

Gene Madness

By Linda Guyan

“It is only through mystery and madness that the soul is revealed.”

—Thomas Moore
Irish poet
1779-1852

Prologue

*Northern California, Foxwood Bay,
Saturday, April 13, 1912
Merrick-Ryland Funeral Home*

“**M**adness is fascinating, don't you think?”

Benjamin Merrick II smiled widely, happy to discuss his favorite subject.

“Who could not be intrigued by insanity?” Douglas Ryland

He concurred with his business partner as they both gazed at the naked female corpse on the metal table in front of them.

Ben Merrick and Douglas Ryland were intelligent, idealistic, and driven young men with their lives ahead of them, filled with hope and dreams and success in their scientific endeavors.

Fascinated by the corpse, Ben understood the gravity of what it meant for their research.

"Insanity stirs my scientific soul into a frenzy of curiosity."

"Add heredity to insanity, and you could have a deadly combination," Douglas added. "Miescher was on to something in eighteen sixty-nine. This molecule he wrote about in his eighteen seventy-one publication is the key to who we are as human beings."

"Our experiments have already proven that fact, as far as I'm concerned," Ben Merrick began. "Madness in the genes is handed down from our ancestors with the same blood disease."

"But whether a person acts on that madness gene or not is something else we must prove," Douglas said. "There are many factors to consider in a human's life."

"Which will win out?" Ben posed. "Blood or family?"

"I suspect it's a bit of both," Douglas suggested. "But I believe that blood is stronger than environmental family ties any day." Ben nodded his agreement.

"Gene madness can be connected to a long list of insanity diagnoses, as well as a host of violent tendencies, including

murder.”

“The German scientist was on to something remarkable,” Ben said. “And we will prove it, Douglas.”

“I agree, Ben. Frederich Miescher’s chemicals, nuclein, in the white blood cells was a scientific breakthrough, but he did not realize the far-reaching implications of his discovery.”

“But we do,” Ben said, smiling as Douglas nodded his understanding.

“This genetic anomaly is an inherited disease of the blood,” Douglas stated emphatically. “And we have discovered it!”

“It’s official now,” Ben agreed as he picked up the letter they had just received in the mail from the United States Patent Office.

“Gene Madness is our patent,” Douglas said proudly.

“That it is,” Ben said excitedly as he picked up the magazine they had received just yesterday. “And we are published, Douglas!”

“This is a proud moment, Ben,” Douglas told his friend as he reached out for the important periodical and read the cover heading aloud. “The New England Journal of Medicine. April eleventh, nineteen twelve, volume one hundred sixty-six, number fifteen.”

“A moment in time to remember, my friend,” Ben told him as Douglas scanned the Contents and read it aloud proudly.

“The Lineage of Blood Disease by B.G. Merrick and D.H. Ryland.”

"I like the sounds of that," Ben said as he looked down at the corpse on their operating table. "It's that blood disease that creates killers like this woman."

"She's a marvelous specimen, Ben."

"She's our chance to prove that some people are simply born bad," Ben said as he examined the woman's wounds, her naked, cold, mottled white skin having no affect on him.

"I believe that without a doubt," Douglas added with emphasis as he pulled the metal instrument tray close to the table.

"That is my goal, Douglas. It is my *métier* in life," Ben said as he picked up a scalpel.

The two young men began the woman's autopsy with more excitement than morticians should possess. These men had ulterior motives for their obsession.

This woman was important to the Experiment.

Just east of the Merrick-Ryland Funeral Home was a narrow, winding road, Victoria Lane, which led up a steep hill to their large and stately residence, as well as the private family cemetery. The large residence was separated by an excessively — yet necessary — long, enclosed connecting walkway. At the end of the quarter-mile long passageway, another massive building loomed far to the right of the other.

This was the asylum.

The town of Foxwood Bay began calling the huge buildings on the hill, the "Castle." Not surprising since they did

appear to be just that from the vantage point of the town below.

In fact the manor house was, indeed, a castle. Benjamin Merrick had it shipped piece by piece from England as a wedding present for his wife, Catrina Bishop. The massive Victorian with its Gothic spires, gables, and turrets sat high on a hill overlooking Foxwood Bay on seventeen acres of prime, wooded land. A narrow, five-mile road winding through the woods led to the main gate, keeping the prying public far away from the asylum grounds. In the basement below the residence – Merrick Manor – was the laboratory.

