

The Tavern

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

On a muggy summer night in August, I ended up at the south end of Paysleigh Creek all over again to investigate the gangs that routinely gathered in the Hogtown Abattoir. Unlike the vegan activists that sometimes would protest in the daytime against the industrial slaughter of pigs within the facility, I found myself in an alley bordering the slaughterhouse, cleverly concealed in a dark corner of an old garage to look into a tip involving human trafficking in the area. With my small camcorder, I point the lens through the high barb-wired fence and toward the gated entrance that would only open for vehicles when authorized by the guard occupying the special security booth at the east part of the facility's inner perimeter.

Soon, a large transport truck arrives at the gated entrance, honking three times to signal its arranged shipping arrival. Still pointing my camera at the gate, with limited range on the audio, I film it beginning to slide open. Seconds later, once fully ajar, the transport truck revs up its engine and drives through the twenty-five foot entry space. Following the truck as it drives by me, I catch the driver waving out of the far window at the security guard in the booth and notice the squealing snouts of dehydrated hogs through the small slit openings in the large rear cargo carrier. Soon, the sliding gate closes again as the truck lumbers into the shipping and receiving area and spins around to dock itself in one of the large cargo bays. After filming the truck coming to stasis, I hear a distant shud—as the rear door of the truck cargo opens—then a trampling of hooves as the squealing pigs are ushered into the meat packing facility to be converted into bacon and ham. Staying in my secret perch, a few hours of inactivity go by as the lot grows dark and then almost pitch black. Suddenly, I tense up as the booth security guard leaves his post and lights up a cigarette less than fifteen feet away from me. Staying as quiet as possible with my camcorder off, I sneak a peak in his direction, noticing the slight light of the ember of his cigarette. After about five or ten minutes, I spot a light from a smaller motor vehicle approaching the same gate to the slaughterhouse. I then listen as the driver shouts out of his window.

“Dougie! What’s up buddy? Back on duty tonight I see!”

“Yeah, had to be here for the big hog shipment earlier tonight. Just guarding the lot cuz apparently word got out we’ve been sneaking real peeps through this here gate.”

Got nuthin like that tonight, Dougie! However the plan is to bring a large shipment of the two-legged ones next week and hide them in with the hogs! That is if the coup goes through as planned.”

“Heard they’re meeting up at the Klaxton that night ahead of time to rally the troops!”

“Yeah, I’ll be there! Apparently the Colonel is showing up!”

After that brief conversation, the guard heads back into his booth and presses the button to let the small car into the confines of the slaughterhouse. As the red-coloured vehicle drives by, I point the camcorder discretely through the fence again and capture the first four letters and digits on its rear license plate. After noting down 604W__ on a small notepad along with the name "Klaxton", I slip out of my hiding perch trying to stay in the nightly shadows and leave the alleyway to find my vehicle parked a few minutes walking distance away.

Three nights later, I station my small sedan on Power Drive, a side street intersecting with Main St. and the seedy Klaxton Tavern. Built in a Romanesque Revival style of the late 19th century, the former inn was bought some thirty years back by a local drug baron who later changed the lot into a tavern and gathering place for local white nationalist gangs and hoodlums. Parked at the north end of Power Drive, I could still see the entrance to the Klaxton with my trusty pair of birding binoculars. Taking a quick peak through the lenses and fine focusing to a clearer image, I quickly take note of an approaching red-coloured vehicle which promptly pulls up to the curb, some twenty feet from the tavern's big blue doors. I then notice the front row passenger door open and see a burly man with a shaved head exit the vehicle, pausing to do a Nazi salute to the night spot's bouncer. After the vehicle's door closes, the car does a u-turn in my direction, presumably to park somewhere nearby. As the car drives along Main St., I manage to see the license plate 604WNT confirming that it is the same vehicle from three nights ago. Soon, the red-coloured car turns onto Power Dr., causing me to duck a little in my car seat to avoid being visible in my observation post by its bright headlights. As the car speeds south past my location, I quickly message a duo of undercover agents already in the tavern who were also awaiting the arrival of the mysterious driver from the recent nightly abattoir footage. About a minute after sending the message, I duck again and pull a blanket over my head as the driver of the red-coloured vehicle walks to Main Street and toward the tavern. Once he is some 50 or more feet away, I pop my head back out from the blanket and take another look through the binoculars as he approaches the guarded entrance. Unable to do much but wait for a signal, I put my trust in the 'Hate Crime Unit' who now solely have eyes and ears in the mysterious 'Klavern'.

