

Thrip, the sole survivor of the worst mass murder in Georgia history, is about to be betrayed by those trusted to protect him. He sits at his computer in an isolated farmhouse, interacting with his only true friend, a Homebound Outreach instructor, unaware of the forces conspiring to shatter his life and destroy his fragile inner world.

Thrip

by J.D. Brayton

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THRIP



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What We Owe Them:

An exclusive interview with Charleston Terser

by

Arthur Basil Tegardin

When Charleston Terser of Terser Forensic Investigations agreed to sit down for an interview, I think he was as surprised as I was. Terser, fifty-two, ex-FBI agent, owner and chief investigator of one of the best-regarded private investigation firms in the state of Georgia, is not a talkative man. If you have never heard of him until now, don't be surprised. Private investigators rarely seek the spotlight; it is, after all, part of the trade that they remain discreet, blend in. PIs are rarely seen, much less heard, even when the case is solved.

In 1995, Charleston Terser retired after twenty-three years in the FBI, Atlanta office, as a missing persons specialist. He was a lead field investigator in the infamous Senator Chester Dade kidnapping and disappearance in 1992. (The case remains unsolved.) His work was instrumental in breaking up the Florida drug cartel of Pedro Uchoa and, by happenstance, uncovering the illegal labor camps in Immokolee, Florida, responsible for the virtual slavery of agricultural workers from Chiapas.

In 1996, with the intention of settling down into a mild life as a private investigator, he began his own firm, Terser Forensic Investigations. The firm is involved primarily in finding bail-jumpers and alimony

cheats and following paper trails. As he admits, “Not very exciting stuff, not like the movies. Dull as watching grass grow.”

While working on a case involving several missing persons in Florida and Georgia, he was responsible for uncovering the illegal activities of Ernest Loafe, white supremacist candidate for senator in Georgia and leader of the ultra-right-wing American Patriot Party, who was responsible for directing the burning of several historically black churches in Florida, Georgia, and Alabama. Loafe was found shot dead before he could be charged with murder, extortion, kidnapping, and mail fraud and jailed under the federal RICO Act, as well as a half-dozen civil rights violations. As a result of his investigation, many Georgia politicians and contributors have either resigned, been voted out, or been charged with corruption. Of all the cases to make Charleston Terser a “quiet legend” in the forensic investigations community, this was it.

Tragically, in the course of the Loafe investigation, Charleston Terser’s wife, Marian, was brutally murdered by one of Loafe’s employees, leaving his son, Clive, without a mother and Terser without a wife. This is not a subject he will discuss in this or any other interview.

Seven months ago, in late November of 2015, Charleston Terser was contracted to find the whereabouts of an unknown woman missing since late 2004–05. The case brought him to Tifton, South Georgia, and the tiny nondescript hamlet of Ty-Ty, population three hundred, the scene of one of the most horrific mass murder scenes in Georgia history – the Breedlove pig farm. This was the infamous case of satanic cultists Milton and Amber Breedlove, the married couple responsible for the murder of more than fifty homeless and itinerant laborers on a desolate rural farm, discovered by chance by a postal worker in 2005. It was determined by investigators that many of the

remains of Breedlove's victims had been fed to the pigs raised, butchered, and sold to meat markets in a five-county area by the couple.

None of this was the concern of Charleston Terser, who was now unwittingly drawn into one of the most fascinating and horrific cases since the Breedlove pig farm incident. His client, Collier Scottlund, a Hollywood producer, was using him to reopen that infamous case by finding the mother of a young man, dubbed by the media "the Sooy Boy" – a five-year-old child – the sole survivor of the fiery raid that left Milton and Amber Breedlove dead and two state troopers mortally wounded after combined SWAT teams and Georgia police converged on the farm out on Pecker's Grove Road in August of 2005.

Charleston Terser was once again put in the center of a drama he neither expected nor bargained for.

On November 4, a shooter burst into a Homebound Outreach Education Center in Albany and shot eight people dead in what, on the surface, seemed to be another mass school shooting in America. One of the prime suspects was Mavyn Justain Breedlove, the boy found in the basement after the raid in 2005, now the fourteen-year-old son of Milton and Amber Breedlove, who had been living quietly in a foster home in rural Ty-Ty. One of the victims, Deidra Brook was his Homebound Outreach instructor.

