

# The Pig's Ear

This compilation is self-published  
Copyright © 2017 by Gewaly Art  
Gewaly Art is a registered trade name in the state of Colorado, USA.

## Chapter 1 – the Trial

Jerry and Daniel sat at the defendants table watching as the trial played out. Each had previously presented their sides of the story twice, once for the plaintiff's attorney and a second time for their own. David, Daniel's fifteen year old brother, was currently at the stand sharing his recollection of the incident in question. This was his second trip to the witness chair. The three boy's attorney, the honorable George Watts, of Leesville, Louisiana, was posing the questions.

Even though this was only a juvenile hearing, the proceedings were surprisingly formal. The plaintiff, Mark Fredrick, sat at one table with his attorney, the debatably honorable Alex Draper, of Shreveport, Louisiana. The suspected juvenile offenders, Jerry and Daniel, who were each sixteen years old, and David shared a second table with Mr. Watts. A handful of spectators were randomly seated in the audience, including a number of very concerned parents. A court reporter sat at a small rickety pine desk next to the witness chair, pecking away at the stenograph machine, while a noticeably bored bailiff stood restlessly off to one side. Behind a massive elaborately adorned hickory podium loomed the judge.

His honor, Desoto Parish's own, Albert W. Harmon presided. At first glance, Judge Harmon could have been anyone's kind, loving grandpa. He was a large jovial looking fellow with thick jowls and a round balding head. His soft blue eyes sparkled behind rectangular shaped eyeglass frames. Aside from the lack of a beard and mustache, he could easily be visually compared to one Saint Nick. However, looks don't always portray demeanor. When the good judge took his seat behind the podium any and all illusions of a doting, merciful father-figure were quickly and unquestionably thrown out of court. Albert W. Harmon was all business. The courtroom was his kingdom, and he sternly and ceremoniously ruled, yielding his gavel like a royal scepter.

David finished his testimony and was released from the stand to return to the defendant's table. Mr. Watts informed the Judge that the defense rested and took his designated seat with the boys. Quietly, the attorney and the three young men huddled to discuss status of the proceedings. A fourth young man, John Davis, leaned far across the rail that separated the audience from the legal participants and listened intently to the conversation that was taking place.

John had a special interest in the trial; he wasn't a defendant in this particular case, but he was involved in the happening. He was a participant in the alleged crime and he too would eventually stand trial. However, John was not a minor. John had turned eighteen years of age exactly one month before the incident in question. And, unfortunately for him, in Louisiana eighteen was the age that separated boys from men in the eyes of the judicial system. His hearing, in a full-fledged court of law, would take place in about a month subsequent. John was interested in this case, extremely interested, because it would establish a legal precedent for his impending day in court.

In the huddle Mr. Watts spoke slowly and deliberately, choosing his words carefully. “Well done, gentlemen. You all handled yourselves exceptionally on the stand; you all spoke clearly, eloquently, and confidently. Your testimonies were consistent, and I think they adequately and admirably removed any doubt that you are either miscreants or deviants. You all look pretty sharp too.” He added with a smile.

Jerry long before noticed that Mr. Watts used a lot of big words when he spoke. It was a lawyer thing, he decided.

“However,” Mr. Watts continued. “I do need to present to you the reality of rural living. In these parts, everybody is related to everybody else one way or another and blood transcends all, including the law. You need to know that Mr. Fredrick’s attorney, Alex Draper, and the Judge, Albert W. Harmon, are kin. They are first cousins through their mothers. Unfortunately, I only recently discovered that fact. Had I known earlier I could have requested a change of venue to move the trial to another jurisdiction. My request more than likely would have been denied, but at least we could have properly noted a potential conflict of interest.”

Mr. Watts looked at the boys to gauge their understanding of the dilemma. Seeing the somber expressions on each of their faces, he quickly realized they effectively grasped the magnitude of the problem. “Obviously, the relationship between them shouldn’t matter.” He said. “Mr. Harmon is an honorable man of long tenure. I trust that his judgment will be based on the facts of the case and his ruling will be just. I see no reason to believe otherwise, but one never knows. We need to be prepared for the worst. If we don’t get the decision, know that we do have a contingency. I will appeal the case on the grounds of a potential conflict and try to have the decision thrown out. We’ll have to see how it goes.”

At that, Judge Harmon spoke, “Mr. Draper, please present your closing remarks.”

“Thank you, your honor. I would like just a minute to confer with my client.”

“Granted,” was the judges reply.

After several minutes of quiet, though animated, collaboration with Mark Fredrick, Alex Draper stood up to plead his case.

“Your honor, I think it is pretty clear what happened on the occasion in question in November of last year. These three hoodlums maliciously and wantonly stole something of great value from my client.” The words oozed from the attorneys lips.

Daniel took offense to the slanderous accusation. The words spoken were tolerable, but the way they were delivered was unbearable. He started up from his chair to voice his opposition, but before he could make it all the way to his feet he was grabbed and pulled back down. Mr. Watts had one arm and Jerry was tugging on the other. Mr. Watts moved in close to Daniel and spoke quietly, but sternly. “Daniel, you must calm yourself. He’s trying to bate you. Don’t let him! Remember, anything you do or say, even at this late stage in the proceeding, can influence the judge’s decision. Relax!”

“He’s lying,” Daniel snarled through gritted teeth. “He’s been lying throughout the whole trial.”

“That may well be the case, but let things run their course and the truth will prevail. Let him say what he has to say, and then we have the final word. You must remain calm.”

Alex Draper stopped his monologue and purposely looked toward the defendant’s table to draw attention to the exchange. He turned to the Judge. “Your honor, please!”

Judge Harmon peered over the upper rim of his glasses and glanced toward the source of the commotion. “Is there a problem Mr. Watts?” he asked.

“No, your honor, there’s no problem. We were just having a side bar discussion. Sorry for the interruption. It won’t happen again.”

“Let’s hope not,” the Judge gravely pronounced. “You may continue Mr. Draper.”

Mark Fredrick was staring coolly at the Judge’s bench, wearing a wicked smirk.

“Thank you, your honor.” Alex Draper continued with his discourse. “As I was saying, they stole something of great value from my client. Then, knowingly they tried to cover up their selfish act. They literally tried to bury the evidence. When they were caught red handed in possession of the goods and they realized that they couldn’t sweep it under the proverbial carpet, they claimed it was all a big misunderstanding. They didn’t know it belonged to my client, they didn’t know it belonged to anyone. What did they think? They could just take whatever they wanted without any recourse? Your honor, these young men have shown a blatant disregard for the rights and possessions of others, and they need to be taught a lesson.”

Mr. Watts and Jerry were hanging on tight to Daniel’s arms. He was about ready to explode and they were doing all they could to keep that from happening.

“Finally, your honor, for several months my client attempted to rectify the problem. He tried to contact each of them to see if he couldn’t strike some sort of deal. He sent letters and he left telephone messages. He tried desperately, repeatedly to give them the opportunity to make restitution. My client wasn’t looking to make money off the deal; he was prepared to settle for a fraction of the item’s worth. But, sadly, they turned a deaf ear. They instead denied culpability and shunned responsibility for their actions.” Alex Draper stared directly at Daniel and raising his voice to enhance the effect he said, “They are delinquents and they need to experience the full measure of justice.”

Daniel could take no more. “You liar!” he bellowed. Pulling himself free of the grasping arms that held him back, he dove across the top of the table in the direction of the stunned attorney. David screamed out, “Daniel, no!” The bailiff, proving that he was more than window dressing, sprang to attention and made a dash to position himself strategically between the charging youth and Alex Draper. The motion was honorable but unnecessary. Both Jerry and Mr. Watts quickly, impulsively caught Daniel before he could officially break free. The two were able to get a firm grip on each of Daniel’s legs. They pulled him back across the table and settled him in his chair.

