

Marijuana Smuggling and the sinkhole murders in Florida's panhandle.

Twisted Justice

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CHAPTER II

The Murders

The *Gunsmoke* sat with its bow intentionally put aground just outside the intercoastal waterway. Small boats shuttled back and forth carrying sixty-pound bales of marijuana from the *Gunsmoke* to an isolated beach along Sandy Creek on the eastern edge of Bay County, Florida.

Record-setting low temperatures in the teens and occasional rain showers made this night of January 23, 1977, miserable for those unfortunates forced to be outside. The shrimp trawler had been plowing through rough waters for ten days to get to this location from Colombia, South America and the illegal smuggling operation could not be postponed or rescheduled.

Walter Gale Steinhorst, on lookout and taking a break from his freezing guard duties, sat in a silver van sipping hot coffee out of a quart thermos. He was thankful for the van being parked there as his way of avoiding the cold, wet night air and for occasionally warming himself. He noticed headlights in the distance coming down the Sandy Creek Road and stared at them. He couldn't help but verbalize his thoughts, "Awhh. . . shit!" He immediately jumped out of the van. As the headlights of the oncoming vehicle got closer, Steinhorst rushed to the side of the road to intercept it. Two miles further down the road from his position, fifteen men were busily engaged in hauling 20 tons of marijuana to shore. Hired as a guard, it was his job to make certain the smuggling operation wasn't interrupted.

He stepped into the headlight beam of the approaching vehicle and threw up his arms. "Stop!" He yelled into the darkness. His breath was instantly visible in the chilled night

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air. He yelled again, this time much louder, "Stop." He thrust his arms forward as if pushing backward on a large object.

On a rutted path off the main clay-based Sandy Creek Road, was the van where he'd been sitting, facing outward, and two ten-wheel, refrigerated trucks which obviously indicated something was going on. The oncoming pick-up didn't heed his order but slowed. The headlights swept across Steinhorst as the pick-up turned into the rutted road, the driver disregarding any instructions. The headlights spotlighted the van as well as the two large trucks. It stopped facing into the van. Walter was pissed! A young teenage girl sat in the passenger side of the pick-up and began rolling down the window.

"You've gotta leave the area, Police Operation." Steinhorst spoke harshly, his temper already roused. He kept a reasonable distance from the pick-up as he voiced his order. He was ticked off and knew they better respond or else. He would accept nothing less than total compliance.

"I know what's goin' on, y'all are hauling in some weed!" Harold Sims, the driver, drawled loudly enough to be heard. Sims was a lean five foot seven, 145- pound man, taxi driver by trade. Feeling the confidence of a day full of beer drinking, yelled across his young female passenger, who continued struggling with the faulty window crank. His pick-up was old and the windows cranked down only if you guided the glass into its channel with one hand and cranked with the other.

"You gotta stay now!" Steinhorst paused slightly, before barking his second words for emphasis: "Dammit, you shouldn't be here!" He was really pissed off and getting red-faced angry. He was beyond his threshold of patience. He was a man soured against a world that he felt had always victimized him and he was not going to take any crap from this guy. He

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brushed his full mustache with the back of his left hand and scowled as he moved his gun hand toward his .38.

“Show me your badge!” Harold Sims taunted back with a grin as if taking pleasure in his role as an adversary. Beer gave him confidence. His brain seemed to function better and faster when he was drinking. He felt invincible. There was no outward indication that he had downed over two six packs of his favorite drink.

Steinhorst, a stocky and well-muscled man, solid as a rock, standing five-foot-eight who could handle himself in any fight, was goaded by this SOB’s chickenshit remarks. His face flushed red in anger. He was rabid as he barked out his final order, “Get out! Get out of the damn truck!” This time Steinhorst reached for his .38 and flashed it without hesitation. “Get your ass out of the Goddamn truck.” He glared. “Now!” Steinhorst raised his .38 making certain he wouldn’t get any argument.

Sandy McAdams, the fourteen-year old high school girl in the right seat, saw the gun and reacted instantly by reaching for the door handle. Shaking, she opened the door to get out. Steinhorst moved backward away from the door allowing room for the two to exit. When her feet touched the ground, she moved over to the side of the truck to accommodate Harold’s exit. Spurred on by too much beer and feeling a redneck propensity for not being ordered to do anything, Harold saw the gun and leaned toward the passenger side, conveying his intent to get out. As he slid across the seat, he used his right hand to feel under the seat for his sawed off shotgun. It was already cocked and loaded in case they had been lucky enough to spot a deer. His next beer crazed and fatal move was to raise the shotgun and point it directly toward Steinhorst.

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“Look a here!” Sims scoffed.

