

*The Atlantic Ocean, off the coast of
Assateague Island, Maryland, U.S.A.
The evening of April 1, 1945*

Gustav Wunderlich stared through his binoculars into the inky blackness and worried about the party he'd sent ashore from his command, U-Boat 2513, over three hours before. As the veteran captain fretted on the conning tower of his boat, he thought of the good hunting he'd had off of this very shore, during the happy days earlier in the war when he and his brother captains had spread havoc from one side of the Atlantic to the other, sinking so much allied tonnage that it seemed England must starve.

They'd ranged from Maine to Hatteras, going where they pleased and doing as they liked with little concern for enemy interference. They'd been so brazen as to surface just a few hundred yards off of Atlantic City so they could listen to the music from the band stands on the boardwalk.

But the days of Germany's ascendancy were over and now, as opposed to the early days of the war, he'd be extremely lucky if his boat was not detected by radar and attacked by naval and air forces. All this risk to hide something important to the continuation of the Reich after it is defeated. That was what the entire crew had been told by the political officer about the nature of his mission and the thought of the briefing made him speak aloud, "Whale drek."

"What is that, Sir?" his first officer asked.

"Whale drek," Gustav repeated. "That is what I think of our mission to preserve the future of our glorious Reich. Bah! Once Germany is rid of this Reich, no one will want to bring it back. There will be no Germany if we don't end this war soon. The allied bombing has reduced our wondrous cities to rubble and the populace is mostly widows and orphans."

"Those are dangerous words Captain. If the political officer were to hear you, he would see you hanged upon our return," said the first officer.

"Maybe we won't go back. Maybe I'll surrender. Or maybe I'll just shoot the political officer...I never did like Gestapo. But later for that...for now we are stuck here in this exposed position until the shore party comes back. It is a good thing there is a diversion supposedly taking place north of here – an attack by agents on a coastal radar installation. That will at least draw off the cavalry squad that patrols this stretch of Assateague Island, and if we're lucky it will pull the naval units out of this area."

The Captain said no more, so the first officer said no more, and in the silence on the bridge Gustav thought again of the senselessness of risking his men, this close to the end of the war, in a foolish attempt to bury some mysterious cache right under the enemy's nose. His thoughts were interrupted by three short and two long blinks of light that signaled that the shore party was returning to the boat.

"Thank God," Gustav said to his first officer. "Get some men up here to help retrieve the shore party and have the radioman send our coordinates to home base."

"Aye, Sir!"

Chapter One

Flying “H” Baseball Stadium

Tulsa, Oklahoma

The present.

Clint looked the little lady up and down. She said she was a reporter for whatever magazine it was that wanted to interview him, but he'd been expecting a typical gossip columnist, come to cozy up with a celebrity. They were usually cute buxom heifers, but Beatrice Howe looked more feminist than femme, with a stern chairman Mao haircut, men's clothes from L.L. Bean, no make up and lines puckered about the corners of her mouth and eyes as if she was often making disapproving expressions and exhibiting stern looks.

“Pardon me Ma'am, but if you don't mind me asking you a question first...” Clint paused waiting to hear if she voiced disapproval, “...you don't seem like the usual celebrity reporter. You look more like you would work the political beat. What made you ask for this assignment?”

Beatrice allowed only a slight smile to barely lift the corners of her mouth, “I won a Pulitzer doing a piece on a self-styled prophet who was a great fan of yours in lower Delaware.”

“I think I read about him. Wasn't he the one who saw visions of a feathered Madonna in an oil stain in road?”

“That's right. About ten thousand Central Americans came and built a shrine in the middle of that road. It's still there,” Beatrice replied.

“What was his name?”

“Clay Stool. Anyhow, when the research staff came up with the fact that you got your start in Delaware, the editor thought that my adventures in that state would give me some insight into your story. Once he promised I wouldn't have to set foot there again I agreed to do your story.”

Clint laughed and said, “Well, I'm mighty pleased that you took the project on. I can't think of a better way to spend the day than to be at a ball game with a pretty woman.”

