

The Legend

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Chapter 1

The legend began very early in Jerry's life, even before he was old enough to tell it. It started with his brother, Wayne, who was five years older than Jerry. Wayne told him stories about his older sister, Marie. At first the stories were tame enough. Marie was a nuisance. Every chance she got, she would frighten him and Dave, another of Jerry's brothers. Marie liked to hide in dark places and jump out when they least expected. On occasion she wore masks and costumes for effect. One time she dressed as Frankenstein and another time she dressed as the Creature from the Black Lagoon. The way Wayne described it every day was Halloween around their house.

By the time Jerry was five the tales grew taller and became far more sinister. Marie inflicted actual pain and suffering. According to them, in her younger days she developed some sort of a home-grown, hybrid martial art. It consisted of part karate, part judo, and part jujitsu. She used the two older boys for practice at every possible opportunity. She kicked them, threw

them to the ground, and tied them in knots. Dave corroborated some of the stories. They described certain encounters with vivid detail.

The legend finally topped out when Jerry was seven, two summers ago. He remembers it well. Their father took the three boys camping and fishing at Bundick's Lake. Bundick's was a small man made reservoir located south-east of the town they called home. The evening of the first night presented the perfect setting to solidify the legend. It was a cloudless night with a full moon. Father was away from camp checking on some poles he left at the lakes edge. He was fishing for big catfish. The three boys sat alone around a crackling camp fire torching marshmallows. Wayne told the story while Dave, who was two years older than Jerry, played along. Jerry clung to every word.

"About six months ago poor Brian Jones made a fatal mistake. Brian knew of Marie's fighting skills, so he was wise enough to keep his distance. But, he didn't know of her other skills. He taunted Marie, and he thought he could do it from afar. He didn't know that Marie played baseball. While she wasn't a pitcher, she had the arm for it. She could throw with frightening power and uncanny accuracy. It's always the unknown that comes back to bite one. On that day Brian danced around, making faces and calling names. With the composure of a debutant Marie picked up a softball and hurled it. Brian never saw it coming. Like a bullet shot from a rifle, the ball flew fast, straight, and hard. It connected with Brian's forehead with a thud. He dropped like a rock, landing face first in a mud puddle. An ambulance came to pick him up. Brian was out cold, medics had to use a gurney to get him into the vehicle. The family had to move to another city, a bigger city, to get adequate medical attention for their son. Brian hasn't been heard from since."

That was the story. Wayne concluded it with a few simple statements. "Marie did that. She was scarier than an ugly monster and meaner than an angry badger. Keep your distance!"

That night Jerry couldn't sleep. He lay awake nestled in his sleeping bag listening to the sounds of nature and thinking. The story Wayne told was unbelievable, but it struck a nerve. The Jones' moved away several months before, Jerry knew that. But, the reason was never made clear. Actually, he never asked. Brian wasn't much of a friend. The way Jerry saw it, if Marie smacked him with a ball, he probably had it coming. But that wasn't the point, was it? Did she do it or didn't she? He didn't think she was that scary, she didn't have horns or flaming red eyes. But, was she that mean?

Over the remaining days of that camping trip Jerry thought back on some of the other stories his brothers had told. He had a hard time accepting them. According to the stories, she did a lot of things but he couldn't remember seeing any of the things she supposedly did. Marie never jumped out of any hiding places to scare him. She never kicked him, punched him, or tossed him around. For that matter, he couldn't remember seeing her do any of those things to either of them. None of it added up.

Still, Jerry had some concerns. Each time one of the boys told a story, it was usually built around some juicy piece of physical evidence. There was always an injury to support their claim. If it wasn't a cut or scratch received during a fight with Marie it was a bruise caused by a baseball or rock that she threw. One time, one of them even sported a clear, identifiable bite mark. He remembered seeing that. And of course, there was Brian.

There was no arguing, Brian's family moved away. That was important. In Jerry's mind, he could overlook a single story. But, the preponderance of stories was difficult to ignore. Doubts started to flood his mind, and he couldn't help but think about it. Was Marie that bad?

Jerry returned from that camping trip more confused than ever. Marie was his sister. The two of them should have been close but they weren't, in part due to the tall tales but more due to the difference in age. She was seven years his elder and they didn't share much in common. Sure, they talked on occasion, but they seldom had a lot to talk about. The exchanges were usually short and often lacked real substance. He came to realize, good, bad, or otherwise, he didn't know his sister.

After the camping trip, that summer turned into autumn and autumn ushered in the start of a new school year. It was then that Jerry discovered he no longer had to worry about Marie. She started high school. It was her ninth grade year. Intramural activities, sporting events, and social engagements all seemed to steal her away. She and he never interacted. Her tenth grade year was even worse than the ninth, or better depending on perspective. Marie was never around.

Since the camping trip, there were other stories. But as time passed the tales came fewer and farther between. And it seemed, at least to Jerry, that they came with less intensity. Jerry figured it was because Marie was off to bigger and better things. Her alleged antics became old news. Soon the stories faded all together. The legend died. But, the mystery surrounding the legend lived on.