A trail of murders in Tifton and rural Ty-Ty were discovered after Mavyn Justain (Breedlove), fourteen, and an accomplice, Chandler Cump, eighteen, escaped from the minimum-security juvenile psychiatric ward of Tifton General Hospital, resulting in an intensive manhunt by Tift and Dougherty County Sheriff Departments. What was uncovered in the subsequent investigation has made national network news, been the subject of true crime tabloids, cable television

documentaries, internet conspiracy chatrooms, and is now rumored to be the subject of a major motion picture currently in production in the Peach State.

Charleston Terser and one other man, Dr. Bertrand Timm, were seriously wounded in an ambush by the state-appointed foster-father, Willard Custis, while attempting to apprehend Mavyn Justain Breedlove in the hopes that he would voluntarily surrender to the police.

Mavyn Justain Mazure (Breedlove) was charged and acquitted of murder by reason of self-defense and non-compos mentis. He is now confined in a state psychiatric hospital until he turns eighteen.

Charleston Terser is what might be best described as a “quiet legend” among his colleagues in the profession. He does not waste time or mince words. He is not one for witty repartee or clever anecdotes. Most importantly, he knows how to listen. He answers questions carefully, studiously. He rarely betrays emotion. He is known for his capacious, clear, and plainspoken manner, occasionally mixed with dry wit. He never uses obscenity. For security reasons, he would not allow photographs of himself to be taken for this interview.

What follows is the first, and only, interview given to any media organization by Charleston Terser about the case.

(Editor’s Note: Mavyn Justain Breedlove was subsequently found to have the surname Mazure; hence, the parentheses where his name is used in the interview. ~ A.B. Tegardin)

ABT: First of all, I want you to know how much I appreciate you granting this interview. I know it wasn’t your preference.

C.T.: To be honest, no, it wasn't.

ABT: I know reliving parts of this case will be difficult. You were seriously wounded in an attack by Willard Custis, the foster father of Mavyn Justain, and so was Dr. Bertrand Timm, correct?

C.T.: Yes, that is correct, although I'd point out that Dr. Timm was severely wounded. My injuries were mild in comparison.

ABT: You suffered a facial injury, were shot once in the knee, and were wounded by shrapnel in your foot.

C.T.: Yes.

ABT: What precipitated the attack by Willard Custis?

C.T.: We were in the wrong place at the right time. I guess that would be the only way to describe it.

ABT: Why were you out on Peeker's Grove Road?

C.T.: Dr. Timm and I were trying to find Mavyn Justain Mazure (Breedlove) before he was caught in a violent confrontation with authorities. Dr. Timm and M.J. were well known to one another. I had never met M.J. before that day.

ABT: How did you know M.J. Mazure (Breedlove) would be in that precise location?

C.T.: We didn't. It was a calculated hunch.

ABT: Did you know Willard Custis before he attacked you?

C.T.: Not personally. Dr. Timm was well acquainted with Custis. I only knew of him second-hand through written reports and such.

ABT: Why, in your opinion, do you think Willard Custis found and targeted you and Dr. Timm out by the ruins of Breedlove Farm?

C.T.: Hard to say. It may have been that it was random, that he simply stumbled upon us at the same location he believed he would find M.J. Mazure (Breedlove). The attack happened fast. We were pinned down by a massive and violent thunderstorm at that moment. Though he was obscured by the fogged glass, Willard Custis did look in the passenger window where Dr. Timm was sitting and must have recognized him. In my opinion, Custis made a split-second decision to eliminate all witnesses who might identify him. Simple as that.

ABT: Willard Custis died at the scene by being shot by M.J. Mazure?

C.T.: Correct.

ABT: Did you know M.J. Mazure was armed?

C.T.: No, not for certain – but we knew the authorities suspected it. Our intention was to locate M.J., disarm him if necessary, and, if possible, bring him in to authorities to surrender voluntarily. Dr. Timm was particularly concerned that misunderstandings might escalate into violence.

ABT: Did you alert authorities, the sheriff's department or the Georgia State Police, of your intentions or your location? Or, to put it differently, why didn't you alert authorities?

C.T.: There wasn't much time, but yes, we had every intention of contacting the authorities as soon as we were on location. It was a very fast-moving, fluid situation.

ABT: Do you regret that decision?

C.T.: Hard to say. It does no good to relive or rethink something that has already happened. I'm still certain that M.J. might not have survived if he had met the police instead of us. We had no way of knowing that Willard Custis was armed and actively hunting M.J.,

much less that he was involved in the murders of Curtis Lumpkins and Chandler Cump.

