



Lodge
Lane

by
Author M.M.

Lodge Lane

by

MM



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CREATED & PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

***This work is dedicated to those with an
insatiable curiosity...***

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Note from the Author

I have stepped away from the novels for just a moment. In doing so, I find more than a few story lines spinning up in my ever active imagination. Sometimes it is hard *not* to write! I have never been much for short stories because I feel they rarely if ever, give the reader enough background information or enough character information. Thus, the reason I am a novelist. This short story however came to me while on the train to my day job and would not go away until I dumped it all out on paper. *Lodge Lane* has a simple premise, simple storyline, and absolutely no complicated characters, unlike my novels.

Wanting to publish something for my readership, as well as to mark the first year of my Halloween Writing Contest of 2006, I felt *Lodge Lane* was the perfect story for the occasion. I hope you enjoy the short work.

As always, thank you for your continued feedback, support and readership.

Author MM



Chapter 1

Seth leaned against the old gnarled oak tree and stared into the cemetery. He pulled the collar of his lined jacket a little higher and then dug his fists deeper into the pockets. Staring at his feet he wondered if the time spent with this eye to the keyhole and creeping around old cemeteries would ever amount to a single decent story. Being an investigative reporter on the supernatural in the boring listless town of Culpeper was sort of like being a marine archeologist in Arizona. He paid the bills by delivering the *Culpeper Times* in the morning and working a few nights a week at the movie theatre as an assistant manager. His real love was the supernatural. All he ever wanted to do was write an article that would seem like it was a script off of the old television show, X-files.

A screech owl let out a blood curdling scream a few hundred yards across the cemetery. Seth watched as the small owl dropped out of the tree and onto the ground like a stone. Its scream paralyzed the mouse in its tracks and the owl taking complete advantage of the situation. Not much supernatural about a screech owl grabbing a mouse for dinner. He shook his head and scanned the perimeter of the old cemetery.

When he first got into town he had offered his services to the local newspaper. All they seemed to want were photos of the local high school sports games. Writers they had, aging oldsters who reused the same fall celebration articles year after year. Writers they had, talent they did not. He settled for delivering the newspaper. It paid better.

He had written a few articles that had been published. Tabloids picked up his work mostly. At first he was ecstatic until he realized they took a speculative article and with some creative editing, turned it to fact. But, they paid well and their checks did not bounce, so, when he needed the cash, he sold an article to the tabloids. Eating cup o noodles only went so far. Every once in a while a guy needed McDonalds.

Seth shook his head and clenched his jaw. He had a few bucks saved thanks to those well paying tabloids. A few more articles and he would be able to move. Culpeper was a sleepy little town with sleepy people with very little desire for excitement. If there was one thing he did not understand, it was the people. All the girls in high school had gone nuts over the jocks. And all the jocks wanted was a roll in the sack and an athletic scholarship to any college, as long as it was far away. This left two kinds of people in town after graduation, expecting single mothers, and the unpopular kids. All the jocks went into the military or off to college. All the smart kids found a way to get to any college they could. It would mean freedom from the boredom of Culpeper.

Now that he was one of the few single eligible men in town all the girls looked at him differently. The problem was, he was not about to get into a relationship with a pre-made family. Taking care of Biff's kid was not his idea of family values. At first a few of the girls had come on pretty strong. Their interest waned when he tried to hold an intelligent conversation with them. All they were

used to was, “Do you want that super-sized honey?” and “Let me help you take that off.” He hated to say it, but the local educational system had failed miserably in educating Culpeper’s youth in many ways.

He grinned into the darkness, he was one to talk, here he was, briar bushes all around him, cold, and waiting for something, anything, to happen that would constitute excitement. What separated him from his twenty something counterparts was that he craved knowledge. Sure, he had a bent towards the odd and supernatural, but who didn’t? Everyone knew who Fox Molder was and there was not a person alive that did not believe something happened at Area 51. The problem with Culpeper was the locals fully accepted the fact that the base out side of town was very quiet. It was supposed to be a training base but the only thing that moved was the great big satellite dishes that rotated towards the heavens. No one in town even knew anyone who worked there. Yet, just like good American citizens, they asked no questions and turned a blind eye to what happened on the base.

People in the area were complacent about everything. They were complacent with Friday night bingo at the VFW. They liked their newspapers delivered before sunup. Church service could never be any later than 9 a.m. and the cheery blossom festival had to have at least two floats. It was all very simple, very easy, very contented and all insanely boring to anyone with a pulse.