Despite cringing inside at the sexist comment, Beatrice kept a coldly formal smile upon her face. She was not the type to be charmed by petty compliments from glib tongued actor, even if he was, at his advanced age, still tall and lean, with a full head of gray hair, and flashing that patented Clint Hardy smile. Clint was in his late seventies and had been out of show business for nearly thirty years. He had taken the money he made as a singing cowboy and plowed it into ventures in the oil business and professional baseball and was now inordinately wealthy.

The skybox where he was being interviewed was in a stadium, that he owned, where the team that he owned played – The Tulsa Tornadoes. Now he spent his time pursuing the pure joy of life that only the rich know. Being an avid baseball fan he simply bought his own franchise. He took great pleasure in owning the team, but he was smart enough to not interfere. He didn't try and run the team, but left it to the men he hired.

Even high up in the stadium, and behind glass panels, the state of the art electronics made it sound as if they were on the field with the batters as they took batting practice. The chatter was just audible and the thwack of the pitching machine was usually followed by the hard crack of Louisville ash wood on a horse hide covered ball.

“I love to watch batting practice, because I love that sound of the bat hitting the ball. You hardly hear it in a game these days, the pitchers are so good, but the boys like to have their way

with the mechanical arm out there...it always pitches slow and across the middle.” Clint Hardy looked wistfully out across the field.

Beatrice said quietly, “Mister Hardy, may I call you Clint?”

Clint turned to her, smiled and replied, “Sure, Ma’am, that’s what I call myself. Though Clint isn’t my real name, it’s been my handle for nigh on fifty years now.”

“Ahhh, I see. Clint is your screen name.”

“That’s right, little lady. The name I was born with is Melvin. Melvin Schmidt. I was near onto 25 years of age before I became Clint Hardy, when I made my first movie.”

Beatrice made a small sound to clear her throat and replied, “And could you please tell my readers how you got your start in the movies?”

Clint leaned back in his chair, pushed back the cowboy hat he had worn for the occasion, and took a deep breath, “Well I reckon it was because I’d lost my job and saw an ad in the paper. That was back over fifty years ago. Up until then I was working in a sideshow. I was the outside talker for the Morris Brother’s Sideshow. We had our ten-in-one show set up at the Kent and Sussex County Fair in Harrington...”

*Kent and Sussex County Fair
Harrington, Delaware
Friday, July 23, 1954*

Calliope music filled the air as the crowd pushed and shoved their way along the midway of the 1954 Kent and Sussex County Fair at the Harrington Race Track. The progress of the mass of humanity was impeded by a knot of people that stopped in front of the entrance to the sideshow to listen to the spiel of the tall young man who was exhorting everyone to come inside:

“Ladies and gentlemen, inside this tent are the most fantastic attractions of this or any midway. This is the ten-in-one show that delves into the strangest of the strange to present the most unbelievable aberrations of nature. Behind this wall of canvas is a creature so extraordinary that the eye of man has never beheld its equal – Silky, the Seal Woman. It is certain that Silky is more animal than human. You may not believe it, but you will see with your own eyes this step backwards in evolution. Instead of arms and legs, Silky has flippers. She was born of normal parents, by normal birth, just like you and me. But in the womb she reverted to the primitive heritage that lurks within us all. Just lay two bits on the ticket counter and experience it all.”

It was a typically hot July day and Melvin Schmidt stood on a small platform exhorting the passing throng to pony up the admission and see the lurid attractions of the freak show. In the crowd gathered around him stood Lester Dowd, sixty-six years old and the richest man in Kent County. While he was reaching into his pocket for two bits, Lester was jostled by a young man among the crowd of people streaming into the tent.

“Excuse me,” the younger man apologized.

“That’s ok...no harm done,” Lester said. Then he gently grabbed the young man’s elbow and asked, “Don’t I know you?”

The young man scrunched his eyebrows together as he puzzled over Lester’s weathered face, then exclaimed with a slight German accent, “Herr Dowd! Yes, I’m Wolfgang Jodl. I used to work for you during the war.”

Lester had a vacant look as he strained to recognize Wolfgang.

“I was one of the P.O.W.’s that worked for you during the war,” Wolfgang added. Coincidentally, before Lester had accosted him, Wolfgang had been contemplating the irony that one of the prisoner of war camps that he’d been held in had been located on these very fairgrounds.

