

# THE CANNIBALS OF CANDYLAND

CARLTON MELLICK III



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# THE CANNIBALS OF CANDYLAND

## Also by Carlton Mellick III

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AVANT PUNK

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# Chapter One

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Franklin hates children, loves animals, and is deathly afraid of the candy people.

He also hates: riding the bus, talking to people on the phone, talking to people in person, dancing, getting haircuts, modern politics, the sound of vacuum cleaners, popular men's fashion, getting stared at, getting presents, having a boss, Chinese food, and his two wives.

He also loves: walking around downtown, playing with the puppies at pet stores, reading historical books, listening to Mozart and death metal, watching the sound of autumn leaves rustling in the wind, making sandwiches, talking about books, blowing up balloons, historical politics, growing older, giving presents, working for himself, chess, Korean food, and wearing red.

He is also afraid of: pretty much everything.

Red is his favorite color. All of his clothes are red. He likes a particular shade of red that he calls apple-red. It is a bright red with a hint of orange.

His wives always say: "Your clothes are too orange-ish to be called apple-red."

He always responds: "When I was a boy, my parents had a tree in the front yard that grew apple-red of this color."

His wives always shake their heads at him.



Franklin walks down the sidewalk in his apple-red suit, wearing red gloves, a red baseball cap, and holding a red umbrella over his head. He shines loudly at every person who passes him. The people in his neighborhood have grown used to his glowing attire, but whenever he enters a new part of the city he can feel everyone's eyes on him. This is a bad part of Chinatown and not the kind of place where you'd want to stand out. A small gang of what Franklin believes to be Triads eye him from across the street near the entrance of an Asian strip club. If it wasn't raining they probably would confront him. Franklin has been beaten up twice just for wearing his red suit. Once by skinheads because they thought he was gay. Once by a couple of Chinese drug dealers because his clothes pissed them off, and because he walked on their sidewalk without the intention of buying any of their drugs.

He closes his umbrella and enters a pawn shop. Jake, the fat crooked-lipped owner of the shop, squints his puffy eyes at him as he approaches the counter. They nod at each other.

"In the back," Jake says.

Franklin wipes water out of his soul patch as he steps behind the counter into the back room. It is filled with cardboard boxes, broken appliances, a glass case full of swords, and an over-used sex doll with Judy Jetson hair.

"Adam wasn't fucking around when he said I'd recognize you," Jake says, flapping his arms and air out his yellow-stained armpits. "That suit is one of a fucking kind."

It wasn't exactly a compliment, but Franklin smiles as if it were. "I have all my clothes tailored in Argentina."

"Whatever floats your boat." Jake pulls a beer out of a mini-fridge and sits down in a rubber chair. He doesn't offer Franklin a seat. "Some people blow all their money on strippers. Some people

blow it all on faggy outfits.”

~~Franklin clears his throat. His hands hide in his pockets.~~

“Okay, let’s see what I’ve got for you,” Jake says. He opens up the casing of a broken VCR and pulls out a pistol wrapped in a white cloth. He unwraps it and presents the weapon to Franklin.

Franklin’s left hand curls around the cold metal barrel and he picks it up like a hatchet. Then he places it into his right hand.

“How does it feel?” Jake says.

Franklin nods at the gun and rubs his fingers against it.

“That there is a Walther PPK,” Jake says.

Franklin says, “Wasn’t Adolf Hitler’s gun a Walther PPK?”

“Where’d you read that?” Jake says.

“I’m kind of a history buff.” Franklin smiles and hands the gun back.

“So you don’t want it?”

“No, thank you,” Franklin says. “I’m not interested in a Nazi gun.”

“This is a common weapon,” Jake says. “It wasn’t just used by Nazis. James Bond also used a Walther PPK. Don’t you like James Bond?”

“My grandmother was a holocaust survivor.”

“So was my wife’s family. What’s the big deal?”

Franklin shakes his head.

“Didn’t Adolf Hitler kill himself with his Walther PPK? Just think of it as the gun that killed Hitler.”

“Don’t you have anything that’s not so antique. Something newer?”

“I only sell classics,” Jake says. “Adam said you were a collector. I don’t sell them for any other reason. No fucking way.”

“I’m a collector.”

“I’m just doing the community a service,” Jake says. “Ever since the pussyfart liberal government took away our second amendment, us collectors had to move underground. I’m not in the business of selling arms to street thugs or to vengeful husbands who want to kill their cheating wives.”

“You sell bullets, though, right?” Franklin says.

“Of course I do,” Jake says.

“Okay, how much?” Franklin says.

“Look, I don’t think I even want to sell it to you now. You look like a fucking wife-killer.”

“How do I look like a wife-killer?”

“You look like the kind of guy who gets cheated on all the time.”

“I’m not going to kill my wife,” Franklin says. “It’s for protection. Maybe I’m not a collector but I need this.”

Jake gives him a deep stare.

“Look me in the eyes,” he says.

Franklin looks him in the eyes.

“I can tell if a fuck is being dishonest if I look him in the eyes.” Jake blows snot into his fingers as he moves in closer. “Now tell me, what do you need the gun for?”

“Protection.”

“Bullshit,” Jake says. “Who do you want to kill with this? Your wife?”

“Not my wife.”

Jake leans back and rubs the back of his neck, exposing crusty gray armpit hair. “Okay. Let’s say I believe you. If not your wife, then who? The guy who’s fucking her? Your boss? Some guy who owes you money?”

“No,” Franklin says. “I would never kill a human being.”

~~“But you’re interested in killing,” Jake says. “I see it in your eyes.”~~

“I would never kill another human being.”