Outside the huge, black, wrought iron gate flanked by stone pillars was a private gated cemetery to the right. Another, for patients, was at the rear of the building. Small, round stone markers engraved only with the patient identification number kept them anonymous. Just outside the gate to the left were more woods and a steep incline down the mountain with a view of Foxwood Bay Lake.

The Merrick-Ryland Lunatic Asylum was their fathers' masterpiece. Not only did they build a home for the insane and develop treatments for them, it marked the beginning of the Experiment.

It was 1888 when Gabriel Dane Merrick and Harrison Douglas Ryland had a vision for the future. Not only did they endeavor to cure the insane, they were both dedicated to finding the cause. They passed on their knowledge, as well as their obsession, to their elder sons – their heirs. Benjamin and Douglas eventually branched out to the funeral home business, where they could continue their parents' and their own experiments under the guise of

serving the needs of Foxwood Bay by providing funeral services for the city's dead.

Death was a thriving business venture – one that would never end. Since the asylum, business had been booming.

About five miles down the hill from the Castle, sat the Merrick-Ryland Funeral Home. Benjamin Merrick and Douglas Ryland had purchased the modest home last year on a large two-acre lot at the end of a private street at 56 Victoria Place. Just over a wooden bridge with a finger of Foxwood Lake serenely floating underneath, the private road led to the only house on the street. At the rear was a large yard, then a fence with a gate, followed by a narrow strip of land that led to another fence. Another gate led to the pier where you could walk out over massive Foxwood Bay Lake, which took up a large portion of the small town. The house on Victoria Place may have been modest, but the land was expansive.

The house was perfect for their needs for a funeral home. The basement became their embalming room and body storage facility, while the large master bedroom became the coffin display room. The living room served as the parlour for the services. The entrance for the services was through the rose garden courtyard just off the master bedroom, giving the mourners a pretty setting for the worst day of their lives. Two front bedrooms became the offices, while another was set up as a flower shop. The garage held their one hearse, a brand new 1912 Great Eagle. The boathouse was made into a private laboratory.

Interior access to the basement was through a door off the kitchen. Outside access was on the west side of the house,

through a ground level double door secured with a large padlock. No one could open it and go down the stairs into the basement without the key that only Ben and Douglas possessed.

Since the men needed easy access to both the embalming room and their lab, they built an elaborate tunnel system under the house and grounds. These tunnels not only connected the facilities, but also led into the woods on either side of the house for their secret burials. Adept at construction, the men built the tunnels themselves to keep prying eyes away from what they were doing. A hidden panel was built into the basement floor to hide the jewelry they stole from the corpses. This panel also served as a safe for their innumerable corpse photographs and other valuables, keeping them away from prying eyes and hands. Unless the house was demolished, their secrets would never be found.

Access to the boathouse lab tunnel was through a trapdoor just inside the front door and to the left.

The boathouse subjects consisted mostly of transients, the homeless and the poor whose bodies were “donated” to science. These were the ones who eventually ended up in what Merrick and Ryland called Woods Cemetery, in unnamed burial plots. This was a private and unknown cemetery situated immediately left of the mortuary on a half-acre strip of forested land that extended to the west perimeter of the Victoria Place property. Each burial received merely a small, square stone marker with an identification number – nothing more identified the deceased. If they had loved ones – and if the loved ones ever

cared enough to even look for them – they would never be found. The markers were for their own purposes in case further experimentation was deemed necessary. The men kept impeccable records of the dead bodies that crossed their threshold – it was imperative to their work.

Another half-acre stand of woodlands served as the eastern perimeter of the property. The entire north wall of the house was covered in numerous mullioned windows. The customers loved the expansive view of the lake. Weather permitting, services could be held in the backyard. Regular customers would get a full-service funeral complete with hearse and procession up Main Street to the nearest public cemetery, Maple Grove.

