

4-2018

Book Proposal: Evangeline: A Murder on the Cajun Prairie

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Book Proposal: *Evangeline: A Murder on the Cajun Prairie*

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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Submitted to the LSU Roger Hadfield Ogden Honors College in partial fulfillment of
the Upper Division Honors Program.

April, 2018

Louisiana State University
& Agricultural and Mechanical College
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

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What is a Book Proposal?

In the following pages you'll find my official Honors Thesis, which is in essence a book proposal for a nonfiction manuscript that I have been working on for about a year now.

A commonly used method to works of nonfiction, a book proposal is essentially a way for writers, even new ones, to get their books published by a trade press. The healthy market for nonfiction encourages these publishers to buy up nonfiction book proposals, keeping marketable material on their lists while they await their next big novel.

Since my project as a whole is as of yet unfinished, selling the book on proposal would allow me to attain an advance to help support me financially as I continue my research and investigation. I would also be allowed to retain first serial rights, giving me the option to publish chapters as I complete the book. This will both increase my profits and help the book garner attention and audience.

This proposal, organized so that it suitable for submission to publishers or to literary agents who might help to attract such publishers, is arranged into three parts:

- I. Summary: Provides an overview of the storyline and project; Situates my book alongside other successful comparable works of similar subject matter and genre
- II. Table of Contents: Provides an outline of the chapters in the book, complete with a short summary of each
- III. Writing Sample: Selected chapters and sections of the work showcasing the scope of the project and my skills as a writer

Summary

Standing on a wooden bridge in 1983, pointing to a spot in the Bayou Nezpique, a father asks, “Here boy, you see that pile of trash over there?” His small son nods, closes one eye and raises his .22 rifle. “Take aim, careful now, 1..2..3..shoot.” And 1, 2, 3 bullets entered the cold, wet corpse of my great grandfather. After ten days, the largest manhunt in the history of Evangeline Parish, Louisiana was over.

The Mamou banker Aubrey LaHaye was taken at knifepoint from his home before the sun rose on January 6, 1983. His kidnapper left no traces except for a teasing and unpromising ransom call. FBI agents, state investigators, and local volunteers materialized to scour rice fields and hunting camps on horseback and ATVs. Pleas for information made national news. A reward was set for \$25,000. And rosary after rosary was prayed for his safe return. The swollen waters of the Bayou Nezpique surrendered his body to a sharpshooter and his son on January 16, at a Sunday afternoon target practice.

I, the great granddaughter of Aubrey, was born thirteen years and four days after his murder, just as my family settled into an era of comfortable prosperity and tranquility. My world was a small one, coddled by privilege and obliviousness. But even inside that protective sphere, I perceived the traces of a darker reality on its edges, inside its very walls. An accumulation of adults’ quick, bleak references and underhanded whispers betrayed the not-so-distant realities of my family’s darkest hour.

Evangeline tells the story of my investigation into the kidnapping and murder of my great grandfather, into his alleged killer’s denial of guilt, and into how this trauma shaped my family. In the vein of Maggie Nelson’s true crime memoirs *Jane* and *The Red Parts*, I intertwine investigation, cultural critique, and personal narrative as I navigate the shadows of a violent

death in one of America's most overlooked landscapes. Like Louisiana native Truman Capote, I use a novelistic approach to true crime, enriching the story of a murder with a deep sense of place and character. This genre has enjoyed a resurgence in recent years, thanks to true crime podcasts such as *Serial*. These programs prove that a novelistic approach to true crime, combined with journalistic authenticity, can be both consequential and mainstream. But like the *Serial* spinoff *S-Town*, *Evangeline* is about much more than the crime. It is a study of characters in a unique place, an exploration of how history and geography influence the human psyche in the wake of violent acts.

Evangeline balances on the tightrope between proximity and journalistic objectivity. In searching for truth entangled in personal and familial trauma, I look to the elegant and unwavering prose of David Berg's *Run, Brother, Run*. Both he and Nelson, along with James Ellroy in his gritty memoir *My Dark Places* have served as models as I weave introspective reaction and reflection into the facts of my family's history. I situate myself, as they did, in the age-old tradition of attempting to elicit meaning of the incomprehensible through the medium of storytelling.

In the sample provided, I describe a moment between my father and I one year into my investigation. Standing on the bridge above the bayou where they found my great grandfather's body, he turns to me and asks the question at the root of this story: *Why did this happen?* For over three decades, we—the victims, the audience, the descendants—have been condemned to a perpetual lack of closure. Doubt in the integrity of our justice system, a subtle vein of distrust through the 'tight-knit' town of Mamou, and the convicted murderer's adamant denial of guilt have left us with a series of unresolved questions and missing pages in the story. *Why would someone kill our PawPaw?*

In an increasingly desperate search for answers, I reach out, via letter, to the one person who might have them: John Brady Balfa, serving two life sentences and 99 years in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola for the crime. As of today, the only response I have received from him was a Christmas card wishing my family “a blessed holiday.” I resort to secondary sources. Struggling with the looming, if slight, possibility that the case against him is erroneous, I find myself attempting to navigate through massive piles of court documents and the history of Louisiana’s justice system. Somewhere amid the many conversations with those who knew him, my obsession to understand the man Balfa becomes all consuming.

In an effort to develop an accurate understanding of what Balfa’s life might be like today, I draw on inmate accounts, particularly those of Wilbert Rideau. Angola’s prolific award-winning inmate journalist, in his memoir *In the Place of Justice*, provides clear and stunning insight on life behind the walls of Angola during the late 20th century. Drawing what pieces I can together, I begin to uncover the bewildering Balfa: honors student, Edwin Edward’s unknown protégé, alcoholic, gentleman, gambler, brother, disillusioned illusionist, rapist, SGA president, prisoner, preacher. Murderer?

The countryside of Acadiana, flat and lonely prairies under an immense and moody sky, is home to a distinct community of the American South. To evoke the spirit of LaHaye Road, where my family has resided for four generations, I draw inspiration from one of the few writers who has managed to effectively capture it, bestselling author James Lee Burke. In his fictional Dave Robicheaux series, Burke masterfully evokes the compelling people and landscape of New Iberia, only seventy miles from where my story is set. In *Evangeline*, the culture’s deep connections to land, language, and music, are examined from varying and sometimes contradictory lenses. The reader will experience my Acadiana through the starry-eyed lenses of a

girl growing up immersed in its traditions—traditions of lighthearted celebration and undying family loyalty, traditions of strict morality and inherited expectations. They will experience my Acadiana as I, a woman in the twenty first century, come to recognize tradition's hold on me as I negotiate what I hold dear and what I can no longer carry.

So, while I conjure the “joie de vivre” of Acadiana and its characters, I also struggle to strip it away, to look beyond its romanticism and locate the darker realities of the Cajun fairy tale I was told every day of my childhood. What is it about this strange place, this society, this people, this world—what are the evil influences at work here that could possibly add up to the moment in which an old man is ripped from his home, knife to his back, then bludgeoned to death and left in a bayou? *Evangeline* is my story of an undeniably beautiful culture and the violent act that led me to re-examine my experience in it.

Evangeline's Table of Contents

Prologue: Picture Perfect

My entire family lives on a single road known as LaHaye. Traveling down the straightaway mile flanked by cattle pastures and crawfish fields, one encounters one by one, the pristine and charming homes of Aubrey LaHaye's descendants. I grew up on this road, in a kind of rural fairy tale where marriages always work, success and comfort are inherent gifts of life, and everyone is beautiful.

Growing up, it was easy to believe it had always been this way. But whispers of a darker past, a past not so very distant, floated through the family lore like ghost stories. As I emerged into adulthood, I was confronted very suddenly by the impossibly complex and devastating world in which the rest of humanity lives. In an impossible quest for understanding and for truth, I find myself turning back to my family's darkest hours.

I: Someone took PawPaw

Emily LaHaye wakes up before the sun to turn the coffee on, as she has every day for the last fifty years. Just after she crawls back under the covers to escape the early January chill, she hears a knock on the door, announcing the beginning of her worst nightmare. The stranger enters their home, asking for help. His car has broken down. Fifteen minutes later, Emily is tied to her bed, watching the man lead her husband out of the room with a knife pressed to his back. It's the last time she will ever see him alive. Over the next 10 days the sons and grandsons of Aubrey, accompanied by Louisiana State police and FBI and hundreds of volunteers, scour the wetlands and rice fields of Evangeline Parish, searching for a clue, a sign, a body.

II: Agrarian Nostalgia

I make my way down the LaHaye Road of today, stepping into the homes of my aunts, uncles, and grandparents, reminiscing on summers spent at the pool, closing my eyes to the sounds of Parrain Danny's guitar, sitting across from the worn navy chair my grandfather has resided in since I can remember. I collect their memories of Aubrey and Emily, building in my imagination spectral impressions of my great grandparents and the agrarian nostalgia of LaHaye Road during the mid-twentieth century. I entertain the fantasy, imagine that I am checking on cows in PawPaw Aubrey's Crown Victoria, the window opened a crack, inhaling the sweet cigar smoke as he breathes it in. As he breathes.

III: The Erasure of Evil

Romanticism reigns in the stories of the south, and the Acadian story is no different. Alongside Longfellow's Evangeline and her celestial wanderings through the South Louisiana bayous lies the dying native peoples, infected by European diseases. Every "back in the day" farm tale my great aunts offer blurs over the exploitation of the area's African American laborers and betrays the remnants of that history still present in their prejudice today. Just as the singing dwarves of Snow White were actually deformed children, Hansel and Gretel were born out of the infanticide and cannibalism of a 14th c. famined England, and Cinderella's stepsisters butchered their own feet so that they could marry the prince—every story is inevitably rewritten to reflect the ideal. Smoothed over, violence wiped out, only the beautiful and the good remain in our histories and the tales we lull our children to sleep by.

