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Mary Marshall, eleven years old, disappeared from her hometown of Pampa, Texas, Halloween night, 1985. The authorities and citizens of the city searched in vain for a week after her disappearance for any clue to her whereabouts. None could be found.

A week later, the local newspaper received a letter from a person claiming to be the killer. He played a cat and mouse game with them for two weeks sending a series of cryptically encoded glyph-ridden letters claiming that if the “stupid pigs” were smart enough to decode the letter, then it would lead them to the whereabouts of little Mary. He threatened to kill again. The letters and symbols were published in the local paper, begging the public for any clues or help. Various academics and law enforcement officials descended upon the little Texas panhandle town. Many came and many tried, but nobody was able to decode the messages.

And then after two weeks, the letters stopped arriving. After a year, the case went cold. After two years, some ambitious smart ass who worked for Time Magazine started pointing fingers at the parents. The FBI descended on tiny little Pampa to investigate. Her parents were viciously and constantly interrogated as potential suspects. Their faces, and that of poor little Mary were plastered all over the newsstands in the likes of Time, Newsweek and The National Enquirer. In lieu of any concrete suspect, they were convicted in the court of public opinion as the murderers. At the end of this grueling investigation, the authorities could find no evidence linking the parents to the murder. They were officially exonerated. But that did little, if nothing, to assuage their grief.

It proved too much for the Marshall family to take. Three years after her disappearance, Mary’s father took his own life. Mary’s mother bounced from one relationship to the next, staying as far away from Pampa, Texas as she could possibly get. Mary’s older sister, Jan, was left to fend for herself. She dropped out of high school, was on and off hard drugs and alcohol throughout her twenties and wouldn’t clean up and get her act together until she was nearly forty years old.

After five years though, nobody in the town of little Pampa talked about it much. The national media went on to other “if it bleeds it leads” journalism. And after another ten years, the whole incident was forgotten. People went about their daily business and life resumed.

Wade Cafferty was only fifteen years old at the time of Mary’s disappearance. And he had been one of the last people to see her that night. Wade and Jan had been dating that whole year and had been at The Marshall’s house for Halloween. Mary had been so excited to be going trick or treating without the supervision of adults for the first time. Wayne and Jan had said goodbye to Mary that night as she walked out the front door with her friends as happy as any kid in the whole world could be. Wade had taken part

in the effort to find Mary's body. He watched how it had ripped the Marshall family apart and how it had caused a rift between Jan and himself that would never be repaired.

That had been thirty-five years ago and so much had happened since then for Wade. He had gone off to college down in Austin at The University of Texas. He had gotten a master's degree in criminal justice. He returned to Pampa, married to a girl from Houston he had met in chemistry class at the university. They had two kids and a nice house over by the Lake. And by the age of thirty-five, he had become the Sheriff of Pampa. By the time the twenty-first century had rolled around, he had put the incident behind him. It hardly ever crossed his mind anymore. And as sheriff, it hadn't even crossed his desk for twenty years.

Being the Sheriff of little Pampa, Texas wasn't too much unlike the fictional world of Mayberry, North Carolina that Andy Griffith lived in. Wade made sure people drove safely through downtown, he attended the weekly rotary club meetings, he handled the odd domestic dispute fairly and discretely. As he approached age fifty, he even entertained the odd thought of retiring one day.

That all changed the afternoon of Wednesday January 22, 2020, though. His world of routine hum-drum law enforcement came to an end that afternoon. That was the day he received an odd piece of mail. It was a bubble mailer with no return address postmarked from Delta, Colorado. The killer, after thirty-five years of silence had jumped back on the grid for one reason or the other.

The object he had received was an antiquated five and one quarter inch floppy disk. The disk was labeled with the date of the night Mary had disappeared along with some of the strange glyphs that the killer had originally used.

In an abundance of caution, Wayne had taken the disk to an old acquaintance, Joe Becker, who was the local technical genius. Joe worked for the government down in Amarillo at the Pantex plant where nuclear weapons were assembled and disassembled. Joe's family wasn't sure what he did for government at Pantex. He couldn't talk about it. They didn't much care if the paychecks kept on coming.

Joe had been able to somehow pull the data off the floppy disk. The disk had contained an archaic decoding program written in BASIC. They were able to use the original codes published in the local papers to finally discover the message the killer had sent to the police. The message had led them right to the body of Mary Marshall. The killer had buried her in the city cemetery that night. He had placed her in a newly excavated grave on top of that of the other corpse. He had dug up the grave, put Mary's body in the casket along with the freshly buried body and then covered it up again.

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It was there in the city cemetery, in the grave of a man named Warren Frazier, that they had found the remains of little Mary on top of the other corpse. It was unmistakable. She still had her Care Bear costume on, and her thick muss of red hair was still covering the remains of her skull.

