

HILLSIDE AVENUE

John Boston

The house was built sometime between the world wars. It was right in the middle of Hillside Avenue. It was a multi-family house with huge rooms and a huge basement. Everything about the house was gigantic, or so it seemed to my ten-year-old self. Our family had occupied the house for nearly forty years. Three generations lived in it, grew up in it, and died in it. I lived in the house for a short time after I was born, as did my cousins.

My grandfather was about as nondescript a person as you could find. He grew up amid the depression, fought and nearly died in the second world war, came back home, and raised a family, like so many millions of others had done. He never talked much about his time in the pacific. I think his silence said more than anything else. He had a combat patch from Guadalcanal, which he gave to my father. That was it. He never advertised his war experience, never embellished it, never really wanted anything to do with it. I once asked him about what it was like to be in a war and he just replied that "war is the most horrible thing there is." A statement that even now, decades later rings just as true.

I don't really know much about my grandfather. He went to church every Sunday. The church was big in our house. He worked for decades at a factory in town, working his way up to general manager. He probably forgot more about the business than most MBAs will ever know. He was a good man, the kind of man that built this country and defeated the Nazis, which is why what I found in his basement on that cold spring morning astonished me.

The basement of the house contained all sorts of relics and treasures. My grandfather loved bicycles and had dozens of them scattered all throughout the basement and garage. He actually rode bicycles twenty miles back and forth from work for years. They were his guilty pleasure. He had a giant pool table in one of the rooms that he and my father and uncle assembled piece by piece one sweltering summer. No one in the house seemed to use it.

He had closets of used bowling equipment and old radios that were in varying states of disrepair. He had tools and more tools. The lighting in the basement was quite poor. You had to watch your step, otherwise, you were risking injury. It seemed like the basement became a giant storage bin for everyone's passions at some obscure moment in their lives. There were old audio recordings of Star Trek episodes. No video, just the audio recordings of the old TV set when they were first aired. There were old comic books from the 1960s and 70s. Baseball bats and catcher's mitts. My grandfather loved the Red Sox, they were the pride of New England and still are.

I would spend hours down in the basement just wandering around, opening boxes and jars. I found Christmas decorations so old, they fell apart in my hands. I found the local newspaper from the day I was born, not much exciting happened. I found some kind of old projection machine that was probably very expensive when it was new. I found all kinds of mysterious and

wonderful things. The basement was an unopened treasure chest. It was my treasure chest, just waiting to be rediscovered.

I remember the day vividly. It was about the middle of April, right around my birthday. I had just turned ten. I remember it being very cold that morning my mother had dropped me off at the house. I had some breakfast upstairs with my grandmother. My grandfather wasn't home. He had gone to do some errand for the church. Grandma kind of left me to my own devices, which meant watching TV, or treasure hunting downstairs. Playing with the other kids in the neighborhood was kind of a no-go for me. I was very socially awkward then and probably still am to this day. That was the best part about hanging out with grandparents: *they didn't give a shit how awkward I was*, they loved me anyway. I remember sitting out on the front porch watching the cars go by. That lasted for about ten minutes, then I made my way downstairs. The cellar door was metal.....like real goddamn metal. It must have weighed a ton. Why on Earth the basement had a metal door I have no idea, but it did. I remember the last time I was down there, I had found an old metal chest, buried way in the back. The chest had been locked and I ran out of time trying to open it. That was not going to happen today. One way or another *that chest was going to open for all to see*. Like most ten-year-olds, I should have realized there was probably a very good reason it was locked and I should just have put it away and moved on to something else, but I was ten, my critical thinking skills were still in their infancy. I guess I figured if it were really that important, it wouldn't be sitting down here in the basement.