The Judge banged his gavel repeatedly. “Order, order, I will have order in my court! Mr. Watts, if you cannot control your wards I will shut down these proceedings at once and those boys will be remanded to the Desoto Parrish Juvenile Detention Center without so much as another word. And, they will stay there until I decide otherwise. Am I making myself clear?” The Judge was furious; he was glaring at George Watts.

“Your honor, this case has been a very long, exhausting ordeal for us all. My client is under a bit of stress. We are very sorry for the outburst. I give my apologies to the honorable Mr. Draper as well. I assure the both of you it won’t happen again.” Mr. Watts was sincerely humbled. Jerry was terrified. If the boys had any chance of getting a favorable decision in this hostile arena, that chance just flew right out the window.

“It better not, I will have the bailiff escort him out of my courtroom in chains.” The Judge took several minutes to compose himself. He then looked over at Alex Draper and nodded. “Council, whenever you’re ready. Please continue.”

Alex Draper was a little on edge himself. However, he was noticeably pleased with the results of his psychological manipulation. The boy broke, which was just what he wanted. Mark Fredrick gleamed.

“Thank you, your honor.” Alex Draper spent several minutes reviewing his notes. Finally, he continued. “Your honor, I am not sure I really need to say anymore. That little display by Mr. Daniel Morris spoke volumes. His behavior validated what I have been saying throughout this trial. These kids are menaces to society; they are irresponsible, irreverent, undisciplined, and deviant. They are thieves. They have little regard for others and the possessions of others. They have shown no remorse for the suffering they have imposed on my client. Now we see through Mr. Morris’ outburst, they have tendencies toward coercion and intimidation using veiled threats and violence. So, what do we do? What do we do, indeed?”

Alex Draper paused and paced back and forth across the floor silently for what seemed an eternity. Finally, he continued. “Your honor, I like to think I am a just man, a fair man. But, in this case, what is just? What is fair? Obviously, I can’t tell you how to rule, that would be presumptuous on my part. But I can tell you what I think is best for all. As you well know, your honor, my agenda is not to ruin lives. My agenda is to reform them. Right them before they go too wrong. Perhaps that is what is needed here, now. Before it is too late, these boys need reform. Had they shown even a desire to set things straight, had they made even a feeble attempt at restitution, had they shown even a smidgen of personal accountability, perhaps I wouldn’t think so. But, on every account, they didn’t.”

Again, he paused. “Your honor, my client is seeking full and fair restitution for his loss as well as any and all attorney’s fees accrued through this harrowing ordeal. I think that much goes without saying. Even so, there is one more thing I would like you to consider. As you



know, the crime of which these young men are guilty, as the evidence and testimony have proven, is a felony in the great state of Louisiana. It is a serious act that is punishable by fine, by time in detention, and or by both. So as to provide each of them with a true appreciation for life, liberty, and property, and to protect others like my client from their ilk, it is my recommendation that you not only award the decision to my client but also consider the criminal element and impose a sentence on each of them to the full extent allowable by law. Thank you again, your honor!”

A cumulative gasp rose from the audience. The three boys all started speaking at once.

“Can he do that? Can he say that?” David asked. “Will the Judge listen to him?”

“That’s bogus,” Jerry said. “We’re not criminals!”

“The liar,” Daniel growled. “That man is evil!”

“Simmer down boys,” George Watts said softly. “As I have explained before, this is a civil case, brought on by the plaintiff. This is between you and him. The state has no intentions of turning this into anything more. If the state was going to press charges, it would have happened long before now. I wouldn’t worry too much about Draper’s comment, he’s not the DA. He’s simply trying to enhance his argument and influence the judge’s decision by trying to emphasize the seriousness of the charges. But it’s not going to work.”

“How can you be so sure?” Jerry asked, skeptically.

“Well,…” Mr. Watts started. “First, I don’t really know Judge Harmon all that well, this is my first case before him, but I do know him by reputation. Some of my colleagues have stood before his seat and word has it that he is a fair and honest man. I truly believe that he will consider the case on merit, and not on theatrics. He will listen to both sides, patiently and impartially, and he will render a decision that is just. As I said before, Draper’s cousin or not,

Mr. Harmon is an honorable man; Second, I still have the last word. I plan to answer Draper's arguments, his lies as you like to call them, with truth. You boys are not in the wrong, and the truth will bear that out. So, sit tight and remain calm. Everything is going to work out fine. Trust me," He said reassuringly. "Truth will prevail." He then looked seriously at Daniel, "And, no more leaps across the table. I'm too old for that crap. Understand?"

"Sorry," Daniel soberly responded. "But, he is a liar!"

"Mr. Watts, present your closing arguments," Judge Harmon barked.

"Thank you, your honor." He looked at the boys and said, "I'm up. Wish me luck."

"Wish you luck," Daniel scoffed, while rolling his eyes. "We should be wishing us luck."

George Watts strolled to the center of the floor facing the judge's bench and set his file on a small podium. He looked briefly at his notes and then commenced with his arguments. "First, your honor, Mr. Draper, Mr. Fredrick, members of the audience, I would like to apologize again for the recent disturbance. It was clearly not my intent to taint these proceedings or to disrupt this courtroom. It was unfortunate and I am sorry, I assure all of you that my client shares my sentiment, he has stated as much. This process has been trying for us all. He asked for me to relay his sorrow as well." Mr. Watts paused briefly to allow the sentiment to take hold. Then the real show began.

"Your honor, Mr. Draper has stated some things that I would like to speak to. First, he indicated that my clients maliciously and knowingly took something from the plaintiff and then made the attempt to - the words he used - bury the evidence. I think, your honor, from the testimony we've heard here today and from the evidence presented, specifically a copy of the police report provided by the fine officers from the Desoto Parish Sheriff department, they didn't

try to hide or bury anything. The item in question was in plain sight when Mr. Fredrick stumbled across their 'lair', as he called it, and it was still there in plain sight thirty minutes later when law enforcement arrived at the scene. These boys had thirty minutes, your honor. Thirty minutes is a lifetime in some cases. If my clients were miscreants, deviants, or hoodlums they would have literally discarded the evidence. Heck, they could have just left the scene. They could have jumped in their car and drove. Mr. Fredrick failed to get their names, addresses, license plates. He said so himself. In thirty minutes they could have been thirty miles away." He paused and stared silently into the judge's eyes. "But they didn't."

"Mr. Draper contends that Mr. Fredrick made repeated efforts to contact my clients, he wrote letters and he made phone calls. Supposedly, he wanted to strike a deal, a deal at a fraction of the items value. He claimed my clients never acknowledged his attempts. They didn't respond to the letters, they didn't return the calls. Well, your honor, the reason they didn't respond is because the attempts were never made. I have been council on this case for four months and I personally have never heard a word from either Mr. Fredrick, or his attorney. During the hearing Mr. Fredrick stated that the attempts were made before lawyers were brought on board. He wanted to settle before the sharks started circling, was the term he used. Also, as was stated, these attempts went on for several months. Yet, records indicate that he hired his attorney a mere two weeks after the incident in question. If he tried, and I say if, the attempts were feeble at best, and they didn't occur over a span of several months. On the contrary, my clients made the attempts, I myself made several attempts to make contact, to initiate a dialog. It was Mr. Draper and Mr. Fredrick that were unresponsive. Your honor, Mr. Fredrick never tried to strike a deal; he never wanted to strike a deal. I think testimony and the facts have proven that."

“Finally, your honor, Mr. Draper indicated that my clients are irresponsible, irreverent, and undisciplined. They have no regard for others or property belonging to others. This is just not true. As has been pointed out in these proceedings, three of my clients are on the honor role at their high school, two of them with straight A’s. Not a one of them has been involved in any kind of altercation at their schools and not a one has even a smudge on their high school transcripts. They have never been involved in disciplinary hearings, in or out of school. Not one of them has anything on their police records, not even a speeding ticket. All three worked over the last summer break; two are currently holding down jobs and still keeping up with their studies. All come with solid work and character references.” Mr. Watts continued to look at the Judge, but he turned and pointed to the defendants table. “Your honor, these are good kids. They are hardworking kids. They are honest kids. They are church going kids.” He paused briefly to let the moment linger.

