

Up north in Alaska, strange things happen. In this collection of short stories, there are tales of ghosts, sasquatch, shapeshifters, extra-terrestrials, supernaturals, night visitors, and unexplained events that haunt the history of Alaska.

**NORTHERN STORIES:
GHOSTS, GOBLINS, AND THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT**
By Jacques L. Condor Maka-Tai-Meh

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NORTHERN STORIES

Ghosts, Goblins, and Things That
Go Bump in the Night



Jacques L. Condor Maka Tai Meh

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THE LAST WALTZ IN DAWSON CITY

Laura hated the sawdust on the bar floor. It squirmed into her open-toed pumps and settled right smack under the ball of her foot, making it uncomfortable to walk, let alone dance. She was in this bar, to dance. Dancing was Laura Sparks' weekend escape from the monotonous isolation of Fairbanks, Alaska. Her love of dancing, especially waltzing brought her to the *North Star Bar and Cafe* on Saturday nights. Another benefit at the *North Star* was the abundance of dance partners. Men were everywhere in Fairbanks since the war began last year in 1941. Laura's best friend, Lillian Brewer, who just happened to be her brother Chester's girl friend, tagged along on Saturday dance nights, so things worked out 'Okey Dokey', as Lillian always said. Laura looked toward the bar area to see if her favorite dance partner, a cute boy named Elton Meyers, from Seattle, was in the line at the bar. He was. Laura saw his mass of wavy, unruly hair, his green eyes and the double dimples that showed whenever he smiled; which was often. Laura smiled and Elton waved. He made a gesture for 'dancing' and raised his eyebrows in a question. Laura nodded back and smiled again. Elton made an OK circle with his finger and thumb. He approached the girls' table with two large cherry Cokes and a beer cradled between his hands.

“Here you go, Lillian,” Elton said and held out his arms so she could take a coke glass from him. Elton handed the second soft drink to Laura, and took a chair next to Laura’s brother, Chester.

“See you have snagged yourself a dancing partner, Sis,” Chester said.

“Did not,” Laura said. “Elton volunteered. Didn’t you, Elton?”

“Sure enough, I did, Miss Laura,”

Laura looked at him. Sometimes Elton was overly polite and that annoyed her almost as much as Lillian’s giggling.

“I’m just plain Laura. Not *Miss* Laura,” she said.

“You’re far from plain, Laura.” Elton showed his dimples in an expansive smile. Laura returned his smile and took a sip of her cherry coke.

* * * * *

The piano player ran a ripple of notes up and down the piano and sang the band’s theme song: “*Happy days are here again, the sky above is—*” She interrupted the song and made her usual Saturday night announcement: “We’re the Miner’s and the Trappers plus One. Send any requests wrapped in a five-dollar bill and we will gladly oblige. Here we go with a new swing thing, the latest hit from Outside called, *In the Mood.*”

“Oooh Chester! The jitterbug stuff. I love it. C’mon Chester.” Lillian pulled a reluctant partner from his chair. Elton and Laura sat out the first dance.

“They’ll play one more fast one and then a slow one so we can dance, Laura.” Elton scooted his chair closer to Laura. “Maybe they’ll even play a waltz.” The band did play a waltz next. The easy pulsing rhythms invaded Laura’s heart and her heartbeat seemed to control her feet as she glided in Elton’s arms around the dance floor. Elton swept Laura around the tiny space. Laura was in heaven. She was waltzing with a great partner. Elton was happy because he was dancing with Laura and Laura was happy simply because she was dancing. The dances and the hours whirled by.

* * * * *

The four young people made their way to Elton's moss-green LaSalle sedan parked at the far end of the lot. At three in the morning an eager ray of first sunlight found the automobile and made the car glint with the green sheen of a fat beetle. The Alaskan late summer nights would last only another week or so. Laura and her friends intended to take advantage of the remaining summer's daylight.

"What do you want to do now, Laura?" Elton asked. "You want to drive around all morning?"

"I'd like to go on a trip somewhere. Maybe up north of town. Take a picnic lunch or something. We could drive up to Livengood."

"What's that? And where is it?" Elton smiled at Laura. "Never heard of it."

"Livengood? It's a little mining camp about eighty miles from here. When the war came last year, they closed the mine and everyone just up and left with the clothes on their backs. They left a lot of interesting old Yukon and Dawson City stuff up there."

"How do you know all this?"

Laura batted her eyes at Elton. "Would I just make this up to get you to take me somewhere?"

"Maybe." Elton pretended to batt his eyes back at Laura. With the same innocent coquettishness Lillian used.

"Well, I didn't make anything up. My father worked up there and he told me."

"How did things from Dawson and the Yukon get there?"

"Livengood was the last gold stampede. Legends say Bear Grease Tom and Pinky O'Brien found gold in the area about 1914 and some say it was Jay Livengood. Anyway, all the miners who still dreamed of gold came down the Yukon River and set up mining at Livengood."

"And they brought all that stuff with them and years later just walked away?"

"That's it. That's the story. My father said they brought a complete bar with stools and back-mirrors and all that. Even brought a piano on a raft and packed it into the camp on horse-drawn sledges."

"I'd like to see all that. We'll have to drive up there."

“It will only take me fifteen minutes to get a picnic together.” Laura was enthusiastic. “We’ll need blankets, pillows and things like that so we can spend the night.”

* * * * *

At five-thirty that morning Elton drove the road out of town to the north. It was barely graveled and full of ruts and numerous bumps caused by frost heaves. Elton drove until the party reached McCord Creek before he changed places with Chester. In the driver’s seat. Laura moved to the back seat to sit with Elton and Chester plopped his bulk next to Lillian in the front. Elton was crowded against Lillian’s suitcase. Lillian had insisted on packing a formal dress, against Laura’s advice. Lillian insisted they ought to ‘look pretty’ for the boys so Laura finally capitulated and placed one of her own dresses and a pair of heels in Lillian’s suitcase.

* * * * *

The two couples switched places in the car at nine o’clock, Elton drove and Laura sat beside him. It was ten at night when they took the turn-off leading into the town of Livengood. Fifteen minutes later, Elton drove the car down an alder-covered hillock.

“Look! I see lights; I thought you told me this place was abandoned, Laura.”

“Well, I guess not completely, Elton; not if you see lights.”

Chester leaned forward from the back seat. “There are a couple of families who stayed on. At least that’s what my father said. But the town itself is abandoned, nobody’s there.”

* * * * *

A hand-painted scrawl of crudely shaped letters on a large plank of wood was illuminated by the headlights. The sign was nailed to a tree where the road took a sharp right angle turn and then forked in two directions. The sign’s message answered their questions about the lights. The hand-lettered information read:

Tom and Mabel's Store

Now Open all Sumer

Gass-Groseries-watter

Fairbanks prices

Another painted wooden sign was nailed just below on the trunk of the dead spruce. It read:

POST OFFICE

LIVENGOOD, TERR. OF ALASKA

STOP HERE

Elton stopped the car. The store was a two-story log cabin with a front porch. The porch, about three feet off the ground, was accessed by a wide set of stacked log steps. The front edges of the porch railings were a litter of signs and ads. Laura saw a three-foot tall metal 'Coca-Cola' bottle nailed near the stairs. There was a flurry of smaller signs; for *Redman Snuff*, *Colgate Toothpaste*, *Nehi Orange Soda* and *Campbell's Soup*.

