A silhouette of a scythe is positioned on the right side of the image, with its curved blade extending upwards and across the top. The background is a cloudy sky with a bright, glowing sun or moon in the center, creating a lens flare effect. The overall color palette is muted, with greys, whites, and blacks, accented by the red text.

G.A. MILLER

REBIRTH

REBIRTH

G.A. Miller

Dark Imagination Publications

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Publisher's Note: This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are a product of the author's imagination. Locales and public names are sometimes used for atmospheric purposes. Any resemblance to actual people, living or dead, or to businesses, companies, events, institutions, or locales is completely coincidental.

No demons were harmed during the production of this book.

Rebirth/G.A. Miller -- 1st ed.

For Anita and Willie

"The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated."

—MARK TWAIN

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BLACKOUT

With the power out again (for who knows *how* long this time?), my small house was stifling in the oppressive July heat and sleep was just not happening.

I gave up tossing and turning in the sodden bed, pulled on shorts and a t-shirt, and decided to take a walk, hoping a stray breeze might offer some relief. I saw candles through the windows of one or two fellow insomniacs, but most homes simply blended into the inky darkness of the moonless night.

I was surprised at how deathly quiet it was, not even the sound of a stray car braving the streets with no working signals on this night. The only sound was that of my sneakers on the road finding stray gravel to crunch now and then.

I'd planned to just take a walk around the block, but found myself heading to the park nearby, to maybe sit by the pond and hope for just a little moving air.

Soon after I entered the park to chase that elusive breeze, I felt goose flesh rise on my arms and paused. I couldn't see or

hear anything, but my adrenaline was racing, and that primal *fight or flight* instinct was coming on strong. The feeling came out of nowhere, having been tired, bored and irritable only moments before.

I didn't know *how*, but I knew I wasn't alone.

I squinted uselessly into the darkness, seeing nothing but black trees blending into the black sky above, no moon or even stars to help... and then I became aware of a deep rumbling sound nearby.

Something was breathing, and by the depth of the sound, something big.

My mind was racing now, debating which way to go, unable to see where the source of that noise might be. Turning around, I decided to retrace my steps toward the park entrance, my senses straining to pick up something, *anything* to determine what else was here and how close it was.

That rumbling was just a bit louder.

And closer.

I scanned the path around me, trying to locate a stick, a rock, *anything* I could use as a weapon if I needed one, but it was just too dark.

Louder.

Closer.

I debated running, but dismissed that idea immediately. With my bum knee, I'd be on my ass in no time flat, easy prey for whatever the hell was making that sound. I didn't even have

a pocketknife in these shorts, and had left my phone home, having turned it off to conserve battery for an emergency.

Like this one.

“*Fuck!*”, I whispered to myself. How could I have left the house with *nothing* in hand in case something happened? I *always* drop a knife into my pocket when I go out, along with my wallet and keys. Well, always except *this* time.

I shivered then, and not from cold. My body was coated with a fine sheen of sweat and my blood pressure was hammering in my chest. My hands balled into fists, as I silently promised myself if I was going down, then I was going down swinging.

Just then, a set of headlights blinded me momentarily, as a car swung into the park entrance. I heard a loud rustling nearby, as though something large was pushing itself through the hedges. As the car got closer, I saw it was a police cruiser, and nearly sobbed with relief. I held up my hand and the cruiser rolled to a stop next to me.

“Evening sir. Everything all right?”

“It is now, Officer. I was taking a walk and thought I heard something behind me, just before you came into the park.”

“*Something* behind you? You mean someone?”

“I’m not sure, but it sounded big, who or whatever it was.”

“Did you see anything?”

“No, it’s too damn dark. I couldn’t make anything out.”

“Do you live near here?”

“Oh yes, I’m just a couple blocks west of here. I couldn’t sleep in this heat.”

“Oh, I bet. If you like, I can give you a lift back home?”

“That would be great, thank you!”

“Hop on in the back. I’ll let you out once we get to your house.”