IV: The Dark Decade

Rigging a hunting rifle with rubber bands and a chair, Aubrey's niece Smokey killed herself and her unborn child in September of 1983. A year later, on the anniversary of her death,

her husband was found with a bullet in his head, lying on the cold stone ground before her grave. While Aubrey's body was still warm in the ground, a lawsuit was filed against his estate as a result of his dealings at the bank. Unable to explain his actions or defend himself, the entire LaHaye estate was sold off for pennies. A few years later, another granddaughter of Aubrey's was killed in a car crash, leaving behind a son who most of us never got the opportunity to know. Finally, in a cataclysmic end to the nightmare that was the eighties, Aubrey's son Glen was found, bullet in his head, parked in the middle of the field by his house. A gun accident, they said. An accident my grandfather still resolutely claims. From that moment Janie, Glen's wife and Smokey's mother, began to lose, one by one, her memories. Today she doesn't recognize her own children.

These are things we do not talk about. Ghosts lost to the dark decade before my birth.

V: The Mermentau's Westward Daughter

My father and I take a trip to the Bayou Nezpique, to the place where they found Aubrey's body. Neither of us have been here before. Leaning over the graffitied walls of the bridge crossing the bayou, we reflect. My dad remembers the day they found him here, he tells me. Holding his daddy while he cried. Together we wonder about which side of the bridge it was that the sharpshooter and his son, spending a Sunday afternoon target practicing, found him. We wonder if this is where the stranger beat him to death. My father expresses to me, for the first time, his deep desire to know what really happened. His desperation for answers. We leave without any.

VI: Who is John Brady Balfa?

In the newspaper articles covering the trial, John Brady Balfa is often referred to as "honors student," "former SGA president of LSU-Eunice," "nephew of the famous Cajun

musicians, The Balfa Brothers”. A good old local boy, he was on the path to becoming a famous lawyer, the governor even, like his idol Edwin Edwards. I meet with four men who lived with him over the course of his college career, and only then do I begin to hear stories of decline. How John would wake up on a Wednesday at his apartment at LSU, fix a stiff one and call his bookie before heading to class. Thousands of dollars coming in for him monthly from who knows where only to disappear in days. Running for SGA president at LSU-Baton Rouge, never standing a chance, and stealing an antique trumpet.

VII: Portrait of a Criminal

Some say it was on the anniversary of the day he raped his girlfriend. Others say it was simply because he was angry with his landlord. Either way, on John Brady Balfa’s criminal record, it stands clear as day: attempted arson. He never faced any official charges. He was charged, however, with raping a convenient store clerk in 1982, though he never saw a day in prison for it. They called him “the honeybun rapist,” and then gave him 10 years’ probation. In 1985, as they began to connect him to the murder of my great grandfather, he was awaiting another trial for attempted murder. He had broken into his bookie’s house for money, tried to tie him up, and stabbed him in the back with a rusty knife.

VIII: A Plead of Not Guilty

John Brady Balfa pleads not guilty to the charges against him for armed robbery, kidnapping, and murder. He claims that he was no part of the event at all and uses alibi witnesses to prove this. In a confusing match of “who do we believe,” time seems to be manipulated not only by Balfa but by the prosecution. Nothing seems to add up. Then Emily LaHaye takes her place at the witness stand, points to the defendant and tells the courtroom in a fierce, shaking voice, “That is the man who took my husband.” In his only statement during the entire trial, John

Brady growls at her, “Better be sure lady.” Those words keep me awake at night, haunting me with questions about my great grandmother’s memory and credibility, the power structures in the Evangeline Parish justice system, and the controversial presence of a mustache.

IX: Mamou’s Rumor Mill

Around 2007, an ex-con, fresh out of Angola, comes into my father’s doctor’s office and tells him he has a story to share: “Believe me or not, Doc. John Balfa...he’s innocent I’m telling you. He told me that he can’t ever tell the truth. He’s got no choice but to sit and rot in that cell. Or they’ll come after his family.” A madwoman in the Mamou hospital swears she overheard men in the next room discussing their plan to lay it all on Balfa. The Sheriff tells newspapers all throughout the investigation, despite the FBI’s protests, that he believes it was a contract killing. Names are still whispered to this day, suggestions of mafia involvement engineered by Carlos Marcello. Others call dirty politics, issued by Governor Edwin Edwards, reaching its arm into the banking deals of Mamou. Of all the theories, the most unsettling is the suggestion that my Uncle Sonny, married to Aubrey’s daughter Tot, had a hand in it. And it remains increasingly difficult to ignore the many powerful men in town who scalped up the family estate—many of Aubrey’s partners, friends, and family members—who benefitted, and continue to benefit, from his absence.

I investigate the merit of the conspiracies. And I wonder at the public’s reluctance, much like my own, to accept the motive given by the courts. The narrative that has been accepted by my family—that a man angry at my great grandfather for refusing him a loan, came to his house one morning and murdered him—feels too fantastic, or rather, perhaps too infantastic, to be true.

X: Spreading the Good News Behind Bars

Still maintaining his innocence, Balfa continues to fight for his freedom today, half a lifetime into his double life + 99 years sentence. At the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, he serves as a minister in the St. Augustine Chapel. He tells fellow prisoners and young Catholics on confirmation retreat that even in the world's worst situations, there is God. And there is hope. My grandmother tells me that she hopes that his soul is cleansed, changed. She hopes that he has become a saint. Like Augustine, whose statue John Brady greets every day, leaving his sins and the pleasures of evil and earth behind him to pursue the greatness of Heaven. In the same conversation, she tells me that she wishes he knew what he had done to our family, that he could feel every drop of the pain he caused us. I wonder about the ways in which vengeance and forgiveness resemble each other, and if either is even possible in the wake of potent uncertainty.

Epilogue: Frayed but Flesh

My investigation into my great grandfather's murder reveals to me, more than anything, the complexity of human nature, human interaction, and human storytelling. I study the way my world's characters react, the ways they remember, the ways they forget. On a search for truth, for something real, I coax out the most tender and vulnerable parts of the people I love. The parts they keep deep below the surface. The ugly parts. And in their suffering, in their mistakes, in their reflections of their worst tendencies, I discover a new layer of humanity. An emerging spirit of authentic, intentional flesh and blood, seeking understanding and fearing rejection in a world masked by the ideal. Damaged and broken, but real. True.

Sample

I: Someone Took PawPaw

January 6, 1983-- 1075 LaHaye Rd. Mamou, LA 70554

Emily's old eyes meet the outline of herself in that small glass face, sleeping-capped and dentureless, a reflected shadow against the pale light of a lamp in the predawn darkness.

She shivers. Breaks the encounter. Palming the clock and turning it over, she cranks it to the correct time and sets it back upon the mantle. 5:00 AM

Her bare feet shuffle through the thick rug, water rushes—splashing against the glass coffee pot, the measuring spoon clanks quickly against the edge of the canister, the old man sighs from the bedroom: the silent house awakening to its familiar morning whispers.

The cold air grips her by the waist and leads her back to bed. There is no hurry today, no suit to lay out. Breakfast can wait a bit longer.

She curls up next to him like when they were young, back when they lived in that cold little house, dirty chickens clucking through gaps in the floorboards. He grunts a little, rolls over, gives her a lazy smile, and squeezes her, eyes still shut. She breathes in the first curling fumes of fresh coffee. And for a moment, only a moment, all is quiet. All is well.

A knock.

Aubrey doesn't budge, and not wanting to leave the warmth of his body and her bed again, Emily convinces herself it was her imagination.

Again. Knocking. More urgent. Unmistakable.

“Someone's at the door Aubrey.” She rises, waits a moment while he rolls heavily to a sitting position, rubbing his eyes. The knocking persists, insistent.

She walks through the kitchen, doesn't turn on any lights in the still lightless morning.

Can't see anyone. No one ever uses the front door.

More knocking, now at the side door. She turns back through the room, passes the sink, takes a quick look through the kitchen window, flips on the porch light and the subject materializes, bathed in harsh yellow.

White male, slim build, dark jacket, dark beret cap

She opens the door just a crack. "Can I help you?"

In a quiet voice, accented with a Cajun dialect not unlike her own, "I uhhh... I just had myself a little accident down the road. I was hoping I could use your telephone to call a wrecker."

She opens the crack an inch wider. "Aubrey! Please come see." She looks at the stranger,

Late twenties, maybe early thirties

Dark skin, round face, clean shaven

5'11"

Sweet eyes.

Aubrey walks out and takes a look at their guest, "Good morning sir and what is your name?"

"Hey Mr. Aubrey I had an accident."

Aubrey frowns, "Who are you?"

"I'm Vidrine. I live right down the road."

"Where do you work?"

"I work in Mamou."

"..surely I know you? Come on in."

Emily gathers up some phone books, hands one to 'Vidrine'. She turns to flip through one herself, "Which wrecker do you want?"

"Pierottis'll do just fine."

Finger on the number, she reaches for the phone on the wall when Aubrey's voice reaches her ears,

"Oh no...no."

She turns around, the phone book hits the ground with a thud.

A knife is pressed against her husband's chest.

Almost whispering, voice shaking, the stranger says, "I don't need a phone book. All I want is money."

Aubrey's eyes wide are locked on Emily's. She can see him, reigning his terror inside, trying not to mirror the panic he reads on her face.

Breathing in she flails for her voice, locked somewhere dark and dry inside her ribs, "There's none in the house."

Aubrey captures her eyes again, focuses them, "Em, go get my wallet in the bathroom."

She's frozen.

A strange hand grasps her arm. "How do I know you won't go get a gun?"