"Look, they have gasoline for sale here." Chester saw the flying red horse emblem for *Mobil Gasoline* tacked to the far edge of the porch. "Don't see any gas pumps," he said. A voice came from out of nowhere, "Don't have any pumps. Sell it by the full five-gallon can." The voice was like the grinding of heavy gravel shaken in a rusty tin can. "Come on in," the voice said. The screen door was pushed open. A man and a woman appeared. Elton guessed them to be in their late sixties.

"Hello," Chester said. "We came up to look around. We're visitors."

"Already figured that out, young, fellar. You ain't from around here because there ain't nobody from around here, except us," the

man with the gravel-in-a-can voice said. "I'm Tom and this here is Mabel, and she ain't my wife."

"I'm his slave. That's what the hell I am." The round and pink-faced woman chortled. Then she slapped the man Tom on his back so hard he lurched forward. She laughed a banshee laugh that used four octaves of the scale.

"What in hell are you kids doing up here in this *gawdfersakenshitholeofaplace*? And I do mean shithole. I'd leave in a heartbeat if I didn't love this old slave driver so much." There was a brief pause, "So answer me. It's the polite thing to do, you know. What the hell you doing up here so late at night?"

Laura answered. "It was my idea. I've always wanted to come up here. My father used to have a claim up here."

"That so, Missy?" The gravel voice grated, "What was yer daddy's name?"

"Everett Sparks." Laura answered.

"Hell, I remember him!" Mabel let loose with another banshee hoot. "Good lookin' man. Never could get into his pants, though, he was kinda prissy-like about sex."

"Can't forget about men fer a minute, can you Mabel?" Tom growled.

"Why the hell should I? I like the hell out of 'em," Mabel belted another hooting laugh and thwacked Tom on the back again.

Tom turned to Laura. "I remember you daddy. Good man. Good miner.

What's he doin' now?"

"He's working on the army base like all the others who came down to Fairbanks from here," Laura answered. "It's supposed to be a secret construction, but everyone around Fairbanks knows about it."

"We know about it up here, too. But I'm stuck tryin' to make this place pay."

"Yes, and I'm paying for it by living' in what's left of Shitsville with a grouchy old man." Mabel laughed. "Hell, you're like family 'cause we knew your daddy. So come on in." Mabel pushed Tom away from the door and held the screen-door open as far as it would

go. Laura led the way in and Elton and Chester followed Lillian into the cabin-store.

* * * * *

There was little in the way of merchandise. There were a few cans of Carnation milk, some obviously outdated boxes of Quaker-oats cereal and a dozen or so quart size jars of home-canned meat; moose, probably. On the wall, beside an orange and blue sign advertising *Wheaties, the Breakfast of Champions*, was an antique flip-page calendar. Laura saw the date; it read August 14.

“Today’s the seventeenth,” she said.

“Is it now?” Mabel answered. “Up here livin’ alone, just the two of us, days don’t much matter.” Tom,” She yelled. “You old fart; you forgot to tear off the damned days.” The woman hurried to the wall and flipped three sheets on the calendar until a big black number ‘17’ was revealed. “Have to do every damned thing around here myself. Tom’s a worthless old shit nowadays.”

Laura smiled and Mabel smiled back. “Have a look around my place,” Mabel said. Laura looked. The shelves were filled with things far more exciting than the few food items for sale. Old medicine bottles, some with their contents intact, were stacked six deep on some shelves. There were old books. Bibles and novels rubbed covers with books on mining and gold measurements and old family albums and scrapbooks. Picks, pans, scales and other accoutrements of the gold mining craze were side by side with framed photos and tintypes of miners, pioneers and good time girls.

“Oh, Elton, look. Look at these marvelous things.” Laura turned around in a tight circle to take in a new group of Gold Rush treasures with each turn.

“I’m looking,” Elton replied. “Is any of the stuff for sale?”

“Only the groceries,” Tom answered.

Mabel laughed. Her entire body jiggled when she was in full laugh. “Hell, Sweetheart, you don’t have to *buy* this kinda stuff. Don’tcha know you can go up to Front Street and take your pick of what’s left up there?”

“Chester, you want to go up and look around? I do. So does Elton,” Laura asked.

Mabel stopped in mid-laugh; suddenly somber in her tone. “I wouldn’t go up there at night—especially this night. I’d wait until the sun is up, if I were you.”

“Any danger from bears?” Elton asked.

Tom grunted, “No bears up there.”

“No bears,” Mabel repeated, “But all the same I don’t think—“

“Let ‘em go up and see fer themselves. Ain’t nothing living up there to hurt them,” Tom interrupted. “Need any supplies? Canned milk, water? Oats?”

“We brought food with us,” Elton said. “A picnic basket full.

* * * * *

Elton backed the LaSalle sedan out of the parking area and took the left fork up the hill to the town of Livengood.

“You might need to turn on the lights, Elton.” Chester sounded concerned. “It’s a lot darker up here with all these high hills all around us.” Elton switched on the headlamps. The car’s bright beams swept across a growth of alders and willows. The growing dusk hung like black fog in the hollows of the hills. The car lights sliced the dark and a sudden flash of white birches was the only indication that the road to Livengood took an abrupt turn over a ridge, before it dropped down into a broad flat valley. The first of the empty and forgotten buildings came into view. The main street, Front Street, was a rutted, gravel road. Elton slowed the car to a crawl, and all four windows were rolled down so the visitors could study the old buildings along Front Street.

“Wow!” Elton said. “Most of these buildings are just large cabins.”

Elton’s comments were taken up by Chester. “Some of them are two stories. Look over there. Two in a row with second stories.” Chester pointed out the car window. Lillian and Laura tried to read all the faded signs painted on the false fronts of the stores.

Laura leaned out of the front passenger window and pointed at a peaked-ridged, log building with a wide false front. She read the sign

aloud, "*Pioneer Bar-Liquors and Lodgings*. Pull over here Elton. I've found a hotel for us."

"We won't be able to see without some sort of lights," Elton said.

"I packed two flashlights and a box of kitchen candles in the food baskets," Laura said. "Let's dig them out, Lillian."

"Okey dokey," Lillian giggled again.

* * * * *

Chester and Elton made an exploratory trip into the building displaying the *Lodgings* sign. The inn portion of the two buildings was attached to the *Bar-Liquor* building with a narrow, roofed hallway. The hallway was an obvious later add-on of planking to connect the two log buildings. The boys carried in the food boxes, the blankets and Lillian's bulging suitcase. Three candles, stuck in makeshift wax-puddles, gave enough light to read by. Laura reached over and tapped the bronze bell on the desk.

"Boy, take our luggage up to room eight."

