

Blood Moon

TALES OF DA YOOPERNATURAL, VOLUME 1

PD Allen



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The Secret Life of Trees,
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Blood Moon

I

I am Connie Hillman.

I don't know how many times I told myself that since regaining my senses. It became my mantra.

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The doctor here at the hospital gave me pen and paper and encouraged me to write, in hope that I will work my way through my delusions and come to the truth about what happened in that dark and isolated wilderness on the western side of the Huron Mountains in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

They do not understand that I have been trying to tell them the truth all along. Only, the truth of what happened is so bizarre they do not believe it. It is difficult for me to understand it myself, much less recount it to others. But the elders on the L'Anse Indian Reservation, they would understand. And they could help me to understand, too.

Well, I am stuck here. Perhaps I can work this out on paper and get it out of my system. Then I might be able to come up with a story they will understand and accept to explain Phil's disappearance and the grisly deaths of the others.

I am Connie Hillman.

By avocation, I am a novelist. I am the author of several historical novels about the exploration of the Great Lakes Territory and the early contact between the Europeans and the Indians. My best known novel, **Northwest Passage**, made the New York Times Best Sellers List for a while. My books generate enough income so that I do not want for anything.

My needs are simple. I have a small cottage in the woods south of Duluth, Minnesota. In the summer I tend my garden and lay in firewood for the upcoming winter. In the fall, I can up most of the produce from my garden. Along with the chickens and eggs from my chicken coop, fish from the lakes and streams and the occasional bit of venison my friend Bob Murphy brings to me, it is enough to see me through. My visits to the grocery store in town are usually light, my purchases consisting of little more than flour and baking supplies, beer, soft drinks and something for my sweet tooth. Honestly, I tend to bring back larger packages from the city library than I do from the grocery store.

My life is quiet, and that is the way I like it. It leaves me plenty of time to write, take walks in the woods, and fish. I do have a few friends such as Bob Murphy and Doreen Simpson. Maybe once a month I go out to the bar and let my hair down. Every couple of weeks Bob will drop by and wind up spending the night. That is enough for me; my needs are simple.

I inherited my talent for storytelling from my great grandfather Peter Joseph Hillman, who was a country doctor in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. He spent much of his time driving his old Ford down the narrow dirt roads of the back country, in the days when they used to make house calls. He once treated John Dillinger's Indian girlfriend for stomach flu. He said Dillinger struck him as being a real gentleman; he paid Peter quite well for his services.

Even now, the fragrant smell of pipe tobacco, aromatic and sweet as cigars and cigarettes never were, can take me back to his parlor, where he sat in a padded easy chair smoking his pipe, while I sat on a stool at his feet, begging him for a story.

Great Grandfather did not own a television, and while I found that odd, I did not miss it when I spent time at his house. He did have a radio, but he complained that radio had gone to hell. When it was on, the radio was invariably tuned to the local public station, where he would listen to classical music, the news before dinner, and jazz on Friday evenings.

Great Grandfather did not read anymore, his eyes clouded over with cataracts. My Great Aunt Pruitt read to him a good deal, sitting close by in her rocking chair. Widowed before I was born, Pruitt lived with her father and took care of him. I remember her as a doting, heavy-set woman in flowery dresses, who would fill the house with the mouth-watering smells of home cooking. Many a morning, I woke to the aroma of coffee and fresh-baked cinnamon rolls. Next to reading aloud in the evening, my clearest

memories of her were in the kitchen, kneading bread, which she seemed to do every day.

While his eyes were not good enough to read anymore, Great Grandfather was an avid and formidable chess player. On summer days, he sat on the front porch with a chess board before him. Old timers, and many not so old, would stop by to jaw and play a game with him. When I was not playing with my cousins, I would sit on the porch and listen to them trade wit in their Yooper slang.

In the winter, he kept his chessboard set up in the parlor. Neighbors were always welcome to drop by for a game. Great Grandfather taught me how to play. I always had a feeling he went easy on me, drawing out the games and occasionally letting me win so I would not lose interest. If company showed up while we were playing, he would bring the game to an end within a couple moves.

In the evening, Great Aunt Pruitt read aloud in her quavering, delicate voice. She read the classics, Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, Louisa May Alcott. I found much of it boring, but I always enjoyed Dickens and Twain. Years later, when I read these books to myself, I discovered she had omitted the racier passages from Mark Twain.

When I began to fidget in my seat, Great Grandfather would tell her, “Let off, Pru. Your boring da child. She doesn’t wanna hear such dull ramblings, eh.”

Great Aunt Pruitt would shut her book in a huff, always careful to mark her place, and set it on the reading table by her rocker.

“Fine by me. I gotta make da cinnamon rolls so dey will rise by morning.” So saying, she would turn out the light on the reading table and toddle off to the kitchen.

