time.

Timber walked over and said, “You sure like to take the farthest booth, don’t you?” Before Johnson could answer, she continued, “I know, I know. You can see everyone who walks in and your back is safe.” She laughed and sat down with two coffees.

Johnson laughed and asked, “I take it Sheriff Taylor sat here?”

“Yep! And every sheriff before him. But...”

“But what?”

“Well except Deputy Yerkes. He sat anywhere as long as he had a view of the courthouse. Except... oh never mind. I’m just exaggerating.”

“Tim, go ahead and tell me. I don’t think you’re exaggerating.”

“Why, I do believe you’re trying to flatter me. But okay, I’ll tell you my silly little thought. Ever since Sheriff Taylor’s accident, Yerkes has been sitting at the counter facing away from the courthouse.

Johnson thought that was odd, but kept it to himself. He joyfully responded, “Maybe he doesn’t want to be reminded of Sheriff Taylor, so he looks at the other view.”

“Cowboy, I do believe you’re flirting with me again” Timber said as she swirled her finger in her coffee, then in her mouth before pulling it out slowly. “You wanted to ask me something?”

Johnson was fixated on her and responded with a weak “What? Questions?”

“You said you wanted to ask me a few questions.”

“Oh, yes! Yes, I do. The two guys who were in here earlier today – can you tell me anything about them?”

“Hmmm, where do I start?”

“TRY AT THE BEGINNING!” yelled Mr. Hammond through the wall.

“YES, MR. HAMMOND!” Timber yelled back. “Sorry about that, Sheriff, but he really likes them two boys. He thinks they got screwed over, but here’s the story. They are brothers who live at the very end of Thunder Row Road-”

“The old Miller place?” Johnson interrupted.

“Yes. They purchased it about three years ago with some money their dad left them when

he died. They were a couple of young college hippie-types with big hearts and an even bigger dream. They were very friendly and well-liked by everyone in town. But trouble soon came their way. An out-of-state asshole named Tony Kicker was buying up a lot of land at the time and wanted the Miller place real bad for some reason. But the boys beat him to it, and that pissed him off. He wanted that 300 acres bad. The 5,000 he owned wasn't enough."

"He owned that many acres?" Johnson asked.

"Owns. He runs a logging operation. Anyhow, he tried to buy the land from the boys, but they were not interested in selling because of their own dream. Kicker tried everything, but the boys would not budge. Then the boys got mysteriously busted with a shit load of crack-cocaine. Long story short, the asshole Kicker bought 280 acres from them to pay their legal fees. He paid pretty much nothing for it. He left the boys with the house, the barn, and a small pond all on 20 acres. But the boys were still in big trouble and needed a good attorney. They were looking at a lot of time locked away. The asshole had connections and promised to keep them out of prison, which he did even though they are now both felons with records. And that's how their

dream went up in smoke.” Timber took a drink of her coffee before continuing, “So they stay pretty much to themselves and try to survive. They are pissed off at the world, hate cops, and are plum mean. I mean, a nasty mean. Most town folks are afraid of them with good cause. Except Mr. Hammond. They like him and he likes them.

Johnson thought about what Timber said earlier. *A drug set up. But why?* “So, Tim, this Kicker guy is more than likely the top tax payer in town now and pulls a lot of strings. Does he hire a lot of locals?”

“No, he doesn’t hire anybody from here. Matter of fact, he doesn’t do much logging either. He was well-liked at first and everyone put their trust in him. They all thought he was helping them when in fact he gave them loans that he knew they couldn’t afford to pay back. So he charged them a high interest rate and collected that only. He pretty much owns them and their house.”

“How much interest, Tim? There are laws about loan sharking.”

“I already checked into that. He is legal. Just barely. But legal never-the-less.”

“Did he get you?”

“No way, cowboy! No one’s getting my tiny little trailer on my one acre!”

“I’m going to look into this Kicker guy. See what I can find.”

“Better be careful. He is a lot smarter than some small town folk, Sheriff.”

Johnson got up and put on his hat. He looked at Timber and said, “’Til now!” He headed for the diner door, but stopped at the entrance, turned, and said, “Do these boys have names?”

“Wally and Willy Smally.”

Johnson gave his look and mumbled, “You’ve got to be kidding.” He walked out the door and got in his truck when Timber came running out.

“Sheriff! Sheriff! I made you a coffee for the road! On the house!”

Johnson rolled down his window and said, “Thank you very much, Tim!”

She gave a warm smile and turned away to head back into the diner.

“Tim?”

“Yes, cowboy?”

“The dream. What was their dream?”

“It was a wonderful dream. A special place for special needs kids to come camp and feel normal with no pressure.”

“So, a campground?”

“No, way more than that! Way more.”

Johnson nodded and drove away

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K. N. Messier is an avid explorer of old-time places, such as ghost towns and abandoned structures deep off the well-used path. Though their stories have long been forgotten, their remains inspire K. N. Messier to bring forth a story of fiction and put into words what make them unique. The product is an exciting novel filled with mystery and unimaginable excitement in every horrific turn of the page.

K. N. Messier has experience in ghostwriting, as well as playing a character in an indie film – both of which fueled his passion to create the miniseries of novels known as TOP COUNTY. Living in the great state of Maine has offered K. N. Messier an abundance of imagination. Follow him as he takes you through his twisted and demented mind and unravels all of his thoughts into an unforgettable adventure!

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