Ben and Douglas were alone in the Castle while their fathers took a well-deserved sea voyage across the Pacific and the Atlantic. Gabriel Merrick had planned to travel alone, as his wife was too ill at the time. That is, until Ben's wife Catrina suggested that Gabriel take their youngest son, eight-year-old Emil, on the exciting journey. Dr. H. Douglas Ryland I and his wife, Marina Colucci, joined Gabriel and Emil. Everyone was especially looking forward to the last leg of their journey – sailing aboard the remarkable new ship that was touted as unsinkable, on its maiden voyage.

Departing nearly three months ago, they were due home next month. First sailing to Leiden, Gabriel and Douglas' hometown in Amsterdam, they were looking forward to visiting with the family they had left behind when they immigrated as children to America several decades ago. A month later, they sailed to Southampton, England where they caught up with the Titanic. It was last Wednesday

when they boarded her on the tenth of April, planning to tout their first-class, historic voyage to their family and friends. They would reach New York on the seventeenth, then begin their trip back home, traveling by train. Being mere passengers on the unsinkable ship was a claim to fame in and of itself. Their journey on the Titanic would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, one that everyone in Foxwood Bay would be talking about for years to come.

Douglas Ryland stared at the naked corpse on his table, gazing into her murky, dead eyes, silently wondering if this woman was proof of their genetic theory. He and Ben had followed her most of her life and knew her violent and murderous history. Last night they had found her dead in an alley, apparently the victim of a knife wound, a murder victim at the hands of someone just like her. The two men had surreptitiously taken the woman to their morgue for examination. She would be a perfect specimen for the Experiment.

Madness was in this woman's genes, Douglas thought. Was that the reason, or was it something more insidious? Or a combination of both?

"What caused her to choose this dark path and end up here?" Ben Merrick asked as if reading his friend's mind. "Was it the madness in her blood, or something else?"

"Her body will tell us," Douglas replied as he reached for a scalpel and efficiently and expertly sliced her open from neck to pubis.

"Whatever madness this woman suffered, it's caused her to

butcher a family of six who were picnicking at the lake,” Ben said as he pulled the long flaps of skin back to open up her chest cavity so they could examine her. Both men were adept at their business, examining her body as though it were no more than a specimen – and that was exactly what it was to them. They had no concern for this once-living female as a human being. This woman on the metal table was to be clinically examined and dissected as if she were no more than a frog. But this corpse was no ordinary specimen.

She was a killer. She was part of the Experiment. She was Subject 91. “Last week she murdered a family of three in their home,” Ben added casually as he stripped off his gloves, tossed them in the trash, and took a seat at the desk. “She is wanted for a number of other murders, and the police are linking her to at least twenty missing persons.”

Douglas continued with the autopsy, probing the woman’s lungs and heart with his gloved finger. He stated his findings clearly and distinctly as Ben typed them on their Corona No. 3 typewriter. The report would be added to their private files, separate from the public records.

“Subject number is ninety-one,” Douglas Ryland began as he listened to the tapping of the typewriter keys. “Name of deceased is Boyer, Mildred Olive. Residence, none. Age is approximately thirty. Cause of death is ruptured aorta due to a knife wound. Date of death is April eleventh, nineteen twelve. Burial date April twelfth, nineteen twelve. Burial location is Woods number ninety-one. Valuables, none. Certifying physician and coroner...”

Ben typed the information, adding Douglas’ name at the bottom. “Got it.” Ben rolled the paper out of the typewriter,

ready to add it to their Experiment files. "I'll add her photograph later." Using their new Seneca camera, they were now including photographs of their specimens as part of their records.

When the men were finished with the corpse of Subject No. 91, they waited for the dark of night under a thin, crescent moon and buried her out back in the Woods with all of the other Experiment specimens. As was their procedure, a small marker, the identification number ninety-one etched into the stone, was placed securely over her. The same procedure had been done for years by their fathers at the rear of the asylum up on the hill – in the Castle.

"Her picnic victims are in the freezer," Douglas said later that night as the two young men sipped brandy in their living room. "Their family will be here tomorrow to pick out caskets and flowers and make arrangements for burial at Maple Grove."

"But no family is coming for Subject ninety-one," Ben added as he relished the taste of the strong liquor. "She killed them, too."