It was summer again, two whole years since the campout. Jerry was nine. While the stories had stopped, the doubts hadn't. Jerry had questions that remained unanswered and concerns that remained unaddressed. That bothered Jerry, then more than ever. There was something important he wanted to do, something that required help from Marie. Jerry needed to talk to her, he needed a favor. But, did he dare ask?

Had Marie done all the terrible things Wayne and Dave told him? Was she even capable of such acts? Was she the monster his brothers described? Was she the legend? He didn't think so. But then, he didn't know. For his own sake, he had to know. Little did he know, he was about to find out.

Chapter 2

The Schwinn Stingray stood propped up on its kick stand next to the back door of the house. Jerry eyed the bicycle with deep appreciation. It was a real beauty! It had a blue frame and a white banana style seat. A blue two inch stripe the color of the frame spanned the seat from tip to tail. The bike sported butterfly style handlebars capped with white rubber grips. Blue and silver, sparkly tassels decorated the grips. Jerry walked around the vehicle several times admiring it. Except for the tassels it was perfect.

Jerry loved to ride. His family lived outside of a small town. So far out in fact that his driveway and the road leading up to it remained unpaved. Since he wasn't quite old enough to drive a car, he didn't have many travel options. To go anywhere, to a friend's house or even to his favorite fishing hole, he had to either walk or ride a bike. He preferred a bike.

Walking wasn't against his religion or his principals, but with a bike, he could generate a breeze. That was very important, especially in the summer. Louisiana was hotter than a habanero in the summer. The high heat and humidity in the region made most outdoor activities

unbearable. Walking along a hot, dusty road really should have been outlawed. But it wasn't. So, when Jerry had places to go, he still went. A bike, if one was available, shortened travel time and provided a refreshing breeze along the way.

Unfortunately, Jerry didn't have a bike of his own. The Stingray was not his, though he wished it was, or at least one similar. Jerry wanted a bike more than anything, and he was about ready to do anything to get one.

Jerry thought back to his eighth birthday, his father made him a deal. It was pretty much the same offer made to all the siblings. If the kids earned half the cost, the parents would buy them a bike. Jerry took the challenge to heart and vowed that he would have the needed funds in no time. In his mind, he was getting a bike for that next Christmas.

Jerry took on chores. He got on a schedule to carry out the garbage, keep his room tidy, and help with the dishes. One night he would wash, the next night he would dry and put away. He also arranged to tend to the hunting dogs his father was raising, Irish Setters. Each day he fed and watered them and cleaned their kennels. He even offered to do chores for each of his brothers at discounted rates. Each day Jerry did what he could to reach his goal. Each night he counted his earnings to measure his progress.

His savings grew, though progress was slower than planned. So, Jerry went outside the home to look for other financial opportunities. A neighbor in a farm up the hill had a small herd of American Quarter Horses. The farmer's name was John Brocker. Mr. Brocker often hired Jerry to take care of the horses when he was away. Jerry led the animals from their stalls to a horse walker. He clipped them to a metal revolving structure and let them trot around in a large circle. While the horses worked out, Jerry scooped the poop from each stall and added fresh hay. It wasn't dignified work, but it brought in extra cash.

Jerry found other opportunities along the way. There were lawns to mow, weeds to pull, and vegetables to pick. More often than not, the work he found was hard, but that didn't bother him. Even though he was young and small for his age, he wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty. Jerry watched his savings grow. Money rolled in and his jar filled at an encouraging pace. Christmas was going to be merry.

Then he noticed a phenomenon. It was all his own doing, he knew. But he couldn't seem to get a handle on it. It started as a one-time thing. But, then it happened a second time, and then a third. Jerry found himself taking his earnings and spending the money on other things. First, there was a new edition Batman comic book. That was a must have. Then there was the 12 pound test line for his Zebco fishing reel. How else could he land the largest of the large-mouth bass? And, of course there were movie theatres and skating rinks. There always seemed to be something.

Soon, the seasons changed and earning opportunities diminished. Money continued to flow, but not as fast. It was more of a trickle. While he didn't spend all his savings, he didn't reach his savings goal either. Christmas came and went, and there was no bike under the tree for Jerry. He felt terrible, but it was winter. A bike was not as essential. He promised to attack the problem again in the spring.

Spring came and Jerry went back to work, only to find himself falling into the same bad habits. He earned, he spent. The next several months brought more of the same. He couldn't seem to get over the hump. Finally, Jerry realized that if he was to earn the needed money, it would have to come in one lump sum. He needed to do something spectacular.

One day, Jerry watched a television program called The Wide World of Sports. The show aired every Saturday afternoon. As the title suggested each episode had a sport, or some kind of

sporting event, as its theme. One segment in particular caught his attention. Evel Kneivel, a motorcycle daredevil, performed an amazing stunt. On a Harley-Davidson XR-750, Mr. Kneivel jumped fourteen school busses. It was an event Jerry would never forget.