Just a few weeks ago he had been in the bathroom at the theatre sitting in a stall when a bunch of the local boys came in talking. He normally dismissed the local gossip as red-neck bullshit, but this time the tone of the voices set him on edge. If the local male population stopped using the old gravel road to the Masonic Cemetery as a lover’s lane, there was something going on that must be serious. Lodge Lane had been used for generations as a lover’s lane. All of the locals knew of the spot and more than a few of the local kids had been conceived along that old stretch of road. The way the guys talked made him sit up straight and take notice. The hushed tones of their conversation and the frustration in their voices made it all worth his legs going numb while he sat and listened intently.

Many years ago the property on which he now stood shivering, was the property of an old farmer who was one of the few remaining Freemasons in the area. Details of his exact affiliation were sketchy. All anyone knew for certain was that the property he owned, in part, was used as a cemetery. Seth, did not know a whole lot about the cemetery. One afternoon he took a ride out to the cemetery to see exactly what was so special about the place. He slowly drove up the road and pulled his pick-up in next to the front gate. As he looked through the gate of the walled cemetery, he realized that it had not been cared for in years. Beer cans littered the ground in front of the cemetery. He was sure the tall grass hid a host of surprises inside the cemetery walls.

He found himself picking up cans, bottles, cardboard beer cases and tossing them into the back of his truck. He did this almost instinctively. Seth was amazed that people could be so incredibly disrespectful. Not only did they come on this property and commit acts of fornication but they had to leave mementoes of their passing behind. After he had picked up the front area of the cemetery he

moved slowly towards the gate. The three large trees in the cemetery had been shedding their branches for what looked like years with no-one bothering to pick up a single one. Limbs lay scattered all over the headstones. Some limbs stuck up out of the tall grass looking like skeleton hands reaching out of the grave.

Seth opened the heavy iron gates and backed the truck into the truck up to the entrance. He could take his time and look over the headstones if he looked like he was working rather than snooping. Not that he imagined anyone would care he was here. Seth pulled on his leather gloves and began picking up tree branches and beer cans. He laughed out loud as a thought passed through his mind, the residents of this place should be quite upset. If anyone treated another person's yard the same way the locals treated this hallowed ground, there would be a major battle. Yet no one seemed to care about the Masonic Cemetery. He slowly moved through the headstones, picking up sticks and dragging them to his truck. The full size bed of his truck was filling up rather quickly.

In the center of the cemetery he stopped to take a look at a beautifully carved obelisk that towered over the rest of the tombstones. The obelisk was of superior craftsmanship and covered with strange shapes and symbols. One very interesting feature of the pillar was that on each side, about knee level, a skull and crossbones protruded from the granite. Seth found himself scratching his head as he looked at the marker. The obelisk held no names or dates, just symbols. He wondered if it was a totem of some sort. Seth grabbed a very large limb and began dragging it back to the truck. As he turned, he was startled to see an old man leaning against the tailgate of his truck.

Seth knew almost everyone in Culpeper. He delivered the paper. Everyone got the *Culpeper Times*. If they did not get the paper, he would see them at the theatre. He was very sure he had never seen this gentleman before. The man had all white hair and a pure white beard to match. He stood, holding a pipe in his mouth and his other hand was in the pocket of his red plaid jacket. When Seth saw him, he nodded. Seth returned his gesture and continued to drag the unwieldy branch towards the bed of the truck.

After he had broken the branch in three pieces and put it in the bed, the distinguished gentleman asked, "May I help you?" Seth nodded and said, "There are plenty of limbs left and I am sure more beer cans than I can find, you are more than welcome to lend a hand." The older man tilted his head and raised an eyebrow. Seth shook his head. He was always doing that. Taking questions literally and not figuratively. He was about to say something when the man pointed the end of his pipe at the gate. "How did you get in? This gate has been rusted shut for years." The man walked over and inspected the iron hinges with a critical eye. Seth looked around for the man's vehicle and saw none. He shrugged and said, "It just swung open when I pushed. Must have finally given up the ghost." Seth was pleased with his play on words.