I was confused at first, then it dawned on me... they don’t want the *usual* passengers in the back of a cruiser to be able to operate the doors. I got in, buckled myself and gave him the address. He finished his slow circuit through the park, then turned back toward the entrance as we talked about the unfortunate timing of a blackout during this heat wave. The air conditioning in the cruiser was a therapeutic blessing for me, calming and cooling me at the same time. I looked all around as he drove the route, but the park was even darker in contrast to the dashboard lights in the cruiser and the bright headlights cutting through the gloom ahead. The only thing visible was the road ahead, illuminated by those headlights.

I began to wonder if, being overtired, my imagination hadn’t gone into overdrive, creating the whole sensation out of nothing.

Moments later, we pulled in front of my house, and he opened the door to let me out. I thanked him profusely for being there and walked through the driveway to the back door, which I’d left unlocked as I hadn’t brought my keys with me.

I entered the kitchen and turned to face the door as I pushed it closed and turned the deadbolt handle to lock it. I exhaled deeply and stepped back from the door, turning around so I could make my way to the bathroom in the dark house... and stopped hard when I bumped into something very solid, very large in the middle of my kitchen.

“Fridge? But, how the hell... oh *shit*.”

It wasn't my refrigerator. It was something else.

Oh, and it was breathing *very* deeply.

CHAPTER TWO

FUNNYMAN

When Barry Martin walked out onto the small stage, he was surprised at how bright the spotlights were. The patrons seated at the tables were no more than silhouettes, but at least there seemed to be a small crowd on hand.

“Hey everyone, thanks for coming out to the Asylum tonight. I’m Barry Martin, and it’s my first time here. Whadda ya say, let’s have some *fun*!

As you can see, I’m *old*. I get reminded of that every day, when I watch TV. They play these non-stop commercials for Medicare Advantage insurance all day long, using spokesmen like Joe Namath, George Foreman, and Jimmie JJ Walker.

You know why? Because we *recognize* them. Because we’re *old*! And if *those* don’t get you feeling old enough, along come the ones for final expense insurance because they just *know* we have one foot in the grave already, don’t we?

OK *fine*, I’m old. When I was growing up, we didn’t have these *internet influencers* and all that crap. No, we had

fads. Remember those? The Pet Rock? Oh, another big one was the Mood Ring, the ring that changes color based on your mood.

I didn't need a mood ring. I have a mood *face*. We're constantly hearing people say that 60 is the new 40, but the cop that pulled me over on the way here did *not* seem to share that opinion."

Nothing, he thought. *Better kick it up some, buddy, or this'll be your last gig here.*

"Now that I've lived through a pandemic, I understand why all those Italian Renaissance paintings were of fat, naked people lying on couches all day. Scary stuff, right? If I would have had a choice when my turn arrived, I would have chosen the Pfizer vaccine. Remember, Pfizer is the company that makes Viagra. If they can raise the dead, they can certainly cure the living!

It really made me appreciate my friends, though. Good friends are harder to find than toilet paper in 2020. I even tried some of this new age stuff during that time. My wife does Yoga, so I joined her for a session. I only mastered one pose, though. The Downward Facing Chalk Outline, it was called.

I got in touch with my inner self last week, and I didn't like *that* at all. In fact, I asked my wife to *never* buy single ply toilet paper again! I even went to see a chiropractor the other day. Now, I stand corrected."

Barry was starting to sweat now, and *not* from the lights. Not even titters of polite laughter from the room.

“Does anybody remember the movie, ‘Field of Dreams’? It’s the one where Kevin Costner played a farmer who cut down all his crops and built a baseball field because he heard a voice telling him, *‘If you build it, they will come’*. I wonder if the guy that invented the vibrator heard the same voice?

Speaking of such, I will *never* understand women. A woman will profess to fear and hate all things related to horror, yet her favorite position is *‘Zombie Victim’*, where she lies back and gets eaten. Ah yes, good old 69, a.k.a. the meal for two with the *very* hairy view.