I had watched other people pick locks on TV and figured if they could do it, so could I. I spent the next hour or so trying to pry the lock off. When that didn't work I tried to pick the lock with any tool I could find. He had a bunch of really small screwdrivers that fit in the lock, which must have been fifty years old. Now, how I managed to open it, I have no idea. After about half an hour, I finally heard something click and the top of the lock came off. It had been locked for so long it wouldn't come off, I had to force it to open with a screwdriver. I tossed the lock on the floor. I was so proud of myself. I figured I may actually have a bright career ahead of me like a burglar or something. I grabbed a flashlight and opened the chest. It was just sitting there in a jar, right along with a very bloody sweatshirt. I took it out and held it up to the light. I almost dropped it as soon as I saw what it was.

It was a hand. Somebody.....or something's hand was in this jar in my grandfather's basement. It was not a regular hand, it had long and thin fingers. It was white. its nails were over an inch long. It wasn't so much a hand, *it was more like a claw*. I took out the bloodied shirt in the chest as well. It was very old, it must have been in that chest for decades. My ten-year-old world was just turned upside down.

I quickly put the jar and shirt back in the chest. I looked inside for more clues, but there weren't any. That's all there was inside. Well, not quite, there was a very large, bloodied hunting knife in the chest as well. This chest was wrong.....*very wrong*. This chest was so out of place down here in this basement, it simply shouldn't be here. There are just cool old things down here, not weird hands and bloody clothes.

I knew better than to go to grandma. She had lost her hearing in the 1950s. She had tuberculosis in her kidneys. The doctors at the time were clearly not too familiar with the side effects of intravenous antibiotics. The medicine saved her life, but they gave her way too much and it blew

out her eardrums. My grandfather was just happy to have her back, even if she did not come back one hundred percent. Her speech was perfectly normal, you would never know she was completely deaf. She was a grandmother in just about every sense of the word. She had stopped progressing socially around 1935 and found no reason to do so. She was an almost militant catholic and her house was adorned with just about every catholic knick-knack imaginable. Even my ten-year-old self knew better than to hit her with something like this. There was only one person who could solve this riddle and his car had just pulled into the driveway.

He gave me a big hug. He was a pretty big guy, about 220 pounds or so. He had giant hands that looked like they could pound nails. He always wore these coveralls, as a mechanic would wear in his garage. Made sense, since he was always working on something greasy or dirty. We sat down for lunch. My grandfather didn't say much, we just talked about the Red Sox. I waited until grandma had gone to watch TV before I opened my mouth. He must have sensed something was out of place.

"You're awfully quiet," he said between bites of his sandwich.

"Grandpa.....I found something in the basement today."

"Oh yeah, what did you find?"

"I found an old chest, with somebody's hand in it."

My grandfather stopped eating and put his sandwich down. The expression on his face had changed and not for the better.

"That chest was locked. Why did you open it?" he asked sternly.

"I don't know, I figured it was an old chest in the basement. I didn't know what was inside." I said almost hysterically.

"Things are locked for a reason. You shouldn't go opening locked doors or chests."

"Yes sir," I said meekly and looked away from him.

He continued eating. I knew I had just opened a can of worms. Grandpa was not amused.

"Finish up. We're going down to the basement," he said.

Grandma came in to take away our plates.

"Any dessert?" she asked

"No thanks hon, I'm going to show my grandson his new birthday present," he said.

"John.....that was supposed to be a surprise."

"Surprise!" he said, trying to crack a smile.

My grandfather was usually pretty relaxed. I had screwed up big time, only I had no idea just how bad. Grandpa ate stoically and finished his meal. He drank nothing but ice water. Not beer, not soda, just ice water. It could be the middle of the winter in Massachusetts and he would still reach for his jug of ice water.

Five minutes later we're both downstairs together. He said nothing as he turned on all the lights. He walked over to the chest and opened it. He took out the freakish-looking hand and put it on the table.

I was frozen. I had no idea what was going on. I had never seen my grandfather like this before. It seemed so out of character for him. He put his hands on the workbench as if he was beaten.

"Son, do you know what it means to give someone your word?" he asked

"Yes."

"What does it mean?"

"Well, you do what you say you are going to do," I replied.

"So then, if you give me your word that you will never tell another person what I will tell you, I won't be disappointed."