The man turned abruptly and stared at him intently. "This gate was welded shut over fifteen years ago. I know that for a fact. I welded it shut myself. There is not a sign of a single weld on this gate." Again, he thrust his pipe at the iron gate. "This iron looks almost new as if it were just installed last year." Seth shrugged, "Sir, I don't know anything about this place. This is my first time here." The old

man looked at him harder. "You doing some kind of community service for the courts or something lad?" Seth took off his gloves and ran his hand through his hair. "No sir, I just came out to see the cemetery and well...it looked like it needed some attention. I just thought I would take the liberty of cleaning up a little of what the rednecks have done to the place." He grimaced almost as soon as he said "redneck." It would be his luck that this man takes offense to the slight. Much to his surprise, the man turned and took a step closer to the gate. He was looking at the latch more closely. Without looking at Seth he asked, "Did you back the truck up and hit the gate?" The question was not one that held malice or accusation. Seth shook his head no and said, "No sir, I just turned the latch and pushed, both gates swung open wide without so much as a squeak." The white haired man reached out and almost gingerly pushed, then pulled the gate back and forth. The gate swung freely as if on freshly greased ball bearings. "I'll be damned," was all he said.

The two men cleaned up the rest of the downed branches and picked up the beer cans and whisky bottles they found in the tall grass. When the pickup was full, the cemetery looked much better. Seth leaned against the truck as the old man again, inspected the gate. Seth broke the silence by asking, "Any idea who worked on the gate?" The white haired man took in a deep breath and joined Seth by the truck. "This place is always full of surprises." Seth could smell a story so he played it cool and just nodded. The gentleman continued, "Some years ago it became fashionable for the local kids to have sex inside the cemetery," he started. It was Seth's turn to raise an eyebrow. "Damned kids and adults too would come here, get blitzed and do the wild thing among the headstones... at first, I put wire then chain across the front of the drive." The man shook his head. "It always disappeared, lock included. One time, I put up a logging chain that I had to pull across the road with a tractor is was so heavy. A few days later it was gone." The man produced a pouch of tobacco and began to refill the bowl of his pipe. "Then, I decided to forget trying to keep the rednecks out of lovers lane and just keep them out of the cemetery proper." He pointed the stem of his freshly filled pipe at the gate. "I brought over my welding kit and welded the front gate here shut."

Seth stood and looked around the inside wall of the cemetery. For the first time he noticed that there was a gate in the center of each one of the four stone walls. He pointed, "Did you weld the other three gates shut as well?" The old man shook his head. "No, I was just hoping that if they could not get through the front gate they would not make the long walk to one of the other gates. I was right, they stayed out of the cemetery for years." Seth nodded. "Not to say that I have a finger on the pulse of what's in vogue, but I have not heard any of the locals talk about doing it inside the cemetery. So your plan may have stemmed the tide of the wanna-be necrophilic's." The old man glanced at Seth and gave a grin of sorts. "Lad, if news gets out that the front gate is open; the rednecks will be right back to their old tricks. Believe you me."

Both men stood and stared at the gate for a time. Seth offered, "They make some pretty sturdy bike locks now that would work on this gate. You can buy 'em in black now so it would blend in with the bars of the latch after dark. The

kids may never know if we get a lock on it soon enough.” The old man just nodded and said, “If you are going to the county dump you better get a move on. You will just be able to make it if you hustle.” Seth glanced at his watch. He had managed to waste a good half day cleaning up the cemetery. Seth extended his hand. “My name is Seth, it is good to have met you.” The old man accepted his hand without a word. After the handshake the man turned and walked off into the woods.

Something told Seth that he had just met the cemetery’s groundskeeper and he was probably also the individual behind the mysterious goings on as of late. He climbed into the cab and turned the key. If he hurried he could unload his collection of sticks.

He arrived at the county dump just in time to slip into the gate before the attendant closed it for the day. The man pointed down the road and said, “Look for the biodegradable sign and unload it there.” He glanced into the bed and his eyes lit up. “You going to recycle them cans at the center or dump em here?” Seth had not thought of selling the cans for scrap metal but he was sure that he could make a buck or two from all the aluminum cans in the bed of his truck. Seth smiled, “I am just unloading the sticks and going to sell the cans.” The man’s face fell as he saw an opportunity at a “bonus” pass by. He pointed again down the road and said, “Hurry back, I wanna get home to the lil miss.” Seth quickly threw the branches into a neat pile next to the Bio sign. He took care not to leave any precious aluminum in the pile. He was surprised to see exactly how many cans filled the back of his truck. Seth did not think he had picked up so many cans and bottles but the bed was almost half full.