"How do you know there's a room eight?" Elton handed Laura a flashlight.

"It says so on the hotel register," Laura said, "See its written right there: *John Radak, Room eight*."

"Dibs on that hotel register!" Elton said. "That is one heck of a souvenir from our trip up here.."

"It's your souvenir," Laura said. "Where are you and Chester going to sleep?"

"What do you mean *going to*? Your brother is already out! He's over there on that couch snoring away," Elton pointed to the rear of the small lobby area. "I'll stay down here on the other couch. That drive up here wore me out. I've got a blanket for him and one for me."

"I'll carry two blankets for each of us." Lillian reached for the blankets and followed Elton up the stairs. Laura went up the stairway last; examining the faded floral pattern on the narrow, carpeted stairs in the glow of her flashlight.

* * * * *

Room eight was a small cramped room located under the peaked roof of the *Pioneer Inn*. Laura took the bed nearest the rear wall and Lillian the bed near the stairwell. Laura's bed was covered with a dusty chenille spread. Dust-bunnies mingled with the rounds of chenille balls of the fabric. Laura carefully folded back the dusty cover a little bit at a time and when it was rolled into a manageable bundle she pushed it under the bed where layers of dust covered the linoleum tacked to the plank floor.

"*Dust to dust,*" she thought and smiled. She turned back the sheets and top blanket. There was a slight smell of mold, but no mildew was present and the sheets were clean. Laura opened her handbag and took out a vial of perfume. She spread a light spritz of cologne over the sheets before she crawled in fully clothed.

"Good night, Laura," Lillian called across the space. "Are you all right?"

"I'm just tired," Laura replied.

* * * * *

Laura could hear the faint snoring downstairs. She wondered if it was Chester, or was it Elton. Laura switched on the flashlight and looked at her wristwatch: 12:53. Nearly an hour had passed. Laura was exhausted but sleep didn't come. She was thinking about trying sheep-counting when she heard Lillian whisper her name.

"Laura, are you awake? Can you hear them?"

Laura sat up and listened. "Hear what?"

"The people over there in the bar," Lillian spoke in a loud whisper, "Sounds like there's a party going on. I can hear music and people are laughing. Some people must have come up from town and are having a party!" Laura held her breath and concentrated on listening. Nothing. She took another deep breath. Then she heard it. A woman's laughter and not too far away. The laughter was coming from the bar portion of the inn next door. Lillian popped open her suitcase and dressed in a fancy flowered rayon dress, pinned a silk daisy cluster in her hair, and held her high heeled pumps in her hand.

“Come on, Laura, get up and put on a dress. Let’s go join the party. If it’s a fun party we can come back and get the boys.”

“I don’t think we ought to go.”

“Oh come on, Laura, honey. It’ll be okey-dokey. There’s bound to be dancing going on. I can hear the piano!” *‘Dancing!’* Lillian said the magic word. Thoughts of sleep were abandoned. Lillian helped Laura into the dress she had packed. With the light from the flashlight and Lillian's help, Laura pinned up her hair and settled a gardenia made of white crepe into the coiffure above her right ear. The two girls sneaked down the carpeted stairway, shoes in hand, past the sleeping men and through the connecting passageway to the bar of the *Pioneer Inn*. The sounds of laughter came to them through the doorway. Laura felt her excitement and anticipation building. *‘Lillian was right. It sounded like a fun party—and the thumping clink of the piano assured dancing.’*

Lillian rushed ahead and looked through the square of glass in the door into the bar. “OH! My Gawwwd,” she said, “Would you look at that.” Laura pressed up against Lillian’s back and peered over her shoulder. Laura wiped a round spot of viewing space in the dusty glass. She looked again and muttered an involuntary, “Wowie!” There was definitely a party in progress. Laura couldn’t see the entire room, but she noticed couples seated on padded stools along an ornate bar.

Everyone at the bar was in costume. At least they were dressed in the costumes and clothes of another time. “I think it’s a costume party, Lillian. I don’t think we’re properly dressed for this one, Kiddo,” she said.

“Well let’s go in anyway,” Lillian insisted. She pushed the door inward, took a Firm grip on Laura’s hand, and pulled the hesitant girl into the bar with her. A sudden quiet stopped the girls where they stood. They had been drawn by the noise, the music and the laughter. Now all was silence. The piano stopped. The laughter ceased and the chatter fell in shattered shards of silence to the dance floor. It seemed to Laura as if all motion had stopped at the same time. No one any longer danced. Partners stood transfixed; frozen in awkward parodies of motion. At the bar, Laura saw hands lifted, holding drinks, but no one drank. The blue-purple cloud of cigar smoke circling just above

the bar patrons heads seemed to have stopped swirling. Nothing and no one moved. Laura was embarrassed by the thoughts of having crashed a private party where the silence made it obvious she and Lillian weren't welcome. She quickly lowered her eyes; at the same time she was hoping to think of a polite way to excuse her and Lillian's intrusion. She imagined everyone in the room was staring at them by now. When she finally found the nerve to raise her head and start her apology, she saw this was not the case. The others in the room were looking, not at her, not at Lillian, but at a tall lady standing at the center of the bar. The woman was regal. Her presence commanded attention. She, of all the partygoers, was the only one looking directly at Laura and Lillian. She kept her dark eyes on the two girls for a brief moment and then her full red-painted lips broke into a smile.

"My, My! What have we here?" The gorgeous woman's voice was deep, throaty and warm. She took a few steps toward the girls in the doorway. Laura could hear the rustle of her heavy slipper- satin dress as the woman moved closer. The canary yellow of the fitted gown was accented with a triple loop of jet beads. A coronet of black-dyed egret plumes clung to the side of her up-swept hair. She raised one of her black-gloved hands and tapped her cheek pensively. "What are we going to do about you two?"

"I'm so sorry," Laura began, "I didn't—we didn't know it was a closed party." The woman studied Laura's face before she looked at Lillian. The broad smile was gone and the woman's eyes glinted once, with what might have been a flash of anger. "Are you alone?" the woman in yellow asked, "There are no others?"

"Well, my boy friend is sleeping off a tiny little drunk;" Lillian said "He won't wake up 'til dawn—and neither will Laura's date, Elton. He's pooped. Oh, I forgot my manners, I should introduce myself." The elegant lady made no effort to take Lillian's extended hand but stared with her large dark eyes at Laura. "We don't need names here, but if you insist, we'll hear yours," she said. The red lipped, generous mouth parted in a smile. The lady, whom Laura assumed was the hostess, spoke out, "I suppose we can make exceptions *this* time." She laughed. "Did you hear me, everyone? We

have guests tonight. I'm making some *exceptions* since they've already found us and are dressed for—for *a party*." The tall woman gave a toss of her head and the black feathers in her hair moved as if nodding an invitation. "Well, don't stand there," the lady in yellow said. "Come with me. Come join my celebration party." She led the girls to the center of the bar and had them stand one on each side of her. "Names. You wanted names, but first, tell us who *you* are."

