

Familiar Blood:

The Darkwood Story



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Introduction:

Darkwood Manor is haunted. The simple statement implies a variety of theories to the typical person today, but inside Darkwood, the statement begins to branch out and gain life itself. Was there one event that spawned such horror within its walls? Or did the haunting just appear as an accumulation of repeated obscenities? Which went bad first? The land or the house?

This book is to chronicle and document the extensive and colorful past of the family who created the bloodied and complex history of the manor known today as Darkwood.



The Father of the Manor:

Leroy Darkwood

This colorful individual built a reputation long before he ever acquisitioned the wealth needed for Darkwood. His storied past has proceeded perhaps even the home he haunted. The year of 1842 was a good year for most Virginian's. The Shenandoah Valley was plentiful with game. It seemed as if every seed lowered into the rich earth yielded twice the normal product. This year, in this very valley, Leroy Wood was given to the world.

Pertinent facts on his childhood are relatively scarce. Many relatives questioned his moral lacking due to his superior attitude and apparent enjoyment of life's cruelties. He enjoyed lashing out at relatives and frequently physically attacked his parents. Leroy's issues escalated as he grew in size and gained age. Our earliest accounts have placed him as the murderer of Clyde Farmer. Young Leroy had seen Farmer at the general store earlier in the day with a wallet full of cash. The only way Leroy could obtain that cash is by death. He hid in Farmer's barn and waited for him to tend his animals. Farmer never saw the axe or the boy holding it.

Suspicious grew and many pointed towards Leroy, but it was hopeless. Farmer had angered several other locals previously and suspicion fell on all of them. Just as evidence began pointing towards Leroy, his family panicked. They sent him to Missouri as quickly as possible. His parents, Cecil and Edith Darkwood, were at the end of their rope, and they knew their son would be if they didn't act fast.

Leroy nearly disappeared from history, but his name was saved due to the Civil War. He joined the Confederacy, enlisting at the first sign of fighting. He had no particular issue with war, he enjoyed the violence and bloodshed. He rapidly gained attention from his peers and eventually he also gained the attention of Captain William Quantrill. Capt. Quantrill had an eye for marksmen and Leroy was one of the best he'd witnessed. At such a young age, Leroy had already established himself as having the capacity to shoot the neck off of a glass bottle at 300 yards, with perfect precision every time. This was an era when weapons were far from the smooth efficiency we enjoy today.

Wood's cold and indifferent nature was almost as impressive during a war as his drive. He didn't aim to prove a cause, he aimed because he liked to kill. Eventually, Leroy began to ascend rank in the infamous "Quantrill Raiders," as much as in the military.

August of 1863 was a time of chaos in Lawrence, Kansas, as it was in much of the mid-Atlantic regions in the Civil War. It was feast or famine for the majority of residents and far more were suffering the famine. There were discussions of rationing everything from food to fabric because of the war.

The 21st was the day of the Raid. The Quantrill Raiders swept into town with a killer's hunger and calculation. The excuse given was the city had been a "stronghold of Union supporters." Given the insatiable nature of those holding the reigns and firing the bullets, this excuse was seldom believed. It couldn't be coincidence that a shipment of gold bullion waited at the train station to be carried eastward.

This was a turning point for Wood, and perhaps some members of the group. Leroy Wood became elevated above any other member in the party. His gruesome exploits even revolted many of his fellow raiders. The attacks were primarily upon men and older boys who might become soldiers within a few years. The final tally stood at 183 souls lost on this night. Many were dragged from their homes only to be murdered in front of their families. The Lawrence Massacre, as it came to be known, proved there were perhaps even worse men than those who performed the raids. There were men like Leroy Wood.

Some of the exploits from that night were herding groups into cornfields and setting them ablaze. Any who attempted to escape were shot and thrown back into the flames. Bodies were found shot twenty, thirty, even fifty times, indicating the bullets continued to be fired long after the body was deceased. Wood's absolute ecstasy mortified his companions. Most reported their fellow raider completed his deeds with an evil gleam in his eye. He laughed at most of the screams. Some say that many of the raiders converted to lives of piety after that night, fearing "God's wrath" because they had witnessed the devil's.

The few remaining raiders made it clear to the Captain. They would not continue so long as Leroy Wood remained in the group. The Captain had no choice, but to give Leroy the news. He had to leave the group. Quantrill mentioned in his memoirs, authored from his death bed, that Wood's final words to him were, "I'll see you in hell."

From all accounts and ascertainable documentation, Wood worked as little more than a gun-for-hire for 13 years. He traveled extensively across the West and watched progress ever reach into once-empty lands. His notorious "Bloody 13" was filled with as much gore and violence as Leroy could find. Old letters have him moving from Kansas to New Mexico, eventually arriving in Texas. Wherever Wood ventured, it seemed victims littered his trail as breadcrumbs. Every town he reached was guaranteed a funeral within a day.

His efficiency made him a busy man, but as well did bloodlust. Every target, as they were known, was not the only game he pursued. He enjoyed removing the families as well. A few times, it is believed, some greedy railroad magnates utilized his talents to "encourage" cooperation from landowners. If the property owner refused to allow the railroad company to take the necessary land for the tracks, Wood was summoned, and not only was the landowner issue solved, any issues with "next-of-kin" were equally remedied.

As with many highwaymen of olden times in Europe, Wood began to thirst for something even more than blood. Torture. He adored inflicting pain and misery. The torture was delivered through both physical and psychological means. It was believed that some even committed suicide during his tortures simply to escape. The legends surrounding the man who became "Deadwood" grew as did their travel. It reached the point that many scholars and historians grew to dismiss most claims because of their diabolical outlandishness.

The legend didn't stop there. He became a character, a myth, something false and unreal. His story became fodder for campfire tales or scaring children into complying with their wishes. There is an age-old warning, still used in some parts today, "Better watch out, or Deadwood will be coming for you!"

He again fades from history until the year 1877. In an ironic twist of fate, Leroy had just murdered another gun-for-hire, Avery Dean, when he met his match. Her name was Raven Wolf.

While Avery had been a regular for Raven, it made little difference. The two seemed to know instinctively they were made for one another. She was known for being a half-Apache and half-Irish showgirl. Some believed she enchanted her audiences with tribal music and strange songs from her native home.

The two were inseparable. It is unknown if they had an official ceremony, but legend states they had an unusual marital ceremony performed in the deserts outside of Santa Fe. Details remain unknown. As with most outlaws who decided to attempt normal life, Wood found it was not easy. While he established his name as a merciless killer, it was his name that might get him killed. Or worse, it could just as easily get his new bride killed.

The couple returned eastward in 1880. Some say there were several groups hot on their trail, both law-abiding and not-so law-abiding, with scores to settle. It is unknown how the new couple obtained it, but they returned wealthy. Some historians speculate that Wood took advantage of his fellow Raider's shock during the Lawrence Massacre. The gold at the train station went missing that night, but none of his fellow Raiders ever admitted to having it or showed signs of sudden wealth. Wood was the only one to emerge wealthy. Historians believed he hid the bullion deep in a cave outside Lawrence. He waited nearly two decades to retrieve it to avoid attention.

Now they were financially secure and made their way right back to the Shenandoah Valley. Leroy returned to his hometown of Luray, Virginia, despite the objections of several prominent community members. Among them, Clyde Wood, Leroy's cousin and his sister Ella Wood Dale. Within a year, those who took offense over Leroy's return were both silent and several enjoyed healthier financial lives.

Leroy and Raven both gave full attention to the design of their new house. He purchased a major parcel of land from his brother, Clyde, and began searching for just the right spot for his new house.

Within two years, they were in the new house and their baby girl Abigail was born in 1880. It seemed the incredibly lucky couple would truly have it all, despite whatever they did in the past. It was a brief assumption, for whatever luck they had was nearly out.



The Mother of the Manor:

Raven Wolf Darkwood

Leroy was born in Virginia in 1842, but his bride, Raven Wolf, wasn't born until 1857 on the other side of the country. Somewhere between a tiny oasis that would some day be called Las Vegas and the West Coast, a brief indiscretion led to heartache and tragedy.

Raven's mother was Singing Wolf. She was a much loved maiden in her tribe who had impressed even the elder fathers with her adept drive to learn. She was taught the ways of the ancestors, their mythology and once she had learned the ways of medicine, she was even taught the ways of war. Legend has it that the tribe began to worry she would eventually overtake any warrior, who dared be her husband, with her superior intellect.

The lack of attention to the importance of relationships and the sense of community within the tribe would be Singing Wolf's downfall. She was not afraid when she met Rory O'Conner. She had met white people previously and was not intimidated. Rory was an Irish trader who was just as young and socially inexperienced as Singing Wolf. The two shared a strong friendship for a brief period. Eventually, the friendship became more.

Once the friendship was consummated into a full-fledged relationship, she became with child. Rory fled the area once Raven told him. Some believe this was from simple fear of responsibility while others believe Rory feared he would be killed. It was noted that Singing Wolf's tribe did not socialize with white people, let alone marry into them.

Regardless of the reasons, it became clear that Singing Wolf was pregnant. Many in the tribe hoped the father was one of the handsome braves who had come to court her. Most knew, however, that was not the case. None of the warriors came forth to accept their position as father and, had they done so, would've only gained respect and Singing Wolf's hand in marriage. Eventually, Singing Wolf had to admit the child belonged to Rory.

There was a period of shock within the tight-knit community. No one dared say anything because she was so beloved among the elders. But, not even they would accept a child of mixed breeding. Singing Wolf was exiled at four months. She wandered around the barren tundra and eventually gave birth to Raven. Food was scarce and there were no friends or family there to assist her. Historians today discuss the time when Singing Wolf fought the Green Navajo Snake. The serpent had poised to bite her child and she killed it. The snake bit her. The notoriously lethal animal made Singing Wolf sick, but her medicines helped her quickly recover.

The world did not improve for poor Singing Wolf. Memories of the exile and bitter hostility over the injustice had seared a hateful place in her heart. Other tribes approached her out of concern, but she rejected them all. They said that, in her heart, she knew it was just a matter of time before they exiled her, as well.

Singing Wolf's grudge continued to grow through time. It became clear that she had chosen her baby girl as the tool with which to make them pay. During her childhood, Raven's mother taught her the dark path. She was delighted that the little girl showed just as much ambition and hunger for knowledge.

The sublime spells for daily living became child's play. The art of shape-shifting soon followed and Raven mastered all. Eventually, her mother shared stories of her early life with her. Her struggles and heartache, and how one day they would get even with the people who had made them suffer.

The ideal lost its luster as Raven developed. She blossomed into a rare desert flower in her teens and soon began to lose sight of Singing Wolf's original intention. She had no desire to make anyone pay, especially people she'd never met before in her life. She grew independent and willful, a trait her mother hadn't counted on. They began fighting over what she would do with her life. Soon, Singing Wolf began telling her she had taken after her father. Raven began running away from their camp. She would get lost in the desert wilderness, but Singing Wolf always came for her to take her home.

Raven's first love was Aiden Wexford. She was now 16 and had every intention of settling down with Aiden. She knew her mother wouldn't like it, as Aiden was not only a white boy, he was Irish. She decided he was worth the risk. They continued to see one another in secret meetings out in the desert. Months later, Aiden proposed and Raven accepted. She knew her mother would never willingly let her go so they planned to elope during the night. She believed once they were married that her mother wouldn't try to press her own vendetta on her.

Aiden made arrangements with Father Dowell at the St. Mary's Mission, twenty miles from Singing Wolf's camp. The two kids figured they would be married and back before Singing Wolf realized the girl was gone. It was a noble plan, however Raven would soon taste life's bitter injustices, by her mother's hand.