“Well I’ll be damned.” A pearly smile appeared on Lester’s face and he said, “I remember now. You’re one of the prisoners I used to hire out from the guvment to work the farm. You Kraut boys were all good workers. In fact I still wear the ring you boys pitched in and bought me before you shipped off for home after the war.” He held up his hand and showed the ring to Wolfgang.

During the war the federal government had decided to try and recoup some of the cost of confining prisoners of war by selling their labor to local farmers, merchants, and manufacturers. The truth of the matter was that with the cheap labor and high prices Lester made a fortune off of the German prisoners during the war growing and selling truck vegetables to the government for war rations. A fortune he parlayed into his cannery, which continued to grow his financial standing everyday.

“We worked cheap too,” Wolfgang replied, trying not to show his displeasure at being called a Kraut.

“Wages weren’t my doing,” Lester said, “the guvmint set the wages. But you fellers enjoyed a lot of other privileges for working like you did. You pretty much had the run of the town, and as I recall I used to let you all borrow the farm truck when you had a night out.”

The coincidence of their meeting was actually not particularly agreeable to either man. Wolfgang was seeking to travel in anonymity, and Lester didn’t particularly care for the German’s snotty attitude about the wages he’d paid back during the war. He thought that Wolfgang and most of the large group of ex-P.O.W.’s that had migrated back to Delaware after the war, should be thankful just for having been exposed to the land of the free and the home of the brave and not be complaining about wages paid ten years ago.

But now that they were thrown together politeness forced them to converse.

“What brings you to the sideshow?” Wolfgang asked.

“I just needed something to take my mind off my problems.”

“Oh?”

“I just been with my doctor,” Lester confided. Ordinarily he would have not been so open.

“Bad news?”

“It appears my ticker ain’t keeping good time.”

“Sorry to hear that,” Wolfgang said as he thought, *that’s what you get for taking advantage of us during the war*, and continued smiling.

They ceased talking and returned their attention to the man who’s relentless patter coaxed the curious to plunk down their silver for a peek, “...you’ve come at a good time ladies and gentlemen, for though the regular price of admission is twenty-five cents for adults and ten cents for children, starting right now, and for the next three minutes, anyone, of any age, can enter this exhibition who lays the price of a child’s ticket on that pay box...” Melvin turned and in a loud aside said to the cashier, “Mabel, I want you to put those adult tickets away...everyone goes in for the price of a child.” Then turning to the audience he resumed, “Just by slapping down one thin dime you can follow your friends and neighbors inside and see the main attraction of our show, Silky the Seal Woman, along with our other fantastic exhibits.”

Melvin paused his chatter to lean back and grab the flap to the entrance of the tent. Opening it just far enough to seem like he was speaking to someone inside he shouted urgently, “Hold up starting the show professor, there’ll be a crowd pushing through in just a minute.” Turning again to the crowd he asked, “So who’s going to take me up on this rare and magnanimous reduction in the price of admission?”

The effect was wondrous to behold. Melvin never tired of the thrill he got from being able to manipulate the hoi polloi into entering the show. As the crowd clambered to give up their dimes, Lester and Wolfgang allowed themselves to be swept along.

With his job over until the next show, Melvin stood back, giving his voice a rest. His eyes wandered over the canvas posters depicting the various attractions inside and chuckled to himself about the gullibility of the average rural American.

Being an expert con man in his own right, Melvin admired the skill of the artist who had painted the posters of the show’s attractions that were strung along the midway for a hundred feet.

The seal woman’s image had been rendered as a sea lion with a woman’s face and slinky negligee. In actuality Silky was really a rather pretty woman whose limbs were short, stubby, and undeveloped.

In reality, she had a good figure and a pleasing face that was framed by straight black hair, but her arms and legs were only a third or so of normal length and her fingers and toes were mostly fused. Other than her flipper-like appendages, though, she did not resemble a seal, but by the time anyone figured that out, they would have already paid their entrance.