Steinhorst staring down the barrel of the shotgun, reacted instinctively and darted to his left side as he raised his long barreled .38 caliber Colt revolver with trained authority. When two guns are pointed at each other, it is way too late for negotiating. Somebody has to win. Harold Sims fired the first shot. Steinhorst anticipated the shot and moved into a crouched firing position to avoid the path of the buckshot. He reactively fired two shots into the truck’s cab. Harold Sims slumped backward in an upright position, his body quivered momentarily and then slowly slid down toward the passenger side. The fatal bullet had entered his right chest and exited under his left arm. His eyes remained half opened, mucous drained from his nostrils, and blood streamed across the seat. (Author’s Note # 2)

Sandy McAdams, startled by the noise, covered her face with her hands and jumped back against the truck. Awestruck by the event and shocked beyond normalcy, her mind, also muddled by beer, couldn’t comprehend what had just happened. She began to shake uncontrollably from paralyzing fear and from the freezing cold air. Time seemed to stop, and in the absence of clear thought, an out of body experience took over her mind. She held both hands tightly over her mouth. She wanted to scream but couldn’t. She heard no sound or action coming from inside the truck and knew Harold Sims was dead.

The vehicle belonged to Harold Sims. It was a blue, 1965 Chevy pick-up truck with a camper top and off-road knobbed tires. He was an outdoorsman who liked to fish and hunt, and this vehicle suited his style perfectly. It always had beer cans and bottles rolling around in the floorboard. Any

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passenger entering his pick-up first had to make room for their feet among the wasted empties.

On this night he was there, as usual, driving around through his favorite hunting area for the possibility of spotlighting a deer. He found out earlier in the week that a load of pot was coming ashore in the Sandy Creek area but didn't know the date or time. This information had been passed to him by one of the locals involved who also frequented the same bar on Highway 98 in Springfield. When he saw the van and the big trucks, he knew!

Being thirty-nine years old, married, having a fourteen-year-old high school girl with him, giving her beer, didn't register on his moral scale. The danger inherent in interrupting any smuggling operation also didn't ring any bells. It was around eleven o'clock on a Sunday night. Record setting freezing temperatures and a stiff breeze brought the chill factor further below freezing and made this night miserable. No one should be out on a night like this. But this was his favorite time to roam the woods, drink beer and look for deer.

Before the confrontation, when the pick-up pulled into the rutted road, the two people lying on a mattress in the back of the camper knew something was wrong. They immediately stopped their passionate interlude and raised themselves from prone positions to peer outside. Seeing a man standing there, they lay back down and quickly began to button their clothes. Douglas Hood, twenty-one, and Sheila McAdams, sixteen, almost seventeen, had been accidental lovers for several months. Tonight the lovers had been enjoying each other, oblivious to temperature and all outside occurrences. Sheila, a mature sixteen-year-old, well-developed, and engulfed with hormonal urges, readily welcomed Doug's fondling advances. Both allowed each other's hands to wander unchecked under

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heavy winter clothing. Their passion had fogged the camper windows making it next to impossible to see outside.

As shots rang out, they bounded from the rear of the camper. Steinhorst was shocked as he witnessed the two exit from the rear. "Get over here," He barked while waving his .38 in motioning directions. As Doug and Sheila emerged from the rear of the truck toward the passenger side of the camper, both looked toward the cab of the pick-up trying to understand what just happened. Sheila prayed her younger sister was unhurt. As they came forward, both saw Harold's motionless, slumped body on the seat, leaning toward the passenger side door. Both instantly knew he had been fatally shot. All three stood speechless and in horror. Doug and Sheila were still coming down from the euphoric high associated with sexual excitement. This seemed surreal, as if they were standing there watching a horrible nightmare unfold and feeling totally detached from it. Their minds were in an early state of shock. Assessing events went well beyond the brain's ability. Doug stared into the cab, disbelieving and motionless. Sheila looked into the eyes of her little sister, searching for answers. Sandy's eyes were wide open, fully dilated, eyebrows raised high into the forehead, displaying paralyzing horror while she still clutched her mouth tightly with both hands.

Gathering full control, Steinhorst ordered the three to march around the truck to the right side of the silver van. Flamboyantly flashing his .38 "baby doll" from side to side, he pointed out his directions. The three did just as they were told. They were way too shocked to do anything else. Steinhorst opened both rear panel doors on the passenger side of the van and ordered them inside. The three hostages, not knowing what was in store for them, stood facing the door briefly before stepping inside.

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The van was a silver Dodge panel truck modified into a van, with tear drop, bubble windows, mag wheels, a top rack, and multiple antennas. This was the fashionable vehicle to have in the mid 70's. It outwardly displayed the character of the owner. With a desire to be in vogue and in touch with the coolness of the times, each van owner would personalize his vehicle. Any young teenager would be king of the campus if he could only drive such a van. The interior, customized by the owner, was comfortable enough to be used for an overnight stay in a campground. A bed, topped with a foam rubber mattress, had been built over the wheel wells and a large piece of plywood had been deftly cut to precisely fit the floor space. The addition of a shag throw rug added a final touch.