This was my cue to move to the footstool at the base of Great Grandfather’s chair and beg for a story. Under my prompting, Great Grandfather offered wonderful tales about life in the northern wilderness a century past, tales full of adventure, bloodshed, and other sordid details. He told me stories of lumberjacks and miners, Indians and immigrants, stories of hunting accidents, shipwrecks, and the great Flu Epidemic of 1918. He had a few ghost stories to offer as well.

My favorite story, one I never tired of asking for nor he of telling, was perhaps the oddest of the bunch. It was really quite fantastical, though there was not a whole lot to it.

“Tell me da story,” I would beg.

“What story would dat be, eh?”

“Da story of Goliath.”

“I told you dat more’n a hunnerd times.”

“Please, Granpa.”

“Well, awright.” Great Grandfather gave in. I think one reason why he did not mind repeating this story was because I believed it, and I was the only one who ever did.

He puffed on his pipe for a moment. I sat in the semi-darkness waiting. As he spoke, the dim parlor fell away and I was with him in the Model-T, putting down a country road through thick forests of maple and oak interspersed with wet cospes of cedar and tamarack.

“It was a nice fall day in da year a 1924, I do believe.” Great Grandpa spoke in his thick Yooper accent, an accent I as an adult worked hard to erase. “It was one a dem refreshing fall days with a slight nip in da breeze. Sunny and clear. I was driving out to tend to an Ojibwa boy whose family lived in da L’Anse reservation on da west side a Huron Bay, Billy Martineau. He spent a good two months with his arm in a caste, and he was itching to get it off, eh.”

Great Grandfather paused to draw on his pipe, exhaling a cloud of aromatic tobacco. “I was tooling along in my old Ford, enjoying da colors. Ah, dat was a car, eh. It could hardly do over thirty tops, and you had to be careful cranking it up it didn’t kick back and yank your arm outta socket, you betcha. But dat car had personality, about like a horse. Not like dese fancy cars nowadays, no sir.”

Great Grandfather lost himself in his memories for a moment. “Nobody was in a hurry back den. Dere was nothing to hurry to. Back den we knew all da pleasure was getting dere.

“Anyway, I was tooling along, enjoying da fall colors, when I come to dis steep hill. I shifted into low gear and I was slowly chugging up dis hill. Da road was bad. It’d rained a couple days before and da waters washed down dat road, cutting ruts and building silt in a few spots. Dat old Ford was having a hard time, and I thought I might have to back down da hill and walk da rest a da way, eh. I had a good ten miles to go yet. On foot I wouldn’t a made it before dark. I’d a had to bed down dere for da night and walk back in da morning. And I’d a heap rather slept in my own bed with Millie next to me.

“Da Ford caught a rut and da tires began to spin. I knew it was over den, but it’d be a job backing down without crashing off da road. Dere was only a little ways left to da top a da hill. So’s I hopped out and started to push while steering with one hand. I almost got it outta dat rut, but I just couldn’t do it myself, eh. I was about to give up when da car lurched and started climbing. I’d a fallen flat on my face if I didn’t have a hold a da steering wheel. I rushed to keep up and

leapt into da driver's seat. I looked back behind me and dere was da biggest guy I ever did see.

"I knew some big lumberjacks, but dis fella towered above any a dem. He was a hairy gentleman, with thick hair on his arms and hands. At first I thought he was wearing a fur coat, eh. Whoever he was, he pushed me up da rest a dat hill with no trouble at all, eh.

"As I topped da hill, dis giant stepped round da side a da car, eh. He stepped right over da passenger door and sat aside me. I was crowded to one side to make room for him. Da carriage a dat Ford groaned and dipped down to his side. I'd picked up many a hitchhiker in my day, but never da like a dis fella.

"Wedged in close beside him, I wondered if he was even human, eh. He had a head big as a country ham, with a massive jaw and wide flared nostrils. He had an eyebrow ridge dat jutted out from his tall forehead. His ears were tufted and dey moved round like an animal, eh. And he had a barnyard smell — not unpleasant. Kind a like a wet horse.

"He was dressed in a leather jerkin dat come down halfway to his knees, and he carried a staff, must a been eight foot long. It was twined in copper filaments with some sort a writing etched into da wood. And da top had a large crystal set into it. I had a hard time taking my eye off dat crystal. It was like I got lost in it, eh."

At this point, it was a tradition for me to ask, "Weren't you scared a him, Granpa?"

"Naw; it takes all sorts to make dis world. For all his size and looks, dis stranger had a gentle air about him. His eyes held an intelligent warmth, and he wore a large smile full a good humor. After he helped me outta dat tight spot, da least I could do was give him a ride, eh."

