

Section XXIV: Trumbull's Corner

BE IT specified herein with regards to the area within the Town of Odsburg called and known as Trumbull's Corner, defined and delineated as by the boundaries of Glover Meadow to the North, Wear Brook to the South, Hume's field to the East, and Greene's fir stand to the West that in these environs so-called paranormal, supernatural, occult, unusual, or atypical occurrences and happenings have been witnessed and attested to at various times and by various Town residents.

THEREFORE, let all Town residents be so informed, for the good of all Town residents, and be advised to approach the aforesaid location with all due caution and, if and insofar as it be at all reasonably practicable, to avoid attending upon Trumbull's Corner altogether.

FURTHERMORE, let all Town residents be advised that if they are to attend upon Trumbull's Corner, they shall be wise to avoid bringing children, horses, and dogs to said place, as these are known to be most sensitive to such occurrences, energies, emanations, and happenings that have been known to have occurred at the aforesaid location.

Section XXV: On the Disposal of Refuse

Dear Diary

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- Comment [Office9]: This word wasn't really used before the early 20th century. I would recommend cutting it, as you have a great list of synonyms. Also, I took out the hyphens because, though I realize they are used for effect, they wouldn't have been treated with a hyphen in 1854, being a commonly used word for quite some time before then.
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- Comment [Office10]: This reads repetitively within the sentence. Consider cutting it.
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- Comment [Office11]: Be specific as to what the townspeople might be attending, give a few examples.
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- Comment [Office12]: I see that you're trying to make the diary entries sound older or have the clear voice of a settler by leaving out words. And this is okay to a certain extent, but, writing is usually more formal than actual speech during this time. I would recommend filling these entries in a little bit more. Mrs. Ods clearly spent time with her journal, and anyone who has one has long ... [1]
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The following are extracts from diary entries believed to have been written by Mary Elizabeth

Ods, the wife of town co-founder Josiah Ods. From what I can gather, Mrs. Ods's disappearance after her husband's death was a topic of speculation among her contemporaries, and evidently still interests local history buffs.

One theory is that Mrs. Ods traveled abroad, studying various spiritual traditions, only to return years later under the name Alva Moonstone (when discussing the town tendency toward odd and unexplained happenings, residents cite Ms. Moonstone's presence and ascendance as another factor). Mrs. Ods would have been in her sixties or seventies, thereabout by the time of Ms. Moonstone's arrival, which would generally agree with the historical accounts—not that this is proof of any kind, but the timeline would fit the narrative.

The original documents are among the papers of the Odsburg Shadow Historical Society, housed in a small, sublet storage area in the third-floor attic of the public library building directly above the offices of the official Odsburg Historical Society (which I was told placed the highest value on verifiability—to the exclusion, it seems, of highly interesting materials such as the ones that follow—but declined to comment on these documents). Their provenance is admittedly unverified, but to my eye they looked authentic.

I was fortunate enough to view and hand copy the documents below after I became fast friends with the self-appointed chief historian of the OSHS, Martha Robbins, thanks to what else—a shared affinity for collecting and preserving otherwise-shunned ephemera and historical castoffs.

While not strictly on topic, I feel it bears mentioning that Ms. Robbins made the best banana-walnut-chocolate chip muffins I have ever had the privilege of sampling.

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Comment [Office14]: Another factor in what? This is a great spot to elaborate, even slightly.

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** Reprint—Historical Primary Document **

15th August 1855

Not long in this place, new home bearing our name, Josiah has grown strange. Eyes foggy, half-blank, his mind wanders Lord knows where. It's not like him. But, it does no good to dwell upon it, there's too much work to do. And with no help, all this knitting, darning, washing, cooking, tending our tiny flock, won't get done if I do,

What little fortune we had is now gone. What choice do I have? What choice but bear up, and do the work of two? My arms are strong from chopping wood, carrying water, tilling this patch of borrowed—stolen—earth. I don't mind work, but I worry. I worry the water has put some sickness in him. Something in the foodstuff, some forage he found, berries or bark. I can't help but worry for when, whether he will pass.