The recycling center was open later than the county dump. Seth pulled up after a family who just unloaded bags of aluminum cans from a trailer marked, “Brownie Troop 35.” A lady walked up to his truck and nodded, “Mixed load, aluminum and glass, dump bin three.” She pointed to the sign with a big blue number three that hung over what looked like a dock. Seth glanced over, “This is my first time here, I don’t have a shovel or anything. How does this work?” The lady smiled and said, “I will bring you a push-broom. Just open your tale gate, back up to the dock and push it all into the hopper. The sorter will do the rest.” She held up a finger and trotted over and picked up a broom for him. When she handed him the broom she asked, “Do you want to set up an account, check or cash?” Seth’s ears perked up at the mention of cash. He must have been incredibly transparent because she smiled and nodded. “Cash it is!”

Seth pushed the cans forward, dropped the gate and backed the truck up to the dock. When he jumped into the bed he realized that the dock was actually a hopper that funneled the recyclables onto a wide black belt. He pushed the cans and bottles into the hopper and listened as the belt began to move. It was easier and faster than he thought. He had just put the broom in the back of his truck and pulled back around to the office when the lady re-appeared with a large slip of paper. She handed it to him. “Almost all aluminum, you did not make the minimum weight for glass or plastic for a cash sale. If you open an account Seth, we can keep track of all the weight and you will get credit for it over time.” Seth was surprised she knew his name. But he knew her as an avid movie goer. She

caught almost every opening night he had worked. He nodded, "What does it take to open an account?" She smiled, "I already opened it for you. All you have to do is say "account" from now on. When you want to make a direct deposit into your checking account, just give me your debit card." Seth smiled. This town was a backward as anything with the exception of money. Merchants had cutting edge technology when it came to money. He wondered if it was like that all over the world. "Thank you! I really appreciate that." He reached into his truck and popped open his glove box. Seth handed her two free movie passes and smiled. "Thanks for looking out for me, I really appreciate that," he said to the young lady. The lady looked at the tickets and smiled. She handed him a fist full of cash and winked. "See you at the movies, Seth!" Seth loved giving away the free passes as much as people liked getting them.

As he drove away all he could think about was the new Python bike lock he saw at the hardware store in town. He had been eyeing it for his mountain bike but, in this case, it would work well to secure the front gate of the Masonic Cemetery. The wad of cash in his pocket had been thanks to the rednecks that had filled the cemetery and surround area with beer cans. Wasn't it only fair that *they* pay for the new lock on the cemetery gate? Seth smirked. He liked the idea. The hardware closed at all different times but never before 6 p.m. The lights were still on when he pulled into the parking lot at 6:30 p.m. so he figured it was destiny that the rednecks buy a new lock for the gate. Old man Wilkerson gladly sold him a top of the line model Python lock. Seth would have never paid that much for it for himself but, considering it was being paid for with "found" money, it was a fun purchase. He even had enough to get a quarter pounder meal at McDonalds with the money left over. What more could a good Samaritan ask for?

As he was sitting in McDonalds' parking lot munching on his fries, he figured that it was time to drive by the cemetery and put on the new lock. No time like the present to get the job done. He could put the lock on the inside of the gate so that the latch mechanism hid it from a casual glance. He could latch the gate and synch up the lock as tight as possible so even if someone rattled the gate, they might not notice the lock on the backside of the gate. Seth slurped the last of his milkshake and headed toward the cemetery. If he moved fast, he could make it before dark and beat all the "lovers".

Chapter 2

It had been a week or so and Seth continued to pick up news of odd goings on at Lovers Lane. He kept a low profile as he made his field notes about the cemetery and the old man with no name he had met. He included the fact that securing the property had been next to impossible. Seth also noted that the old man had said the chains and locks had disappeared. He made special note that he had not chosen the words, "had been stolen." He made notes about everything he could remember. He kicked himself for not taking his digital camera to get a few snapshots of the skull and bones on the obelisk or some of the other great looking headstones. The images would make a great addition to his piece.

He jotted down some of the scuttlebutt he heard at the movie theatre about the cemetery and Lovers Lane. The one thing he knew for sure was that the nocturnal happens on the lane had taken a big hit over the past few weeks. The locals seemed to be avoiding the place at all costs. Seth figured it stood to reason. Now that he had found a cash cow he could milk once a month or so that the locals would find a new place to dump their beer cans. All for the best he figured.