Turning back to the Judge, Mr. Watts continued. “In closing, your honor, my clients never denied the incident. They never denied that a loss occurred. They felt remorse and they tried to express that remorse. They apologized to Mr. Fredrick at the scene. Since that time, no less than eight hand written letters were sent to Mr. Fredrick, expressing further regrets. Through those letters they also made numerous offers to pay for their mistake. They wanted to make restitution, they wanted to settle the score, and they were prepared to do so for more than what was considered fair and reasonable. Alas, it was Mr. Fredrick that turned a deaf ear.”

“Your honor, the fact that this incident had to go on as long as it did is a travesty. This case should have never come to court. Had Mr. Fredrick been even the slightest bit understanding, had he even the tiniest bit of compassion, had he even the smallest bit of decency, this issue would have been settled way back in November. None of us, your honor, would have

needed to be here today. In closing, my clients don't deny Mr. Fredrick's loss. Our offer for restitution is still on the table. With that, we ask that the decision go to the defendants. As far as I am concerned, that, your honor, is justice. Thank you!"

After his speech, the only noise in the courtroom was the slap of Mr. Watts' leather soled shoes against the marble floor tiles as he made his return to the defendants table. The pristine silence continued for a solid two minutes after he took his seat.

"Thank you, Mr. Watts, for your remarks. Your comments are duly noted and your arguments will be meritoriously considered. Now, I'll take a ten minute recess and retire to my chamber for deliberations. I'll return with my decision."

The bailiff stepped forward. "All rise!"

The Judge in his flowing blue robe glided gracefully across the floor and disappeared through the chamber door. Immediately, Mr. Draper and Mr. Fredrick dove into a huddle and spoke quietly. Mr. Watts and his clients did the same. Like before, John Davis hung over the railing listening to the defendant's conversation.

"Wow," Jerry said. "I thought that went real well. There's no way the Judge can award the decision to Draper, even if the two of them are kin. You did a knock down job Mr. Watts."

"Oh, ya!" David interjected. "That was real impressive - you stomped on every one of his lies."

"Agreed," Daniel said. "All of his lies, the liar!"

"Well, thank you," Mr. Watts responded, and then he slipped into deep thought. The boys just watched him. When he returned from his trance he looked at them and spoke sternly. "I too think it went real well and I did counter all of Mr. Draper's arguments appropriately and eloquently. And, I think throughout the course of this hearing I, we, have presented the facts to

effectively support my counter. I am confident.” He looked each boy in the eyes and continued, “However, I must warn you... It’s not over. While I am pleased with my presentation, and I feel like the facts and the evidence are clearly on our side, I really don’t know what the Judge will come back with. As I said before, in these parts blood transcends all. He could come back and render the decision my way, or he could lean toward Mr. Draper. Or, to save face and maintain familial relations, he could come in somewhere in the middle. Here in Louisiana it’s as much a matter of politics as it is law. If he does the right thing, the just thing, we will be fine. But, again, I simply don’t know.”

At that, the bailiff stepped forward and bellowed. “All rise, this court is in session. The honorable Albert W. Harmon is presiding.”

“That was sure quick,” Daniel observed.

Mr. Watts looked up, “You’re right, that wasn’t anywhere close to ten minutes. That could be a very good thing,” he paused, staring warily toward the Judge. “Or, it could be a very bad thing.”

Judge Harmon strolled purposefully to his chair behind the bench. Taking his seat, he banged his gavel a couple of times and called the proceedings to order. He paused and stared soberly over the top rim of his glasses. Tension filled the quiet courtroom. The good judged looked first toward the plaintiff’s table and then turned his attention to the defendant’s table. After what seemed an eternity, he rendered his decision. Everyone in the place was riveted to his every word.

“This has been a very intriguing case.” He said. “The issue of guilt and innocence was never in question. Mr. Fredrick did indeed experience a loss. No one disputed or contested that assertion. And, the defendants were directly responsible for that loss. Again, an allegation that

was neither contradicted nor disproved.” His stare bore deep into each of teenager’s souls.

“These young men took something of value from Mark Fredrick. In principal the decision should have been easy.” He softened his gaze. “However, in the course of these proceedings it has been made clear that there was more to the story, much more. So as to properly serve justice, the whole story had to be heard, and more importantly it had to be considered. This case is to be decided not on actions, but on intent.”

“Claiming ignorance to the specific laws and statutes of the land, the defendants assert that there was no mal intent. They came across the item in question and not seeing or knowing of an owner they took it for themselves. At that time they didn’t know Mr. Fredrick, nor did they know of his specific claim to the property. How could they intend to harm him? Furthermore, it was stated that immediately upon learning and understanding the laws governing their errant actions, they felt adequate remorse and they made a real and sincere effort to rectify the situation. They wrote letters and left messages expressing their heartfelt regrets. In those letters and through those messages they also communicated the desire to make full and reasonable restitution. They offered to pay for the loss.” Judge Harmon paused.

The troupe at the defendant’s table was ready to break out in dance; the good judge was singing their song. In not so many words he eloquently summarized the defendant’s case, and he delivered the summation sincerely, with apparent understanding and compassion. Judge Harmon was on their side. The youth at the table glanced over toward the plaintiff and grinned as they each mentally planned their individual celebrations. They would quickly learn however, the celebrations would never happen. The good judge was about to change his tune.

“However,” Albert W. Harmon continued. “Intent, real intent, is a difficult thing to gauge. That’s where I struggled. The defendants say they went the extra mile, apologized, sent

letters, and offered to pay for their mistake. If they did indeed do those things, they were post facto measures, in other words, they were actions performed after the fact. That being the case, the sincerity and the legitimacy of those actions would come into question. Was there truly a lack of knowledge regarding the specific laws? Was there genuine remorse for the loss sustained by the plaintiff? Was the offer an honest attempt at restitution? Or, were the actions simply token offerings provided to avoid the natural, legal consequences for the wrong committed? These are all valid questions that had to be considered in this case.” Judge Harmon paused. The courtroom was deathly still.

Judge Harmon looked directly at Daniel when he continued talking. “After hearing both sides, after weighing all the facts, after sifting through all the testimony and evidence, and especially after observing the defendant’s conduct in my courtroom this day, I am not convinced that the regret was real or that the remorse was authentic. My decision is to the plaintiff!”

The small courtroom erupted. Gasps swelled from the audience, friends and families openly voiced their disapproval. The boys in unison rose to their feet and bellowed their annoyance. Mr. Watts leaped from his seat and sounded off. The bailiff moved quickly to the center of the floor without really knowing why. The Judge pounded his gavel and screamed out in an attempt to gain control. In the midst of the commotion, two lone figures sat quietly by, simply observing the chaos. With bedlam breaking out all around them, Alex Draper and Mark Fredrick just smiled.

Eventually, the booming voice of the Judge resonated through the court. “I will have order,” he yelled, while slamming his gavel repeatedly against a round hickory sound block on his desk. “I will have order, now!” Judge Harmon was fuming.



Eventually a semblance of order was restored. When things calmed enough for the judge to be heard he addressed the entire courtroom. Angrily, he looked from face to face as he spoke. “I will not allow anarchy in my courtroom. Another outburst like that and I will site every person in this building for contempt and have the lot of you thrown in jail.” Judge Harmon waved his gavel at some of the people in the crowd. “I have made my decision, and public outcry will not influence that decision. The law is the law. It’s not a proposal up for debate nor is it an issue to be measured by an opinion poll. It is the law. And, in this courtroom it is the final word. I hope I have made myself clear.” Glaring across the span of the room, the Judge finished his remarks. The crowd was silent.