With the discovery, came years of pent up emotions for Jan and her mother. Wayne had assured them that he was going to keep it under wraps. He promised them that it would be handled discretely, and the media would be kept in the dark about the events this time around.

And with a little internet research into the online white pages of Delta, Colorado and some fingerprint work from prints left on the bubble mailer and floppy disk, Wayne had found his suspect. Matter of fact, he was sure that he had found the killer. There was no doubt left in his mind. The man in question was Kevin Conroy. Kevin had been one of his classmates. He had been a noted computer hobbyist and loner. More importantly, Kevin Conroy was living next door to the Marshalls at the time of Mary's disappearance. He dropped out of school shortly, thereafter, left town with his mother and was never heard from again. That is, until two weeks ago when he anonymous sent Wayne the bubble mailer.

That's why Wayne was presently sitting in his Ford truck at five thirty in the morning outside of Kevin Conroy's residence in Delta, Colorado waiting for him to leave for work. He had made the ten hour drive up from Pampa as soon as Mary's body had been given a proper burial. He had set out from Texas without even knowing for sure what his plan was once he got there.

He watched Kevin come out of his front door. Out of the front door and then to his car. He immediately recognized him, even thirty-five years later, Kevin still had the same tall skinny frame, dirty blonde hair and gauntly drawn in face. Kevin pulled his car out of the driveway. Wade followed at a safe distance and pace. He followed him right to the local Marijuana dispensary. He parked across the road. Kevin didn't come out. Wade came back later in the day, parked across the road again, and watched Kevin leave the dispensary at 5:00 pm sharp. He followed Kevin home. Apparently, Kevin Conroy was not only a customer but also an employee.

He repeated the process every day of the week.

He was back the next Monday morning. Kevin noticed the truck on the opposite side of the street. He walked over to Wade's truck. Wade rolled the window down. Wade still wasn't sure of what action he was going to take. "Morning, Kevin. You're looking well. Haven't changed a bit, have you?"

Kevin Conroy stood on the curbside looking at Wade, "How...How..how did you find me?"

"Well you know, Kevin, you ain't the only smart son-of-bitch in this world now, right?"

“So, what now. Are you just going to sit there and watch me every day for the rest of my life?”

“Maybe. Maybe not.”

“You going to arrest me?”

“No Kevin, can’t do that. I’m just a little old sheriff from Nowhere, Texas. I don’t have any authority around here.”

“You going to turn me into the police here, then?”

“Nahhhhhhh...can’t do that, Kevin. I’m not going to rake Jan and her mother over those coals again. I thought you and I could just settle this like men.”

“Like Men. What the hell does that mean?”

Wade thought about it for a second. He moved his jacket off the seat of the car to reveal his pistol sitting beneath it. “Get in the truck, Kevin.”

“What, are you going to shoot me?”

“No, we’re just going drive around and have a little talk.” Wade reached over and cocked the pistol.

Kevin motioned to the weapon and said, “Guess I don’t have a choice.”

“Guess you’re right about that partner. Now walk slowly around the front of the truck here and get in over there in the passenger’s side.”

Kevin complied. He got in the passenger side. Wade quickly snatched his left arm, threw one side of a handcuff around Kevin’s left wrist and cuffed the other hook to the handlebar on the truck console. “Buckle up buddy, it’s going to be a long drive.” Said Wade.

They drove out of the town into the wilderness. Wade was making the whole thing up as he went. It was a half hour before he spoke, “What the hell, Kevin. After thirty-five years. Case was as cold as ice and then you pulled that little stunt.”

Kevin grunted as if in pain and said, “I guess I started feeling sorry for the family”

“Oh, that’s bullshit, and you know it. If that was the case, you could have just sent me a letter or an email telling me where the body was. You could have just sent it from an anonymous email address. No, man. No, you were craving the media attention again. You wanted to start playing that old cat and mouse game with the FBI again. I don’t know why. I don’t want to know why.”

Wade drove on through the no-man's land of western Colorado. There was a deadly silence between him and his passenger. Finally, he looked at Kevin again and spoke.

"Your little floppy disk stunt led us right to her body. We dug her up. Her parents took her down to Waxahachie and gave her a proper burial in their family plot.

"I didn't think the information on that old disk could have even been retrieved much less decoded anymore. How in the hell did you do that? I guess I just thought it might be interesting to see what you did if you got that in the mail," said Kevin.

"Oh, I've got connections. It might just be a little windswept forgotten west Texas town, but I have connections." Wade laughed. And then he laughed harder.

"What?"

"You know, it was one of your old computer buddies who decoded that old disk for me."

"Who?"

"Joe Becker"

"Goddamn Joe Becker still lives there?"

"Yes, and he's got a barn full of computer gadgets, cables, monitors and shit."

"Christ's sake, I didn't think anybody would even try to see what was on that disk."

"But we did, and now here we are, you and me. And you have nobody to blame but yourself. Do you have anything to say for yourself? Anything at all?"