“You’re not...” Jake says. “You’re not one of those candy man hunters are you?”

Franklin breaks eye contact with the fat man. Just for a split second, but the fat man notices.

“You are, aren’t you?”

Franklin pets something furry in his pocket. “Yeah, so?”

“You believe in the candy people, too?”

“Yeah... do you?”

“I’ve seen some weird shit,” Jake says. “But I’ve never seen any fucking candy people. There’s a big part of me that thinks it’s all a bunch of bullshit, but there’s a little part of me that isn’t quite sure.” He cracks open another beer. “A lot of people come to me wanting to buy guns to protect the kids from the candy people. They tell me they’ve actually seen those things up close. I’ve looked them right in the eyes and not a single one of them has ever lied to me. Whether they exist or not, I have no fucking clue. But I’ve met a lot of people who truly believe they are real.”

“They are definitely real,” Franklin says, leaning in closer to Jake’s eyes. “I promise you. They are real. And I am going to kill every last one of those bastards.”

Jake stares at him for a few minutes and snorts. Then he pulls three boxes of bullets out of the VCR.

“In that case,” Jake says. “Let me give you a little piece of advice. Shoot them at close range. You won’t be able to break through their hard candy-coating unless you shoot them at close range or get a more powerful weapon.”

Franklin nods and hands him an envelope. As Jake counts the money, Franklin examines the swords in the glass case and something catches his fancy. It is bright red, almost an apple-red.

He turns to the fat man and asks, “How much for the red cane sword?”



## Chapter Two

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Franklin was named after Franklin Pierce, the 14th President of the United States. Franklin Pierce is known as one of the worst presidents in the history of the country, for doing nothing to stop the rising tension between the North and the South in the days before the Civil War. He just wasn't a strong leader. He was the wrong person to be in charge of the country at that time in history.

When he was young, Franklin always wondered why his parents named him after the worst president in history, but they wouldn't tell him why. He studied the president, looked for a good side of him, looking for a reason as to why they would have named him after this particular man. Franklin Pierce was handsome, young, well-spoken, well-liked, and won the presidency in a landslide. He also accomplished quite a bit in the realm of foreign policy. Unfortunately, he just wasn't up to the task of being president.

After reading more about the president, Franklin started feeling sorry for the guy. Not only is he known as the worst president in history, he also lived a very tragic life. Two of his children died of diseases when they were very young. Then, two months before Pierce went into office, his third and final child was killed in a train accident. Jane Pierce, the president's wife, blamed her son's death on her husband's political ambitions. During her stay in the White House, she went into a state of mental anguish. She spent most of her time locked in a room, all by herself, writing letters to her dead son. While in office, his wife turned on him, his political party turned on him, and even his Vice-President died forty-five days into office and was never replaced. Eventually, Franklin Pierce turned to alcoholism. It is believed that he killed an old woman while driving a carriage drunk one night. It is also believed that he drank himself to death after his wife died of tuberculosis.

Franklin still wonders why his parents named him after this man. He wonders if they did so because Pierce was such a pathetic, tragic figure in history. He wonders if his parents viewed his birth as a tragic event in their lives. Perhaps they didn't want him, and he ruined all of their hopes and dreams. Or perhaps they just wanted to name him after a president and chose the most handsome one they could find, without bothering to do any research on the man.



With his umbrella tucked under his arm, his red cane (which contains a hidden sword) tapping with his footsteps, petting the inside of one of his pockets, he walks through the wet streets of Old Town to get back home. On the way, he runs into four children playing a game of can hockey in the street. Can hockey is somewhat similar to regular hockey, but instead of a puck they use a crushed beer can, instead of a stick they use their legs, and instead of a goalie box they draw lines in the road with chalk rock. They don't use skates or helmets. It is a game Franklin used to play with his siblings when he was a kid, before they were brutally murdered.

These kids are Franklin's neighbors. He sees them playing in the street all the time, at all hours of the day, even at three in the morning. He tries to ignore them as he passes, but they stop playing their game when they see him in his bright red suit and chase after him. Their legs seem to be too short for their bodies, even for children. Franklin has noticed this in the past. It seems that most children around their age tend to have this genetic flaw. Although the news channels have never

mentioned it, Franklin believes it has something to do with the fetus-enhancing drugs that doctors are persuading pregnant mothers to take these days.

“Let me see it,” one of the short-legged boys shouts at Franklin. The one with the thick-rimmed glasses.

“Not today,” Franklin says.

“Aww, come on,” the little one says.

The little one is the nice one. His name is Jimmy. The brat with the thick-rimmed glasses named Troy. He doesn't know what the other two are called.

“Just show it to us, bitch,” Troy says.

Franklin keeps walking.

“Just for a second you pussy bitch,” Troy says. “You want me to call the cops and tell them you tried to touch my dick?”

Troy always threatens to call the cops on Franklin with child molestation charges if he doesn't do what he wants. Because of this, Franklin often ends up buying the kid expensive toys or renting him rated horror movies. He doesn't know what else to do.

Jimmy tugs on Franklin's red coat.

“I just want to pet him once,” he says. “Just for a second.”

Franklin lets out a puff of air.

“Fine,” Franklin says. “Just one second.”

He opens up his coat and a small kitten pokes its head out of the inside pocket. Its fur is red, white, and green. Candy-colored.

Jimmy's eyes light up. As he pokes his finger towards the kitten's fur, the kitten deflects it with a lick of its scratchy tongue. This cat isn't actually a kitten. It is a midget cat. It is a fully-grown five-year-old cat that is stuck in the body of a chubby little kitten with plump cheeks, frizzy fur, and scratchy high-pitched meows.