Talking about women, I believe all the women who’ve had breast implants should create their own political party. Instead of Democratic or Republican, they can call it the Tupperware Party.”

Jesus, I’m working harder than an ugly stripper up here, and nothing, he thought.

“You have to be careful about what you say these days. For example, If I call a dog a Fur Baby, everyone thinks it’s cute, but if I call a child a Skin Baby, they think I’m depraved and hideous.

And all this social media stuff is an absolute friggin’ nightmare. Hoping to avoid conflict when browsing social media is like jogging barefoot in a dog park and hoping you don’t step in shit. Me, I’d rather just visit a local bar and talk to people. The regulars at my neighborhood bar were so happy to see

me return the other night that they invited me to be the goalie on their dart team!

I've had people ask me if alcoholics run in my family, but I tell them nah, they just stumble around and break shit, that's all. I used to enjoy when they'd all get lit and try singing nursery rhymes. *'Old MacDonald had Tourette's, E, I, E, I, fuck!'* “

I give up, he thought. *Let's wrap this up and move on.*

“Hey folks, I'm Barry Martin, and thanks for coming out. If you enjoyed the show, visit my web site at BM dot funny, and no, that's *not* the one about enjoying your bowel movements.

I'll leave you with a thought from the great George Carlin, who told us that there might not be an *I* in team, but there certainly is in Individuality, Independence, and Integrity, so always be yourselves and...”

Barry stopped, his mouth agape. The spotlights had dimmed, and the houselights had come up, and now that he could see the audience, he saw they were all *corpses*, in varying states of decomposition and rot.

“What the fuck...”, he whispered, hearing footsteps behind him. He turned to face a large man, dressed in a tuxedo smiling broadly.

“Nice set, Barry. I'm sure all your guests enjoyed it.”

“Guests? What the *fuck* are you talking about, and who the hell are you?”

“Don’t you recognize them, Barry? Look, your former wives are all together at that table right up front, there’s the group you embezzled from when you worked for that brokerage, and...”

“But...*how*? I mean, they’re all...”

“Dead? Well, of course they are. Many by their own hand, courtesy of having known you, Barry. And now, they’ve all come to witness your final performance and welcome you to...”

“*Final*? No, no, I have a gig upstate next week.”

“You *had* that gig, Barry. Not any longer, I fear. Do you remember that joke you used to tell about how someone would tell you to go to hell, and you said you couldn’t because the devil had a restraining order against you?”

“Y-yeah, sure, what about it?”

“Congratulations, Barry. I’ve *lifted* my order, and we’re *all* here to welcome you to Hell, a spot you’ve worked *very* hard to earn.”

“*NOOOOOOOO!!!!*”

CHAPTER THREE

DOROTHY PARKER KNEW

Dorothy Parker knew.

Between the carefully edited news stories on the TV and the nervous conversations in the church hall during Friday night bingo filled with all the lurid details left *out* of the news broadcasts, she knew.

“The Rhode Island Ripper”, as he’d been dubbed by the press, wasn’t the first serial killer to make headlines in their area, but he was far and away the most sadistic of the lot. He followed in the footsteps of the original Ripper, eviscerating his victims after slashing their throats and taking an internal organ away with him as a heinous souvenir of the crime. The police, despite all the technology at their disposal, had no clue as to his identity... but Dorothy did.

A mother knows her child, after all. Her dear husband Tom tried his best to keep it from her, but she remembered the stories about what was happening to so many small animals in the neighborhood, and the strained glances between father and

son at the dinner table. The angry conversations in the basement, Roger's denials sounding less than genuine, as though he was lying, holding back when Tom questioned him.

She'd need to do some shopping first, and then write a letter to her daughter Sarah to explain it all, and then just wait for her son Roger to come back home for his annual Christmas visit.

She'd make his favorite meal, a meat loaf with mashed potato and chopped spinach, along with her special gravy. Same as he'd loved all his life, but with *one* small difference in the gravy.