Li'l Douglas MacArthur Jr. was no more than a run-of-the-mill midget in a general's uniform and sporting a corncob pipe – he bore no other resemblance or connection with the General. He could have been Li'l anyone for it was his costume that gave him his persona. If he was to put on a frock coat, knee britches, and square glasses while holding a kite in his hands, he could just as easily be Li'l Benjamin Franklin.

The only performer whose poster came close to resembling himself was Otis Nelson the human cannonball – known by his stage name of Quaker Otis, because he was, “Shot from guns.” His poster was a parody of the Quaker Oats logo, with Otis's grinning face and helmet replacing that of the colonial Quaker with his stylized hat.

Next to the human cannonball's poster was the one for the show's other daredevil, Monty Zuma, the high diver.

Bomba the Pinhead's poster was a grotesque exaggeration of his already caricature-like appearance. Born with a nearly empty skull, the poor microcephalic man had an IQ slightly inferior to Billy Bob the two-headed dog and his hair was shaved into a small knot at the apex of his pointed cranium to accentuate his pinheadedness.

He was a genial good natured simpleton who had to be escorted in public because of his fondness for fondling himself. Otto Morris, the older of the two brothers who owned the show, had given Bomba's parents a hundred dollars to sign a document making him the pinhead's legal guardian.

The next poster that Melvin's eye drifted to was the fat lady's – Enorma Hindenburg who doubled as the tattooed woman. Though she was new to the show, her poster was the most faded. The fat women came and went, for their very attribute limited the length of their careers – she was the third fat woman since this poster had been painted.

No one bothered suggesting they paint tattoos on the fat lady poster, figuring she'd be gone and the next fat lady would probably not be tattooed. So they put the tattooed lady's poster next to the fat lady poster. Enorma filled two slots in the ten-in-one show, which seemed fair since she weighed as much as any two other people.

Melvin chuckled to himself. Most of the attractions were gyps in one way or another: the hippo that sweated blood—all hippos have red sweat; the hermaphroditic Siamese twins really were joined together at the girdle, but they only portrayed themselves as being of two different genders by one of them wearing a dress and makeup and the other wearing trousers and a beard.

Since two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time, to make maximum money in the carnny racket it is essential to keep the rubes cycling through the tent. By having final attractions that required exiting the rear of the tent, a fresh batch of admissions were able to fill the vacuum from the front.

This act was used to lure patrons outside for the *blow-off*, and the Professor relied on two skills to pull it off.

The way the segue to the *blow-off* progressed was that after the human blockhead finished the inside portion of the show, by driving a sixteen penny nail into his head, he invited everyone to move towards the exit of the tent to see one of the most fantastic feats of daring imaginable. The flap that covered the back entrance would be pulled open by one of the roustabouts and the

crowd would see Douglas MacArthur Jr. standing at stiff attention in the opening with a swagger stick tucked under his arm and his corncob pipe clenched between his teeth.

Reaching up with a flourish to remove his pipe, the midget would shout with a voice like a drill sergeant on methamphetamine, "Forward! Harch!" then turn on his heel as a crisp snare drum played by an alcoholic musician began counting the cadence.

It did not take much inducement to get the crowd outside. The two hired shills would call, "Come on," and rush after Doug. This tactic never failed to induce the crowd into a stampede to do likewise. Once the yokels were outside, the trap would be sprung by a roustabout pulling down the tent flap and fastening it against reentry.

Of course before the crowd realized they were on a one-way trip back to the midway, their attention was drawn to the swaying platform held erect by guy wires. It consisted of three upright poles crisscrossed by struts with a narrow ladder attached. It all held a small platform aloft forty feet in the air.

At the base of this tower was a vat that appeared to be little more than a child's swimming pool filled with a dark brown liquid that was alleged by the master of ceremonies to be chocolate.

Despite their dual billing, Otis and Monty did not get along together well. *There's something weird about that highdiver*, Otis used to say to everyone but Monty – ironically most everyone also said that about Otis.

On the opposite side of the staging area was the huge tube that was the cannon. Painted red and white like a barbershop pole, its barrel was lowered to a small red and white pedestal on the ground.

The next step in the *blow-off* would begin when the drum roll ceased its marching cadence, and Li'l Dougie, as the sideshow folk called the general, took his place halfway between the tower and the cannon to announce, "Presenting the most dynamic duo of daredevils to ever appear on the stage simultaneously... performing a coordinated stunt... Monty Zuma and Quaker Otis!"

