

This is a horror-love story, where a husband, ex cop (Otis Tweedy), is forced to confront an evil entity that is terrorizing his wife. Otis is aware of the power this supernatural force wields, but he has little choice and the danger is growing.

Cappawhite

By Gerald J. Tate

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Cappawhite

An ancient evil
An unstoppable force

GERALD J TATE

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Also by Gerald J. Tate

Beyond the Forest's Edge Cappawhite II

Dead Village Cappawhite III

From Sparta

Hot Sand Cool Sea

Chapter 1

BERING SEA 1830

Darkness enveloped the great man-o-war as she climbed up into another mountainous wave and violently lurched on a roll to port. The timbers, masts and rigging creaked loudly from bow to stern as they strained under a wind and sea so powerful, that it threatened to break the vessel into a thousand pieces as the waves crashed around and over it. A mighty lightning bolt turned night into day as it forked its way majestically across the dark clouded sky; stretching its powerful talons over the sea, and betraying the condition of the ship below with its ripped and tattered sails, that blew like colourless streamers on some faraway grotesque battlefield. Midshipman Roberts stared out from the forward hatchway, his eyes widening with fear, open mouthed as he stared up at the mast head and the scene he was witnessing high above him. "Dear Lord, I must tell someone," he cried as the sky lit up again and he scurried down below.

The gale-force wind was unrelenting as it pushed and pulled at the ship from all directions, forcing it uncontrollably toward its doom. Another flash and the deserted decks lit up again, deserted save for the sea and rain that thundered across them, stripping the last barrel of its tether and flinging it far over the side as the foaming waves forced their way, unstoppable, across to the other side and beyond. Below decks there was a great fear among the sailors and marines as they clung to the bulkheads with whispered prayers, praying for some divine providence to come save them as sprays of sea came showering in all around, freezing and wet. “Stay at the pump will you man?” A distant voice faintly raged from the fo’c’sle.

Master’s mate Collins nodded at the frightened midshipman who had just whispered a message frantically into his ear. A message that would see him battle his way back toward the stern, back to the great cabin. Collins shook his head in disbelief at what the midshipman had just told him, but he would have to inform the captain immediately, and before walking away he patted Roberts gently on the arm. “Take it easy lad,” he said as he smiled and nodded at the youngster who wasn’t quite yet a man. He held tightly to the rope rail as he stumbled and tripped through the darkness as the incessant heaving increased.

He moved quickly through the shadows, fighting constantly against the roll and pitch as the out-of-control vessel lifted into the crest of yet another large wave,

only to be forced back again when she plummeted into the valley below, but he struggled on regardless. The roaring noise from the clash of thunder overhead was louder than Collins had ever heard before, and he could not hide his fear as he pounded his fist on the great cabin door.

“Captain,” he shouted, unheard as the storm raged all around him. “Captain,” he repeated as he jerked open the door and held tightly to the frame, struggling as he did to force his way inside.

Captain Bingham sat at the large table, facing him with head bowed. His left hand rested on the log while his right hand held firmly onto the ship’s Bible. Collins stared at the mess on the floor between the captain’s feet where he had thrown up, and even in his own fear he realised that this war-hardened old seaman was a mere mortal like the rest of them after all. Captain Bingham had been through the most dangerous and hazardous times of any seaman during his thirty-five years at sea, fighting with distinction as a young midshipman with Nelson at Trafalgar, and being badly wounded in the process. The wound still gave him considerable discomfort, the winter months being especially hard on him and causing him most concern. It was these months that would see his pains increase tenfold, and which would seriously hamper him in the running of his ship. No one would ever know this though, because the captain had always hidden his condition from the men, only allowing the ship’s surgeon to share his secret. Now was such a time as he sat and cursed his pain, and

he prayed for the strength that he knew he was going to need. The captain had also weathered the toughest storms that even the Horn could have thrown at him, but he had endured and had lived to tell the tale. He had even taken to the boats on occasion, once when one of his ships had foundered twenty miles off Van Diemen's Land. But this, this was something different. This storm had crept up on them, ambushed them with no prior warning. There had been no time for any orders to be implemented to secure the ship, and this storm he knew was going to be the last one they would ever encounter. This storm was death.

"Captain," Collins cried, as he gripped the table with both hands, while the ship continued to roll and pitch ferociously. The captain slowly lifted his head and stared solemnly at the master's mate without speaking.

"Captain Sir, I've got a message for you sir," Collins shouted, raising his voice above the thunderous roaring from outside.

"Speak man," the captain ordered in his loud, gruff, Cornish voice.

"I've just had a report from young midshipman Roberts. He says there's someone moving about up in the shrouds sir."

"Who is it?"

"The thing is sir, he doesn't know."

"What do you mean, he doesn't know?" Captain Bingham bellowed.

"Well sir, the men are all accounted for below decks, and..."

“Impossible man,” the captain interrupted, sounding angry and confused.

“No one could have stowed away on this vessel. Why, we’ve been at sea for three months man, without even nearing land,” he shouted loudly as the roaring outside became stronger, almost deafening them.

“Well, you’d best come see for yourself then sir,” Collins said and pointed toward the cabin door.

Somewhere above old Cyrus was busy pumping frantically as the water levels increased in the brig below.

“It’s bloody useless boys; the pump’s not holding. Go tell the captain we’ve lost the fight. He’ll have to give the order to abandon her,” he yelled to one of the junior rank.

“You’re scaring the lad, Cyrus!” someone shouted.

“I’d rather take my chances here than go out in an open boat in this storm,” Martin, the cook barked to no one in particular.

“Well, there are no boats to go in,” someone added. “They’ve been blown off the deck and over the side, down to the dark ocean floor.”

Back at the cabin the captain had sprung up from his seat, wincing in his pain, but he disguised the fact and very quickly stormed past Collins, almost knocking him over as he hastened out into the small corridor and up the steps that led to the quarter deck. Collins looked back into the cabin and noticed that the ship’s log still lay on the table, but the Bible had gone, clutched firmly in the captain’s grip as he struggled to hold onto the rail.

“Wait, captain sir,” the mate implored as he slowly pulled himself up the rail behind him. Suddenly the ship spun around on its axis and rolled violently to starboard, sending the two men sprawling together in a heap, down on to the hard wooden deck below. As another lightning bolt turned night into day, the men stared hard at each other. Collins could see that the captain had been hurt in the fall; his cheek gashed quite badly, the blood running down in little rivulets onto his shoulder. The captain though simply shrugged it off and carried on, pulling himself purposefully back up the steps, the Bible still held tightly in his powerful grip.

On reaching the quarter deck doors Captain Bingham pushed with all his might, but the gale-force wind and rain gave no quarter and the doors held fast. Suddenly the arm of the master’s mate shot over the captain’s bloodied shoulder and the two men now pushed together in unison with all the strength they could muster.

The doors began moving slowly outward, and in an instant they burst open; the wind and rain blasted at the men’s faces and bodies as they held firmly to the rail. Collins pointed up into the darkness and as the captain shielded his eyes from the biting rain he stared hard up to the rags that had once been used to propel the ship across the vast seas and oceans.

The lightning bolt that lit up the sky, just for a second or two, gave enough time for him to see the hooded figure climb the rigging.

“How can he move about in this wind? Why, it’s impossible,” he stated as the rain poured down his face,

diluting the blood from his still bleeding wound. Collins made no reply but simply shook his head. "Well, we're going to have to get him down," the captain added. "Send Benson and Martin aloft, they're our best," he ordered.