His next day off, he grabbed his digital camera and took a ride out to the cemetery to check and see if his new high dollar lock had disappeared. When he turned on Lodge Lane he knew something was very different. Along both sides of the road used to be an unkempt lawn of sorts. The grass strip on both sides of the road had been overgrown. Now the grass was lush green and cut down nicely. Not a single beer can graced the side of the road. He put the truck in low gear and let it slowly roll down the long length of the lane. The pull-off points that had been littered with cans and bottles had not a single piece of litter around them. The pull-offs, oddly enough, seemed to have fresh grass sprouting from them.

When he pulled up to the cemetery, it was as if some type of magical transformation had occurred. His lock still graced the front gate. But the inside of the cemetery had undergone a metamorphosis. The old man must have returned with a mower and trimmer and worked for days on the grass. The lawn was manicured as compared to what it had been. The transformation was almost miraculous. Seth would have never believed it if he had not seen it with his own eyes. The place looked like the National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. Seth jumped out of the truck, and pulled the digital camera out of his pocket. He took a few quick pictures of the front gate.

He closed the truck door and began the long walk around to the side gate. Opening the front gate might give someone the idea that it was no longer secure. He wanted to help keep that façade in place. He walked around the side of the cemetery and along the eight foot high stone wall. While he tromped along the wall he wondered if the sudden caretaking of the site is what was making the locals uneasy. They were used to a run down uncared for cemetery, then, all of

the sudden they show up to their favorite party spot and it looks like a country club. He could see how the rednecks would have issues with a clean well kept lawn. He could also see how the local boys would have issues with taking their favorite girl to a well maintained cemetery versus a run down one to get some booty. No long grass to hide behind. Seth shook his head at the stupidity of the local populace and lifted the latch of the side gate. It was open, just like the old man had said.

Seth spent a good part of the day walking up and down the rows of tombstones. He snapped photos of the more interesting headstones and took several dozen shots of the obelisk in the center of the yard. He noted more than a few headstones sporting the skull and crossbones. Seth also found odd inscriptions and bizarre symbols on a variety of headstones. The dates on a few of the plots amazed him. It dawned on him that the cemetery was here before the country had declared independence. Some of these people had been here longer than the country! Seth stood by the gate he had entered with almost a full memory card on his digital camera. He was amazed that this place had been here so long.

As he walked back to his truck he realized that the locals were right. Something was very wrong here. He could not put his finger on exactly what it was, but something was indeed, very wrong.

Chapter 3

Seth moved in only one social circle, his own. Most of the people he met were interesting for about a day, tops. For the most part, their lack of interest and inconsistency in just about everything annoyed him. He never had all that many friends. People had a tendency to do two things, lie and never want to be held accountable for their own actions. Seth, not exactly a bible thumping religious freak could not understand why most religious people had such a hard time with these two concepts. The people he tried to get along with who claimed to be “good Christians” were almost always, anything but. After a while he gave up in hopes of being declared mentally incompetent by reason of truth and accountability.

He delivered his papers on time and in all weather. He took responsibility for everything he did on route, even the time it was icy and his truck slid into Mrs. Thomas’s mailbox, snapping it off at ground level. He had paid for the damages and apologized profusely. The assistant manager’s position at the theatre was more fun than it was work. He never really could figure out why they paid him so much money to watch movies, eat all the free popcorn he could eat and take peoples money hand over fist. Seth knew the movie industry was a money making racket. The box office would take in more money on an opening night than he and the entire staff would make, collectively, in their lifetimes. His best guess was that the box office totals posted in the news were very low averages of what was actually collected. His theatre bank deposits always balanced to the penny and the people on his shift always worked the hardest. Seth worked hard and so did the people he worked with. The slackers never seemed to stay around long enough to get fired.

Seth had work ethic, or so he had been told time and again. He had also been told that he was too honest for his own good, whatever that meant. Seth did not understand people and people in turn, they did not understand him. He had become used to the odd relationship. And that is exactly what was bothering him. Never before did he agree with the general population, yet lately, he did agree with them on one point. Something about the Masonic Cemetery was just not right.

Reading his notes over and over, he knew everything was well documented and in order. Nothing, leastwise on paper, was out of place. The grounds of the cemetery had gone from complete disarray to manicured thanks, in part, to his efforts. The place had undergone a superficial transition. But the locals had a “feeling” long before the mower and trimmer had a workout. He also knew that his return visit had given him the exact same feeling of unease that the locals spoke of. Everything looked right, but something was very wrong with the Masonic Cemetery at the end of Lodge Lane.

