

CHAPTER ONE

REVEILLE

I awoke when the first rays of the rising sun pierced the heavy timber that crowned Berkeley's Knob, thinking of ancestors, ghosts, witches and such, probably because I had gone to sleep re-reading entries in journals scribbled by a long line of grandparents.

The faded, crumbling diaries and day books I'd discovered in a chest in our family library at about the age of ten led me to suspect the Old Timers' thoughts mainly concerned when the next band of Indians would cut down on them from the top of the ridge. Gunpowder residue around loopholes in the log walls of the foyer, the only remaining visible parts of the original log cabin, reinforced that idea in my young mind.

Teenaged re-readings of the old documents made me wonder at the motives of the early settlers who had taken the effort to quill pen happenings by the light of candles or a fat pine knot. Their chronicles of terrible hard work, buying and selling, dance and frolic, church meetings and revival, courting and marriage, birth, sickness, natural death and killings made it apparent they had things, other than Indians, on their minds. The Journals also suggested my two hundred plus year old house had a long history of

haunts lurking about the premises. I had not seen anything in, or near, the old house, nor had I heard anything that I could chalk up to an unknown source. I would have preferred to believe the tales were no more than pure stern wash, but the fact remained that non-sense folks had seen apparitions prowling about. Journal entries by generations of my ancestors recorded the occurrence of death tokens, sightings of strange beings and lights of unknown origin passing above the mountains.

My great-whichever-grandmother woke one night to see a man dressed in buckskin standing at the foot of her bed. That lady, who feared nothing, except her Lord, rose from her bed and asked his intentions. He peered at her for a moment, then disappeared. She received word the next day that her brother had been killed by a runaway horse. She saw the apparitions once again -- striding away as if he had just stepped from the wide front porch. She received word the following week that her youngest son had been killed during a Civil War skirmish on Rich Mountain. She wrote that she knew, somehow, the ghost was that of the original Henry Clay Berkeley circa Seventeen Hundred--Early.

According to family legend, Margaret Louise, the gravely ill, aged wife of Henry Clay Berkeley, told her husband and a daughter that she had had a visit from the "cutest little men." Her husband and daughter disregarded her strange remark, thinking she was delirious. My great-whichever uncle stood death watch over his mother that night during which time he saw stubby, bearded, little men standing in her room -- one holding a vase. The fellow with the vase threw it to the floor where it shattered. The little men walked from the room, turned toward the kitchen and disappeared. His mother passed to her reward within the hour.

My uncle later told that story to his running mates in a local tavern, probably when he was stern over tea kettle on stump juice. An Irish woodsman asked if his mother had any connection with Ireland. My uncle told him his mother, the matriarch of the Berkeley Clan, had been the sole Paddy among a long line of Limey ancestors.

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Their trek led them to a mountain valley deep into the wilderness of Western Virginia, the first white folks to arrive in that particular area. They located a riffle-swift river as a ready source of water, then chose the highest slope above the river as their cabin site. From this couple, during their era, came land holdings and what turned from a rude hut into a six-room log cabin. Two centuries plus later, their cabin had evolved into an odd shaped, fourteen room house with walls and flooring ranging in age from those of their first permanent cabin to the early nineteen-thirties, a time when the Berkeley name was fast becoming thin upon the ground. Berkeley unions were not prone to birthing males.

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The Irishman argued, after hearing my uncle's tale, that the appearance of Leprechauns was not unknown at the death of Irish persons of distinguished ancestry. He insisted that, despite Margaret Louise Tinney having shipped as an indentured servant, her ancestors were folks of renown among the Celts, otherwise, the Leprechauns would not have appeared.

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Given a choice between the interview and marooning, I'd have taken marooning. I had, however, raised my right hand to finalize the shipping over ceremony when I last reenlisted in Uncle Sam's Canoe Club. I was, therefore, legally bound to participate in the interview even though an understudy to a lunatic had contrived the evolution.

After cautioning Jarhead on the perils of running amok and Blue Suit on aiding Jarhead in executing an escape and evasion effort, I set forth with sword and buckler to do battle with a modern day Philistine. I feared the worst when I looked back at the farmhouse and noticed Blue Suit posted himself to lookout duty on a window ledge. That usually meant Jarhead was engaged in plotting a run

ashore. It was only a matter of time before my neighbors tarred and feathered me, followed by all three of us being awarded a free ride out of town on a fence rail

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I executed my right to play Simon Says and told her what to do with herself.

Given a choice between the interview and marooning, I'd have taken marooning. I had, however, raised my right hand to finalize the shipping over ceremony when I last reenlisted in Uncle Sam's Canoe Club. I was, therefore, legally bound to participate in the interview even though an understudy to a lunatic had contrived the evolution.

After cautioning Jarhead on the perils of running amok and Blue Suit on aiding Jarhead in executing an escape and evasion effort, I set forth with sword and buckler to do battle with a modern day Philistine. I feared the worst when I looked back at the farmhouse and noticed Blue Suit posted himself to lookout duty on a window ledge. That usually meant Jarhead was engaged in plotting a run ashore. It was only a matter of time before my neighbors tarred and feathered me, followed by all three of us being awarded a free ride out of town on a fence rail