“Her name is Crabcake.”

Jimmy pets Crabcake on the head and she closes her eyes and smiles at him. A kitty smile.

“She's a cutie!” Jimmy says.

Troy pulls a BB Gun out of his orange Naruto backpack and pumps the handle.

“Hold it there, Jimmy,” Troy says as he pumps the pistol. “I'm going to shoot it out of his hands.”

Franklin hides Crabcake inside of his coat.

“Fucking psycho,” Franklin says to the kid and jogs away from them.

The kid gets angry. “Wait! I didn't say you could leave!”

Franklin picks up his pace, holding Crabcake firmly inside his pocket.

“Fucking faggot!” Troy yells. “Run away, you faggot!”

Troy shoots his BB gun at Franklin's back. Even though the BB just bounces off of Franklin's suit, it still hurts him enough that he lets out a small yelp. Besides Jimmy, all of the kids laugh at him. They chase after him and take turns firing the gun at his back until he gets inside of his apartment building.

Troy is the reason why Franklin hates children.

# Chapter Three

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Franklin lives in a tiny studio apartment in Old Town with two women that hate him: his wife and his wife's mother. He calls them his wives because it feels like he has two wives whenever they're both around. His wife, Sarah, looks very old for her age. Her mother, Susan, looks very young for her age. They look almost like twins. He isn't sleeping with either of them. He tries to distance himself from them. The only thing they want from him is his money, which is never enough to satisfy them.

When he enters the flat, he finds Sarah and Susan having sex with another man. They regularly sleep with other men, but they're usually a bit more discrete than doing it froggy-style on the rug in the entryway. They also regularly share the same lover, but they usually don't fuck him at the same time.

Franklin assumes they were hoping that he would walk in on them, so he tries to act as if it doesn't faze him. He steps over their wriggling legs and crosses the room to his box. Besides the bathroom, his box is the only private area in the studio. It is a homemade cubicle he constructed for himself using sheets of plywood for the walls. He also uses a blanket for a ceiling and door, so that his wives can't see what he's up to. To block out the sound, he listens to death metal on his headphones (which he initially only listened to because it was the loudest music he could think of, but he has strangely grown to enjoy it). It is the closest thing he has to a private room. His wives don't even bother him while he's in his box, as long as he promises to never bother them anywhere else in the apartment.

Franklin unfolds an aluminum chair and sits down at his small elementary school desk. He turns on a reading lamp attached to the side wall and pulls out his bottom-line laptop from the cubbyhole. After it powers up, he plugs his headphones in and listens to some Human Remains MP3s to block out the sound of sex in the room. He turns the volume up as loud as it goes, but he can still hear Sarah screaming at the tops of her lungs as if she is purposefully trying to be heard over the music.

His wireless card doesn't pick up any unsecured networks at the moment, so he's unable to log onto the internet. This annoys him because there have been a lot of candy people sightings in the past few days and he's been wanting to track them or see if there have been discussions about them on the message boards.

He lets out a puff of air and looks at the mess of notes and maps that are pinned to the wooden walls of the cubicle. His entire life has been dedicated to tracking down the candy people. Ever since he dropped out of college, it has been his primary obsession. He has other obsessions, such as reading historical biographies and inventing new types of sandwiches, but proving the existence of the candy people is the only thing that's really important to him.

Crabcake wakes up and climbs out of his coat. She yawns a crackling meow as she crawls into his lap and goes back to sleep. Franklin rubs her belly with his free hand.

Franklin has given up a lot in his pursuit of the candy people. He dropped out of school to hunt the candy people. He's lost several jobs because he was too focused on the candy people. He's given up most of his free time to hunt the candy people.

He also married Sarah instead of his first love, Staci, just because Sarah also believed in the candy people. He didn't like Sarah all that much but he thought he would be happier with somebody who could relate to his obsession. He didn't know that she was a compulsive liar before they were

married, and that all of the encounters with the candy people she told him about were complete fabrications. ~~If it wasn't for his obsession he wouldn't have married Sarah, which was one of the biggest mistakes of his life.~~

He also moved to this neighborhood, even though it's very small and the rent is very high, just because this area has the highest concentration of candy man sightings in the country.

Franklin takes the gun out of his coat and hides it in some dirty underwear. He knows his wife won't go anywhere near his underwear. Then he removes his right ear and pushes a small yellow button on the side of his head. The back of his skull opens like a sunflower, revealing his swollen organic brain.

Besides giving up his personal life to the hunting of candy people, he has also given up his natural human brain and had it replaced with a more advanced artificial brain. He spent all of his inheritance on the operation. The brain is made of silicon-based imitation neural tissue that works as a hybrid between computer and brain. It has given him a picture-perfect memory, the math skills of a calculator, advanced deduction and puzzle-solving skills, superior eye/hand coordination, and the ability to think or read twenty times faster than anyone else can speak. He can also beat any video game without losing a single life, most of the time.

Although he assumed the brain would be a major benefit in the hunt for candy people, it hasn't yet been much use to him. His two wives approved of the operation because they thought he would be able to get a high-paying job with his new brain, but that didn't happen to be the case. Companies stopped hiring people with artificial brains a few years ago, after they discovered all the defects. Almost five thousand people received the operation before anyone realized that the brains don't last as long as normal human brains. They have a tendency of breaking down, freezing, or frying in the way that most computers do after a few years. Many people who have had the operation had their memories wiped, some had lost senses or had their senses swapped so that they saw what they smelled and felt what they tasted, some had become vegetables, and many have gone completely insane without warning. Nothing has happened to Franklin yet but the doctors told him that it is only a matter of time. He might have three days, three years, or three decades. Nobody knows for sure. But they do know that it will happen someday and there is nothing that can be done to stop it.