Singing Wolf caught Aiden as he was reaching for Raven's hand. She delivered a fatal blow to the back of his head with the stone axe she carried. Raven immediately crumbled with him. Singing Wolf had no words of sympathy or even compassion. She continued ranting about the family's purpose and what she wanted to see. Raven couldn't take it any longer. She used the knowledge she'd been given to become the wolf and attacked her mother. Those who stumble across the camp months later say there were bits of bone scattered throughout the hut.

Raven had nothing left after that. She had no tribe to support her or relatives to turn to for help. She made her way to the town of Santa Fe alone and penniless. She soon discovered an even better application for the knowledge she'd been given. Men were easily spellbound. She also discovered that while they were entranced, they would quickly hand over what money they had.

Rumor had it that many children starved while their fathers' funded her "career." Her reputation for entertaining men traveled far. Many described her as exotic and bewitching, without even knowing that was true in the literal sense. Naturally, women of the town grew bitter. Without the advantages of ancient magic or the ability to spend hours a day pampering their vanity, they became cynical and eventually vengeful. Money for supplies and for some, mortgages, was eagerly handed over to the starry-eyed vixen. Several families lost their farms, reportedly due to the husband's "generosity."

In 1876, Raven had just started one of her performances, an obscene burlesque according to the town sheriff (who also was a regular). A group of women waited on her to return to her dressing room. They found an assortment of crudely formed figures, all of them wore tears of clothing and locks of hair from a variety of known regulars pinned to the exterior. Most of the women recognized the missing pieces from clothing they had to repair. One particularly enraged wife, whose child had recently died because the money for medicine was given away, hailed from the swamps of Louisiana. Despite the fact that Raven had never been to her home state, she believed the figures to be a voodoo fetish, or voodoo "doll. "

Catherine Music was the Louisiana native and promised to give Raven a taste of her own medicine. While they waited, she grabbed a handful of the clay used to make the male dolls. She quickly formed a human shape from the malleable substance and used one of the feathers from Raven's boa. She spoke to the doll in a whisper, none of the other ladies understood what she said. She began toying with the doll.

At first, she pushed a hat pin into the dolls' throat. Raven's song was cut short when she began coughing on stage. The women all smiled. She began pushing the pin into the doll at different locations, each with some disturbance to the on-stage antics below.

When the song finished, the women prepared themselves to capture her. They removed the bits of clothing and hair from the dolls and Catherine broke the spell. They destroyed the figures as they heard Raven's European shoes approaching the door. Catherine hid behind the dressing room door and as soon as she entered, they all swarmed her.

They were able to drag her from the window and bind her. From there, they loaded her into a wagon below and took off with her. Something happened to the town at that point. The woman attributed it to the destruction of the fetish dolls in the dressing room. Many woke, as if they'd been dazed, and many wept when they realized what they'd done.

The women were just getting started. Catherine was disappointed that she left the doll in the dressing room when the chaos of abduction ensued. It didn't matter. She knew of more ways than one to deal with a witch.

Raven was devastated that someone had finally matched her skills with the unseen. The woman countered every glamour, every affection spell, she couldn't get a proper invocation spoken without Catherine's equally powerful retort.

The men returned home, but the wives had vanished. They regrouped on Main Street and realized something had happened. They first broke into Raven's dressing room and found evidence of a struggle. They began searching for their wives. They were drawn to a glowing area that lit the desert night. The women had created a pile of brush and bramble, in the center, a massive pole pointed to the sky. The men knew they were going to burn her. They knew if nothing was done, every wife there would likely be hanged. Many of the law enforcement were regulars with Raven.

They encircled the women and calmed them down, but not before a torch, which Catherine threw, landed amid the dry materials. The fire went up quickly. Horace Music, Catherine's husband, freed Raven and begged Catherine for forgiveness. There is no further record of this couple in Santa Fe. It was believed that they moved that night elsewhere.

Raven fled into the night, but voices carried the rumors that she was merely hiding. She had been exposed and few tolerated her at that point. Many men couldn't come to terms with what they'd done in frequenting the Silver Saloon. Several found their land now belonged to banks and mortgage companies. A few found several children, or even their spouse, had died. The number of suicides in the town at this time increased.

Shortly after that night, the disappearances began. Women were spirited off in the night with no warning. Mothers would go to see what was disturbing the animals and vanish. Fathers would see why the dogs were barking, only to return to an empty house. The children slept peacefully, but the mother was gone. It was during this time that many farmers reported a strange abundance of livestock. It seemed that several herds had grown in numbers without any explanation. Some people believed the witch had changed those women into animals, but no one would investigate the claims.

Raven opened up her own bar on the outskirts of Santa Fe. She changed her name to Ravina Smith and purchased a new wardrobe that would help her blend in with the townspeople. By day, she was a regular business woman with a restaurant. At night, she ran the town's most brutal saloon, competing with the draw of the Silver Saloon. Around a year later, she decided to make a comeback on stage. Many of those once-regulars had moved away hoping to keep their families intact. The promise of gold in the west kept a steady stream of new faces coming through the area. She began the spells and enchantments once again.

The year 1877 was the fateful year when she ran into a legendary gunslinger named Leroy Wood. She'd heard of him often, but assumed it was all rubbish. Few gunfighters carried any respect with her. Before long, however, the two were inseparable. They had a violent, whirlwind romance that ended in a mysterious wedding in the far desert. It was rumored that the devil himself showed up for such an unholy union.

Raven was lucky she married when she did. Word had already began traveling that she was up to her old tricks with men. Even though she terrorized new families, many of the wives promised to return and finish the job they'd started. Leroy's luck was just as bad. There were already a number of men on his trail and they were quickly approaching.

The two fled the city in the middle of the night. They remained below public record until 1880, when they came to Virginia. Raven was tortured by the thoughts of leaving the desert, but thoughts of leaving Leroy were just as despairing. Now that communication was traveling so quickly through the once-remote desert, it wasn't going to be easy to maintain her cover. Most of the old woman who tried to burn her had scattered across the west and mid-west to new farms and towns. The desert was decreasing in size as her name became just as well known as Leroy's. There was scarcely a store or saloon she could enter without hearing about the "Raven Witch of Santa Fe" as they called her. Some of the rumors said she was an ugly old hag who bewitched the ignorant into believing she was beautiful. Others said the only way she could make a living from men was by enchanting them, while brothels thrived without aid of magic.

She was grateful that no one recognized her, but seeing what kind of hatred she would need to battle made Virginia look even better. Leroy enjoyed the bravado of life as a successful gunslinger while the rumors of her were far less flattering. Fame had been a turbulent experience and infamy had proved to be even worse for a woman of her talents.

She helped Leroy fund and design their house. She was astounded that many woman of the town already knew what she was so popular for. Some of the more affluent ladies brought in pastors and constructed new churches when the couple announced their plans to build. Other, more superstitious residents, invited acquaintances of voodoo to live in the valley and thwart any attempts the Raven might make to enchant or bespell.

The home's construction was unlike any other the region had witnessed. The structure that should've required a year and a half to erect, was completed in less than a year. As with nearly everything in the couple's life, the situation prepared to go from instable to downright dangerous. A construction worker, Henry Faye, got into an argument with Leroy. It seemed the master bedroom couldn't be constructed in the way Leroy wanted, without the risk of damage to the structure.

The conflict was over, but Frye disappeared. The other workers were ready to flee the vicinity of Darkwood. They believed the home would be cursed, not only due to Frye's death, but because of the couple constructing it. It was rumored that Frye's death wasn't merely the result of a fight, but a deliberate sacrifice to whatever diabolical beings that had allowed the couple to survive thus far.

The home was completed and christened with the birth of their daughter, Abigail, in 1882. It wasn't long before the evil from the past would catch up to them.



Darkwood's Progeny:

Abigail Darkwood

Abigail was perhaps victimized from the beginning. The offspring of two people, so hated, could only expect the world to return what her parents had delivered. Abigail was the only child of Leroy and Raven Darkwood, born in 1882. Luray, Virginia, had never witnessed such a feared family in its forests or meadows.

Abigail's early life is a mysterious period for the family as far as records are concerned. Her parents were no longer the flamboyant characters who seemed to thrive on inflicting some sort of misery on others. They became withdrawn and nearly paranoid. The staff who worked for them noted that most of the mansion doors were locked at all times. The couple reasoned it away as worry that someone would steal something valuable. Some people believed those ghosts had followed them from the wild west and haunted the home they designed. It was assumed that Abigail would be just as unscrupulous and unsavory as her parents.

She was reported to have the whitest blond hair during childhood. It was a rarity to see such platinum locks in a child from such darker-featured parents. There were questions of legitimacy, but most knew when they looked at her, there was no mistaking Leroy's eyes. The child was not normal in any regard. One of the numerous staff that came and went from the estate said, "That child produces a chill in ya that you can feel all the way to the bone... a chill of long dead places."

Reports of misgivings about the child spread. It became harder and harder to find staff for the estate. To make matters worse for Abigail, her parents refused to let her attend public schools. Again, they rationalized it away as "fear of secondary education when she deserved the best." Those around them knew the couple feared someone would abduct the child.

Abigail was given a private tutor. After many attempts with others, they finally seemed to find success with a woman named Fannie Buracker. Fannie worried over the child as she taught her. Her parents were cold and nether would openly discuss their own childhoods without some sort of cautious exchange. She knew both parents had a horrific past, but didn't realize how it affected them so after so many years.

Fannie would not remain silent. She whispered details of the home and the child's life to other concerned women in the community. Poor Abigail was shut in the house nearly all the time. Her parents scarcely let her explore their land, she was not allowed to enter many rooms in the home. Fannie knew Abigail needed a far friendlier and far more nurturing atmosphere to flourish in. Otherwise, she would remain the curious introvert she had become.

A local tax assessor also revealed details of the home in 1887. One of his most-discussed entries from the era is about Darkwood. He claimed, "That house is more menacing than the wilderness around it!" in his journal.

The house also seemed to have a personality of its own. Perhaps it didn't enjoy sheltering the two figures or perhaps it was filled with wandering spirits that hungered for retribution. The legends surrounding the property often hinge upon Raven as the primary source. Many residents believed her black magic prevented Leroy from the descent to hell, where he belonged. Others attributed the activities to her past and the magic she dabbled in. As the years went by, speculation arose that perhaps Raven conjured those devils to hold Leroy hostage in the old estate.

This bizarre and fear-ridden atmosphere was home to Abigail. We are privileged to feature several entries from her nanny's diary, Fannie Buracker, in the next chapter. Suffice to say, she had many qualms regarding her pupil. However, time did not stop for her fears and Abigail grew quickly. History seemed to repeat itself as the girl became a woman. During her teen years, she also had a variety of conflicts with her mother. Neighbors reported seeing the two in heated arguments that could easily escalate to screaming matches. Several claimed to linger and soon after heard monstrous, unearthly sounds exchanged between mother and daughter. The source of the embitterment became just as well known: Leroy Darkwood. The object was control. The two couldn't agree on who would control the man they both loved.

As Abigail truly blossomed into womanhood, Leroy wilted into oblivion. Neighbors and community members believed he had gone insane. Years of guilt and the perpetual torment of conscious had finally shoved him over the brink that he had teetered upon for so many years.

Things were relatively customary at Darkwood until 1898. A traveling band of performers called The Proteus Circus Players came to entertain Luray. The group was to remain in the town for 3 days. Raven Darkwood enjoyed their variety show and many believed it took her back to her own youthful days on stage. She had such fun and felt such a kinship with the players that she invited them to stay at Darkwood while they were in town.

At home, the news of the invitation was all the fuel necessary to ignite Leroy's notorious temper. He instigated a screaming match of his own, witnessed by Fannie, and told Raven she might as well kill their daughter. His paranoia had grown, by now, to include the world. He became convinced that someone in that band of players had been after him. That they were now going to kill him or his family. Raven believed she had calmed his temper and assured him his fears were ridiculous. She tried telling him they were not from the west, and thought he accepted it, but time proved the assumption wrong.

