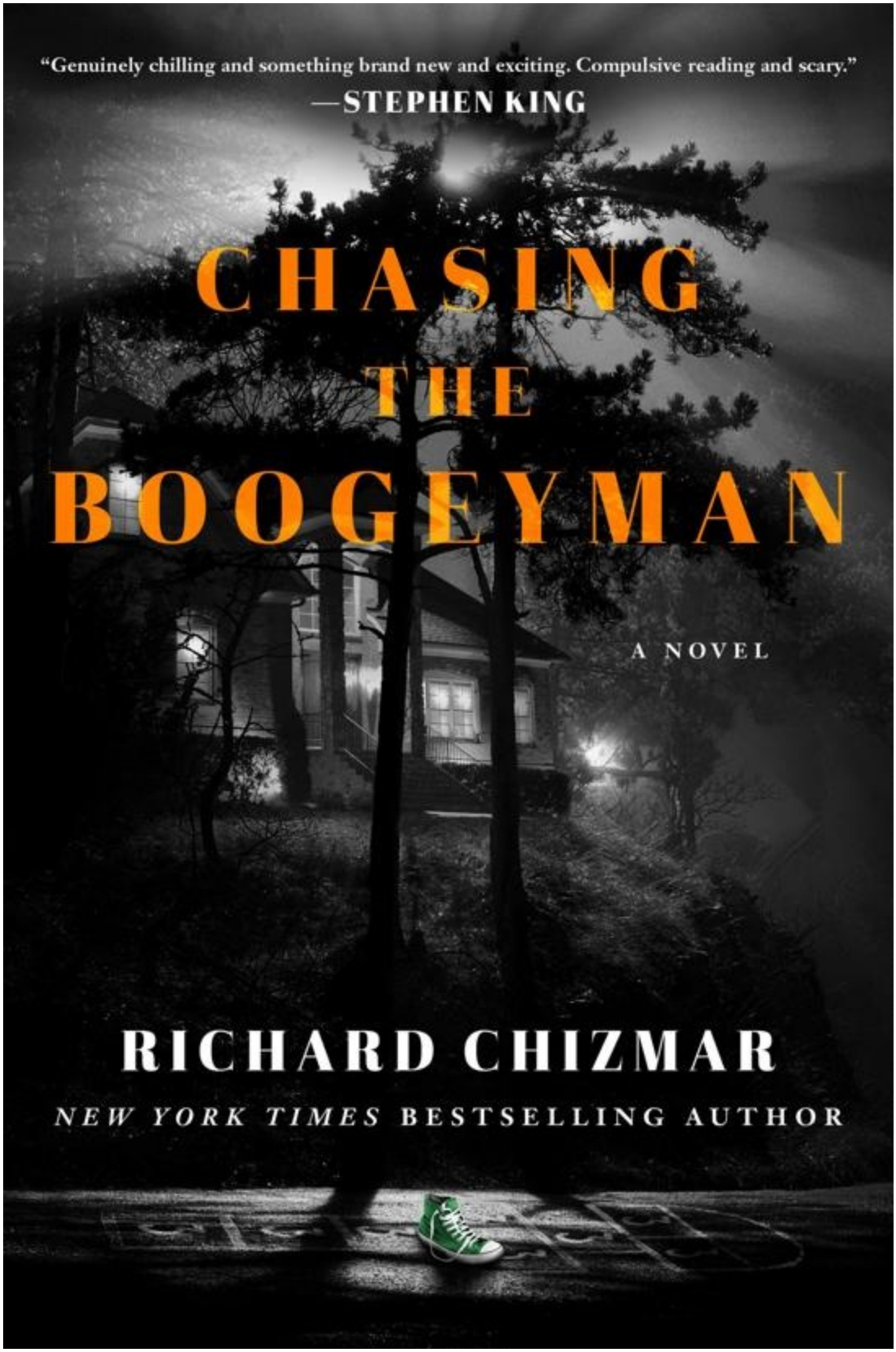
"Genuinely chilling and something brand new and exciting. Compulsive reading and scary."
—STEPHEN KING
CHASING THE BOOGEYMAN
A NOVEL
RICHARD CHIZMAR
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

PRAISE FOR *CHASING THE*

BOOGEYMAN

"*Chasing the Boogeyman* is genuinely chilling and something brand new and exciting. Compulsive reading and scary… I thought often of *I'll Be Gone in the*

Dark, but never to the story's detriment. Ray Bradbury's influence is all over it, but he never could've written that ending. *Chasing the Boogeyman* does what true crime so often cannot: it offers both chills and a satisfying conclusion."

—Stephen King

"Hammer in hand, Richard Chizmar's come to shatter the idea that everything's

already been done. An absolutely chilling mash-up of styles, media, biography,

and legend. Elastic, unsettling, brilliant. And here you thought you knew the names of every genre."

—Josh Malerman, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Bird Box* and

Malorie

"Brilliant.… Absolutely fascinating, totally compelling, and immensely

poignant. I dare you not to finish it in one sitting. This one will stay with me!"

—C. J. Tudor, *New York Times* bestselling author

"Riveting. Chilling. *Chasing the Boogeyman* is an unflinching look at a real-life monster and the ordinary heroes obsessed with stopping him."

—Riley Sager, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Final Girls* and *Home Before Dark*

“Literature was invented around 3400 B.C. Approximately 5,419 years later, Richard Chizmar has invented an entirely new genre of literature with *Chasing*

the Boogeyman. Compulsive, encompassing storytelling. Do not miss this one!”

—Brian Keene, bestselling author of *The Rising*

“With *Chasing the Boogeyman*, Richard Chizmar demonstrates the full power of his impressive storytelling reach. A fascinating conceit paired with deeply human writing creates a thriller that conjures writers as disparate as Stephen King and Michelle McNamara. The result is a marvelous mind game of nuanced,

layered storytelling.”