Much of the skin on Franklin's face is plastic. They had to remove his ears, the skin on his scalp, and his forehead or else the flesh would rip every time he opened his head to let his brain breathe.

That is one of the things Franklin likes most about his artificial brain... letting it breathe. His brain overheats once or twice a day, sometimes three or four times during periods of high stress. When this happens, he has to open up his skull and let it air out for ten minutes or so. Airing out his brain is incredibly relaxing to Franklin. It is like having a strong brandy and a good cigar at the end of a long day.

As his brain pulses against the cool draft, Franklin closes his eyes, strokes his purring candy-colored cat, and listens to the screeching music on his headphones that has become as calming as white noise.

# Chapter Four

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Franklin Pierce is self-employed. He makes his living teaching pet owners how to give the Heimlich maneuver and CPR to their dogs. It has strangely been a profitable venture for him. People care a lot more for their pets than he thought. At first, he wanted to make money by selling a manual on pet care. He wrote a book called “How to Save Your Best Friend’s Life: A Do it Yourself Guide to Pet Paramedics.” The book teaches people how to save their pets from choking, drowning, heart attacks, bleeding to death, and other such emergencies that require quick action in order to save a pet’s life. He sold a lot of copies in pet shops and local bookstores, but found that more people were interested in taking lessons in person rather than reading his manual. So he started teaching lessons. He gives a group class twice a month and teaches private lessons almost daily.

Today Franklin is giving a private lesson to an old lady with a large angry Doberman who lives in the West Hills. When he arrives at her house, he meets a frowning overweight purple-haired woman wearing a large red bow and a flowery dress.

“Take off those shoes and that smile,” she says to him.

She tells him that her dog gets angry whenever he sees someone smile.

Franklin complies. As he takes off his shoes, he hears Crabcake meowing from outside. Although he takes his kitty with him everywhere he goes, he never takes her into a client’s home. He’s never sure how his client’s pet will react to her, so he always keeps her by the mailbox.

“Here he is,” the old woman says as she presents her dog.

Franklin lets out a puff of air as he sees the dog. The animal matches the old woman in every way. It is old, overweight, and wears a flowery bandana with a red bow. It even has purple hair.

The dog growls at Franklin. As he usually does whenever he gets nervous, Franklin puts his hands in his pockets. Normally he does this to pet Crabcake, whose soft purr relaxes him, but this time he doesn’t have a kitty in his pocket. This time he has a gun. He pets the barrel of the gun and finds that it, too, relaxes him.



Franklin never wanted to buy a gun, even though he was hunting the Candy people. All he wanted to do was capture a candy person on film and then prove to the world that they exist. Once the world accepts that they do exist, he imagines the military will hunt them down and exterminate them all.

He has been successful at capturing them on tape three times. The first two times were not very clear. He got them from a distance, a safe distance, but they just looked like people in crazy-colored clothing. Even the community of candy man hunters online didn’t believe they were real. Even he wasn’t sure about one of them. But the third time, he captured one of them perfectly. He was less than twenty feet away, on a balcony above it, and was able to zoom right into the creature’s face. It was like the creature was posing for him and stood there for a good five minutes. It was a perfect shot. The best footage anyone had ever captured.

Franklin thought he had won. But, still, nobody believed his footage was real. The cops laughed at him. News stations wouldn’t respond to his letters or phone calls. Some of his online buddies believed the footage to be real, but most of them were skeptical. That’s when he decided that the only

way to prove the candy people are real is to kill one of them and use the corpse as indisputable evidence. That's when he decided to buy a gun.

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As he teaches the old lady how to save her grumpy dog's life in the case of an emergency, Franklin caresses the gun in his pocket. He imagines what it will feel like to shoot one of the candy people, blow apart their candy-coating, and splatter their guts all over the sidewalk. He wonders if killing just one of them would be enough to avenge the death of his little brother and sisters. He wonders if the military will do anything about them, or if he'll have to kill them all himself.

The Doberman growls at Franklin as his lips turn into a large wicked smile.



After his job is done and Franklin picks Crabcake up from the old lady's lawn, he sees something in the corner of his eye. It is something moving down the street towards a small neighborhood park. Something with bright colors that glitter in the sunlight.

When Franklin looks up, he sees pink cotton candy hair disappear behind a grassy hill. And in the air, he smells something sweet and fruity, like a wet artificially flavored strawberry lollipop. It's the same thing he smelled when he met the candy person as a child, over twenty years ago.

# Chapter Five

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Franklin encountered the candy person when he was ten years old. He was with his older sister Hillary, who was twelve, his little brother, Andrew, who was nine, and his little sister, Laura, who was seven.

He had just finished playing basketball with Andrew in the park. He didn't like basketball, but his brother loved it and loved playing against Franklin because he always won. Andrew only liked to play games that he was guaranteed to win.

After the match, Andrew kept saying, "You got pwned!" over and over again. Pwned was Andrew's favorite slang word and used it as much as possible.

"I pwned the hell out of you!" Andrew said.

"Yeah, yeah," Franklin said.

"Don't swear," Hillary said.

"I didn't swear!" Andrew said. "Pwned isn't a swear word."

"I meant hell," Hillary said.

"Oh," Andrew said.

The four of them often visited the park. Andrew went because he liked to play basketball and climb trees. Hillary went because she liked to climb trees and make sure nobody got into any trouble. Laura went because she liked to get into trouble and find toadstools. Franklin went because the parents didn't like it when he stayed indoors, drawing pictures and reading books all day.