Leroy gave into her, grudgingly, and said the players may sleep in the barn. Raven believed he had finally realized that the world had gone on while he hid at Darkwood. His legend had faded into history. His once-repeated exploits had been crushed beneath the weight of such figures as Billy "the kid" Bonny and the James Brothers. Leroy refused to believe it. The Lawrence Massacre had been replaced with legends of Tombstone and the "Four Dead in Five Seconds," gun battle. Apparently, even she underestimated his mania.

Two more shows were given for the residents of Luray without incident, Raven and Abigail attended all. Raven must've felt an immense relief for it seemed her favorite performance artists were going to emerge unscathed after all. On October 5, 1898, the Darkwood Tragedy came to be. At 3 in the morning, the festivities had quieted, the singing silenced and the motley troop had fallen asleep. A raging fire broke out within the Darkwood barn. Witnesses claimed they never so much as imagined a structure could burn as fast or as hot as that barn. By the time the volunteer firefighters arrived on scene, the barn was gone. Not a single player from the group survived.

Leroy became center of suspicion when they investigated the fire. No visible traces of accelerants could be found, but some neighbors claimed he had sinister help in destroying the light-hearted group. They rumored the devil himself came to give his favorite man a hand. Despite any suspicions, no evidence anywhere could be found. Not even seasoned detectives could locate footprints in the mud from the rain earlier that night. The most damning evidence came from a neighbor who heard one of the performers yell "Darkwood" just before the barn seemed to burst into flames.

The incident did more than enliven old memories that had started to rust. The citizens again knew that Leroy had kept his death lust despite the coming of age and maturity. Raven and Abigail felt the pangs of isolation as the few individuals they spoke with outside the estate ignored them. Letters were unanswered and invitations were ignored. The town had rediscovered the old grudges against Leroy and regardless of the two women with him, they were all evil once again.

Abigail spent the time after engrossed in her studies. She learned from her both her nanny and mother, but it didn't stop there. She read and absorbed information so quickly the family could barely keep her supplied with texts. Money finally did offer Abigail something her parents never knew: promise.

By 1900 she was enrolled in the prestigious Miskatonic University located in Arkham, Mass. Her capacity and capabilities did not tarnish with time. She attended a total of five years, during which she earned three degrees in her primary areas of academic interest. The first degree was in mathematics, which soon led to a degree in physic. Finally, she obtained her degree in anthropology. Rumor has it that her intent was to pursue a doctorate in the metaphysical realm.

We find today fine examples of her authoritative tone in the essays she left behind. The University Library has some of her work still on file. One essay in particular, "Paradigms of Obscure Theology" remains under a glass case to showcase the finest exploratory theology the university has produced.

One of her more shocking compositions included a brazenly controversial interpretation of the sinister *Necronomicon*. Rumor had it that Abigail was given a copy of the arcane publication by one of her professors. In 1906, Abigail returned home to Virginia. She had no time for social causes or local goings-on, she believed her work to be far more important.

Abigail engaged in a variety of botanical endeavors that brought great success. She is the only person to ever successfully hybridize a true black rose. Her glossy black "Crossbones" rose was displayed near the outskirts of the gardens for years until the plant wilted away in 1920.

The botanical exploits were just a mere hobby for Abigail. It was a way for her to bring beauty and grace to an estate that was everything, but beautiful or graceful. In private, she continued her studies into the realms of the *Necronomicon* as well as various Codex volumes. She was known for fluency in both Latin and Greek languages. She wanted to crack the ancient mysteries that baffled humanity today.

We can only theorize what her true intentions were based upon what evidence is left today. This letter was written on October 5, 1908, to one of her professors. Professor J. Malone was one of the individuals so impressed by her knowledge and ambition. She wrote:

"Dear Professor Malone:

"I hope this letter finds you well. I continue the research I began at the university, but without the access to the resources I so enjoyed at the university. My progress is slower than I wish it to be.

"Unfortunately, I could not stay in Arkham. My primary concern remains the health and comfort of my parents. Despite their tattered reputations or their dubious legacies, they are indeed still my parents. My father is a source of particular inspiration to move forward in my quest for the knowledge of the ancients. I am convinced that the secrets of the elder gods remain locked away within those texts. I believe that, if brought to light, many mysteries will be solved in an instant.

"Resurrection is merely the start of all the possibilities contained within the mad Arab's grimore. My equations are impeccable and the formulas, at this point, have remained flawless. I believe once I unite the necessary calculations with the proper powers, I will have all the strength needed to provide answers that will benefit the world. I am making progress, albeit sluggish. I have been visited by several other children whom I played with in childhood.

"I must close this letter now. My time for correspondence and brevity is dreadfully short. Please share your wisdom on the matter. I am also sending you a copy of the equations regarding the doorway to the otherworld. I look so forward to your return.

Fondest Wishes, my dear friend;
Abby"

Despite her open devotion to her parents, Abigail could not stop time. The house was silent during the start of 1910. Leroy and Raven both seemed to simply disappear. The staff was requested fewer and fewer times a week, when they did visit, they found the majority of it undisturbed. The master bedroom was locked after that year. Abigail promised neighbors and staff she personally looked after her parents. They were ailing so greatly they didn't want to receive visitors or be bothered with worries of the estate.

A few of the citizens became alarmed and feared the worst, that perhaps the child had inflicted evil on the parents. It became a matter for gossip. Few cared. After the barn fire, few townsfolk ever cared for the family again. Ironically, there were several people who seemed to hope Abigail had dispensed with her parents.

Evidently, however, they had lived for the next winter, a blizzard came to Luray. By the time the snow and ice thawed, nearly two months later, death paid a visit to Darkwood. Abigail summoned the sheriff and reported her parents' demise. They passed away during the worse of the weather and she buried them as quickly as possible. They died of pneumonia and she feared a spread should she wait. The staff had to live with her at the time.

She claimed she had several servants bury her parents in the gardens of the estate. The troublesome element came later. The sheriff wanted a simple statement from the staff that verified Abigail's account. The exact servants who allegedly performed the burial were never located. No tombstones were ever placed for the most notorious residents of Luray, Virginia. From all information provided, it is doubtful that anyone shed any tears.

Abigail was now the sole owner and proprietor of Darkwood Manor. For years it seemed she wouldn't ever really return. She traveled abroad extensively. A few lucky individuals in Luray received postcards from her adventures in the world. Her destinations were as varied as her fields of study in college. Postcards came from France, Norway, Egypt and some even came from Istanbul. One lucky resident was sent a card all the way from China.

Her associates at the university enjoyed a plethora of postcards and letters. Abigail was on the search for artifacts and relics. She pursued legend and lore regarding the "lost ones." Her colleagues could never agree precisely what was lost, or if she even found whatever she sought.

No matter how much of the family wealth she spent or how many destinations she visited, it wasn't enough. Her hunger for research and discovery possessed her. It neared frenzied proportions. The postcards and correspondence came more slowly as the years passed. Even Professor Malone, who enjoyed being her favorite correspondent, grew to miss her lively and vivacious discussions. He never heard from her again.

Abigail's obsession continued, and by 1914, had reached a new and concerning level. People were barred from visiting Darkwood Manor. She justified the demand gracefully and excused it as a safety measure. She was developing a new form of fertilizer that involved numerous chemicals that were lethal if inhaled. It isn't understood why she believed people would accept this. It was well known that she hadn't been home long enough to be so deeply engrossed in research and no deliveries had been made to Darkwood Manor.

The public grudgingly accepted her request and most gladly stayed away. They began to doubt Abigail's faculties and rumors traveled that her parent's had caught up with her. The rumors gained a new fire when visitors came to Darkwood. Strangers visited the estate in strange cars. Many residents in the area would simply watch the endless parade of foreigners to the tiny town of Luray. This occurred for months before the home was again silent.

The years were unkind to the estate. The exterior of the building fell into ruin. Tales again began to circulate about the "home that evil built." Abigail was discussed as much as the house. The once stately manor had become the haunted house of Luray, the eyesore that had once been a paragon.

Countless folktales traveled about the property that has long faded into history. One event, regarded as bizarre even to the most skeptical of the era, was documented and supported by a variety of witnesses.

The summer of 1929 remains one of the hottest on record. Evening provided no relief to the residents as the balmy summer nights only foretold another smothering and miserably humid day. A traveling salesman noticed the house and the now-broken gate. Leroy's 12-foot tall iron fence, that he bestowed such affection on, served multiple purposes during its lifetime. At this period, it was a trellis for the encroaching ivy that had nearly engulfed the house.

Harvey Firestone was a peddler from Charleston, West Virginia. He sold much of everything and it was rumored his unique appearance made him instantly forgettable to some, while confounding others. Firestone had a knack for entertaining kids and it seemed they were entertained just by his presence. He often joked of his nose, which was too long for his face, and his feet which were equally disproportioned. His light self-depreciation made him instantly welcome in the valley.

The story he told instantly drew the attention away from his features and towards his tale. Leroy reported the situation to the sheriff later on in the day. He said he worried he might have angered a local or insulted them in some way. He paid a visit to Darkwood before lunchtime. He knocked, but there was no answer. He made several attempts to bring someone to the door. With the heat of the day pressing down upon him, Firestone gave up. He admitted he was looking forward to the cool shade of the sheltered section down the road.

Firestone descended the steps and started walking away. He suddenly felt something off. He paused and realized he had the feeling he was being watched. He quickly turned and looked back at the porch. Two children stood on either side of the main entrance. He returned to knock and before he began walking up the porch steps, the children disappeared.

He had a bad feeling about the place afterward. He left the property and paused beneath the tall trees of the shaded road. The sheriff agreed to investigate his claims by the time they finished their lunch. He was certain Abigail was on another vacation. He worried that children may have dared one another to enter the home. Abigail told the town the house contained some dangerous substances for her experiments.

He left Firestone finishing his desert and rode out to the estate. He knocked, expecting no answer. If it had been a prank, the tricksters had probably long fled the property. He was turning to leave when the front door opened. It was Abigail. The sheriff told her that children had been reported and he thought she was on vacation. She briefly chuckled and ensured him no one had trespassed. She added that the children were her niece and nephew visiting from Europe.

Mortimer Fines had no reason to doubt her. As a new sheriff, he was still becoming acquainted with the ways of the valley and the people he presided over. He accepted her story and didn't even mention it to the others that evening. Perhaps that is a great regret of time, if only Fines had mentioned the story to any of the older residents, he would've quickly be assured Abigail had no siblings. It was impossible for her to have either niece or nephew because she never had a brother or sister. The question continues to raise debate today of precisely who these children were.

There were stories spoken of occasionally when the gossip had grown stale in the valley. Darkwood Manor was always the faithful topic to draw interest. Rumors circulated that Abigail was involved in macabre practices of ancient heathen arts. Others stated she was seeking a means of redemption and to lay all the souls her parents had killed to rest.

The variety of claims ranged from simple lights that were somehow "unnatural" to stories of strangers roaming the roads near the home. Despite the number of claims, no one could ever produce proof of what they experienced.

A decade after the children were reported at the estate, the home was truly and utterly silent. This did not raise too much concern as locals were accustomed to Abigail's solitary and eccentric behavior. Many felt much pity for her, being born to such wretched characters, and suffering a childhood confined to Darkwood's cheerless grounds. Many just assumed she continued her travels.

On a sunny spring day during April of 1940, the town received a shock that sent the wagging tongues in a frenzy with speculation and supposition. The county officials received a package of paper work from an attorney who represented Miskatonic University. Amid them, a death certificate for Abigail Darkwood.

The letter stated that, while on an expedition in the jungles of South America, Abigail had contracted the fatal yellow fever. She died while in the Village of Cluthuian, where she maintained living quarters. She was cremated there and her ashes scattered across the ruins.

The package also contained a copy of her will. Abigail left Darkwood and all of her belongings to the university. The will requested that her material goods be used for a higher purpose. Many in the town had cheered for Abigail during her youth. It seemed that, despite the evil womb she came from, she emerged untouched by the blackness surrounding the family. A community memorial was held to commemorate an individual who had become iconic.