—Michael Koryta, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Never Far Away*

“Richard Chizmar, with *Chasing the Boogeyman*, presents himself as a print version of Norman Rockwell, if the artist had devoted himself to the creepy things that hide under the bed.”

—Linwood Barclay, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Find You First*

“If Ray Bradbury had written *In Cold Blood* it would probably look a lot like Richard Chizmar’s masterful *Chasing the Boogeyman*, a perfectly written and unnervingly suspenseful thriller about a series of murders that tear apart the fabric of a picturesque Maryland town and the writer who puts everything on the

line to solve them. This is a mind-bendingly engaging book. Be prepared for the

hairs on the back of your neck to be standing at attention as you devour every rich page.”

—David Bell, bestselling author of *The Request*

“Richard Chizmar spins dark magic with *Chasing the Boogeyman*. A true-crime

masterpiece with Chizmar himself as a key player in the grisly mystery. Highly

recommended, but not for the faint of heart.”

—Jonathan Maberry, *New York Times* bestselling author of *V-Wars* and

Patient Zero

“Wonderful… a knotty mystery with an elegant resolution at its heart.… It feels

so original, dizzy-making in its expert layering of fact and fiction.… A hymn to

both innocence and to growing up.”

—Catriona Ward, bestselling author of *The Last House on Needless Street*

CHASING THE BOOGEYMAN

A Novel

RICHARD CHIZMAR

GALLERY BOOKS
New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi

For Kara.

Again.

a note to readers

Chasing the Boogeyman is a work of fiction, an homage to my hometown and

my passion for true crime. There are slices of life depicted throughout that are very much inspired by my personal history, but other events and real people and

places and publications are used fictitiously, and to provide verisimilitude to this crime story. Other names, characters, settings, publications, and events come directly from my imagination, admittedly at times not a very nice place to inhabit.

foreword

James Renner

I write about crime, and sometimes I chase serial killers across the country. I cut my teeth at the *Free Times* in Cleveland, where I worked as an investigative journalist at a time when young women were disappearing on the west side of town. We all knew there was a murderer in our midst, but nobody could find him. I spent a month researching the cases of victims Amanda Berry and Gina DeJesus. One of Amanda's ex-boyfriends looked good for it, but the police had

no evidence. Then one day, in 2013, I was watching my son tumble around in his

gymnastics class when I got a text from an old source in the Cleveland Police Department—Amanda and Gina just walked out of a house on the West Side. And a third woman is here. By the end of the day, Ariel Castro was in custody. When I went back through my notes, Castro's name was there. His daughter was the last person with Gina DeJesus before she was

abducted. My editor had asked me not to interview her because, at the time, she was a minor. I will always wonder what

might have happened if I never listened to him.

The summer after they caught Castro, I took my family to Ocean City,

Maryland, on vacation. I needed a break from it all and intended to get caught up

on some Stephen King and John Irving novels while my kids built sandcastles on

the beach. The condo had this old dining room table with an annoying wobble,

and on the second day I was motivated to fix it. I surveyed the owner's bookshelves for the right-sized paperback, and in that way happened across a sun-faded copy of Richard Chizmar's true-crime book, *Chasing the Boogeyman*.

I started leafing through it and quickly forgot about the table. By dinner, I was

obsessed with the details revealed in the book and the horrible unsolved murders

that rocked the town of Edgewood in 1988. By midnight, I'd finished it.

I took *Chasing the Boogeyman* with me when we left. I guess that's stealing, but I reasoned this was a better fate for the book than holding up the corner of a

dining room table. When I got home, I puttered around the internet for a bit to

find out if they'd ever caught the guy, but all I could find were old articles on LexisNexis. No updates for the last ten years. I was surprised, though, to find

that Chizmar had become a publisher himself, with some Stephen King titles, no less. I even had an old issue of his magazine, *Cemetery Dance*, from back in college, and it had his contact info listed on the editorial page.

On a whim, I decided to email Chizmar. Any updates on the Boogeyman mystery? I took a picture of my pilfered copy of his book and sent it along as an attachment, and

included my phone number. Five minutes later, my phone rang. It was Chiz. I think we talked about the murders for two or three hours that night. Twenty-some years later, he still remembered every detail, every source he'd spoken to.

It was still an obsession, I could tell. I had planned to write a feature story about his quest as a young man to find the killer, but other stories, newer stories, got in the way.

Then came that morning in September 2019 when I saw "The Boogeyman"

trending on Twitter. I clicked the link, thinking it was a promotion for some new

horror movie, a part of me trying not to get my hopes up, and sure enough, it concerned the Edgewood murders. I felt my body go numb when I saw the name

of the man police had just arrested. It was the last person I'd expected.

Chizmar didn't answer the phone that day, or for the rest of the week. I got the

details from Carly Albright's updates in the *Washington Post*. There was a feeling of palpable relief in the air, and it reminded me of when the Golden State

Killer was apprehended. When a monster is finally caught against all odds, it feels like magic. The author J. R. R. Tolkien had a word for that feeling

— *eucatastrophe*. The opposite of catastrophe, and all the more important because it's even rarer.

I've been waiting for Richard Chizmar's final words on the matter. I heard he

actually interviewed the killer in prison, and I was anxious to hear what he'd discovered. So it's quite an honor to be asked to introduce this long-overdue final edition of his book.

If I've learned anything from Chizmar's journey though, it's that, in the end,

patience and hope win out over evil and indifference. Almost all the time. I hope

you will agree.

— *James Renner*

March 3, 2020

James Renner is the author of *True Crime Addict*, the controversial book on the Maura Murray disappearance, as well as the novels *The Man from Primrose Lane* and, most recently, *Muse*. He got his start as a crime beat reporter in Cleveland. He currently hosts the *Philosophy of Crime* podcast.

introduction

"What kind of monster does that?"

When I first started clipping newspaper articles and jotting down notes about

the tragic events that transpired in my hometown of Edgewood, Maryland,

during the summer and autumn of 1988, I had no thoughts of one day turning those scattered observations into a full-length book.