Franklin would rather have stayed home than gone to the park, but he didn't completely loathe the experience. He liked spending time with Laura, who was his favorite sibling. Although she was only seven, she was fearless, clever, and charismatic. Nobody could stop her from doing whatever she wanted to do, not even Hillary. She was everything that Franklin was not. He envied her.

While Andrew and Hillary went off to climb a big tree in the middle of the park, Franklin went with Laura to find toadstools. She liked toadstools because they reminded her of fairies.

"How about this one?" Franklin asked, pointing at a toadstool growing under a bench.

"Nah," Laura said. "It's too mundane."

"Mundane?" Franklin asked.

"It's boring and ordinary. I only want the ones that are special."

Franklin pointed at another one.

"How about that one," he said. "That one looks like a turtle!"

"Nah," Laura said. "That one is ugly and deformed. Only ugly fairies would sit on a toadstool like that. I want to find a pretty one so that a pretty fairy will sit on it."

Laura planned to put the toadstools she collected into a flowerpot and place it on her windowsill in the hope that a fairy might come and sit on one of them. Then she would catch the fairy, put it into a cage, and keep it as a pet. Having a pet fairy was what Laura wanted more than anything. The rest of the family thought it was kind of weird, but Franklin thought it was cute.

Laura and Franklin were the two weird ones in the family. Whenever Laura did anything weird, their parents would laugh. Whenever Franklin did anything weird, their parents would get angry. Franklin concluded that it was only okay to be weird if everyone already really likes you.

When Franklin found a toadstool with pink spots and a light blue hue, he knew it was just what Laura was looking for.

“How about this one?” he told her. “This one is perfect.”

But Laura didn't look at it. Her eyes were focused on something else. Something much more interesting.

“What?” Franklin said when she would not respond.

He smelled the sweetness of strawberry lollipops in the air. Then he saw what Laura was looking at. A brightly colored woman, kind of like a clown, was walking through the grass towards them.



It was a woman made of sweet treats. She wasn't wearing any clothes, but her skin was coated in a layer of candy. She had pink cotton candy for hair, white taffy skin with cinnamon cheeks, plump gummy lips, a maraschino cherry nose, red and white striped legs like candy canes, shoulders made of chocolate, blue hands that looked like gloves of bubblegum ice cream, long butterscotch candy fingernails, a rainbow-swirled belly like a giant circus lollipop, and soft marshmallow breasts with gumdrops for nipples. She carried a jump rope of red licorice and a large white bag. The only things not made of candy were her eyes, but they were as pink as strawberry soda.

“Wow, she's pretty!” Laura cried. “I bet she has treats in her bag!”

Then Laura ran towards the candy lady.

Franklin knew something was wrong with the woman. He could sense it in the way she glared at him with her pink snake-like eyes and the way she curled her hard candy fingernails as if they were raven claws. Even though he sensed danger, he couldn't help but become drawn to the woman. The sweet smell in the air that filled his lungs was intoxicating. It warmed his mind with a calming bliss that took away all of his fears and worries. It pulled him towards the woman's heavenly sweetness.

Franklin saw that Andrew and Hillary were also drawn to the woman. They had climbed down from the tree and walked like drunken zombies towards her. They were even closer to her than Laura and looked to be twice as dazed.

It was Andrew who got to the woman first. He said hello to her and asked her for candy. She didn't speak. She took him by the shoulder and pulled him closer, allowing him to lick her sweet candy stomach. As he closed his eyes to lick, the woman wrapped her claws around him. That's when Franklin noticed her teeth. Although her outside was sweet and pleasant, her insides were nasty and horrific. Her tongue was like that of a snake's and her teeth were razor-edged nails.

The woman bit into Andrew's neck and tore out his throat. That's when Franklin snapped out of it. He screamed as he saw the woman tear into his little brother and thrash her head around like a shark ripping a chunk out of a seal. She made squealing growling noises as she thrashed at him. Franklin then realized she was more like a vicious animal than a human being.

Andrew's blood splashed into Hillary's face. She cringed and wiped the blood out of her eyes. It wasn't until she took her hands away from her face that she realized where she was and what was happening. She shrieked and turned around to run away, but she didn't get far. The candy woman whipped her red licorice vine at her and it wrapped around her throat. The woman jerked it back like a fishing rod and Hillary's neck made a loud cracking sound. Then she fell limp to the ground.

Franklin turned to run, but Laura didn't follow him. She was still in a trance. Even though she had just witnessed her brother and sister murdered by the woman, she was still drawn towards the candy smell. Franklin tried to pull her by the arm, but she resisted with all her strength. He tried to pick her up, but she kicked him as hard as she could in the stomach. He tried slapping her face, but she didn't seem to notice.



The woman dropped Andrew's body and stepped towards them. Blood dripped down her white candy chin as she exposed her teeth. Franklin pulled on Laura as hard as he could, but she would not move. Once the woman was within arms reach, he had no choice but to let his sister go and run for his life. He ran several yards away and then turned around. He watched as his sister embraced the candy woman like her own mommy, with a big smile on her face. His sister didn't even let out a whimper as the woman bit into her belly. It was like Laura was so drugged that she couldn't feel a thing. The candy woman kneeled over her, coated in gore, pulling her insides out and stuffing them in her mouth. Before she died, Laura turned her head and looked at Franklin. The big smile was still on her face like it was the happiest day of her life.

That's the image that burned in Franklin's memory. It is what he has seen every day when he goes to sleep at night, and every morning when he wakes up. He sees his little sister smiling at him as the creature made of candy squats over her open body, eating her innards.