"Okey Dokey." Lillian giggled in her silliest manner and made a little embarrassed curtsy, holding out the hem of her dress as she did so and looking like an insecure seventh grader taking bows after a school play. "I'm Lillian. Lillian Brewer—uh—from Fairbanks." There was another awkward moment of silence. Lillian blushed.

The tall woman turned and looked directly at Laura. The woman's dark-eyed stare was hypnotic. Laura couldn't look away, and the woman held her gaze as she asked, "And you? Who are you, my gorgeous one?" Laura was uncomfortable. No one had ever looked at her with such intensity before. The woman took the girl's chin in her gloved hand and tilted Laura's head to the side. "Such a beauty," the woman whispered. "What do they call you?" Laura answered a bit too fast; her words tumbling out in a rush to cover her embarrassment and the blush she was rising in her cheeks. ". My name is Laura Sparks."

"Laura, is it?" Still the woman stared and the silence grew. Laura pulled away "Thanks for letting us join your party—I mean your celebration," she added and tried to look away. The feathers of the high-coiffure gave another little nod of assent to the words the woman spoke, "Well you're welcome here, Laura; welcome as no one else has been without—without an invitation to this yearly celebration—so, go mingle, meet people and dance. The drinks are on me, since I own this bar, and the party goes on until —until I say the party's over!" The lady smiled at her guests. She turned back and flashed a smile at Laura. "Call me, Cynthia."

"Thank you, Cynthia," Laura said.

"Yeah, thanks," Lillian giggled

"Let's push this party up into high-time," Cynthia shouted and reached for two drinks a handsome barkeep handed her. "Thank you,

Carl. Girls, this is my assistant. Beautiful man, ain't he? I call him, Darlin' Carlie."

"His name suits him, doesn't it," Laura?" Lillian giggled. "He's so cute."

"Yes, he's very good looking," Laura said. The hostess studied Laura for a brief moment and smiled. "It's a good thing for Carl you didn't come into this bar and my life earlier." Laura felt herself blush warm once again and looked away. "I'm just saying Carl likes your type, Honey," Cynthia said. "Thank you," Laura stammered.

"Forget it, Laura. No need to be shy around this gang of mine," Cynthia's tone changed. "I drink whiskey, but there's brandy if whiskey's not your taste." She gave a cut crystal glass to each girl. "Drink up. Remember, girls, time waits for no one, and don't I know from experience that's the damn truth." She lifted her glass in a brisk salute. "Party like there's no tomorrow!" She laughed again and everyone in the hall laughed with her. This sudden happy roar was a surprise after the previous minutes of near total silence. The piano player started thumping his foot on the pedals and pounding the keys with exuberance. The laughter and clinking of glasses mingled once more with the ebb and rush of barroom chatter. Lillian looked at Laura, "There's a lot of cute men here." She added, "And lots of competition. Look how pretty the girls and women are in their fancy costumes. Laura looked around the room. She saw most of the guests were dressed in costumes, not fancy costumes exactly, but costumes from the past. Laura saw flappers in short skirts and rolled stockings waving long strands of fake pearls. A raccoon-coated man whirled a slender girl dressed in a long Edwardian skirt around the floor to a lively polka tune. A trio of girls wearing flowing crepe dresses with floral prints of the 1930's scuttled past her line of vision. Men were dressed as gamblers in frock coats and lurid coloured vests. Some were attired as hard-luck miner in shabby work clothes. This variety of costume eased her concern about her own dress, and she relaxed. Across the room, a lovely native girl with exotic features stared at Laura and Lillian. She was an Indian girl, probably Athabascan from nearby Ruby or Nulato. Wherever she was from, Laura was impressed by her beauty. She sported a 1920's bobbed hair-do and wore a short

umbrella-hem skirt dripping with loops of fringe. Laura smiled at the Indian girl. She smiled back and began a languid crossing of the dance floor toward Laura. As she came closer, Laura saw that the exquisite beauty of her features was marred; flawed by dozens of little pock-mocks scattered across her sculpted cheeks. *Smallpox scars!* Laura thought, *How awful for her.* The girl stopped directly in front of Laura and lifted her glass high in a salute, “Hi, tonight we use names, so I’m Ruth. Never saw you here before. Did you just—?” “Don’t bother with questions, Ruthie. These two are my guests.” Cynthia interrupted. “Go get yourself another brandy. Tell Darlin’ Charlie it’s on the house and that I said to make it a double.” Ruth looked from Cynthia to Laura and then back again. “What ever you say, my friend, you’re in charge here.”

“And I say keep your pretty mouth shut and just enjoy the celebration party.”

“Oh, I always do, Cynthia. After all I’ve been attending your anniversary party for over twenty years.”

When Ruth moved away, Laura turned to Cynthia, “Twenty years—how could she have been coming to your parties for twenty years? She doesn’t look much over twenty-five.”

Cynthia’s eyes darkened for a split second as before and then the smile beamed. “She’s much older than she looks. You can’t tell the age of Native girls as easily as you can others. Besides under oil-lamps and candles, we all look damned better than we have a right to. Don’t you agree?”

“You’re probably right.” Laura smiled at Cynthia and took a sip of her brandy. “—about the lighting in here, I mean.”

“Damned certain I’m right about the lighting.” Cynthia said. “I couldn’t and wouldn’t be caught out in broad daylight. I like the way the candlelight flatters my features, in spite of the fact that it’s all *smoke and mirrors.*”

“Smoke and mirrors?” Laura questioned. “Make-up, Honey. My face is painted on. Bit too much? What do you think?”

“You look lovely.” Laura smiled a sincere smile at Cynthia. “So natural.”

“That’s what they said.” Cynthia reached down and brushed away some imaginary lint from the satin gown. “Enough chit chat, Honey, let’s get you girls dance partners.” Cynthia raised her gloved arm and gave her hand a little shiver of a wave in the air. A man dressed as a gambler; spats, tie and embroidered vest, saw her signal and crossed to the bar. He approached Lillian and offered his arm in an invitation to dance.

Lillian listened to the beginning bars of a waltz the piano player flung into the air. “Oooh! Sweetie-pie,” she said to the gambler-man, “I don’t waltz so well. That’s not my style, why don’tcha ask my friend Laura, here. She loves to waltz.”

The gambler looked at his hostess, Cynthia, seeming to wait for her instructions.

“Ask the girl to waltz, Stephen,” Cynthia’s voice contained the echo of a command. “Stephen is my husband, so I can tell him who to dance with. I’ll find you another partner, Lillian.”

“That’s Okey dokey with me. I don’t usually dance with *husbands*,” Lillian giggled, “Pick me a good one, a cute one.”