Douglas nodded. "Ninety-one was a very interesting specimen."

"She was rather adept at getting away with her crimes, wasn't she?" Ben commented. "Until yesterday."

"Most of her kind end up riddled with cops' bullet holes sooner or later," Douglas replied. "Or like number ninety-one, killed by one of her own kind."

"Which facility did this subject come from?" Ben asked.

“Our best and most prolific one,” Douglas told him. Ben smiled knowingly.

“Blackport.”

* * * *

Part One

Mystery

“Where there is mystery, it is generally suspected there must also be evil.”

—Lord Byron
English Poet
1788-1824

Chapter One

Blackport, Monday, January 1, 2001

Some people are just born bad.

The killer's thought bore out her own experiences, having seen that phenomenon firsthand many times through the years. Whether it was scientifically accurate was debatable. For some people, it was like they were born angry. As if murderous tendencies flowed through their veins and the killer impulse couldn't be denied. Bad blood, some would say. And maybe it comes down to that.

Who's to say that our ancestors haven't passed down their violent tendencies to us, not so much unlike passing down a penchant for painting, writing, dance, or an athletic sport? Not even a loving family, being raised in a nurturing environment, could help someone like that.

Today's victim was one of those people.

Blackport is a small town. And, as most small towns go, everyone knows everyone. So if there's a serial killer in town, you're going to know them.

The difference is that you may know who they are, but you won't know what they are — that they are a murderer — a serial killer.

Tessa North was a beautiful, intelligent, and successful woman.

Tessa was also a serial killer. Tessa knew her victim — she had known him all his life.

Evan Corey, age twenty-six, was born and raised in Blackport, California to Lewis and Noreen Corey. The oldest child and only son in a family of five, Evan's four sisters

ranged in age from fourteen to twenty-two. Lewis and Noreen had their hands full with a large family, the mother giving up her teaching career to be a stay-at-home mom. Remarkably, Evan had been the only child who had anger issues. He was a difficult baby who grew up to be an icon for the terrible-two's that continued on through his young life. If you go by what criminalists and profilers say, Evan was a poster child for the homicidal triad at an early age. The Macdonald triad of sociopathy consists of three behavioral characteristics: cruelty to animals, fire setting, and bed-wetting beyond an acceptable age. Evan met all three criteria. The boy was a screw-up even as a kid, but he got worse after high school and continued down a dark path into adulthood. He couldn't — or wouldn't — hold down a job, lived with whoever would take him in until they kicked him out, did drugs of various kinds, shoplifted, and stole from anyone. An obsession with sex and violence at an early age soon led to the rape and torture of women. Beginning with his sisters. Evan thought he could get away with anything. And he had for far too long. Tonight, that would finally end.

"No one will miss him," Tessa mused in the silence of her car. "No one will mourn or weep. No one cares about Evan Corey. Not even his family. Maybe especially his family."

As serial killer unwritten rules go, Tessa tried not to kill in her own town. But sometimes rules just had to be broken. At least that's the way it was for Tessa North.

And that's the way it was today with Evan Corey. Undeniably, this young man was a violent predator and needed to be eliminated.

The evening's light rain had just become a downpour as Tessa spotted her victim up ahead on the right.

After stalking the twenty-six-year-old rapist for two months like some human version of a cat-and-mouse game, knowing his every move, his every predilection, killing him would be easy.

"It's time to kill him," Tessa said as she glanced confidently to her right. On the passenger seat was a deadly thirteen-inch butcher knife with a carved handle made of rosewood that fit her hand perfectly.

She returned her attention to the road as she thought about the weapon that would end the life of Evan Corey. *I've got a dozen more just like it in a knife block in my kitchen cabinet. It's always best to be prepared for occasions such as these.*

Once again she took a quick sideways glance at the knife, remembering what had drawn her attention to buy this particular one in the first place. Made of high carbon, the stainless steel blade was hand finished by skilled craftsmen in Switzerland. This particular model had been touted by the manufacturer as an "Extra Heavy Bone Knife & Lobster Splitter" and "good for butchering large pieces of meat."

Her attention back on the road, she laughed at the incongruous description. "Only the best knife will do for murder."