Seth’s next day off was spent in the local library. All the librarians knew him by name. Not only because he was one of the few patrons below retirement age but because of his unique choices in reference topic. The first few topics had set the library staff on its ear. Now they expected odd requests. Seth often

thought about going in and just asking for something simple like, "The Civil War" but decided against it. No sense in killing an 80 year old librarian.

When he asked about information on the old Masonic Cemetery outside of town the on-duty librarian gave him a long look. Seth smiled and politely waited. Finally, the librarian stood up and slowly moved toward the library's spiral ladder leading to the basement archive room. "You know young man," the white haired retired school teacher and grandmother of six said to him, "You are the only person we have had ask about that place in over a decade." Seth smiled to himself. He had no doubt that they local populace had no desire to learn about the area or its historical background. They were far to interested in getting out to learn about where they resided." The elderly woman navigated the cast iron spiral staircase with astound agility. She continued when they both reached the basement, "You will find the old cemetery holds more than a few secrets." Seth followed her as she moved toward the far back corner of the achieve room.

The librarian stopped and pointed to the top shelf. She stood, waving her index finger back and fourth pointing to a few books on the top shelf of the stack. "The books got wet and were almost destroyed when the basement leaked after that one big storm. We salvaged what we could. Those four books will give you all the information we have." She paused as Seth reached up to pull down the books. "These are probably the only books left about county attractions. No one writes them anymore." She said sadly as she turned to go. Seth placed the ancient books on the reading table and looked up. "Thank you Ma'am. I really appreciate your help!" The librarian looked and him, shook her head, and continued to climb up the spiral staircase.

Chapter 4

Seth continued to research the cemetery and make notes from the observations of the locals he overheard. Nothing was conclusive, but he dutifully recorded the statements and comments in his notes. His collection of notes on the story had become quite extensive. His personal observations, comments from eye witnesses, his research notes from the library combined with the file folder of digital pictures on his lap top, he figured this was the most “researched” story he had ever done. And yet, it felt like he had virtually no information at all when it came down to actually writing the article.

Normally, Seth could take a few facts and expound upon them enough to create a story of acceptable length for the editors to chop all to hell. This time it was different. He had plenty of speculative information, digital images by the dozens and enough historical data from the library to make one very interesting article...for an article in the *Masonic Cemetery Monthly*. No matter how he sliced the story, he could only come up with an interest piece and not a supernatural piece. He needed something, anything that would kick the story into the paranormal. A Masonic Cemetery, disappearing chains and locks, welded gates that swing wide open, a spooked local population and an old fellow with white hair just did not make the front page. He needed an angle.

One evening while he was working his shift at the theatre, Elizabeth came up to him in her usual bubbly fashion. She seemed to always have more energy than anyone else. Seth figured it was because she had the energy of a six foot person in the frame of a 5'2” body. She asked him if they were going to do “the Halloween thing” again this year. Seth raised his eyebrows and glanced at the calendar. Sure enough it was the middle of October. His reaction made Elizabeth smile.

Seth had started a tradition of sorts in the small town. On a whim, and with the manager’s permission, he had rented *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, and a few horror classics like *Dracula*, *The Wolfman* and *Frankenstein*. He put up a few black and orange streamers and advertised an all you can eat popcorn and Halloween movie night at the theatre. The ad he put in the *Times* said admission was 10 dollars and you got to see four movies and eat all the popcorn you could munch for free. A costume contest would be held at intermission with free movie passes as the prize. No one, including Seth could have predicted the monstrous turnout. Three quarters of the high school showed up in costume for the “event.” He and the manager worked themselves sweaty that night making popcorn, sprinting up the stairs to change the reels and moderating the costume contest. Seth’s idea had made the theatre a ton of extra cash. The manager gave him a health bonus with the condition that he had a full staff on hand next year to handle the mob.