"Dougie! Hey bud! Glad you could make it tonight! Someone else on duty tonight I guess!"

"Hey Russell! We're making great strides in Jackson City! Tonight could be the night we take over this town for good!"

Soon, the man who was in the passenger seat of the red car approaches the two men with a pitcher of beer in one hand and a large glass in the other.

"Dougie Doug! Been a while man! Buddy! You still smell like the slaughterhouse! You came to see the Colonel tonight too I suppose?"

“Hey Petey! The Colonel should be getting here any minute. I wouldn’t miss this night for the world! Check out my tattoo right here on my right arm.” The three hundred pound man says rolling up his sleeve to reveal a Nazi swastika with the words “Legion” inscribed below it.

“Nice! Hey guys, the Colonel’s here!” Russell hollers from the bar area.

Soon, the three men and all of those present, turn toward the front entrance, gesturing their allegiance with an outstretched and angled right arm toward the senior Klan militiaman.

“Hey there boys! Stand down! We’re gonna teach those sand jockeys a lesson tonight! All I gotta do is make one quick call, and our coup is gonna be put into high gear on this very summer night, when ‘Operation Hogtown Assassin’ is initiated!”

“Let’s drink to our Colonel!” Dougie hollers raises a large glass mug in the air that spills some of its foamy contents on the sticky floor.

“TO THE COLONEL!” The crowd hollers, drinks raised high above their shoulders.

Raising their glasses like the others, agents Fulnam and Bradstock try to blend in near the bar, gesturing as though mildly intoxicated, while trying to appear filled with fidelity and devotion to the ultra-right wing cause. Soon, Fulnam leaves his partner to go toward the restroom and to relay information on the nightly rally.

“Looks like our Colonel is the new man at the top of the coup pyramid so far. He’s giving a signal tonight from inside the Klaxton to initiate a top-secret operation. Looks like we’re gonna need to send back-up to Hogtown quite soon.” Fulnam says with a quiet tone of voice barely carrying over the loud shouts of the tavern floor.

“Copy. I’ll send word out to check all vehicles heading into the abattoir lot tonight.” I say to the lead agent of the ‘Hate Crime Unit’.

“Gotta get back to Bradstock and see when the signal goes through. Good luck on the outside.”

Back on the tavern floor, the large throng of Klansmen loyal to their cause begin to sing a popular military song with the words “We Are Marching Onward” as its rowdy chorus. At the conclusion of the drunken ballad, the Colonel raises his glass in the air and says: “In another minute, I’m going to give the green light to ‘Hogtown Assassin’. Are ya’ll with me?”

“We are with you now and to the end, der Oberst!” The crowd shouts back together.

At this moment, Bradstock and Fulnam leave the floor and both make calls for back-up by the restrooms. While Agent Fulnam signals that the abattoir operation is now in motion, Bradstock makes another call to a police precinct in the Klaxton Tavern’s jurisdiction.

“Looks like we may have to arrest the Colonel tonight in front of all of his faithful.” Bradstock says on a special police line to another agent in the ‘Hate Crime Unit’.

“We discussed that we can’t get him for another trivial case of public mischief.”

“I know we’re running low on options, but we’ve got to check his phone... He’s been all over the map this week with conspiracy. We’re better off safe than sorry.” Bradstock replies to the skeptical cop on the other line.

“Ok, Roger that. We’ll send a few cars over for a raid and hope the crowd doesn’t retaliate like last time.”

“Much appreciated. We’ll be around.” Agent Bradstock says before ending the call.

Five minutes later, a sound of police sirens can be heard approaching along Main Street. Soon the bouncer rushes indoors calling on the crowds to disperse. A few seconds later, the police breach the doors and rush in for another raid.