“Furthermore,” the Judge continued. “Since the actions of the defendants constitute a felony in this great state, I am sentencing each of them to the maximum punishment allowable by law. They are to be immediately remanded to the Desoto Parrish Juvenile Detention Center where they will...” His comment brought on a new, violent eruption from the audience. The boys were back up on their feet. People were literally screaming, at the judge, at the defendants, at the plaintiff, at the attorneys, and at each other. Over the uproar the Judge continued his sentencing. “...serve a term of no less than two years...” The boys were hollering at Mr. Draper. Daniel moved toward him and bellowed, “You worthless,... How could you do this to us?” David, near tears, screamed at his parent, “I don’t want to go to jail; I’m too young for jail.” Jerry roared, “This isn’t right, I’m not a criminal!” John Davis stood in a daze. The judge continued, “Bailiff, cuff them and get them out of here. Call for backup if you need to.” Parents got involved, several of them started toward the Judge. Three enforcement officers bound into the room to provide assistance. Daniel grabbed Mr. Draper by the shirt and reared back to strike. Before he could deliver the blow, he was subdued by one of the backups. Jerry’s head spun, he

fought to get the words out. “This isn’t right, I’m not a criminal!” The bailiff grabbed his right wrist and slammed the cuff down hard. It closed tight...

## Chapter 2 – Not a Criminal

Jerry woke up with a start and sat up straight in his bed. “I’m not a criminal,” he said, fighting off sleep. “I’m not a criminal.” When he came to his senses, he realized it was a dream. He flipped on the lamp that was sitting on the nightstand next to his twin bed. In the dimly lighted room, he took stock of his surroundings. His bed was in disarray, as if a tornado trooped across it. The top sheet and the blanket were wrenched to one side and one of his two pillows was across the room leaning against the closet door. The remaining pillow was sticking up from where it was jammed between the bed and the headboard. The pillow was damp, along with much of the rest of the bed. Jerry was covered in sweat, from head to toe. He shivered. The dream, the nightmare, was so real.

He sat quietly in the cool, springtime air pondering the dream. It was the third time in as many weeks that he had it. Not the same dream exactly, but one that was very similar. Facets of the dream changed slightly from one version to the next, but the stage, the players, and the plot remained consistent.

The scene was always the same. It was a small courtroom, the large ornate judge’s bench prominently filling most of one wall with the much smaller stenographer’s desk tucked off to one side. Two rather plain tables sat facing the judge’s platform with a thick wooden rail

immediately behind them. Twelve chairs in a box on a raised platform were strategically positioned to the side of the room opposite the stenographer's desk so that twelve sometimes angry, sometimes sympathetic faces, peers they were called, could observe the proceedings. A lone, smallish podium stood in the middle of the room facing the judge.

The players were always the same as well. The Judge, the two lawyers, the plaintiff, the bailiff, even the quiet, non-imposing clerk were all there. Like a well-rehearsed theatre troupe each played his or her part admirably and consistently. Of course the other boys were always there as well. How could they not be, after all they were Jerry's partners in crime? The parents were there, always supporting, usually crying. The enforcement officers might have changed between episodes, Jerry wasn't entirely sure. He really couldn't remember their faces, mostly because he didn't want to. They were who he was most trying to forget, they were the ones with the handcuffs.

Then, there was the plot. Over the span of the three night visions the basic elements of the storyline remained true to the original version. The evil lawyer of the evil plaintiff babbled on for far too long and spewed all sorts of venom, he basically portrayed the youth as the scourge of the next generation. The good attorney took over, using wit, charm, charisma, and a silver tongue he seemingly snatched victory from the jaws of defeat. He was followed by the judge, good, honest, righteous judge Harmon. He lectured, he sermonized, he pontificated, and then he pronounced his decision. "My decision is to the plaintiff". It was a decision that was always followed by the dramatic, surprise ending, a vicious, stunning right hook that none of them saw coming. They were ordered to juvenile detention. That bothered Jerry.

But, as he thought about the series of dreams he realized there was one thing that bothered him even more. The most recent was very real, even more so than the ones before.

Sounds that didn't even register in the first occurrence became clearly discernible, more intense in the latest. The constant, rhythmic tapping from the stenograph machine and the reverberating slapping against the tile floors hailing Mr. Watts' concluding remarks rang clear and true in his head. Also, each new episode visually played with increased clarity, lines grew finer, contrasts turned sharper, and colors became brighter. It was like going from VHS to DVD to Blu-ray. Minute details became well defined. He thought about the swirls and cracks in the marble floor, the ornate trim on the judge's bench, and the faces belonging to the players. Jerry couldn't help but dwell on the faces. In the first version of his nightmare, the faces were blurry, featureless smudges. Not so in the latest rendition. They became clear and distinguishable. While he had never met most of the people from the dream Jerry felt that he could recognize any one of them if he met them on the street, and that's what really bothered him.

The repetition and the ever increasing clarity gave him cause to wonder. Were the experiences more than dreams? Perhaps they were signs, omens. Jerry's head began to spin. He couldn't help but think about the conclusion, they were ordered to juvenile detention; they were going to jail. If the nightmares were foretelling coming events, he was in big trouble. The real trial, his trial was only five days away. He really didn't want to go to jail. Subconsciously, Jerry began rubbing his wrists.

He rose from his bed and began to address the disaster that was his room. It was only two a.m. so he set about the task as quietly as possible so as not to disturb the rest of the family. In short order the strayed pillow was recovered, the linens were changed, and the blanket was casually draped back across the bed. Jerry climbed under the covers and turned off the lamp in an attempt to grab some much needed sleep. Sleep didn't come immediately. Lying in the darkened room, watching shadows dance across the ceiling, and listening to piercing silence his

mind raced. He was haunted by the memories of past events and by the fears of future possibilities. There were so many questions. For two full hours Jerry tossed and turned and fretted trying to answer them all. Eventually, with one final, pivotal question dangling from the tip of his tongue, he became drowsy. Ultimately, submitting to exhaustion, he closed his eyes and whispered, “How did it ever come to this? I’m not a criminal.”

### Chapter 3 – Hunting Trip

Six months prior...

“You want to do what?” Jerry’s father stared at him like he had green hair.

“I want to go hunting with some friends,” Jerry replied.

Jerry was standing in the shadows of a large oak tree. His father was sitting on a creeper, looking up at him.

“Can you hand me a nine-sixteen open end wrench, please?” his father asked, his face void of expression.

Jerry stepped to his right and reached into the top shelf of a red, two-tiered tool box. After fishing around for several seconds, checking the size of each tool, he came out with a grey one about six inches long and handed it to his father. His father confirmed the size, laid back, and pushed off the creeper, disappearing under a light-green 1972 Buick Skylark. Jerry sat for several minutes listening to the sounds of bangs and dings coming from under the vehicle. Soon a dark and dingy hand appeared. “Can you hand me a Phillips screw driver?”

“Large or small?”

“Give me something in the middle.”

Jerry fished around some more in the tool box and eventually filled the hand with the desired instrument. Several more minutes passed with only the symphony of metal and steel to entertain him. Soon the creeper slid out from under the car and Jerry's dad sat up and looked at him. "Okay, let's go through all the questions, what, who, when, where, and how," he said. "What is it that you want to do?"

"We want to go hunting, you know, with guns. John knows of a good place north of here."

"Who's John?"

"He's a friend from school, he's a senior. You know him! His parents own the Sandwich shop east of town. He's been over a number of times."

"Oh, he's the one with the yellow Datson?"

"Yah, that's him. Of course you would know him by his car. You being a mechanic, I guess I should have just said the yellow car guy. Huh?"

"Don't get sassy, youngen!" Jerry's father looked toward the tool box and asked, "Can you move that closer, please? I need a few more things."