Many of my closest friends and colleagues have a hard time believing this to

be true, but I promise that is the case.

Perhaps *something* working deep in the basement of my subconscious had an

inkling there might be a story here to tell, but the surface-world Rich Chizmar, a

fresh-faced twenty-two-year-old—who on an early June afternoon loaded up his

meager belongings (including my beloved Apple Macintosh computer, which

I'm still paying for in monthly installments) into the back seat and trunk of his

dirt-brown Toyota Corolla and headed north on I-95 to his parents' house at the

corner of Hanson and Tupelo Roads—had no clue whatsoever.

All I knew was this: three days earlier, a few blocks from where I'd grown up,

a young girl had been taken from her bedroom in the middle of the night. Her savaged body was discovered in nearby woods the next morning. The local

police had no suspects.

I learned most of this information from a pair of newspaper articles and the evening news. Initially, reporters were suitably vague about the condition of the

girl's body, but an old friend's uncle was a Harford County sheriff, and he spilled all the grisly details. "Jesus Christ, Rich. What kind of monster does that?" my friend had asked, as if my lifelong interest in the macabre made me some kind of an expert on deviant behavior.

I had no answer for him that day, and now, more than a year later, I still don't.

Call me naive, but I believe some things just aren't meant to be understood. So

much of life—and death—is a mystery.

My father was his typically quiet self when we spoke on the phone the

evening before my homecoming—he was mostly concerned with what I wanted for dinner my first night back so he could pick up groceries at the commissary—

but my mother was a mess. "We've known the Gallaghers for over twenty

years," she said, voice cracking with emotion. "They moved here shortly after we did. Joshua was just a toddler and poor Natasha hadn't even been born. You

should reach out to Josh when you get home. I can't imagine what it must feel

like to lose a baby sister… especially like that. Can you? You'll come with us to

the funeral, won't you? You and Josh graduated together, right?" On and on like

that.

I assured her that no, I couldn't imagine losing a baby sister (it didn't matter

one bit that I was the youngest of the Chizmar children and therefore didn't have

a baby sister; that clearly wasn't the point), and yes, of course I'd go with them

to the funeral, and yes, Josh and I had in fact graduated together, although we hadn't been particularly close, the two of us running with different crowds.

Even at such a relatively young age, I was already well on my way to

becoming a reformed Catholic, but my folks were about as devout as they came,

especially my mom. When the world around her suffered—a deadly earthquake

in Asia, floods in South America, a distant second cousin diagnosed with treatable cancer; it didn't matter how near or far—my mother suffered right alongside each and every one of them. She'd always been that way.

Almost breathless by this point in the conversation, Mom went on to say that

she and Norma Gentile, our elderly next-door neighbor, had gone to mass every

morning for the past week to pray for the Gallagher family. They'd also walked

over a platter of homemade fried chicken and coleslaw to show their support. I

could hear my father's muffled voice in the background then, chastising my mother for keeping me on the phone for so long, and she scolded him right back

with an emphatic “Oh, you hush.” When she got back on the line, she apologized

for being so upset and chewing my ear off, declaring that nothing like this had

ever happened in Edgewood. Before I could muster much of a response, she said

goodnight and hung up the phone.

Late the next afternoon, as I steered my overloaded Toyota off the I-95 exit ramp and headed for Hanson Road, the radio newswoman pretty much echoed

my mother’s claim. There’d always been plenty of crime to go around in a town

like Edgewood—assault and battery, breaking and entering, theft, any number of

drug-related offenses, as well as the occasional homicide—but no one could remember anything remotely this violent or depraved. It was almost as if an invisible switch had been thrown, the reporter claimed, and we now existed in a

different place and time. Our little town had lost what remained of its innocence.

Sitting beside me on the passenger seat that day was my diploma from the

University of Maryland School of Journalism, still rolled up in the cardboard mailing tube in which the college had mailed it. I hadn’t bothered buying a frame. To my parents’ disappointment, I hadn’t even bothered walking across the stage at my graduation ceremony earlier in the month.

After four-and-a-half seemingly endless years, I’d had enough of formal

education. It was time to get out in the real world and do *something* with myself.

There was only one small problem.

What that *something* was, I wasn't entirely sure.

I'd published a folder full of newspaper articles during the past couple of years, mostly sports stories and a handful of public interest features in my college paper. I'd also gotten lucky and managed to crack my hometown weekly,

Hartford County's *Aegis* (twice), and the *Baltimore Sun* (once). As a lifelong Baltimore Orioles fan, I was particularly proud of the Earl Weaver feature I'd written for the *Sun*. Unlike my diploma, it was neatly framed and carefully bubble-wrapped in the back seat of my car.

So, armed with my impressive body of clippings and hot-off-the-press

journalism degree, you'd think I'd be anxious to get settled in at home and launch right into an aggressive job search.

And you would be wrong.

You see, somewhere along the way, amid all those stuffy classroom lessons about how to write a proper lede and when to utilize an unnamed source and how to interview a reluctant subject, I fell head over heels in love with a different kind of writing. The kind that came with a whole lot fewer rules and no

harried bosses barking in your ear to "hurry the hell up, Chizmar, we need to go

to press!"

That's right, I'm talking about the bane of every real journalist's existence —

the hippy-dippy, Peter Pan world of Make Believe: fiction.

But wait, it's even worse than that. I'm talking about *genre* fiction. Crime, mystery, suspense, and that black sheep of them all: horror.

I'd already managed to sell a half-dozen short stories to small-press

publications located around the country. Magazines with illustrious names like *Scifant*, *Desert Sun*, *StarSong*, and *Witness to the Bizarre*. Magazines with circulations in the mid-to-low three-digit range that often arrived in my PO Box

with sloppily stapled bindings and painfully amateurish black-and-white artwork

on the front covers; magazines that paid a penny per word if you were lucky, but

oftentimes, nothing at all.

