

In 1952, a small group of people are snowbound in an old Massachusetts farmhouse with a charismatic psychotic hypnotherapist. During therapy sessions, he learns of unpunished misdeeds they had committed. He now intends to dispense justice himself by killing them, and burying their bodies in the cellar.

SNOWBOUND

by Larry Quillen

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A photograph of a winter landscape. The scene is dominated by snow-covered trees and branches, creating a dense, white, and somewhat blurry background. The lighting is soft and diffused, typical of an overcast winter day. The overall mood is quiet and serene, with a sense of being 'snowbound'.

SNOWBOUND

**A NOVEL BY
LARRY QUILLEN**

ALSO BY LARRY QUILLEN

Jenny Cay
Digger
The Rogue
The Rampart Alert

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July, 1952

THE PORTLY REAL ESTATE agent and his client climbed out of the car, and the agent made a sweeping motion with his arm toward the horizon. "Here's your farm, Mr. Hobbs! In the beautiful Berkshires of Western Massachusetts," the jovial agent said. Then he walked over to his client and asked, "May I call you David?"

"I would prefer that you didn't," the tall, thin man in his forties replied with a dour look while making eye contact with the shorter man.

"Oh, uh, yes sir, Mr. Hobbs," the agent stammered and then looked away. Feeling the deep blue eyes of his client boring into his was unnerving. Looking down at his notes, the agent described the acreage of the property, and then pointed to the near side of the open shed in front of them. "This is the cover for your station wagon, Mr. Hobbs, with enough room left over for your tractor," he said. Then he pointed to a big pile of firewood on the far side of the shed. "As you can see, it's also a good place to store firewood. It looks like the previous owner left a couple of cords for you."

The real estate agent waited for a response. When he didn't get one, he turned and pointed toward a huge multi-level barn with vertical board siding and a gambrel roof. "The original barn is still in good shape, Mr. Hobbs. A corncrib and several stalls are on the bottom, with plenty of room in the loft for your hay." When the agent saw his client nod, he continued. "The smaller building between the house and the barn is the smokehouse. It's been several years since anyone has hung meat in there, but the last time I was in there I could smell the stale odor of animal fat."

"It permeated the wood," Hobbs said.

“Yes, it did,” the agent said, relieved to finally get a response from his client. Then he pointed toward the house. “Mr. Hobbs, this house was originally built by Silas Garner over two hundred years ago. It’s about forty feet by thirty feet, two stories, plus an attic and cellar. There are five rooms on the ground floor and five bedrooms on the second floor. The attic doesn’t have any dormers, only windows on either end. I’m told the attic is full of items stored there by previous owners. Anything of value up there will belong to you, of course, should you decide to buy.” The agent paused, gazing at Hobbs, trying to see if the information impressed him. Apparently, it hadn’t, so the agent continued to talk as they walked toward the house.

“Silas Garner was probably a German because, as you can see, the house is built on a steep front-to-back slope, which allows access to the cellar from a full-size doorway in back.” The agent then pointed to the top of the house. “It also has a central chimney, another popular feature of the German community at the time. It has three fireplaces on the first floor and three more on the second, all connected to the central chimney.”

“And were constructed by the owner with thousands of bricks he made by hand, a few at a time,” Hobbs added.

The agent looked down at his notes. “The large fireplace in the living area was originally used for cooking meals, but sometime later a wood-burning stove was installed in one of the first-floor bedrooms and it became the kitchen. The most recent owner did a lot of remodeling after the electric company ran service out here. He wired the whole house for electric lights and installed a water pump on the well. He also installed a gas range and hot water heater that are connected to a propane tank and he plumbed the kitchen and bathroom for hot and cold running water. The bathroom and the kitchen are connected to a septic tank.”

“He must have been quite a handyman,” Hobbs observed.

The agent looked up from his notes and nodded in agreement. “I believe he did it to entice his wife to move out here. It is a rather remote location as you can see,” the agent said.