"Listen sir, no one could climb up there in this storm. Like you just said sir, it's impossible," Collins answered.

"What are you saying man, blast your hide?" Captain Bingham thundered, even more confused now as he stared at the figure aloft. Collins cupped his hands and shouted into the Captain's ear, trying to make himself heard above the constant roar of thunder.

"Whatever that thing is up there sir, it's not human," he shouted, as he stared at the captain, the fear etched on his face, and the captain didn't notice that he was gripping the Bible so tightly that his knuckles had turned white. Suddenly they watched as the figure made its way quickly over the mast head and along the rigging. Another flash and the figure moved further along, over the yardarms. Its unnatural jerking movements left the two men below staring in terror, and the captain wiped the rain from his eyes before he spoke.

"Dear Father in Heaven, what is this thing that has been sent to us?"

He knew, as Collins had just stated, that no one could possibly move about like this in these conditions, yet here before his very eyes someone was, and at a speed that was impossible for any mortal man.

Another bolt of lightning lit up the ship, followed by six more in succession, and then to the men's horror they watched as the figure floated back across to the mast

head, levitating in mid air as it rotated slowly around, the face hidden deep inside its hood. And now there was something else the captain was aware of. It was watching them.

This was a demon, the captain knew. He had heard stories about these evil creatures from other sea captains. The story of Captain Lang and his stout crew came to mind. This highly thought of captain had reported a demon coming on board his vessel. Eighteen-fifteen it was, when Lang's ship, *The Everest*, a 150 foot merchant man, was sailing from Jamaica to England, when some time in the night a fierce storm blew up and a grotesque, wailing creature somehow came on board. According to Captain Lang it seemed only interested in one man; an able seaman by the name of Jeremiah Cotter. The demon did not harm him in any way though, but left the ship rather quickly. Ten nights later it returned, but at first not one of the people threatened it. In fact most of the crew stood cowering in the nearest corner they could find. However, when the demon seized and tried to take Cotter, five brave seamen attacked it. Three were killed instantly and it took Cotter with little effort. Captain Lang, an honourable man, refused to return to naval duties after this trip and nothing more was heard of him again.

Now Captain Bingham faced one of these unspeakable creatures, and he knew he would be powerless against it. The ship shuddered as it moved across the crest of another mountainous wave, but

Captain Bingham's eyes held firmly on the figure, as now it was slowly descending down toward them.

"God Almighty," the master's mate yelled, as he forcefully pulled the captain back inside. He jerked frantically at the quarter deck doors, slamming them shut behind him. Slowly the two men backed down the steps, down into the bowels of the ship. Suddenly Collins grasped the captain's arm tightly. "What is this fucking thing?" Collins screamed. All respect for his captain was now gone, and unable to hide the fear and panic in his voice, he continued to mouth obscenities.

Captain Bingham at first did not answer, but looked at Collins in a most threatening manner. He had never been spoken to like this before, not from anyone below his station, and in normal circumstances this sort of disgraceful act would be punished very severely. However, as it seemed the ship was about to go under at any moment now, it seemed fruitless to pursue the matter any further, and he had already decided on his next course of action.

"Calm yourself down, you damned scoundrel, and behave like a bloody man," he bellowed, as he began to recite the Lord's Prayer. This seemed to have an immediate effect on Collins and he stared at his brave and wise captain, now realising just how cowardly he had sounded.

"S-sorry, s-sir," he stuttered nervously. Blood still slowly rolled freely down Captain Bingham's cheek as he spoke, and Collins, even though he had never quite mastered the words, joined him enthusiastically in prayer, holding onto the front of the Bible as if it were

some sort of magic talisman that would save them from this hell.

In the darkness Collins thought he saw a shape, just as something brushed sharply against his side and he jumped with fright, almost forcing the captain down the steps as another lightning bolt lit up the staircase once again.

The light filled every crevice of the ship as the cold wind and rain blew fiercely around them, blowing down from the quarter deck, and at once Captain Bingham knew the reason why.

“The doors,” he yelled, and as they both turned around in unison they could see at once that the quarterdeck doors were gone. Then to their dismay and horror they noticed that the doors had not been blown open, but had been torn and smashed from their very latches by a different force. The hinges now strutted out at odd angles as they glistened in the darkness against the streaks of moonlight that had forged their way down to them between the clouds. Collins, by now reduced to a pathetic figure of the man he used to be, muttered loudly as they retreated further down the steps. He would go deep into the ship, anywhere away from this nightmare, and he pushed himself further on, crying and panting as he went.

Another large wave sent the ship on yet another vicious roll, sending the two men tumbling head first down the remaining steps.

Quickly scrambling to their feet, they forced their way into the large cabin, and Collins slammed the door shut behind them. Below decks the crew were unaware

of their captain and master's mate's predicament, but they held hands tightly in prayer and thought about their families back home, as they now believed the end was drawing ever nearer.

Emerson the American didn't want to die like this. He had loved the seafaring life, had left America as a small boy and had served in His Majesty's navy for over forty years. He was also one of the oldest men on board, and he had served under this captain for the last twelve of them.

This captain is the bravest of them all, he thought. Why, this captain was a man whom he would gladly have followed to the ends of the earth and beyond.

"Why is the captain not with us?" Emerson shouted.

"Aye, get the captain," someone yelled.

"God knows we need him," Emerson mumbled. "I'm going to bloody find him," he muttered to no one in particular, and with that he made off toward the stern, stumbling along the lower deck and almost falling on his face when he tripped over Toby, the ship's dog. Toby had partly wedged itself between a large ammunition chest and a small water keg, its hind legs protruding out over the deck.

"Damned hound," he shouted as the dog snarled loudly and snapped ferociously at him, its white teeth bared and showing up in the darkness. Until now Emerson had always liked this good natured animal, and he had never known it to be vicious like this before. Now he felt frightened. He wondered why the dog was behaving in such a way, but he moved on slowly along

the deck as the large ship continued to roll and lurch in all directions.

“You’re a damned devil,” he shouted at the dog, which was now behind and following him, snarling and growling fiercely. And all the while saliva dripped from its mouth.

Inside the large cabin Collins stood firmly at the door, determined that nothing would enter through, as Captain Bingham flung himself into a chair, shaking and panting for breath as he tried to compose himself over this horror that he had just witnessed. The captain pulled open a drawer as he groped blindly in the darkness, and removed the fine bottle of wine he had purchased at Tenerife all those many months ago as a present for his good friend Captain Price. He uncorked it and quickly swallowed some down. He would never normally let drink pass his lips, at least not since he was a young man, and not because he had any moral issue about it. It was simply that as a young officer he had tried it, and found the taste revolted him. Now though, he believed that if he was ever going to drink, then this occasion would now be as fitting a time as any. Crash, the thunder outside roared and he felt he was on the receiving end of some hell ship with a 1000 gunner’s broadside.

Suddenly the cabin filled with light and the slow movement of the shape before them caught the captain’s eye. He let out a loud gasp as the bottle slipped from his sweating palm, and he was unaware of it smashing down onto the hard deck.

He stared in horror upon the figure that was hovering less than ten feet in front of him, arms outstretched, it moved menacingly toward him.