Shaking her head, "...none in the house."

The stranger looks at her intently. She won't meet those eyes. "No, we'll all go."

Her body acts, leaving her spirit behind, moving into the hall, through the bedroom, one step after the other, bare feet moving through carpet quickly, frantically. The men follow awkwardly, the knife never budging, pressing a crease under the fourth button of Aubrey's baby blue pajama shirt. Emily's hand grasps the worn leather wallet by the sink, where Aubrey set it

last night to brush the peanut brittle from his teeth. She watches as her arm, unfeeling, detached, holds it out to her husband. Eyes still locked on hers, he doesn't budge. The stranger grabs it from her hand, looks inside, shakes his head.

\$200.

Twitching his head in the direction behind him, the stranger's eyes grope for hers again, trying to rip them from Aubrey. "To the bed."

Mind paralyzed now. Somehow body moves forward through time without it, mechanical. Stepping out of the bathroom, standing at the end of the bed, seeing only the floor.

The stranger keeps Aubrey close. He finally moves the knife away from him and points it toward Emily. If either of them moves, he will not hesitate to hurt her. He produces a coil of rope from under his jacket, grabs her arms and slowly draws her clenched fists together.

She doesn't let herself breathe when he seats her in the chair. Doesn't look at him while he winds rope around her wrists, pressed together, blood pulsing furiously on each side of shaking soft skin. If she were just to unclasp her grip on each fist, to bring them together as one, it would almost appear as if she were praying. Doesn't look at Aubrey as the stranger wraps a loop around the bedpost.

She stiffens, waiting to feel it tighten, for aggression, for pain, ready for whatever comes next. It never comes. The anticipation so heightened, the moment will haunt her for the rest of her life. How gentle he was, tying her to her bed.

The knife returns to its place at Aubrey's chest. "You aren't going to tie me up too?"

"No," he says. "We'll go to the front."

Emily reaches for her husband's eyes one last time before he is led out. She manages to find there a familiar reassurance, almost like a nod, seeming to say, "It will be okay Emily. We will be okay."

He turns away.

In two years, she will tell a courtroom, "When he turned his back in the bedroom with me tied to that post, that's the last time I saw my husband alive."

They walk through the den to the front door, the stranger's steps heavy, Aubrey's padded, barefoot. The door creaks open, slams shut.

The house is silent again. The awakening sky has begun to seep through the windows, into the kitchen. At the bedpost, Emily can smell fresh coffee as her heart starts to pound louder and louder, the only noise in the deathly quiet.

She moves. Frantically, panicked, as if in this one minute she might escape the entire morning, wake up and it was all a dream. Her hands fight the rope in spasms, struggling, bruising herself against the bedpost.

She stops. Takes a deep breath, and oxygen clears the blurry haze before her eyes. She realizes that the rope is pathetically tied. Carefully, she wiggles one hand just enough to easily break loose.

She lurches to the phone, calls 911, shakily tells them about the last 20 minutes.

Running into the living room, she sees the front door open. Her heart sinks with every step her bare feet take to the porch, onto the porch, in the cold wet grass. Standing there alone in her nightgown, shivering.

He's gone.

Phonesong

Glen receives his mother's phone call around 5:45 A.M. and takes off across the pasture for her. His 13-year-old daughter Dusty is left to notify the rest of the family. And the message is spread, traveling through phone lines like a map down LaHaye Road, through Mamou, and beyond. Home by home is awakened by the insistent song of the telephone, and the words are repeated over and over again,

“Someone took PawPaw.”

Like moths to a flame, the LaHayes follow the map leading back to the house at 1075 LaHaye Road.

By around 7:00 A.M., cars are lined all the way up the driveway, spilling hazardously onto the yard. Glen and Janie, Wayne and Susan, Tot and Sunny, and most of their children. Uncles and aunts and great uncles and great aunts and cousins and friends from miles around. If you didn't know better, you might think it was some holiday celebration or Sunday dinner. They gather in the outdoor kitchen, trying not to disturb the crime scene. People are pacing anxiously, shoving the swirling poison of despair and fury deeper into their chests. Holding onto each other, weeping, or furiously cleaning, anything to resist standing still. Emily has around six hands on her at any given time as she confusedly moves through waves of anguish, anger, determination, misery.

Suddenly phonesong sings in the house, its warbling traveling from the living room down to the outdoor kitchen to reach the anxious ears of the vigil. Glen runs up into the house, Wayne bounding right behind. Glen grabs the phone from the wall.

“Hello?”

“Do not call the cops.”

“You’re damn stupid if you think we haven’t called the cops already.”

Wayne moves to the bedroom, picks the phone from the bedside table, listens, doesn’t breathe. They want \$500,000.

“I want my daddy back alive,” Glen shouts into the receiver. “We ain’t gonna pay a dime for a dead man.”

“This is our ballgame and it’s gonna be played by our rules, Mr. LaHaye. We’ll call back at 9:00 with instructions.”

A sacrifice

At 7:00 A.M. mass on January 6, 1983, four of Aubrey’s great grandchildren kneel in the front row of the echoing empty St. Ann’s Catholic church, hands folded, heads bowed low, hiding their bewildered faces.

Wake up your brothers and sister. Ya’ll get to mass and pray hard. Something bad has happened.

They’ve shared with Father Nunez what little their mother told them. “Someone took PawPaw.”

The mass is offered up for the intention of Aubrey LaHaye and his family. The sacrifice on Golgotha carried out once again, bread and wine exchanged for living flesh and blood.

Au nom du Père et du Fils et du Saint Esprit

Keep him safe.

Keep him alive.

Bring him home.

Reverberations I

Detective Rudy Guillory, a family friend who lives half a mile from the scene of the crime, receives a call from Glen around 5:50 A.M on January 6, 1983. He meets Deputy Tom Lupkey at the scene and proceeds to interview Emily about what has happened.

His first instinct is that Aubrey had been taken as a hostage to extort money from Guaranty Bank, which Aubrey had only recently retired from as President. He calls the Mamou Chief of Police Bradley Reed to place guards at the bank, readying for a confrontation. He then calls the FBI and Region II Detectives of the Louisiana State Police.

While waiting for their arrival, he begins to process the scene for fingerprints. Emily sees what he is doing, shakes her head. You won't get anywhere with that. He was wearing gloves."

The FBI arrives in an investigatory camper, a headquarters set up in the driveway. Some more arrive by helicopter. It lands on Wayne's front yard, foreign as a spaceship, everyone's heads tilted up and forward, watching across the pasture as it descends, forcibly shoving a strong pulsing breath throughout the petrified prairie.

9:00 A.M. comes.

Everyone is quiet, 'huddled prayer-like' around the phone. It has been wired and tapped, every noise coming from it to be recorded and traced. MawMaw has been coached on how to answer it.

9:01 A.M.

The silence screams.

For some, three decades later, it screams on.

Maybe they meant 9:00 P.M.

Nothing.

For the next week, the phone rings again and again. Relatives calling to check in, nosy members of the community wanting updates, a psychic who wants to talk to the family, a call traced to Angola prison, prank calls, taunts. Dropped calls, answered to an empty dial tone. Anxiety and fear and hope filling and draining the room with every ring.

People drive back and forth along LaHaye Road to see the house, the FBI, the helicopter. To try to get a glimpse of the family. The FBI sets up checkpoints between the hours of 5:00 A.M. and 7:00 A.M. for the next three days, and everyone passing on the highway during that time is questioned about if they had seen anything on January 6th.

At Guaranty Bank, Aubrey's contemporaries on the board of directors count up \$500,000 cash. They lock it in a bag and place it in a safe. The bank's security officer, Mr. Harold Hollier, keeps a nightly vigil with it just in case the call ever comes, ready to run \$500,000 to the kidnapper.

A noise in the rice field

Early morning, my father sits on his horse, the initial excitement and anxiety of helping to find his PawPaw fading, feeling now as if the deputies only sent them out today to keep them busy. Some odd noises heard overnight in the rice field. Just like there was yelling at that old camp, a light on in an abandoned house, footprints in the woods. It's been five days, but it feels as if they've been searching for months. Its early morning, the sun just peeking over the edge of world, stretching itself thin over the flat, seamless water.

The only sounds are the splashing of hooves wading through water, the hum of the four-wheelers following behind, an armada of young, angry men balancing on a thin thread of hope and despair. Glen's sons follow behind, Richard with a homemade machine gun strapped onto the ATV. The FBI have not made any comment on it since they started sending them on these

expeditions. And Jody is still carrying that suitcase holding PawPaw's suit and tie for when they find him. His pajamas must be filthy by now.

Reverberations II

For ten days after January 6, the house at 1075 LaHaye Road is transformed from 'grandma and grandpa's house' into a crime scene, an FBI headquarters, a mourning site, an everlastingly aimless game of pool, and a paparazzi horde. Police are stationed at every family member's home. Guns are purchased by the FBI for Glen, Tot, and Wayne.

The women cook all day long to feed the congregation. Rice 'n gravy and gumbo and many many sandwiches. The FBI agents have never had such food before. So many people come in and out of those doors that on the seventh day the plumbing breaks down.

Every single morning whoever is around gathers together in the living room around Glen's daughter Smokey, rosary beads wrapped around their palms.

And the words blend into the air, indecipherable against the activity bursting from strained hearts and heads. Prayers bursting through meditation against the repetitive hum of the *Je vous salut Maries*.

III: The Erasure of Evil

Happy Birthday

Today is September 27, 2017. Today you would be 105 years old.

105 years, 1,260 months, 5,460 weeks, 38,351.25 days ago John and Olena LaHaye brought you into the world, their eldest son. Born on LaHaye Road, before they called it that.

Isn't it funny how every person's very existence is so dependent upon all who came before them? People you'll never know, people time has carried far far away?