“Get in and keep your mouths shut,” Walt ordered.

Steinhorst watched the three step submissively into the rear of the van. Not certain about his next action, he stood silently for a moment, stumped. Casually he changed gun hands, freeing his right hand to reach inside his jacket to retrieve half a King Edward thirty cent cigar. It was the unsmoked half of his previous smoke. Large cigars, half chewed, half smoked were his comfort. He was seldom seen without a cigar clamped into his jaws. Walt could go for hours without removing the cigar from his mouth and without spitting.

Steinhorst pulled a large, red and white bandanna out of his rear pocket and entered the van to blindfold Douglas Hood. With Hood blindfolded and his hands tied, he pushed him down onto the mattress. He then searched his jacket pockets for another bandanna with which to blindfold Sheila McAdams. He had nothing else on him with which to blindfold the other two hostages. Walt tied the hands of the two girls then pushed them down onto the bed. Walter reached under

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the bed and pulled out a box full of miscellaneous items. Rifling through the box, he found a T-shirt from an Aerosmith concert. Placing the .38 in his belt, he flipped the T-shirt to unfold it. With his pocket knife he made three cuts at the base of the fabric, and tore it into three thirty-inch lengths of fabric, each about three inches wide. As he retied the new blindfold on Doug Hood, he forced him back down onto the bed face up. Walt did the same to each girl and made them lie down on the mattress face up with their feet dangling over the side of the bed.

The bed had been elevated during construction to allow clearance for the wheel wells. Consequently their feet couldn't reach the floor of the van and dangled freely. With all three safely blindfolded, hands tied and lying flat on their backs, he felt secure. His main efforts were to lessen the chances of the three making any future positive identification of himself. Walt knew he had been seen and could be identified. He also knew they were the only ones who knew what happened between himself and Harold Sims. It was essential to prevent them from talking to anyone. Even then, his thoughts focused on eliminating the three.

Time was approaching 2:00 A.M. on the morning of Monday, January 24, 1977. Walt had been alone with the hostages for nearly two hours. They had been quiet and proved to be no trouble.

At the off-loading site, Charlie Hughes was on the water throwing his load of pot to the shore. David Goodwin was shouting at him that Walt had shot someone and wanted him. Hughes was reluctant and had to be coaxed by Goodwin to go to the Steinhorst location. David was talking gibberish, scared and incoherent. He made no sense. He told Hughes to take the pick-up and go, he wasn't about to go back up there.

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David was forced to go. Charlie didn't know the way. Going back up there was against David's better judgment.

Billy Jo Wynn drove his partially loaded, ten-wheel U-Haul truck to the Stenhorst location as he was leaving with the first load of pot. He was followed a few minutes later by Goodwin and Hughes. Charlie was given the details by Steinhorst and overheard Billy Jo tell Walt to do anything he needed to do to make the operation go down. At that point Steinhorst was in total control based on Wynn's orders.

Walt ordered Charlie Hughes to clean out the rear of the pick-up and then test drive it to ascertain if it would be reliable transportation for a trip out of the area. When Charlie returned from the test drive, he shook his head indicating the truck might not make it anywhere. With that knowledge, Walter Steinhorst made the choice, "We're gonna have to take the van." He ordered Hughes to place the body of Harold Sims into the van with the others. Goodwin objected. Steinhorst said, "I'm taking the van or I'm taking you along with it, or whatever I have to do." Fearfully David stepped back behind Hughes. Steinhorst held the gun pointed directly at David. Hughes believed Walt was going to kill David right then and there, because David was giving him some static about the van. (Author's Note #3)

The relationship between Walter Steinhorst and Charlie Hughes could hardly be considered as close. They had worked together in the past, but being described as buddies wouldn't be correct. Neither were talkative and an engaging conversation between them was an impossibility. Charlie was five foot six, with an average build. He was a very likable individual but shyly stayed apart from everyone else. He appeared as a 'loner', but those who he allowed to know him knew otherwise. He was just a man of few words. His downfall

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was in being a less than strong personality. One who would 'go-along' rather than dissent. An excellent worker, he was always able to get a job as an auto mechanic. He was a plaid shirt and jeans kind of man. Always sporting a full beard, his disheveled brown hair and hazel eyes fit his personality. He liked not to be noticeable. When Walt ordered him to do anything, it was natural for him to respond without questioning his demands.

The girls, side by side on the mattress, attempted to talk to each other, very quietly in barely audible whispers. They could roll their head to the side, moving toward each other to whisper their thoughts. Walter Gale Steinhorst sat on the floor of the van in the rear and watched the hostages as Charlie Hughes drove the van out of the area. Unknown to the blindfolded hostages, the body of Harold Sims had been dumped on the floor just inside the forward rear door. Blood still oozed from the body, turning black in the process, with clear serum separating from the coloration and floating on top of the darker blood.

"Are they gonna kill us?" Sandy whispered to her sister.