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“Yes, I can,” Hobbs said. “It’s exactly what I was looking for.”

The agent smiled as he looked down at his notes again. “The previous owner left four well-worn beds and bedding in the upstairs bedrooms and he seemed to have just walked away from all the kitchen utensils and dining ware, but there’s no furniture downstairs except the old dining table and a few well-worn chairs.”

“Why would he do that?” Hobbs wondered out loud as he frowned.

“I’ve been told that, sadly, his wife died of cancer shortly after they moved here. I expect that, in his state of mind, the owner took only what he thought he needed at the time, intending to come back later. However, as far as I know, he hasn’t been back since. His current address is in Ohio.”

Hobbs nodded.

“Would you like to go inside and take a look around?”

“I’d like to take a look at the cellar first, if you don’t mind.”

“Well, yes! Of course. Come this way,” the agent said, then led Hobbs down the slope to the rear of the house and to the cellar door. The agent spent some time searching for the right key, found it, and opened the door.

“The electricity has been turned off, so it’s a little dark in here. If you’d like to wait, I’ll go back to the car and get my flashlight.”

“I think it will be light enough if you’ll leave the door open,” Hobbs said.

“Oh, yes, of course,” the agent said and did as Hobbs requested.

As the men stood just inside the cellar, the real estate agent pointed to an enclosed wooden box, about six feet on each side and three feet high. On top of the box was an electric water pump with pipes leading away from it. “Here’s your well, Mr. Hobbs. Most of these old houses had cisterns in the cellar that collected rainwater from the roof, or water was piped in from a nearby stream or spring. Silas Garner decided to dig a well in his cellar instead.”

Hobbs nodded. "He may have dug the well first. When he reached a good flow of water, he lined the well with bricks and built a house on top of it."

"Yes, he may have," the agent quickly agreed. "In the old days, anyone who needed water would come down here to the well, draw a bucket of water, and then carry it upstairs using the flight of stairs over there that the previous owner removed for some reason." The agent paused, smiling. "Folks didn't bathe very often in the summer back then, and not at all in the winter, so making trips down here for water for cooking and drinking was all they needed most of the time."

Hobbs looked up and saw a rusty hook in the beam directly over the well. The hook was still there, but the pulley and rope were gone. "I wonder what the last owner did if he lost power to the water pump?"

The agent walked closer to the well and pointed down to one side of the box. "He made a trapdoor in the top over here. It looks big enough for a water bucket to pass through," he said, then indicated an old wooden bucket on the shelf. "That one's seen better days. You might want to buy a good galvanized one to replace it."

Hobbs nodded absentmindedly as he focused on the eight-foot square stone base of the chimney in the center of the cellar. The base reached almost up to the ceiling before the first course of brick for the chimney and six fireplaces began. Hobbs nodded in appreciation of the craftsmanship required to accomplish such a feat two hundred years ago.

As his eyes became accustomed to the dim light, Hobbs looked about the cellar. The walls of the cellar were dirt and stone, and the floor was hard-packed bare dirt. There were three wooden barrels, gray with age, along one side. One of the barrels had some rusty farm tools in it: a hoe, rake, spade, pitchfork, and a snow shovel. Freestanding shelving of rough-sawn boards and concrete blocks were against another wall. There was an assortment of dusty jars, old paint cans, and other odds and ends on the shelves. On one shelf near the doorway was an open wooden box with a claw hammer and assorted pliers, screwdrivers, screws, nuts, bolts, and other carpentry items, all with a patina of rust on them.

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“As you can see, the cellar hasn’t changed much in the past two hundred years,” the agent said. “But, for an urbane man such as you, it would be ideal as a wine cellar with a little upgrading. You did say you were from Boston, didn’t you?”

“Years ago. I live in Hartford now,” Hobbs said as he looked about him.