PawPaw if you had not been born, my Papa Wayne would never have come into the world. He would have never have loved Susan Dupre.

Danny, Suzette, Jay, Nick, and

Marcel would not have been born

And I would have never existed.

The idea that humans create humans, it's overwhelming. The act is not. We do it naturally. As animals do. We almost, almost don't think about it. We make each other. And centuries after centuries we multiply. We make our history.

In just the 105 years since your initiation into existence, 99 new lives have sprung forth as a result.

Every year during the liturgy of the word, at some point there comes to the pulpit the first seventeen versus of the Gospel of Matthew. They read it in church, name after name after name: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and on and on until we get to Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

Every year, we wonder why it matters. Why this litany of names we'll never remember, people we'll never know, people long long dead, why does it matter to me today?

And every year, the priest tells us that we must know this. We must know that Jesus came from Abraham. We must know that he is part of the chosen people. And that he is human. We must know that it was a process of chance and love and hate and sin and divine intervention that brought us the Christ.

Dominoes falling, people creating people along the way, from wherever they are, however they are, whatever they are.

Neither you nor MawMaw would have existed if in 1836, Nicolas Augustin De LaHaye, your shared great grandfather, had not lost his first wife Arthemise after 11 years together. If he had not found Domitile and then had nine more children. If their children didn't exist, I, my father, my grandfather, you, MawMaw, her parents, your parents, her grandparents, your grandparents—none of us would be or have been.

I wonder if Nicolas loved Arthemise.

I wonder if he loved Domitile.

If he did, how did he fall in love with them? Were they introduced? Lifelong friends? Did Domitile bat her eyes from across the room at that handsome man 23 years her senior?

Was he even handsome?

I wonder if he was a good father to his 12 children. I wonder if your great grandfather Marcena looked up to his father Nicholas. If he ever told his daughter Louisa, Mawmaw's great grandmother, that she was beautiful.

Meaningless now maybe. How is it that over time we come to lose those stories that quite literally bring together the combinations of genes that we are? What would we find there?

How much goodness? How much badness? How can we trace the different combinations over time? Eventually coming to ourselves, encountering the particles that make up every physical cell and the fabric of our very souls.

Fantasies and fairytales, magic and dragons and good-will-win-out. Always spurred on by underlying darkness. Evil must exist before heroes can conquer it. And fairytales today in all their magic are built on the darkest of ideas. The singing dwarves of Snow White were actually deformed children, Hansel and Gretel were born out of the infanticide and cannibalism of a 14th c. famined England, Cinderella's stepsisters butchered their own feet so that they might marry the prince. Smoothed over, violence wiped out, only the beautiful and the good remain in the stories we lull our children to sleep by.

To truly tell the story of the world, I realize one must first peel away its magic, its good. One must reveal its ugliest, blackest secrets. Peer into the dark.

The dominoes fall and fall, knocking each other down, lying slanted against one, then the other, then the other, drawing some intricate, indecipherable picture.

PawPaw, did you know that my dad wanted to be a veterinarian? You probably did. I'm sure that he discussed this at some point with you before he moved to Baton Rouge in the Fall of '82.

Like his older brother Danny, he didn't want to do just what his father, Wayne had done. He didn't want to be a doctor working 12 hours a day every day. My brother Ellis just moved to Baton Rouge this fall. He says he doesn't want to be a doctor either.

No Dad's plan was to serve his four years in Baton Rouge, go to vet school, and get back home as fast as possible. He would open up his practice and get back to hunting and fishing with his brothers, probably get married, and have a nice, perfect little family right there across the street from you.

When you were abducted, he was home for Christmas break. When the search parties continued into the start of school, he refused to go back. He stayed, helped the FBI investigate every tip, showing them how to get around. He'd wait for a command, and then go out with some deputies and other volunteers to check out whatever useless hint they had been given, searching for clues, searching for you. Dead end after dead end.

When it was all over, instead of going back to Baton Rouge a week late, he decided to stay to with the family. He got someone to pull strings and enrolled late at LSU Eunice, around twenty miles from Mamou.

And he thrived there. My dad has always done better with small town folks, able to connect and blossom out. He had friends, he joined clubs. He re-evaluated his commitment to Catholicism through the Newman Center on campus. He eventually was elected President of the Student Government Association at LSUE.

But then, he changed his mind. Everyone around him was pre-med, and being around home more, he was able to use his father's practice as an avenue to learn and make connections. He changed his path to medicine, and after two years he finally made his way back to Baton Rouge to complete his coursework before medical school in Shreveport.

Four years later, after a miserable break up, he made the unthinkable decision to attend residency in Galveston, Texas.

No one ever went that far away from home.

By now, both his eldest and youngest brother were married with children. Danny, not quite two years older than my dad, had three.

My dad was one of those bachelors who blamed 26 year old single status on the world's failure to produce a perfect woman. You see he had this list:

1. She had to be willing to go back home, to live on LaHaye Road.
2. She had to be Catholic.
3. She had to have a dad with a nice hunting lease.
4. She absolutely, positively could not be a doctor.

My mom broke every one of these rules, except for the most important—she agreed to raise his children in Evangeline Parish, Louisiana, though by the time they returned, there was no more space on LaHaye Road.

PawPaw if you had not been killed

You might have been able to save the estate.

Your grandson Danny might have taken your place at Guaranty Bank.

Your son, my Papa Wayne, might have been able to retire before this year at the age of 79.

Glen might still be alive.

Smokey might still be alive, and

If she were, then her baby certainly would be. He'd be 34 now.

If she were still alive, Robert might be too.

Maybe then Aunt Janie wouldn't have lost her memory.

Of course, no one really knows how those years would have turned out if you had been there. But the family still wonders about the events of that dark decade initiated by the robbing of your life.

There is one thing that is almost certain though PawPaw.

If you hadn't been taken 12,682.5 days ago, my dad would have returned to Baton Rouge for the spring of his freshman year. Would have gotten out in four years, gone to vet school for one. He would have gone home. Maybe met a girl who met his criteria, maybe before he was 26.

He wouldn't have made it to Galveston. Would never have met Chantel Euler, the protestant, Texan girl training to be a pediatrician. Wouldn't have married her.

PawPaw, if you hadn't died,

I still wouldn't know you.

I wouldn't exist.

V: The Mermentau's Westward Daughter

I had been planning my visit to the bayou for months. Well, not really planning as much as considering. Considering the idea in a fleeting, passing over my head to-do-list-without-a-clear-deadline type of way. A combination of excuses (“I’m not even exactly sure how to get there”), a prolonged plan of preparation (“I need to be in the right frame of mind”), and a sense of dread that I insistently avoided confronting filled my calendar with other, more palatable priorities.

Sitting at a Five Guys one evening, on a whim I ask my father how one even gets to *that* particular spot on Bayou Nezpique. How far is the drive? Where do I turn? How will I know that is it?

“Oh, I’ll just come with you,” he says after wiping a drop of ketchup from his beard. I hesitate, taken aback. “Dad, have you been there before?”

He shakes his head. He does it casually, as if he is telling me that he hasn’t heard of some band I’ve mentioned. Or forgot to listen to the news that day. “But I’m sure I can figure it out.” And just like that, I have a date at 9 A.M. the next morning with my father. To visit the spot where they found PawPaw’s body.

Just east of Jennings, spilling out of Lake Arthur, the four daughters of the Mermentau River rebelliously split from their source, never to return. Of the four, the Nezpique (Nip-ee-kay) leans farthest west, passing through Vermillion Parish and right under I-10. From there she finds a purpose—shaping the territories and social categorizations of the state—becoming the border between Jefferson Davis Parish and Acadia, then eventually tracing out the line between Allen and Evangeline. Cutting right through highways in the rural settlements of Evangeline Parish, the

river splits right above LA 376, birthing the Nezpique East and the Nezpique West. Follow the East Fork as it winds through the prairies between Oakdale and Mamou, wander with it down Chapman Lane, cross Ambrose Road and the LA 13 highway. Should you meander with it around the back end of Mike Fontenot's Braford Farms in a squiggly arch, and cross underneath Heritage Road, across the cattle field you'll find my home.

When I was in middle school, I'd run to the bridge and back twice, two miles. Sometimes my dad would join me, and we'd inevitably venture off the path and into the strip of wilderness. Run to the bridge, turn right, wander along the dark wooded edges of the placid brown waters, discover a fallen tree and dare each other to walk across it, spanning the river's width. Whenever we rode horses, which wasn't often, we'd ride through the muddy pasture that separated our house from the bayou. Run there and back, make circles in between. We'd wander close to it, drawn under the shade of the mysterious woods.

There's a story my dad tells. He had been driving to work when he heard an announcement on the local radio that a man had lost his goats. The entire herd had carried out an elaborate escape. Three days later, jogging over the bayou's bridge, he was overwhelmed with the unmistakable stench of death. Curiosity overcoming disgust (mankind's inexplicable and consistent reaction to death) he sought out its source, peering over the edge to the water below him. Small, white, bloated, tongue protruding, a goat bobbed, disturbingly comical, in the Nezpique. The next day, when he returned, the goat was replaced by the most monstrous alligator he had ever seen, fat and content, sunbathing on the bank.

The morning of our trip, I am apprehensive. I had intended to make this journey on my own, knowing that what this place means to me is not what it will mean for my father. Or anyone else for that matter.

Actually, I'm not sure what this place will mean to me.

I've pictured it hundreds of times. Anticipated the dissonance that occurs when the imagination's conjuring of an image confronts the actual reality of it. The way it confuses you for a moment, before you convince your mind to surrender nicely to the replacement, then abandon the original conjuring entirely, letting it fade into the "unnecessary" section of the memory. Matter over mind.