“Cute” Cynthia said. “I’m afraid you’ll have to settle for a handsome polka-dancing man.” Cynthia waved to a younger man dressed as a miner in twill pants and a plaid shirt, who crossed to the hostess. He didn’t speak a word to Lillian, but inclined his head in an abrupt nod that might have been a stiff attempt at a bow. Laura knew Lillian didn’t care whether he talked or not, as long as he was cute. The miner’s full lips were curved in a fixed smile. Lillian glanced at him sideways, with her eyelids at half-mast in her best vamping style. Lillian tried some heavy flirting; making her eyelashes flutter like dying butterflies. The man didn’t seem to notice. The young miner grabbed Lillian and whirled her in a rolling motion to the polka tempo. When the couple twirled close to where Laura stood, Lillian managed a loud whispered, “Ooooh! He is sooo cute.” The miner guided Lillian through a complicated polka turn. She shouted back to Laura as they danced away, “And, boy oh boy, can he dance!” Lillian looked up into her partner’s face to see the effect her remarks had on the young man. The same smile was fixed on his face. “You’re not

much for talk, are you?" Lillian said. Her dancing partner answered with a single word, "No."

* * * * *

Laura waited with the man Cynthia had called Stephen. She hoped for a waltz next. Stephen hadn't said a word to her, and she didn't want to appear too chatty, so she stood in awkward silence and watched Lillian and the young miner circle the floor with enthusiastic skip-hop-whirls of the polka. The piano player ended the polka with a flurry of notes and the barroom echoed with applause. Lillian and the young miner walked to a darkened corner of the bar. Laura looked in the direction the pair had gone. The young miner was seated on the padded banquette bench at the far end of the hall. Lillian had plopped down on his lap. While Laura watched, Lillian threw her arms around the young man's neck and covered his full curved lips with her own. Lillian made it a long, drawn-out kiss, came up for air, and then kissed the miner with more abandon a second time. Laura had an urge to cross into the dimly lit area and pull Lillian away from her conquest, but at that moment, the three-quarter-time beat of a waltz tempo stopped her. It was a moment before she recognized the melody. The man at the piano was playing her favorite waltz, *The Varsuivienne*. Stephen held out his open arms to her and Laura arranged herself in his light embrace. Cynthia waved them off, turned around and blew a kiss at Carl. The blond bartender hurried to where Cynthia stood, leaned across the bar and kissed her lover full on the lips. Laura saw the kiss, but Stephen, his back to the bar, did not. She was surprised by her un-acknowledged attraction to Carl. While she waltzed with Stephen, Laura tried to focus on Cynthia and Carl at the bar and felt embarrassment by the lovers' kisses.

"Something wrong with my dancing?" Stephen asked.

"Oh, no," was all Laura could say.

* * * * *

For Laura, the music was wonderful; her favorite tune. Her partner Stephen was an expert dancer and the party, the brandy and Cynthia's smiles so intoxicating, she just wanted to keep waltzing.

The entire celebration, including Cynthia, her blonde lover and her costumed guests, no longer intimidated or frightened her. Stephen held her close. Her body in his arms seemed natural; a perfect fit. They glided in effortless union and harmony around the floor to the music of *The Varsuviennne, the Last Waltz of Summer*. *My favorite waltz song*, she thought and beamed up at Stephen. Laura saw Stephen's fixed smile was gone. His eyes darted around the room, searched every dimly lit corner and each pocket of gloom where the lantern-light didn't reach. Laura felt his arms drop away from her. They stopped dancing. Stephen stood rigid in the center of the floor. Laura stepped away from him. A silence, as sudden as an autumn gust, swept across the barroom. The piano player jumped up from his stool and hurriedly walked away to the bar. Couples began to move away from the dance floor. . Laura was drawn along with the moving crowd. All the guests at the celebration party now formed a staring, silent circle. Watching and waiting. For what, Laura didn't know. Stephen stood alone in the puddle of down-light from the candles guttering in the overhead chandelier. Laura saw his fists clench and open to clench again. She saw his jaw muscles bulge in a grimace of anger.

He raised his arm and pointed to a darkened corner of the room. "You!" he shouted to someone in the shadows. "Get away from her. You can at least show me some respect in front of these people." Laura strained to make out the persons in the dimness. Lillian ran to stand with Laura. Two forms emerged and became recognizable in the circle of light. Laura saw Cynthia and beside her, stood the bartender, the man she'd called, Darlin' Carlie.

Stephen shouted, "I warned you, you bitch! This time I've had enough." His voice fell to whisper; a threat, "You're going to pay for what you've put me through."

Cynthia moved forward and stood in front of Carl, "What in the hell do you think you're doing, Stephen?" Her voice was shrill and had an edge of panic. "What gives you the right to start shouting and threatening people here in this bar?"

"The rights of a husband," Stephen answered in a voice forced into calm. "The rights of a married man." Cynthia threw back her

head and laughed. The feathers in her hair swayed; a silent black echo of her laughter. “Husband? You call yourself a husband? When I was busy building up this business—raking in the money you spent so carelessly—what help did you offer me? And you ignored me. You think I didn’t hear about your trips to the cribs of every new good-time girl who moved in town to ply her whore’s business?” Stephen clenched his fists again.

Laura saw spittle forming at the corners of his mouth. His neck and face were burnished red with embarrassment. “You bitch!” he shouted. “I married you to make you a respectable woman.” The silent guests watched the drama unfold. Laura felt her heart thump and her blood pulsed a harsh noise inside her head.

Cynthia lowered her voice and spoke through clenched teeth. “And where do you get off, calling yourself my husband, my lover?” Cynthia’s deep, husky voice was raw with scorn. “You’re not half the lover my Carl is.”

The crowd gasped at her remark. Some of the partygoers headed for the doors. Others huddled in groups, unable to leave, hypnotized by the lure of impending violence. Laura saw the flashing glint of something shiny. Carl pulled a pistol from his leg holster. Almost at the same time, Stephen drew his own gun. Both leveled their pistols at each other but did not fire. Cynthia ran to place herself between the two in the path of any bullets. The remaining crowd of watchers shrunk back into the dark corners pulling Laura and Lillian backward with them.

“Both of you idiots put down your guns!” Cynthia looked from Carl to Stephen and back again. The crowd waited but neither man lowered his pistol.

“I said, PUT DOWN THE DAMNED GUNS!” Cynthia reached into the cleavage of her yellow satin gown and pulled out a tiny silver pistol. The crowd gasped again in delighted fright. Cynthia pointed the pistol at her own temple and said quietly, “Put them down or there’s not going to be anyone for you two to fight over.”

Laura heard the clatter as two guns dropped to the wooden floor.

Cynthia kept the pistol at her temple. She called out, “Come and get their guns, Jeff!”

Jeff turned out to be the young miner; Lillian's dancing-kissing partner. He scurried out onto the dance floor and scooped up both of the pistols on the run. He ran back and tossed both guns on the bar.

Cynthia lowered her gun and walked in calm dignity to the bar and placed her pistol along side the other two. She turned in a half circle to address the remaining guests.

"Surprised all of you, didn't I? Well, friends and patrons, that's what a good hostess does at a party—she surprises her guests. I hope all of you know what to do now that the party is over. You do know what to do, don't you?" Cynthia took a step forward. "If you don't know, I'll tell you. It's simple, just disappear," Cynthia laughed. "Be good guests, and just disappear." Isolated groups emerged from the shadows and began to move toward the front doors and out of the Pioneer Bar. Lillian dragged Laura toward the side door entrance to the inn. The barroom was empty of all guests except the girls at the side door.