Jerry walked the box over and sat it next to the creeper. His father reached into it and grabbed several more wrenches. Looking at the sizes he exchanged a couple until he had what he wanted. He leaned back on the creeper and slid back under the car. After a few more clangs and pops Jerry heard, "Is it just the two of you going, or is there someone else? You did say you wanted to go with, 'some friends'."

Jerry hesitated before he spoke. "The Morris brothers are coming along too, Daniel and David," He said. He tensed awaiting the response. Jerry's father wasn't a big fan of the Morris boys. He thought they were, among other things, reckless and undisciplined. It seemed to him



that chaos followed those two wherever they went. Jerry knew this could be a deal breaker, but he couldn't leave them out of the discussion. Withholding information was akin to lying, and lying was definitely not an option. On edge Jerry prepared for the blowback. There was only silence.

Soon the creeper slid out from under the Skylark and Jerry's father sat upright. "You know I don't like you hanging out with those two. The oldest is a hot head and the younger one is a simpering whiner. Both need to be strung up by their toes and beaten abundantly with a tennis racket."

"I would agree, David is a whiner, but Daniel has been working on his temper," Jerry stammered. "I haven't witnessed any outbursts from him in several months."

"Still, the two of them could only spell trouble. Will they have guns?"

"I don't know for sure, but we are going hunting," Jerry scoffed. "Daniel said something about a 16 gauge shot gun and David mentioned a .22 caliber long rifle."

Jerry's father looked at him sternly. "Well, that seals the deal. I can't agree to this. The two of them are bad enough. But, the two of them with guns? There's no way that will end well. You're not going!"

"Oh, come on." Jerry desperately pleaded. "They are not that bad. John's parents are still letting him go."

"I'm not John's parent."

"Dad, really? You know I'm responsible and I won't let them get me into anything dumb. You got to trust me."

Jerry's father calmly looked at Jerry. "It's not you I worry about!" The two sat in silence for several minutes locked on to each other as if in a trance. Finally, Jerry's dad broke the spell, "What about John, he bringing a gun?" he asked.

"Yes, that I am sure. He will be bringing his 12 gauge."

Jerry's father thought for a minute. He then leaned back on the creeper and slid back under the car. After several more minutes of uncomfortable silence words echoed from beneath the Skylark. Jerry's father asked, "When is this disaster supposed to happen?"

"It won't be a disaster. It will be fine." Jerry spat, trying hard to hide his disdain. After a brief pause, "We want to go in a couple weeks. We're planning on Monday through Wednesday over the Thanksgiving holiday. We're all out of school those days. We want to bag some game for the big feast on turkey day."

"What kind of game were you thinking you would bag?"

"Deer, rabbit, squirrel, or maybe even wild turkey. I guess it depends on what we see."

"Do you all have your licenses to hunt?"

"David doesn't need one, he's only fifteen. John and Daniel have theirs; John even got a deer tag. I was going to get mine this week. That is, if you let me go," Jerry responded.

"Well, it does sound like you at least thought that through." The creeper emerged from under the car. Jerry's father sat up and looked around. Spying what he was after he pointed to a clean, white cloth across the tool box. "Can you hand me that towel?"

Jerry handed the towel to his father, who promptly started wiping his hands. Jerry's father arose from the creeper. "You said John knew of a good place north of here. Exactly where is that place? And, how does John know about it?" his father asked.

“There are public lands just south-west of Mansfield, up against the Sabine River. John says he has been there before. He has a cousin in Many. The two of them have been up to that area a number of times. It’s just off state highway 191.”

“That’s pretty far, you can’t find somewhere closer? That has to be a two hour drive, at least. There are plenty of places nearby.”

“We know, but we really want to go there. Partly because we kind of want to get away, make an adventure of it. But mostly because John says the place is lush and green with lots of trees and most of all its remote, we could have it to ourselves. And, there are all sorts of animals. One day he and his cousin hiked through the area and in just two short hours they saw everything from white tail deer to armadillos. We’re guaranteed to come back with something,” Jerry stated, not able to mask his excitement.

“Huh,” was all that came from Jerry’s father, who then turned and walked away. Jerry followed him to a picnic table where the two sat on sun faded benches across from each other. Jerry’s father stuck the soiled towel in his hind pocket and took out his pocket knife, a silver Bowie lock blade. With the tip of the 4 inch blade he began whittling the dirty grease from under his finger nails. Jerry looked on anxiously, awaiting a response.

Jerry’s father looked up from his manicure and asked, “So, how are you all getting there?”

“John’s Datson,” Jerry replied. “It should have enough rear space to hold all our stuff. It’s a little wagon. What we can’t fit in the back we will cram in the back seat next to whoever is sitting there and in the floor by our feet. We will have plenty of room.”

Jerry's father looked directly into Jerry's eyes. The expression on his face was a reflection of care and concern. "I don't know," he said. "I don't like this idea. There are just too many things that could go wrong, especially with the Morris boys."

"But, Dad..." Jerry rose from his seat.

"Sit down and let me finish," Jerry's father interrupted. "You want to be treated like a man, than act like one." Jerry slowly sat back down and Jerry's father continued. "You will be more than a hundred miles from home in a remote area, completely cut off from any communication. If something were to happen, there would be very little any of us here could do to help. I just think it is a bad situation and I don't feel comfortable with it."

Jerry was fighting to keep his emotions in check. "Dad, you have to trust me. Have I not proven that I'm trustworthy? I'm doing fine in school; you and mom have never had to worry about my studies. I'm an honor student. I help out around the house without complaining and without being asked. Well, at least sometimes," he paused, working to come up with other entries for his resume. "I held down a job last summer with the building company and did well enough they want me back next summer." Jerry was near tears arguing his case. "I am responsible, I can be trusted, and I really want to go. Please, Dad!" Jerry pleadingly glared at his father.

Jerry's father looked down at the peeling brown paint on the table in front of him and went into deep thought. Jerry stood by, emotionally shaken. Minutes passed that felt like hours. Finally, Jerry's father spoke. "You're right; I do need to trust you." He paused. "So, I'll bend, but just a little. You can go, but under one condition..."

With those words, Jerry was filled with energy and excitement. "What's the condition?" He interjected.

Jerry's father paused. "You're not taking any gun of mine," he said.

The deflation was instantaneous. "What?" he shouted. "Dad, you know I don't have a gun of my own. If I can't use one of yours, I won't have one at all. We are going hunting, how can I hunt without a gun?" Jerry was back up on his feet.

Jerry's father continued. "I don't know. But I do know I will not be getting a phone call that you or someone around you is injured or worse yet, killed, by one of my guns."

Jerry was furious. "That's crazy, who goes hunting without a hunting rifle? I'm going to be a laughing stock."

"I don't care if you're a laughing stock. I would rather have you come home embarrassed or humiliated than my having to deal with guilt and pain if something like that were to happen."

Jerry glared at his father, "You don't trust me, I knew it!" Jerry stepped over the bench and was about to storm off.

"Hold on," Jerry's father exclaimed. "I said before that it is not you that I have issues with. I trust you can control yourself, but I don't trust that you can control those other numbskulls. Anything can happen out there. Be angry all you want, but that's my final say. You can go, but you will not be taking one of my guns."

Head down, Jerry marched defiantly to the back door of the house.

"And Jerry," his father said, raising his voice a few decibels. "With or without a gun, I still don't think this is going to end well. When this is all over, don't let me say I told you so."

Those were the last words Jerry heard before he entered the house and slammed the door.