The agent nodded, and then pointed to the far corner of the cellar where an area of the hard-packed dirt floor had been disturbed. “That was Silas Garner’s ice pit over there. He would saw blocks of ice from a nearby lake in the winter, surround the ice with sawdust, and store it in a hole over there to be used to keep his wife’s icebox cool in the summer. A previous owner filled it in after commercial ice delivery became available out this way. It’s firm enough to walk on, but I wouldn’t put anything heavy on it.”

Hobbs walked over to the disturbed area and stepped gently on a mixture of dirt and sawdust. When his foot easily sank in an inch or so, he smiled. “How deep was the ice pit before it was filled in?”

The agent looked down at his notes, then back up. “I really don’t know. But, it would seem to me it would have to be deep enough to store several layers of ice between layers of sawdust. Three, maybe four feet?”

“At least,” Hobbs said as he felt a little thrill of exhilaration. The disturbed area looked to be large enough to accommodate three, possibly four, human corpses. And excavating the dirt and sawdust would require very little effort. As he continued to gaze downward, a smile curled the corners of his mouth. If it was deep enough, he could turn the bodies on their sides and nest them close together, creating space for more bodies. Six? Eight? Could he fit eight bodies in there? The challenge seemed worthy of his time and effort.

Hobbs abruptly turned and walked out of the cellar. In the light of day once again, he turned to the agent. “I think I’ve seen all I wanted to see here.”

“Do you want to see the upstairs now?”

“That won’t be necessary.”

“Oh,” the agent said, clearly disappointed in his client. “Well, then, perhaps I can show you something else. You said you were interested in a farmhouse in a remote location. There’s one near Shelburne Falls that might be suitable.”

Hobbs shook his head. “You misunderstood me. I have no need to see more because I have decided to buy this property.”

The agent’s head jerked back in surprise. “Really?”

“Yes, really.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to take a look inside the house?”

Hobbs looked at the agent and said, “I’m familiar with the five-down, five-up interior of a center-chimney colonial house. If there are four beds and bedding somewhere upstairs, a modern kitchen with some basic cooking and dining ware, a functional bathroom, and a few chairs in the living area, that’s all I really need to know at the moment.”

“Uh, what sort of offer were you thinking about making?”

“I’ll pay the price the man is asking.”

The agent frowned. “This farm has been on the market for some time, Mr. Hobbs. From one man to another, I think the owner would be willing to take less than the listing price.”

Hobbs frowned. The man clearly didn’t appreciate that a few thousand dollars meant very little to someone who had inherited a sizable portion of his mother’s estate. He wanted this property very badly. The ice pit would be ideal for what he had in mind. If he made an offer for less than the listing price, there was a chance someone else would make a higher offer for the property on the same day and the owner would accept it. “Dickering back and forth would be tiresome to me. I want to take possession of this property as soon as you can arrange the sale. I intend to pay cash which should eliminate banks and appraisers. When we get back to your office, I will give you a check for ten percent of the listing price and the name and address of the Boston attorney who will take care of all the legal documents and will represent me at the closing. Will that get things rolling?”

“Yes, sir! It certainly will!” the agent said with obvious enthusiasm.

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Hobbs glanced back at the cellar, and then looked at the agent. “Good. I don’t plan to live here full time, but I would like to bring friends up for the weekend from time to time to enjoy the rustic atmosphere this place offers.”

“I will get right on it as soon as we get back to Greenfield. This place should be yours by August. There are a lot of sugar maples on the property, Mr. Hobbs. People come to New England from all over during fall foliage season, just to look at the trees. I’m sure your guests will enjoy them as well.”

“I’m sure they will,” Hobbs agreed.

As they walked away, Hobbs allowed himself to become quietly elated, knowing the key element to his plan to make deserving people disappear would soon be his. He smiled as he considered potential candidates for the ice pit. It was like trying to choose one flavor of ice cream from a cooler filled with a wide assortment of equally delectable choices. Perhaps he would only invite three the first time. Designing a weekend scenario in which three people would disappear without a trace should be fairly simple.