I often find myself more comfortable within my imagination. In it, I can convince myself what occurs there is not real. There is a certain amount of distance that the mind allows you to maintain in your interior wanderings. The bayou in my mind exists in the past. That strange part of the past that was the world before I entered it. A place I've never been. It might not even really exist. Just part of a story. The picture blurry and the people blobs of color. The emotions and trauma, faded and artificial.

I know, seeing this place where they found him, in all its solid realness, drawing its details into my memory, that one more protective layer of imagination will be stripped away. And I am afraid.

Preparing for this trip, I am stunned to discover my own latent fear. How I still cling to the story, to the imaginary, to the separation. How I, like my family, actually do prefer this story as a passing ghost tale, a spectral figment of the past.

And yet, isn't this the whole reason I'm here? To confront the real? To get as close to it as possible, to get as close to the truth as possible. The Platonic mission, though the truth we are seeking here is far from ideal.

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As a child the bayou always held a strange mystique in my imagination. It called to me, especially at the beginning of springtime, the sun returning after days of rain. Walk across the soft, flat pasture, totally exposed to the vast and unforgiving Louisiana sky. The woods welcomed me over their threshold. A dark, wet world canopied by a myriad of trees all wrapped together—a private room with a luxurious green carpet of moss.

It was a time when I was captivated by all things magical and mysterious. My bookshelves overflowed with stories of fairies and wood nymphs. I even learned to write in the language of the flower peoples, and my friend Ardhyn and I would get caught at school passing notes in our lovely and indecipherable scripts. At the Nezpique, hidden away from the rest of the world, our fantasies came to life. I imagined the fae hiding in between the waves and knots of a cypress' foot, dancing on the canopy of leaves above my head, twirling as they gently fell into the ominous water. I planned to bring my one true love there someday, to kiss under the tupelos.

Years later, in high school, with nothing to do on a cold and rainy afternoon, I brought a North Louisiana friend down there, thought we might go on a walk. Soaking wet and freezing, we walked up to the bayou, and though water streamed from the sky, the small river lay muddy and almost empty. Everything was brown. The water, the dirt, the sticks reaching out, begging broken claws. The trees were bare, offering no solace against the cold or the rain, desolate and bored. The magic, with childhood and with the spring, had abandoned my corner of the Nezpique.

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I am unsettled, drinking coffee with my dad, reading the paper before we leave. I cannot predict nor effectively prepare myself for our journey, and he only complicates it all. If I were alone, I could close my eyes in that dark spot, attempt to struggle through it. I could wrestle with the instinct to grieve and remind myself that I have lost nothing, then wonder some more about if it is my place to be here at all. I could reflect on all the unanswered questions, try to recreate what happened here, acknowledge that this may well be the place where Aubrey LaHaye was bludgeoned to death—these trees, this water, that sky—the last things he saw on this earth. The last things he felt: confusion, terror, loneliness, perhaps regret. And for the first time, I would allow myself to feel—truly feel—the horror of what happened to him. I could stand there, alone, and attempt to internalize that pain, that violence, through my whole being and then ask myself what it has done to me. If I were alone I could scream at the complete and utter awfulness of it all, demand an answer from the Almighty.

I could call out to Aubrey's ghost, find out if he still resides in this place. Imagine introducing myself to him, telling him who I am, ignoring what has brought me here to catch up on what we've missed of each other—everything.

I could spend hours and hours scraping the area, digging holes in the mud and checking behind each tree, hoping to find something that was missed those thirty-five years ago, the blood never recovered, a pristine fingerprint, the murder weapon itself. I could step out into the water and immerse myself, baptized in polluted water and blood and decay. Shiver against the Nezpique's cold January caress, and sink to its bottom. Open my eyes, blinded and stinging at the particles of silt scratching my corneas, unable to close them. Unable to move. Tied to the

bottom. Not breathing because his lungs were already resting. And my heart would slowly cease to beat.

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In Longfellow's enduring Acadian mythology, the bayous of Louisiana are graced in literature for the first time by the ethereal and lovely maiden Evangeline. As legend has it, the young bride, downtrodden and banished with the rest of the Acadian people from their ravaged Eden of Acadie, turned with tentative hope toward the French populated lands of Louisiana. As she traveled down the "Father of the Waters," the miserable girl tirelessly searched in place after place for her lost lover Gabriel, collecting in her heart a map of unmarked graves.

Eventually, she and her fellow travelers came to a strange place in which water spreads through the soft sinking soils of the land, swelling and insistently, albeit gently, carving its place in the landscape, settling in for good. The oarsmen's old Canadian melodies rang out, accompanied by the rhythmic whooping of the crane and the steady roar of the gator. Mesmerized by the Atchafalaya's unnerving beauty, the Acadians, made drunk by the odor of magnolia blossoms and seduced by gesturing willows, were drawn into a deep slumber on the bayou's banks.

*Over them vast and high extended the cope of a cedar,
Swinging from its great arms, the trumpet-flower and the grapevine
Hung their ladder of ropes aloft like the ladder of Jacob,
On whose pendulous stairs the angels ascending, descending,
Were the swift humming-birds, that flitted from blossom to blossom.
Such was the vision Evangeline saw as she slumbered beneath it.*

Filled was her heart with love, and the dawn of an opening heaven

Lighted her soul in sleep with the glory of regions celestial.ⁱ

As the maiden slept, dreaming of death and salvation, a rugged and restless youth sat upon the helm of a passing boat, drowning every moment deeper in despair, beginning to lose hope of ever being reunited with his sweet Evangeline. The willows and the cedars, hiding the girl asleep on the bank, betrayed nothing of her presence.

--

Dad calls his brother Danny to find out how we are going to get there. To figure out the exact spot. He has Google Maps pulled up and is tracing the twisting path of the thin river from our house, around the Mamou cattle and rice fields, to a spot off the Oberlin Road, down a side street called George Soileau Lane that makes a ninety-degree angle over the Bayou Nezpique.

It's around a thirty-minute drive from here.

Dad fixes a second cup of coffee. It is now 10 A.M. I think we are both stalling a little. But he betrays no signs of apprehension, asking me about school, about my brothers in Baton Rouge. Inquiring about my plans for Mardi Gras, and reminding me that my youngest brother turns twelve next Saturday. It really has been a while since I've been home to visit. Finally, he grabs one of his barn coats and hands it to me. It's forty-eight degrees and drizzling, a gray pallor clinging to the air. He pats our blue heeler on the head, and we climb into his truck.

Dad's first turn off Heritage Road is right into the backroads of Vidrine, which follows the path of the Nezpique more closely than the conventional route to the highway. Bumping along the familiar dirt paths, we pass small farms and broken-down houses, Braford cattle from

the larger farms spread in between. A dog runs out to bark at our vehicle and chase us until it falls too far behind for hope.

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Though in our history books, Louisiana and its spirit lie dormant before the Cajuns and other European peoples settled here, its bodies of water and regions betray the traces of the land's first inhabitants, its native tribes. Rivers: Atchafalaya, Mermentau, Calcasieu, Tensas, Ouachita, Dorcheat, Catahoula, Tensas, Tchfuncte, and Floctaw. Towns: Anacoco, Calcasieu, Carencro, Lacassine, Mamou, Opelousas. The very word bayou is derived from the Choctaw word for "small stream," bayuk.

"Nezpique" means "tattooed nose" in the language of the Atakapa-Ishak Indians, the native peoples who lived along its banks, and in the Nezpique village. Like the Natchez Indians, the Atakapa-Ishak tribes were known to practice the art of tattooing on their faces and their bodies, pricking their skin until it bled, then mixing the blood with charcoal to create symbols on their foreheads down to their nose and reflections of nature across their bodies.

During the eighteenth century, as the Acadians and other European peoples began to explore and form communities in Louisiana, the Atakapa-Ishak's brief meetings with the French and English nailed down the narrative that would be theirs for the remainder of history, starting with a new name. Their ancient identity as the Ishak, "The People," born from the sea, was forgotten and replaced by the slur Attakapa, "Man-Eaters," a name passed onto the settlers by the Choctaw tribes. Today, the remnants of the Attakapa-Ishak tribes claim the legend of their cannibalism as a vile rumor, related to their practice of roasting their enemies, but not eating them. Accounts from historians and explorers of the area, referring to the Attakapas-Ishak tribes

as *les sauvages*, attest to the wide pervasiveness of the perception of the tribe's cannibalistic practices.

Spread across southwest Louisiana and into southeast Texas, in prehistoric times the Atakapa-Ishak divided themselves into two separate populations known as "The Sunset People" to the west and "The Sunrise People" to the east. Of the mostly-Louisiana "Sunrise" population, the tribes who settled along the Mermentau tributaries were known as the Otse or the "Snake Band," representing the winding snakelike nature of the bayous in which they lived.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Atakapa-Ishak were mostly extinct, the entire story and culture of a people who had lived along the Louisiana bayous since prehistory, obliterated after a short century of sharing air with European settlers, given a new name. Remembered forever after as man eaters. Today, you can still find their abandoned arrow heads in the mud along the banks of the Mermentau's daughters.

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My father is the one who first broke the silence on PawPaw Aubrey's murder, the one who conceived of the idea that this is a story worth telling. That there may be value in ripping open the unresolved questions that everyone has tiptoed around for years, in exposing the pent-up trauma to air and light.

When I decided to major in English as I applied to colleges my senior year of high school, my father argued with me that just because math wasn't my "best" subject, it didn't mean I was incapable of becoming an engineer. Just because I struggled miserably through Physics, and only got through my other sciences because of my ability to memorize, it didn't mean that I wouldn't fall in love with it later in the college setting.