The woman didn't come after Franklin. After she was done eating and after Laura had stopped moving, she gathered the remains of her victims into her large white bag. Then tossed it over her shoulder and walked away.

His parents never forgave him for surviving the encounter, nor did he ever forgive himself. He tried telling everyone about the candy woman, but they all thought he was delusional after such a tragic experience.



Outside of the old lady's house, Franklin pets the gun in his pocket and stares at the park at the end of the street. By the sweet scent in the air, he is pretty sure that it was a candy person who just went over that hill in the park. All he has to do is go after it, pull out his gun and shoot the creature dead. It's that easy. Then his sweet little Laura will be avenged.

But as much as he wants to, and needs to, he can't get himself to go after it. He shakes with excitement at the thought of revenge, but he doesn't go after it. He hesitates, makes excuses, tells himself that he just imagined the candy person. Then he lets out a puff of air. He takes his hand away from the gun in his pocket and uses it to pet his kitty and hug her tightly to his chest.

## Chapter Six

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Franklin spends the rest of the day hating himself for not having the courage to go after the candy person in the park. At one of the breweries downtown, he drinks a few Belgian-style ales. He only goes to the brewery once a month, because he can't afford it and because he doesn't get very buzzed anymore due to his artificial brain.

Drinking a Tripel, he pets Crabcake in his red suit pocket and wonders how many children will die because he let that thing live. He doesn't know why he hesitated. It was perfect timing, too. He had the gun with him and the neighborhood was mostly empty due to it being in the middle of a workday. He only runs into candy people a couple times a year at most. It might be three years before he sees one again. Then again, this was the second one he had run into in just a month. He wonders if they are hunting more frequently. Perhaps they are getting hungrier or perhaps they are growing in number.

After he finishes his beer, he asks the bartender with the Santa Claus tattoo for another abbeey style on cask.

"Sorry, buddy," the bartender says, shaking his head. "All out."

"Of the abbey?" Franklin says. "No you're not."

"The keg is cashed," says the bartender.

"You still have approximately one hundred and twenty-two ounces left in the cask."

The bartender shakes the cask. Beer splashes inside, but he still shakes his head. "Nope, empty."

"Look," Franklin says, taking off his apple-red hat and placing it onto the counter. "I can tell how many ounces are left in it based on the sound it makes when it is pumped. I know that you know there is more beer in the cask and you just don't want to give me anymore for some reason or another. If I had to guess I would say that this is the last of the batch. It is a really good beer. You probably want to take the rest of it home for yourself."

"It's not that," the bartender says. "You've just had too many beers already."

"But I've only had three beers," Franklin says.

"But each of those were over eight percent alcohol."

"But three glasses of wine isn't too much in restaurant and red wine is usually thirteen to fourteen percent."

The bartender squints his eyes and frowns at him.

"Look," Franklin says. "I just want one more beer. That leaves you one hundred and eight ounces left to take home. That is still plenty of beer."

"Yeah, but—" the bartender begins.

"You might have noticed I said one hundred and eight ounces rather than one hundred and six. If you poured me a normal sixteen-ounce pint there would only be one hundred and six ounces left, but you haven't been filling up any beers all the way to the top of any glasses you have been pouring which has been shorting people out of two ounces of beer per glass. I am okay with this. I don't like to complain. But if you will not give me another pint from the cask, I would at least like six ounces of beer to make up for the beer I already paid for."

The bartender shakes his head at Franklin as if he were the biggest asshole customer he's had all week.

"Fine," the bartender says, and pumps him a beer from the cask.

When he gets the beer, he discovers it's six ounces short of a pint. The bartender still charges him for a full pint and quickly walks away to serve another customer before Franklin has the chance to complain about it.



On his way home, Franklin runs into Troy in the street again. This time the kid is all alone.

"Hey Fagboy," Troy says to Franklin. "Where the hell were you? I've been waiting for you a day."

Franklin ignores him and keeps walking.

"I need some money," Troy says. "Right now."

"I'm sorry, I'm broke," Franklin says.

"Right now!"

"I told you I don't have any money."

"You better have some money. Or else you know what's going to happen."

Franklin wonders if the kid knows he is lying.

"Look kid," he says. "I spent it all at the bar."

"You have to have some money. Just give me whatever you've got."

Franklin stops and turns to the kid. "What do you need it for, anyway?"

"It's Jimmy's birthday tomorrow. I want to get him that new transformer he's been asking for. Our parents aren't going to give him shit."

"He's your little brother?" Franklin asks.

"Yeah," Troy says. "I look out for him."

Franklin stares at him for a moment. Then he nods his head.

"Okay," Franklin says. "I'll give you what I've got. But it's not much."

"Give me all of it," the kid says.

Franklin gives him seven dollars and some change.

Troy takes the money and runs off. Then he turns around and says, "Thanks, Fagboy!"

And when the kid turns around Franklin hears him say, "What a stupid bitch."

Franklin stands in the street for a few minutes, wondering if he has just been duped. Even with his fancy hi-tech brain, Franklin can't outsmart an eleven-year-old.



At home, Sarah and Susan are waiting for him. There is another guy with them, sitting on the couch. He might be the guy from the night before or maybe he's somebody else. The apartment is destroyed. It smells like smoke and pee. Franklin guesses they're on another meth binge. They always destroy the apartment when they go on a meth binge.

"What happened?" Franklin asks.

He notices that his handmade cubicle has been razed to the floor. Part of it is blackened as if they lit it on fire and then pissed the fire out, which would account for the smell of the room.

"We've made a decision," Susan says. "We want you to move out."

"Yeah," Sarah says.