Tessa smiled as she placed her right hand on the knife handle as though it was an old friend. And it was. Next she ran her hand over the cold surface of the long, aluminum baseball bat.

Driving slowly up the deserted road, Tessa knew exactly where her victim would be. The last moments of Evan Corey's life had been carefully planned. Even down to the weather that she had researched. Inclement weather washed away many clues and forensic evidence, making the police officers' and crime scene investigators' jobs a whole lot harder. Rain and dropping temperatures were predicted through the rest of the week, which would speed up the decomposition of the remains. Insects, bacteria, and animals would help with the rest.

Every detail had to be perfectly planned.

Evan Corey was a creature of habit. Tessa knew that he strolled up this deserted and dangerous stretch of road every evening. As if he had a death wish, Evan walked as close to the cliff edge as possible. One wrong move and he would fall hundreds of feet to his death. She edged closer to Evan. He was walking up the road about half a mile ahead. On this chilly, wet evening, Evan's killer watched as he chain-smoked and gulped beer out of a can as he drunkenly wandered up Ridge Road, a remote, non-residential road that was rarely traveled. As always, he walked as close to the cliff edge as possible. She could almost sense Evan's exhilaration, the danger coursing through his veins. The rain would only add to Evan's excitement, making every footfall precarious at best, the ground beneath him threatening to fall away at any moment. This was how Evan Corey lived his life — on the edge.

Evan turned as she approached. She guided the vehicle to a stop alongside him — so close that he had to take a precarious step back, even closer to the cliff edge. He smiled as Tessa

rolled down the passenger window. She knew that he wouldn't give a second thought to stopping for a friendly chat with someone he had known all his life. She knew that Evan would feel safe as he eased his upper body through the car window. When he did, she smiled as she watched his eyes take in what he saw inside the car — her odd clothing, the passenger door, seat, floor, dashboard, and ceiling, all lined with thick plastic sheeting secured by lots of gray duct tape.

“Hey!” Evan said casually, taking a deep drag of his cigarette and flicking it into a large puddle, followed by his empty beer can. “What’s with the crazy getup? It’s not Halloween, is it?” he asked, gesturing toward her boots, hat, and goggles.

Tessa North smiled.

That was all it took. That simple friendly gesture put Evan off guard, leading him into a false sense of security. Tessa shrugged innocently and told Evan the truth.

“I don’t want your blood to get all over my nice car.” She was quick. It took all of ten seconds to grab the knife and slit Evan’s throat. Keeping one foot on the brake, Tessa grabbed the baseball bat and leaned over, using just enough force to shove his corpse over the edge of the dangerous, high cliff.

In an instant, Evan Corey was gone. Tessa immediately drove on as if nothing untoward had just happened, the rain conveniently washing blood off the car. Driving more than a hundred miles to another city, she disposed of the bloody plastic sheeting and knife in two separate and desolate areas in the Redwoods. She checked her car and herself for any

sign of blood, then changed into a clean set of clothes that she had brought with her, burning the bloody ones. Tessa didn't like overlooking details. Details were what kept you from getting caught. She drove back home to Blackport, tired from her night's work.

"I must be getting old," she mused. "All I want is to go home, take a hot shower, get a good night's sleep, then spend tomorrow in my courtyard, relaxing on my chaise lounge while reading the newspaper...and maybe a good murder mystery."

As she drove the nearly deserted highway she thought about Evan lying at the bottom of that cliff back home in Blackport. Even if he hadn't already died from the gaping wound in his neck, he would drown. Blackport Gorge was known for flooding even in the lightest rain. Either way, Evan Corey's dead body was also being washed of clues by the rain. Soon insects and wild animals would begin to feast on his corpse. It would be days, maybe weeks, before his body was found in the deep ravine – if he was found at all. Evan Corey wasn't someone that people cared enough about to report as missing. Not even his family, who would no doubt assume he'd simply run away again. They might even sigh with relief when he never returned home.

Tessa felt good that she had rid her hometown of such a violent predator. The women of Blackport would be safer now.

Tessa North thought about her career choice. It made sense to her. It came naturally. And she was very good at it.

"Maybe I was born with bad blood, too."