The college seemed to be equally overwhelmed with the sudden possession of a house so far from grounds. Several university representatives paid a visit many months afterward and remained tight-lipped about their intentions. They hired a local to keep the grounds and repair the damage that time and the elements had inflicted on the house.

It would be another 16 years before anyone would live again in the residence. A professor from the university decided to move in during the summer of 1956.

Few know that Abigail was also a proficient poet and many of her works today remain unpublished. Here is a sampling of her works:

The Traveler

The Traveler treads cross vaporous paths
of silent souls, the aftermath
of tight spun tales
let loose and wild
to drain the blood from man and child.

Clever be to proof your ears
against uttered words, to cure your fears
of horrid beasts
that shirk the sun
and render human souls undone

But futile will your efforts be
to slight the tale, for as you see
The Traveler's words,
imbued with death
take on form with every breath.

The music lifts upon the air
around a sorry figure, there
to nightly chord
a lonesome song
the remandment of the beasts prolonged

The Traveler speaks, the music ends
a deep and grisly sound portends
the arrival now
of beasts unknown
to chew the living flesh from bone

More sagas sung and soon take form
the horror of the dead reborn
with savage minds
A life now cursed
they lust for blood to quell their thirst

A tale of dreams thus brought to life.
In bloodied hand, an knife
for base intent

as chanting calls
The Traveler speaks to bones within the walls.

-Abigail Darkwood 1914



Raising the Good/Bad Seed:

Fannie Buracker

Fannie Buracker was an unusual character in Luray. She had enjoyed a life of privilege and wealth during her youth, but simply wasn't interested in settling down or starting a family. Her interests lay in art and history. She gained her love of teaching children during her own childhood. She was the big sister who ushered seven siblings through the insurmountable homework that came from private tutelage.

She held several honors awards for her studies and had enjoyed numerous creative writing recognitions. She would not be known until years later when she wrote her infamous, *Dubious Intent*. It is believed she modeled this gothic horror on her life with the infamous Darkwood family.

She had no knowledge of the Darkwood legend before coming to Luray. Her origins in Boston society did not allow tales of outlaws or saloons. She spent more time traipsing the English coasts than listening to stories of gunfights or strong drink. Such stories were in no way proper for a well-bred lady. Her parents were somewhat disappointed that she chose to follow academia in lieu of pursuing a husband and family. They always knew her intelligence surpassed the majority of her peers and she may not be content with typical family life.

We know of Fannie previously for her numerous successful fiction pieces *Dubious Intent*, the *Ghost of Eagle Bay* and *The Pariah*. The finest individuals of Boston applauded her success, but were initially horrified at the Ms. Buracker's gruesome works. *Dubious* was a sensational work that portrayed astoundingly seedy and colorful characters with such realism, it was rumored that Leroy and Raven both discussed their past in great detail with Fannie. It is no surprise. Fannie remained one of the longest employed individuals that lived in Darkwood.

Fannie regularly kept a diary and it is thanks to her tedious nature that we have a rare glimpse into life on the estate. The staff frequently changed hands as few people could work in such a strange place and even fewer had the patience for the family's peculiarities. She remained steadfast, regardless of what she saw. She impressed the parents of Darkwood and she made a considerable impression on young Abigail. Some reports state that Fannie's encouragement ushered Abigail into academic life. It is even believed that Fannie tutored Raven as much as Abigail, helping her fit better into proper society and showing her the finer points of penmanship and literature.

It wasn't always perfect. There were rumors that Leroy's temper almost caused Fannie to leave on more than one occasion. But, regardless of any conflict, the family employed Ms. Buracker for nearly two decades. It was clear that Fannie made a great impression on the ladies of the house.

The first entry we've used in this is dated 1889. Fannie had just come to live with the Darkwood family and it had only been a few years since she left college herself. Her youth and curiosity is evident in many entries. Her family claims they intend to publish a full volume at a later time, but have graciously permitted use of her words in these few entries:

“It is difficult to believe that nearly a full month has passed since arriving in Luray. I shall keep my life documented here. I first met Abigail Darkwood a month ago. I was interviewed twice by her parents, Leroy and Raven. The couple does seem somewhat odd, certainly nothing like the families of Boston. But, this land is nothing like Massachusetts, either.

"Abby is a fascinating child and I see much of myself in her. She has such a remarkable intelligence and grasp of learning. I fear my abilities as a teacher will not do her justice. My previous employers had bright children, they were gracious and well-behaved, but Abby is exceptional. I had a moment alone with Mr. Darkwood today. I suggested that perhaps she would benefit more if she were admitted to private school in addition to her home studies. He adamantly refused the suggestion and asked if I were unhappy here. Of course not. Despite the estate's eccentricities, I thoroughly enjoy working with Abby. It is sad that he would automatically assume a mere question would have an ulterior motive. I was merely thinking of the child.

"Mr. Darkwood is a strange man. I am curious as to how he was raised. He is such a hard and quick-tempered man. In normal situations, I would greatly worry for Abby's safety if she was to provoke that temper, but my concerns are calmed through simple observation. I have never seen a father's love his daughter any greater. And she seems to adore that ill-tempered bull. She can do no wrong in his eyes.

"The only concern I currently have for Abby is her incredibly fantasy life. Such imagination! I know children need to pretend, it is a way of establishing social boundaries based upon what they see in reality. But, her imaginings are so vivid to her. Her imaginary friends are so tangible to her that she tries to hold their hands. I have taught children previously who resent adult intrusion or any suggestion that the fantasy is pretend. Abby is apathetic. She doesn't care if anyone can see them or not. She is firmly locked into that unseen realm.

"We were in the classroom yesterday on the third floor and I gave her a composition assignment to complete. I began grading some of her previous assignments as she worked. I left the room and sat in the hallway as not to disturb her focus. When I returned to check on her, she talked to one of those imaginary figures. I reprimanded her for playing when she was supposed to be working, but she had an excuse. It wasn't one of those she played with, it was a friend of her father's, to beat all. She called him, 'the man with the hole,' whatever that meant.

"I told her she needed to keep her that nonsense for play time and not study time, but she had nothing else to say. She gave me a cold look and returned to her story. Why did she do that? She seemed to think it was something she couldn't help, but she could. The imagination is a wonderful faucet of life, but must be kept disciplined. Otherwise, it will have you seeing and hearing things everywhere. If I let my imagination go here, I would be mad from all the sights and sounds it tries to show me. But, it isn't real. I know it. I wish Abby could accept it. She behaved wonderfully for a brief time, but half an hour later, she was talking again.

"Perhaps it should be more worrisome, but I think this environment plays a key role in that. She rarely has other children to play with. Her parents are very busy and can't provide the company she needs. In the span of a month, she has had conversations with imaginary friends on numerous occasions. Perhaps this is an issue that will only stop when she allows it. Perhaps she is so accustomed to staff coming and going from the estate, she needs some kind of stability. Regardless, I will remain here for her, for as long as the family will allow it.

"I attempted to consult Mrs. Darkwood about her need for more social stimulation. She only brushed my concerns away and excused it with her child being as gifted as she was. I didn't ask her to elaborate on that. Exceptionality and talent have nothing to do with being human or the need for human interaction. It would greatly improve her focus on studies to have those imaginary characters absent for a time.

"I am confident that I can teach Abby. If we can move past the issues with focus and flights of fancy, I know she will make immense strides academically."

Another entry we are allowed to use comes from 1892.

"I am at my wits end with life here. I can't leave, but if it weren't for Abby, I would. I took the child for a stroll around the estate and we came to the work shed. There is a bed of hydrangeas there. They were all in bloom and we stopped to pick flowers. Before I knew what happened, Abby had entered the shed. Mr. Darkwood strictly forbade entrance to the shed.

"I ran after her. I was so afraid she might get cut or fall over the equipment inside. I caught up with her, but not before I saw a skull on the shelf above. I don't know why he would have a human skull in his shed, but it gave me chills. Luckily, the child did not see it.

"I managed to urge her back outside where it was safe, but not before I saw another peculiarity. There is a heavy-hinged door to the basement there. Perhaps it's simply a storage area, but the manor already has a basement.

"Mr. Darkwood was angry over our trespassing. How I loathe that temper. Mrs. Darkwood has disappeared somewhere in the house again. She will do that and she is gone for days at a time. The staff doesn't see her. The kitchen workers never see here. It is so strange.

"I think she is a negative influence on Abby. She takes her for extended walks often through the woods behind the manor. I don't know what they talk about, but I am curious. Abby eagerly tells me everything when they return, but I often think its more fantasy. Why on earth would a mother ever tell her child such rubbish? I asked Mrs. Darkwood about it previously and she simply said it was an Apache tradition to teach the children the ways of the elders. I don't understand, but perhaps it is a native version of fairy tales. With her incredible imagination, I'm sure Abby could take any work of fiction and give it her own flavor and interest.

"I would leave, but I feel much needed here. I will give it more time and see if things improve. I don't want to make a decision in haste that will not only affect me, but a family."

Abby did learn of native mythology from Raven, but she also taught her what she called the ways of the "Old Ones." It is ironic that, while Raven seemed to detest her own mother, she raised her child in many of the same ways that she was.

One of the neighbors actually asked Leroy Darkwood how he felt about his wife and daughter roaming the woods when any thief or attacker may accost them. His reply was simple: "I'd be more concerned for anything that got in their way when those two went out in the woods."

Regardless of what Fanny witnessed in the estate, one thing is for certain, she became a literary legend based upon her vivid imagery. We believe that, if not for the Darkwood Estate, the world would have been deprived of such classic and notable figures. Fanny swore to never reveal her sources when it came to her writing. It is believed that author Truman Capote developed his integrity for protecting informants based upon Fanny's essays regarding the subject. She remains an unsung hero of the Darkwood Estate.



The Last Known Professor:

Dr. Simon Ghoulshy

Professor J. Malone, friend and close acquaintance of Abigail Darkwood, retired from the university in 1938. By 1939, his replacement, Dr. Simon Ghoulshy, was already making an impression on Abigail's Alma Matter. Ghoulshy was a celebrated professor at the Romanian Transatonic University. He was formally educated there as a medical doctor, but wasn't satisfied with a medical license. He returned to academia and received his tenure in the newly added parapsychology department.

Ghoulshy grew up in an affluent home. His father, Matthias Ghoulshy, had traveled through the embassies and worked with a variety of governments. He was originally Hungarian, but because his ancestral home was in Wallachia, Romania, he chose to raise his family there. It should also be noted that his father was a direct descendent of Vlad Dracul II, the father of Vlad III, also known as, "The Impaler" the historic figure Bram Stoker used for his creation *Dracula*.

Simon was a handful in childhood. It seemed he wanted nothing more than to challenge everything in his young life. He became a physician to study the human body. He was the youngest child in the family and was not able to accept his aged parents' health. He wanted to do more for them.

Unfortunately, Ghoulshy had lost both parents by the time he was a successful physician. His focus then moved from the human body and became affixed on human energy. He was most fascinated with the idea of paranormal energies. Perhaps his most controversial volume, titled *The Lost Medical Science of the Ancients*, is also the collection that assured his position in history at Transatonic University.

Dr. Ghoulshy expanded his knowledge during his eight years at Transatonic. Such an ambitious figure wouldn't be content with one institution for long. Transatonic was known for being a secondary school in comparison with Miskatonic. When he heard the head of the parapsychology department was making retirement preparations, he began a wave of correspondence for the position. His letters were sent to both administrators as well as colleagues at the school. The Administration at Miskatonic remained reluctant to hire Dr. Ghoulshy. His creative theories had caused quite a controversy among literary circles. His extensive education and consummate professionalism remained impossible to ignore.

Eventually, Ghoulshy's determination won. The college hired him and he was welcomed into their ranks.