"No sir. When I give someone my word, I mean it."

"This is serious son. I can get in a whole lot of trouble for this."

"I understand. I won't tell anyone, not even my parents, or my best friend Raymond."

"Right.....well, hell.....somebody ought to know," he said.

I pulled up a chair and he told me the story of how that stuff came to be in the chest in his basement. He told me the story, not embellishing or exaggerating anything. He was a quiet man of sorts. Not really mysterious, he just kept to himself. Looking back on it, he and I were probably more alike than any other two people on the planet. I was just a younger version of himself.

"It was the summer of 1954. It was hotter than hell. Nobody had air conditioning back then. You sweated your balls off and waited for the weather to break. Four straight days of over a hundred degrees. In Massachusetts, that's a bonafide heatwave. I had gone to confession. I went once a week. Sacred Heart here in town. The priest was this weirdo drunk named Kevin Leary. A rather milk toast man of the cloth if I do say so myself. I never expected anything like that to happen. I sit down and start confessing my sins when Father Kevin Leary just starts sobbing right there in the confessional. I didn't know whether to shit or go sailing. I ask him what's wrong and he tells me that he just took the confession from a child killer."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Somebody had just confessed that they were responsible for killing the Fitzgerald girl and the Winkler girl in town. Horrible crimes. They found the Fitzgerald girl floating in one of the canals in town. So, I say to him, shouldn't we call the police? That son of a bitch just continued to sob and said that he couldn't. He was bound by the church not to disclose anyone's sins. I about lost it. Stealing candy or hitting your wife is not the same thing as killing a nine-year old girl. I ran out of the confessional and into the street, but he was gone. That bastard walked right by me in church. I didn't even get a good look at him. I couldn't identify him. He was going to kill again because I couldn't identify him. From that day forward, I made it a point to observe everyone around me at all times, no matter where I am.

I ran back into the church and found Leary. He was throwing up in the men's room. I begged him to tell me who it was. He said he had no idea. I grabbed him and smacked him. I had never hit a priest before, I know It's a sin, but I didn't care. I was angry. He knew more than he was telling me. He may not have known who he was, but he was the only one who had spoken to the killer and could identify him. Leary was a mess. All I could get out of him was that he must be a carpenter or woodworker or something. It wasn't much, but it was a start. I didn't think he was telling me everything. I had no choice, I told him I was going to the cops. He about lost it. He grabbed my legs and wouldn't let me leave. I gave him one last chance."

"His name is Delavan. Jack Delevan. He used to be a priest." he said, sobbing on the floor.

"Used to be a priest?" I asked.

"He's a sodomite. The church kicked him out when they realized he was having relations with all kinds of men. Prostitutes, homeless. You name it. The man is an animal. I assume he is a furniture maker or something because he said the ideas come to him when he's working on his furniture. He's sick.....very sick. He needs help. You go to the police and they will kill him. A child killer won't even make it to the station before he disappears, I know how these cops work."

"The hell do you think will happen if we don't stop him? You think he's just going to stop killing little girls?"

"What am I going to do? Do you have any idea how bad this is going to make the church look? Any idea?" he screamed.

"Alright, Kevin. I won't go to the cops, but I will stop him. For God's sake, somebody has to." I said.

"Grandpa.....why didn't you just go to the cops, especially since you knew who the killer was?" I asked.

"Father Leary was right. In those days, a priest that was kicked out of the church was a very big deal. The more I learned about this guy, the more I disliked him. He was a very, very evil man. Sick or not, he had to be stopped. If I had gone to the police and they arrested him, the fact that he was a former priest, yes, it would have made the church look very, very bad. I know it's hard to understand, but at the time, this country was very divided, in many ways it still is. Lots of people don't like Catholics, especially down south."

"Why?" I asked

"Because many of the Union soldiers were Catholic. The south is still fighting the war. It was much different in the 1950's. The country was still divided by the Mason Dixon line. People would have used one person's bad behavior and made it seem like all Catholics were like him. I know it doesn't make any sense, but that's what would have happened. I did what I thought was best."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"Remember what I said about giving me your word you won't repeat this to anyone?"