"What're you two waiting for?" Cynthia scowled at Laura and Lillian. "Go now, get out. Carl and Stephen and I—well, we'll work things out. Jeff will stay and be our referee, won't you, Jeff."

The young miner nodded in agreement. He picked up Carl's pistol from the bar and pointed it alternately at Carl and Stephen who were still facing each other. He gave the gun quick directional jerks and pointed with it to opposite ends of the bar. Laura watched Carl and Stephen move to the places Jeff had indicated. Lillian tugged on Laura's arm, harder than before, trying to pull her into the hallway.

"Cynthia, is there anything I can do?" Laura felt immediately foolish for asking.

"There is," Cynthia said, "Leave this place. Leave the inn. Leave now and take your sleeping boyfriends with you. It is almost time—look at the time."

Laura glanced at the clock above the back-bar and saw it was half past four in the morning. She felt Lillian tugging her; urging her to go.

"Thank you for the dancing," Laura said. "It was a very nice party."

"It always is," Cynthia smiled, "Now leave us."

* * * * *

Laura found the car keys on the registration desk where Elton had left them. Together, the two girls managed to re-pack the car: food, luggage and blankets while Elton and Chester snored away, oblivious to their frantic packing. The men's snorts and gurgles punctuated the brief minutes it took the girls to finish loading the car. Laura woke both men with vigorous shakes. Chester sat up in bed and started swinging at an imaginary assailant. Elton opened his eyes and asked what was wrong.

"Plenty." Lillian whispered, "There was a big fight at the party. We got to get out of here."

"Party? What party?" Elton was wide-awake now.

"We'll tell you all about it on the way down the hill," Laura said. "Come on, grab your blankets and let's go. We've already packed the car."

Elton followed Laura to the waiting sedan and Chester, draped in his two blankets and prodded along by Lillian, came grumbling behind. "How come you never woke us up for a party?" Chester grouched. "You know I like parties."

Lillian pushed Chester toward the car and opened the door. "Be quiet and just get in the backseat," Lillian hissed. "I told you we'd explain later." Just as the sedan crept away from the inn, Laura heard four loud popping sounds. "What was that?" she grabbed Elton's arm so tight he swerved the car.

"Sounded like a hunter," Chester said from the back seat. "Probably poaching moose out of season."

"Who'd be crazy to hunt in the dark?" Lillian asked.

"Anybody who needs meat," Chester said. "Besides, it's almost dawn. You can see a moose silhouette real good against a dawn sky."

"Just someone hunting," Laura whispered. "Please, Elton, drive and let's get away from here." Laura insisted Elton not turn on anything but the parking lights until they'd reached the ridge and had started down the hill, back to the little grocery store.

* * * * *

The eastern sky above the ridge was a pale line of faded yellow when Elton stopped the car in front of Tom and Mabel's Store. Laura saw old Tom sweeping the already spotless porch. The windows of the cabin glowed a welcoming orange. When Laura and Elton stepped out of the sedan, they could smell brewing coffee and what Laura hoped was baking cinnamon rolls.

Laura spoke first, "Good morning, Tom. Are you open yet?" Tom stopped sweeping and looked at Laura, "What's the sign say? *Open all summer*. It's still summer, so I'm open."

He squinted at the couple standing below the porch deck. "Hey, ain't you the kids that went up to the old town last night?"

"That's us," Elton said.

"Didn't stay long, now, did you?" Tom grinned and showed his snuff-stained teeth. "Something scare you away?"

"Yes," Laura answered. "There was a fight in the bar and we were told to leave. We came back here."

"A fight—you say?" Tom turned. "Mabel, you better come out here. You ought'a hear what these kids is tellin' me." Mabel's voice boomed back, "I'm busy with my bakin'. Bring them kids in here and for some breakfast and coffee and *then* I'll listen.

Breakfast was homemade cinnamon rolls and coffee laced with canned milk and molasses. The four travelers sat hunched over the counter in the store. Laura and Lillian took turns describing the night's adventure. Mabel and Tom sat on the opposite side of the small counter. The old couple sipped their coffee and listened to the tale Laura and Lillian told. Once or twice during the telling, Mabel interrupted and asked Laura to repeat a detail about how someone looked or what they were wearing. Elton and Chester listened to the story and inserted occasional remarks: "I'll be damned!" or "You're kidding me?"

To which Tom replied, "I know they ain't kiddin'."

"They shore as hell ain't kiddin' nor tryin' to fool you two boys," Mabel said. She stood and refilled the coffee mugs. "I've known the story fer years, but nobody told it to me on a first hand basis, like these two girls sittin' here."

“What do you mean—you’ve known about the story for years?” Laura’s tone rose in her confusion. “It all happened just last night!”

“Did it now?” Mabel said. She shared an enigmatic smile between Laura and Lillian and went on, “Let me drag out some scrapbooks about our little town of Livengood. I been working on them fer years.” Mabel stood up and waddled away.

“You’re in for a surprise, Missy,” Tom showed his stained teeth in the grin he directed at Laura. “Follow me into the back room.”

The back room itself was quite a surprise to Laura. It was a veritable greenhouse, pleasantly warm, if a bit muggy. The entire south wall of the room was a mass of weatherproof, double-paned windows. Plants in pots, cans, cracked teapots and even a sugar bowl hung in crocheted hangers from the ceiling near the row of windows.

Mabel saw Laura staring at the floral array and said, “I like flowers, Honey, almost as much as I like collectin’ things for my scrapbooks here.” Mabel carried a wooden box.

Inside the box Laura could see the scrapbooks, which were Mabel’s pride. The woman set the box on the floor, selected the first of the scrapbooks and plopped it down on the table with a heavy thud. Particles of brittle paper-dust puffed in all directions.

“You’ll excuse the dust—comes from all my old books and papers,” Mabel said. “Now, Honey, I want you to thumb through this book of mine. Take your time but tell me if you see a picture of anyone of your friends from last night’s party.”

The scrapbook was thick with old photos and an occasional sepia-toned tintype. In between pages of pictures were pages of notes, letters, postcards, invitations and a riot of old newspaper clippings. Laura and Lillian bent over the book and turned the crisp dry pages. “There!” Laura said, “This old tintype looks something like the woman who gave the party—only, she called it a celebration.”

“Let me see.” Mabel bent to look and then slid the tintype from the four black triangular holders that secured it. She flipped the old picture over and read a yellowed label on the back, “*Cynthia Alice McGuire, Seattle, Washington, 18 years.*”

Laura took the picture from Mabel and studied it closely. “The name Cynthia is the same. This looks a little like her, but it couldn’t

be the woman we met. This must be a picture of her grandmother or something.” Mabel said, “Let me show you somethin’ else, Hon.” She turned a dozen pages at one time and thumbed through more before she said, “Is this the Cynthia you met?”

Laura and Lillian studied the large photo mounted on the page Mabel held open. “Yes! that’s her for sure,” Lillian squealed.