The Administration was relatively satisfied as far as ascertainable records state. Ghoulshy did continue instigating controversy, but it always seemed to work out for the college. Admissions grew every year, donations came in from all over the country, the institution was hailed as an incredibly progressive facility.

Technically, Ghoulshy's theories remained little more than theories. Every discovery was dampened by the fact that so little could be proven and documented. He poured over the Necronomicon, just as Ms. Abigail Darkwood had decades earlier, and persisted in his search for answers. As with most ambition, there can be a dark side. Ghoulshy became even more jaded and bitter as each year passed. It seemed his work was going to ruin. His private life was nearly nonexistent. The few individuals he could claim as friends knew he was far too gone. His life became a pattern of work and then hours in the lab.

Many believed that fate led Ghoulshy to discover Abigail's work when he did. It seemed they were the star-crossed couple that time should have united, instead of separating with the decades. He became obsessed with her findings just as much as the accursed volume. His hours in the lab slowly evolved from isolated sessions of frustration to great periods of incredible silence and focus on papers authored decades earlier. Many of his colleagues say he became like a new man when he discovered the facility was still in possession of Abigail's home.

Somerset Montague, Miskatonic Dean at the time, reported that Ghoulby almost seemed giddy when he learned no one had found the time to examine the home or its contents. He quickly volunteered his time, even if he had to pay for it. Montague was amused by Ghoulby's reaction, but relieved. The majority of the staff wanted nothing to do with the house. Those who had attempted to visit were always back within days, citing everything from the primitive landscape to the house itself. He didn't really believe Ghoulby would stay at the house for any length of time. He consented and told Ghoulby he could take the entire summer to inventory the home and note any items that might benefit the school. The college had considered selling the estate, in any regard. It cost more to pay taxes and maintain the estate than they had ever received from ownership.

Ghoulby seemed to take offense at the thoughts of having to wait. This was the fall of the year and he couldn't put off his research for nearly a year. He informed Montague that Ms. Darkwood's papers proved she was "...leading to the same goal [as his], but from different directions. Maybe she got farther than anyone imagines".

He argued that he needed an immediate sabbatical in order to go to the Darkwood Estate. He seemed to sense the hesitation and threw in, "I'll have the home and grounds inventoried in a month. You can prepare to auction or sell as you wish." Montague reported misgivings for the rest of his life. He felt responsible for what happened to Ghoulby and, even though they were both adults, never recovered from his agreement. Montague was once a student of Miskatonic and even admitted to visiting the state during Abigail's life. He swore he would never return.

Simon Ghoulby was ecstatic. Staff reported that he hadn't been in such high spirits, ever, at least not in the years he'd spent at the university. The arrangements required longer than Ghoulby expected. He wasn't able to visit until the next spring, in 1956. Montague felt qualms about sending Ghoulby alone, but the professor wouldn't hear of an associate or an assistant. The home was stocked with necessary food and a room was prepared for the professor. In the spring of 1956, Ghoulby finally walked through the front door of Darkwood Manor. Dean Montague warned him that he may run into the caretaker, Ed Darkwood, but no acknowledgement was ever given that someone else lived on the estate.

Montague became worried after the first month. Dr. Ghoulby's letters changed. At first, every weekly correspondence noted important antiques and features in the house that might benefit the college as a secondary institution. Ghoulby, for reasons unknown, came to the conclusion that such a fine home would make an excellent addition to Miskatonic's facilities. They were very persuasive at first.

After the first month, Ghoulby wrote and excused his absence. He noted he needed more time to go through everything. He finally admitted he'd discovered Abigail's office, but never elaborated on his findings or where her research had ended. Months continued to go by, Ghoulby's letters became more chaotic and less frequently. Almost a year later, Montague couldn't procrastinate any longer. He knew something had happened to the doctor and it was likely a mental condition.

Dean Montague arranged for several professors, headed by Professor Hiram Peters, to make a weekend visit to Darkwood. The professors were impressed by the lovely town, but every one noted the strange atmosphere of Darkwood and the home's even stranger construction.

The professors knocked for half an hour and sat on the porch. Several believed Ghoulby had likely taken a walk somewhere or might have visited town. Eventually, entered the home. The front door was unlocked. The home was not what they expected. The home had been only minimally maintained; dust and cobwebs still encrusted most surfaces. The ornate interior and solid walnut used in construction was barely noticeable now. They described their entry, through the parlor, the living room, the kitchen, but they found Dr. Ghoulby in the solarium.

Peters wrote down that, "Judging from the state of the body, I would say that Dr. Simon Ghoulby died several days after he arrived here."

Dean Montague knew that couldn't possibly be true. He'd just received a letter a month earlier. It was indeed Ghoulby's handwriting, but the letter rambled and jumped topics as if it were written by a different person. He had a handwriting expert examine the two and it was proven that Ghoulby did author the letter. The letter opened normally, but only contained a single line of legible text: "Don't hunt what you can't kill, and death can not die."

All details of the case as well as the details aside from those mentioned here have been kept locked away from the public's curious eye.

The university closed the home permanently after the professor's death, they even stopped the staff from caring for the property. The gates were repaired and large "No Trespassing" signs posted on Leroy Darkwood's iron fence every five feet.

Only in recent years has the home been reopened and the mysteries within exposed.



The Unknown Son:

The Mystery of Thane Darkwood

Abigail Darkwood was two years old in 1884, long before Fannie Buracker came to be her nanny, the tight-knit family had yet to open their doors to full-time staff or visitors of any kind. We introduce a rumor that has only come to light recently, that of possible Darkwood son, Thane.

The secret would have remained hidden were it not for the inheritors of a seemingly unrelated estate an ocean away. Calvin Tybek was a noted 19th Century spiritualist on both sides of the Atlantic. He was one of the first to interview the Fox sisters and helped found the American Psychical Research Institute. His decedents discovered a full room of mementos and correspondence that had long been overlooked. The simple storage room, as it had been presumed, was really a stockpile of letters and notes regarding a vast amount of Tybek's work.

While going through the age-old letters, they happened upon numerous letters from Mrs. Raven Darkwood. We were able to obtain permission to use many of the pieces in this book. The first letter came during March of 1884. Raven's letter, summarized, was:

"Mr. Tybek:

"I am writing to you as one of the few individuals who will understand the seriousness of my situation. It has been several weeks since the birth of my son, Thane, and though I feel I have recovered physically, my mind is ill at ease. I do not want to put down my concerns in writing, for fear certain information could become known, but I implore you to visit with us as soon as you are able. Your insight and advice would be most welcome, given your most recent research..."

Tybek was no stranger to the more bizarre aspects of life. By this period, he'd already authored two critically acclaimed books on spiritualism and the occult. It is rumored that Tybek drew much of his inspiration from the writings of Russian spiritualist Madam Helena Blavatsky. Despite a few open critics who accused them both of fraud, they were incredibly successful.

Tybek's books included *Spiritualism and the Physical Realm* (1882). Raven had apparently read the book as she referred to one chapter in particular in several of her letters. Tybek described a condition he deemed as Spiritual Blight. This was the result of someone being born with no spiritual connection whatsoever. They are unable to develop in any spiritual aspect and this inability often bleeds over into other areas in life. Left untreated, Tybek said the individual is often sickly, a perpetual state of poor health. The "spiritual self" as he describes, "withers and dies inside the body, leading to madness, murder, or suicide," (p.133).

Tybek thoroughly believed there were physical signs and symptoms exhibited birth for Spiritual Blight. He described it as an inability to show emotion or cry, intense aversion to touch, frequent negative physiological reactions to light, and lastly, what he describes as "palpable sense of dread which seems to affect any who are in the infant's presence. I myself have been witness to this and was forced to leave the room after only ten minutes," (p. 142).

The second letter, found so far, that came from Raven was three months later. In June of 1884, she stated (summarized):

"I find that I am unable to take the drastic action you have recommended. We are taking the necessary steps to ensure the safety of everyone involved, and we will, if you are willing to assist, work to find a way to correct the situation."

To what degree Tybek assisted the family is unknown. Neighbors didn't report an abnormal number of visitors to the property, but if visitation were made during nightly hours, it wouldn't likely have been common knowledge. Many residents of Luray believed it ill-luck to be near or to watch the Darkwood property at night.

The last letter from Raven, found as of this date, came from May of 1888. On the 13th Day, Raven wrote:

"Dear Mr. Tybek:

"I fear that there is no other conclusion to come to other than that you were correct in your original recommendation. I find I now regret that I allowed this to continue for so long. Additionally, I feel that the interventions we attempted served only to worsen the situation. I await the end, whatever that may be. I still welcome your visit, but can not guarantee your safety.

Raven Darkwood."

The documents found amid Tybek's notes did corroborate a visit to Darkwood in the autumn of that year. He returned a changed man and his family never discovered what happened. His career was over. He spent the next few years in total seclusion and stopped publishing any work. It was supposed grief from the death of his good friend, Madam Blavatsky, finally caught up with him.

Whatever the reasons, he stopped his writings and refused to make further public appearances.

The appearance of these letters leaves us to wonder what happened on the Darkwood estate nearly two centuries ago. Did they keep the child locked in one of the rooms forbidden to staff or Abigail? Was he locked away in the work shed that Leroy Darkwood forbade anyone to enter?

One of the peculiarities mentioned in Fannie Buracker's diaries was the family members' near paranoia. Rooms locked away from the world where not even staff could properly clean them, parts of the woods that were fenced in, even a bizarre garden that resembled an ancient cemetery.

What we do know, and has been confirmed, is there are no records of a son, whatsoever, in any deeds, wills, or public records. The existence of Thane is and will likely remain a mystery.



A Lunatic's Chronicle:

The 13 Horrors of Ed Darkwood

Hollywood has been known for characters in reality as much as on-screen. From self-centered and quirky to downright psychotic, the land of the motion picture is just as much the land of the psychologically unstable.

Edward Darkwood is one of those figures who had a life just like a character onscreen. His legacy is clouded through myths and fictions of all kinds. The chore lies in finding out the truth behind his life as factual and documented details are scarce. There are details which are common truth and accepted fact, which we will discuss. The mistruths and lack of information have given the director a gruesome air that continues growing today. One of the more unsettling truths is that those who do attempt to discover the facts behind the man, have bad ends. Several have been reported missing, and those who do survive, they have all wound up in Arkham Asylum.

Many believe he was born on October 13th of 1924. One public record listed in Dark Hollow, where he was born, supports this. Dark Hollow is a small community a few miles from Luray, Virginia. It should be noted now that Ed's father, Mason Wood, was not as successful as his siblings were. Ed's great-uncle was none other than Leroy Darkwood. In film, Wood changed his surname to Darkwood, believing it would look far more sophisticated, and hoping to capitalize of Great-Uncle Leroy's notoriety.

Many theories divide his followers simply based upon his date-of-birth. Some say he just inverted 13 to add fuel to his cult following while others say it's vice versa. We have documented, however, he was indeed born on the 13th.

Ed's father, Mason, was not an educated man or a successful man. He kept a roof over his family's head and food on the table, but they were always scraping to get by. As time passed, it seemed Mason was getting less work. Rumors abound that there were no shortage of jobs out west. Everyone had plenty of work and a man could make a decent living in no time. As the jobs completely died out, when the Great Depression truly began, the family moved in search of that lauded employment.

Unfortunately, the family soon found the claims were just rumors. Mason would stop in a town for a while and make enough for supplies to get them to the next town. Onward they continued, desperately seeking some thriving metropolis where there was no end to employment.

Despite the lack of success, Mason was soon elated that they moved when they did. The strangest accident in Virginia's history claimed all of Dark Hollow within a few years. Details are sketchy to this day. Some believe it was a mass abduction while others say it was the Darkwood curse. Some say it happened just as, across the country, Ed was seriously considering changing his name to Darkwood.

The family didn't stop moving until they reached the Pacific coast of California. Work there was difficult to come by, at first, it soon became somewhat steady. They resided in a tiny down called "Hooverville," which is a part of San Bernardino today.