"I give you my word, I will not tell another person what you are going to tell me," I said stoically.

"I waited until I thought he was alone. I remember sitting in my car outside of his furniture store and wondering if Leary had made a mistake. What if this guy wasn't the killer? I had to be sure. I drove over to the rectory and found Leary. He was drunk in the confessional. I asked him if he was sure. He just looked at me and started laughing.....*the little drunk bastard actually thought this was funny!*"

"Yes, John. I'm sure." said

"You know what I have to do," I told him.

"I know. Maybe we could find somebody else to do it. It shouldn't be very hard." said leary

"I just want to make sure I'm not going to kill an innocent person. You are one hundred percent certain he is the killer?"

"I'm a thousand percent sure, Johnny boy," he said and went back to his bottle.

"That was enough. Leary wasn't lying. Delevan had confessed his crimes to him. I knew what I had to do. I waited a week. The biggest goddamn mistake I ever made in my life was not killing that twisted freak that day. I waited. I had to be sure and make time to plan. Three days later the body of Lily Pendergast was found in some bushes near a park. She had been beaten so badly her parents couldn't identify her body. The whole city was on fire. There were over fifty detectives and State Policemen working on the case. The whole time, I knew who the killer was. I knew and I didn't say anything because of how it would make the church look. Maybe if I had gone to the cops, that little girl might still be alive today. I'll take that screw-up with me to the grave. I waited until it was raining. A good soaking rain. I heard Delevan liked to work late at night, alone. Sometimes his boyfriend would stop by, but most of the time, he worked alone. I waited until it was just about closing time at five-thirty. The store closed at six. If he had customers, he would stay open later. At five-thirty, I walked into the store. Delevan was sitting at the counter, reading a magazine. That knife that's sitting in the chest, the one with the blood on it, that's the one I used. I should have been nervous, I was about to commit murder, but I wasn't. Every time I thought of running, I just looked at a picture of the two little girls he murdered. I cut them out from a newspaper. It was like God gave me a mission, just for me to carry out. I walked into his

store. It was only like a hundred feet, but it seemed to take forever. I was so nervous, I could hardly walk. "

"Jack Delevan?" I asked

"That's me. What can I do for you?"

"Did you murder those little girls?" I asked. "I knew right away from the expression on his face that he was guilty. His reaction was so strange. It was like he was glad he was caught. Like some big weight had been lifted off of his shoulders."

"Father Leary has a very big mouth. Did he ever tell you what he does with that mouth? A few drinks in him and it's hard to keep him off of my dick. All of us priests are queer. You must know that." he said.

"You know I have to kill you," I said.

"Of course you do," he said. "He reached under the desk for something. I reached over the table and lifted him off the floor. I was a lot bigger and stronger than he was. He had the gun in his hand when I plunged the knife into his chest. I stabbed him and stabbed him. I think he was dead before his body fell to the floor. I had committed the worst sin possible. Even in the war, I didn't kill anybody. Had plenty of opportunity, but I didn't want to carry that on my soul. Now, here I am, a murderer. I ran outside and washed the blood off me. It was raining so hard, I don't think anybody noticed me. I made sure the blood was completely off me before I walked back into the store and called the cops."

"Wait....why did you call the cops? Weren't you scared they were going to arrest you?"

"No son. I called them from the phone in the store. They just thought I was another customer. As soon as they got there and recognized it being Delevan, the cops weren't surprised at all."

"Yeah, the little freak got a little too freaky with somebody I guess." said one of the officers.

"See, I opened the register and took the money out, to make it look like a robbery. The store was in a pretty bad part of town."

"Wait, so the cops never knew you killed him?"

"No, why would they? As far as they knew, I was just a customer looking to buy some furniture. I even had my boss write me up a little slip for an estimate, just to make it look official. Cops never even suspected me, why would they, I'm not a criminal."