Great Grandfather was an easy going and accepting person. It was his policy to treat his fellow men with open friendship, respect and courtesy. He turned this same amiable face to his new riding companion.

"Thank you for helping me up dat hill,' I says to him. 'Where you going dis day, my friend Goliath?"

"He didn't say nuttin. Just smiled at me all da larger. Dat was fine by me. I was never one to disturb da peace when I got nuttin to say, eh. We drove in silence, enjoying da day. We traveled like dat for about an hour. We was nearing da Martineau spread when Goliath stepped outta da car.

"Is dis where you want off den?" I says.

"Da giant nodded.

“Very well den,’ I tipped my hat to him. ‘It was a pleasure meeting you, my good friend Goliath.’

“Goliath disappeared into da woods and I went on my way.”

“Butcha saw him again, eh,” I piped up.

“Who’s telling dis story? Don’t get ahead a me.”

Great Grandfather pointed the stem of his pipe at me.

“Sorry.”

Great Grandfather took a drag on his pipe and found it had gone out. He tapped the ashes out of it into an ashtray built into the top of his old-fashioned smoking table. “Get my tobacco.”

I opened the door on the front of the smoking table and drew out a pouch of pipe tobacco. Great Grandfather filled his pipe bowl, tapped it down with his thumb and lit it with his cigarette lighter. This pipe ritual always fascinated me, and I watched quietly until he had the pipe going steady.

When he did not take up the story immediately, I prompted him. “So what happened dat night?”

Great Grandfather puffed on his pipe a bit before continuing. “I didn’t say anything about Goliath when I reached da Martineau’s place. Dey was in an uproar. Paul Martineau and his brudder Robert had just found some deer bones in da woods out back a dere spread. It was a fresh kill, but dere was nuttin left but da bones and some loose fur, eh.

“Da dogs tipped um off and da brudders grabbed dere guns and went out for a looksee, while dere granfadder an da women folk settled da dogs down. Dey saw something feeding on da carcass. Robert thought it was a wolf, but Paul said it was a man. Whatever it was, it frightened um. Paul fired a shot over its head and it was gone before dey could blink. I showed up just as dey was telling everybody about it.

“Me and Granfadder Yellow Moon and even Billy with da caste on his arm, we all went back with um for a look. Da bones was stripped clean, and some were scratched up with teeth marks. Whatever ate dat deer did a clean job. Dere wasn’t much blood spilled, an da only thing left beside da bones was a bit a fur, eh.

“We couldn’t see how it devoured da deer so quick. Couldn’t a been more than a minute or two from da time da dogs started barking till dey chased it off. We hunted round for tracks but we couldn’t find none.

“Back in da house, I cut da caste off Billy’s arm while we talked about what

happened. Turned out dis wasn't da first one. In da past week, half a dozen deer carcasses turned up like dat, stripped to da bone. Da Johansons half a mile down lost a dog da same way. Dat's why dey kept all da dogs in da house, and dey had dere horses shut up in da stables. Den dere was da story Carl Natewa told.

“Carl was walking home late at night, taking a short cut through da woods. He heard something growling behind him. When he turned to look, he saw a hairy giant standing maybe a hunnerd yards back, pointing some kind a spear at him. And racing toward him was da ugliest, most ferocious hunting dog he ever did see. Carl started running, eh. He left da pathway and headed straight for Gary Babineau's cabin. Carl ran like da devil was after him, and he made it to da cabin. Da next day, he and Gary couldn't find any sign a da hunter or his dog. Dey did find anudder deer, stripped to da bones.

“Paul and Robert argued some. Robert thought Carl's story proved it was some kind a dog or wolf dey saw out back. Paul said dis story didn't mean nuttin. Carl was walking home from da bar, drunk as a skunk. He could a seen anything.

“I kept my mouth shut, but da giant hunter had to be Goliath, eh. Except I couldn't see him chasing after Carl, and he didn't have any hunting dog when I met him. Yellow Moon settled da whole thing. ‘It was a Weendigo.’ Dat shut um all up.”

“What's a Weendigo?” I asked.

“It's a demon, sort a like a human. Weendigo are cannibals, so hungry dey'll eat anything. And da more dey eat da hungrier dey get, and da more dey grow. Da Ojibwa have a strong fear a da Weendigo, even if dey don't believe in um.

“I finished with Billy and got ready to leave. Night would set in soon and I wanted to get home to my Millie. Da Martineaus wanted me to stay da night. Dey said da roads weren't safe but I told um I'd be alright. Sally Martineau insisted I should have supper with um. She had a venison stew cooking and it smelled good.

“We were eating when we heard da horses crying out in da stable. Da dogs headed for da door, barking and growling. Paul and Robert grabbed dere guns. Dis time dey let da dogs loose, and dey was off for da stables, with us menfolk not far behind.