#### Chapter 4 – Camp

To get to the desired hunting spot the troupe had to leave State highway 191 and head west toward the river. The patchy route that was used consisted more of paths and trails than actual roads. At first the going was easy for the lack of much undergrowth. However, it eventually became treacherous the farther off the main road they went. The yellow Datsun snaked its way through the tall pines dodging as many bushes and saplings as it could. Even so, the way was rough and the car was feeling it. The older model vehicle noisily complained at every hole and branch it encountered. Some of the protests were so severe the boys weren't sure the smaller station wagon would survive the journey. But, it did. Twenty minutes after leaving the highway the vehicle came to a stop just outside of a small clearing.

“This is the place,” John triumphantly stated.

The near perfectly round clearing measured roughly 20 yards in diameter. It consisted of calf-high, brown grass with a few small sapling pines and leafless deciduous shrubs scattered throughout. Shortleaf pine trees at least 80 feet tall purposefully surrounded the site, standing as guards against the wind and sun. At the center of the clearing one could find a spectacular view straight up into a blue, cloudless sky.

The boys poured out of the car and enthusiastically stretched their limbs. After two plus hours of confinement in a cramped mobile box they were all ready to be up and about. They walked around for several minutes working out the kinks and quietly taking in their new surroundings. Daniel was the first to break the silence. "Is that the river I hear?"

"Yes, if I'm not mistaking, the Sabine is about 100 or so yards that way," John said, pointing toward the source of the noise.

"Wow, let's go see," said David, darting in the noted direction.

"Hold up," Jerry said. "Shouldn't we get settled first?" Of the four, Jerry was the voice of reason. In his mind if they setup first, they could play all they wanted afterward and they wouldn't have to worry about the labors.

"Oh, come on, you stuff shirt," Daniel replied. "It's early. We made it here in good time. Let's go check out the area. We can setup camp later." Daniel started after David. John looked at Jerry, shrugged, and headed off after the other two boys. Jerry stood for a few minutes. He looked first at the Datson and then turned toward the departing boys and watched as they gradually faded into the trees and shrubs. When they finally disappeared from site, he thought about unloading the car alone but quickly talked himself out of it. He decided he wouldn't do all the work while they had all the fun. He left to join the gang.

Jerry caught up with the others at the edge of the river. In the few brief minutes from when they departed to when Jerry arrived each of the boys had already settled on their activity of choice. David had removed his shoes and socks and he was making his way into the gently-flowing water. John was searching along the shoreline for smooth, flat stones to skip. And, Daniel had grabbed a long, pointed stick and was scouring the river's edge for any sign of life. He said he wanted to gig something.

None of those things sounded appealing to Jerry. Even though the climate in Louisiana was temperate, the river flowed from the north and it was November. The water was far too cold for wading. Rock skipping just sounded like more extra work than he wanted to do right then, and because it was November Jerry was pretty sure anything big enough to gig would be hard to find. Crawdads would be in hiding and larger fish would be in deeper waters. After only slight deliberation Jerry found a dry spot on a levy running alongside the river. He sat quietly and watched with mild interest the antics of the other three, but mostly, he basked in the serenity of nature.

Play time continued for a solid hour and finally concluded when Daniel pushed his brother into the river, soaking him from the waist down. David, near tears, waded back to shore, screaming all sorts of profanities along the way. Daniel and John just laughed. Jerry, observing from atop the small hill, wasn't as amused. In that instant words from his father echoed in his head. He was seeing it in context. The Morris boys were on the wild side and controlling their actions would be far more challenging than anticipated. Was his father right? Would this outing end poorly? Solemnly, he arose and started back toward the car.

The Datson was quickly unloaded; the gear was moved more into the clearing for quick, easy access. While David changed into dry clothes in the emptied vehicle, the other three boys worked on their shelter. They selected an area on the outskirts of the clearing where the ground was flat with few hazards to deal with. All the sticks and pinecones they could find were tossed aside to make for a smooth, level sleep site. David was back on the scene by the time clearing was completed.

The tent they brought was a green, six-man Coleman. It was rectangular in shape and came with an awning across the front. The tent was positioned facing into the clearing. With all



hands on deck, the shelter went up quickly and easily. The soft Louisiana soil accepted the stakes around the base graciously. With four stakes across the front and back and one more on each side, the floor was set firm in the ground. Three sets of metal poles elevated the roof, one shorter set on each side and one longer set in the middle. A couple more straight poles were used to stretch the awning.

With shelter in place the gear was put away. Sleeping bags, ground mats, blankets, and pillows went into the tent along with extra clothing. Coolers were set in front of the tent to the side of the front entry. Food bags were hung on a sturdy branch of a tree on one side of the tent. On the opposite side a line was strung between two of the pines to hang wet clothes. David had the honor of being the first to test the clothesline. The three guns, a Remington .22 caliber long rifle with scope, a Browning single-shot break-action 16 gauge shotgun, and a Winchester pump action 12 gauge shotgun, were leaned against the Datson alongside a shovel and an ax. Ammunition was locked inside the car.

In the center of the clearing a round, concaved hole about three feet in diameter and about six inches deep at the middle was dug. Large logs were dragged from the forest and positioned around the hole as a fire break. Four sizable tree stumps were found; they were posted on one side of the pit for seating. Larger dry logs and limbs were gathered and piled six feet off from the pit opposite the stumps. A second pile that included smaller sticks and branches was created next to the first. Finally, dry needles and pine cones were generously laid in the bottom of the hole as kindling. The fire pit was ready for action.

“So, let’s start a fire,” David said, way too enthusiastically. “I’m freezing.”

“I have a lighter,” John chimed in. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small red Bic butane and tossed it to Daniel, who was kneeling next to the hole.

In short order a crackling blaze was stretching to escape from the pit. “Oh, this is so nice,” David said. David was standing over the fire warming his wrinkly fingers. After ample fuel was added the rest of the boys gathered around as well. Quietly they absorbed the much anticipated heat, while enjoying the fragrant aroma of simmering pine. Minutes passed with only the occasional ping or pop from the burning logs disturbing the peace.

Finally, with each of them warmed and reenergized the boys broke out their lunch. The night before, they packed sandwiches, peanut butter and jelly, for the first day, knowing that they would be too busy with other camp related activities to worry about actually cooking. Each boy grabbed a sandwich and a canned soda, Daniel additionally grabbed a bag of nacho cheese Doritos, and they took their respective places on the stumps set up around the fire. The boys talked while they ate.

“How’d you like that river David?” Daniel chided. “I sure hope you brought extra pants, you’re going to be nasty, cold come Wednesday.”

“Shut up, Danny!” David shot back. “Mom’s going to hear about it when we get home.” Daniel just laughed.

“This is such a sweet spot, don’t you think?” John offered. “My cousin, Sammy, told me how to get here. He said he and his father came hunting here last month and they saw all sorts of things.”

“Did they camp here, or just walk through?” Jerry asked. “The site was pretty raw when we arrived. It didn’t look like anyone had actually stayed here before.”

“They walked through,” John continued. “They were just hunting for the day, not necessarily camping. But, when he described the location I knew it would be a great place to camp. At least it sounded cool.”

“All I care about,” said Danial, looking at John skeptically. “Is whether or not they killed anything.”

“Yah,” blurted David. “Did they kill anything?”

“Well, he didn’t say they actually got anything, he said a few of the animals they saw were too far away for a good shot. They did shoot at a few squirrels but they weren’t able to knock any out of the trees.”

“Didn’t you say you hiked through here before and saw tons of animals?” Daniel continued. “The reason I ask is because driving through the woods I don’t recall seeing anything, not even a bird.”

“From the front seat I saw a rabbit dart in front of the car,” Jerry provided. “It was a good sized cotton tail. So, there are animals out here.”

“Yah, I saw that too,” John added. “And, I thought I saw a couple of squirrels in a sassafras tree along the way. I can’t be sure though.”

“Why didn’t you guys say something, because I didn’t see nothing,” David said.

“You can’t say you didn’t see nothing,” poked Jerry. “That’s a double negative. That means you saw everything.”