Another lightning bolt filled the cabin with its brightness, sending little shadows dancing into the furthest corners, and lighting up the master's mate who was now armed with a cutlass and charging at the beast, striking it hard on the side of its head. But it spun around with astonishing speed, and just before he had a chance to strike again, the creature gripped his neck with its large, grey spindly hand, as the captain watched in horror. A deep growl emulated from the creature as it stared into Collins face before it squeezed with a force so powerful that it tore his throat out as easily as squashing a rose petal. When it released him, his lifeless body crashed down to the floor of the cabin. It continued moving slowly toward the captain again, its hooded head quickly turning from side to side as it neared him, and the captain groped blindly for the Bible that was no longer in his hand, before realising to his dismay that he had dropped it outside the door of the cabin, somewhere out in the dark hallway, beyond his reach.

"What is your business here sir?" he bravely spat at the creature as it caressed his cheek with its long fingers, and pushed its face closer to his. The creature continued slowly moving its head from side to side and the captain felt as though it was somehow mocking him. He also felt numb with horror and fear when he stared back into the beast's twisted, face. The taste of its foul breath on his lips nauseated him as he fought to stand up, but he found himself unable to move.

“Damn your blood, you hound from hell,” he bravely bellowed at the creature, before it shrieked at him so loudly that the storm could no longer be heard, and he felt that his eardrums were about to burst open. Just then the cabin door swung open and Emerson came stumbling in, tripping over the lifeless body of Collins, but he managed to hold on to the edge of the table to stop his fall.

“What in God’s name is happening here?” he muttered, as he witnessed the scenario unfolding before him, and he quickly lifted the cutlass from the floor as the creature moved slowly away from the captain, toward the door.

“No, leave it man,” Captain Bingham shouted loudly, as Emerson lifted the cutlass to strike the beast.

But the captain’s command came too late as the faithful old sailor swung the blade hard, hitting the creature firmly in its back with a blow that would have killed most men instantly, but didn’t even seem to make this beast flinch.

The captain watched again in terror as the creature turned around and gripped Emerson’s head in one large powerful hand, as it held his shoulder with the other. Another flash and the cabin turned to daylight once more. The captain wretched as he witnessed Emerson’s head being quickly torn from his body. The creature threw Emerson’s head unceremoniously over its shoulder and as it bounced across the cabin floor the thunder outside boomed on loudly.

Something else was in the room now, and in the darkness the captain could just make out the shape as it lunged onto the creature.

Something sounded familiar, and as the cabin lit up again and he knew. It was Toby, hanging on to the creature's arm, biting and snarling, twisting its body violently as it ripped and tore at the beast. The creature then seized the dog with its other powerful, gnarled hand, pulling the snarling animal away to arm's length. The creature sneered before throwing the dog down onto the hard deck, its pointed black teeth showing as the injured whimpering dog struggled out through the cabin door, into the hallway, and disappeared down the dark corridor.

The beast continued to move slowly on through the doorway, and the captain, on his feet now, ran to a side cabinet and withdrew the loaded pistol he had always kept there in case of mutinous behaviour with the crew. He quickly chased out after the beast and took careful aim as he hung on to the rail to steady himself. He didn't fear it now though, not after it had violated him, violated these dead seamen, leaving its evil testament in blood all over the cabin floor, and if he were to die attempting to kill it, then so be it.

The creature had just reached the point where the quarterdeck doors used to be, moving backward out through the doorway and into the wind and rain as it mouthed words at him, though none could be heard. Suddenly Captain Bingham fired at it, hitting the creature directly in the chest. It proceeded on though,

seemingly unhurt, to move on out, up over the side of the ship, and high into the storm filled sky.

All at once the lightning and the crashing thunder stopped, and below his feet the captain could feel the ship steadying as the sea became quite calm, the storm ending as quickly as it had begun.

“It’s a bloody miracle captain;” the sailors and marines shouted as they ran up onto the deck.

“The Lord has answered our prayers;” one of the men said softly to the captain as he fell to his knees in thanks.

The captain thought back to the story of Captain Lang, and how the demon had sought out only one man, seaman Cotter. It had returned for this fellow some days later though and had taken him away. Now he was quite sure that this demon had sought him out, and only him. And now he was convinced this creature would be returning for him also.

“No;” the captain answered loudly to the men, who stood almost cheering in their relief.

He looked up into the moonlight and pointed, hand trembling, to the now barely visible figure disappearing high into the clouds.

“The Lord has had no hand in this day’s work lads. No! This is something else, something very evil, and I don’t believe we’ve seen or heard the last of it, God help us all,” he said.

As he hurried back down the steps, the men looked about to each other with fear in their eyes. Their brief stay of death short lived. Because if the captain thought this about their situation, then they were sure it would

happen to them. This captain was seldom wrong about things, they felt. This fearless captain had led them through many engagements with the enemy and had always been right.

"Set a course for home, full speed," he ordered before going below and retrieving the Bible from the passageway floor. He gripped it tightly under his arm and slammed the cabin door behind him as he wiped a tear from his eye.

Chapter 2

Ireland 1967

As the Boeing 707 approached Ireland, Otis clenched his huge fists around the end of the arm rests until his knuckles turned white. The pilot had just announced that they would be landing at Shannon Airport in about fifteen minute's time, approaching from the west, and he wondered why they volunteered this useless piece of information. Because as far as Otis was concerned, he would rather they said nothing until the goddamn plane was on the ground. He hated flying, and not just because of the dangers involved. But now well into his forties, and after many years of Sarah's cooking, he had increased in girth so much that before take-off, in his embarrassment, the seat belt, even on full adjustment had taken him three attempts to lock in. Sarah jokingly remarked that she would ask the hostess for an extension strap. But Otis simply responded by flashing his teeth in a broad grin as he gave her one of his looks. A look and smile he had perfected over the years which made him resemble a black Burt Lancaster.

Cappawhite

“Sure thing honey,” he said, mimicking and sounding just like Burt Lancaster himself, as he moved his head in the Burt way, which caused her to laugh loudly.

His medical discharge from the force had been tough, but Sarah was there for him, Wife, lover, cook, and above all best friend. He loved her flowing red hair and her special smile. A smile that could send his pulse racing, and her slight Irish accent that he never tired of hearing. At least on that score life had been kind to him.

Sarah had recently inherited a house in Ireland after her favourite uncle, Patrick, had suddenly passed away, and the couple had decided to leave racist sixties America, move to Ireland and live at the house. Patrick, her father’s brother, had never married, and therefore had no children of his own, but he had loved Sarah like a father. And because Sarah was an only child, Patrick had spoiled her since she was a baby. Then, when her mother had taken her to America, he was heartbroken, but could do little about it as her mother and he were barely on speaking terms. Sarah never did find out the reason why though. In any event, he had never forgotten Sarah, and had remembered her in his will. The house he had bequeathed to her was only about a mile from where she had spent her youth, deep in the south of Ireland, in a little village named Cappawhite. As Sarah stared out of the window of the aircraft, she thought about Otis, and her mind wandered back to the time when it had all began for them.

Sarah had just reached her teens when her father had been killed in a freak accident on the farm where he worked, and her mother had then taken her to America. There they would stay with Sarah's Aunt Polly in Boston, and Sarah, who was only thirteen years of age when the accident happened, was heartbroken. Sarah cried almost every night for weeks, finding it hard at first to adapt to the American way of life. Then after a couple of years, and just as Sarah was starting to settle down, her mother announced that she was going to be married again, to Don Parker.