ABT: The police initially thought M.J. was a prime suspect in those murders and had something to do with the overdose deaths of Craig Ralph and Pauline Jolly.

C.T.: That's right. Neither Dr. Timm nor I had any idea how convoluted this case was at the time. My professional involvement was confidential, limited in scope.

ABT: Can you elaborate?

C.T.: I was there in my capacity as a private investigator.

ABT: To investigate who?

C.T.: I was hired in a paternity investigation involving the true parentage of, as he was then known, Mavyn Justain Breedlove.

ABT: At the time, it was a closely guarded secret that Mavyn Justain was not Milton and Amber Breedlove's natural son.

C.T.: Correct. Those records were sealed. That specific information was known only to Dr. Timm and the Georgia Juvenile Protection Services. He was a minor when he was discovered in the Breedlove farm incident.

ABT: Were you aware of the specifics of the Breedlove farm raid of 2005?

C.T.: To be honest, I knew very little. I was distracted by my work and personal life at the time. I was entirely unaware of any connections between M.J., the Breedlove farm incident, and my client. I was hired as an MP (missing persons) investigator to find any link between several missing women in the year 2005, and I was trying to collect

DNA from the families of those missing women and report my findings to my client.

ABT: Who was that client?

C.T.: I prefer not to divulge that information, but I'm sure you can find out more by researching the case and all arrest records connected with it. I respect all my clients' rights to professional privacy.

ABT: Did your investigation lead to the identity of Mavyn Justain Mazure's mother?

C.T.: Obviously. Otherwise, his legal surname would not be a matter of public knowledge. I was not responsible for making that information public. The media did that.

ABT: It was Mavyn Justain who led investigators to the undiscovered remains of his mother, Tara Mazure, correct?

C.T.: Yes.

ABT: This is one of the most bizarre aspects of this case. No one can explain how he could have known the location of her unmarked grave. Considering the circumstances of her murder by the Breedloves, and the fact that the investigation determined she was killed immediately after giving birth, it is improbable that Mavyn would in any way be aware of the location of his mother's remains. Yet he did. Do you have any theories as to how M.J. knew any of this? Do you think M.J. has psychic abilities?

C.T.: I don't believe in supernatural explanations where scientific reason is called for.

ABT: Or perhaps the Breedloves might have spoken about it, and it was simply a buried memory?

C.T.: No. I think he has a unique, analytical mind. Some might try to argue clairvoyance, but it is better explained by his ability to connect mathematics with a psychological condition known as synesthesia. The only way I can try to describe it is that he reasons in geometrical shapes. My hypothesis? Mavyn Justain may be on the edge of the spectrum close to autism, the sort of unexplained genius that gives otherwise dysfunctional people the ability to do perfect calculations at computer speed or to see or act upon things that normal people cannot or do not notice. I do know that he became obsessed with the work of an obscure philosopher, B.W. Betts. I think that may be a thread you might consider investigating further.

ABT: Do you think his confined family situation and educational limitations made his gift easy to overlook?

C.T.: In a word, yes. I think his Homebound Outreach instructor knew. By all accounts, they had a deep connection. The transcripts of their sessions show as much. I'm only sorry they were made public during the media feeding frenzy after the case made network news.

ABT: This teacher was Deidra Brooks, one of the victims in the Albany school shootings?

C.T.: Yes.

ABT: Wasn't Mavyn Justain considered one of the possible suspects in that incident?

C.T.: So I'm told. So, also, was Deidra Brook's husband, Hale Brook. Both M.J. and Hale Brook were missing and unaccounted for the same day of the attack. Both had a connection to the Homebound Outreach Program. It was an understandable investigatory thread. Neither were true. In the case of Hale Brook, a veteran with a traumatic brain injury, it was a tragic suicide.

ABT: If you read the most recent correspondence between M.J. Mazure and me, did you notice the passage that would seem to suggest that M.J. saw Hale Brook's body? What was your impression?

C.T.: A bit odd. I knew nothing about that. To be honest, if it is true, then it is new, prescient information. It might explain how M.J. somehow circled behind Willard Custis and saved our lives.

ABT: As it turned out, the school murders were committed by the jealous wife of... I'm sorry, what was his name?

C.T.: Humbolt. She caught him with his pants down. She pleaded guilty. She faces the death penalty for all eight murders. Might be one of the few women in Georgia history to face lethal injection. Rumor has it that she wants a firing squad like that Gary Gilmore thing. Strange bird. Some sort of gun rights nut.