Elizabeth leaned against the door jam of the small office and looked at Seth with big brown eyes. He would have noticed had he not been frantically flipping through the rolodex looking for the phone number of the vender he rented

the horror movies from dirt cheap. "Andy said his dad has a bumper crop of pumpkins this year and he could bring in a bunch for decorations. Everyone is already getting their costumes ready." The first year, he and the manager had been the only ones not in costume. In order to get anyone to work Halloween, Seth offered them a free set of movie passes, time and a half, and a waiver from wearing their standard uniform for the night. The ghouls jumped on the offer. The staff went all out on their costumes. They even brought in decorations and helped put everything up before hand. Halloween at the theatre had become a yearly event in the small town. Elizabeth continued, "I am going to be Elvira this year. I found the perfect dress." Seth was preoccupied but he was not dead. He stopped looking through the rolodex and looked at Elizabeth who broke into laughter. "I thought that would get your attention she chided." Seth closed his eyes and shook his head. He could imagine her perfect 5'2" body in a tight black low cut Elvira type dress. He opened his eyes and looked into hers. "Lets not start a feeding frenzy this year ok? Make sure to bring a dagger so you can fight off all the werewolves and vampires who try to divest you of your virtue." Elizabeth burst out laughing. Before she could retort Seth waved his hand, "I think you have a reel to change Mistress of the Dark." Elizabeth stopped laughing and took off at a dead sprint down the long hall to the far projector booth.

Chapter 5

The Halloween party at the theatre had gone over very well again this year. More people than ever showed up. This year someone finally figured out all the fun stuff you do and yell during the Rocky Horror Picture Show. It was interesting trying to explain to the manager why people were bringing umbrellas, squirt guns and bags of rice into the theatre. Seth was actually impressed that someone in town had the gumption to actually do some research and find out about something new. He bagged that thought however; as he overheard one girl tell her friend that her mother had told her all about what to do at Rocky Horror.

Seth worked the event until close. After all was said and done the manager was happy about the take but more than a little upset that the night cleaning crew had to deal with wet rice and popcorn all over the theatre floors. Seth knew it was just a knee jerk reaction. He was not done counting the box. Once the manager realized the amount of money he made in just one night, he would gladly shovel and sweep the rice and popcorn out himself. Seth left only minutes after the last costumed staff member. He told the manager he would be in early tomorrow to help with clean-up.

Seth jumped into his truck and took off toward the Masonic Cemetery. His notebook, digital camera and bottle of water were in his pack on the front seat. He had planned on spending a night in the cemetery for investigative purposes anyway. Halloween just seemed to be the perfect night to do it. Elizabeth had invited him to an after party and that surprised him. Her invitation had caught him totally off guard actually. She was one of the few women, his age, which did not already have a few kids or did not want to get out of Culpeper. He told a bit of a lie when he told her he had to help the manager count the box and clean up before tomorrow's opening. Her eyes told him that she did not believe him. She was kind enough not to call him on the lie outright. Elizabeth had been working the theater almost longer than him; she knew the routine just as well as he did. He should have known better than to try to lie to her. But it was better to lie to her than to tell her, "No Liz, I can't because I have some investigative work that I would rather do out at the old Masonic Cemetery rather than spend the rest of the evening with you...in that dress...just the two of us." Seth mused that humans were all morons. He clenched his jaw and drove toward the dirt road kicking himself all the way.

He arrived at the end of the dirt road a little after 3 a.m. He grabbed his small backpack and jumped out of the truck. Pulling a compass out of the backpack he took a quick reading as he stepped away from the truck. When at the county building he had gone over all the plats that showed the cemetery and its proximity to all roads around it. According to the map, if he headed due North, he would run right into the stone wall of the cemetery. He was very glad there was a full moon overhead; it gave him more light to navigate by. Seth put the compass in his pocket and stepped into the forest.

On the map, the hike to the cemetery looked long. But, in a matter of only a few minutes, he stood, facing the stone wall of the Masonic Cemetery. He found himself on a small knoll, looking down into the cemetery proper. Around him were briar bushes and a very old oak tree stood in the center of the patch in which he stood. Seth leaned against the tree and took a deep breath of the fresh night air. He looked down Lodge Lane as far as he could see and there was not a car or truck parked in sight. Seth pulled the notepad out of his pack and made a few notes and drew a hasty image of the cemetery below. He pulled out his digital camera and realized that even with the full moon, there was not enough light. He would have to use the flash. A blinding flash of light would give his position away. After remembering he had dozens of great photos on file, he put the camera back in the back and took a long pull from his water bottle.

Something was wrong here. He expected to see at least one or two cars parked on the lane. It was after all, Halloween and three quarters of the local young male and female population had just viewed the Rocky Horror Picture Show. Seth shook his head. The locals must have found a new spot to park. Not that this was a bad thing he thought. If something was going to happen in the cemetery, it would happen on Halloween night he thought to himself. Seth stood, hands pushed down into the pockets of his jacket, leaning against the oak tree, trying not to fall asleep.