We can still find a few of Ed's interviews from the height of his career. He noted his first job came when he was 8. By the time he reached 10, he'd started working in theaters. Sometimes he helped usher, but most often he assisted projectionists. That was the first time he'd witnessed a full motion picture and the first time he'd fallen in love. He adored movies from the first day. He continued to help in as many theaters as he could find, even performing much volunteer work in smaller movie houses. The family's move to California was a stroke of luck he'd never anticipated before. He could now work behind the camera. He performed a variety of tasks on the sets of countless movies. Some of his work behind the scenes was:

- *The Return of Chandu* (1934) - Assistant Editor
- *The Ghost Walks* (1934)- Set Worker
- *Texas Terror* (1935)- Assistant Writer
- *The Mystery of the Marie Celeste* (1935) - Stunt Man
- *Sunset Murder Case* (1938)- Assistant Editor
- *The Devil Bat* (1940) - Assistant Editor

His desire to learn the industry was said to impress all. He is one of the few individuals to undertake volunteer work on various sets to learn more about what his dream job entailed. His determination and enthusiastic personality were magical qualities and by 1940, he was hired by Majestic Studios. He continued to climb in his work and eventually had the opportunity to shine as the director he always wanted to be.

The magic surrounding Darkwood seemed to reverse. His luck and incredible fortune had vanished within years. Despite his drive, it was his lack of talent that spelled his doom. He just could not move past the realm of a crew member into that of a director. Even on the day where his ambition was honed and every member was walking the thin line of professionalism, other forces seemed to be at work. Bizarre accidents happened on set, actors became ill, necessary props broke at the worst time. When they could manage to shoot properly, problems always occurred within the film as improper lighting and mysterious images in the reel. Even these could be overlooked, but the finished product that was viewable, resulted in abject disappointment.

Despite the amount of research involved, we aren't certain of how many films Darkwood participated in creating. Due to numerous studio fires and poor storage conditions, most of the films crediting him have been lost to time. Rumors say that, for several years, he helped create some of the most classic films in history.

Poor Ed Darkwood found himself again in abject poverty by 1945. He lived in a tenement apartment and worked as a projectionist at a local theater. This was a time of poverty and rejection for Darkwood as he had few friends and even fewer supporters. The eccentricities of his personality came forward during this time. His "quirks" had taken full control of his life. Those loyal to him simply dismissed this as proof that he was focusing all time and attention on future projects.

Those who followed him even during this period of obscurity claimed he had developed an intense fetish for cosmetics. His practice quickly went into make-up artistry and special effects. Whatever talent he may have lacked in the directorial department was more than compensated for in his artistry. Most around him claimed he regularly used himself as a model, dressing as witches, monsters and the living dead. He surrounded himself with various props from his previous movies, not because of a mental issue, but because he maintained his drive through dwelling on past failures. It wasn't until the 1950s that he received word a relative had passed and he had a considerable sum waiting for him.

In 1954, Darkwood received a letter just like something out of a movie. An unknown relative, Abigail Darkwood, had passed away nearly two decades earlier. Since then, her attorneys had been feverishly working to find the next-of-kin. The majority of those mentioned in her will had passed away during the previous decade. Darkwood was reasonably overwhelmed. He missed work the day he learned of the fortune and the theater reported that he never came back. His relative left him a sum of \$100,000. It may not seem like a great deal today, but in the 1950s, that was around the equivalent of \$800,000 in today's money. Darkwood had more than enough to press onward towards achieving his vision.

Once the amount was deposited in his account, he began a wave of telephone calls. Who was this mysterious relative? What generous heart would see fit to remember him or his family in anything? He eventually learned of the accomplished scientist and that her estate was currently empty. It was owned by the university where she attended college.

He contacted Miskatonic University, the entity that currently held title over the Darkwood Estate in Luray, Virginia. He explained the situation to the Dean himself and begged for permission to visit the property. He needed to visit her house and pay respects. He'd never heard a great deal about Abigail, his father rarely mentioned his family, and to consider that such a famous scientist was overwhelming.

The reluctant Dean agreed so long as the visit was kept brief. He noted he believed the home was in disrepair and quite dangerous. He also said he would be required to sign off on paperwork stating he had been warned. Darkwood didn't care. He was just amazed that any person in his family had that kind of money, let alone a sizable estate.

Darkwood packed the items he regarded as precious and sold the rest of his belongings. He didn't know what he might find in Virginia, but most believe he didn't care. He saw the trip as an adventure. It had been so long since he'd visited his native land that he'd forgotten it. He boarded the next airplane and arrived in Luray within the week.

He was spotted about town on several occasions during the next week. He stocked up on food and supplies and disappeared into the property within the next week. Some people suspected him of stealing the university's property and trying to sell many of the more unusual artifacts he found, but he had no luck. We can still see advertisements and classified ads today hawking the strange and unusual from Darkwood, no trace of any transaction or purchase is known.

The locals had a healthy fascination with the house, even after it had long been vacant, but superstition emerged victorious. No one wanted anything from the house. No matter how good the offer was, it seemed every individual backed out. Several who openly voiced their interest admit that, once they visited the house, they had no interest in the contents. They believed everything housed in that structure carried the curse of Leroy Darkwood.

There was one purchase believed to have been made months later. Despite the agreement that Darkwood would only remain in the house for a week or so, he was never spotted leaving. He also never returned to town for supplies. One day, a black van rolled into the property and several boxes were loaded onto it. Then, it disappeared.

Whatever the relic was, Ed apparently made a good deal of money from the sale. It was during this time that he came across a camera. A moving picture camera. No one knew how such a modern appliance would find its way into the abandoned house, but evidently, it did. Several close to Darkwood, who visited him briefly, claimed the box he stored the piece in was embellished in the strangest leather. A large decorative seal scrolled across the top and in black ink, the words "Camera Obscura."

He didn't seem to care what quality the film was, but he used this camera to begin creation of his next series of disastrous films. Rumor had it that he only hired vagabonds and other wandering riff-raff to star in the films. Why he wanted such unheard of talent is not known for certain. What we do know is that, with no family, the stars were virtually expendable.

His first film, titled "Ghost of the Phantom," was an independent release in 1956. Friends say he was ecstatic, but the curse upon him hadn't left. The film failed terribly. The university was also concerned as he was supposed to have been gone months earlier. But, Dean Montague assumed he was caring for the home and it was far cheaper than constantly employing caretaking staff.

Darkwood continued to attempt his "career resurrection," but followers today admit that it was never really alive to be resurrected.

He followed the same method of operation, hiring cheap labor amid vagrants and using what resources he had on the property in his films. He had virtually no overhead as many of his "stars" reported to work for nothing more than a roof over their heads for a night or so. The movies all met with equally grim reception and success:

- *I Married the Spider Queen*, 1958- The movie starred a young girl by the name of Melba Daniels. Her parents reported her missing in 1957. She'd ran away to try and reach Hollywood. The first and last time she was seen was onscreen. No information is known of her whereabouts. It was around this time that local farmers reported spider webs in their trees. Some had been large enough to entrap their livestock.
- *Mutant Cannibal Mom*, 1959- The movie didn't actually contain any children so Darkwood hired a homeless woman and two young vagrants he found at the railroad station on night. Henrietta Billard was seen after, hitchhiking, but the two young gentlemen were never seen again. It was also reported that some of the locals had to seek emergency medical treatment for what appeared to be animal bites. One died from being eaten.
- *Psicko of Hotel Hell*, 1960- As far as we can ascertain, this film was created with no harm to the actors. However, it should also be noted that Darkwood starred in this film, himself. The failure of this feature was due to the ever-morphing lighting.

- ***The Monster Mummy Unbound***, 1962- A total of five people seen onscreen, in this cheap thriller, were never seen again.
- ***I Was a Teenage Cheerleader Zombie***, 1963- The two girls starring in this role were found dead in December 1963, two weeks after filming stopped. There was never evidence enough to suspect Darkwood of having a hand in it, but it was a striking coincidence. The cause of death for both girls was determined to be "biting."
- ***Asylum of the Frozen Dead***, 1964- The star of this film was found twenty miles from Darkwood Manor in February 1965. Shooting of the film ended in November of 1964. His words remain unknown today. Authorities reported he spoke nothing, but gibberish and was institutionalized in the Arkham Asylum.
- ***It Came from the Cellar***, 1965- This strange film kept neighbors up for months. The strange noises from the home, when it was supposed to be closed, kept everyone on edge. However, the sheriff of Luray could never find anyone in the house to warn.

- ***The Horror of Doctor Brain***, 1966
- ***Invasion of the Scarecrow Zombies***, 1968- It's remarkable to know that the United States Air Force responded to this series of scares. The citizens of the sleepy town of Luray reported unidentified flying crafts for three months.
- ***Terror at The Freak Show Circus***, 1969
- ***Werewolves of Black Bog***, 1970

The latter four movies were equally dismal, but such had become the legacy of Ed Darkwood, Jr.

There are those who believed the infamous Camera Obscura was something found by Abigail during one of her South American excursions. The legends stated the camera actually brought the vision of the user to life, regardless of how impossible or supernatural those images may be.

There was once lore amid camera enthusiasts around the first few decades of the Twentieth Century. The new technology seemed limitless for depicting situations and portraying visions. Legend has it that Darkwood's Camera Obscura is part of a trio that once belonged to noted South American filmmaker Caesar De Manga. De Manga was an occultist and allegedly created three cameras. The first, the Camera Infurnum, created moving pictures that targeted the audience. Those who viewed the film instantly saw their greatest fears onscreen, regardless of what they might be. The film was created with basic plots that could conform to an infinite spectrum of plots and subplots. No footage exists from this camera today and we couldn't locate any witnesses or relatives to speak with regarding the film or the cameras. It was as if De Manga disappeared.

The legend surrounding the Camera Obscura is a more fascinating one. Caesar considered the individual who may lack in creative talents. The Obscura was to realize the filmmakers dream for him. Sadly, Caesar's intent was clearly not the same as Darkwood's. Many believe the dismal film history was due to Darkwood's macabre visions. Had his visions been that of romance or comedy, his luck would've likely fared better, according to the known information.

By this time, Darkwood had installed a telephone line into the estate without the university knowing. He continued to discuss things with a few of his California friends. He admitted he was staking his entire career, and much of his life, on a movie he titled *Yigg*. We know this film by its more common title, *The Snake God Lives*.

The now 60 Darkwood sent a reel to a projectionist friend of his back in California. This was the last communication known from Darkwood. Ed admitted in that final letter that something stalled his production, but he was confident of overcoming any obstacle.

His disappearance seemed to rocket Ed Darkwood into the realms of legend. Just as the Great-Uncle he never knew, Leroy Darkwood, found himself amid the rank of legend nearly a century earlier.

What became of the hungry filmmaker remains unknown. His telephone service was disconnected soon thereafter for failure to pay. Some locals believed he ran into whatever killed Professor Ghoulisby. Others believed he simply lost control of the camera and the "effects" it produced. Many say that when the air is quiet, it's common to hear horror movie sounds from within the abandoned estate.

The more creative rumor-mills say that Darkwood is still alive, well past 80 by now, and still attempting to finish production on his magnum opus. They say that despite his monstrous appearance now, due to the camera's terrible energy, he has never relented in his pursuit to make the greatest masterpiece of his life. Other say his 13th film simply killed him.

I am concluding this biography by saying there are so many things we may never know about Ed Darkwood. I, myself, have been inducted into the palatial residence of the Arkham Asylum for nearly a year. My doctor says I am making some excellent strides in my recovery. Sadly, that one rumor is painfully true. All Darkwood biographers undergo a terrible transformation. I find that everyday, I look out my room window and see giant spiders crossing the fields and terribly decomposed alien zombies.

My doctor assures me it's just stress and I hope to be released within the year.