Parker was a guy Sarah disliked immensely. Parker, she felt, was a sleaze of a man, who would leer at her, try to touch her, and say rude things to her when her mother wasn't about. Not that Sarah thought her mother would have cared too much about it anyway. Like the time he smashed his glass deliberately against the wall one night while in one of his many mood swings, blaming it on Sarah, and her mother had sided with him, not caring to listen to anything she would say. Her mother had then informed her that they would be moving to the suburbs of Los Angeles, his city, and Sarah felt betrayed. She had only started to make new friends here, and was actually getting to like the place. Protest as she may though, her mother would not listen and her objections fell on deaf ears. However, Sarah later enrolled in drama class. Anything to get out of a house where her mother still behaved like a love struck teenager, showing absolutely no respect to the memory of her dead and loving father.

It had almost been six years since Sarah left Ireland, and the years had passed by quickly for her. Now her thoughts were completely immersed in her guest list, which she had been meticulously planning

for her eighteenth birthday which would be in around four week's time. She was looking forward to the event, sighing joyously at the prospect of it, but fate however was to intervene.

The three youths had been casing out JJ's diner for the past fortnight, deciding it would be an easy hit, with only an old man, and one or maybe two waitresses. Now there would be no more watching the place, tonight they would put their plan into action. They were three brothers, the oldest being only nineteen, but they were streetwise, each having served juvenile detention, and they were ready. The shift had began like any other at the restaurant with the usual complaints, customers coming and going, some tipping well, some not so well, and Sarah would be glad when her shift was over, as she had some more finishing touches to add to her guest list of friends for the party. Johnston Jerome was very decent with her on that score, and she had been allowed to be very flexible with her hours.

Sarah would normally finish at nine-thirty, but if things weren't so busy, like tonight, Mr Jerome would let her go home early. A tall gangling man with a hooked nose, he had never quite gotten over the tragic death of his daughter at two years of age. He was so proud back then to have become a father as he approached his fiftieth birthday, although sadly, fate had also dealt him

a deadly hand. This was when his little daughter drowned in the pond at the back of the house, which had left him with a burden of guilt that he would always carry with him for the rest of his life. Little Aimee would have been about Sarah's age, had she lived, and sometimes when Sarah wasn't looking he would stare at her, thinking of how his little Aimee would have looked now, had she lived. His wife Martha couldn't cope with the loss though, and had to be institutionalised six months after Aimee's death. Johnston had regularly visited her, even though she would never speak one word to him. That is until his last visit, when she screamed murderer at him, over and over again, and almost gouged his eyes out.

He stopped visiting after that, and Martha died four months later. Since then he had put his work and time into his restaurant, but there wasn't a day passed that he didn't think of the two of them.

"You go on ahead Sarah, place is empty anyhow," he moaned, "I'll finish here and lock up."

"Why thank you, Mr Jerome," she answered.

"It's Johnston," he said smiling, "Johnston," he repeated, and Sarah couldn't stifle a giggle as she thought about his name, which seemed to her to be back to front.

It was nine o'clock and Sarah was just starting to leave when the three hooded men entered. Her body jerked rigid as she looked at the guns in the men's hands.

"W-what do you want?" she stuttered as the tall one raised his automatic.

“Get the fucking money,” he barked. “Move it bitch.” Sarah found herself unable to move and felt glued to the spot, as a fear she had never known before engulfed her body.

Three miles away a young Otis Tweedy and his partner, veteran cop Lewis Sanko were nearing the end of their three-to-eleven shift. A light rain shower covered the patrol car’s windscreen, and a cold breeze outside made them glad they had been assigned to mobile duty instead of the beat. The Second World War had ended over four years previously, and Otis, too young to join the fighting men then, had now made it into the Los Angeles Police department as part of a new recruitment drive. A new government policy that now allowed coloured men to be integrated into the police force, and he was proud to be one of the first.

This was his second week on the job since he had finished his basic training, and he was enjoying every minute of it. Lewis, an old veteran, liked the kid, regardless of his colour, and had not hesitated when the chief partnered the young rookie off with him.

Lewis remembered the feelings he had; way back forty years ago, when he had first joined the force. A young, naive Texas kid, who would soon learn things the hard way. Lewis had known it would only be a matter of time before blacks would be allowed into the force, and he personally welcomed the move, even though most of his colleagues objected strongly, including the chief. The President had decided though, and that was good enough for him, he felt. Lewis wasn’t

afraid to air his views on the matter either, and to hell with what the others thought. Lewis though was mostly well liked among the majority of his colleagues, a tall, balding heavy set man, he had been married to Beverly for the last thirty years, and he had been looking forward to his retirement in eight months, when he and Bev, (as he had always called her,) would be going on the fishing holiday of a lifetime, to Canada. It had been a long time since they had been on vacation outside the States, what with the war and all, and Lewis was counting the days.

“Hit the gas son,” Lewis ordered, “and take us in.”

“Speed limit,” Otis jokingly answered, as Lewis stared back at him.

“What the hell are you talking about? You’re a cop now. Speed limit my ass, you goddamn rookie,” he replied with a laugh in his voice, his Texas drawl still prominent, as he shook his head and stared at Otis, a friendly smile beaming across his cheeks. “Speed limit,” he muttered, laughing.

“It seems kind of peaceful and quiet tonight,” Otis remarked.

“Peaceful and quiet,” bellowed Lewis. “Peaceful and quiet,” he repeated. “Why, don’t push it son, tonight’s a one off. You know this time next month you may just have notched up a half dozen crazies on your belt, then maybe you can call yourself a cop, and then you can tell me it’s goddamn peaceful,” Lewis mumbled.

“You ever had to shoot anyone Lewis?”

“Sure have son,” Lewis boasted. “Shot so many goddamn crazy people they want to name a cemetery in my honour.”

“Wow!”

Otis sat quiet for a moment before he questioned Lewis further.

“It must make you feel bad later though, having to shoot someone, I mean, knowing that you’re responsible for their death. How do you manage to cope with something like that?”

Lewis stared at Otis for a moment and laughed.

“Listen son,” Lewis said, “don’t be so goddamn serious, I’m only kidding you, I ain’t ever shot anyone, and I ain’t ever been shot. I was stabbed once though; by a lady of the night when I tried to arrest her. Why the bitch almost severed my little finger,” he moaned as he held his open hand up to the rear view mirror and turned it from side to side, slowly inspecting it. “But if some asshole is threatening to shoot me or anyone else,” he went on, “then I’ll blow his sorry fucking ass back to where it came from, and no mistake, wouldn’t even give it a goddamn second thought. Then I’ll go to bed and sleep like a damn baby.” Lewis made his hand into the shape of a gun and waved it about.

“C’mon you crazy bastards,” he yelled.

Otis shook his head from side to side, unable to figure this guy out.

“Five minutes to the precinct,” Otis said. “Oh and by the way, you’re a fruitcake,” he offered as an afterthought, and laughed.

Lewis didn’t answer immediately, but sat with a grin on his face that reminded Otis of Oliver Hardy, as he played with his tie in the same Oliver Hardy way. A full

minute later Lewis broke the silence, “Fishing,” he said, as he put his hands behind his neck and leaned back in the seat scratching his head. “Huh?” Otis mumbled.

“Fishing,” repeated Lewis. “That’s what I plan to do when I retire next year. Ever do any fishing son?” Lewis asked.

Otis was about to answer but Lewis pressed on, ignoring him.