"Wow, that's a pretty crazy story, grandpa. Weren't you afraid you'd be caught?"

"Of course I was. Father Leary could have turned me in if he wanted to. I'm kind of surprised he didn't. I think he just wanted this to go away, just like I did. I didn't have to wait long for Father Leary."

"What do you mean?"

"Paper said he died in his sleep. Word on the street was that he hung himself in the basement of the church. Whatever the truth may be, he took it with him when he died. The cops never did find out who killed him, not that anyone really cared. Delevan was about as popular in the town as cancer. They weren't going to make much of an effort to find his killer. I read they arrested one of his boyfriends but never did charge him. His obituary was on the back of the newspaper. No one wanted to remember him."

"Did it stop? The killings I mean?" I asked.

"Yes. Yes, they did. Cops never did tie him to any of the crimes. He was never even a suspect. The problem is what Delevan whispered to me before he died. I just couldn't get it out of my mind."

"What is that?"

"He makes me do all of these horrible things.....he's the one I should be killing."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that Jack was only a puppet. He was a very evil puppet, but he was just a puppet. Someone was pulling on the puppet's strings. Someone was making him do these things, at least that's what he believed."

"Did you believe him?"

"Not at first. I mean I went back to work the next day like nothing had happened. I went to church that Sunday and took communion from Father Leary. We acted like nothing had happened. I figured that was the end of it, until five months later when they found the body of another little girl. I knew then that Delevan wasn't acting alone, that he had been right all along. There was someone else or *something* else involved. Problem is, I just didn't know where to start looking. I just kind of fell into the last one. I knew it would be up to me to stop the killer. I was hoping the police would nab him, but that was wishful thinking."

"Grandpa, I don't understand. Why was this your responsibility? You already stopped the last bad guy?" I asked.

"It wasn't my responsibility. Not at all. But, if I didn't do something, another little girl would be killed. That Pendergast girl might still be alive if I had acted sooner. I prayed and prayed. I asked God for guidance. In my dreams, he answered me. Like a thunderous voice bellowing from the heavens. I asked God what I should do." said Grandpa

"What did he say?"

"He said Christians stop evil, that's our job. Just like that, I knew what I had to do. It was ridiculous, I mean I sell nameplates for a living and here I am up to eyeballs in murder. It's a terrible thing to take someone's life, son. It will haunt you for the rest of your life. Even a piece

of garbage like Delevan, sometimes I wonder if I had done the right thing. Only God has the right to take someone's life. Don't ever forget that. It's pretty much the only commandment I expect you to follow. The other ones are important too, but that one is the most important."

I was lost in translation. My grandfather was confessing his crimes to me. Why he chose to tell a ten-year-old kid, I have no idea. It didn't frighten me, or scare me, or traumatize me, no, rather it was like I was watching it all on TV. I learned a lot about my grandfather that day, maybe more than I cared to. I learned he was human, just like the rest of us. He wasn't perfect and he made mistakes. He had a Herculean task dropped in his lap and he did what he thought was right. Looking back on my now, I realize he told me simply because I was the only one he could tell. He had never told another person what he had done. The story only got better.....maybe I should say *stranger*; *not better*.

"I figured the cops must have searched Delevan's house, looking for clues. I knew that's where I should start, except it had been over five months since he died. He lived in an apartment downtown that was probably cleared out and rented out to a new tenant. I had no idea where to look. I didn't even really know what I was looking for. A boogeyman? A demon? A monster.....I just didn't know. The only place I had to look was his old store downtown. It was closed, but the furniture was still inside. I could see through the storefront. I broke the lock on the back door and went inside. It was stupid. Looking back on it, I was damn lucky I didn't get caught. I was the one who called the cops and found Delevan's body. If I got caught breaking into his store, there were bound to be some very lengthy questions as to why I was in there. I walked around the store and didn't find a thing. Nothing. Delevan may have been a sexual deviant, but he kept his storefront immaculate. I went into the back room and that's when I found the door leading to the basement. I had my flashlight and my hunting knife with me, that was it. If I got into trouble, I didn't have much protection. I wasn't expecting to find anything down there. It was just a basement. A very old very damp basement. I got down the stairs and turned on the light. I walked around a bit and that's when I saw some light coming from a doorway around the corner. The closer I got, I could hear music. Big Band music, from when I was a kid. I turned the knob and pushed the door open. It was an apartment. Someone was actually living down there. I walked in and turned the corner. I saw a man.....at least I'm not sure it was a man. He was old, very, very old. He was so old, the skin was literally falling off of his bones. He was almost bald. He wore these wire-rimmed glasses. His clothes were old. His cane was old. *If it were possible for a human to live to be around a hundred and fifty years old, this is what they would look like.* We just stared at one another for a moment. Finally, he spoke.