The Lore:

The Legend of the Iron Coffins

There are many stories and legends that surround Darkwood Manor; some more bizarre and unexplainable than others. This is one those tales.

Very few of the facts in this story can be verified. Most of the information relayed here has been passed down by word of mouth, and dramatized by the author.

The Dark Hollow Horror

From 1880 to the 1940s, the Darkwood family employed a large number of people as servants and farmhands. Most of these people, and their families, lived in a hollow of the Blue Ridge Mountains near Darkwood Manor. The land in the hollow belonged to the Darkwood family, and the folks that lived there were share renters or tenants. All of them, in one way or another, relied on the Darkwood family.

When the Darkwoods came to Luray in 1880, only a few families lived in the hollow. Some say that those were related to the Darkwood patriarch, Leroy. Over the years, more people migrated to the area, which came to be known as Dark Hollow. The original families, and the newly immigrated, formed a very close-knit community. The hollow residents had a very bad reputation among other people in the surrounding county.

They assumed the hollow-dwellers were uneducated, godless, and irreligious. Due to their Darkwood family associations, they were also often harassed and accused of witchcraft. By the early 1900's most people in Page County avoided any and all contact with the hollow and its people.

In 1935, Virgil Prince was the caretaker at Darkwood Manor, and the sole liaison between the hollow people and Abigail Darkwood. At that time, she was presumed to be the last surviving member of the family

Virgil, and all the people who resided in the hollow, faced a crisis. The government had acquired neighboring lands in the mountains. They intended on creating the Shenandoah National Park. Abigail, like all other landowners, was compelled to sell most of the land she owned to the government for preservation and conservation. This fateful transaction included all of Dark Hollow.

The residents of the hollow weren't initially worried about the change in ownership. Several were informed they would be able to stay on the land after it became a park, but by the summer of 1935, the government changed its mind. Now every resident was required to move off the mountain.

The Dark Hollow residents became infuriated. It was their home. That mountain and its hollow was the only thing most of them had ever known. They were terrified at the idea of leaving, with no place to go, and no money to travel on.

Virgil pleaded with Abigail to help them as a representative of the hollow residents. She told him the matter was out of her hands and there was nothing she could do to stop the government. Virgil relayed the message to his fellow residents. A somber feel settled across the valley, people felt utterly hopeless. Abigail was their last hope. The Page County Sheriff would eventually come into their hollow and remove them by force. The group huddled together by the community bonfire every night. After a long and heated argument, it was agreed. Most residents decided they would protect themselves via a dark means.

Everyone knew the Darkwood family was involved in conjuring, and such, but only a few knew of the hidden library within the walls of Darkwood Manor. Those who knew about this secret immediately came forth and boasted the library contained books of ancient and forbidden knowledge. Virgil was one of the few that knew about the library and what it held. He knew the only powers able to prevent him and his family from losing their home was hidden in those books. Even though it meant betraying Abigail, he intended to have that power.

They waited for the next available moment. It came the next week. Virgil came into the manor as usual to find a stack of suitcases and bags. Abigail was making another trip to South America. He was excited, but maintained his composure. As soon as she left, Virgil returned Darkwood Manor.

Once inside, Virgil actually had no clue where to find the library, or the books he needed. The house looked far stranger without Abigail there. Corner seemed to shift and walls seemed to appear where they weren't before. He wasn't backing down. He paused a moment and smiled. Something guided him quickly to the library, and the book he knew he needed almost called out to him from its place on the dusty shelf. Virgil returned to the hollow with the book.

The very next night, Virgil and members of 6 other families from the hollow had gathered in a meadow on the mountainside after a day of discovery. Survivors today say he credited the book with revealing itself, as if it was written just for him. It told him precisely how to call the force to protect Dark Hollow and its people.

He built a bonfire along with his neighbors, that night and set about performing the rituals. People surrounded the bonfire in a circle, and Virgil read. The sounds that passed from his lips, and then echoed back from the fire, were beyond any normal earthly comprehension. After Virgil finished speaking, the book slammed shut, and the fire exploded around the circle of people.

They were all blinded for a moment, but the fire had not consumed them, or even singed their clothes. Astonished by what had occurred, Virgil did not notice the horse and rider that entered the meadow. It was Abigail. She had ridden her horse up to his side, and grabbed the book from his hand before he realized it.

"You don't know what you have done, Virgil!" she spat at him.

"I'm sorry, but we do not want to be taken from our homes." he pleaded.

"There are worse things than being driven from your homes. You all have been fooled," she yelled turning toward the others in the circle around the flames.

"You have let your fear and hatred blind you! Yes, the government wants to drive you from this mountain, but what you conjured here this night may very well drive you from this world! Pray that your spell failed!" She rode off back down the mountainside.

The circle broke up in a state of shock. The silent residents of the hollow made their way back to their homes. A few days passed, which turned into a few weeks and nothing seemed to have come from the spell cast. The sheriff and the government still pressured them to leave the hollow. They believed that the dark magic failed completely. But, perhaps it was a blessing in disguise. Perhaps they need not fear any repercussions from their attempt, like the old Darkwood woman had warned them.

Nellie, Virgil's young wife was the first to announce the news. Almost 2 months from the ritual night, the Prince family discovered that they were going to have a baby. And, like dominos falling, all the other families that took place in the ritual soon announced that they were expecting children.

Virgil hoped that maybe this was a desired result. Maybe the government would let them stay if they knew that there were so many babies on the way. Nine months later, all the babies were born. The pregnancies had not changed any minds about their leaving the hollow. The sudden influx of new residents into the Dark Hollow didn't make them feel any more sympathetic toward the mountain people.

Each of the seven children was delivered on consecutive nights. This taxed the stamina of the local midwife, but all the newborns were normal and healthy. Virgil and Nellie's child was the last to be born, and it was a boy. They named him David. He was their first child, and they were very proud. After the first week, however, their baby started to change.

It grew very rapidly, at first. Its facial features slowly became more and more...twisted. Within the first month their son was able to walk. Virgil kept it a secret from everyone else in the hollow by not venturing out to any place where he would have to talk to any one. He was afraid.

Around two months after the birth of the children, a pounding on the front door of Virgil's home awakened him. He grabbed his rifle and went to see who had come to his home in the middle of the night. He was relieved to see Tom Cave, and not the local sheriff, standing in the moonlight. Tom had been involved in the ceremony last year, and his wife had also given birth. Virgil noticed that Tom looked ghastly white in the light from the lantern he was carrying.

“What’s wrong Tom? What you doin’ here this time of night?” Before Tom could respond, Virgil realized exactly what was wrong. For the past several weeks, he had watched David grow from a baby into a hideous thing that had to remain locked in its room. If his assumption was correct, Tom had witnessed the same kind of transformation in his own child. He knew that they had all cursed themselves and the curse was growing.

Tom swallowed hard, and searched his mind for what to say. Virgil looked away from toward the door of the room that held his...son. He heard him pace behind the wooden door. He didn’t believe the child ever slept any more. It just ate, grew, and changed. Nellie had gone into a state of shock over what had become of her child. Virgil was barely holding on to his sanity, but he didn’t know what else to do, except carry on.

“It’s my girl, Virgil,” Tom managed to choke out the words. “Something seriously wrong with her.... I can’t...I can’t...”

“What’s wrong with her?” he played along, but he knew all too well what was wrong with her.

There came an unearthly cry from out of the darkness and the two men cringed. It came from just beyond the lantern light, out on the dirt road. Tom quickly spun toward the direction of the sound and lifted the lantern high above his head. Virgil could make out Tom’s old buckboard in the dim light. He could see movement in the back of the wagon. Something thrashed about in the darkness.

“I managed to knock her out and tie her....I just couldn’t....” Tom walked toward the wagon with his lantern held high. Virgil followed him. The closer they got the more Virgil could see.

It looked remotely human. It wore a dress, but the face and the hands were wrong. Its eyes seized upon Virgil’s and froze him in his tracks.

“That can’t be your new born,” but he knew all too well that it was.

“It killed my oldest girl, and Melissa, my wife. It just tore’em apart”, Tom was on the verge of tears. “I couldn’t bring myself to shoot her, but it has to be put down. It isn’t human, Virgil. ”

“Why did you bring her here?” He asked finally able to turn a way from the nightmare he witnessed. He already knew, though. It was no surprise.

“You got to do it. I can’t.”

“You want me to shoot her?” Of course he did. Somewhere in his mind, he still believed the thing to be his child.

“I can’t...” he managed to say as he turned away, and hung his head. It was the last thing old Tom ever got to say.

Her cry pierced Virgil’s ears like a knife as it burst free of its ropes. Before he realized what had happened the creature was off the wagon and on Tom’s back. Its monstrous hands locked around his head, and the snap of Tom’s neck was loud and quick.

Virgil remembered the rifle in his hand. He raised it to his shoulder, and took aim. Tom’s lantern laid on the ground near his lifeless body. Its flicking light made aiming difficult, but she would be hard to miss at such close range. Virgil squeezed the trigger. The gun flashed, and the sound echoed off the mountains. He struggled to regain his sight. As the smoke cleared, he could see her. She stood over her father’s body and picked at the bullet hole in her chest. She lifted her head, and to his utter shock, she spoke with a voice no man should ever hear:

“You...can...not...kill. We...are...the...flesh...of...your...prayers.”

They said their voices were like the sound of broken glass in chorus with nails on a schoolhouse chalkboard that produced words. He wanted to run, but not into his home. There was no safety there. He wanted to run into the woods. He wanted to run until he found the light of the sun again. That was the only place he might be able to maintain his sanity, but he couldn’t move. Again, he was frozen in place by her eyes.

He knew what she meant. The horror that stood before him, and the simple agony of the truth spoken, made his stomach knot forcing him to expel its contents on the ground before him. He lifted his eyes again and the monster was gone.

His mind and body felt ripped apart. He peered into the darkness where it had stood. He wasn't going after her. He looked into the hopelessness and terror that had become life. You always reap what you sow and harvest time had come to Dark Hollow. The flame in Tom's lantern finally flickered out.

He was pulled from the downward spiral by a scream in the house. It was a human scream. It was Nellie. He turned and bolted inside. He ran toward his wife's bedroom, barely noticing his son's door was also open. He rammed open the bedroom door to find Nellie on the bed with her arms spread wide. Her inert face now wore a perpetual look of shock. The gaping hole in her chest still oozed blood. Red liquid flowed in tiny rivers from her body and dripped off the bed to the floor. He moved slowly toward the bed. He was beyond shock. Virgil Prince had hidden his self away somewhere in his mind. His body was moving more on reflex than anything else.

He lowered his hand to his wife's blood splattered face, and with the tips of his fingers, closed her lifeless eyes. He stared into the pie sized hole in her chest. For some reason, he had to tear his eyes away from the patch of clean bedding beneath. Her heart was gone. His son had stolen his mother's heart. His knees buckled and his body twisted as he fell to the blood covered floor. The last thing he recalled was his wife's blood wet against his face as he mercifully lost consciousness.

He regained consciousness sometime just before the sun rose. He tried to stand, but found he was partially stuck to the floor. His wife's blood had acted as an adhesive as it dried. He pulled himself free and raised upright. He checked on Nellie, but the bed that had held his wife's body was empty. Someone must have been there while he was asleep. Had it been the sheriff? No, couldn't have been, because Virgil would have woken up in a jail cell had the sheriff found this mess.

He crept outside, but Tom's body was gone as well. The buckboard wagon and horse were still tied off out front. What had happened? Who or what had taken the bodies?

He returned to his son's room, but deep down he knew that he wouldn't find him. He was correct. The room was empty. The creature he sired was loose out there in the woods.

Between weeping and the staggering waves of horrific dread, Virgil got himself cleaned up. He used Tom's wagon and headed off toward his dead friend's home. He didn't know what he would find there, or what he was looking for, but he felt compelled to do something, and it was an escape from the ruins of his own home.