“Why, I plan to go down to the lake every single day, big damn catfish in there the size of a goddamn shark, and I’m going to whip his big sorry ass, yesireebob, you see if I don’t,” he said loudly, as he pointed at Otis.

Suddenly a man ran into the middle of the road, arms waving, and Otis had to brake hard to avoid hitting him as the car side swept to a halt.

“What the hell?” Lewis yelled. “Cover me boy,” he ordered, and then he was out of the car. The light rain had made the road shine like a mirror, reflecting the bright lights of the numerous bars and restaurants that lined the avenue, giving it an almost picture postcard effect, the brightly lit sign of JJ’s eclipsing them all. Almost at once the man was level with Lewis.

“Hold it,” Lewis ordered, aiming his weapon at him as the breathless man broke in.

“There’s something up at JJ’s,” the frightened man wheezed, as he struggled hard for breath, “three fellows ran inside, carrying guns and,” he coughed, “they’re wearing hoods with, you know, holes in the, um and th...”

“Call for backup right away,” Lewis interrupted. Immediately Otis shouted down the mike, “possible two-eleven in progress, JJ’s diner, Garfield Avenue.”

Control responded at once and the sound of, “all units, all units,” echoed from the radio as Otis sprang from the car, pulled his weapon from his holster, and started to run toward JJ’s.

“Come back here Tweedy, you stupid asshole,” Lewis barked, and Otis stopped in his tracks.

“What the hell are you trying to do here? Get yourself goddamn killed? Well, not on my retirement plan you’re not. If you’re going to die at least try and wait until you’re an old man. Now get back in the damn car,” Lewis ordered.

Otis walked slowly back to the car, feeling like a schoolboy who had just been scolded by the head teacher. Tweedy, Lewis had called him, not Otis, and he felt offended by his older partner’s unfriendly reaction toward him.

“We’ll wait for the cavalry,” Lewis ordered.

Inside JJ’s the tall one spoke again,

“I said get me the fucking money bitch. Now move your ass or you’re gonna get it,” he snarled.

Sarah could tell they were Hispanic, even with their makeshift hoods covering their faces.

“Please don’t hurt us,” she cried.

The smallest of the trio lashed out and hit her across the face with his automatic, cutting her cheek and lips, and sending a small spray of blood across the counter.

“Just do it, bitch,” he scowled.

Johnston looked at Sarah, who was now reeling from the blow, and he felt a sudden rush of anger rise inside him.

He could remember his wife's last words to him on his final visit to her. 'Murderer,' she had called him, 'murderer.' And the damn thing about it was that it was true. It was as true as if he had drowned their little daughter himself. Wasn't he the one who had wanted the damn pond out in the back yard, and wasn't he the one who was left to babysit their child while his wife worked part time in the laundry? Wasn't he also the one who was so engrossed in the ball game that he didn't notice little Aimee sneak out back and fall into the pond, drowning in ten inches of water?

His gaze shifted to the man who now had Sarah firmly gripped by her hair, all the while screaming obscenities into her ear, and striking her again and again as he dragged her across the floor.

Johnston quickly stretched over, unseen, across the counter beside the vegetable rack, and picked up a large knife he had placed there earlier. Johnston pushed his body away toward the centre of the room,

grabbing the man holding Sarah. Without warning, he quickly tore the mask away from the robber's face, only to discover that this was no man. Why, this was only a boy, a boy of about eighteen years of age, he guessed, and Johnston paused for a moment. The other robber who until now had done and said nothing, aimed his sawn-off shotgun at Johnston and fired both barrels, striking Johnston in the back and side, and hitting Sarah full in the pelvis, sending the blood spraying in every

direction. Johnston was still on his feet though, but he already knew he was beyond hope.

He looked down in horror and disbelief at Sarah, who was writhing on the floor, and his anger reached new heights.

Johnston had been top pitcher at his school, and was master at arm wrestling against all the other boys, once beating four boys in succession. That however, was a long time ago, and it had been many years since he had indulged in that sort of activity. But he was still strong for a man of his age, and although losing blood rapidly, he pushed his dying body for its last reserves of strength.

Now he didn't think of them as boys, they had come here to rob and kill, and that's what they were, cold-blooded heartless killers who deserved no mercy.

Johnston lunged at the young robber, gripped his head tightly with his free hand, and swung the knife around in an arc. The struggling youth sensed what was coming next and his eyes widened with fear, widened so much they looked as though they were about to pop out of his head.

"No!" The tall one yelled as the knife entered his brother's neck, and ripped clean through to the other side, sending blood spiraling out in all directions.

The youth staggered backward, his lips tried to speak, begging for help, but the blood filled his mouth now, and the only sound he could make was the gurgling in his throat, as the warm blood cascaded down over his chest, streaking his white jacket red. His hand desperately but fruitlessly tried to dislodge the knife as

his shocked body started to convulse. The tall one fired his automatic now, sending at least another four rounds into Johnston's back, but still he did not fall, and the robber drew back, frightened by the man's strength.

Then something strange happened to Johnston. He looked up, and there they stood. The two figures at the end of the counter were smiling and beckoning him to come to them, motioning him through the haze of the room, and arms outstretched, he stumbled toward them, smiling. It was his wife and daughter, together again, he could see them clearly, waving at him, urging him, and he forced himself closer to them. They had returned for him, forgiven him, arms raised to him, and now at last they would be together again, forever.

He tried to force himself to speak to them, but the blood pumping up through his nose and mouth, gagged him, and he gave up and simply smiled at them, embracing death. He was still smiling when he closed his eyes for the last time, and he raised his hand as he crashed heavily down onto the floor.

On hearing the first shots Otis scrambled from the police car again and ran toward the entrance of JJ's.

"Come back," Lewis screamed, but this time Otis wasn't for listening. "Crazy fucking kid," Lewis grumbled, but he followed Otis anyway. Otis ran into the hallway and slammed up against the wall for cover. Hearing the girl scream, he knew he would have to go in, but just then Lewis's voice rang out again, "Jesus H. Christ, what are you doing?" he yelled. "Who told you to leave the damn car?" Otis ignored Lewis's latest

outburst and was surprised at how he could still think so rationally, as he found himself wondering what his favourite actor John Wayne would do if he were here in this situation. He had gone to the movies just the previous week to see his new movie, '*She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*,' and he had enjoyed it so much that it was still fresh in his mind.

Why big John would just dive in, guns blazing, he thought, and then there would be three less robbers to worry about. But this was real life, not some stage play or film set where they only shoot blanks, and this wasn't acting.

Maybe he should have listened to Lewis, he felt. But now it was too late anyway, he was here. Suddenly another scream filled his ears and he knew he had to make his move. He was afraid, but his adrenaline kicked in and he went for it, kicking open the door and bravely diving into the main room.

The robber with the sawn-off had now reloaded, and he swung the barrels menacingly around toward Otis. Otis leveled his gun, aimed it at the man, then hesitated. He had never shot any living thing before, not so much as a possum, and his finger felt numb as it froze on the trigger. An explosion beside his head, followed quickly by five more, almost blew his eardrum out. It was Lewis, gun blazing, blasting away at the robbers. *Move over John Wayne*, Otis thought.

Here was a real hero, Lewis Sanko, his partner, wasting the bad guys. Suddenly one of the robbers started firing back and Otis returned the compliment. Squeezing the trigger time and time again, feeling the

gun kicking in his hand, until, when empty, the kicking stopped.