"Can I help you son?" he asked.

"Did you know Jack Delevan?" I asked

"Yes, he rented this place to me. Nice fellow. It's a shame what happened to him, isn't it?"

"Yes, it certainly was."

"What's your business here, son?"

"Jack and I kind of had some unfinished business that needed settling," I said.

"Oh.....what kind of business?" asked the old man.

"The kind that involves killing little girls."

"Oh.....well, Jack's hobbies are of no interest to me. I'm only his tenant." said the old man.

"Right.....see Jack believed that someone was making him do all those terrible things he did. Maybe he was crazy, maybe not. You wouldn't happen to know anything about that now would you?" I asked.

"No son. I only saw Jack when he picked up the rent. That was the extent of our business dealings with one another."

"Right, well, I'm sorry I wasted your time."

"No problem, John. Close the door on your way out." said the old man.

I was actually out of the apartment when it hit me. I was just about to close the door. I walked back inside. The old man was making a pot of tea.

"How did you know my name?" I asked.

"Well, John.....I heard you give it to the police, the night Jack was murdered upstairs. I watched the whole thing from the back room. I watched you plunge that knife in your back pocket right into his chest. Never took you for a killer. You didn't even flinch." said the old man cracking a smile.

"So, why didn't you go to the cops, tell them what you saw?" I asked.

"Jack was an animal. I got no use for animals, other than their meat. Jack let his pecker do all his thinking for him. No matter. He had syphilis. Wouldn't have lasted much longer anyway. You probably did him a favor. Watched someone else die of it, years ago when I was locked up. Might have heard of him, his name was Al Capone."

"I really didn't know what to say or do. All I could do was listen." grandpa said.

"I was born to a peasant woman in Poland over a hundred years ago. Couldn't even read or write her own name. She milked the cows and made butter. A milkmaid. My mother was a milkmaid. That was all she knew. Nowadays kids can press a button and be entertained for hours. Guess there's not much use for somebody like me."

"What do you mean?"

"See John, I just want to be your friend. That's all. I'm the guy who listens to your problems. I'm the shoulder you cry on. I'm the best friend you never knew you had. All I ask for in return is for you to do some favors for me. I'm too old to do them myself."

"What kind of favors?"

"Well, even an old man like myself likes to have a little fun now and then," he said smiling.

It was at that exact moment I knew this was the guy Delevan had been talking about before he died. I'm not sure how, or why, but somehow, this old man had killed those girls, not just Jack. He was just as responsible.

"You like killing little girls?"

"Some men paint, some work on cars. I have my own little diversions. The first one's always the hardest, isn't it? You won't even remember the second one. You might think you aren't a killer, but you are Johnny.....you are." he said grinning.

"He had to be stopped. The cops would have done the same thing. He never would have even made it to the station." I said.

"True, but let someone else take his life, not you."

"What difference does it make, he's gone. That's all that matters."

"Oh, no Johnny.....it isn't all that matters. See, you just showed up on the ball field and told everyone you are going to play. You weren't even invited. No matter, I'm sure you'll fit in just fine."

"What are you talking about?"

"The devil is in the details. By killing Jack, you volunteered to take his place. That's how the game is played. Sorry you never read the rule book." said the old man.