21st August 1855

Last night I awoke to find an empty bed beside me and the door, ajar. I peeped out to find Josiah full dressed, muttering in a tongue I could not recognize with leaves in his hair, soil beneath his fingernails. He's been outdoors, but doing what I cannot guess. Not planting nor gathering, surely. He neither saw nor heard me and I, took myself back to bed, but could not rest my mind.

Forgive my better nature overtaken by this bitter tone. Lord knows I came along here willingly, true enough, and know that whatsoever I get here I shall own. But I find that I cannot settle what to feel: anger, fear, or sorrow. I waited for first light to go stoke fire and put the kettle to boil.

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Comment [Office19]: Did he ever come back? (... [6]

29th September 1855

~~Josiah's condition has grown~~ much worse. ~~He moans~~ in an otherworldly way. ~~He sounds~~ like neither animal nor man, but some spectral thing. ~~He trembles as if with~~ fever, but ~~is~~ cool to the touch. His brother stopped coming 'round. That ~~so-called~~ doctor Bemis ~~is~~ good for nothing. Says only, "Give him rest." Says his spirit must be tired. ~~But he's no~~ longer ~~eating and his ribs~~ show through his vest. Dark half-moons have bloomed beneath his eyes.

~~I can't~~ hardly sleep. ~~Likens to~~ caring for a newborn babe, ~~except~~ I cannot lift or soothe him, nor ~~can I~~ wrap or rock or nurse him, to cure whatever ails him. Suppose it wrong to say, but ~~I~~ thank the Lord he did not see ~~fit~~ to bless us with a brood. ~~Each time I bled~~, I cried ~~and~~ surely felt bereaved, but now can only feel relief. Not for lack of love, but ~~I~~ could not care for children and my husband now. They say more hands for working, but I never saw it so. And Lord forbid those never-children showed what ~~ill's~~ in ~~Josiah's~~ blood.

22nd October 1855

He brought me here, then left me. The words repeat unbidden. I tell myself he did not choose to leave me, but ~~I can't help but~~ still curse him for it.

He sets there on a stump all day, makes nary a sound, ~~facing~~ the wood, but would wager my life, whatsoever it be worth, he sees not a thing—~~not trees nor sky nor ground nor me~~. I bring him food, as always—~~bacon, bread~~—he stares right ~~through~~. Lord help me, I had hoped to find some peace here in this place, now we were settled. |

12th November 1855

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Comment [Office20]: Elaborate on this. Something like, "each time I bled with loss," would give a clear understanding of what she means without spelling it out fully.

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Comment [Office21]: Right through what? The food or her?

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Comment [Office22]: This ending reads unfinished. This is a great place to elaborate even with one more sentence on how those expectations were shattered or a vague hint of her feelings on her loneliness or emptiness.

His eyes. I cannot find the words to say what I mean precisely. His eyes still have those dark crescent moons beneath them, and gaze straight through aught earthly set before him, but he seems to so clearly see something. Thought I saw him reach out with an arm, perhaps to point a finger at it, to stroke it with his palm. Whatever it is, it seems I shall never know.

1st December 1855

Josiah has passed, gone to the Hereafter, whatsoever it may be. I suppose I ought to feel more grief, except he left me long ago. I have already mourned. He never did return to himself, not properly.

Near the end he looked up at me, square in my eyes, first time since I can remember, and said, "Don't we all, Don't we all." I know not what it meant, nor if he said all that he meant to, or was leading to something more.

1st January 1856

I cannot say what I ought do now. Jedediah says they could take me in, him and Delia, that dour wife of his and their roiling crop of children. I could stay, grow old, a too-young widow graying in their kitchen, an extra pair of hands to mend their socks. But I feel a pull to go off on my own.