When they first bought the house all those years ago, they found it had a vermin problem. Her husband bought some strychnine and set out traps, and the problem was quickly solved. As the children came along, he'd stowed the remaining poison in the rafters of the basement, a place curious kids wouldn't tend to explore.

But he'd told his wife where it was, and it had remained there for decades now, the vermin having wisely chosen to nest elsewhere. She'd need the stepladder to get to it, of course, but that could wait for now.

She went to see Frank the butcher first, for the mixture of ground beef, pork and veal she needed to make the loaf, and then to the grocery for the potatoes and spinach, along with a few other items.

Roger planned to arrive early on Christmas Eve, Sarah saying she'd be delayed, but would be there on Christmas day, sometime in the afternoon, so Dorothy's special meal would be their Christmas Eve dinner.

She shifted her weight in the hard plastic seat on the bus, enduring the pain in silence. The same aggressive cancer that claimed her husband Tom had settled into her now, and she didn't need a doctor to tell her she didn't have much time left.

She finally arrived home and put her groceries away. She sat at the small kitchen table, a pad of paper in front of her, and wrote a long letter to her daughter Sarah.

She apologized for leaving Sarah with the unpleasant chore of cleaning up after her, and the undue attention it would surely generate, but explained her own condition and her decision to use the time she had to make things right and put an end to the killings. As she signed the letter, a single tear fell from her cheek, blurring the ink at the end of her name.

She folded the sheets, inserted them into a plain envelope, and licked the flap to seal it. She wrote a single word on the front, her daughter's name, and placed it on the bureau in her daughter's bedroom. All that remained to do was to carefully fetch the box from the basement and wait for tomorrow.

Dorothy went down the stairs to the basement and picked up the stepladder, leaning against her husband's old work bench, as it always did. She took it to the dark corner in the back, next to the bulkhead, the one where the labyrinth of pipes made their

way up through the walls to deliver the hot water to the radiators. She set the ladder in the tight spot beside the oil tank and climbed up, stretching to reach into the rafters.

Her fingertips brushed against the dusty box, causing her to sneeze and nearly lose her balance. She closed her hand around the box and slid it carefully out and stepped back down to the safety of the dirt floor.

Tom had closed it well, the deadly contents within untouched by the years of storage. She nodded and took it upstairs, leaving the stepladder next to the tank.

After tomorrow, it wouldn't matter. None of it would.

She set the box on her small kitchen table and looked around, satisfied.

Everything was ready. All she had to do now was get through one more night of pain before waking early to begin her preparation. She decided to sit in her living room and put on the television, knowing she'd doze off and on in the chair, which had proven to be less painful than trying to sleep in her bed.

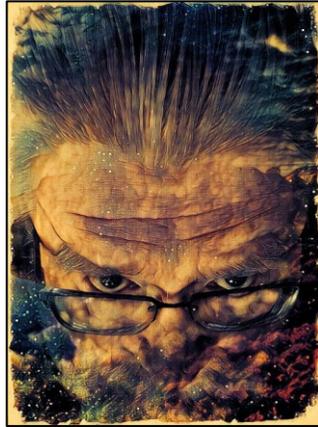
The sunrise didn't look like a greeting card at all once the morning arrived... it was more of a gradient change from nearly black to a slate gray. That sky, coupled with the chorus of aches in her joints, let Dorothy know the weather was going to change soon. Snow, by the feel of it.

She lowered the recliner and hobbled into the kitchen to put up a pot of coffee, then stood under a hot shower while the coffeemaker filled the air with its aroma, letting the hot water

lessen her aches a little bit. She dried off, put on her robe and paused for a moment in her living room to turn up the thermostat on her way to get dressed.

On this, of all days, she wasn't worried about conserving the heating oil in her basement.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



The rumors surrounding the disappearance and probable demise of G.A. Miller were grossly exaggerated, and subsequently false.