Quaker Otis's costume was a pseudo-colonial outfit that aped the apparel of the man on the box of Quaker Oats. In tights and wearing a cloak, Monty's resembled that of a super hero.

It was a constant thorn in Otis's side that Monty's name was always mentioned first. Otis tried to compensate for this perceived slight by attempting to upstage Monty during the entrance by bounding onto the stage with more grace, vim, and vigor than Monty. Monty, not to be outdone, practiced for hours in front of a mirror the art of striding onto the scene like the Aztec emperor whose name he had adopted.

The two stuntmen tried to exceed the depth of each other's bows and the exaggerated sweeps of their arms until, impatient at the delay in the *blow-off*, Li'l Dougie would signal the drummer to start the roll that announced it was time for Monty to mount the ladder and Otis to step onto his pedestal and slide into the muzzle of the gun.

As the daredevils prepared, Li'l Dougie would continue, "And now for the first time, we present an act that is not only physically amazing, but quite possibly the most dangerous act ever attempted. The fearless Monty Zuma will plunge over thirty feet into this pool of chocolate while the incomparable Quaker Otis streaks over the Aztec diver with fantastic timing and precision to pull this lever..." Doug gestured with his swagger stick to a lever attached to the tower, "...to dump ten gallons of whipped cream onto Monty to make a sundae. If he survives, Quaker Otis will land in the net on the other side of the stage. No one has ever before attempted such a feat of daring."

It was actually too risky to have the trick depend on Otis pulling the lever, for it would probably take his arm off if he did – so a dummy lever was used. An inflatable device was made of rubber sheeting. The exaggerated replica was eight feet long and designed to look like it was made of iron. A roustabout, stationed to one side of the stage, would surreptitiously pull a cord that rotated the fake lever and activated the whipped cream dump as Otis flew through the air.

At a signal from Doug, Monty would throw his cape to the ground, gracefully arch his body, raise his arms above his head, then step forward to flow off the platform and plummet head first towards the direct center of the vat. The cannon would boom as the diver entered the brown dyed water, and Otis emerged flying from a cloud of smoke. The human cannonball would arc over the vat, brushing the lever as the roustabout released a quantity of talcum powder that fell in a large white clump that was meant to simulate whipped cream. After a half a heartbeat Monty jumped up through the surface of the liquid in the vat to show the crowd he was okay to an eruption of applause.

By now Otis would be out of the net and bounding back towards center stage as Monty scrambled out of the barrel in an effort to beat him there. After taking their bows, the performers would disappear and the crowd, unable to get back into the tent, would disperse.

The inside show was still proceeding as Melvin stood in front of the tent and continued looking at the posters. He knew all these performers well and they had become his family – they had lived, worked, and traveled together for years.

In their own way, these freaks were ordinary people who had faced up to their shortcoming in life and had figured out a way to make an honest living with the unusual *gift* God had chosen to give them. He had mixed emotions – he felt lucky not to be a freak who had to display himself vulgarly to the public to make his way in life. But in the kingdom of the freakish, the man with no genetic anomalies is the freak.

It was symbolic that he should be on the outside while the show went on within. Melvin rarely saw the show, for he was usually warming up the next batch of marks as it progressed. As close as they all were, Melvin and the freaks were always aware that he was not like them. But the fact he brought the money into the tent made them all dependents of Melvin's in a way.

Without his skill there would be no income for the members of the show, yet he went unrenowned. There was no poster of Melvin Schmidt the Outside Talker Extraordinaire. He wondered if he would ever be famous. *Maybe I'll have a poster someday*, Melvin thought to himself and smiled. Being ordinary seemed to be an obstacle despite his natural good looks. What was his destiny? From a farm boy to a talker, Melvin had moved easily from one station in life to another, but he felt destined for much more. He was young, and was sure that someone would come knocking at his door. He was ready to answer the summons.

His looks served to give him credibility with the crowd, for he more resembled a movie star than most people's conception of a carny. With a straw boater upon his head, and wearing a red and white striped seersucker suit with brown Florsheim shoes, he looked festive and gay as he gestured with his cane towards the posters as his glib tongue caressed the smooth words he used to entice passersby.