I know not where, nor what for, but I believe I shall go. I was only ever squatting here, at best. I'm no fool, I can tell the truth. I'll wait for spring thaw. Sooner would be foolishness, I know. While I miss Josiah, but need not join him straightaway. When the weather turns mild, I shall pack my few things quietly and leave. Nothing at all holds me here.

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Seeking Advice and/or Assistance re: Mountain Lions

What follows is a personal story transcribed from a field recording. The speaker was an addled-looking man in his mid-thirties with matted hair, dark circles under his eyes and several days' chin stubble whom I met riding the 9 Trumbull County Transit bus to the GroceryPlus supermarket. He did not give his name, though I asked for it repeatedly. He seemed distracted, fretting constantly with the frayed cuff of his sweatshirt sleeve and tapping the toes of his sneakers erratically on the rubberized floor.

This also seems an opportune place to mention, regarding the various theories of town strangeness, that there are those, perhaps more practically minded, who by way of explanation cite Odsburg's proximity to a state-run psychiatric hospital a few miles away in the town of Klester. I cannot say that I favor one explanation over another—the supernatural and the psychological have always struck me as separate branches of the same tree—nor am I suggesting that the gentleman who gave the account below was a psychiatric patient. On the contrary, he seemed to be a rational, level-headed person in what I would describe, at risk of understatement, as a challenging situation.

Comment [Office25]: Why is the narrator not used in this section? I'm just curious as it is clear that the narrator might be saying something in between the space that divides the paragraph. Honestly, I would love to hear the narrator in this discussion. Though I really enjoyed this chapter from the man's perspective, I think you could insert further hilarity with the inclusion of the narrator's voice. Just something to consider. Even just little additions, such as transcribed sound or gestures would give the reader a much-craved visual.

In regards to dialogue/dialect, I made some small revisions to cement the feeling that this is transcribed from a recording, to make it feel a little more real and a little less written.

Also, for questions regarding reformatting, see my comment at the beginning of the transcription on page 31.

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Comment [Office26]: I see what you're going for, but I recommend changing the phrasing of this just for clarity. Something like, "regarding the various theories behind the town's peculiarities."

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** Story—Transcription from Recording**

MAN ON BUS. Yes, so.

There's a family of mountain lions living in my basement.

I say a *family* because I know there's more than one, but I don't know exactly how many. If I knew how many, I would just give you the hard number. Like, *five* mountain lions. But that would only be a guess.

To be fair, a family of mountain lions may not be accurate, either. I'm not sure they're related. *Okay*, there is a *group* of mountain lions living in my basement. And, in case you're wondering, *there's* no proper term for a group of mountain lions. I looked it up.

Not ~~herd or pack or gaggle or pride~~, not even murder. *Like* with crows, which, *personally*, I think would be *appropriate!*

Notice I ~~haven't~~ entirely lost my sense of humor *yet*.

Anyway, apparently, they ~~—~~ mountain lions ~~—~~ typically fly solo. Solitary beasts. So no one ever bothered to name a group. What I want to know, is how I managed to get so lucky. A whole group of them in *my* basement! *If you can't tell, I'm being facetious* about the luck *thing*.

I planned to have my house custom-built. *It's a beautiful house, by the way. Three beds, two baths, open floor plans. In a desirable neighborhood. I did a lot of research. Figured out all the details. Thought I'd planned for everything. Took out a sizable loan from the credit union to finance it. Thirty-year mortgage, but worth it. At least, that's*

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what I kept telling myself. I didn't plan to have mountain lions living in my basement. I

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guess it goes to show you can't plan for everything. That is what I call a lesson for life.

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During construction, I stopped by every week to see how it was progressing. One

Moved up [2]: It's a beautiful house, by the way. Three beds, two baths, open floor plans. In a desirable neighborhood. I did a lot of research. Figured out all the details.

day, I noticed that the foundation was open, exposed to the elements, while the

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construction crew framed and walled the main structure of the house. It occurred to me

that if it rained, water would get into the foundation. So, I said something to the

Comment [Office27]: What exactly does he mean by this? Be more specific.

construction workers and the foreman said not to worry, they had it all under control and,

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he waved me off like a buzzing fly. He told me to relax: leave it to the experts.