2

WITH THE BRILLIANT red, yellow, and orange sugar maple leaves blowing in the cool September breeze outside the old colonial farmhouse, David Hobbs paused in the doorway of his upstairs bedroom with his hands on his hips. Dressed for the day in casual clothes, he smiled in anticipation of the tasks awaiting him.

“Let’s check on Mrs. Black, shall we?” he said aloud to no one. He opened the door to the bedroom adjacent to his, walked over to the bed, and looked at the gray pallor of a corpse’s face drained of blood.

“*Bonjour, Madame Noir!* Did you slept well?” he asked, then chuckled. “You should have, with all the barbiturates you swallowed after I hypnotized you.” He paused for a moment, gazing impassively at the woman’s lifeless body, feeling neither pleasure nor remorse for what he had done to her. She represented the fulfillment of his life’s goal, nothing more.

Hobbs looked down at the dead woman and nodded. So far, his plans for the weekend were progressing nicely. “Now, Mrs. Black, if you will, please remain here while I check on your future accommodations,” he said aloud, then paused for a few seconds as if listening.

In one of his hypnotherapy sessions with her, she had revealed that she had run a stop sign one New Year’s Eve, killing the inebriated driver of the other vehicle. A legal technicality, and her husband’s judicial influence, had allowed her to escape punishment for what she had done—until today. “I’ll be right back, Mrs. Black,” he called out as he left the woman’s bedroom.

Humming a light melody from the long-running Broadway play *Oklahoma!*, he hurried down the stairs to the living area, then out the front door. He paused for a moment in the

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morning sunlight, and then looked up, smiling. "Oh! What a beautiful day!" He walked out into the front yard and then down the slope to the cellar. In the ice pit corner there was now a rectangular hole and a big pile of dirt and sawdust beside it, a product of previous visits to the farm to prepare for his guests. He smiled and nodded. "Yes, indeed. This will do nicely for all three of them." He stretched and yawned. "But, first a little something to start the day."

* * *

THIRTY MINUTES LATER, Hobbs was still sitting at the small table in the kitchen, enjoying the peace and solitude of a quiet Sunday morning as he leisurely sipped his coffee and smoked a cigarette. When he set his coffee cup down on the saucer, the contact of china on china was the loudest sound in the house. One of his weekend guests had brought a copy of Friday's *Hartford Courant* along on the trip up from Connecticut. The last person to read it had left a few sections on the table. He picked up the newspaper and began to read.

Republican vice-presidential candidate Richard Nixon's speech that he had made on television last Wednesday night was still in the news. In the speech, only six weeks before the 1952 presidential election, he had defended his use of his political fund and vowed to stay on the Republican ticket. He did admit to receiving one gift, a cocker spaniel dog, that his daughter had named Checkers. Dwight Eisenhower and Republican Party officials had made statements assuring everyone they were satisfied with Nixon's explanation, but their Democratic Party opponents, Adlai Stevenson and John Sparkman, weren't convinced.

The race between Massachusetts Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and Democratic Congressman John F. Kennedy, who was attempting to unseat him, was in the news, as was the Korean War, now in its third year of American involvement.

When he was finished with the newspaper, Hobbs drained his coffee, stubbed out his cigarette, and stretched his arms high over his head as he yawned. "Ah, such a beautiful morning, such a beautiful day," he said, and then sighed. "Now, to work."

After a trip to the bathroom, he went outside to his station wagon and retrieved the canvas tarpaulin and clothesline rope that had been used to cover the luggage on the vehicle's roof on the way up from Hartford.

He returned to Mrs. Black's bedroom carrying the tarp and rope. "Good morning again!" he called out cheerfully to the woman's corpse.

He spread the tarp on the floor, yanked the bedcovers off the woman's body, rolled her onto the tarp, and wrapped the thick canvas cloth about her. He fed the rope through the tarp's metal grommets, tied the ends together, and then grabbed a loop in the rope and pulled. "Oof! You are heavy, Mrs. Black," he groaned as tugged on the rope to pull the woman's body across the wooden floor. "Apparently my hypnotherapy didn't help you lose as much weight as I had hoped."