"Take his place? Why would I want to take Jack's place? He was a piece of shit who killed little girls?"

"Because Jack was between a rock and a hard place. The symptoms from his disease were beginning to show themselves most peculiarly. He was unable to control himself. I offered him a way out."

"How's that?"

"I keep his disease in check. In return, he does some little favors for me."

"Like killing little kids?"

"Well, I'm not really at liberty to discuss the details. It was a private matter between Jack and I. See, a man in your position has several options if he is caught. You could just confess and let the chips fall where they may, but you will still be charged with his murder and there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever to connect him with any of the crimes, I made certain of that. It is just your word. That faggot priest can't even help you out, since he sucked one dick too many. You're looking at some serious prison time. You would never get to see your children grow up. You're going to die in a cage and no one will ever remember you. Just another prisoner with a number.

Of course, if you decide to cooperate with me, I'm sure we could come to some kind of an agreement. Something that would be mutually beneficial to the both of us."

"What the hell makes you think I would cooperate with you?" I asked

"You don't have much of a choice my boy. It's either co-operate or be stuck in a cage for the rest of your life. It won't be kids this time, I'm sure we can find a more suitable target for you. Maybe it will just be niggers. No one is going to look for them. How does that sound? You be my little nigger killer and I won't turn you into the cops?"

I didn't even hesitate. I took out my knife and plunged it into him. I lifted him up off the ground. I slammed him against the wall. I tried not to look at him. I really, really tried. I'll never forget his last words.

"I could have gone to the cops, Johnny boy, but I didn't and this is how you repay me? Do you think you've seen the last of me? Shit boy, I was walking this earth when you were just stardust! We'll meet again soon, my friend."

He collapsed on the floor. Somehow when he fell, he broke his wrist. I mean it very nearly broke off. I just hacked away at it until it came off. I grabbed a jar off the table and put it inside. I don't know why. I wasn't thinking rationally at the time. Somehow, I thought his severed wrist might connect me to the crime. I turned off the stove and walked around the little apartment. I was trying not to panic. Killing Delevan was almost too easy. If I got caught I could simply say I was killing a child killer. The courts would understand, but this was just some crazy old man. I killed him in his own apartment. I'd go away for life if I was caught. I had to get his body out of there without being caught. I wrapped him up in a big burlap bag Delevan had in the basement. I cleaned up the kitchen as best I could. I mean I scrubbed that place until it was immaculate. I turned off the lights and closed the door. I carried the old man upstairs. I put him in the trunk of my car and drove out to Quabbin Reservoir. Way out past Gate 18 and dug a shallow grave. He's buried out there. I've never been back there. As far as I know, his grave is still out there."

"The cops never arrested you?"

"Nope. I got lucky. Very lucky. I've treated each day as a blessing since that night. You've got to make the most of your life son, it will be over before you know it. I graduated High School in 1936.....that was fifty years ago, seems like it was only yesterday. This life, it's just the blink of an eye, then it's over. In my heart, I know I did the right thing, even if it was horrible at the time."

"How do you know you did the right thing?" I asked.

"Because the killings stopped, that's how," he said.

"So, that shirt, that's the shirt you were wearing the night you killed the old man?" I asked.

"Yes. I've kept them hidden down here all these years. I've never even opened them until today. I just wanted to forget about that horrible summer. I don't think I ever will. Now you're a part of it too, whether you want to be or not."

"Was this old man some kind of a monster?"

"Yes, I think he was. He was the worst kind of monster: *a monster that looks just like you and me. The kind you could pass by a hundred times and never look twice.*"

"Do you think you're going to go to hell grandpa?"

"I don't know where I'm going, son. None of us do. I do know that if I hadn't done what I had done that more children would have been killed by this freak and his puppets. See, demons aren't like the kind you see on TV. They don't always have tails and fangs. Demons are very old and wise. They know you and they know how to get inside your head. They prey on the weak and wounded. Lord knows there's enough of weak and wounded people floating around here. It takes a very strong soul to defeat a demon. They know you better than you know yourself. If you ever have to battle a demon, don't let them talk. Kill them. You won't get another chance."