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But, you know what didn't occur to me when I saw the gaping foundation? That a

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group of mountain lions might nest in the basement. So I didn't say anything. My

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They must've come down from the hills north of town. The mountain lions, that

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even know the hills had mountain lions living in 'em,

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But I guess they do—or they did.

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So anyway, wherever the mountain lions came from, now they're in my

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basement. I'd like to restate for the record: the possibility of this happening did not occur

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to me. It simply did not occur. Apparently, it didn't occur to the construction foreman

either. Or to any construction foreman, ever. Or to the people who wrote the building

codes. There's nothing on the books about it at all. So, for these reasons, the foreman is

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telling me he's not liable. He says he followed standard procedure and that it's my

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problem. He also said they had everything under control. I guess maybe that's just an

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expression.

Still, whoever may or may not be liable, there are mountain lions in my basement. And I'll tell you something else: I didn't even know they were there. Not at first, at least. Not for a while. I know that sounds silly. How could anyone overlook a group of mountain lions? Well, I'll tell you how. It was winter when we moved into the house and the mountain lions must've been sleeping deeply. Taking a long winter's nap or something. Notice I didn't say *hibernating*. The word choice was intentional. According to my research, mountain lions don't hibernate.

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Call it what you will: Sleeping. Napping. Snoozing. Lying in wait. Whatever. They were down there in the basement, quiet and unmoving, for months. At any rate, when spring came, the mountain lions awoke.

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They must've been hungry then because they started scratching at the basement door. I remember thinking. What could that be. I didn't know it was mountain lions. I peeked through the narrow gap underneath the basement door in the kitchen and saw big tan paws and sharp claws and fangs and fur and whiskers and several large, pink noses. When I put all this together, I had my answer.

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Comment [Office28]: This sounds too formal, I recommend replacing it with something more like, "It took me a minute to put it all together," or something that sounds more colloquial.

Mountain lions.

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They were scratching from the inside-the-basement side. I could hear them from the other side, the outside-of-the-basement side, where I was. So at least we were on opposite sides of the door, me and the mountain lions. I guess that's what you call a *silver lining*.

They were also snuffling, which was quieter than the scratching, but still audible. It made me feel weird to think they were smelling me. And when I say *weird*, I mean *terrified*.

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I first heard the mountain lions when I was in the kitchen, ~~but~~ noticed I could hear them from my bedroom when I tried to go to sleep that night. My bedroom is on the second floor, which meant they were scratching pretty ~~loud~~. My wife and our baby were both ~~scared~~. My wife was scared of the idea of being mauled by mountain lions. My son was just scared of the unfamiliar sound. ~~He's~~ too young to know what mauling is, or what mountain lions are. Another silver lining.

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~~So~~, I went to the garage and got a saw ~~and~~ cut a narrow slot in the basement door. The slot ~~was~~ for sliding raw steaks into. The raw steaks ~~were~~ for feeding the mountain lions. The feeding ~~was~~ so they would hopefully calm down and stop scratching.

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After all, ~~that~~ door wouldn't stand up to all that scratching forever. I mean, sure, it's solid hardwood—really high-end construction—but come on: those multiple sets of four-inch claws, working day and night? Piles of ~~rich blond~~ wood shavings had begun to collect and grow larger on the threshold. And the math behind it so brutally simple: the bigger the piles, the thinner the door.

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Where was I? Oh, the feeding slot. The feeding slot seemed like the only sensible thing to do. And the steaks appear to appease them. There's a lot less scratching now. But at what cost? I mean, I can tell you at what cost. I have the receipts. Steaks are not cheap. So it's not a sustainable solution. Not to mention, at risk of stating the obvious, the mountain lions are still there. And the scratching and snuffling haven't stopped, they've just lessened. So I can't say the problem is solved. De-escalated, I guess, ~~with an~~ endless—and very expensive—series of raw meat band-aids.