There were only 5 miles between his place and the Cave home, but the trip seemed to last a lifetime. His mind replayed the events of the previous night, and year, over in his head. None of it seemed real. He arrived at Tom's place an hour later. It was empty. There were no signs of life at all, but what did he expect to find?

He spent the rest of the day visiting everyone's home that had been involved in the spell casting the latter year. Each house was as empty as Tom's. Some showed signs of struggle and others it seemed like the occupants had just walked out.

He was at the foot of the hollow by day's end. He had just visited the last of the coconspirators' home to find what he had found at the rest. Nothing. Oddly enough, he hadn't encountered anyone else along the way, but it was just as well. He had a hard enough time just being in his own company much less trying to discuss things with another person that was outside this mess. Maybe everyone was gone. That's what the government wanted in the first place. Maybe he had just helped them out rather than stop them like he sat out to do.

There was only one place to find an answer, but he didn't want to go. He turn the wagon towards the west and with trembling hands ventured out of the hollow. He had to go to Darkwood Manor and talk to Abigail Darkwood.

Evening was dimming the land by the time he had started down the road to Darkwood. He had traveled this road hundreds of times before, but not in over a year. The last time he had gone there was when he took the book. He never had the courage to return after Abigail had caught them with her stolen book. Rumor had it she found another to take care of the property.

The manor was creepy during the day when he worked, but at night, the place felt like hell. As he approached the house, he could see lights on in several windows, but that light didn't offer any relief. He tied up the horse at the front porch and inched up to the front door. Maybe she would be on vacation. Maybe she wouldn't even be there.

His hand now felt like an anvil as he raised it to knock on the door. Sounds echoed through the halls beyond the door. Eons of time seemed to pass before the door opened, Virgil's already fragile mind had long since passed exhaustion. He wanted to run and never stop, but he steadied himself. He had to find out what had happened, and where were those...children.

The door opened. "Hello, Mr. Prince! How delightful of you to come calling. Is this a social visit, or do intend to pilfer another volume from my library?" Abigail smiled at her former caretaker with all the southern charm expected from a woman of her position.

"Miss Darkwood, I'm sorry I stole that book. I just thought it could save our homes."

Virgil's voice was full of weariness and fear from what had befallen him in the past 24 hours.

"Has it worked? Has your homes been saved, Mr. Prince?"

"No mam, it ain't. That's why I came here. I wanted..."

"I know what you want, Virgil", the earlier charm in her voice was gone. The change in tone sent a chill down his spine.

"You want to know what happened to your newborn children and why they have turned on you. You may not be aware of this yet, but they have turned on everyone. At this very moment they are finishing off anyone left in the hollow, and they won't stop there," her eyes bored into him. He felt the weight of his sin as he buried his face in his hands in shame. He couldn't hide from her accusatory expression.

"Don't behave like a child, Virgil. Follow me," She turned sharply and made her way down the long entrance hall.

His fear made him hesitate for a moment, but he dared not disobey her. As he stepped through the threshold, the heavy door swung shut behind him.

"This way. We don't have much time. If we are to act it must be tonight."

He followed her deeper into Darkwood Manor. He kept his eyes on the floor. The house did not invite him in as it had on his first unauthorized venture into the halls. It was quite the opposite. He felt a thousand eyes upon him; they glared at him in hatred. He felt the menacing dread most people describe when looking at the outside of the house. On the outside, you could look away to escape that feeling. There was no looking way when you were inside.

Abigail stopped in front of a door. She took out a key, inserted it in the lock and opened it wide. "Come in, I believe you may remember this room."

He crept past her into the room. It was the library where he had stolen the book, but it looked different. It also seemed like he came from a different direction. It didn't matter, he wasn't about to ask. The room was darker than he recalled when he got the book, and it smelled faintly of decay now. He hadn't noticed that his first time here.

The most notable difference was the seven large casket objects that lined the far wall. Abigail entered the room behind him, and closed the door. "Please....tell me what happened to our children?" he needed to know before he fell any further into this madness into this madness.

"They are not your children. Yes, they did indeed wrap themselves in the flesh you gave them; used it to incubate themselves, but they aren't yours. Of course, you opened the door, and awakened them with this," she reached for the bookshelf, and pulled down the volume he'd stolen a year earlier. She looked at it as she held it in her hands.

"Books are full of knowledge and power. Some good, some bad, and some...well, let's just say some shouldn't be opened at all." She crossed the room to lay the book on a table near the coffins. She turned back to him. "There are things that lurk beyond. Creatures that got shoved out of our world long ago when we were just bugs. They were exiled in a dimension parallel to our own."

She motioned for him to sit at the chair. He wasn't about to contradict her as she continued, "Of course they want desperately to return to our world. They claw, and press at our reality constantly trying to find a way in."

He stared at her as she spoke. What she was saying seemed insane, but only insanity could explain what had happened. “The book you...chose...to steal is a particularly foul grimore. It was composed as a key to unlock a door to another reality. It's a key and an invitation to a group of creatures known as Killcrop. When you misused it, the door for them opened wide. They entered this world and found purchase in your flesh.”

“Dear God...” Virgil whispered. If his mind had not already been shattered the night before, then this would have done it.

“The ones you brought into this world, your... children, are different. They have different traits, like humans, and will continue to transform your flesh into different forms. They are all as malignant to us as any cancer. They will feed on every soul and mind they encounter. As you already...”

“Show me,” Virgil interrupted, “show me how to kill them. I'll do it.”

“They can't be killed, Virgil.” She disdainfully looked at him. “I know of nothing that can kill them. I don't even know how to send them back. It is beyond my understanding. The best we can do is contain them. I can lock them away, but they won't be dead.”

She turned back toward the book and the caskets that lined the wall.

“These coffins are made of cast iron. The metal will restrain them. I had these specially made and brought here six months ago. Not an easy task to order seven iron coffins without raising suspicions.”

“You knew that this was gong to happen six months ago?” Virgil's voice rose beyond the whisper it had been since he had started talking to Abigail. “You knew what was gong to happen to us and you didn't say anything? I've lost my wife and everyone else is dead!!”

“Yes, I knew six months ago, you fool. I warned you, but what was I to tell you and your coconspirators? Should I have said that your wives carried a demon in her womb? You wouldn't have believed me. You would have thought the old witch was trying to trick you. Or you might've even thought I deformed your children as punishment for stealing the book. No, you had to come to me.”

He hung his head again. She was right. His anger quickly faded. He had no one to be angry at except himself, all of them. He would've assumed she bewitched his Nellie. It would've been easier for them to believe Abigail was to blame instead of accepting it was their own fault.

“Now, let's get this business done.” She rose and began to read from one of those ancient books. The ritual took over an hour. Her words and utterances were indescribable in any normal means. He wasn't even sure the words came from her at all. In the end, he had to sacrifice a small amount of his blood. She cut across his palm with a knife to allow several drops blood to drip into each of the iron coffins.

“Blood attracts blood. Sin attracts sin.”

It was one of the few things Abigail said that he was able to understand. Shortly after he gave his blood, Abigail told him it was done. He remained with her to watch as the first...thing slithered through the library doors. It moved soundlessly across the library and sank into the first iron coffin. He wished he had never lived to see the procession and it would happen six more times before all of them were captured.

He recognized the one next to the last to enter the library. It was Tom's daughter. Her eyes were the same as they were the night before, but she had changed more. The Killcrop within her had become fully formed.

David, his son, was the last to enter. His features had transformed during the day to the point there scarcely anything left that Virgil recognized. The eyes were all that remained of his baby boy. He was the only one of the Killcrop that looked directly at him. The creature studied him while it lowered itself into the iron coffin. Again, he felt that urge to run, and to keep running, but he knew there was no place to go.

They slid the lids on to coffins, and sealed them. All of the coffins had strange symbols on them, markings he had never seen before. So long as they helped imprison the evil within, it made no difference to him.

By the time they had finished the work, it was midday. They had worked so hard he hadn't even noticed the brightening outside. "I will keep six of the coffins here," she noted. "They will be secure beneath this house. You may take your son's coffin and bury it in the hollow. It's best you don't tell anyone where you place it. Make sure it's somewhere no one will ever look."

Abigail called forth some strange servants and they helped him load the coffin in the back of the buckboard. It was strange that the servants did not ask who or what was in the coffin. Of course, in comparison, it was the least strange thing he had noticed that night at Darkwood Manor.

As he was making ready to leave, Abigail came outside. "Do as I have instructed, Virgil, and this matter will be closed for us."

"I shall." He hung his head again, still not able to look her directly in the eye.

"I'm sorry for your loss, but what has been done has been done. It cannot be changed. Now take your burden, and never return to Darkwood Manor." He looked up at her last words, but she had already turned and retreated back within the walls of the house.

He turned the wagon down the road and off the Darkwood property. He carried his back to the hollow alone.

The local sheriff and his deputies performed a final sweep of Dark Hollow six months later. They found the homes empty and many had even left all of their belongings. It was strange that they would leave their stuff, but he didn't make an issue out of it. He was just glad no one put up a fight.

They found one former occupant in the Prince household. Virgil Prince had remained, but he didn't put up a fight. His body still hung from the rafters of the old house. By the looks of his corpse, he had hung himself several months back. He was missing his left leg, the right was taken off at the knee, all attributed to hungry wild animals. There was no sign of his wife. Some people believed she had run off with someone, while others that she had jumped into a neighbor's wagon when Virgil wouldn't leave the house. Whatever the reason, they believed Virgil just took the coward's way out.

There were no reports of them finding any iron coffin.



The Lore:

The Last Horse of Flagstaff

Leroy Deadwood became an icon of the American Old West. As with most famed outlaws, his steed also gained a fan base. Bullet, the black Quarter horse mix, carried Leroy from city to city with staggering speed and dexterity. Many believe that Leroy robbed the Devil of his finest horse and, so long as he rode Bullet, the Devil couldn't catch him.

Bullet's whereabouts remain unknown. Once he married, he and his wife returned to the east coast in a covered wagon pulled by two regular horses. Perhaps that is the source of the ill-fate the plagued the family when they decided to try domestic life.

Witness accounts state that Leroy and his wife rode their regular horses until they reached Flagstaff, Arizona, where they purchased a wagon and horses from a local farmer. It was believed that they were attempting to elude a group of angry riders closing in. The man had no idea who he'd conducted business with and never figured out what happened to Bullet. He wasn't taken to any local stables or farms.

The horse's name never faded. Many say that, even today, you can stand still in the deserts surrounding the town and hear his galloping across the desert. Witnesses have reported strange lights out there and the sounds of a horse whinnying when none are present.

Establishing Blood Roots:

Leroy's genealogy is perhaps of as much interest as his life. His parents Cecil Wood and Edith Rhett had their own histories. Cecil's lineage has been traced back in connection with such figures as the infamous werewolf Gandillion family of France, while Edith's is also flawed, traveling back to the murderous Gilles de Retz, or Gilles de Rais, as he is known today.

Perhaps the rumors are correct and Leroy is the victim of the sixth child from the sixth generation from this cursed bloodline.

Author's Note:

I began this as a fan-fiction work using the information supplied at Darkwood Manor's [<http://www.Darkwoodmanor.net>] web site. All the character names and general information has remained the same. The storylines have been expounded upon and seemed to take a life of their own during the literary exploration. Works such as "The Legend of the Iron Coffin," have been edited and included as these are previous full works of fiction in themselves and do not require additional elaboration.

I would also like to state that the actual movie names, images and graphics used in this book were taken from the internet. Currently, they are in the public domain.

Author Biography:

Laura Wright has been writing since 1988. She has three published novels: *While I'm Dying* (2001), *Timeslips & Terrors* (2005), and *Virginia Creeper* (2007). She resides in Southwestern Virginia and can be found online at <http://laurawrites.net>, <http://vacreeper.com> and the not-for-profit literacy awareness site: <http://appalachiangothic.com>.