He allowed the body to bounce and roll as it followed him down the stairs to the first floor living area. He paused in front of the large colonial fireplace, breathing heavily from the exercise. After a moment, he continued to pull his burden across the parlor's bare wooden floor, and then out the front door. He paused once more at the corner of the house, and then pulled the body down the steep slope and into the cellar.

He was positioning the body in the ice pit when he heard a loud engine noise outside. He stopped his work, closed the cellar door, and walked back up the hill with a frown on his face, clearly upset. As he waited and watched, a large green farm tractor turned into his driveway. "This man was not part of today's scenario!" he said, clearly annoyed by the intrusion.

The farmer pulled his tractor up near the house, stopped, turned off the engine, smiled, and waved. "Good morning! I'm Burt Stodfield. You must be Mr. David Hobbs."

Hobbs walked close to the tractor, hoping by doing so he could end the conversation before the farmer dismounted. "Yes, I'm David Hobbs. Who are you again?"

"I'm Burt Stodfield. I'm your neighbor down the road," Stodfield said, pointing in the direction he came from.

"I see," Hobbs said. "Uh, what may I do for you, Mr. Stodfield?"

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“Not a thing. I heard someone had bought the old Garner place. I saw your station wagon drive by Friday evening so I thought I’d drive up here this morning and say hello to you and see how you folks were doing.”

“There’s no one here but me.”

Stodfield frowned. “I thought I saw some people with you when you drove by.”

Hobbs paused momentarily. “There was an illness. I had to take them back to Hartford yesterday. I came back alone last night.”

“Oh, I guess I didn’t see you driving by.”

“That might explain it,” Hobbs said, trying to end the conversation.

Stodfield looked at Hobbs for a moment, then coughed and cleared his throat. “Well, there is one thing I’d like to talk to you about.”

“Oh, what’s that?”

“Well, sir. My property is just down the road from yours. The property line runs right through the middle of about a hundred acres of trees. I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but there’s an awful lot of sugar maples in those woods.”

“Yes, I have noticed,” Hobbs said. “This time of year, they’re hard to miss.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Their leaves sure are pretty in the fall. But come next spring when the sap starts running, there’s money to be made off of them. Some of them on your property are big enough to handle three or four taps each.”

“So, what do you want from me?” Hobbs asked. “I’m not interested in going into the maple sugar business.”

“Oh, I didn’t say you were. I’m not asking you to do anything. No, sir. All I’m asking is that you let me tap your trees. There’s no point in all that sap going to waste. In exchange, I’d be happy to leave a couple of gallons of syrup on your doorstep. If you don’t like pancakes, I’d be willing to plow the road from my place up to here if you ever need it. The county won’t plow that one-lane gravel road, but I’ve got a snowplow attachment for my John Deere that I use to plow the road from the blacktop up to my place. I could plow all the way up here at the same time.”

Hobbs frowned. This man wanted to be a friendly neighbor. That was the last thing he needed. His weekend scenarios were complicated enough without introducing a variable such as this man. "Have you ever heard of Robert Frost, Mr. Stodfield?"

"No, can't say I ever have. Is he a friend of yours?"

"He has many friends, all over the world," Hobbs said, then added, "He's a poet."

Stodfield slowly shook his head. "Don't know any poets."

Hobbs smiled and nodded. "Not only is he a poet, he's a great observer of human nature. He wrote a poem once about rebuilding the stone fence along the property line with his neighbor. He thought it was silly to mend it, but his neighbor told him good fences made good neighbors." Hobbs paused, then said, "Well, sir, that's how I feel about it, too. As long as you stay on your side of the property line and I stay on my side, we'll be good neighbors."

Stodfield silently stared at Hobbs. "Is that right?"