Chapter 6

The manager at the theatre was the first one to realize that something was amiss with Seth. His Assistant Manager had not come in the morning after the Halloween Freak Show, as Seth like to call it, to pick up his bonus check. If Seth was anything, he was complete attention to detail when money was concerned. The Manager had seen Seth and Elizabeth talking so he figured they had gone out for the rest of the night partying. When he called Liz at home, the worry in her voice told him all he needed to know. Seth and Elvira had not hooked up that night.

The distribution manager for the Culpeper Times was beside herself. She took Seth missing the morning's delivery of the paper after his Halloween production at the theatre in stride. She and Seth had discussed it and she knew Seth was only going to get a few hours sleep between the close of the theatre and the morning run. She loaded up the van and had made the deliveries herself. When Seth missed the next two runs of the paper without so much as an email, she knew something was very wrong. Seth would not miss a run unless he was in a foreign country or...she preferred not to think of that as she dialed the number to Seth's apartment for the 15th time today.

The Sheriffs department received two missing person phone calls, almost back to back. The local theatre manager had called saying that his very responsible assistant manger had not shown up to pick up his check or work a shift in two days. The duty Sergeant had taken the report in painstaking detail. Culpeper County rarely had such reports. That is what made the second report in a matter of minutes stand out like flare in the dark of night. Scotty, the distribution manager at the Culpeper Times had called her sister, the Sheriffs office assistant, to report that her most reliable carrier had missed not one but two and a half days of paper delivery without so much as a courtesy call in. She said it was very much out of character for her best carrier not to report in. The now had the answer to the question he had asked himself this morning for the second morning in a row, "Why the hell is the paper late again today?"

Only the Sheriff knew that both reports were about the same person. He read and re-read both reports carefully. He knew that one report could mean anything but two reports, from two unique sources, meant something bad. Sheriff Cupp knew the lad in question. The young man had given him two free movie passes one afternoon when he had delivered his paper 15 minutes late. The man's sincerity had made an impression on him. He typed in the man's name on his computer and the make and model of his vehicle came up on the screen. The Sheriff nodded, older model full size truck, vanity tags, should be easy to track. He scrubbed the info off the screen and dropped it into the APB that he would send to the deputies throughout the county. Odds are the kid got drunk on Halloween night, and put his truck in a deep ditch off one of the back roads. The sad part was he knew someone could walk to a phone in two days. He hit the send button that would put a description and information on Seth onto the computer screen of all the cruisers in the county as well as in the database of all

the local courts and county buildings. If he was around, he would be reported in a matter of hours or less. The new system was a god-send compared to the old days of the lame amber alert system.

In less than two hours one of his units called in saying that Seth's truck had been found on old state route 666. The K-9 officer had led his deputy's to a spot next to an old oak tree, where they found a small nap sack. The sack contained a notebook, digital camera and a half full bottle of water. A spot next to the tree looked trampled down like someone had been standing in one spot for a long time. The K-9 tracked the man no further.

The notebook had Seth's business cards in it. They ran the digital cameras serial numbers and the owner was none other than Seth. The prints on the bottle came back the same. They had his truck, and his personal affects but no person. A full sweep of the area was done by State Police officers and his deputy's. Nothing was found that could help find the missing investigative reporter.

When the Sheriff looked at the map and realized the proximity of the man's disappearance to the old Masonic Cemetery, he gently placed Seth's missing persons file folder in the bin labeled, "unsolved cases/hold." The older man ran his hand through his pure white hair, sat back and twisted the ring on this right hand. His hand fell on the notebook Seth's notebook containing notes on the Masonic Cemetery. The collection of facts was one of the most complete he had ever read. Sheriff Cupp knew Seth had found the answer he was looking for...

About The Author:



MM lives in the foothills, somewhere in Virginia. His first horror ebook, a novel titled, *Birthright... Slayer* has been a wonderful achievement. In his first published novel, **MM** lifts the curtain on a nightmare world that contains danger, excitement, and the possibility of eternal love or death. In his second work, *Vampire Nation*, he continues the adventures of a True Slayer and his mission to rid the world of the undead.

He continues to write and self publish his works as a hobby. **MM** enjoys archery, fishing and the outdoors as well as window-shopping at midnight, it is after all, the best time to hunt...

For more information on the author and his works make sure to visit his [Author's website!](#)

Slayers Trunk

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