

## Chapter 2

### [Ancestors](#)

Quinn lay sprawled across the couch with his laptop on his chest. Rain pattered against the windows in the gray morning light. His second cup of coffee was going cold on the low table in front of him. He was engrossed in an email from his sister, pondering the document she had attached. She had sent it the night before, but he had not seen it until this morning. Soon he would have to drive up into the wet suburban hills to his sister's house.

Hey Big Brother,

I'm really looking forward to seeing you tomorrow. Here is some of the stuff I have been digging up on the family history. The attached document is from a historical society in Illinois. I hope it gives you something to chew on for your article. I'll have lots more to show you when you get here.

Love,  
Susan

Quinn clicked a button on the laptop. The attachment Susan had sent flashed up on the screen. He began to read it for a second time.

Interview: Transcript of Witness. William Hanks Murder. Anna, Illinois, 1912

It was the damnedest thing I ever seen yet, I'll tell you that. Poor old Bill Hanks a'laying there on them hotel steps damn near cut in half by that scatter gun. I never knew what two barrels of 12 gauge could do to a man but B'God, I do now, and it was a sight. Charlie never even let him get to the bottom of the stairs, just blasted him where he stood. He never said nothing to Bill

Hanks, didn't cuss him or even say good morning. Charlie, he just raises that A.H. Fox and lets go with both barrels. I never seen a man fly up stairs, but I did today. Mr. Hanks ain't no small man, but I swear to you, he flew two steps back up them stairs when that buckshot caught him.

Where was I standing? Well Sir, I'd been leaning on the iron fence right out front of the hotel, fixing to have me a smoke. I had just rolled it and put away my makings. My shift was done at the hotel and it was a bright morning. I like to watch the folks walking by in their Sunday-go-to-meetings afore I head off to home. Yes Sir, I was right there when Charlie Boyd walked up. I was mighty surprised to see him since it weren't his day to work at the hotel, being Sunday and all. I started to hallo him, but Charlie didn't pay me no mind, like he didn't even see me. Then he swings that Fox double-barrel out from under his coat and points it up them hotel stairs. I look up where Charlie's pointing that thing and here's Bill Hanks and two other fellas I don't know walking down. They're all three busy talking, or mostly Bill Hanks is busy talking and the other fellas is busy listening. They're so busy talking and listening they don't see Charlie or that big shotgun, not right off anyway. Then Bill Hanks, he looks straight down them big wide granite steps and sees what's awaiting on him.

Sir, I know this is going to sound like a lie, and I don't mean for it to, but I don't know how else to tell what happened. For just a tick, everything froze still, like we was all in a photograph portrait. There was Charlie standing square off on the sidewalk with that A.H. Fox planted against his shoulder. He was leaning forward on one foot, leaning in like he knew how that thing was going to kick when he fired both barrels. There's a little drop of sweat shining on his left temple and his newsboy was pushed back on his head. Seemed like a whole minute I watched that bead of sweat move down his temple, but that couldn't have been, could it? Bill Hanks, he's standing on one step with his left foot and his right foot ain't reached that next step down yet, like he's frozen in mid-air, like that shoe ain't never going to touch that granite. As it turns out, it never did. Bill, his eyes are locked on the end of that scatter-gun. He sees it now, the last thing he'll ever see, not talking anymore, not hearing what that other feller started to say. And right then, like I said, everything is locked still. Seems like there's nothing else in the world 'cept Charlie fixing to pull both them triggers and Bill looking into them barrels like tunnels and me just watching the two of them.

Well then, everything started up extra fast. Charlie pulled them triggers and everything goes from frozen in time to happening all at once. Bill's right foot never did reach that granite step. They's a roar like the gates of hell opening up, all noise and smoke and fire. Them two loads of buckshot caught Bill right in the center of his chest and threw him back up the stairs. Old Bill lands in a heap two stairs up from where them other fellas was. The smoke from the end of that shotgun is rolling up the stairs while the recoil is rocking Charlie back on his heel. Nobody seemed to have noticed Charlie before, nobody but me and him and Bill Hanks. Now everyone sees Charlie, all the Sunday folks on their way to services, the two fellas splattered with Bill Hanks' blood, everyone except Bill Hanks hisself. He don't see nothing and never will again. He's

a'laying on that granite like a big ole rag doll, blood already started to run down over them stone stairs. I never reckoned there was that much blood in a man, but there it was, sunlight shining down into it. The women on their way to church were screaming at all that blood while their menfolk stepped in front of them or tried to turn them back.