Everything was silent now and all that remained was a room full of smoke, upturned tables, and the stench of cordite that hung in the air. As the smoke cleared Otis could see the bodies on the floor, five in all. Someone among them was moving, a girl.

“Help me,” she pleaded to the handsome young black cop approaching her.

Otis removed a gent’s coat that was hanging from a rail and placed it under Sarah’s head.

“Hang in there girl, ambulance is on the way,” he said softly, while in the distance he could hear the sirens.

“Cavalry’s coming,” he shouted behind him in Lewis’s direction, but Lewis didn’t hear him. Lewis would never hear him again, because Lewis was dead. Even before Otis got to him he knew his partner was beyond help. Lewis had been shot in the head, and half of it was gone. Then the ambulance crews arrived, and a sobbing Otis, now on his knees, ushered them toward the girl with one hand as he rocked Lewis’s head with the other. Against all of his experience and self preservation, Lewis had stormed in, stormed into a bloodbath to save his young charge, caution to the wind and had paid the ultimate penalty. Otis felt overwhelmed with guilt and grief as he gently lowered Lewis to the floor. Why, this crazy white guy had saved him.

Then he stood up, hands dripping Lewis’s blood, and slowly made his way through the crowds of police, medics and detectives who were rapidly filling the place.

He found the girl being rushed out on a stretcher and he gripped her hand.

“You’re gonna be all right,” he sobbed, and as she squeezed his bloodied hand he was aware and amazed at her strength.

“Will you come visit me?” Sarah choked.

“Yeah, if you wish, I’ll come visit with you,” he promised, his head still spinning as they closed the ambulance doors.

Sarah later spent five hours on the operating table before the surgeons announced that the operation had been successful; she would pull through.

Otis kept his word, visiting Sarah regularly at the hospital after this, and a bond formed between them, so much so that when she was released from hospital they started dating. And even though Sarah’s mother was totally against the relationship, telling Sarah that she would ruin her life by getting involved with a black man, Sarah totally dismissed her advice. After all, it wasn’t long after Sarah’s injury when Don Parker finally dropped her mother for a younger woman. The distraught woman hit the bottle hard after this and no one could give her advice or even reason with her, and so Sarah had let things take their own course. It wasn’t long before the couple fell in love, and it wasn’t too long either before Otis proposed, and Sarah had no hesitation in accepting.

As the years rolled along it was clear to everyone just how much the couple were devoted to each other, as they spent all their free time together. Otis loved his

job though. He had gained much experience in his almost twenty years now of policing and felt he was accomplishing something good in the force, especially when he could help some of the kids to learn to have some respect for themselves and everyone else.

The last call Otis was ever to make as a police officer had been a domestic. A drunken guy had been threatening his wife with a loaded flare gun, and Otis and his partner, Eric Little Feather, a full blood Lakota Sioux Indian, had been assigned to the call. Eric had managed to persuade the guy to put the weapon down on the floor and was just about to cuff the verbally abusive man who continued to shout racial remarks. These insults were not addressed toward Eric, but at the handsome black cop who was talking to his irrational drunken wife. Suddenly and without warning he took a swipe at Eric, knocking him off balance before kicking him violently. With lightning speed the man pulled out a knife and stabbed Eric in the back as Eric fought hard to keep his balance. The deranged man was about to stab Eric again when Otis responded with even greater speed, shooting him twice, and sending him sprawling across the unkempt floor. Although badly hurt, Eric noticed the woman quickly pick up the flare gun, and Otis didn't hear Eric shout a warning as the woman aimed it at Otis and pulled the trigger. Eric watched helpless as one side of Otis's head and shoulder exploded in a white ball of flame, and Otis fell unconscious to the floor. Eric, although losing blood and badly wounded, instinctively pushed himself to help his badly injured partner, beating

out the flames with his cap, and burning his hands badly in the process. When back up arrived, Eric, who had collapsed bleeding onto a chair, revolver in hand, was cursing and threatening to shoot the woman, who was sitting silently weeping on the floor. Otis was still unconscious when they took him away, and at the hospital they had revealed that he had suffered second degree burns to one side of his face. The doctors had worked on him for hours, but apart from the burns, Otis also lost an eye and spent a long time hospitalised.

To be commissioned out of the force, especially in the American sixties, with the racism and unemployment so high was a dire prospect for a black man. This was exactly what was to happen to him though. Otis managed to struggle by on his payout, but the next few years became a problem for him as he tried to deal with his deformity, as well as the loss of the job he loved. However, with Sarah's care and devotion he gradually began to accept the situation, although Sarah assured him that it didn't make one bit of difference to her how badly he was scarred, because she still loved him as much as she ever had.

The captain's voice interrupted their thoughts again, welcoming them to Ireland, and Otis squeezed Sarah's hand and smiled. He would try to be happy with her here. He was just sorry he couldn't give her the children she had desired, but this could never be, as the injury she had received all those years ago had cruelly ended any hope of this. Still, she was home again.

Chapter 3

As they stepped through the doorway of the aircraft, a fierce cold October wind blew at their faces and Otis pulled up his coat collar and shrugged. “Damn,” he remarked to Sarah, as she huddled tightly into him.

“So this is Ireland,” he groaned. “Damn place feels more like Siberia.” They collected their cases and then proceeded to collect the Ford Consul which they had leased with great difficulty before they left the States; they would buy one later. Sarah had already explained to Otis that Ireland was way behind America in technology, and everything else for that matter, the pace of life being a lot slower, but that in time he would get used to it.

“Roads are damn small,” exclaimed Otis, feeling happy that he had let Sarah drive, and especially with his limited vision. Sarah ignored him and continued driving the car through the narrow winding countryside. “My first impression is that the Irish people seem very friendly though. Those airport guys were real hospitable,” he said as if in compromise.

“Yes, Irish people are like that,” Sarah agreed.

“When do you think the Irish will realise that they drive on the wrong side of the road though?” Otis asked

jokingly, but Sarah simply gave him a stern side glance. *Better keep quiet*, he thought.

“Not far now to our new home,” Sarah announced, as they passed through the little village of Doon and sped on down the road toward Cappawhite. Even though it was starting to rain and there was a strong wind blowing outside the car, Otis was amazed at the beautiful surroundings of emerald green fields and hills that swept into the distance, forming little valleys of their own as they blended into one another.

The land of myths and legends, he thought.

“I think we’ll be fine here honey,” he said, “just fine.” He put his arm around her shoulder and smiled.

“Did you know that from Cappawhite we’re only about eight miles from Tipperary?” Sarah informed him.

“Yes honey, I believe you have mentioned that to me before,” Otis laughed.

“I have?” Sarah answered, unable to remember saying anything to Otis about it.

“Just about a hundred times,” Otis replied, and Sarah looked disbelievingly at him, her eyes squinting.

“Do you know what the name Cappawhite, or *An Cheapach* as it’s known in the Irish language means?” Sarah asked him.

“No, I don’t think you mentioned that one.” he said as Sarah sped on.

“It means, the plot of land,” she answered smiling, and somehow she felt as though she had gotten one up on him.

“Well I’ll be, you just learn something new every damn day,” Otis answered sarcastically, as he mimicked

to her in a southern drawl accent and Sarah slapped him hard on the hand and laughed.

As they drove into the village, Sarah was amazed at how little it had changed from the last time she had been here and she stopped the car at the side of the road and got out. A little man riding on a very large cart, being pulled by a very small tired horse, trotted passed them, and the little man stared inquisitively at them.