As further evidence of youthful ignorance and bravado, I'd actually taken my

love affair with genre fiction a step further, by recently announcing the start-up

of my very own horror and suspense magazine, an ambitious quarterly going by

the questionable-at-best title of *Cemetery Dance* (stolen from the name of the second short story I'd ever written, for which I'd received compliments from roughly a dozen editors regarding the evocative title of that particular tale and exactly zero compliments regarding the quality of the story itself). The debut issue of *Cemetery Dance* was scheduled to be released in a matter of months—

December 1988—and as usual, I was in over my head. An awful lot of long days

and long nights of on-the-job training awaited me.

But first came the hard part—explaining to my old-fashioned, by-the-book,

conservative parents that I didn't even plan to assemble a résumé, much less look for a real job. Instead, I had a different master plan in mind: First, I'd take up residence in my old bedroom on the second floor of my childhood home.

Then I'd spend the next seven months sharing their dinner table most every night, preparing for my impending marriage (and subsequent move to Baltimore

City so that Kara, my bride-to-be, could finish her undergraduate work at Johns

Hopkins University before moving on to physical therapy school, thus insuring

that at least one of us would eventually earn a steady income), and lounging around in my sweatpants or pajamas while I worked on my little magazine and

wrote stories about bad guys and monsters.

Talk about a Can't-Miss Plan, right?

Fortunately, my mother and father soon revealed themselves to be saints on a

whole new level (they still are to this day), and for reasons unknown to intelligent man, they agreed to support my plan and expressed their unwavering

faith in me.

So, there you have it… that's how I found myself in the early days of summer

1988, sitting behind my writing desk beneath a window overlooking the side yard of the house I grew up in. Every time I took a break from the

computer screen and glanced outside, I imagined the ghosts of my childhood friends sprinting shirtless across the lawn, whooping with laughter and disappearing into

the wavering shadows beneath the towering weeping willow whose spindly

branches had snagged so many of our taped-up Wiffle balls and provided hours

of cooling shade in which to play marbles and eat pizza subs and trade baseball

cards. I'd even kissed my first girl under that tree when I was eleven years old.

Her name was Rhonda, and I've never forgotten her.

But that was the past, and as golden-hued and sweetly nostalgic as those images painted my daydreams, I quickly realized the here and now was a shiny

new gift sitting right there in front of me, just waiting to be opened.

As the humidity-drenched days ticked by and the words on the screen added

up, the decision to move back home felt truer and truer inside my soul, almost as

if a kind of predestination was taking place—and frankly, that surprised me.

When Kara—a bubbly, patient, green-eyed beauty (who coincidentally also came from a large Edgewood family)—first suggested I move home for the

months leading up to our wedding, I thought she'd lost her mind. I loved my parents with all my heart, but I hadn't lived at home for longer than a weeklong

holiday break since I'd been seventeen, five long years earlier. I carried with me

legitimate fears that the three of us might drive each other crazy living under the same roof again, and my mother might even resort to poisoning me one evening

at dinner.

But as luck would have it, Kara possessed a razor-keen intuition to go along

with that million-dollar smile of hers—and as was to become routine in the years

that followed, she was right about everything.

The seven months I spent on Hanson Road were just what I needed. In a way,

for me, they formed a kind of bridge to adulthood—and both the good and the

bad that came along with it.

First, the good: I worked hard in the comfortable silence of my old bedroom

and got better at my craft. A handful of stories sold, and the first issue of *Cemetery Dance* arrived on time and on budget, proving a moderate success. I saw people I hadn't seen in years. Rekindled old friendships. I got to help my father mow the lawn and trim the bushes that summer, and rake the leaves and

clear the gutters that fall. We tinkered in his garage workshop and watched Orioles games in the basement while sharing paper plates stacked with cheese and crackers and frosty six-packs of Coors. I watched the bathroom scale tip upward as I feasted on my mother's home cooking, and the sound of my parents'

laughter as they watched television sitcoms in the dark of their bedroom became

my nighttime lullaby.

But then there was the bad; the unimaginably, indescribably bad, hovering above all those wonderful memories like an angry, slate-gray thunderstorm sky.

Four innocent girls murdered. Four families ripped apart. And a town held hostage by a faceless madman, a monster far more frightening and evil than anything I could imagine in one of my stories.

For a brief time, not long after the third murder, I tried to tell myself that I didn't know any of the girls that well, not really. But it didn't matter—and I knew it. They were our neighbors. They were friends of friends, siblings of friends, or in some cases, children of friends. And they were from Edgewood.

The one place in the world I knew and loved the most.

I've had plenty of time since then to think about it—a little more than a year

and a half, to be exact—and I believe the woman disc jockey on the radio that

long-ago June afternoon was right when she'd said it was as if we'd experienced

a loss of our innocence. After everything that'd happened, it felt like we could

never go back to the way it was before.

And maybe we shouldn't.

Maybe that's what grieving is all about: never forgetting what we've lost.

I can't explain how or why it happened the way it did, the timing of me being

back there on Hanson Road when the murders occurred. I don't know whether it

was fate (as many in my life would like to believe) or simple misfortune.

Ultimately, the reasons why don't matter.

I *was* there.

I was witness.

And, somehow, the monster's story became my own.

– Richard Chizmar

June 20, 1990

one

The Town

"It was during those long, slow, breathless walks up that gravel driveway

that I first began telling scary stories to my friends…"

1

Before I get to the Boogeyman and his reign of terror during the summer and

fall of 1988, I want to tell you about the town where I grew up. It's important that you carry with you a clear picture of the place—and the people who live there—as you read the story that follows, so you can understand exactly what it

is we all lost. There is a John Milton quote that I think of often while driving the streets of my hometown: *"Innocence, once lost, can never be regained.*

Darkness, once gazed upon, can never be lost."

For the citizens of Edgewood, this was our time of darkness.