"Naw, I don't think so," answered her sister Sheila.

Steinhorst hearing the babble above the roar of the road and engine, yelled at them. "Shut up or I'll shut you up." He no longer flashed his pistol, but he couldn't resist the urge to fondle it. He held it in his right hand and caressed the polished wooden handgrip with his left hand. There was something about a gun that struck a cord in Walter. While any gun was in his hand, he would constantly roll his wrists, so he could watch and admire the gun from both sides. The gun gave him a sense of power and security. For the next hour, Walt sat in the rear of the van keeping the hostages silent.

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“We’re ‘bout to Blountstown, Walt, now where do ya want me to go?” Charlie Hughes asked Steinhorst who was clearly the boss. Hughes had no weapon and felt powerless. He remembered what Wynn told Walt, as Billy Jo was leaving for Havana. “Do whatever you have to...eliminate anyone you think might need eliminating.” Charlie felt that meant him also and he wasn’t about to do anything contrary to Walter.

“Do you remember where we used to hunt, off Highway 98 near Perry?”

“You talking about the area ‘round Goose Pasture road?”

“Yeah...that’s the place.” Walt mumbled his response, not really wanting the three hostages to know where they were headed.

“I used to work at the limestone pit, is ‘at where you mean?”

“Yeah.” Walt again responded. In an effort to get up off the floor, he raised himself up to his knees and in doing so he bumped his nose on Hood’s knee. Mad at himself and in a fit of barbarity, he struck Hood’s kneecap hard with the butt of his revolver.

Doug yelled, “Ohh...Ohh...Oh God damn...my knee!” He writhed in pain and continued to cry out. The two girls yelled out thinking Doug had been seriously harmed. Their own fate was now utmost on their minds. Both girls started shaking uncontrollably.

Steinhorst grinned to himself, satisfied his domineering, sadistic side had again been soothed. “Don’t nobody make a sound or I’ll come back and hit all y’all.” Steinhorst made his way to the passenger seat, and drew the makeshift curtain behind separating the front from the back. Hughes looked over in Walt’s direction and could see the gun still in his right hand.

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Charlie turned his head back to the road. He had been around Steinhorst plenty in the past. He knew he was mean but he'd never seen him this crazy. This time he noticed several other things. He noticed a definite tick. Anytime Walt was excited he would constantly jerk his head to the left ever so slightly. The movement was hardly noticeable but the quickness made it apparent. The other thing that truly bothered him was Walt's cold-blooded viciousness. His eyes squinted and he sucked air between his teeth, totally detached from anything and anybody. Hughes was scared. He knew he could easily be another victim. He shook his head to rid himself of the image he had created, then spoke, "Are you thinking about the sink hole area?"

"Yeah. That's where we'll take care of business." Walter settled back into his seat, then looked at his watch. "It's about a hundred miles to Perry, so we should be at the sink about day break."

Hughes just nodded his head in agreement. He now knew Walt was planning to kill the hostages. He also knew Walter had the ability to detach himself from any situation. He fully expected the three hostages would suffer some sort of hurtful agony at the hands of this man. Charlie Hughes knew Walter Gale Steinhorst. He was mean to the core! In their past, Walt had broken his leg in three places while they were scuffling. Hughes always felt he did it intentionally, although Walt apologized for "being too strong" with him and said he didn't intend to inflict any pain. After Walt broke his leg, Hughes had gotten the message: don't ever cross Walter Gale Steinhorst. Through circumstances, he was once again thrust into Walt's circle. While he didn't do it voluntarily, he couldn't retreat now.

Sandy McAdams rolled her head toward her sister, "What do you think they're doing?" Her mind was full of

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thoughts of Harold Sims. She had watched him get shot and her mind raced in a variety of directions. “Are they going to kill us? Are they going to turn us loose? Why don’t they talk to us? Why are they driving us further away? Who was that man that shot Harold. He certainly wasn’t a police officer.” Her thoughts continued to race. She waited for a response from Sheila. Sheila rolled her head to the side, “I think they’ll turn us loose, after they get us far enough away from Sandy Creek.”

As Sheila spoke, she knew nothing good was going to happen. All three had a good look at the man doing the shooting. All three knew a smuggling operation was going down at Sandy Creek and that was partly why Harold drove them down there. But they didn’t know exactly when or if the operation was to take place. They shouldn’t have driven out there. Their unplanned arrival on the scene was a fateful misjudgment. Sheila’s anxiety began to flush her skin. The thoughts to herself were more horrible than she had displayed to Sandy. She began to softly whimper, trying as best she could not to allow her bad thoughts to be conveyed to Sandy.