“Hi,” Sarah shouted at the man, throwing him a friendly wave, but the man ignored her, cracking his whip at the small horse which struggled to break into a gallop. *Well, maybe everyone is not so friendly,* she thought.

The old grocery shop and Armshaw’s pub, five doors down, were still there, although they looked different from what she could remember. *New windows perhaps, or maybe painted differently,* she thought. Then there was the old school, her school, which hadn’t changed one bit since she last stepped through the wrought iron gates all those years ago, and she wondered if Mrs McGill, her teacher, was still alive, although she would be an old woman now if she were. *Beautiful Elspeth McGill,* she thought, *with her flowing black hair, and who had looked more like a movie star than a school teacher.* This lady would teach the girls to dance, that was until her drunken husband turned up at class one day and called her filthy names, before beating her in front of the entire school, with some of the girls screaming and crying. It had taken three policemen and a lot of violence to subdue and arrest him, and Mrs

McGill had never returned after that. Sarah later heard rumours that Mrs McGill had been having an affair with the headmaster, Mr Blain, but she dismissed these rumours immediately from her mind

as being nonsense, considering Mrs McGill's beauty and the age difference between her and old Mr Blain.

Sarah entered through the half open school gate and walked about fifteen feet along the inside wall, knelt down, and pulled out a little loose brick from the wall and smiled. The initials, S M and M T were still written inside the recess in black crayon, and had hardly faded after all these years. Her own name, Sarah Maguire and her friend Maureen Thorne, and she remembered the two of them writing this just before she had left for America. It would be their secret, a friendship thing, and Sarah laughed aloud as she thought of Maureen. Funny little Maureen, who could make her laugh more than anyone else. She was still laughing as she walked back through the gates.

Otis cocked his head smiling as he wondered what his wife was so happy about, and he thought about how homesick she must have been all those years they were married, but said nothing. Next door to the school, at the corner, was the old Garda police station, just as she remembered it. The police never had very much to do there when she was young, she felt, except for the Mrs McGill episode, and she wondered if this had changed any over the years. Sarah didn't hear Otis leave the car and sneak up behind her, and when he put his arms around her waist she jumped.

“So this is your past,” he said softly, as he gently kissed her neck, and Sarah in response held his arms tightly.

The house was about a half mile outside the village, and when they arrived they were greeted by old Thomas McCabe and his wife Kathleen. Thomas removed his cap and bowed, while Kathleen curtsied.

“Welcome sir, madam,” they said in unison.

“Please hurry in out of the cold,” Kathleen added.

The house looked smaller than Sarah had remembered it. *Perhaps this is the price of growing up*, she thought, and she was annoyed that she had over exaggerated the size of the house to Otis long before they had left America, which now made her feel slightly embarrassed. Otis seemed happy with it though and said nothing, so she wouldn't bring up the subject again unless Otis did. At the front of the house there was a small garden, which would need some tidying, and at the rear there was an even larger one that was as big as a field, with at least a dozen trees of different varieties.

A narrow road with just room enough for one car ran up the side of the house and disappeared into the distant woods, and Otis, wondering where the road ended was just about to ask when Thomas ushered the pair into the living room area of the house. The warmth from the large turf fire that was glowing in the heavy stone fireplace greeted them. Sarah also noticed that a small fire was also burning in the kitchen, which was a pleasant surprise on a cold day like this, and she smiled at Tom, who pointed into the dining room, which was filled with boxes of all sizes.

“Your belongings madam, arrived from America a few days ago,” he stated.

“Great,” Sarah replied with a grin.

“My wife will just make you both some tea,” Thomas proudly announced, as Kathleen made for the stove.

“It was very kind of you to have the place ready for us,” Sarah remarked.

“Yeah, really appreciate it,” Otis said.

“Oh don’t thank us sir,” Thomas replied, “that’s why the agency pays us. Anyway, forecast says a storm’s a coming, not that we pay much heed to those people, but just in case the buggers are right this time, then we didn’t want you catching your death from the cold.”

Sarah stared out of the window for a moment and pondered at the narrow road running up the side of the house before speaking.

“The old guest house up there in the woods,” she said as she pointed toward the trees, “do you know if it’s still in use now-days?”

Kathleen had her back to Sarah, and so Sarah could not see the surprised look of horror on Kathleen’s face at the inquisitive question. Kathleen dropped a cup on the tiled floor, smashing it to pieces, making old Thomas jump.

“Stupid bloody woman,” Thomas quipped, but Otis stepped over and helped Kathleen clean up the mess. “Thank you sir,” she said, embarrassed as Otis smiled at her.

“Well sir, madam, if we are no longer required then we will bid you both good night,” Thomas said.

Otis removed a ten Irish punt note from his wallet and handed it to Thomas.

“Thanks for everything,” Otis said with a smile, and before Thomas had a chance to pull up his jaw that had almost dropped down to his chest, Kathleen snatched the note from him and forced it into her purse, clasping it shut and pushing the purse deep inside her apron pocket.

“Thank you sir, but it’s safer here, sure wouldn’t he only drink it,” she declared.

As they were about to leave, Sarah repeated her question about the guest house to Kathleen, and was amazed at her stern response.

“Look ma’am,” Kathleen answered, her cheeks turning bright red. “The house that you are talking about has not been a guest house for many years now. Old Mary Doyle lives up there though, has done for a long time, but if you take my advice you will stay away from that house. There have been frightening rumours about strange goings on up there, things you shouldn’t meddle in. Take fair warning mind, and stay away from that place.”

As they left the house they began to argue and Otis wondered if they were arguing over the tip, or the question of the old house up the road, which seemed to annoy them. As Otis wandered around inspecting their new home he noticed an old horseshoe surrounded with shamrocks nailed to the back door. Some words were written underneath, but they were in Irish.

“What’s this all about honey?”

“Oh it’s for good luck, an Irish thing. It’s also supposed to keep evil spirits away,” she answered, smiling.

“Evil spirits huh? Well I’ll be,” Otis whispered as he rubbed the horseshoe and muttered something that Sarah couldn’t make out.

“We’ll need some more supplies,” Sarah informed him as she checked out the cupboards. “Nothing that can’t wait until tomorrow though,” she muttered to herself.

Later that night, as the couple lay in bed Otis pulled his funny Burt Lancaster face and threw the voice that was just like the real thing as he tickled her neck.

“Wanna make out some, Mrs Tweedy? Huh?” Otis’s grin almost lit up the room and Sarah laughed.

“Um, not tonight Burt, but I’ll get back to you on that one. I’ll contact your agent,” she laughed.

Next day Otis drove the couple down into the village and they stopped at the corner shop. Sarah entered the little shop that she hadn’t stepped foot inside for almost thirty years and was immediately stunned. She felt as if she had just passed back through the years and came out of some sort of time machine. The inside of the shop hadn’t changed a bit from what she could remember, with the shelves bulging out to capacity, just as they were back then. The unopened boxes of different products stacked against the walls and covering most of the floor space was the same as before, and Sarah had to dodge around a few of them. Then, as she stared at the old woman behind the counter, a thousand memories

came flooding back to her. Even though the woman had aged a lot since then, Sarah instantly recognised her. It was Constantine Murphy, the friendliest woman in the village, she reckoned. This woman, Sarah remembered, was always so kind to everyone when Sarah was a child. Constantine had just taken over the shop then. She would often give extra measures out to people, and sometimes for free to the needy, and even then Sarah wondered how she had managed to stay in business. Here she wast though, still going strong after all this time. Constantine would have been about forty years old way back then, Sarah thought, but she supposed Constantine really hadn't changed that much since.