2

I believe that most small towns wear two faces: a public one comprised of verifiable facts involving historical timelines, demographics, matters of economy

and geography; and a hidden, considerably more private face formed by a fragile

spiderweb of stories, memories, rumors, and secrets passed down from

generation to generation, whispered by those who know the town best.

Edgewood, Maryland, located twenty-five miles northeast of Baltimore in

southern Harford County, was no exception. Situated in the top center of an inverted triangular peninsula created by the Chesapeake Bay to the south, the Gunpowder River to the west, and the Bush River to the east, Edgewood was originally home to a number of Native Americans, most notably the Powhatan and Susquehannock tribes. Captain John Smith was among the first to navigate

the Bush River, naming it "Willowbyes Flu" after his beloved hometown in

England. In 1732, the Presbury Meetinghouse was established on the river's shoreline as one of the first Methodist churches in America.

A railroad system constructed through the area in 1835 provided distribution

for local agricultural markets, and the railroad's extension in the mid-1850s provided a foundation for the town of Edgewood's development. The wooden

railroad bridge crossing the nearby Gunpowder River was burned in April 1861

during the Baltimore riots, and Confederate soldiers burned it a second time in July 1864.

Although the population of Edgewood was a mere three-dozen full-time

residents in 1878, the railroad and neighboring countryside's lush farmland contributed to eventual growth. Before long, there was an abundance of new homes in the area, including a number of extravagant residences, many erected

by businessmen commuting daily to Baltimore via train. A schoolhouse, post office, hotel, general store, and blacksmith were soon established within the town's borders.

The Edgewood train station also experienced increased popularity because of

its proximity to valuable hunting grounds for numerous species of waterfowl.

Soon, gentlemen sportsmen from northeastern cities as far-ranging as New York

and Boston traveled to Edgewood to take part in the hunt. General George Cadwalader, a colorful war hero and respected Philadelphia lawyer, gradually acquired large plots of property in the area, consisting of almost eight thousand

acres, and invited affluent and influential friends to visit. He leased waterfront land to various hunting clubs and established more than a dozen farms on the property. Hardworking tenant farmers paid Cadwalader a healthy percentage of

their seasonal crops.

Another prominent figure in Edgewood's early days was Herman W. "Boss"

Hanson. A prosperous gentleman farmer and longtime member of the Maryland

House of Delegates, Hanson was also a shrewd businessman. Tomatoes were his

company's most profitable crop and at one point, he operated four canneries in

the area and purchased all the other local farmers' tomatoes to fill orders. The canned fruit was marketed under the Queen Brand and sold all over the country,

eventually even shipping overseas.

The only real drama in the town's history up until that point arrived in the summer of 1903, when a group of armed outlaws attempted to rob a payroll train

docked at the Edgewood Station. A fierce gunfight erupted with the local constable and his men, resulting in the death of two lawmen, a civilian employee

of the payroll company, and all six of the outlaws. A local newspaper reporter counted over two hundred and fifty bullet holes in the station's walls.

Fortunately, such violence was rare in the still-rural town.

A short distance down the tracks was the Magnolia Station, named for the lovely magnolia trees that flourished there. Across from the station was

Magnolia Meadows, a popular resort for picnics, outdoor events, and excursion

parties from Baltimore. A spacious pavilion centered in the grove was used for

dances and weddings, and by the early 1900s, Magnolia boasted a post office, church, schoolhouse, canning house, general store, shoe shop, and barbershop.

The pastoral life of those living in and around Edgewood changed

dramatically in October 1917, when the U.S. government took possession of all

the land south of the railroad tracks to create Edgewood Arsenal military complex. Thousands of people flocked to the area to construct a number of facilities designed to handle the various aspects of chemical weaponry. The government built massive plants to produce such toxic chemicals as mustard gas,

chlorine, chloropicrin, and phosgene. They even produced gas masks for horses,

donkeys, and dogs. Peak employment during July 1918 totaled 8,342 civilians and 7,175 military personnel.

While wealthy residents such as General Cadwalader were reimbursed for

their lost property, local tenant farmers and sharecroppers received no such payments. A number of Black farmers relocated to establish a small community

of modest homes in the Magnolia area known as Dembytown. A general store, a

two-room schoolhouse, and a ramshackle jazz club called the Black Hole were erected in a trio of narrow clapboard buildings along the northeastern border of

Dembytown. The club burned down in 1920 under suspicious circumstances.

The burgeoning military presence soon transformed Edgewood. Schools,

housing, and a multitude of businesses spread across the area. World War II brought yet another wave of military personnel and civilians to town. A

modernized train station was hurriedly built to handle the great influx of people.

Additional civilian barracks and off-post housing units were constructed in numerous Edgewood locations, including a twenty-six-acre development named

Cedar Drive. The overflow of new residents, coupled with the completion of Route 40, a four-lane highway cutting through Edgewood, spurred further

economic development. Edgewood Meadows, a sprawling community of single-

family homes, was established in the early 1950s. Old Edgewood Road and

Hanson Road bisected the sprawling development, and both roadways were soon

dotted with commercial establishments. Farther south on Hanson Road, a

sprawling community of affordable town houses, the Courts of Harford Square,

was constructed, replacing over a hundred acres of fertile farmland. Sitting upon

a grassy hill overlooking the new development stood the original “Hanson

House” built by Thomas Hanson in the early 1800s. The grand Victorian home

featured fifty-one windows and seven gables, and was the first house in

Edgewood to enjoy indoor plumbing. In 1963, the Edgewood Public Library opened on Hanson Road across from the bustling Acme supermarket. Later that

same year, the Edgewood exit on Interstate 95 opened, spawning even greater numbers of residential neighborhoods. To support the influx of young students in

the area, three spacious schools—a high school, middle school, and elementary

school—were built on 102 acres along Willoughby Beach Road.