Tall and thin with a wispy moustache grown to cultivate a look older than his twenty-four years, he parted his long, thick black hair in the middle and slicked it straight back with Brylcreem – “a little dab'll do ya.” With his bright blue eyes, he looked into the gaze of marks with an insouciance that made him appear honest in his appeal for interest in his show. Though his nose was long and sloping, it had a hint of roundness at its end, and was proportional to the length of his face with its jutting chin and slight dimple. It was what people called a *strong* chin.

He had the complexion of one used to the out-of-doors, and though he was sharp in his dress and deportment, there was still a hint of the farm about him.

Inside, as the throng elbowed and jostled each other for position near the stage, Wolfgang was irritated that he could not shake Lester. The canny millionaire had decided he and the German ex-prisoner of war were, if not friends, at least better than passing acquaintances and had better stick together.

But Wolfgang's intent was to remain furtive in his purpose for attending the sideshow that day. He'd been to scores of freak shows, any that came within a hundred mile radius of his home just outside Harrington, Delaware, in a search for a certain deformed woman.

He had indeed been employed on Dowd's farm during World War II while a prisoner of war at the Harrington, Delaware P.O.W. camp. Due to the shortage of manpower in the states, any prisoner willing to give his parole not to escape or engage in war-like activities was allowed to go abroad during the day to work for local farmers, merchants, or businesses. Most formed friendships or romantic liaisons with locals as they expanded their participation from the working world to the social life of southern Delaware.

Following his repatriation to Germany after the war, Wolfgang, like many of the prisoners, emigrated back to the U.S.A.

Now Wolfgang wanted cover for his task at hand and to not leave an impression with anyone that he was *up to something*. Lester was cramping his style, and he wanted to shake his ex-employer during the few minutes remaining before the object of Wolfgang's interest, the Seal Woman, came on.

He wanted to get closer to the stage to see what he needed to see. It would be difficult to take pictures unnoticed, even with his miniature Leica camera, with Lester close at hand. But he carried on a civil conversation for appearances sake, at least for the time being.

Finally Lester said, "It's been mighty nice runnin' into you again, Wolfgang, but I'm gonna move down to the other end of the stage, I want to get a closer gander at that tattooed fat lady. She's mighty handsome."

"Nice seeing you again, too. Take care," Wolfgang said with relief as Lester turned and walked away.

The crowd quieted down as Professor Jack Hammer, strode out onto the stage again. Besides being the human blockhead, he swallowed swords and served as master of ceremonies. He began his act by passing around a sixteen-penny nail to some of those in front then driving it straight into the front of his face, at the bottom of one nostril, with a large claw hammer.

As the professor spun the hammer around and used the claws to lever out the nail, a great commotion erupted just outside the flap that had been dropped over the main entrance when the show had started.

The professor tried to ignore the ruckus, but he couldn't keep the crowd's attention on the sword he was about to jam down his throat – instead they were craning their necks around and turning away from the stage to see what was going on.

The flap was thrown aside and a large brutish man, tall and wide, appeared in the square of sunlight. He wore a greasy army fatigue jacket with sawed-off sleeves and emblems of the 101st Airborne, and though a large beer belly extended over his belt, his barrel chest and huge arms suggested this fellow was capable of intense mayhem when he set his mind to it.

His face was large and round with apple cheeks flushed red with drink and anger. A beard of several days growth made his pockmarked face appear dirty rather than unshaved, and the

long black hair that covered his head was slicked back with liberal application of Wildroot Cream Oil. Holding a beer bottle in his hand, and with the necks of several others protruding from his pockets, he staggered inside the show followed by two other men of similar disreputable appearance and comportment.

Lester spit on the ground in disgust. He recognized Winston Nowland and shook his head in disapproval. Nowland and his cronies were all certified heroes of the recent war with Germany. These ex-members of the elite airborne division had parachuted into enemy held territory the night before the Normandy invasion and had held the line during the worst of the Battle of the Bulge. Yet these same men, when returned to their native element and natural state, had been unable to resume their former normal lives. They had left home as gangly teenagers and returned as hardened killers.

