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“SERIAL KILLERS ARE MADE, not born.” That was the opening sentence in a long monograph that Dr. Forbes had planned to turn into a book before the I-80 killer had stabbed him. He didn’t know it at the time, but the hooded figure who jammed the blade into his femur was the living embodiment of that dictum. Axel had been born, like all children, with a pure soul and an innocent heart. He carried no extra Y chromosome as so many mass murderers did. His mother had been a prostitute who’d used crack cocaine, but she’d been in prison and clean throughout most of her pregnancy, so there were no residual drugs in her system at the time Axel was in utero.

He was born at the Decatur Women’s Correctional Center. The name on his birth certificate was Bobby Leroy Cole. But since his mother had another year to go on her sentence, baby Axel was sent into foster care. At the age of four weeks he was placed with a couple named Tingley in the farming town of Mattoon, Illinois. From that point on, fate became truly monstrous for little Axel.

Roger Tingley had been a sugar cane farmer in Thibodaux Louisiana. He’d met his wife Dotty, a Mattoon native, during a booze-sodden Mardi Gras week in the mid 1970’s. They’d struck it rich in 1979 during the “Arab oil crisis” when the Government

subsidized ethanol production. The cane crop on Tingley's 60 acre spread yielded five times the return he'd gotten from granulated sugar, but when the bottom fell out of the market in the early 80's, he lost the farm that had been in his family for six generations. Humiliated, Roger tried to stave off foreclosure by setting up a bootleg ethanol distillery. But his short career running grain alcohol bought him a sixteen month stretch at the State Penitentiary in Angola.

During his time inside, Dotty was "saved" by the evangelicals and when Roger got paroled, they moved into the five bedroom ram-shackle farm house in Mattoon that her daddy had left her. It was 1982. With no marketable skills and a \$30,000 IRS bill for back taxes, the Tingleys began taking in foster children. By the time baby Axel arrived in his state-issued bassinette, they had six other troubled juveniles ranging in age from two to thirteen— all white and all the progeny of criminals. It wasn't illegal back then for a paroled felon to run a foster home, even a raging alcoholic like Roger. He got his revenge for the broken life he'd led, by disciplining even the youngest of the kids with a barber's strop used for sharpening straight razors.

At the age of three, due to a bladder infection that had been neglected for months, Axel began wetting his bed. Dotty responded by locking him in his bedroom closet with a radio outside his door. Every night he'd fall asleep on the closet floor to the preachings of some fire and brimstone minister who blamed all of God's "infamy" on that "harlot in the Garden" from Genesis.

On his first day of kindergarten, Dotty made little Axel wear his urine-soaked underpants to school. What beatings didn't come from his classmates, he got from his older "brother" Raymond who had an I.Q. in the

low 70's. "Ray Ray," as they called him, got a book on taxidermy for his eleventh birthday, along with a skinning knife.

He used it to stuff squirrels he'd trap in the yard. When Axel started "acting out," Dotty began calling on Raymond to discipline him. Night after night he'd be locked in the closet with Raymond outside holding the key and brandishing the knife; threatening to come in and cut off his "pee pee."

When Axel tried to fight back, Roger would whip him or sic Raymond on him. By the age of five, Axel had sustained two jaw fractures, a broken right wrist and a broken left arm. The Tingley's covered up the abuse by telling hospital authorities that the little "devil" had hurt himself climbing trees.

The only outlet that Axel had back then – his only refuge – was his imagination and the strange ability to draw that God had given him. He still believed in Jesus in those days. In fact, he covered the inner walls of the closet with drawings of Biblical figures, imagining what they looked like as the evangelical preacher's sermons blared from the radio. Sometimes he'd find little note pads and make flip book animations of angels carrying him off from the dreadful house. Soon, he began to perfect a plan for escaping himself.

A few days after his fifth birthday Axel swallowed a handful of salt at breakfast, inducing vomiting so he'd have an excuse to stay home from kindergarten. While Raymond and the other kids were at school, he gathered up all of "Ray Ray's" mountings and put them in the middle of his parent's bed. Roger was out at an A.A. meeting and Dotty was at a prayer service when Axel found the can of lighter fluid and lit the match. A neighbor saw the smoke and the blaze was quickly knocked down by the local F.D., but Axel was

sent back to Kankakee to a juvenile holding facility run by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

He was put into a “ward” with a dozen older juveniles, most of them habitual offenders from the south side of Chicago. With his deep blue eyes and blond hair, Axel was almost “pretty” back then. So the older boys tied him to his bed and raped him repeatedly until he escaped. For the next two years, he moved through four different foster homes. He learned to box at a summer youth camp near Evansville and was tested by a DCFS psychologist who wrote the words “near genius” in his file. But if there had ever been any hope of rescuing this boy, the system had long since abandoned him.

A victim since birth, Axel now began to punish others; starting with insects. He stole a magnifying glass from a teacher and used it to burn ants and other bugs. He found that he loved the smell of their tiny burning bodies, so he experimented with matches and disposable lighters. By the time he reached his last foster family at the age of seven, he’d graduated to killing stray dogs and cats.

Childhood was a terrifying period for Axel. He was in an unending state of war. He could never remember a moment when he’d felt safe or comforted. To the foster families he was nothing but a check every month. To his siblings he was a competitor for the shitty scraps of food they’d dish out. To the string of therapists and “counselors” who’d get his file, he was just another case in the endless parade of unwanted children spawned by poverty, addiction and crime.

By the time he was sent to St. Timothy’s, Axel was a hardened sociopath who spent every waking moment thinking about his revenge. The abuse continued at the

orphanage as one particularly sadistic nun tried to stop the bed wetting with a wooden yardstick.

But Axel soon learned that the Catholic Church was an institution that inspired the best and the worst in humankind. In his church history classes, the sisters exposed him to the Renaissance along with the Inquisition. As an altar boy during Holy Week he lit the Pascal Candle which bore the Greek letters for Alpha and Omega – the beginning and the end. It was this strange duality that all Catholics lived with: the love that they felt for the Prince of Peace and the contempt they had for the clergy who had spent centuries corrupting His simple message. Dark and light. Birth and Death. Good and Evil. They now existed on one plane for Axel and it was no longer the straight line of beginning and end, but a circle.

In this dark Catholic orphanage where Axel spent so many awful nights, he also perfected his artistic gift. He developed the skill to paint like the masters. It was here that he first conceived of the master work that would convey his message. It would be an icon so epic that the world would have to take notice and for once, they'd begin to understand the unmitigated cruelty that comes from treating little children like animals. Maddy, the defiant Deputy Sheriff, would help him perfect that message. Like him, she understood the concept of redemption. She had fallen and risen and she would come for him now. Their union was inevitable. If death was the price she paid for her place with the others in the painting, then so be it. He was on a trajectory now and he didn't have a minute to lose.