But with every boom there comes the inevitable bust—and in the years

following the United States military's involvement in Vietnam, a number of weapons testing programs at Edgewood Arsenal were either downsized or

canceled altogether. Troops and civilian personnel were transferred to other bases along the East Coast and, soon after, numerous remote sections of the Arsenal took on the appearance of a ghost town. For several years, there were well-publicized rumors that the U.S. government planned to open a paratrooper

school in the abandoned areas, but those plans never materialized.

By the late 1980s, the unincorporated community of Edgewood covered

almost seventeen square miles. Population hovered at nearly 18,000 people —

68% White, 27% African American, and 3.5% Hispanic. The median household

income was a slightly below national average, $40,500. The average household

was 2.81 occupants, and the average family size was 3.21.

This was the public face of Edgewood, Maryland.

This is the Edgewood I know and love:

I grew up in a modest two-story house with green shutters and a sloping driveway at the corner of Hanson and Tupelo Roads. That house and the

sidewalks, streets, and yards that surrounded it were my entire world from the time I was five years old until I left for college at the age of seventeen. My parents still live there today.

I was the youngest of five children—following in the footsteps of three sisters

(Rita, Mary, and Nancy) and the eldest of the bunch, my brother (John)—by a margin of nearly eight years. In other words, I was probably a mistake. I've never actually asked my parents if that was the case, but I've heard it enough times from my siblings to mostly believe it to be true. Regardless, it never really mattered.

My father (retired U.S. Air Force, a quiet, hardworking man of decency and integrity) and my mother (a diminutive-in-stature caregiver of the first order, and still very much the Ecuadorian beauty my father married) treated their children

with equal measures of love and understanding and patience. Well, almost. I

must admit that as the youngest—and some say the cutest—not to mention the last of the Chizmar clan to live under their roof, I very well may be my parents'

favorite.

But I digress.

The white-painted front door and large bay window of our house peered out upon Hanson Road, one of the busiest-traveled roadways in all of Edgewood.

The speed limit sign posted directly across the street read 25 mph, but few drivers obeyed that particular law. The right side of our house bordered

Tupelo

Road, a much quieter, tree-lined avenue that stretched all the way from Tupelo

Court across the street to Presbury United Methodist Church on Edgewood

Road.

A small, enclosed breezeway connected our dining room to a single-car

garage. The garage was my father's private place, his sanctuary. Growing up, I

was alternately intimidated and fascinated by it. For whatever reason, it always

reminded me of the magical and chaotic sorcerer's workshop in the Disney movie *Fantasia*. A narrow homemade workbench lined much of the far wall.

Hanging above it, covering every available inch of mounted pegboard, were dozens of tools and gadgets, mysteriously labeled and organized in ways I still don't understand to this day. At opposite ends of the bench, tucked against the wall and stacked atop each other, were four cube-shaped organizers featuring rows of small plastic drawers, each neatly labeled and filled with various-sized

nuts, bolts, nails, and washers. Attached to either end at the front of the bench was a pair of large steel vises. Underneath were tidy stacks of pre-cut lumber, a

number of plastic buckets, and a couple of old stepstools. The garage's

remaining wall space was taken up by sheets of leaning plywood, old furniture

awaiting repair, and large, dangerous-looking machinery: a table saw with

gleaming metal teeth, a twin-belt sander, a router, and drill press. To my friends

and me, the machines all resembled sophisticated instruments of torture. Higher

up on the walls hung shelf upon shelf, also homemade, stacked with small cardboard boxes, glass jars, and old coffee cans labeled with strips of masking tape bearing my father's all-caps handwriting: *ROPE. TAPE. WIRE.*

BRACKETS. CLAMPS. BALL BEARINGS. In other words, the stuff of magic when you're eight years old.

Unfortunately, the rest of the house wasn't nearly as interesting. A small kitchen, dining room, living room, and foyer occupied the first floor. An antique

stereo cabinet, housing my father's impressive collection of jazz records, was centered beneath the bay window, and several mahogany bookcases lined the walls. The sofa and accompanying armchair were inexplicably green. Upstairs, there were three modest-sized bedrooms and a bathroom. My bedroom was

situated in the far corner with windows facing both the side and back yards. On the lowest level was a prone-to-flooding basement with dark paneled walls, sectional sofa, his and her recliners, a black-and-white marble coffee table on which my father played solitaire most every evening, an RCA television, and a

spectacular hand-carved cuckoo clock centered on the back wall.

One of my favorite places in the house was the large screened-in back porch

accessible through a sliding glass door off the rear of the dining room. I spent countless summer evenings on that porch—reading comics and paperback

books, sorting baseball and football cards, or playing board games with friends.

My mother would bring out a pitcher of homemade lemonade and chocolate chip

cookies still warm and gooey from the oven, and my friends and I would feel like kings of the world. We also had sleepovers out there when the weather was

warm enough.

Despite my early love of reading, not to mention obsessively watching scary

movies and westerns on TV, I was an outdoors boy. From the day we moved in,

I spent countless hours beneath the ageless weeping willow tree that stood watch

in our side yard, pretending I was Cy Young Award–winning pitcher Jim Palmer

of the Baltimore Orioles. I'd use the heels of my old tennis shoes to carve out a

pitcher's rubber in the grass, and then I'd go into my best trademark high-leg-kick wind-up and hurl fastball after fastball at a square patch of bare concrete wall, located dangerously close to the basement window. I still consider it a small miracle that I never once broke that window, but the green shutter bordering the window's left edge paid dearly for my youthful arrogance. Dented

and battered beyond recognition from hundreds of errant throws—high and

inside to my imaginary right-handed batters—it barely managed to cling to the wall with a pair of bent and rusty nails. That beat-up shutter remains a sore subject to this day between my father and me.