“It’s her,” Laura said. “The hair, the gown the gloves. Do you know her?”

“No,” Mabel answered, “But I know her name, it’s Cynthia M. Barnette; Famous in these parts and the Yukon, too. The Indian girl in this picture is Ruth Shelton, poor thing.”

Lillian gasped, “Ruthie was at the party, too!”

“I told you you’d be surprised,” Tom put in.

“Hush up, Tom,” Mabel said. She turned a few pages and said, “Look at this page.” There they were; Carl and Stephen in two separate photographs, but pasted in the scrapbook side by side on the same page. “That’s the man I danced with, Cynthia’s husband, Stephen and that man is the bartender, Carl.” Laura pointed to each picture.

“I danced with a boy named Jeff,” Lillian said. “You got a picture of him?”

“Sure she has,” Tom said. “She’s got pictures of all the folks and the news clippings as well. Why she can—“ “Hush up, I said!” Mabel interrupted.

Mabel carefully fanned a few pages and stopped; her forefinger touched a fading photo, “Is this the Jeff you’re talkin’ about?”

“Yes, that’s him,” Lillian giggled. “So cute and what a kisser.”

“What did you just say?” Chester looked at Lillian.

Tom popped out a gruff sound that was his form of laughter. “Lucky you,” he said. “Don’t many folks have *that* kinda experience.” He looked at Elton and Chester. “You two boys been takin’ all this in?” Chester looked bewildered “I heard her say she kissed some guy. She’s supposed to be my girl and not go around kissin’ strangers.”

“No need to look at pictures,” Elton said. “We weren’t at the party.”

“Lucky you,” Tom said and laughed again. “It’s time to show them the last page, Mabel.” Mabel shrugged her plump shoulders. She turned to the last page. “Read it yourself, girls,” she said. Laura and Lillian bent forward and read the aged, ivory-coloured clipping.

DAWSON CITY STAR & GAZETTE

Week of August 25, 1897

QUADRUPLE MURDER SHOCKS YUKON TOWN

Dawson City, Yukon Territory, Canada

RCMP authorities in this Northern city, announced this week, after due investigation and interpreting the testimony of several witnesses, that the murders in the early morning hours last Saturday, August 18th, were the result of a love triangle. Corporal Dickson Reed, RCMP Spokesman, said the clues were in the positioning of the bodies and the caliber of the bullets retrieved by the coroner. Three guns were involved in the shootings. Two identical, 38 caliber Smith and Wesson revolvers and one small pistol, described as a Derringer of a small caliber. All had been fired. It is conjectured that one, Stephen Barnette co-owner of the Mother Lode Saloon and Dance Hall, shot and mortally wounded his wife, Cynthia McGuire Barnette in a jealous rage after uncovering her affair with bartender, Carl Owens Raleigh. Sources told this paper that the three had quarreled earlier in the night before Mrs. Barnette ordered all customers to leave the premises, and closed the bar. The RCMP believes Mr. Barnette shot and killed Mr. Raleigh before he turned the gun on his wife. The authorities say a young miner, Jeffery Perkins, was also shot by the same caliber gun used by Barnette to kill the others. The theory held by the RCMP is that young Perkins was shot trying to come to the aid of Mrs. Barnette, but which owner of the Smith and Wesson revolvers fired the bullets that killed Perkins, has not yet been determined, and likely never will be decided.

One aspect of the event is not yet explained. Stephen Barnette was shot four times with a small caliber pistol. This gun was found in the hand of his dead wife but both hands of the young miner were still wrapped around Mrs. Barnette’s gun hand when the bodies were discovered. Authorities say they are not sure as to who fired the

small, silver, Derringer pistol. Some people conjectured Mrs. Barnette shot her husband, but the possibility remains that the young man, Jeffery Perkins, may have fired the fatal shots at Mr. Barnette. Authorities say they cannot make a definitive statement in this regard. Cremation of all the deceased is scheduled for Friday next on the riverbank. Event is open to the public.

Laura sat up in her chair. “And Ruthie?” She asked.

“You mean Ruth Shelton, the Indian girl? Poor thing, she died in the last small pox epidemic in Livengood; almost twenty years ago.”

Lillian said, “I don’t get this at all. Are you telling me these people are dead? That can’t be! I talked to Cynthia myself and I *know* that I danced with Jeff!”

“And you kissed him, too!” Chester pointed his finger at Lillian. “I thought you was *my* girlfriend?”

“I *am*, Sweetie!”

“But you cheated on me!”

“Not exactly,” Tom chuckled. “That is—the man’s been dead for forty-five years.”

“You mean I kissed a *dead* man?” Lillian shrieked, “Oh my gawd, I’m gonna be sick!” Lillian clamped her hand over her mouth and bolted from the room.

“Serves you right for cheating on me,” Chester yelled after her.

“Don’t puke on my clean front porch,” Tom shouted.

Mabel focused on Laura; the girl sat tight-lipped, her confusion evident on her face. She placed a comforting arm on Laura’s shoulder. Laura wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. Wet remains of tears glistened on her cheek when she turned to look up at Mabel. “I want to go back up there. Will you go with me Mabel?”

Mabel nodded ‘yes’ and said, “Tom, keep an eye on the store. Me and Laura are goin’ up to the bar.”

“Now?”

“Yes, *now*, you idiot! It’s broad daylight and nobody’s gonna be there.” Laura took the car keys from Eldon. “I don’t know how long I’ll be gone. I don’t even know why I need to go back up there—but I do. I guess I’ve got to find out if I believe in ghosts.”

* * * * *

During the rough ride, Mabel spoke to Laura, “You know, Honey, I was like you. I never believed in ghosts and haunts and things like that until I moved here to Livengood.”

“When did you start believing?”

“Well, it was when that bar changed hands three times in one year for no good reason. That’s when I began to ask questions.” Mabel shifted in her car seat. “Old Charlie Harding was the last owner. Kept the bar for ten years before he finally sold it in 1941—just before the town was abandoned and everyone left Livengood. Charlie told me at the end of that July, he was about to up and sell the bar.”

“Did this Charlie tell you why he sold the bar?”

“He sure did, but I already had guessed the most of it,” Mabel said. “You see, Charlie and all the other owners always shut down the inn and the bar before the middle

of August every year and didn’t open back up until Labor Day. So I was suspicious. Why shut down in the middle of the best month of the year?”

“What did you decide was their reason?”

“Charlie drank too much of Tom’s home brew one night and spilled the beans.” Mabel continued, “He said the damn place was haunted and one August night, the 18th it was, he woke up to sounds of a party and opened the door to the bar.”

“Did he say what he saw?”

“That’s the funny part of it,” Mabel said. “Charlie told me when he opened the bar door there was nobody there.”

“Then, how did he figure it out if those who haunt the bar weren’t there?”

“Old Charlie didn’t figure it out, I did!” Mabel said. “I read about haunts wanting to be around the things and places where they’d died, I put two and two together and come up with a score of one hundred.”

“What did you find out?”