I look back on that now with a new appreciation for the fact that my father has always, since I was a child, inculcated in me the idea that I can do anything. And it mattered. I was never afraid to dream big, to conceive the impossible, to believe in myself.

My dad and I are very different. It was a gulf that opened up the day, branded into my memory, standing in the barn, when he regrettably and awkwardly told me for the first time that he could no longer carry me on his shoulders. In that first transition from “baby girl” and “my little princess,” from dependent to personhood, I was stung by the reality that we no longer knew what to do with each other. It was a line easily drawn by gender. And my hypermasculine father had four sons with whom to relate, to hunt, to fish, to ride. It only made it harder that when he occasionally tried to include me, it was usually too late. I was far behind. Though my brothers were younger than I was, when I was invited to tag along, I could feel the embarrassing pacification in the air. Could sense the way my father wished he didn’t have to spend so much time untying my knots after clumsy casting, didn’t want to deal with my terrible aim, couldn’t understand my frustration at being unable to keep up.

It wasn’t that I felt I was disappointing him. I knew that I wasn’t expected to engage in these activities. It was the exclusion. Which resulted in rebellion. Which served to settle me exactly into the gender roles reserved for me and separate me from him even further. Now, he was ceaselessly supportive, staying up late to help me study, clapping from the kitchen as I clanged on my newest Mozart recital piece, promising that my ballet solo had brought tears to his eyes.

He really was a wonderful father.

But even today, sometimes we struggle to traverse the gulf, to meet in the middle, look each other in the eyes, and smile in the warmth of understanding. We are trying.

He didn't understand why I wanted to major in English when I was born into a legacy of doctors. Couldn't accept that I was going to resort to writing rather than pursue that path of prestige and success and security. Didn't want to entertain the idea that the path I chose might not lead me back home.

But around a year and a half ago, we sat and we talked for hours. He described to me, for the first time, the whole story of Aubrey's kidnapping. How it happened, what it did to everyone. How in medical school, working with a forensic pathologist, he was able to see the photos of his grandfather's beaten body. He told me for the first time what really happened to Uncle Glen. To Smoky. That she was pregnant. He told me that he believed it was all related, all a chapter in the saga that began on January 1983. It was an inner layer of my father that I had never experienced before. Vulnerable and exposed, and he was offering it to me.

He asked me to write it. To tell the story of our family, the good parts and the bad parts.

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We turn down Veteran's Memorial Highway, going until we pass the end of LaHaye Road. A dark green pickup truck turns off it, pulling in front of us. I imagine that there is an old man in the back seat, tied up. From this point on, our path follows that of the killer, the path that represents the gaping hole in the narrative of January 6, 1983. What happened in between the moment the stranger led Aubrey out of his home, knife pressed to his back, and the moment he sank under the water, already dead.

I keep this realization to myself.

Making this journey together, we have yet to address the complexity of our Saturday morning drive through the prairie. We gossip about people in town, he tells me that the lesbian couple in church is pregnant, I tell him that my roommate broke up with her boyfriend again. He

worries that my little brother is being bullied for his online rap videos. I tell him that I think the kid is talented. Weird and goofy. But undeniably talented. He tells me that he has just finished the last of James Lee Burke's Dave Robicheaux series and was disappointed in it. And sometimes we sit in silence, allowing the low volume of a country song on the radio to accompany our individual contemplations.

--

I often find myself returning to the question of why I am doing this. To some degree, this project has, from the beginning, been a way for me to connect with my father. To combine his most intimate, difficult, and dear memories with my own innermost thoughts and experiences and bring them together into the physical entity of words on a page. To have something to discuss deep into the night with him, to spontaneously call him for in the middle of the week.

And yet, there remains a strain of restraint in our interactions, even in this. The deeper and deeper I delve into my investigation, the more mine it becomes. The entire concept of memoir implies a degree of self-insertion, and though this is my father's story and my family's story, it is also mine. And in the same way that I keep him at arm's reach as I engage in the most internal struggles of understanding my great grandfather's murder, my father keeps a calculated distance in telling me of his experience. Never revealing his own reactions, his own feelings. Always observing everyone else's. I don't think that he is exactly holding back when he tells stories this way. My father is a passionate man, explosive and unpredictable at times. A nightmare to argue against. Smiles easily. But he is externally inclined. Does not peer inward when he can help it. I don't think he has any idea how he was affected by that trauma, though he will easily tell you how the others were. He tells stories as if he is the narrator rather than the

main character, doing what he can to take care of the people around him, always moving forward. Allowing it to become simply a part of his history.

It occurs to me that I sometimes do this too.

--

We drive on down the Oberlin Highway. Dad says he's pretty sure he knows where we're going but is trying to keep an eye out so that we don't miss George Soileau Road. I keep watch out the window: Rodnis Rd. Manuel Ln., Daugereaux Rd., Bergeron Ln.

I point out Balfa Ln. to my father. He gives a little chuckle that comes out almost as a grunt, nods and drives on in silence.

"It should be right about here." Dad slows the truck. But it's not. Instead of George Soileau, we are confronted with BJ Lane. Confused, Dad keeps going. "It has to be around this area," he says. We drive, and then he decides. "No, that had to be it. They must have changed the name." Turns the truck around. "Are you positive Dad?" *We can't go to the wrong place*, I think to myself. "Yes, that's where the bayou crosses. It doesn't go this far."

By now, the green truck has long disappeared.

We turn and drive down a narrow, wooded road. There's no one down here. No houses. No traffic. There's not even really much room for two vehicles to drive past each other if they needed to. No one would be bothering us.

Dad points out that no one would have bothered him. "He knew that. That must be why he chose it."

Eventually, we come across a bridge. "Is this it?" I ask Dad, losing confidence that we will have any way to definitively know that we are in the right place. "I think so," he replies, but drives right over it. I am starting to get panicky. *Why did he pass it up? Did we come all the way*

here just to do a drive by? How do I ask him to stop? We go a little further and I stay silent.

“Yep that had to be it,” he says, pulling onto the side of the road to turn around.

We drive slowly now, approaching the wide concrete bridge, park right in the middle of it, pause for a second, and then open our doors at the same time. “This has got to be it,” my dad says. “I don’t think the bayou crosses the road anywhere else in this area....but,” running his hand over the waist high concrete walls, visibly disturbed, “I think....I remember in the pictures that the bridge was wooden.”

I know the picture he is talking about. It was published in one of the first newspaper articles I found on the Aubrey LaHaye investigation. Law enforcement crowded around, one man leaning against a wooden rail, another pointing out towards the water. He’s right. The graffiti-strewn cement sides unnerve me, and they look wrong. For the first ten minutes they are all that I can focus on. I walk up and down the length of the bridge, the width of the river, around ten feet. In unimpressive spraypaint curliques and gashes: “Brandon and Liz 4 Ever,” and later, brighter, “Fuck Brandon,” “IDGT”. A series of names, with no accusations or partners or obscenities, just left there for the sake of being part of it: “Duke Mew,” “Pierrotti,” “Chet,”. In one dark corner I make out a messy “Jordan”. In another, I spot the word: “Terror.” Largest of all, flanked on one side by a swastika and on the other the Star of David, in huge angular script is written: “SINISTER.”

Dad finds, on the far end of the bridge, a sign that reveals that it was built in 2007. This cold stone has no answers for me, nor do the people who have left us their chemically-inscribed autobiography. I wonder what drew them to this place. If it was the same thing that drew Aubrey’s killer. Silence. Isolation. Escape from society.

Ten days after the stranger entered Aubrey and Emily's home, a man chose this spot because there would be no people here to disturb him, no people to disturb. It was perfect, safe to shoot load after load into the trees. He even brought his child to practice alongside him. I stand against the edge and look out, trying to imagine where their chosen target had lain.

Here boy, you see that bag of trash over there? Take aim, careful now, 1... 2... 3... shoot.

Three bullets entered the cold, wet, corpse of my great grandfather before man and son realized something was very very wrong. Before they snapped the rope drawing him to the ground, and his floating body rolled over in the water, revealing the top of his battered and bloody head, a protruding leg, a folded arm.

Standing there with my father, I try to place myself in their shoes. To feel their shock and confusion and horror. It's impossible. I cannot unknow this story, cannot inhabit a body that does not recognize that bobbing pile of trash.

"I wonder which side it was on," my dad says, standing, lost, in the middle. It's a valid question. I'm drawn to the northeast side, where the slow-moving water folds around the bottom of a cypress someone has cut down clean. Where bone-white naked tree limbs reach out over the banks, hiding a portion of the river's trail from your view. The water is shallow today. There is a line on the banks, a stark chromatic separation between dust and mud. There is trash along the edges, beer cans and a Kraft macaroni box.

When they found Aubrey, the papers described the Nezpique as "rain-swollen," with an unusually fast moving current. His killer had weighted the body with two Camaro rims, tied with a rope that wrapped around his broad waist and secured his arms. The only reason the Nezpique surrendered him that day was because of the pressure of accumulated rain, running swift and pushing him up into the light.

The other side of the bridge presents a neat, straight strip of bayou, framed on each end by trees leaning into each other, their reflections visible on the surface of that muddy water, a gothic silhouette against a bright gray sky. I shiver.

“It was right around this time of year,” my dad says, entering the space beside me. “I remember it being so miserable riding horses, looking for him.” He tells me that he remembers the day it all ended too. Emotionally, psychologically, and physically exhausted from ten days of torment, his friend had convinced him to take a break, to try and get his mind off everything. They were taking their horses, freshly ridden from days of search parties, to the camp at Miller’s Lake with some girls from Lake Charles. “I don’t even remember who they were now,” Dad smiles a little, shaking his head. On their way, a truck came up alongside them honking angrily and insistently. It was my dad’s cousin Billy. “And I knew right away that they had found him.” “None of us came out here,” he says. “I don’t even remember where we were. But we were all together. I remember holding my daddy while he just sobbed into my shoulder, shaking. I had never seen him cry before.”