The sidewalk that ran in front of my house, parallel to Hanson Road, had thirty-three cracks of various sizes and shapes. The sidewalk that ran alongside

Tupelo had nineteen. I knew those walkways like the back of my hand. I'd walked, skateboarded, or biked them every day for twelve years. When we were

young boys, my friends and I built ramps with concrete blocks and wooden boards salvaged from construction sites or "borrowed" from my father's

workshop, and jumped them on our bikes. More often than not, we were bare-chested with nary a helmet in sight. Once, we even convinced a little kid who lived a few blocks away to do it blindfolded. That didn't end well, and we never

tried it again. Sometimes we upped the ante, soaring over trash cans or plastic bags filled with grass and leaves. Other times, we lay down side by side on the

sidewalk and jumped over each other. Believe me when I say that lying on your

back on a sun-blasted slab of concrete with your arms at your sides and your eyes closed, letting your idiot friend who truly believes he's Evel Knievel hurtle

over you on a bicycle, is the apex of blind adolescent loyalty.

One summer afternoon, my buddy Norman's older sister, Melody—a local

force to be reckoned with as she already had her driver's license and smoked unfiltered cigarettes—swung her Trans Am into the driveway next door, got out,

and implored us to let her take a turn. After initially refusing, Norm finally relented and handed over his bright-green, chopper-style Huffy bicycle. I

remember it like it was yesterday. David Bowie was blaring from the midnight-

black Trans Am's speakers as Melody rode all the way up the hill on Tupelo and

didn't turn around until she'd reached the fire hydrant at the corner of Cherry Court. Then, she'd started pedaling. Fast. Too fast. My friends and I stood on the

curb, slack-jawed with awe, as she hit the base of the ramp at a good twenty-five

miles per hour and hurtled through space at least fifteen or twenty feet up in the

air, her long, dirty-blond hair streaming out behind her like a superhero cape.

When the Huffy's tires met the earth again with a loud *twack*, we all cheered and then quickly went quiet again as the tires immediately began to shimmy and wobble out of control. Before any of us could shout a warning to watch out for

the traffic on Hanson Road, the bike—with Melody now hanging on for dear life

—crashed into the stop sign at the corner, flinging her onto the sidewalk like a

rag doll. En masse, we sprinted to her side, certain that we were about to see our

first dead body. Instead, she propped herself up on one skinned elbow, her splayed legs and right forearm a pulpy mess of bloody road rash, and started laughing. We couldn't believe it. Not only was she still alive, she thought the whole damn thing was hilarious. Talk about a freaking legend.

Norm was the only one unimpressed. Furious because the frame of his bike —

a recent birthday present from his parents—was twisted into an ugly and clearly

unrepairable pretzel shape, he let loose with a barrage of colorful language. Most

of which I heard about later because, I have to admit, I was barely paying attention. Instead, I stood there in my side yard, eyes wide, staring down at the

deliciously tan flesh of Melody's bare torso, which had been generously exposed

when the orange tank top she was wearing had been pushed up and torn away after contacting the sidewalk. Above that flat, smooth, tanned tummy of hers, I

could just make out a deep-red sliver of lacey bra cupping a pale mound of bare

breast—the first brassiere and boob this nine-year-old had ever laid eyes on in real life. My eyes were glued to all of this like a dirty old man at a crowded beach until she finally made it to her feet, brushed herself off, climbed back into her Trans Am, and drove away. It was one of the greatest days of my young life.

My father was a big believer that people should take good care of the things

they owned. It was a matter of pride with him. Our cars were always washed and waxed, and the interior and exterior of the house was uniformly tidy. But I think

he reserved his most special attention for the lawn. He'd fertilize in the spring and fall, trim the bushes and trees on a regular basis, pick up fallen limbs after

summer thunderstorms, edge the grass along the sidewalks (he was particularly

conscientious about this task, oftentimes carving deep trenches on each side of the walkways that inevitably snagged our bike tires, causing more than a handful

of spectacular, high-speed accidents; I'm still not convinced this wasn't

intentional on his part), and mow the grass once a week like clockwork with an

almost religious fervor.

As luck would have it, we had one of the largest yards in the neighborhood and, much to my father's chagrin, it served as a frequent playground for my friends. We played everything from Wiffle ball and kickball to miniature golf and war. Permanent base paths, in the shape of a diamond, were worn into my

father's precious lawn. Old dog-chewed Frisbees and trash can lids served as bases. The sagging telephone wire that stretched across Tupelo Road served as automatic home run territory. The ground often shook under our feet as we played, and the muffled *thump* of faraway explosions could be heard as weapon testing operations commenced at Edgewood Arsenal. It wasn't unusual for

squadrons of fighter planes or helicopters to fly above our heads on their way to

or from Aberdeen Proving Ground—where my father worked the early shift as

an aircraft mechanic. When that happened, we inevitably stopped whatever we were doing and pretended to shoot them down with invisible machine guns and

bazookas.

I often set up magic shows in the breezeway, charging attendees ten cents a head, and makeshift carnivals in the side yard, using old, discarded toys and comic books as game prizes—all in an attempt to pry loose change from the younger kids' pockets. I also set up a card table on the sidewalk at the corner of

Hanson and Tupelo and hawked waxed paper cups of ice-cold lemonade to

passing drivers.

A mature plum tree and a tangled cluster of crab apple trees grew in the front

corner of the yard, supplying us with plenty of ammunition for our frequent neighborhood battles. The trees also provided perfect cover for bombing cars. If

there was one weakness I had as a young man, one bad habit I was unable to break no matter how many times I'd been caught and lectured and punished, it

was throwing crab apples or dirt clods or snowballs at passing traffic. I have no

explanation for this failing of character other than to say if you've ever lain on

your stomach in the cool summer grass waiting for an approaching vehicle, sprung to your feet, hurled a small round object at said vehicle, and then listened

to the beautiful *boom* of impact, then you know exactly what I'm talking about.