“Yah, you twerp! Who taught you how to talk English?” Daniel said. John laughed, more at Daniel’s comment than at David. Jerry even found some humor in it and he laughed too.

“Stop it, Danny! You’re going to be in big trouble,” David whined.

The boys continued to eat in silence. Then Daniel said, “So, why didn’t you say anything about the animals, John?”

John was hoping the question would be forgotten, he was starting to feel like he was being put on the spot. After all, this area was his recommendation. Bad hunting would be a bad

reflection on him. “Well, I was a little busy trying to dodge trees, logs, and holes.” He stammered. “I had other, more pressing things on my mind.” He paused and after a few seconds of thought he continued. “So, what if we didn’t see anything on the way? I can only imagine that a noisy car rumbling through the forest would have scared away everything for miles.”

“I would agree with that,” added Jerry, coming to John’s rescue. Jerry looked at Daniel. “I don’t think a car barreling through the trees, crushing log and limb, would attract wildlife. Do you?” John anxiously laughed.

“Well, that makes sense,” Daniel relented. “Still, because I didn’t see any animals coming across and I didn’t see any signs of life down by the river, I am just a teeny, tiny bit skeptical.” He said, with a touch of sarcasm.

“Relax, Daniel!” Jerry said. “There’s wildlife out there, you can be sure.”

“There better be,” Daniel replied.

“Is everyone done with lunch?” John asked. All heads nodded. “Then let’s go see what is out there. It’s time to go hunting.”

Sandwich wrappings were tossed into the fire as the boys stood in unison and headed to the guns.

## Chapter 5 – The Hunt

Each of the boys grabbed their respective rifles, all except Jerry. John loaded three shells into the 12 gauge, but held back on pumping one into the chamber. He filled the pockets of his goose down jacket with about a dozen additional shells. Daniel had brought an orange hunting vest; two dozen shells occupied the little pockets that surrounded it. He popped the latch of the break-action 16 gauge and pushed one into the open barrel. Until needed, he kept the barrel broke. David took a dozen .22 long rifle shells and loaded the Remington. He put the rest of a small box into his coat pocket. While the other boys were arming themselves, so as not to be caught empty handed Jerry foraged around for a long, straight stick. He wasn't exactly sure what good it would do, but holding something that was gun-like made him feel more a part of the team.

Armed and ready the hunt began. The group quietly walked about a hundred yards or so south of camp. Still facing south the three with guns formed a straight line. They stood side by side with about 30 feet separating each of them. John was in the middle, Daniel and David occupied the wings. Jerry stayed back about 10 feet just off of John's left shoulder. In the new formation, they slowly continued south, watching and listening for any signs of prey. So as not to

be too intrusive, when they communicated they kept their voices low, the volume just above a whisper.

The small company marched for about an hour without seeing anything worth the price of a shell. After another half hour or so the serene sounds of nature were unexpectedly shattered by David. “This stinks!” He hollered, “There’s nothing out here.”

Almost in unison the other three responded at once.

“Shut up, David!” Daniel exclaimed. “What’s the matter with you?”

“Hush,” said John. “If there was anything near, it won’t be near for long.”

“Gees, David,” Jerry replied. “Get a grip, dude! Have some patience.”

“Why?” David shot back in the direction of the others. He spoke at a volume well above a whisper. “There’s really nothing out here. Sure I heard a few bird calls, but we’ve been at it for almost two hours now and we haven’t seen a single thing. This is crap!”

The boys all gathered with John and Jerry to continue the discussion.

“That may be true,” Daniel jabbed him in the side. “But you still need to be quiet. You never know where an animal might be lurking.”

“Let’s stop for a few minutes,” interjected John. “We can sit down, rest up, and when we are relaxed, we can continue.”

David glared back at John, “I don’t want to rest, I want to kill something!” He whined.

“I can’t argue with that,” Daniel added.

It was pretty apparent to all that patience was no longer a member of the team. Even though David was the only one voicing it, both Daniel and John were showing tell-tale signs of fatigue and frustration.

“Maybe John’s right,” Jerry said. “I think a brief rest will do us all some good.”

“I’m actually with David on this one. I didn’t come here to rest,” Daniel shot back. “I came here to hunt.” Danial was looking straight at John when he said it.

“Maybe all the animals are hanging out at the river,” Jerry offered.

“That’s a good point,” John added. “Maybe we should head over toward the river and make our way back north along the shoreline. We probably should be heading back anyway. There are not that many hours of daylight left.”

All agreed. Jerry added, looking in David’s direction, “And, we will want to be quiet as we go.” David just scoffed.

The boys headed west toward the Sabine. Upon arriving at the river’s edge they turned back north and again took up the formation. Moving slowly they started back in the direction of the camp. The soothing flow of river seemed to both calm and energize the group, because the boys proceeded with renewed purpose and conviction. However, the effect was short lived. Still not seeing a thing worth shooting, less than thirty minutes into the march the rest of the boys noticed that an off-key rendition of the Bee Gee’s *Tragedy* was coming from David. At first everyone just stared at him in disbelief. Then from out of nowhere, Daniel bellowed, “When the feeling's gone and you can't go on, It's tragedy”. Everyone laughed. That pretty much set the tone for the next 30 minutes of walking. Singing low and in some cases terribly out-of-tune a number of current hits followed. The Knack’s *My Sharona* was followed by Supertramp’s *The Logical Song* which was followed by something else. After a while the boys paid more attention to the singing than to the hunting. Finally, all out of both patience and songs the group broke rank and headed to the river.

At the river’s edge, Daniel and David decided they needed to scratch their itchy trigger fingers. In very short order competitions broke out to see who could hit given targets at various

distances. John even joined the fray. The boys shot at just about everything. Not a stick, stump, or branch in the near proximity was safe. Even Jerry, borrowing guns from the other boys, got a few shots in. The group fired off several dozen cumulative rounds before finally feeling better about life. However, they soon realized that with all the commotion the chance of bagging game at that point was less than nil. It was time to call it a day. Gathering their things and picking up as many empty shell casings as they could find, the boys headed back to camp.

On route to camp the four youth walked in a fairly tight group with John in the lead position. They moved with an air of nonchalance, without really paying attention to their surroundings. In their minds, the hunt was over. There was no longer a place for subtlety. The level of talking and joking escalated as they drew closer to camp. The volume had become so loud in fact that they were lucky that John was able to hear the noise when he did. He froze in his track, putting his arms out to stop the rest of the group.

“Do you hear that?” He asked, excitedly.

“I didn’t hear anything,” Jerry replied.

“Hear what?” David hollered.

“Shush,” John demanded. “Listen! There’s something rustling up ahead.”

The boys went quiet; each strained to hear what John was talking about. Minutes passed before John said, “There it is again, it sounds like an animal rooting around in the brush just over that hill.” He pointed to a small levy twenty yards ahead of them.

“I heard it that time,” Daniel said.

A new level of excitement was had by all as a flood of adrenaline coursed through each boy. In a flash they moved toward the source of the sounds. The three with guns took the lead. They moved as quickly and quietly as they could, working to reload their weapons along the



way. Jerry took up the rear. Slowly they crested the hill and peered down the opposite side. At first they didn't see or hear anything, the noises they had been chasing were no more. They didn't know if the animal had fled, or if the animal had even been there at all. Perhaps, they were just hearing things. Still, they sat silently and watched for several more minutes. Finally using hand gestures Daniel got everyone's attention and pointed toward a patch of trees and shrubs forty yards in front and to the left of where they were hiding. Discernable movement could be seen in a sizable clump of bushes. "Something is there," he whispered.