ABT: Your former client is in prison serving a five-year sentence for drug possession and an obstruction charge?

C.T.: I really can't comment on that.

ABT: Is it true that your former client is a blood relation to M.J. Mazure?

C.T.: No comment.

ABT: I don't want to press you on this thread, but do you think that your client put your life in danger by not divulging the entire truth of his possible relationship to M.J. Mazure (Breedlove)?

C.T.: Obviously. But again, I'd rather not continue with that line of inquiry.

ABT: Mr. Terser, how do you believe your experience in the case of M.J. Mazure and the Breedlove case has changed or affected you?

C.T.: Every case affects you. This one was intense. Being shot and wounded is a trauma that is difficult to explain adequately to anyone who hasn't experienced it. I think it's important to be grateful in this life, to surround oneself with love and support. That is the only way to heal. Isolating is a very dangerous thing.

ABT: Do you think you suffer from PTSD?

C.T.: Let's just say I'm still working it all out.

ABT: How?

C.T.: I watch a lot of baseball.

ABT: Are you troubled by the media still using the term-"the Sooeoy Boy Case"?

C.T.: First, I'd prefer not to feed the media hyperbole by using that term. Second, the young man in question was severely traumatized by incalculable loss. Empathy is a quality all too rare in our society of late. I do know that it is possible to survive unimaginable tragedy, but not without a lot of support. I only wish this young man the best. Our society is quite ill, I'm afraid. Guns have replaced coping skills. Watching television murder has desensitized the public. But there are still good people out here. It helps me to know that when I deal with what I do professionally every day. Loss changes people, but it doesn't have to be irrevocable. I guess I don't know how else to put it. Try to be kind.

ABT: M.J. Mazure is currently being confined in a juvenile psychiatric facility. Has he tried to contact you?

C.T.: No.

ABT: Dr. Timm was his former therapist. Has he tried, to your knowledge, to contact Dr. Timm?

C.T.: Not to my knowledge. You'd need to ask him. I haven't spoken to Dr. Timm for several months.

ABT: What do you think are M.J. Mazure's (Breedlove) chances of leading a normal life once he is released?

C.T.: I won't speculate. Not my wheelhouse.

ABT: Any opinion on gun laws in the United States? What would you change if you could?

C.T.: Personally, I don't like guns. In my professional life, I've needed to carry, but I've never felt any safer because of it. If I never saw another gun, I'd be content. I'm not sure my opinion matters.

ABT: Anything you'd change?

C.T.: I'd change whatever made it normal for this society to accept children being murdered in a classroom.

ABT: Do you think America can summon the political will to restrict firearms?

C.T.: Son, I'm not a politician. All I can say is this: no one survives a circular firing squad.

ABT: Do you mind me asking if you've ever been in the position of using your firearm?

C.T.: Yes. I have used my weapon.

ABT: Have you ever shot another person?

C.T.: No. I've only ever discharged my weapon in self-defense. To the best of my knowledge, I haven't ever hurt anyone.

ABT: Do you consider yourself a good marksman?

Acknowledgements

This novel began as a series of joke haikus between Patrice and I as a result of our shared and somewhat bizarre experiences living in Ty-Ty, Georgia in 1970. I consider her my sister in humor, creativity and soul. She shared her stories of being a Homebound instructor for sick children and I was moved by the dedication and fortitude it takes to educate and to bear the burden of knowing many students in such programs will not survive. Hope is life. By extension, I dedicate this novel to all educators and all who illuminate what might otherwise be a dark world.

Gary Dryden, one of my oldest friends in life, for his gimlet eye and absurdist sense of humor.

Also: to my daughter Ruby who used her skills as a researcher to help me with many of the facts involving gun violence in the United States. We must do better. Our children are not sacrificial lambs, they are our only hope for a verdant future.

JDB

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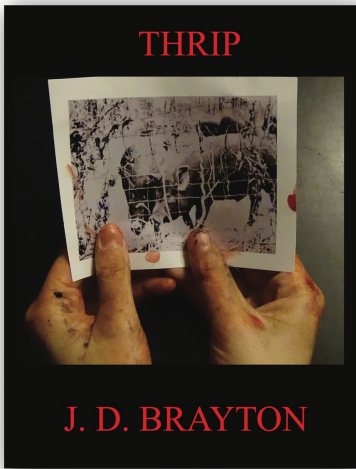
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