"What did you do to my office?" Franklin says as he digs through the pee-soaked boards in the corner of the room.

"We burned it," Sarah says, giggling. "We burned all your stuff."

"You burned my clothes? My laptop?"

"We don't want you here anymore," Susan says. "You're a loser."

“I’m a loser?” Franklin says. “Neither of you have worked a day in your lives.”

“Just get out,” Susan says.

“This is my apartment,” Franklin says. “My name is on the lease.”

“We don’t care,” Susan says. “David just got kicked out of his place so he is moving in. The three of us decided that you should go.”

“Who the hell is going to pay your rent then?” Franklin says. “If you think I am going to the you’re even stupider than I realized.”

“David will,” Sarah says. “He has loads of money.”

Franklin looks at the guy on the couch. He’s much younger than any of them with long greasy black hair, a scraggly beard, and several homemade tattoos. He looks like a cross between a hippie and a Mexican gang member.

“What does he do?” Franklin says. “Sell drugs?”

“He makes more than you,” Sarah says.

“Then why doesn’t he get you guys a nicer apartment? I moved here for a reason. I’m staying. you want to move in with your boyfriend, find another love nest.”

“If you don’t leave now we’ll have David throw you out,” Susan says.

“If you don’t leave now I’ll call the cops on your drug dealer boyfriend,” Franklin says.

“What did you just say?” says a deep voice from the couch.

David stands up and faces Franklin. “Did you say you were going to call the cops on me?” He picks up Franklin’s red cane from the floor. It is the only item of Franklin’s that survived his wife’s meth-crazed wave of destruction. Franklin hopes that the guy doesn’t realize there is a sword inside.

Franklin pets the pistol in his pocket. “I’m not leaving.”

“Yes, you are,” David says.

Sarah cheers with glee as David swings the red cane like a baseball bat at Franklin’s head. But with his quick eye-hand coordination, Franklin is able to duck out of the way and land a punch in the center of David’s face. Although the punch hurt Franklin’s hand far more than it hurt David, it pissed the hell out of the young drug dealer.

“You son of a bitch!” Sarah screams at Franklin.

“What the hell did you do that for?” Susan says.

Franklin doesn’t understand why they are angry with him for defending himself.

David swings the cane another time and Franklin dodges it again. Franklin doesn’t try to throw another punch, because his hand is suffering enough from the last one. Then his two wives join the fight. They throw their fists at his red suit and kick at his shins.

Franklin puts one hand in his pocket to protect Crabcake and with his free hand he reaches for the gun in his other pocket. But before he can pull out the gun, Susan punches him in the side of the head right on his temple. His right ear pops off. He doesn’t realize she has accidentally hit the button beneath his ear until he feels his skull opening up.

As Franklin takes his hand out of his pocket to retrieve his artificial ear, he sees David’s shadow behind him swinging the cane with all his strength. The cane slams into his exposed brain and Franklin blacks out.

# Chapter Seven

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Franklin awakes in an alley a couple blocks away from his apartment. His mind is foggy. He feels the side of his head and discovers that his skull is still open. He gently touches his brain with the tips of his fingers. There are cigarette butts and bits of dirt stuck to his neural tissue. There is also a fluid coating it that shouldn't be there. He rubs some of the fluid with his fingers and smells it. It is human urine.

“What the...” Franklin yells. “Did they pee on my brain?”

He cringes as he tries to wipe the dirt and urine from the surface of his brain tissue, but every time he wipes it causes his mind to go fuzzy and warped. He cleans it the best he can and then pushes the button to close his skull. But his skull does not close.

Feeling the lids of his skull, he realizes that they've been jammed. Two pieces of the metal frame are bent. One of the pieces is dangling from its hinges. He'll need to get another operation to fix it. In the meantime, his brain will have to remain exposed.

He still has his gun, which is jabbing into the side of his stomach. His cane is on the ground next to him. His entire body is filled with sore spots, so his wives must have beat him with the cane while he lay unconscious in the alley. He no longer has his hat or his right ear. His umbrella is missing. And his cat, Crabcake, is not in his pocket.

He scans the alley for his kitten, but she is nowhere to be seen. This worries Franklin. Crabcake stays with him twenty-four hours a day. She never leaves his side even for a minute. Even if he had been laying in that alley for days, she would not have voluntarily left his side.

“They took her,” Franklin says.

He gets to his feet. He knows the only way Crabcake wouldn't be with him is if his wives kept the cat or did something to it.

Franklin leaves the alleyway, holding the gun in his pocket, ready to draw the sword out of the cane. He doesn't care that his wives kicked him out of his apartment. He doesn't care that they burned his stuff. He doesn't care that they beat him and broke his skull lids. He doesn't even care that they peed on his brain. But if they did anything to his cat, he will kill them all without hesitation.

He thinks that Jake, the guy who sold him the gun, might have been right. Maybe he was going to kill his wife with the gun. It wasn't his original plan, but at this moment he is ready to kill someone.



As Franklin gets to the front of his apartment building, he hears a scream. A child's scream. He stops and looks around. The street is empty. Another scream. This one is a loud cry for help. Franklin steps away from the entrance of his apartment and follows the screams.

In a parking garage around the corner, he sees a little boy being eaten alive by a man made out of candy. The man has bulging swirly lollipop eyes and long black licorice hair that resemble dreadlocks. He wears a brown chocolate suit with jellybeans for buttons. The creature has ripped open the kid's chest and is gnawing on his ribcage. The boy cries for help as the man eats him alive. He would have seen Franklin over the creature's shoulder if his eyes hadn't been slurped out of his head.