In the countless accounts I’ve collected of this day, the memory of release is universal. Some were shocked, truly believing that he had been alive this entire time. Others expressed to me, through so many guilt-stricken words, the sense of inevitable relief that it was all over. I imagine it like a dam, collecting water into a more and more powerful creature of despair and fear and hopelessness, and then the release that results in a new creature. A gushing river of new grief and confusion that has settled into the placid lake of the last three decades.

And my father, I imagine him navigating those waters with slow heavy movements, observing and rooting himself in duty, beside his father, his mother, his grandmother. His face is blank, a wall deflecting the overflow of emotions attempting to shove him to the floor.

And part of me knows that this isn't true. I know that the passionate man who is my father absorbed all of it. Perhaps he's let the hard parts go. Or maybe he's just buried them deep inside, managing to hold at the forefront only the plot points that don't hurt so much, just enough to keep the overarching story whole.

This detail about his father hurts though.

Pointing to a portion of the bank where you can walk right up to the water, he says, "This is probably where he killed him." Carelessly, he adds, "It would be easy to take him right there, do his business, and toss him in the water."

"You don't think he could have done it somewhere else?" I ask. I guess I've always gone with the idea that there was some unknown spot in Mamou where my great grandfather had actually died, a spot we would never discover.

"Of course we'll probably never know," he says. "But I've always imagined that he came straight here. Had everything ready beforehand, you know? Maybe had someone waiting here to help him."

I've been careful in addressing with my dad the idea that Balfa was not the sole sinner in this story. I try to let him bring it up. And he does. He's usually the one to lead me on to possibilities and theories. But he does so in a way that seems to dismiss them. I've always gotten the impression that while the conspiracies fascinated my father, he believed that the court had done its job. That it had condemned the right guy.

That my father imagines it was so carefully planned, not an impulsive act of stupid passion, intrigues me.

"You don't think he did it alone?"

"I think it's very possible that he had help."

I think twice, and then hesitantly ask him if he had ever heard about the wallet they found here the day they found the body. He shakes his head.

“They found Tim Balfa’s wallet on the ground,” I look at Dad with eyebrows raised.

“They never brought that up in court...” he says.

“I know.” I found a letter with this detail in the records at the Parish courthouse. I later saw it again within the prosecution’s initial list of exhibits, crossed out. It baffles me, as I can see that it baffles my father.

“I saw him in my office just the other day,” he says.

The fact that it was never brought to trial indicates that the prosecution believed it would complicate their case against John Balfa, which is true. The wallet’s existence leads to a range of possibilities, all of which lead to deeply disturbing conclusions and even more questions than we began with:

1. Tim Balfa committed the crime
2. Tim Balfa helped John to commit the crime
3. John Balfa attempted to frame his brother.
4. Someone else attempted to frame both of them.

My dad runs his hand over the top of his bald head, flattening the long dark wispy pieces of hair in the middle. He presses down on his eyes, and drags them down his face. We stand in silence for a while.

“What I would just *give* for answers,” he says, offering open palms to the Nezpique.

“What we would all give just to know what really happened here. Why it happened.”

He waits a moment. “I wish...that there was some way that we could talk to Balfa. Could offer him some sort of deal. I wish we could tell him, ‘We don’t think you’re a dangerous man.

We just want to know. *We need to know....*' We could offer him a chance to get out, I don't know... parole or something. If he would just share his story."

"Dad...do you really think everyone in the family would feel the same way about it?"

He becomes resolute, slapping his hand down on the bridge's wall, voice raising, "Yes I'm sure of it! No one is *settled* with this. No one has let it go. Thirty years later and we still are stuck wondering how our PawPaw died.

And why in the world someone would want to kill him."

Shaking his head, "I mean who in the world can really believe that man killed him...killed him like this...because he was angry about a loan? It doesn't make sense. The crime doesn't match the motive. You know that."

I do.

I don't tell him, but I disagree with his confidence in the family. So many people have grown comfortable with the narrative we've been given. I've seen it in the way they react to certain questions, certain suggestions. There is a determination to hold onto what they have come to terms with. The simple motive. The ghost story. An act of raw and basic evil. It is simply too much to contemplate that there may be a more complex reality.

And even the ones who do question, who do want to know, they would never allow that man to walk in the free world again. "Uncle Richard would probably kill him the second he stepped out," is all I can offer. Dad laughs, breathes deeply, and nods.

We stay a while longer, shivering over the bayou. When I was in high school, a religion teacher once described the way you can sometimes sense evil in a place. How your soul can feel darkness moving in places of sin. She'd use examples like the strip clubs or a voodoo houses in

New Orleans. Bourbon Street. The last time I was there, I was not searching for evil, and I certainly did not feel it. I guess that doesn't mean it wasn't there.

This memory floats to the surface as I lean against a railing over the bayou, in the spot where something—anger, desperation, jealousy, greed— possessed someone to beat a sick old man to death, tie him to the metal frames of two tire rims, and dump him into the Nezpique. The strange flora and fauna of this place, plagued by the memory, offers me no answers. I guess I didn't expect it to. There is a legacy of silent tragedy here, of bodies nestled on the banks of the bayous. The waters remaining silent as Gabriel passed through them, missing his sleeping Evangeline—though they surely heard her earnest prayers before slumber. The tupelos and magnolias covering the bodies of the last Sunrise People, dying of foreign diseases, but failing to preserve their story, their name. And pulling Aubrey LaHaye from their depths, resolutely tight lipped about how he ended up there. About why he ended up there.

I close my eyes and reach for the essence of evil, call to it. And I am overwhelmed at its nowhere-ness and then its everywhere-ness. There are ghosts and then there is air. There is goodness and there is badness and there is so much in between. There are questions, and I know, somewhere, there are answers. There is a story here, a true one, and we have become part of it. Me and my father and all that came before us and all that is in us and all that we are. And we are here. Real. Solid. In this moment, together. Disjointed and confused and, ultimately, connected.

VIII: A Plead of Not Guilty

Timing

Reliable. Honest. Inflexible as a conservative old lady. The number of Mississippi you can count between yesterday and today. The speed with which you say them your only power to change that number, the frame in which they are said unyielding. A limit that measures the quickness, the strength, the endurance of man—the barrier between this instant and a hard line of later. A pathway that organizes the processes of existence, of growth, of aging, of decomposition. Of digestion. How fast you can turn food into energy. How quickly you use that energy. How fast bacteria turn you into energy, stealing it for themselves until you are nothing but dirt.

Time doesn't manipulate. People do, disguising its effects and attempting to surpass its limits.

“The timing at which Aubrey LaHaye was killed following his Jan. 6 1983 abduction is the most crucial issue to be decided in the second-degree murder trial of John Brady Balfa,” Defense attorney Julie Cullen attests in a call for mistrial immediately following the prosecution's opening statement.

According to John Brady's father Harry, John was within nine miles of Aubrey LaHaye early in the morning of January 6, 1983. Months before the trial begins he told a local newspaper that he has faith that John will be found innocent.

There's no motive. Never was.

He didn't do it. He couldn't have and we'll find some way to prove it.¹

¹ Monty Williams, Daily World, September 5, 1983

On Monday December 2, 1985, Harry Balfa takes the stand, hoping to help convince a group of strangers, jury members that held his little boy's life in their hands, that John Brady did not beat an old man to death.

I always wonder if he questioned it himself for one second, even just one.

He had gotten up to use the bathroom around 5:08 A.M. on that winter morning of 1983. John was making coffee in the kitchen. He had told him the evening before that heavy rains had canceled his work day the following morning with Sunland Construction. He was going to drive down to Texas to see his girlfriend Debbie. He would leave early the next morning.

5:08. He remembered it on the big clock in the kitchen, glowing green segments on the stove top. Such a mundane detail, branded inexplicably into his mind. When the Evangeline Parish deputies came to the house on January 7, 1983, asking where John was and what time he left, Harry was able to nail when he saw him brewing coffee, down to that minute. No rounding up. 5:08.

In John Brady's own statement to the FBI, he originally said he had left his father's at 5 a.m. He later clarified: "about 5 a.m." He said he had not woken anyone up.

On January 7, 1983, John Brady was arrested for violating probation on previous charges in Gregg County, Texas, 230 miles from LaHaye Road. A mug shot of him, staring ahead dead eyed, is presented to the jury with the date.

Debbie Kinney, John Brady's girlfriend at the time, takes the stand. By now, almost three years later, the two have been married and divorced.

They got married at his daddy's house in April. The air was cool. Just a simple little ceremony. I remember thinking it was odd that they were getting married at this place. I remember it got real emotional and John started crying. And he hugged his daddy and all this.

To tell you the truth I don't think she knew what she was getting into. Kind of innocent. Didn't have any idea.

Debbie tells the jury that on January 6, she received a call from her mother between 10:30-10:45 A.M. announcing John Brady's arrival in Atlanta, Texas at the Best Western next door to the restaurant her mother managed. She remembers the time because she was watching a morning game show when she got the call. Leaving her house immediately, she took the 10-15 minute drive to the hotel, and the couple arrived at the restaurant for a meal with her mother, Geraldine Kinney, around 11:00 A.M.

Geraldine's testimony matches her daughter's. She received John's call around 10:30 and the three of them were enjoying a meal by 11:00.

In cross-examination, Prosecutor Bill Pucheu asks Geraldine when Debbie and John were married. She responds, in April. What day? She fumbles.

Pucheu asks, "How is it that you are able to remember the exact time of a phone call three years ago, when you are unable to recall the date of your daughter's marriage?"