While the jump itself was impressive, the show was spectacular. It was an extravaganza, complete with stage, lights, costumes, crew, and crowds. And, who could forget the motorcycle, the Harley? Jerry didn't have a motorcycle, even if he did, he wouldn't know how to ride it. But that didn't matter. Jerry would soon have a bike. The TV program gave him an idea, one to which he gave a great deal of consideration.

After days of hammering out the details, a brilliant plan emerged. There were a few small problems left to iron out. First, the irony of ironies, Jerry needed a bike to get a bike. And second, the bike he needed, the Schwinn Stingray, belonged to Marie.

Chapter 3

Deep in thought, Jerry gazed at the Schwinn for what seemed an eternity. Wayne and Dave had bicycles and Jerry considered using one of theirs to carry out his plan. That is until he saw the bikes.

The two boys neglected their vehicles. Neither of them put a lot into maintenance. Jerry always believed for a bike to stay functional it required regular servicing. Spokes needed checking and tightening. Chains and bearings needed oiling and lubing. Tire pressure needed monitoring and air needed adding if the pressure was too low. Wayne and Dave never did any of those things. The machines were too often forgotten and abused. Due to lack of upkeep their bikes were much older than their years.

They were also reckless. The older boys loved to jump things. They jumped their bikes whenever and wherever they could. They jumped off hills, over creeks, and across ditches. One time Dave tried to jump a barbed wire fence. That didn't end well. In hindsight their attempts seldom ended well. More often than not the jumps would culminate in a catastrophic collision or

crash. In just the last few years alone Jerry had witnessed more bike accidents than he could even remember. Fortunately, the crashes rarely produced serious bodily injury, but the bikes often took a merciless beating.

The worst part of all, after they crashed a bike if they didn't want to do repairs right then, they walked away. The bike remained in a heap. In their minds, the bike wasn't going anywhere. The next time they needed it, they did the repairs then. It was a lazy approach, but that was the way it was. And, to Jerry that was the bigger problem.

Earlier in the week he inspected both machines and each appeared to be between uses. They had issues. Wayne's bicycle wasn't so bad. It only had a flat tire, a loose chain, and handle bars bent to one side. Jerry could have fixed those problems in no time at all. Dave's bike, however, was much worse. Both tires were flat. It had a crooked seat. One of the pedals lay on the ground next to the bike. And, the chain was off the front cog. While the bicycle wasn't totaled, it was real close. Fixing that would have been more of a challenge.

Of the two, Jerry was more concerned about the condition of Dave's bike. He would have preferred to use it. Wayne owned a larger bicycle with a classic box frame. It was big, it was ugly, and more than anything it was too tall for Jerry to straddle. Dave's bike was shorter and sportier. To complete his plan Jerry needed the shorter bike, and to look good while completing his plan he wanted sportier. After performing the inspection, it didn't seem to matter. Neither bike was in any kind of shape to ride. As much as he hated to admit it, his best option was the bike he was admiring, Marie's Stingray.

"What are you looking at, kid?" Jerry was so deep in thought he didn't see Marie move in behind him. The question startled him. But, that was nothing compared to the panic that struck

him when he realized who was asking the question. He had to take a few seconds to compose himself.

“Um, I was, um, looking at your bike,” He finally said, forcing a smile.

“Oh, you were, were you?” She was watching him like a cat stalking a mouse.

Jerry was nervous, even more so than he thought he would be. He knew that this moment would come, to use the bike he would need to talk to her. Throughout the week, he even tried to prepare himself for this event. But, as she towered over him, all the mental exercising seemed to be for not. Jerry couldn't remember his own name.

“Why?” Marie asked, glaring down at him.

“I..., I was hoping...” Jerry swallowed hard.

“What, what were you hoping?” She asked, showing her impatience. “Spit it out child, I don't have all day.”

“I..., Can I borrow your bike?” He finally blurted. He looked up at her with pleading eyes.

Marie stood up straight, folded her arms across her chest, and glared at him, eyes intent. For Jerry time stopped. It was so quiet he could hear his own heartbeat. Marie was about to speak when from around the corner a familiar voice rang out, it was their mother.

“Come on Marie, we have a lot to get done today. If we're going, you need to come now.”

“Coming mom,” She hollered over her shoulder. Looking back at Jerry she said, “I've got to go, now. When I get home we'll have a little chat. I'll want to know what you plan to do with it. Until then, keep your hands off my bike. Understand?”

“But, I...”

“We’ll talk later,” She said.

Marie then turned and trotted off around the corner. Jerry followed after her, shouting in desperation, “But, I need it today. Where are you going? When’s later?”

“Later,” She said, barking the word.

She then climbed into the front passenger side of the tan Colony Park station wagon. With the closing of the car door, the discussion ended. The auto sped away, leaving Jerry standing alone. He watched as the car barreled down the dirt road and disappeared over the horizon.

That wasn’t so bad, he thought. She didn’t say, ‘Yes’, but she didn’t exactly say, ‘No’, either.

Even more encouraging to Jerry, she didn’t kick, bite, punch, or scratch. To him that was a victory in itself.