Still dazed from the damage to his artificial brain, Franklin isn't thinking straight enough to

afraid. He pulls the gun from his pocket and points it at the candy man. Remembering what the gun dealer said about their candy skin, Franklin stumbles towards the candy man, aims for the head, and shoots him three times. Even though he's only twelve feet away, the bullets don't hit the creature in the head. One of them goes over its head. One of them grazes its soft caramel shoulder. But the third hits it in the side, cracking open its brown rootbeer-flavored candy coating.

The creature shrieks and leaps away from the boy. It sees Franklin. Its lollipop eyeballs swirl at him. Before Franklin can fire again, the creature turns and runs away. It moves as fast as a cat, leaping over the railing of the parking garage and down the street.



Franklin decides it is better to help the boy than chase after the creature. The kid is in pieces. He is crying, coughing up blood. His ribs are exposed. Franklin can see his heart beating rapidly through the ribs.

"Don't worry," Franklin says. He kneels down and holds the kid's hand. "I'll get you help."

The boy stops crying and stares at Franklin with empty eye sockets.

"What time is it?" the boy asks.

Franklin isn't sure why the boy wants to know the time, but he looks at his watch and tells him anyway. "It's a little past midnight."

The kid smiles.

"That means it's my birthday now," he says.

Franklin then recognizes the kid. It is Jimmy. The little kid who wanted to pet Crabcake the previous day. The nice kid.

"That's why I went to the rootbeer man," he says. "I thought he was going to give me a present for my birthday."

The kid no longer seems to be in any pain. Franklin hopes he's just in shock.

"Troy promised me that somebody would get me a present this year," he says. "He wouldn't tell me who. I was hoping it would be a wizard or a lion tamer or someone magical like that. That's why I thought the rootbeer man might be the one. I didn't know he was going to be mean."

Franklin realizes that Jimmy isn't just in shock. The boy isn't feeling pain anymore because he is about to die.

"Jimmy," Franklin says. "The person who bought you a present was your brother, Troy. He told me today that he was going to buy you a transformer. The one you wanted."

The red holes in his head light up with excitement, as if they still had eyes in them.

"Really?" Jimmy cries.

"Yes," Franklin says. "But don't tell him that I told. He'll get mad at me for ruining the surprise."

"I can't wait," Jimmy says.

He sighs a deep happy sigh, but never draws another breath.

Franklin looks away from the boy's body and sees a trail of blood heading in the direction the candy man had fled.



As Franklin leaves the parking garage, his hands covered in Jimmy's blood, he runs into Troy. The boy sees the blood on Franklin's hands. Then he sees his little brother's ragged corpse in the deserted parking lot behind them. He puts two and two together and screams.

Franklin tries to calm him down, but the boy only screams louder. He screams for his mom and

dad, as if they are just around the corner. Franklin tries to put his hand over the boy's mouth but the boy runs away, screaming for the police.

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# Chapter Eight

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Franklin runs down the street, following the trail of blood the wounded candy man left behind. He has to kill or capture this creature or else he'll never be able to prove his innocence to the police.

The trail leads him to a manhole near the old park. The park had been shut down a few years ago because more children had gone missing at that park than any other park in the country. The manhole cover has not been closed properly, making it easier for Franklin to catch up to the creature. Franklin assumes the candy man must have been too injured to close it, but knows that it might also be a trap. The candy man might be down there, waiting for him in the dark.

Although he doesn't have a flashlight, Franklin decides to risk it and go down the ladder. He doesn't have much of a choice. The sewer is surprisingly large and dry. With the little light he has shining through the gutters, he's able to navigate through the tunnel. Following the trail of blood becomes difficult in the dim lighting, and then it becomes even more difficult once the sewer branches off into a maze of tunnels. He has to use all of his fancy brain to focus on the blood trail.



After a few blocks, he comes to another manhole. The lid is still open, just as the last one. Franklin climbs down to discover another maze of tunnels identical to the tunnels above. It is some kind of sub-sewer. Franklin isn't quite sure why there is another sewer below the regular sewer. He doesn't know very much about sewers. This sewer is much colder and darker than the previous one. He uses his cane to guide him forward in the dark. He cannot see any blood in this tunnel, so he moves towards a dim light in the distance. He figures that would be the most logical place the creature would be headed.

The light becomes brighter once he turns a corner, then even brighter once he turns another corner. Eventually he discovers where the light is coming from: another manhole.

He climbs down the ladder. This one goes deeper down than the previous two. The maze of tunnels here are surprisingly clean and very bright. They are lit with some kind of iridescent lighting in the corners of the walls. Franklin can see the trail of blood perfectly now. He walks with his gun pointing forward. The tunnel branches every thirty feet. The blood trail twists through the tunnels in a disorderly fashion. It ends in the middle of a white wall. A bloody handprint centers the wall.

Franklin puts his left hand over the handprint and pushes. The wall opens up like a revolving door. Beyond the door is a tiny room with a red spiral staircase heading downwards. Once he sets his foot onto the first step of the staircase he recognizes that it is made of hard candy.

He takes the ladder down, careful not to slip on any of the blood. Franklin calculates that the stairs go down for eighty-eight feet. At the bottom, Franklin finds himself surrounded by rock walls. The blood leads into the mouth of a brightly lit cave. Franklin moves faster. He needs to catch up to the wounded candy man before he reaches any of his friends.

The farther Franklin goes, the wider the cave gets and deeper into the earth it descends. He keeps his eyes on the blood and his gun pointed forward. Soon the cave opens up into another world. Franklin has to stand still to take it all in. As far as his eyes can see, there is a landscape of bright colors and swirling patterns. A landscape made out of candy.



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