Sheila was engulfed in anguish and began to cry. Douglas Hood, his knee burning in pain, turned his head to Sheila and whispered, “It’ll be all right. I don’t know these people, but it’ll be all right.” His attempt at reassurance failed and Sheila continued to whimper as inaudibly as possible. Through some metaphysical psychic phenomenon, the premonition of death filled her thoughts. The worst was waiting for them. As she thought of the inevitable, she burst out in agony, crying without being able to control herself. Sandy, close to her side, also began to cry, at first softly and then uncontrollably. Sheila burst out. “What’s gonna happen to us?”

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Steinhorst heard the commotion. He turned his head and shouted, "Shut up back there." He paused, then spoke again. "Shut up or I'll come shut you up!"

Sheila got the message but by now was incapable of holding herself in check. Sandy couldn't help but do the same. Horrors were going through their minds. Doug whispered to the two, "You'd better shut up." Doug spoke through the pain. He was only able to grit his teeth together to help endure the pain in his knee. He thought his kneecap had been broken. He tried to raise his leg, but couldn't stand the pain and stopped trying.

Steinhorst, irritated at the crying coming from the rear, barked an order to Hughes, "Stop this van right now, I'll shut 'em up." Walt climbed out of the passenger seat into the rear of the van, as Charlie pulled over. He placed his 'baby doll' in his belt. Again pulling the box out from under the bed, he retrieved the red and white Aerosmith Concert T-shirt. As before, he cut three slots where he could tear it into strips. Standing bent over, he pulled Sandy up from the lying down position

He untied her blindfold and removed it. Sandy blinked her eyes several times attempting to readjust her vision. She looked down and saw Harold Sim's body slumped on the floor. The sight horrified her and she yelled out in agony. Steinhorst immediately stuffed the large red and white rag into her mouth and tied one of the three inch strips around her head and through the mouth, allowing the knot to form part of the gag. As he finished, he allowed himself a free feel of her breast before pushing her back down on the mattress. He had no sexual intent in taking such a liberty of her, he merely wanted to convey that he was all-powerful and could do anything he wanted. His animal-like bestiality helped to satisfy his nature to

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be domineering. He took off Sheila's blindfold and gagged her the same way, then Douglas, and returned to his passenger seat. As he sat back down, he once again pulled 'baby doll' out of his belt and began to stroke the barrel with his left hand as if he were holding some valuable treasure. Charlie Hughes put the van in drive, pulled back into the road, and began to accelerate down Highway 267 towards Wakulla Springs. No vehicles were on the road and the first glimmer of daylight was beginning to offer some light in the east.

"What's that road where the rock mine is in Taylor County?" Walt asked Hughes unemotionally and coldly matter of fact. Hughes felt Steinhorst should be showing some concern for the circumstances, but he was cold as a block of ice. Charlie Hughes was beginning to have even more concern for his own safety. He felt this man Walter Gale Steinhorst had to be mentally unbalanced to get a rush out of caressing a gun, and his lack of balance continued to show in how he seemed to enjoy brutality. Suddenly Hughes flashed back remembering more of what Billy Joe Wynn had instructed Walt. He told him there would be more money if he had to use his gun. Hughes, thinking to himself, began to mentally juggle concerns for the hostages as well as himself; I wonder how much each one is worth and what I might be worth. His thoughts told him he'd really screwed up, gotten himself into one helluva mess...he just hoped he wouldn't end up dead.

"Powell Hammock Road." Hughes answered Walt deliberately but said nothing more, hoping to convey his distaste for what was happening. He wanted to convey he wasn't going to be a part of whatever Walt was planning. Killing these three hostages was not an option. But knowing his own life was in danger he had to maintain a go-along attitude for now.

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Walt spoke again. "That's where they's a lot of sink holes. We might have to use one."

With that comment, Charlie Hughes was now absolutely certain, beyond any doubt, that Walt was planning to kill these three people. Concern for his own life was escalating by the minute. He could either go along and hope for the best, or try to escape before anything happened to these three people, so he wouldn't be held accountable. He started to watch for openings that might allow him to withdraw himself from this mess.

"What are you gonna do with these people?"

Walter changed gun hands and raised his right hand with the index finger pointed straight out simulating a gun and softly blurted out, "Pow...Pow...Pow." With each sound he jerked his right hand upward as if in a recoil when firing.

Hughes' heart sank into his shoes. Those were words he didn't want to hear. "Why?" Charlie spoke quickly before his mind had the opportunity to reject the thought.

"Well, it's better to have nobody talkin' than to have three fingers pointin' you out." Walt's response was practical and unemotional.

Charlie Hughes stared straight ahead intent on the road, trying not to convey any appearance of objections, so he wouldn't be considered hostile. Being stone-faced was difficult.

Steinhorst chewed on his cigar and thought back in time. From the time he shot Harold Sims, Steinhorst knew he had to cover his tracks whenever and wherever he could. His future was grim with too many witnesses. Nobody would believe his self-defense excuse.