The words just rang through my ten-year-old head like gunshots in a tunnel. I didn't know what to say. My grandfather had just confessed to killing two people, even if they barely fit the description of a human being. I'm still not sure why he chose to tell me. I never did ask my grandmother about it. I figured if she didn't know, it was for the best. It was more than she could handle.

I spent the next few days in a sort of daze. In an instant, I went from being an innocent ten-year-old to a traumatized ten-year-old. My family had done their best to keep me shielded from the horrors of this world and here I was about to dive headfirst into it. It was like I was walking on a train track with the locomotive blowing its horn, furiously, trying to get me out to move off the track. I didn't see my grandfather as a killer, or as a bad person, rather, just someone who did what he thought was right. I guess that's all we can really do when the time comes.

I never spent much time at the house after that, only in passing and for brief visits. I saw less and less of my grandfather as I got older until one day my dad came home in tears and told me that my grandfather had terminal cancer. I was around 18 then. Not a ten-year-old, but far from a man. I had grown up a lot since that day. I drove down to see him. He was bedridden and undergoing chemo treatments. He looked like a skeleton. I had to hold back the tears as he woke up and held my hand. Even as he was popping morphine tablets like they were candy, he still found the strength to talk to me.

"How's it going?" I asked.

"Things could probably be better," he replied, cracking a smile.

The tears were streaming down my face. He lifted a finger up and tried to block them.

"The hell are you crying for?"

"Are you kidding? Look at you? You're dying." I said

"Aw hell, we all take our turn in the hot seat. Someday, you'll be on death's doorstep too."

"It's not fair. No one should have to go through what you are going through." I said, fighting back the tears.

"I've had a good life. Remember what I told you that day in the basement. Hope you haven't forgotten it."

"I couldn't forget it if I tried. You weren't lying, were you? Everything you told me was the truth."

"It sure was. I've never told anybody but you?"

"Why me?"

"Why not you? Had a good feeling about you since the day you were born. You got fire in your eyes and a heart of steel. You're not like the rest of these slugs. Even though you were just a boy, I knew you would understand. You're the only one who could possibly understand."

You remember now just like when you were ten. The only reason these old farts like me have their shiny houses and fancy cars is because they have never stood up to the dark forces that control this world. Yeah, you might have your little shiny pot to piss in, but who cares, you can't take it with you. All you take with you is what you did in your life. Make it count. This family might not have much, but we have our beliefs, that's what makes us who we are. You might not be popular. You might go to prison. You might die broke and penniless, but you will have made a difference and that's what matters.....that is all that matters.

He was struggling for air, but I listened intently. I was angry. Angry at the doctors who just let him die. Angry at God who let this happen. Maybe even angry at myself for allowing my own grandfather to become a stranger to me when we needed each other the most. I was a young man and very angry at the world. No human being should ever have to go through what he did.

A week later, he was dead. The family was devastated. Most just knew him as a devout family man. A war hero. The man who built a company from the ground up. No one else on this planet knew who he really was. Not like I did. He had done something few others had the stomach to do. In many ways, my conversations with him shaped me into the person I am today. My grandfather is the reason I became a police officer. He is the reason I suit up every morning and take my life into my hands for pocket change. He is the reason I became a detective. I want to stop monsters too. It's not an easy job.

He's the reason I do what I do for a living.

My grandfather slayed a demon. A real-life monster. No one ever thanked him or congratulated him for what he did. The hand in the jar was lost over time. The house on Hillside Avenue was sold. I never saw the hand again. I still don't really know why he kept it. Maybe it was his way of rationalizing what he had done.

I now have a son and someday I will tell him the story my grandfather told me. Someday he will face monsters as well. This planet is full of them. I only hope he survives. My grandfather got

lucky...or maybe he was just really that good. All of us in life will come face to face with a monster at least once in our lives. It's up to us to decide what to do next.