It was even more fun when the drivers pulled over and chased us. For us Hanson

Road boys, those were treasured moments of sheer, unbridled joy and

adrenaline, and we longed to relive them over and over again. There was a lengthy period of time when I think my flabbergasted father fully believed I was

heading for reform school or maybe even prison due to my addiction. After a while, he gave up talking to me about the subject. My sweet mother tried to steer

me back with “Why don’t you boys chase fireflies or play marbles?” but by that

time those were kiddie games and held little interest. No one was more relieved

than my folks when I finally gave up the habit for good only a short time before

I left for college.

If the house with green shutters and the ancient weeping willow tree

represented the center of my world growing up—the hub of my “wheel of life,”

as I later began to think of it—then each road, big or small, leading away from

that house resembled a spoke in that ever-turning wheel, every one of them fanning out in a different direction, eventually running out of space to roam, and

serving to collectively define the outer boundaries of my beloved hometown.

Regardless of what any map might show, for me, the town of Edgewood

stretched from the Courts of Harford Square (about a mile north of my house along Hanson Road) to the shoreline of Flying Point Park bordering the Bush River (a couple miles south of the high school, which was located

exactly one mile from my driveway). Yes, the old cliché holds true: my friends and I walked

a mile to and from school every day until we were old enough to drive. We'd barely missed, by a block and a half, the cutoff to ride the bus, but we didn't really mind. The long walk gave us more time to screw around before and after

school, and delayed the inevitable drudgery of homework. It also gave us additional opportunities to throw small round objects at passing cars, or even better, at school buses.

I was blessed with an army of companions growing up, but my closest friends,

my true partners in crime, were Jimmy and Jeffrey Cavanaugh, who lived two houses farther up the hill from me on Hanson Road. The Cavanaughs were crafty

and mischievous and a hell of a lot of fun to be around. Brian and Craig Anderson lived right next door to them. Daredevils both, the Anderson brothers

were too alike and hot-tempered to really get along on a consistent basis. Two memorable incidents best defined this dynamic. In one instance, a heated

argument led to Craig storming upstairs into the kitchen, where he grabbed a dirty steak knife from the sink and returned downstairs to stab Brian in the upper

thigh. To his credit, it was Craig who bandaged his older brother's leg that day

and eventually phoned the ambulance. In the second, Craig, in a moment of pure

rage one blisteringly hot summer afternoon, actually dropped his shorts to his ankles and squatted in the middle of Hanson Road, defecated into his cupped hand, and proceeded to chase down his fleeing brother, flinging a handful of fresh poo onto Brian's shirtless back like an ill-tempered monkey in the zoo. I know it sounds disgusting and far-fetched in equal measure, but I was there to witness it—and what an astounding sight it was to behold. I'll never forget it.

Jimmy and Brian were a year behind me in school (Jeff and Craig several years behind their older, but not much wiser, siblings), so the three of us were especially close. Based on advanced age and the ingrained bossiness that comes

along with having three older sisters, I usually assumed the leadership role of our small neighborhood crew. Jimmy and Brian never seemed to mind, and I can't remember a single plan of theirs that we didn't enthusiastically embrace as well.

Depending on whom you asked, we were either the Three Musketeers or the Three Stooges. People knew us and we knew them—every single kid in our

section of Edgewood and most of the grown-ups existed on our daily radar. And

we knew *stuff*, too. We knew where the pretty girls lived, where the shortcuts were, which cigarette machines in which gas stations always had extra packs of

matches left over in the tray (an invaluable currency of which there was perhaps

only one equal: firecrackers), which dumpsters held the most returnable soda bottles, and which tree houses held hidden caches of dirty magazines. We knew

which parents spanked their kids and which ones drank too much; which

neighbors with swimming pools attended church on Sunday mornings—meaning

it was safe for us to pool-hop—and when we were older, which stores would sell

us alcohol, where the cops hid with radar guns, and which parking lots were safe

for making out with a girl.

A typical summer day for us ran the gamut of youthful adventure. We played

every outdoor sport known to man, and some others that we invented out of sheer boredom. We popped tar bubbles on the road with our toes. Cheated at Marco Polo in the Cavanaughs' aboveground swimming pool. Fished in the

nearby creeks, ponds, and rivers. Explored the endless woods, and built secret underground forts. Sometimes, our good friend Steve Sines would join us and bring along his father's .22 semiautomatic rifle. We'd spend long afternoons hunting for crows and vultures in the woods or shooting at empty cans and bottles. Other times, we'd practice responsible gun safety by pointing at each other's shoes and yelling, "Jump!" before pulling the trigger and blasting the dirt where our friend's feet had stood only seconds earlier. It's a miracle we still have all our toes.

Other days, we might shimmy up a drainage pipe onto the roof of Cedar Drive

Elementary and pretend we were standing on a snow-covered mountaintop in a

faraway land. Or we'd climb a similar drainage pipe to the top of the Texaco gas station at the junction of Hanson and Edgewood Roads and moon the passing drivers (that particular stunt screeched to a regretful halt

one memorable afternoon when my father spotted the glare of our skinny, pale asses on his way

home from work. I was grounded for a week).

You have to understand this about living in a small town like Edgewood: boredom made for strange bedfellows, and there was often little rhyme or reason

to the things we did. One summer, along with our old friend Carlos Vargas, we

created an exclusive group called the Daredevil Club. For some unknown

reason, the initiation rites involved throwing miniature Matchbox cars into random neighbors' swimming pools under the cover of darkness. Another time,

we became weirdly obsessed with collecting toads in empty peanut butter jars. I

also once spent an entire July afternoon walking around shirtless with a dead, six-foot-long black snake hanging around my neck. I even tried to enter several

stores, but was turned away. No one—including myself—knows why I did this,

but it didn't really matter. It was all fun in the moment.

The Edgewood Shopping Plaza, located several blocks from our houses and

directly across the street from the library, also provided many hours of interesting entertainment. There was Plaza Drugs, where we bought most of our

candy and all of our comic books and baseball and football cards. I also purchased every one of my Mother's Day gifts at that store from the time I was