“You’re all yella! What the hell are you doin’ bustin’ up our party like this?” The Colonel shrieks as police surround him at the center of the tavern’s floor.

“Colonel Billy Ray Vorn, you’re under arrest for a plot to overthrow Jackson City! Anything you say or do may be used against you in the court of law!” A tall built officer with a dark complexion shouts twisting the Colonel’s arm to shackle him with shiny nickel-plated handcuffs.

“You’re a threat to the purity of our legion! You no good son of a coon lover!” The Colonel hollers in defiance of the police take-down.

Soon, the crowds disperse with white nationalists fleeing through the doors of the Klaxton, some still wearing their Nazi arm bands in honour of the Führer and even a few with their partially hidden ceremonial white hoods stuffed into their jean and pant pockets. After leading the Colonel outdoors into the sweltering heat of the August summer night, a group of three officers put him in the back of a police vehicle and drive him away for a criminal conspiracy charge at their neighbouring precinct.

After exiting the tavern, Fulnam and Bradstock go back to their undercover vehicle and follow up on the unfolding operation at the Hogtown Abattoir.

“After I gave the signal, I headed straight over. I still consider this my case. I need more follow-up on my earlier trafficking leads.”

“We got the Colonel tonight. That phone will put him away for a while if we can intercept something tonight at Hogtown with your unit.” Fulnam says to me proudly.

“Gotta go now guys. There’s a truck coming in now.” I say promptly ending the call.

Soon, from the same lookout post as a few nights prior, I hear the sound of a large transport truck stopping at the gate to the slaughterhouse’s inner lot. Soon a loud

sound of a horn pierces the quiet din of the industrial fortification by the old creek bed. The gate then begins to slide open.

“Gates opening now. Unit on ready for inspection and take-down.” I say in my police radio.

Soon, the gate’s rickety sound ceases as it fully slides open and the transport truck starts driving into the lot toward the shipping and receiving bay. As it drives past the security booth, six human trafficking division agents hustle along both of its sides and quickly halt its progress.

“Stop right there! This is Jackson City Police! We’re going to investigate this shipment right away!” An officer says standing in front the transport truck flashing his badge toward the elevated truck driver as two other officers rush into the security booth to arrest the guard on duty.

Hustling out of the same alley-way and toward the gated opening, I stop at the rear roll-up doors, waiting for my crew to escort the driver to the back.

“Open the doors sir! We want to see what you’re delivering here!” I shout to the driver.

Nervous and sweating profusely, the driver unlocks the hinge and puts adequate pressure to cause the doors to roll up slowly. With the doors fully rolled open, I shine a flashlight into the back.

“Help me get out of here!” The voice of a young child says faintly.

“Get us all out of here! It’s hard to breathe back here in this heat. We need some water to drink!” Another more adult voice says.

Using my flashlight and moving it toward the source of the voices in the rear cargo area, my light catches the lit up irises of a group of at least twenty-five people hidden in the far end of the transport truck’s livestock trailer. Motioning for them to exit out of the back, I notice that the women are wearing traditional hijabs. Soon, the driver overseeing the shipment of human cargo and the security on duty in the lot are shackled and led away by my human trafficking unit. Another call is made to send a police bus to pick up the Muslim hostages and drive them to a police location nearby.

“Looks like that wraps up our investigation for the night.” I say over the phone to Agent Fulnam.

“We’re going to process the Colonel for the call he made from the Klaxton tonight. Then we’re trying to crack down on stifling whatever else was planned with this coup attempt.” Agent Fulnam says to me before signing out.

The following afternoon, large crowds gather in front of City Hall to protest against a sudden rise in cases of Islamophobia in Jackson City. While protest attendees are quite agitated but mostly peaceful, police slowly start to disperse crowds occupying the street to get traffic on one of the city’s main arteries flowing again.

Although the conspiracy case at the Klaxton and the human trafficking at the Hogtown Abattoir the night before enter the nearby municipal court system that same afternoon, no news outlets broadcast updates on the coup attempt in its early stages, with media networks focusing instead on the statements of Muslim community members voicing their immediate concerns over rising hate crime cases in their city.

The End ☹