The van passed through Wakulla Springs towards Newport, where they would connect with US Highway 98 to

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Perry. Hughes began to watch the mileage closely, knowing he was getting ever closer to their destination. Each mile he passed was one mile less he had to extricate himself away from this situation. He had no gun and no opportunity to confront Walter. In a fist fight or a wrestling match, he knew he was no match for the muscular Walter Gale Steinhorst. Without a gun, he felt emasculated to nothingness. He also knew that if he did anything disturbing to Walt and Walt lived, he would be hunted the rest of his life. He was, as the saying goes, between a rock and a hard place, a no win situation.

Charlie heard nothing coming out of the rear of the van and wondered if the hostages were all right. His thoughts were telepathic, as the youngest girl had momentarily passed out due to fright. Sheila, never a church goer, was praying. Bad thoughts raced through her mind: rape, stabbing, torture, sodomy, slow death, watching her little sister undergo these as well. If being raped would get them out of this situation, she would gladly give in. When Walt took his free feel of her breast, that set off a signal which said the worst is yet to come.

Hughes got close to Powell Hammock Road and, attempting to avoid the inevitable, offered to continue to Perry where they might get something to eat. Time was approaching 6:00 A.M. and neither had had anything to eat since 5:00 P.M. last night. Walt would have no part of that. Instead, he ordered, "You turn down Powell Hammock!" Charlie Hughes knew he better not ask again.

Hughes turned down Powell Hammock Road and continued beyond the pavement toward Goose Pasture Road where he turned left. Hughes knew where the sink holes were but asked, searching for anything to delay the inevitable. His thoughts had calculated what was coming. Just before the cattle gap at the roadside sink, he turned right onto the rutted

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path. He drove just short of a quarter mile before stopping on the edge of the sink. Walter directed him to turn around and back-up closer to the sink so the side doors to the van were facing the sink. He looked at Walter. Their eyes met and Hughes knew. Walter had a crazed look of excitement in his eyes. Walt grasped his “baby doll” out of his lap and moved into the rear of the van. He yelled back over his shoulder, “Get these side doors open!”

Charlie shut off the engine. The silence was sinister. In the woods around the sink was a canopy of greenery. Daybreak was just beginning, yet the canopy of foliage offered darkness and added to the gruesome setting.

Hughes put the keys to the van in his pocket in case he might have to bargain for his own life. He walked around the van and opened the doors. Walt ordered him to carry the body of Harold Sims down to the edge of the water. Complying without hesitation, he struggled slightly with the limp and bloody corpse. Hughes could easily carry the weight, but the limpness offered challenges of balance in order to carry the body down an incline. Charlie dumped the corpse near the water’s edge.

There is something about a lifeless body when it is being handled. Every appendage is rubbery and appearing not to have any bones at all. When Hughes dropped the body, the legs contorted unnaturally up the back and the arms rolled backwards away from the shoulders. The head with eyes still half open instantly imbedded itself, face up, into the sand like lead.

Steinhorst was directing the three hostages out of the van. Each knew the next step was a step closer to death. They could see into the eyes and character of Steinhorst. He had no mercy, no compassion, had displayed his brutality and his

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mental detachment from his actions. He was a man crazed and they knew it.

Walking down the incline with tears streaming down their cheeks, they searched each other for consolation and some hope. Only desperation could be found. Sheila was whimpering against the gag. Douglas Hood was limping badly from his injured knee and moaned through his gag with each step. Sandy McAdams was bawling like a baby through her gagged mouth and getting the snuffles to catch her breath. None of the three had any thoughts toward escaping, not yet believing they were going to be murdered in cold blood. Steinhorst stopped them at the edge of the water next to Harold Sims' body.

"Get down on your knees." Walt barked. They instantly complied.

Walter turned to Charlie Hughes, standing close by, and said, "Walk out to the road and don't let anyone come back here!" His comment was an unmistakable order. Charlie paused for a moment and looked straight into the eyes of Steinhorst, as if mentally begging for some reasonableness. Steinhorst's tick returned as he gave two quick jerks of his head to the left. "Go!" He clamped down hard on his cigar and waved his .38 toward the road.

Charlie knew he'd better go as ordered. He turned and walked up the incline past the van and continued down the path out to Goose Pasture Road. This was one time he sure as hell had no desire to see what was going to happen to these people.

Walter Gale Steinhorst flipped out the cylinder to his gun and took out the two spent shells he had fired during the night at Harold Sims. After reloading, he spun the cylinder out of habit, then forced the cylinder back into its locked position.

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Douglas Hood was now convinced they were about to be shot, execution style. During the ride from Sandy Creek to the sink hole, Doug had been optimistic, thinking they were going to be tied to a tree and then left. Since the gags were placed into their mouths, his thoughts were frightening and he was beginning to be overcome with panic. Prior to being gagged he had quietly lain back on the bed of the van, only occasionally speaking to the girls. He passively accepted their plight as the best way out of a bad situation. The beer haze was beginning to clear and reality was becoming more evident. He felt time was running out. Thoughts darted through his brain faster than he could compute. He steeled his nerves to do something. He was no longer going to stand by passively and wait. Doug made certain his knee would hold and tightened his leg muscles in anticipation of action.