Like I said, everything is happening at once. Charlie, he starts clawing at that shotgun, breaking it down and trying to fish them two hot shells out of the breach. I believe he was trying to reload that thing, but he never got it done. While he's scrabbling at them shells, he's screaming at the folks round about. I killed him, says he, I killed him and I'm crazy. I'll kill anyone who talks to me like that. I'll kill the rest of you if you try to stop me. Charlie weren't quiet no more, he was ranting like a lunatic, swinging around in a circle right there on the sidewalk, like he was trying to talk to each and every one of them people backpedaling away from him and all that blood. He was spinning around to face them folks, trying to yell at them and reload that shotgun at the same time. 'Course, you know what happened then. Them two fellas on the stairs ran down on Charlie when he turned away. A couple of them churchmen, they saw that and jumped on Charlie from the front. That shotgun goes clattering to the sidewalk and some other fella grabs it up. Charlie, he's not shouting anymore. It was like someone hit him with a sap, even though I never saw those men do nothing more than grab him. Once they laid hands on him, he just slumped like a sack of corn, like all the life was gone out of him.

No Sir, after that I didn't see Charlie no more, not really. Those men marched him off towards the jail at the same time the officer on duty was marching down. They met right there in the middle of Main Street. There was some sort of palaver and then they all headed off back towards the jailhouse, that man toting the shotgun walking behind them. I could see Charlie's legs stumbling along in the middle to them others as they sort of half-carried and half-dragged him off. No Sir, I hadn't taken a single step. It was like I was rooted to that spot on the sidewalk. Never moved the whole time. Hell, I hadn't even lit my cigarette. It was just dangling there in my hand.

After those fellas drug Charlie off, folks just started doing things. One of the clerks from the hotel came out and covered up Bill Hanks, covered him up with one of those fancy afghans what are draped over the davenport in the lobby. There he was, the shape of him, under that afghan, his blood still running out from underneath. Now some folks on the sidewalk, the menfolk, they started moving their women away from that mess. Other folks pressed in for a closer look. Me, I just stood there planted, like I said. Odd thing was, when them folks pushing forward got a good look, they started pushing back again real quick-like, bumping into other folks pressing forward. It looked like cows milling about in a pen when something's troubling them, like when cows get all wide-eyed and scared at some new thing they don't know. You've seen that, haven't you Sir?

It was Mr. James come out and put people to doing things, taking charge of everyone. Yes Sir, Mr. James runs the hotel, him being the day manager. He set to telling people what to do. First, he tells them folks to back away onto the sidewalk and make some room. With that big black

frock coat and them old fashioned side whiskers, Mr. James cuts a pretty big picture at the top of them stairs, standing over Bill Hanks' body. He's got a voice like a preacher and he's used to telling folks what to do, so they generally do it. This weren't no different, even if there was a dead man at his feet. Mr. James says you folks move on back now and they move on back. Mr. James turns to one of the hotel clerks and tells him to go telephone the county sheriff and that fella disappears back into the lobby. Then he kneels down, slow as a deacon, and lifts the corner of that afghan. He must be looking at Bill Hanks' face, but I can't see it from where I am. Mr. James, he gives that big head of his one shake, just one, then real slowly he lets that afghan rest back down.

The next thing I heard was that big ole voice saying did anyone see this happen and then some of them church-goers was pointing at me. There, him, that young fella saw it all. Mr. James was looking down on me like a preacher from the pulpit, standing there at the top of them granite steps. Is that true son, he says, did you see all of this happen? I just nod my head and say Yessir. You had better stay here son, says he. I believe the sheriff will want to speak to you. He should be here directly. Yessir I say again, and I'm still rooted to that same spot. Mr. James sets a couple of the bellhops to guarding the body, them standing there in their bellhop jackets in the Sunday morning light. Folks are milling about on the sidewalk, not knowing what to do. Those two bellhops are trying to look serious, but they're just scared kids that never seen a body before, much less a bloody corpse like that. I can see the town constable making his way back towards the hotel from the jail, working at straightening his uniform jacket while he's marching down the middle of Main Street. Them two fellas what were on the steps are walking quick behind him, all three of them making a beeline for the hotel. I guess them other fellas stayed to guard poor Charlie.

No Sir, there's not much more to tell about that part of it. The constable looks things over and then walks up the edge of the stairs real careful, so as not to step in any of Bill's blood. He commences to talking with Mr. James, their heads all leaned in close together so no one can hear them. The constable, he nods his head at something Mr. James says, then straightens up and turns to face the rest of us gathered in a little knot. You men take that young fellow around back and wait with him in Mr. James' office, says he. Next thing I know, one of them fellas has me by the elbow, guiding me around to the back door of the hotel and inside. Lots of other things happened, of course, but I was inside waiting with them fellas. They never said a word, either one of them. And now here I am Sir, talking to you.

Quinn closed the laptop and slipped it into a messenger bag. He sat upright on the couch, sipping at the last of his coffee without noticing it had gone cold. What the hell was this story Susan had sent him? Was this Charlie Boyd some long lost skeleton from the family closet? Today may be a lot more interesting than you had planned, he thought. He checked his phone for the time, heaving himself upright from the couch. Okay, out into the big wet world we go.