William Rodrigues III of Bossier City is one of three full-time forensic anthropologists in the nation and recognized as a pioneer in the field of human decomposition research. He shares with the jury, on the prosecution's behalf, the results of his "time since death" determination conducted earlier in the month based on the initial autopsy report and photos.

Did you know that bodies decompose at half the normal rate when submerged in water? Like a cold, liquid, antibiotic blanket—guarding against the Earth's tiniest thieves, hungry for skin, for blood frozen black inside the body's vessels. The body is preserved, frozen in its last form, for just a while longer. Stealing time.

Rodrigues testifies that the body, torn from its blanket on January 16, 1983, was in the very earliest stages of decomposition. It would have had to rest there for 10-12 days, had to have submerged between January 4 and January 6. Aubrey died on the day he was taken.

If John Brady did, in fact, kill Aubrey LaHaye, and if we are, in fact, to believe the witness testimonies, he would have had to do so in an impressively short set of barriers between now and later. Between the moment of 5:08 in his kitchen brewing coffee, and 5:45 when Glen received his mother's frantic phone call, John Brady would have had to:

drive ten minutes through Mamou

knock on the door at 1075 LaHaye Road at approximately 5:18 A.M.

introduce himself to Emily and Aubrey

enter the house

press his knife to Aubrey's chest and demand money

follow Emily to the bathroom, take the wallet with \$200

tie her to the bedpost, badly

walk out the door with Aubrey

hit Aubrey in the head, twice, heft his 200-pound, limp body into his truck, and drive away (all within approximately 3-5 minutes before Emily walks out)

or get away first, to kill Aubrey later.

Between 5:30 when he had driven from 1075 LaHaye Road and 11:00 A.M. when he was sitting eating a sandwich with his future wife and mother-in-law, future ex-wife and ex-mother-in-law, he would have had to:

Drive to some location, discreet

Perhaps hit Aubrey in the head, twice, if he hasn't already; heft his 200 pound limp body into his truck

Unless he killed him at Bayou Nezpique.

He'd have to drive 6 miles from the general Mamou area to Bayou Nezpique, park on the bridge.

He'd have to pull him back out of his truck.

Tie him to the tire rims, with the same kind of rope left on the bedpost in Emily's bedroom,

to lift him, attached to a Camaro's skeletal foot like some sort of ancient torture device, and heave him over the edge of the bridge. To then watch him sink under the blanket of the bayou's muddy brown water.

Somewhere in that time frame, he would have had to make the ransom call, determined by the FBI as local, at 7:10 A.M.

Then drive. He'd have to drive and drive.

The Kinneys claim that the drive from Atlanta to Mamou the day before their testimony took them five hours. FBI testimony claims four and a half, another agent admits that he made it in three and a half at 85mph.

Balfa would have had to leave Mamou by 7:00 A.M. to make it to the Best Western to make the 10:30 phone call to Geraldine.

John Brady's attorney Julie Cullen believed that in arranging the testimonies that she had set up an 'iron-clad' alibi for the jury, understanding that there was no proof to indicate the time that Aubrey LaHaye had died.

In the Billy Pucheu's opening statement, he announces that a forensic pathologist will tell the jury that Aubrey was dead before the 7:10 ransom call was made, two hours after his abduction.

Cullen immediately motions for mistrial. She has been asking for information regarding Aubrey's autopsy for months. They told her no tests had been conducted, and she was not entitled to such information. Pucheu argues that he could not give it to her because it had not yet been entered into the official records of the case.

She rebukes, "But you must have asked the questions, being that you just gave the answers to the entire jury."

After hearing arguments on both sides, the judge denies Cullen's motion.

The next day, forensic pathologist George McCormick testifies that he conducted an autopsy on Aubrey LaHaye's body on January 17, 1983, the day after it was fished out of Bayou Nezpique. He says that in the upper portion of Aubrey's intestines, were peanuts.

Pawpaw would shell them for her. Sitting in his recliner with a big bowl, he'd pull off the outer shell of each peanut while watching his evening television. When the grandkids were younger, they would help him.

Her peanut brittle was something like a praline. You'd eat it and the candy would stick to your fingers for hours. It had whole peanuts in it.

Wednesday was couples' card night. As they did every week, they went to a friend's home, played canasta or boo-ray. They stayed out late, and someone made a gumbo. Aubrey ate his dinner around 8:30 P.M. And before he went to sleep on his last night of life, he helped himself to a piece of Emily's famous peanut brittle.

The peanuts' place in his upper intestines indicated that he had not had a bowel movement that day. He also had a full bladder. Taking into account the fact that he had not

recently taken medicine, had not eaten or drank since the night before, and had normal bowel and urinary functions, McCormick concluded that Aubrey had to have died between 5:31 and 7:30 A.M.

In cross-examination, Cullen asks him when he made this determination, as it had not been shared with her. He responds that he had been only able to make the final conclusions once Pucheu gave him certain information, the details about Aubrey's medicinal and bodily waste elimination habits. Cullen asks when this was approximately.

"10 minutes before I took the stand," he says.

Timing. Who is manipulating it today?

Without having the numbers lined up in front of them, the jury must decide. Whose witnesses are most trustworthy? Is it more likely that the Kinneys are lying than the prosecution, who seems to have withheld information from the defense and gotten away with it?

Or is everyone telling the truth? Is it possible that John Brady managed victory in his desperate combat with time? Driving 90 mph to Atlanta, running as fast as he can away from that sinking mass, getting there in only three hours?

The black caterpillar

During that week in January of 83, Emily is asked to identify the abductor once again. In Aubrey's office, Wayne's daughter Suzette sits with her grandmother as she cries and rubs her hands together. She has been questioned incessantly for the past two days. The police, the FBI, the search parties, all still at square one. Everything seems to rest upon her ability to remember.

The man's name is Johnny Donnels. He is with the FBI, but he tells her that he is also an artist. Trying to calm her, he suggests that she should come and visit his studio in New Orleans

sometime. Right by St. Louis' Cathedral. He pulls out a set of cards, piles of eyebrows, eyes, chins, and noses.

Which nose Mrs. Emily? Can you remember which nose was his?

Were his eyebrows thick and furry? Did they meet in the middle?

Which card most resembles his lips? These? Thick, like fingers? Or thin? Bloodless?

Like a snake?

She would pick and then she'd change her mind. And then she'd say, "I don't remember." She always said that he was young and he was kinda pretty. Like it wasn't a vicious old bulky murderer or a kidnapper like you'd imagine. We sat in there a long time. That face looked so unusual. It was just pieces put together and then he tried to draw it. But she didn't do very well with it at all.

I didn't think it looked anything like Balfa.

None of the four composites drawn really resemble each other. One was decided upon and spread all over town, posted in all of the newspapers. When I show it today to John Brady's old friends, every one of them stare. They try to fit John's face inside it. It's unnatural, doesn't fit. An unidentified, blank face. Eyes far apart, a thick nose. Eyebrows and lips thin. Wearing a beret. Something about him reminds me of the chimney sweeps from Mary Poppins. The man in the drawing looks like a boy, clean shaven.

MawMaw Emily hated facial hair. PawPaw never wore it, and neither did her boys. It was something everyone knew and even laughed about. She liked a clean face. It was nicer to touch, nicer to kiss. Nicer to look at.

Years later, when suspicion of Balfa's involvement heightens, they bring Emily into the police station for a lineup. She identifies him two different times as the man who entered her home on January 6.

In trial, she is the first witness to take the stand. Dressed to the nines, eyes wide—piercing, hands shaking just a little, and back straight as if a board were tied to it, Emily LaHaye makes her way to the witness stand. She tells her terrible story, pausing to recompose herself every few moments, tears always threatening to flood over but obeying her interior commands to not break onto her cheek.

Bill Pucheu asks her, “Mrs. LaHaye, can you identify the man who took your husband in this courtroom?”

Eyes narrowed, Emily LaHaye turns her face toward John Brady Balfa. She points right to him, and in a raised, trembling voice,

“That is the man who walked away with my husband. I have no doubt.”

A growl erupts from the defense table. John Brady stands and utters his first and only words of the trial,

“Better be sure lady. Better make sure.”

A LaHaye in the back of the courtroom stands with Balfa. He’s got a gun in his pocket, has been waiting for the opportunity to shoot the bastard who killed his PawPaw. But he freezes. He can’t do it. John Brady gets to live another day.

In cross-examination, Cullen questions Emily’s credibility as an eyewitness.

“On January 6, 1983 you described your husband’s abductor as 5 feet 10 inches tall, 170 pounds, round or oval face, medium build. And clean shaven,” she says. “The defendant John Brady Balfa is about 6 feet tall, slim build. As you can see, he has a long face with a prominent nose. And a mustache. We have evidence that he also wore a mustache at the time of your husband’s abduction.”

Eight days later Cullen will produce this evidence, the photo taken of John Brady in Gregg County Texas on January 7, 1983, a black caterpillar sitting comfortably on his upper lip.

“I told the police he was slim and about six feet tall,” Emily calmly responds.

“But Mrs. Emily the official report clearly states that you said 5’10” and 170 pounds.”

“Well he’s tall and slim isn’t he? The description I gave police on January 6 was exactly like this man sitting here,” she asserts with determination.

“Mrs. Emily here is a copy of the composite drawn up by Johnny Donnels, the copy chosen to be distributed around town. Can you point out for me the similarities between this drawing and the defendant?”

Emily stares long and hard at the face. She’s seen it so many times now. She looks at John Brady, then quickly back down to the drawing.

“There never was any resemblance to this drawing and the man who came into my home. If I said there was, it was to satisfy the police officer who was working so hard.”

¹ Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, and Arthur A. Dixon. *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie*. London : New York: E. Nister ; E.P. Dutton & Co., 1856.