The boys crept over the hill using any and all available cover to disguise their intentions. Cautiously they inched closer to the site of the commotion. While the three with guns held their weapons at ready, none wanted to fire until they knew exactly what they were firing at. So, they patiently watched and waited. Finally, without warning a large animal burst forth from the brush. Even though the boys were prepared, excitement took over and bullets started flying. The explosions were fast and frequent. The unsuspecting animal, not knowing which way to turn, just stood there and cried out in fear and pain. After the first volley the boys paused to assess the state of their prey. They peered through the heavy plumes of gun smoke only to find that the squealing beast was dazed and confused, but it was still on its feet. Again, shots rang out, but this time the boys left no doubt. The second volley continued until all sounds from their unfortunate prey ceased all together.

In due time all gunfire ended and the smoke cleared. The apprehensive youth cautiously advanced to the kill zone. Arriving at the scene, Jerry poked the fallen creature with his stick to confirm the kill. It didn't flinch; the beast was dead. The four boys formed a circle around the new trophy and shared a moment of quiet reverence. They were in awe. The serenity was eventually disturbed when David softly muttered, "Wow, we bagged a wild pig."

## Chapter 6 – Big Game

“Ham for Thanksgiving,” Daniel softly said. He was all smiles when he said it.

“I didn’t even know wild pigs roamed in these parts,” John said.

“What if it’s not wild?” Jerry asked. “It looks like any other pig I have ever seen. Could it belong to someone?”

“Are you kidding me,” Daniel jeered. “Of course it’s wild. I don’t see any brands or tags. And, even if it isn’t, it really shouldn’t be roaming free in the middle of nowhere. I don’t think there’s a farm or ranch for miles. If this little piggy belongs to someone, he’s a long way from home.”

“I really don’t think it matters at this point,” John injected. “He’s dead. It would be huge waste if we didn’t do something with it now.”

The boys stood quietly and stared down at the animal. David said, “Speaking of, what are we going to do with it?”

“I don’t know,” John said. “I guess I didn’t give it that much thought.”

“You mean you weren’t really expecting to kill something?” asked Daniel. “That says a lot.”

“No, I was totally expecting to kill something, but I never thought it would be anything this size,” John replied. “I’m not quite sure how to proceed.”

“Anyone actually dressed an animal before?” Daniel asked.

“In my younger days, I raised rabbits for food,” Jerry offered. “I’ve skinned and gutted dozens of them.”

“This ain’t no rabbit,” John said.

“True. But, I think the process is the same. Remove the head, remove the innards, and remove the skin and fat. What’s left is meat. How hard could it be?”

“Well then Dr. Frankenstein, I guess you are it,” Daniel sarcastically snorted.

“Does anyone have a good knife?” John asked.

David pulled out a red Swiss Army knife with a two inch blade and held it out in his hand. The other boys looked at the knife and looked at the pig. All at once they burst into laughter. After the group regained composure Jerry pulled up the side of his coat and unsnapped the strap holding a Buck sheath knife with a six inch blade.

“I wasn’t able to bring a gun,” he said. “But, I do have my knife.” He pulled it out of its case and held it up for the other boys to see. “A present for my thirteenth birthday, I think this will do the trick,” he said, smiling brightly. He let the moment linger and then returned the knife to the sheath. “Since I couldn’t be a part of the kill, skinning the pig will be my contribution.”

“Excellent,” said John.

“That’s all good and well,” said Daniel. But, if we are going to do this, we first need to get this thing back to camp.”

“True,” John offered. “How are we going to do that, it certainly can’t walk there.” David laughed.

“Everyone grab a leg,” Daniel commanded. “We’ll drag it back to camp.”

The pig was large; the boys estimated that it measured at least four feet from its snout to its wiggly little tail and weighed around 300 pounds. The length of the beast was determined by having David lie down next to it. Figuring the weight was not so easy. While they couldn’t exactly put the animal on a scale to get an exact measure, they were able to come to a number based on the effort needed to drag it. They estimated anything as heavy had to weigh at least 300 pounds. While their guess was not derived scientifically, the figure they settled on would ultimately prove to be fairly accurate.

Getting it back to camp was not easy. At times the troupe had to weave around logs and limbs and climb over hills and holes. It wasn’t long though, the animal safely arrived at the base.

“Now, what?” John asked, panting a little from exertion.

“We need to string it up by its hind legs,” Jerry replied. Jerry was also noticeably winded. “Find a couple of trees about six feet apart that have fairly low hanging branches. We can use those to hoist the pig.”

After selecting a spot across the clearing from the tent, the boys tied ropes around the two hind legs just above the ankles. They tossed the ropes over branches, one rope per tree, and with two boys on each rope they raised the pig off the ground in a spread-eagle posture, with belly facing the clearing. Once the ropes were tied off, securing the animal in place, the pig was ready for cleaning.

Jerry cut the pig’s throat to bleed out the animal. So as to keep camp as clean as possible a five gallon bucket, originally brought to keep clothes dry, was used to catch the flow. The head was then removed and set aside. A deep slit was made from the pig’s crotch all the way to the throat, opening the pig up completely. Entrails spilled from the beast and spread out on the

ground. As much as was possible the innards were gathered and put into a second five gallon bucket. Finally, incisions were made from the middle cut straight up all four legs and the skin was peeled off. The end result was a carcass much like one would see in a butcher shop.

When the work was all done John said, "Not bad, that looks almost professional."

"I have to say," Daniel added. "I am impressed. Nicely done!"

"Thanks!" Jerry replied. "But now, I'm a disgusting mess." Blood and other bodily fluids from the pig covered just about every square inch of Jerry's body, soaking his clothes and staining his shoes.

"Yah," said David. "And, you don't smell so good either." The other three boys laughed. Jerry found some humor in it as well, but in his current state he didn't feel much like laughing.

"I really need to go get cleaned up," Jerry said.

"Wait. What are we supposed to do with all this?" John asked, pointing to the remains. "It's going to be dark soon and we can't have it around camp. It could attract predators."

"What predators are here in Louisiana?" Daniel jeered.

"Have you never heard of the Louisiana Black Bear?" John replied. "They can be found from East Texas to west Mississippi. I certainly don't want one of them marching into camp. There are also foxes and bobcats. And anyway, even if there are no predators nearby, I don't want this stuff stinking up the place."

"That alone is a good point," Jerry added. "This stuff will go to stink real fast. We really should get rid of it."

"What are we supposed to do with it?" David asked.

"Take it out of camp, maybe a couple hundred yards to the east, away from the Sabine, and bury it," Jerry suggested. "I would help, but I need to get to the river before the sun sets."

“Yes, please do,” Daniel said, while holding his nose and pretending to gag. Again the group thought that was funny. When everyone stopped laughing Daniel continued giving orders.

“John, if you can drag the skin, I will get the buckets. David, you can carry the head.”

“I don’t want to carry the head,” David whined. “It’s creepy, the eyes are still open.”

“Just carry the head,” Daniel barked. “And, grab the shovel when we walk by the car.”

The three boys headed east to bury the remains and Jerry headed west to clean up at the river. They met back together about forty-five minutes later, just in time for the sun to descend behind the western horizon. In the waning glow of evening a fire was quickly stoked providing warmth and spreading illumination across the camp.

“So, what do we do about the pig?” John asked.

Daniel replied, “We probably should get it out of here. It obviously won’t fit in our coolers, even if we cut it in chunks, and I don’t know how long meat stays good out in the open.”

“I don’t, either,” added John. “But, there’s no way we are leaving tonight. It was bad enough driving out here in the daylight. We are not getting out of here in the dark. Even with the moon, it’s pitch black under the trees.”

Jerry said, “It feels pretty cool out right now, I can see my breath.” He blow out of his mouth and watched as the vapor from the exhale glistened in the dancing light of the fire. “It won’t be frozen, but I think the pig will be fine until morning. Then we can clean up and go.”

“Sounds good to me,” Daniel acknowledged.

“I agree,” John said. “And, anyway I don’t think we have much choice. Let’s hunker down and we can leave at first light.”

The other three nodded agreement.

“Now, can we have dinner?” David asked.