Walter was standing in front of the three hostages with his feet nearly in the water. They were approximately six feet away. He turned his head momentarily to the left. As he did, Douglas Hood called upon all his strength and forcefully lunged toward Steinhorst in the hopes he could force him into the water. Walter was too quick. With lightning speed, he moved his pistol straight out toward Doug and fired instinctively. Birds flushed from the trees in a flurry at the sound of the shot.

The bullet caught Doug in the forehead just above his left eye. Doug's body instantly went limp and his momentum carried his body into the edge of the water. His head and shoulders were face down half submerged in the water and his legs were outstretched on the small sandy beach area. Blood rose out of the water and created a crimson swirl as the small waves, created by his falling into the water, circulated the bloody substance in ever increasing ripples.

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Steinhorst stood motionless staring down at the body with the head half out of the water. He looked back at the two sisters to make certain they didn't have any plans to try and jump him. They struggled against their gags and twisted their wrists hard against the yellow ski rope that bound them. They moved in frenzied but futile jerks at their bindings. Neither attempted to raise themselves from their knees.

Walter stuffed his "baby doll" into his jacket pocket and reached down and grabbed Douglas Hood by the pant legs and pulled him ashore. Blood was now slithering over the sand. He slung the body up against Harold Sims' body. Wiping his hands against his pant legs, he pulled out his .38 and moved in front of Sandy McAdams. Sheila, expecting Walt to shoot her sister, lunged in front of her. As she did, Walt shot a round into Sheila's chest. She fell against the knees of her sister.

Sandy McAdams was horrified and yelling unproductively against the constraints of the gag. Her eyes opened ever so widely, her body shook in fear, time stood still. A mental veil closed down her mind and allowed her some detachment. As Steinhorst moved around her, she followed with her eyes as much as she could by turning her head and then her body. Steinhorst grabbed her by the hair and twisted her head to the front away from him. Holding her head steady, he moved around behind her and placed a bullet into her skull. She fell forward against Sheila. Walter, needing to finish what he had already started, grabbed Sandy McAdams by the hair and pulled her off her sister, and then placed a round into the skull of Sheila McAdams, ending his job as he saw it. (Author's Note # 4)

Charlie Hughes standing out by the road, heard one shot, then minutes later heard another, and seconds later heard another, and then another. Four shots had been fired. There

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was no doubt in his mind what had taken place. He lingered for a few more minutes, trying to decide what he should do. Work call was taking place at the rock mine. He could run to the rock mine, but it was too far away to jog the entire distance and if Walter intercepted him before he could reach the mine, he would be a dead man. If he was successful in escaping, there was no doubt in his mind that Steinhorst would track him down. Seeing his plight before him and no way to escape, he started walking back to the sinkhole.

As he rounded the last bend in the road to the sink, he saw Walter coming down the path toward him. He was handling his "baby doll" with his left hand and reloading with his right hand. Charlie could see no expression on Walter's face. He seemed totally detached from events of the past few minutes. Coldness permeated the morning air. The chill in the air made the moment more impressionable and Charlie knew he had a mental picture he would never be able to banish from his mind.

Walt spoke. "Take the van and go get some concrete blocks and some wire."

"How many?"

Walt had already figured the details. "We need twenty blocks and a hundred feet of electrical fencing wire." Walt paused. "I'll wait here, you run to Perry 'n get what we need."

Both men walked casually back to the location of the van. Hughes resisted the urge to look at the victims. He didn't want to have that vision forever. Instead he looked at his watch. It was 7:00A.M. He knew the building materials supply stores and hardware stores would be open by now. Besides it would take another thirty minutes to get there.

"Make sure this looks OK in here." Steinhorst said.

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Glad to have something to do, Charlie glanced into the van. The shag throw rug was covered with Sims' blood. He pulled it out of the van and left it on the ground.

Charlie Hughes drove into Perry. He had no thoughts of escaping. Just doing what he was ordered to do had some life saving overtures. When he arrived at the intersection of US Highway 98 and US Highways 19 and 27, he went straight ahead for the downtown area. After a mile there was the Cashway Building Supply Company on his right. He turned in and parked. Before proceeding to collect the concrete blocks, he took one last survey of the rear interior, making certain there were no tell-tale signs of the misdeeds that had occurred. He was satisfied the interior would allow someone a view without getting suspicious. He walked in and purchased twenty construction concrete blocks and one hundred feet of electrical fencing wire. The blocks and wire were placed in the back interior on top of the plywood flooring. Hughes drove back to the sink hole.