“I found out that everything in that bar, the wall coverings, the lamps, and chandeliers, all the furniture, the piano and that fancy back-bar came down the Yukon after Dawson City’s gold petered out.”

“How did that happen?”

“The family, who bought the Mother Lode Saloon after the murders in Dawson, moved the operation down here to Livengood in the 1900’s. Miners, whores and sure-thing-men like gamblers and barkeeps always rush to the next big strike.”

“So you think the ghosts of Cynthia and everyone came along with the bar stuff?”

“You got it, Honey, and nobody has proved me wrong yet,” Mabel puffed herself up with pride. “I started collecting all the stuff in my scrap books to prove my point. But I was never sure I had it figured out exactly correct. But now, after hearin’ your story I know damn well I got it right.”

* * * * *

Laura parked in front of the Pioneer Bar and Inn. She switched off the ignition and turned to Mabel. “Would you mind waiting here? I want to go inside by myself.”

“You ain’t scared one bit are you, Honey?”

“Why should I be? Cynthia and Stephen and all of them were friendly and very real to me. I’ve just got to let myself see that they were ghosts; nothing more than spirits.”

The door to the bar groaned in protest when Laura pulled it open. The cavern of the dance hall-bar was dimly lit with angled shafts of sunlight sneaking into the room through rents in the tattered curtains. The roll-down blinds behind the faded curtains flapped with the slight wind gusts that pushed through broken or missing windowpanes. Laura walked across the saw-dust-covered dance floor to the bar. She turned and studied the footprints in the dust. She saw only two sets of prints leading from the side door to the inn. They crossed and criss-crossed around the room in a pattern of dance steps. She knew the prints were hers and Lillian’s.

On the bar was a whiskey tumbler stained with the amber dregs of some dried liquid. Nearby were two cut-crystal glasses, exactly like the brandy glasses she and Lillian had drunk from the night before. She rubbed her fingertip across the dusty bar and left a trailing line in the grey residue. Laura crossed to the piano. It was a solid thing;

fussily decorated with carved acorns and scrolling oak-leaves. On the upright portion she found a set of doors. She slid doors apart and saw the parchment roll of a player piano. She sat down on the piano stool and let her feet find the pedal-pumps.

Laura pumped until the air bellows powering the piano seemed full. She flicked the toggle switch above the keyboard to the 'on' position. The thick scroll with its myriad open rectangles began to move. The keys on the piano depressed as if played by an unseen thing. Three light chords and then the melody began. It was the *Varsuviennne*, *The Last Waltz of Summer*.

Laura turned and looked toward the bar, "Same time next year, Cynthia, I'll be back." She left the open space of the dance floor.

At the door to the outside world, she turned again and spoke to the shadows of the dance hall. "I'll be back to celebrate with you." She closed the door and walked to the sedan where Mabel sat waiting.

Laura could hear the faint strains of *The Varsuviennne*. The note-sounds were already slowing down and fading away before she pulled the car door shut and turned on the ignition.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jacques L. Condor (Maka-Tai-Meh) is a French-Canadian, Native American of Abenaki-Mesquaki descent. He has been a resident of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, living in major cities, small towns and in bush villages for over fifty years.

Condor moved to Alaska in 1947. He has lived in Nome, Saint Lawrence Island, Fairbanks, Moose Pass, Seward and spent time in many other villages around Manitoba.

In 1957 he moved to Anchorage and taught art, drama and theatre classes for Anchorage Community College. He holds degrees in Fine Arts and Theatre and Television Production.

Wherever he lived or traveled in Alaska and Canada, Condor began to collect the legends and stories of both the Natives and the remaining 'old-time' sourdoughs and pioneers. In the 1970's, an Alaskan State Arts Council grant enabled him to spend more time in villages collecting such tales and legends. He traveled to Haines, Juneau and the Yukon and Northwest Territories to search out more stories.

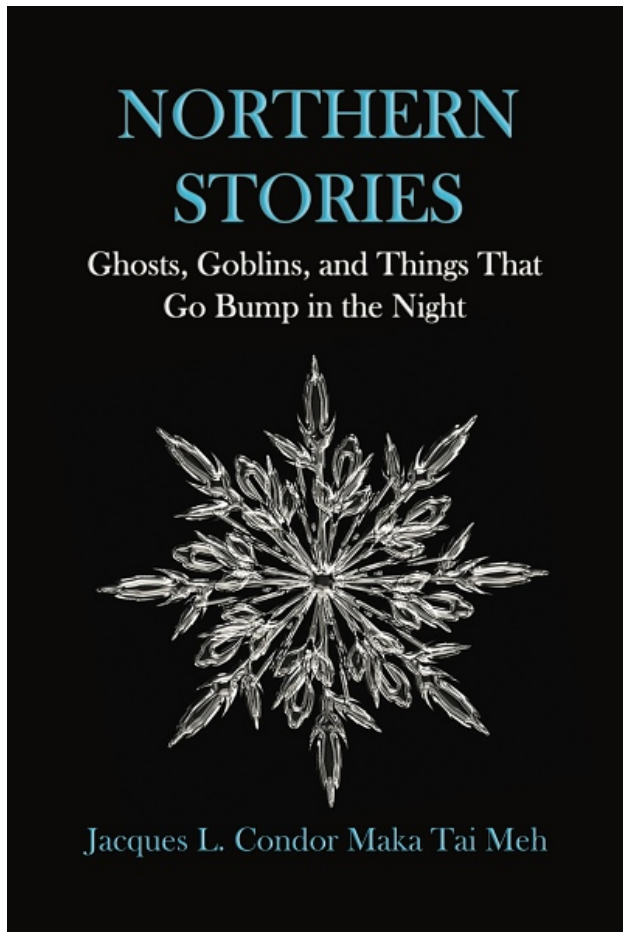
In the 80's and 90's Condor, as a Native American, was tapped to teach the culture, history and arts of his tribes. He held this position for twenty years in the Federal Government's Indian Education

Programs; teaching in schools, colleges, museums, and on reservations in the lower forty-eight states.

At the age of 73, Condor retired from teaching and began writing short stories and novellas based upon the legends and tales he had collected over many years. He has published six books on Alaskan and Canadian stories. Since 2005, Condor's work appeared in several anthologies: *Icefloes* and *Northwest Passages, A Cascadian Odyssey, Queer Dimensions, Queer Gothic Tales* and *Dead North, Canadian Zombie Tales*. He currently has completed five more Alaskan-Canadian-themed collections of short fiction. The stories in the collections are based on the lives of First Nations and Native peoples and the lives of the original miners, settlers, and trappers of Territorial days. Two books are collections of mystery, suspense, and the unexplained tales that haunt the northern half of North America; past and present yet today.

Condor divides his time between retirement in Sun City, Arizona and visits to Canada and Alaska, where he spends the summers, collecting more tales and legends.

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Up north in Alaska, strange things happen. In this collection of short stories, there are tales of ghosts, sasquatch, shapeshifters, extra-terrestrials, supernaturals, night visitors, and unexplained events that haunt the history of Alaska.

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