"I may come up here from time to time, but I don't plan to live here, so I doubt that I will need your snowplow, and I don't care for pancakes. In the meantime, I'd like to know my neighbors aren't helping themselves to anything that belongs to me when I'm not around."

Stodfield slowly shook his head. "Mr. Hobbs, you don't have anything I need. I don't have anything you need either. If you feel that way about your trees, that's fine with me."

"I'm glad to hear that, Mr. Stodfield."

The two men stared silently at each other for a few seconds. Finally, Stodfield said, "Well, I guess I'll head back to the house."

"So long, Mr. Stodfield. Nice meeting you," Hobbs said, then turned and walked away. In a moment, he heard the tractor's engine start. When he reached the front door, Hobbs opened it, then turned and looked back. Stodfield was already on his way. Hobbs took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. Thank goodness the man didn't show up while he had Mrs. Black's body in tow. "Now, where was I? Oh, yes, Mrs. Watson." His brow wrinkled for a moment as he recalled the

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effort it took to get the first body into the cellar. "I'm going to need some help with Mrs. Watson."

He thought for a moment, and then his face brightened. "Ah, yes, the wheelbarrow," he said as he headed for the long shed near the house. His station wagon was parked under it, next to a large pile of firewood. Next to the firewood he found an old wooden wheelbarrow. Its rusted steel wheel wobbled when he tried rolling it, but it still worked. He stopped at the cellar for the tarp and rope, and then headed for the pond beyond the barn. "Oh, Mrs. Watson! Swimming lessons are over!"

Hobbs looked down at the woman's body floating face down in the pond. "Oh, there you are, Mrs. Watson. Now you know how your neighbor's child felt when he fell into your unguarded pool."

Hobbs grabbed the woman's feet and pulled her clear of the water. After struggling with the wet, muddy corpse, he rolled her into the tarp and tied it with the rope. He was able to get most of the tarp-wrapped torso into the wheelbarrow with her head and legs dangling outside. After several stops to catch his breath, Hobbs arrived at the cellar door once again. "A better wheelbarrow is definitely on my list," he gasped.

Once inside, he nested the second woman's body against the first. When satisfied with the result, he walked outside. "Mr. Black! Oh, Mr. Black! Where are you?" Hobbs called with an air of fun and gaiety in his voice. He paused for a moment, listening. "You're in the barn? Oh, very well," Hobbs said, as he gathered the tarp and rope once again and then pushed his wheelbarrow in that direction.

Hobbs entered the barn hallway, then paused at the first stall and looked in. There was a man's body, lying supine on the dried manure and rotten straw, with dark blood clotted about the holes in his chest where the steel tines of a pitchfork were still buried. Hobbs walked into the stall and stood over the man for a moment, then sighed. "*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur Noir*, I now believe you are not the one who killed me in a former life, but my scenario for this weekend was written with the deaths of all three of you as essential

ingredients. I'm sure you understand my dilemma. Last minute changes always make a mess of things, don't you agree? In any case, you are not totally blameless. It was your political influence that kept your wife from receiving her just punishment."

Hobbs paused for a moment, as though listening to the other man's voice, then smiled and nodded. "You agree? Wonderful! I'm so glad," he said, and then put his foot on the man's bloody chest, grasped the pitchfork handle, and jerked upward, extracting the tines from the man.

Later, with all three bodies in the cellar, Hobbs took a break. He went back to the kitchen, poured himself a glass of ice water, and smoked a cigarette. His scenario was progressing very nicely. Except for the intrusion of his nosy neighbor, it had gone very smoothly all weekend, almost as he had planned it.

After the break, Hobbs made some adjustments to the placement of bodies, then added wallets, purses, and other personal items. Once done with that, he pulled a small canvas tarp off several bags of quicklime and soon had all three bodies covered with a thick layer of calcium oxide. He had heard conflicting accounts about the effects of quicklime on dead bodies. Some claimed it would speed up the decomposition; others claimed it would slow it down; they all agreed, however, it would considerably reduce the odor of a decaying body. In the confined area of the cellar, he would need that.