It was close to 8:00 A.M. when Hughes got back. He did the same as before, he turned the vehicle around and backed in as close to the sink hole as possible. This was the first chance he had to completely survey the scene and the bodies. It appeared to him that Harold Sim's body was at the bottom of the pile. Douglas Hood's body had been pulled by the legs over top of Sim's body. His legs laid across Sims' lower body. Sheila McAdams was dragged and placed on top of Hood, and Sandy McAdams was placed on top of her sister. It was a grotesque pile of arms and legs. He thought to himself, how sad, but then tried as best he could to mentally detach himself from the event. It was way too late to worry about it now and make it different. It happened and he was in the

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middle of it. Nothing more could be done except to start looking out for himself.

He walked over to Walt who was sitting on the bank of the sinkhole smoking his King Edwards cigar. Walt's first words were indelibly imprinted in Hughes' memory. Walt said, "You know they's lots of catfish in there. I'll bet they pick these bodies clean within two weeks."

Hughes bent over and picked up one of the numerous lime rock pebbles, drew back his arm and tossed it into the far wall of the sink. He threw it hard in an effort to vent some of his disgust. Hughes spoke brusquely. "What do you want me to do now?"

"Git them concrete blocks down here and let's git ta work." Steinhorst had already been through the pockets of the victims, taking out anything that might identify them. The girls had no ID, only the men carried a driver's license.

Charlie started bringing the blocks down. He could only carry two at a time and was facing ten trips up and down the sidewall to the location of the bodies.

Steinhorst said, "See how that water's boiling on the surface." He pointed to a spot where you could see water swirling upward much like a break in a water main in the city. You couldn't see where it was coming from, you just knew lots of water was coming to the surface.

Walter spoke again to clarify, "That water is part of the Aucilla River, it flows in underground tunnels and in some places rises to the surface. That's what makes these deep sink holes. That spot right there." He pointed out the spot again, "That's where we want to drop those bodies, that's where they's an underground tunnel."

Hughes knew all about sinks and how they were formed, but he just listened to make Walt feel smart.

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“Let’s take the little girl first,” Walt said. “We can put two blocks around the ankles, three blocks around the waist, and one block around the neck. That ought ta put ’em on the bottom.” As they labored over the first girl, Walt spoke again, “I don’t think we need but five blocks on her. She’s pretty light weight.”

Hughes nodded his agreement and continued stringing the wire through the holes in the block, twisting the wire tightly, and continuing through the next block, until he had five blocks attached to the first body. Walt was doing very little to complete the task. He watched and occasionally made a comment like a supervisor.

“That looks pretty good.” Walter said to Charlie. “Now let’s put her into the water right up there.” The two carried the body and the blocks up a slight incline above where the water was boiling. Carrying the body was awkward. Charlie had the torso by the arms and Walt had the feet. As they picked up the bundle, it sagged in the middle and the blocks dragged on the ground. When they finally got to the spot above where the water was boiling, they tried to pitch the body. It didn’t work. They anticipated tossing the body in, but instead they had to roll the body over the side and into the water. The body sank instantly and bubbles came to the surface from trapped air. Some air came from the lungs, which collapsed as the depth increased. Both men stood silently, not out of reverence but out of curiosity, and stared at the water where the body disappeared.

In order they did the same to the next body, which was the older girl, then the younger man, and finally the older man who was on the bottom of the pile. All four bodies were dumped in about the same spot but with some variation to keep the blocks from hanging on each other.

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When finished both sat down and rested. Walter Steinhorst felt nothing, no remorse, no sympathy, no guilt. He felt nothing! Charlie Hughes felt guilt, had sympathy for the victims and their families and was flushed with remorse. He sat there as stone faced as possible, feeling nauseated. He did his best to stay detached from the situation, but couldn't. An overwhelming shame surfaced and his face flushed. He knew his days of freedom were numbered. Either the law would get him or Walter would. The smuggling money no longer mattered. Nothing would ever free his mind from this event. He had become a prisoner of his own mind and would never escape the mental images of the past twenty-four hours.

When the two girls didn't return home that night, Evelyn McAdams, faced with the same problem numerous times before, turned in for the night. The next afternoon with still no word she became concerned. After calling several of her daughter's friends, and finding out nothing, she went to the Springfield Police Department and reported to Chief of Police Donnie Ziglar that her daughters were missing. One week later, on February 2, 1977, The Panama City News Herald ran an article concerning the two girls' disappearance.

Faye Sims, wife of Harold Sims, waited supper for her husband as he had asked. She had talked to him an hour before he left Tot's bar in his Chevy pick-up and wasn't too concerned about his failure to show for supper.

Douglas Hood had left home in late afternoon on Sunday with a plan to walk over to the projects to meet the two girls. Instead of going directly to the McAdams' residence, he walked to the Springfield Police Department in the hopes of

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discussing his breaking and entering charge with Police Chief Donnie Ziglar. After his discussion with the Police Chief, he walked to the McAdams' residence at 204 Everitt Avenue.

Marijuana Smuggling and the sinkhole murders in Florida's panhandle.

Twisted Justice

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