Kevin Conroy was silent.

Wade held up his hand. "No, just fucking never-mind I asked that. You sick fuck bastard. I don't even want to know your side of the story. I know what you did to her. Even after thirty-five years of being buried, the county coroner could tell she'd been beaten, choked and raped. You left a god damn sock in her mouth with duct tape over it."

"I didn't mean to kill her, it just happened accidentally. I just wanted to walk around and go trick-or-treating with her."

"Just shut the fuck up and let me drive, damn it."

"Where are we going?"

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“A long way. A long, long way, partner.”

Wade drove for three hours; he crossed the Utah state line. He exited off Highway 70 and took a long winding road up a mountain range. He pulled the truck over in a turnaround. He parked. He got out, took a satchel from the bed of his truck, walked back around to the driver’s side. He leaned over and unlocked the cuff from Kevin’s wrist. He went around to the passenger side and motioned to Kevin to get out of the car. He pulled out another set of handcuffs. He locked one cuff around his left wrist and the other one around Kevin’s right wrist.

“Now let’s walk.” Commanded Wade.

“Where are we going?” asked Kevin.

“Up”

They began walking up the side of the mountain, in and out of trees and bushes. There was no cut path up the side. It was a very slow walk. Kevin groaned. Wade prodded him. They walked for two hours and finally came upon a small mesa overlooking a cliff. Wade uncuffed Kevin. Wade walked over to one side of the mesa and sat down on a rock. He pulled a pistol out and loaded it. He put it on the ground beside him. He took out another pistol, walked over to Kevin and gave it to him. He walked back to his rock. The two men stood twenty or thirty feet from each other.

Kevin checked the chamber of the revolver. It was empty. He looked at Wade. Wade smiled. Wade took out a box of ammunition, walked halfway to Kevin and placed it on the ground. He returned to his side of the mesa.

“All right partner, load up.” Commanded Wade. Kevin walked over grabbed the box of ammunition and loaded his pistol”

“Now what?” asked Kevin.

“Here’s now what,” began Wade. Two people climbed up this mountain. Only one of us is going down. And it’s up to you which one of us that is.”

“What do you mean?”

“You can try to shoot me, and in the event of that, I’ll feel free to defend myself. But I won’t shoot first, or...”

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“Or we can just sit up here on this mountain and grow old with one another talking about high school and shit like that, or there’s a third option.

“What’s the third option.”

“You do the honorable thing.”

“The honorable thing?”

“Yes,” said Wade. He put his index finger up to the temple of his head and pulled his thumb down and said “Bang!”

“You mean, just sit here and shoot myself.”

“Damn straight. I’m giving you a chance to die honorably like a man.”

“But these guns, I’m sure they are registered to you or the city of Pampa. They’d trace the right back to you.”

“First of all, I don’t care.” Said Wade, “And second, you ain’t the only computer guru in the world these days, you know. I’ve made sure that these pistols are registered to Kevin Conroy, Delta Colorado. There’s a record on file of you purchasing not only the guns but the ammunition at local Wal Mart here in Delta.”

“God damn, Wade, you’re a crazy fucking bastard.”

“Takes one to know what pal. Now what’s it going to be? Take your time. I have all day. I have all week. I’m not in a hurry.

Kevin Conroy checked the chamber of the revolver. He paced around in tiny circles on top of the mesa. He talked to himself. He yelled at himself. He beat his head on the side of the mountain. “Kevin, Kevin, Kevin, you stupid fuck, why did you get yourself into this again.”

Wade didn’t seem concerned. He spotted a bald eagle floating across the sky and watched it fly into the canyon.

Kevin screamed into the canyon. It echoed. He turned around. He flung the revolver up, he shot in general direction of Wade direction missing him by hundreds of feet. Kevin screamed again and kicked at rocks. He pointed the pistol at Wade again. He stood still and stiff, but he didn’t fire. Wade picked up his pistol, held his breath and aimed.

“Well now Kevin. Old buddy. “said Wade. “What’s it going to be? You got a bead on me; I got a bead on you.”

They stood at attention aiming at one another for a silent minute.

Kevin begin to weep, he cocked the revolver, stuck the barrel firmly into his temple, counted to three and pulled the trigger. Somewhere between the beginning and the end of the word “three”, blood, brain bits and skull fragments splattered all over the side of the mountain.

Wayne retracted his body and face. Kevin’s body hit the floor of the mesa. Wade walked over to the body to assure that he was dead. He didn’t touch or disturb the scene of the suicide.

Wayne Cafferty walked back down the mountain by himself to his truck ready to face whatever consequences his actions would bring him if and whenever that time might ever arise. It had been a long two weeks since he had received that mysterious package in his office. He’d hardly slept a bit. He was exhausted. He was hungry. He was weak. He missed his office back in his little Texas town. But he was satisfied. He was very satisfied. Mary’s spirit would finally rest at ease.