After covering the bodies with the smaller canvas tarp, he took another well-deserved break before he returned to the cellar to finish refilling the ice pit, leaving the excess dirt and sawdust piled on top. When was done, it was mid-afternoon and he was sweaty, dirty, and exhausted. There was more work to be done, dishes to wash, linens to change, and luggage to be packed, but all that could wait until after he had a nice, long, soaking bath.

A few minutes later, with a glass of Bordeaux in his hand, he climbed into the tub of hot water and made himself comfortable. He took a sip of his wine, set it on the floor, slid farther down into the water, and rested his head on the rim of

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the tub. With the pleasant feeling of satisfaction that comes with a job well done, he closed his eyes, smiling. His mother would have been proud of him.

* * *

WHEN HE WAS VERY YOUNG, David Hobbs' mother had died on an operating table, the victim of a mishap by a careless surgeon during a routine procedure. The frail, lonely child grew up in an affluent suburb of Boston with a strict father and a stepmother who was horrified by the boy's diabolical drawings. In those formative years, the boy silently vowed many times that someday he would make the doctor suffer for killing his mother, but the doctor died suddenly of a heart attack while the young man was an upperclassman at Harvard.

When he learned of the surgeon's death, the angst he felt, knowing he had failed his mother, overwhelmed him. The embittered young man dropped out of school and found kindred spirits in a Vermont art colony.

For years afterwards, while living on income from his mother's estate, Hobbs tried to express the futile emptiness of his life in his art. However, it eventually became apparent to him, as it had to those around him, that his artistic skills were mediocre at best.

As his interest in art waned, Hobbs became fascinated with the symbiotic relationship between the mind and body, and with the ability of hypnosis to modify human behavior by manipulating the subconscious. In time, he and a few others became adept at hypnosis. While experimenting with the effects of psilocybin, found in magic mushrooms, they discovered that they could regress into past lives and recall episodic events with uncommon clarity while hypnotized.

With the advent of World War II, America began drafting hundreds of thousands of men each month. Hobbs and the radicals and anarchists within the small art community soon realized that they might soon be drafted into one of the armed forces or go to jail if they refused to serve. Some chose to stay, others left for Canada. Hobbs contacted one of his Harvard fraternity brothers, now a department manager at Pratt & Whitney in East Hartford, Connecticut. His fraternity brother

assured Hobbs that he could find a job for him with the aircraft engine manufacturer and, as a critical employee of a defense contractor, he would not be drafted. Hobbs left for East Hartford the next day.

Hobbs was hired by the Graphics Department as a commercial artist, preparing charts, graphs, and slides for the endless presentations by one group to another. He found the work tedious and uninspiring, but welcomed it to fill the hours of the day while waiting for something to inspire him and give his life direction.

To offset his boredom at work, Hobbs focused on his skills as a hypnotist. In time, by word of mouth, he became a hypnotherapist to his acquaintances and coworkers. They came to him with some minor psychosomatic problem that he was usually able to resolve under hypnosis. They were impressed with his ability to make them alter their lifestyle under hypnosis to achieve some personal goal. At the same time, he welcomed the opportunity to explore the mind of another human being.

While under hypnosis, many of them had unknowingly revealed dark secrets about illegal and immoral acts. Some of these acts had resulted in the death of someone. Hobbs knew he could enrich himself by blackmailing these people, but punishing them by taking their money wouldn't be self-satisfying. He already had more money than he would need in this lifetime. Like the surgeon who had killed his mother, they needed to feel the pain of their victims, but, like the surgeon, they had somehow escaped punishment for their deed. "If only I could wave a wand and make these people vanish from the face of the earth," he had cried out in frustration one day.

That day, in a moment of keen insight, Hobbs realized many people, some of them famous, really had vanished without a trace in the past. Why couldn't he do the same with equally deserving people? The more he thought about it, the more the idea appealed to him.