"Hi," Sarah said, as she checked the little list of goods she would need to purchase.

"Hello to yourself," the old woman answered as she eyed Sarah with interest. It had been a while since a stranger had entered her shop, especially with winter coming in fast, and normally with no tourists at this time of year. It seemed odd to her. Just as Sarah looked up, their eyes met, and Sarah spoke first.

"Constantine, am I right?" Sarah probed. "I don't think I'm familiar with you, do I know you darlin?" the old woman asked with a puzzled expression on her face.

"Well, maybe, I mean, I hope, I think so," Sarah mumbled. "I was born here in the village, but my mother and I moved to America when I was a child, after my dad was killed in the farming accident. I still remember you though, um, Sarah's my name, Sarah Tweedy."

"Sarah Tweedy, Sarah Tweedy," the old woman whispered as she tried to recall the name. As the old

woman studied her face for recognition, Sarah spoke again. "Sorry, it was Sarah Maguire back then, before I was married."

"Sweet mother of Jesus," the old woman replied as she ran around the counter and embraced Sarah. "Now how could I have ever forgotten a pretty face like yours my dear?"

Sarah blushed.

"What brings you back to Ireland my dear?"

"I, we're living here now," Sarah corrected, "Otis, my husband and I, at Uncle Pat's house," she added.

"Well, he was a fine man, your Uncle Patrick, as was your father," the old woman said smiling, "I still remember them as though it were yesterday," she added.

Constantine remembered the family only too well. The scandal that rocked the town back then still reverberated around the countryside. She was sure the lady standing in front of her was unaware of the situation though. Because had this fine featured woman have known about the situation, Constantine was certain she would not have come within a thousand miles of Cappawhite.

And as far as the story of Sarah's father being killed in an accident went, well, everyone back then knew that the hard working man had blown his own head off with his shotgun. He just couldn't live with the fact that Sarah had been the product of an illicit affair with his wife and his brother Patrick. He hadn't spoken to Patrick for some years after he had found out, but they all agreed later that Sarah was never to know. Sarah was unaware that he was more than an uncle to her and could never

understand why he was so overly kind to her when she visited him. Patrick had never spoken to Sarah's mother again though, even though the woman wrote constantly to him, expressing her love.

When she knew it was hopeless though, Sarah's mother took the only course she knew and wanted, revenge. She fled with their daughter to America, leaving Patrick broken hearted for the daughter he would never see again. This scorned woman would make this man pay for snubbing her.

Constantine would not reveal what she knew though. Some things were better kept buried away.

Twenty minutes later Otis was getting impatient. He left the car and entered the shop very slowly. The two women were reminiscing so much that they didn't notice him come in. "Hi," Otis said as the old woman went quiet and walked quickly behind the counter. "My husband Otis," Sarah stated proudly.

"Oh!" Constantine mumbled, in a cold and unfriendly manner. Sarah could instantly sense Constantine's disapproval of her being married to a black man and this made her feel angry.

Otis could feel the old woman's resentment as well, but he held out his hand and gave her a friendly smile anyway. As she reluctantly and very loosely shook his hand, she forced a half smile back.

Sarah felt embarrassed, but Otis simply shrugged it off. *Why can't people see Otis for the man he is?* Sarah angrily thought.

As they left the little shop, Otis was just about to drive away when old Constantine appeared at the passenger window of the car and tapped loudly on it. Sarah quickly rolled the window down and the old woman leaned inside the car. "There is a house up in the woods, beside you," she said.

"Yes, we know about it," Otis replied, "the Doyle house."

"Yes, Mrs Doyle's house," the old woman corrected.

"What about it?" Sarah questioned, pretending she knew nothing about the place. Constantine didn't even notice Sarah's dry reaction toward her.

"Stay away from there," Constantine said, and was about to say more when an old man turned the corner and hobbled into her shop. Constantine had changed over the years. There would be no freeloaders in her shop these days. Those days of free handouts had long gone. And even old men like this one could steal from her, she believed. Now Constantine trusted no one. The old woman turned quickly away to follow the old man into the shop, but paused to look back over her shoulder.

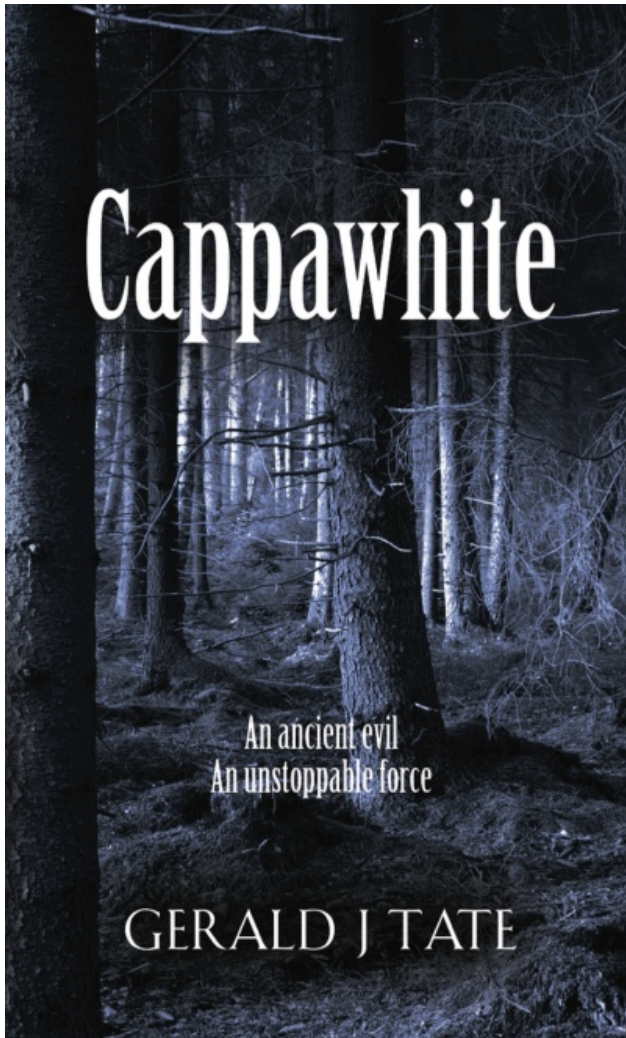
"There's nothing for you up there. Stay away" she said loudly. "Nothing for you," she repeated and walked abruptly on.

As they drove away Otis noticed that Sarah had gone very quiet.

"Superstition honey, that's all it is," he said, and as Sarah quickly glanced around at him, he somehow got the feeling that the situation unnerved her. But it was Constantine's reaction towards Otis that had made Sarah

Cappawhite

behave like this, and she found it hard to control her emotions. She loved Otis, and no one was going to damn well change that. It was the man she loved, not the colour. As they pulled up at the house Otis remarked that the weather was getting worse, but they had so much work to do inside the place that they didn't care anyway. It would take weeks to get the house fixed up properly. Everything would sort itself out in the end though, Otis felt.



This is a horror-love story, where a husband, ex cop (Otis Tweedy), is forced to confront an evil entity that is terrorizing his wife. Otis is aware of the power this supernatural force wields, but he has little choice and the danger is growing.

Cappawhite

By Gerald J. Tate

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