“Da brudders got to da stable first. Dey fired several shots as me and Yellow Moon loped up. In da twilight, I saw someone big race off into da woods. It had to be Goliath, eh.”

“Did dey shoot him?” I asked.

“Naw. But Robert swore he shot da hound. Da brudders were shaken. Dey

went pale from what dey saw. Even da dogs were scared, eh. Dey was whining and hanging round our feet.

“Da stable door was all scratched up, but it was still in one piece. Me and Yellow Moon calmed da horses inside. We shut da dogs in with um for protection, and went back to da house.

“Sally had coffee brewing. We drank it while da brudders told dere conflicting stories.

“Robert saw da giant hunter ramming da stable doors with a log while his beast scratched at um. Once again, Paul said it was a man, not a beast. And da man was trying to claw at da giant while da giant struck him with a large staff.

“Da brudders fired at um as da dogs charged in. Dere was a burst a light and den dey were gone. Dey just disappeared, leaving da men and da dogs blinded and dumbfounded.

“I said nuttin. Yellow Moon told um, ‘What you saw was a Weendigo and a Manitou. You’re lucky you survived.’ He said we should stay in da house till morning. I had to return home to my wife. Dey couldn’t force me to stay. Paul loaded up a revolver and made me take it. Da men escorted me out to da car. After I got it running, just before I left, Yellow Moon gave me a look and said, ‘Don’t be picking up hitchhikers.’”

“Did he know about Goliath?”

Great Grandfather shrugged and drew on his pipe. “I think so, but I don’t know. We never spoke about it again. Yellow Moon knew a lot more than he let on, eh.

“I no more than got outta sight a da house when who should appear but my hitchhiker. He stepped outta da woods and climbed in to sit beside me before I could even change gears.

“After what happened at da Martineau place, his company made me more than a little anxious. I thought about jumping outta da car, but he hadn’t done me any harm yet. And I just didn’t feel any animosity coming from him, eh. He gave me da impression of a soul at peace, if slightly amused by da world round him. I really felt safer with him next to me.

“We drove in silence and I studied him. His hands were big and powerful. Dey didn’t end in claws. His fingernails were carefully pared down. Dey were civilized hands, with fingers used for manipulating objects, not weapons to cut flesh. When he smiled at me, I noted dem big, rounded teeth. They were da teeth of an herbivore, not da fangs of a carnivore.

“Finally I spoke to him. ‘You didn’t devour dose deer, didja? And you weren’t chasing Carl Natewa, were ya?’ His friendly face looked down on me without answer. ‘You don’t have any hell hound, do ya?’ His smile was all da answer I needed.

“You weren’t after Carl Natewa, and you weren’t after Martineau’s horses. Dat thing was a Weendigo, and dat’s what you were after.”

“Da crystal on his staff glittered in da moonlight. When we came to dat hill, Goliath climbed outta da car while I shifted to low gear. He followed behind, giving da Ford a shove now and den to make sure it made it up da hill, eh. At da top, I put on da brake and waited for him to climb in, but he just stood by da side a da road looking at me. Den he headed off into da woods

“Dat was da last I saw a him. Dere were no more attacks. No more deer devoured right down to da bones.”

“Ya think Goliath got dat Weendigo?” I asked him.

He drew on his pipe a moment before answering. “Could be. I like to think he’s still out dere somewhere, keeping vigil. I feel safer at night.”

That was the last time Great Grandfather told me the story of his encounter with Goliath. Two months later he had a stroke. He died within a year. Great Aunt Pruitt sold the house and moved to Florida, where she spent her final years. I missed them both.

Over the years, Great Grandfather recounted the story of Goliath to a few others. All of them were amused, but they took it as a tall tale. I was the only one who believed him. As I grew up, I came to doubt it as well, and then I simply forgot.



About the Author

PD Allen lives in a cabin in a remote section of the Porcupine Mountains in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. His cabin is equipped with a hand pump to draw water. Electricity is provided by a bicycle hooked to a small generator.

He spends his days hunting, fishing and foraging. He travels around the UP a great deal, gathering folklore and exploring various mysteries. He also practices shamanism, and can sometimes be seen traveling through the wilderness, flying from treetop to treetop under the influence of Amanita Muscaria. Occasionally he assumes the form of a large red fox.

On clear nights when there is a full moon, locals say you can hear him playing his fiddle high up on the mountaintops. The Indians say he plays for the little Manitou, which come out to dance and caper.

At least once per week, he travels twenty-five miles on foot to the nearest cybercafé. There he updates his blog — **PD Allen: Stories, Rants, & Raves** <http://allenpd.blogspot.com/>.