What to do with the body, to make it disappear, was the crucial issue. Dumping it in a landfill was a problematic solution, and digging a grave with a pick and shovel was beyond his physical capability. Then he recalled that some of

SNOWBOUND

the old New England homes built in colonial times had ice pits in their cellars that might be large enough and deep enough to accommodate human bodies. Suddenly, it came to him in an epiphany what his life's work was to be.

For longer than he cared to remember, he had felt depressed, first by his mother's death, then by his failure to avenge her, then by his failure to excel at anything he had tried since. Now, he had a purpose. For the first time in this life, he felt alive. Hobbs smiled as he closed his eyes, sighed softly, and allowed his body to slowly relax in the warm bathwater.

* * *

HOBBS AWOKE AN HOUR later in the tepid water. He washed himself, then dressed and addressed his remaining chores. While washing the dishes, he reviewed his scenario for the weekend and smiled, congratulating himself for creating one that had worked so well for all three of his guests.

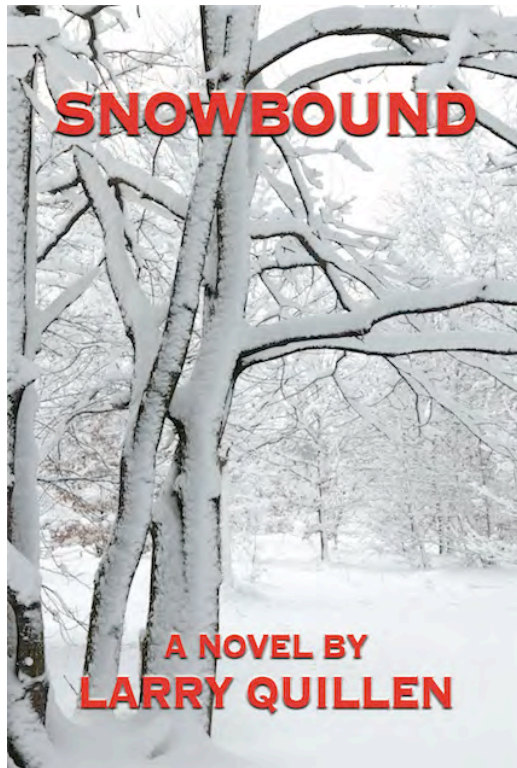
Except for his nosy neighbor, no one associated with his guests knew they were with him in Massachusetts this weekend. He had told his guests to meet him in the back of the long-term parking lot at the Connecticut airport in Windsor Locks, knowing cars could be left there for weeks without causing concern to anyone. With their bodies in his cellar, all he needed to do was to return to Hartford, put their luggage in the railway station waiting room, a piece at a time, and walk away. Ten minutes later, it would be gone.

Shortly before sundown, satisfied that the interior of the house was spotlessly clean and the cellar was presentable, Hobbs piled everyone's luggage into his station wagon along with a bundle of soiled linen and an old saber he'd found in the attic. He was sure it was similar to the saber a French cavalry officer would have carried in the nineteenth century. He looked around one last time. Satisfied that there was nothing else to do, he sighed with a satisfied smile and started the engine.

"Now, let me see, whom shall I invite next?" he asked out loud as he drove away. He could think of several potential candidates for his ice pit, all deserving to disappear forever.

“But, the man who killed me in another life would be the guest of honor.”

They had met only once in this life, but Hobbs was now sure that a young Pratt & Whitney engineer who spoke with a Southern accent was the reincarnation of his murderer. He smiled and nodded. “My saber should be refurbished in a couple of months. With a bit of good fortune, the engineer will feel the sting of its blade on his neck before the end of the year.”



In 1952, a small group of people are snowbound in an old Massachusetts farmhouse with a charismatic psychotic hypnotherapist. During therapy sessions, he learns of unpunished misdeeds they had committed. He now intends to dispense justice himself by killing them, and burying their bodies in the cellar.

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by Larry Quillen

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