They found release in drinking, getting hopped-up and roaring about on the Harley Davidson and Indian motorbikes they were forever altering, while they terrorized decent citizens.

These hooligans lived on the farm Winston had inherited in Little Heaven, Delaware, about fifteen minutes to the north. The former paratrooper operated a produce stand there from which he claimed to make his living, but there were rumors that it was a cover for the income from an assortment of criminal enterprises.

The police had long suspected that many of the area's stolen cars and bikes wound up being chopped up in the barn and that Winston occasionally pimped out some of the women that hung out around the farm. Indeed, the farmhouse was the site of many wild parties and debauches, and he was the major supplier in the area of the red barbiturate pills known as "goof balls."

As he watched Winston and his goons Lester thought, *From heroes to hoodlums, how does it happen?*

Nowland and his gang began telling the people gawping at them to mind their own business then they demanded the performers get on with the show. "We paid our dimes. Now get on with it!" Winston howled and his posse began chanting, "On wid da show...on wid da show..." and they kept it up until Professor Jack Hammer had resumed his master of ceremonies patter.

Their impatience turned to cheering when the Professor stuck a long steel skewer through both his cheeks and gripped it between his teeth like a horse's bit. Then General Douglas MacArthur Junior led out the two-headed dog

"Why it's a little Dugout Dougie!" one of Winston's associates shouted.

The little general put the dog through his paces, the highlight of which was a tug of war between his two muzzles over an old sock.

Back outside the tent, Melvin's attention had returned to attracting the next audience. He would throw comments out to those who tried to pass him without exhibiting any interest in the show, "You look like an intelligent gentleman. Surely you would not want to miss these wonders of science?" as he waved his cane at the posters. Sometimes he would set up three cups and roll a small rubber ball between them and call out to the passersby in the throng, "I'll give two bits to anyone who can follow the ball and tell me where it is..."

Melvin already had a score or so of lookers-on when a quartet of roustabouts wheeled Enorma out front on a cart to ballyhoo the crowd – this was the signal to Melvin that the show was nearly over inside. As she struck her classic poses the talker cried out, "Ladies and gentlemen, behold the fattest woman east of the Mississippi river. Why she's so big it takes four robust young men to roll her out here. Her enormous body is entirely covered in tattoos...her left side alone depicts the lives of the twelve disciples while her right side illustrates the tales of

Scheherazade. The story of Aladdin's lamp is told on a part of the body that can't be shown outside here, but for the price of admission you can see it all along with the rest of the exhibits." Everyone crowded the podium to stare at her inked bulk and a good deal of pushing and shoving developed as more passersby joined the crowd.

"That's it folks, step right up...don't worry there's plenty of room inside for everyone," Melvin said. "Ordinarily we charge twenty five cents to see the ten-in-one show, but for the next three minutes you can view Enorma's vast immensity for free."

Melvin looked down the midway for other likely marks and saw a man in a suit with a string bow tie and a pure white straw cowboy hat on his head. When Melvin caught the glint of light off a large silver star on the stranger's chest, his words died in his throat. The man had the typical bearing of a sheriff and was followed by a pair of men who had to be deputies. They were escorting a group of women whose quality of dress and conservative taste made them stand out from the garish crowd. Melvin recognized them as high society ladies, who would not usually deign to tread among the lower classes, and the fact that they were fast approaching in the company of law-men did not bode well.

Melvin smelled trouble. As the women approached, he could see disdain for him and the show written on their faces. The tallest of the women looked to be in her fifties. Melvin guessed she was probably a doctor's wife. She took a position directly in front of him, and, after checking to be sure the sheriff was still behind her, addressed Melvin, "Young man, we are representatives of the Women's Social Justice League of Kent County and we're here to see that you cease and desist your cruel exploitation of these poor unfortunate people whom you have on display."

Before Melvin could say anything, the sheriff stepped forward, tipped his hat and pulling a document from inside his jacket said, "Evening. Sorry to be bothering you, but this here paper is an injunction from Judge Luther Davis of the Superior Court of the State of Delaware stating that he finds the treatment of the freaks in this here freak show to be inhumane and dehumanizing and that the operator of said exposition shall cease and desist from all exhibitions and demonstrations of or involving persons of a deformed, crippled, or twisted nature."