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Last week, I called the Department of Fish and Game ~~and~~ asked if they could help me. Maybe bring over a couple of those neck snare things, like you see on those nature-

man shows. Pull the lions out, bring them back to their native habitat, let them loose.

They said it's not their problem either, though. Those guys and the construction foreman, two of a kind.

They also said this particular type of mountain lion is endangered, meaning it's illegal to kill them. It would even be a felony if I let them die of neglect in my basement.

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Another reason to keep it up with the steaks.

So, I thought maybe if they're so rare I could make a few bucks off them. Sell them to a zoo. Nope. Selling them is a criminal offense, too. Endangered animal

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trafficking. And to top it off, word's gotten out to the animal rights people. A whole bunch of them are picketing out front, carrying signs with slogans:

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At first, I thought they might be of some help. Raise awareness. Help get these animals back to the wild, back where they belong. But no, their position is exactly the

opposite. The mountain lions have chosen to live in my basement. They should be allowed to remain. We've taken over their habitat, so now it's payback. The activists

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insist they'll *intervene immediately* if I try anything that might harm the lions. Or anything that might infringe upon the lions' *inalienable rights*. Which apparently includes living in my basement.

So no help there, either.

And did I mention the thing about the laundry? The washer and dryer are in the basement. So we can't do laundry, considering the mountain lions. I know, we could go to a laundromat. But we just spent two grand on a new washer and dryer. And now I'm

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going to go and spend even more money to wash my clothes at a laundromat? In their inferior washing machines? With their harsh powder detergents? In their non-adjustable oven-like dryers that'll shrink all my clothes? That'll burn my nice sweaters into charred husks of lint and transform my poplin shirts into what? Into very expensive, nappy rags, fit only for doll costumes. Come on. I mean, really, come on. And then what will I wear to work, when all my clothes are ruined? I'm a professional—an engineer, for goodness sake. I have an advanced degree. I work at OdsWellMore. I can't just go to work in a, a pair of greasy sweatpants. So, no. No thank you. I will not throw my wardrobe away in those ill-maintained lint traps! Those churning boxes of imminent fire hazard! Gosh-damn-it-all to hell!

Wait, stop.

Deep breath.

I'm sorry; I think I'm misplacing my anger about the mountain lions. I'm not angry at laundromats. Not really. Laundromats don't deserve that kind of badmouthing. They're perfectly productive businesses that provide a needed service to society. I just lost my head for a minute. Please excuse my outburst.

Anyway. If you have any idea what to do about the mountain lions, please let me know. I'm kind of at the end of my rope, here. Damned if I do, and all that. A felony to kill them, a felony to sell them, and a danger to keep them around. I mentioned that I have a baby, right? And a wife? They can't defend themselves. Not against a hungry mountain lion. Much less against an unknown number of hungry and captivity-crazed mountain lions. And that door won't hold forever. I may have to take matters into my own hands, consequences be damned.

Comment [Office30]: There could be a better description for Laundromat washing machines. Be really specific here, like what kind of smell emits from a machine after someone else has used it for something really weird. Your humor is in your details, go for broke.

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Comment [Office31]: Maybe I've just got a mouth on me, but I feel like very few people say "goodness" when they're all riled up. I recommend just going for what this person might actually say in this moment like, "for Christ's sake" or "for fucks sake." It might feel crass, but the situation calls for being real, and it'll draw in more of that humor.

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Comment [Office32]: Same thing as the comment above. We're at a boiling point in his emotions. Go with it.

Comment [Office33]: This is the perfect place for that transcribed gesture or sound I spoke of at the beginning of this section. It'll give a better pause and auditory description of what's happening.

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But not right now. Not yet. I don't want to do anything too rash, too hasty. At

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~~least, not~~ until I've exhausted all my other options.

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So, like I said, if you have any ideas, I'm open to suggestions.

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For now, though, I'm headed to the GroceryPlus. We're out of steaks."

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