Melvin had seen this before. In fact it was becoming all too common, for there were do-gooders in nearly every town. But this was the first bunch to get a court order shutting the sideshow down. Usually they just protested what they assumed to be the humiliating exploitation of deformed people. In reality, despite their high-minded motives, the do-gooders were ignorant and wrong. Their good intentions were destroying the only opportunity for the freaks to earn a reasonable livelihood in a world where they could not otherwise make their own way – if not for the exhibitions, the freaks would be wards of the state, on the dole, or worse.

The ladies preceded the sheriff and his men through the entry of the tent and began telling the audience to get out. When the sheriff announced that the show was closed and why, the members of the Women's Social Justice League were quickly disabused of the notion they harbored that the freaks they were "freeing" would be thankful. General Douglas MacArthur Junior began cursing and kicking dirt on them the way a baseball manager does to an umpire he is arguing with, while both of Billy Bob's heads snarled in menacing unison as he strained at his leash.

Excited by all the commotion, Bomba began masturbating while he pranced about the tent like a spider monkey. This was more than the ladies could stand, so they retreated back outside the tent. Appalled that the freaks they were helping turned out to be such ingrates, the good

matrons went home riding a wave of righteous indignation – leaving the freaks with no prospects, home, or money.

While the sheriff ran the rest of the spectators out of the tent, he was ignored by Winston and his boys who continued drinking while the freaks bemoaned the loss of their livelihood. Enorma wailed, “Once the Morris Brothers get word that we’re no longer bringing in funds they’ll run us off the lot.”

“Hell, ya’ll can come stay at my place,” Winston as his cohorts nodded and grunted their assent. In extending his invite Winston said, “I been meaning to promote my vegetable stand...you freaks can help me set up a roadside attraction. I’ll guarantee you three hots and a cot. You’ll get paid when we start making more than what it costs to keep ya.”

“See, there is still a spark of charity left in the county,” Sheriff Wattson said as he reached into one of Winston’s pockets and withdrew a long neck bottle of whiskey. Pulling the cork with his teeth, the sheriff drank without wiping the mouth of the bottle then passed it to one of his deputies. The sheriff and Winston had been childhood friends, and reliance on familiarity with the sheriff went a long way to keeping Winston out of trouble. “If I was y’all,” the Sheriff said waving his arm in an arc meant to signify inclusion of all the freaks in the tent, “I’d take old Winnie up on his offer.”

Melvin and the freaks convened a conclave in one corner of the tent to consider the offer and within a few minutes they voted to move their caravan to Nowland’s home in Little Heaven.

By this time, Otis and Monty had heard the commotion and had come into the tent. Once they’d both been filled in about the situation, Monty announced haughtily, “I was planning on leaving this menagerie anyway...to be a cliff diver in Acapulco. Good bye!” Then he strode from the tent.

“Good riddance to bad rubbish,” said Otis then added, “don’t let the door hit you in the ass on your way out.”

Wolfgang, having managed to avoid expulsion along with the crowd because of his status as the Sussex County stringer for the Wilmington Morning News, witnessed these events. No one thought anything of it when the German brandished his press pass and began shooting pictures with his Leica camera. He especially concentrated on Silky the Seal Woman with close-ups of her deformed limbs. *I’ll enlarge these pictures later and then we’ll see if it’s really her*, he thought.

Wolfgang never had to develop the film to confirm her identity. For he found by the tent flap a small display rack offering pamphlets that encapsulated this woman’s story for a nickel apiece. Looking both ways, he saw that no one was paying him any heed – everyone’s attention riveted on the sheriff and his posse. Taking advantage of the opportunity, Wolfgang snatched several of the booklets without depositing any coins in the rack’s coin-box.

Stepping outside the tent to the midway, the German stopped and read the missive. When he saw the words, *born in Budapest, Hungary in 1930, Silky was a prisoner in Ravensbruck prison camp for most of the war until liberated by the Russians*, Wolfgang had all the confirmation he needed that the Seal Woman was his quarry.