



Shelley's Corner

It was a baby all right, but still so small That Dave couldn't tell whether it was a boy or girl. He cupped it in his hand, at the same time bringing it closer to his face for a better look. He felt it quiver, "My God, it was alive!"

This thing in his hand was a living , breathing somethon', but that was impossible! He looked down at the sewage that was already starting to climb up his boots. Damnit, there was no way this kid could have come through those pipes, (for God only knows, how many miles) and then just pop out here. AND STILL BE ALIVE!

But *it* had done just that. Somehow, this thing had beaten all the odds, 'cause here it was'.

Later, he'd have been hard pressed to explain what he'd done next. He reached down with his free hand, opened the lunch pail and put the infant inside. Under different circumstances it might have been funny. "The kid just fit." Its head rested on the apple, its tiny feet stretched across the grapes and the body itself slipped down between the two open halves of his Tuna sandwich. He bent down for a closer look. "Yep, it was still breathin."

Dave tried to only partially close the lid, so it could get

some air, but it didn't work. It kept snapping shut. Then he got an idea. He took off his union button and stuck it in the corner, below the lid, that seemed to be the trick. He laughed to himself. "Hey kid, you're now a member of local 247."

But he was starting to get second thoughts about this whole thing. "What the hell was he doing, playing 'baby sitter' to some kid that couldn't be more than a couple days old."

Nothin' made any sense. Here he was a forty-two year old construction worker, twice divorced, a drifter. Why hell, he didn't even like kids. "So what was he jerkin' around with this one for?"

It was almost lunch break and his being a loner, no one would pay any attention if he just wandered off. At least it would give him time to think.

A scary thought hit him. "What if the kid died." How was he gonna' explain that? Shit. Maybe he should just go over to the foreman and show 'em. No, that would take too much explaining. There had to be a better way.

Again, he looked down at the lunch pail. "Who's kid are you anyway? Where did'ja come from and how the hell did you get through those pipes?"

He glanced over the hood of his truck and spotted the engineer's table. "Hey, Davey boy, maybe there's some answers over yonder."

No one was near the tent, so he just walked in. Spread out in

front of him was the relief map detailing the area they were presently excavating. It covered the entire North Country, but it especially pinpointed the area they were working in right now. It took him a couple of minutes to figure out just which were the sewer lines.

When he did, he traced them back from his present location to the first possible 'feed-in' connection. He picked up a pencil and slowly did some figuring.

"Son of a Bitch, it couldn't be." According to his calculations this kid would have had to travel 22 miles through shit that would kill anything in the first couple of feet.

"What in the hell had he gotten himself into?"

Then a half-assed plan started to form in his mind. He yelled at the foreman that he felt sick and was gonna' go home. He picked up the pail, got in his truck, stuck it down in between the bucket seats and took off.

He had a pretty good idea where the *place* was. If he was right, the 'feed-in' connection should be in an area, not far from where he'd done some hunting last fall.

It had once been a prosperous mining town called, "Shelley's Corner", but over the years as the holes had to be dug deeper and the coal coming out smaller, eventually everyone just up and left.

He knew he'd hit it right when he came up over a rise and saw the remains of the town just below him. He drove slowly down what

once must have been the main street, now little more than a muddy trail and worked his way toward the outskirts, parked the truck and went the last few hundred yards on foot. His search took him the better part of an hour, but finally found it!

However he found something else too! Not 30 yards from the connection pipe was what had once been the entrance to the local cemetery.

He felt a cold shiver run up his back. "God, how he hated these places. When his parents had died his Aunt had forced him to attend the burial. He's never been inside one of these places since.

On the way back to his pick-up, he even considered dumping him and just taking off. But he didn't! Stupid as it sounds, he felt some sort of an obligation to this kid.

But he still had no answers. How had it gotten here, in the first place? And even a tougher, one, how had it traveled to where he'd stumbled over it?

Had some women just hiked up here, had the kid and then simply jammed it into the feed-in? But why do that? If she'd wanted to kill it, all she'd of had to do was just leave it on the ground. It would have died the first night.

He'd heard about stuff like that. Unwed mothers leaving new born's on church steps, in hospital waiting rooms, even bus stations, but never just stuffin' them in a sewage line.

And that was nuts too. These things weren't built like a can of beans. Ya' just couldn't open the connection drop a baby in and simply walk away. NO, there had to be a better answer!

"Kid, why the hell can't you talk?"

He got back in the truck, flopped down on the seat and let his head fall on his chest, his eyes glancing toward the lunch pail. "Damnit, this shouldn't be happening to him. Here he was sitting next to a baby, that probably should still be in some mother's stomach, not laying in a lunch pail, stuck in between the seats of his rust-bucketed 'Four-by Four' that was only a deep breath away from the nearest junk-yard.

He sat up, shook his head in disgust, reached over and lifted the top of the pail and glanced down!

His scream (that shook a flock of Crows right off their perch on a nearby telegraph pole,) was followed by three words.

"Oh, God no...."

He threw his head to one side with such force that it smashed right through the side window and stuck there. Out of the corner of his eye he could just make out the pail, see the outline of the kid, but that was all!

"There was no apple, no grapes, no Tuna fish sandwich, shit, even the paper had disappeared."

The tiny body still lay on its back, but now the eyes were open and seemed to be staring up at him. Then it moved. Son-of-a-Bitch, not just moved, it was tryin to stand!

With a frightening desperation, born out of absolute terror, he reached up, his fingers clawing at the wet, sticky hair and tried to wrench free. Finally he was able to force torn and bloody fingers past his ears grab at the back of his head and give a mighty yank.

The head came free with a loud 'slurp' but now the momentum carried it forward with such force that it now buried itself between the spokes of the steering wheel. In the next instant he felt something scurry across his leg, race up his arm and leap onto his face.

His final and futile gesture, a scream of pain, was cut short by a pair of rapier like teeth, that first bit into his tongue then ripped it out of his mouth!



It was only by a fluke that the Sheriff's department even found the truck at all. The area was seldom patrolled, but of late there had been reports of possible drug transactions being carried on. So the DEA had asked the 'locals' to keep an eye on the place.

Sheriff Keene and his Deputy were completely baffled by what they found. Nothing seem to make any sense!

Take the truck for instance. From all appearances, it could'nt have been parked here for more than a couple of days. There was no sign of any undergrowth climbing up over the wheels (curious, the tires were missing?) and yet the entire vehicle was still covered with a heavy film of road dust. This, in spite of

the fact that last night's heavy downpour should have washed it clean.

But, it was the inside of the cab that really shook them up. There, sitting on bare springs was the skeleton of a man, bent almost in half his skull jammed down between the spokes of the steering wheel!

Here again was another contradiction, the two men had to face. The few pieces of skin still remaining on the bones were soft and blood soaked, indicating they couldn't possibly be more than a few hours old.

Then there was the matter of the cab itself. It could only be described as "scrapped clean". There wasn't a piece of material to be seen anywhere! No fabric on the seats, the door panels, the roof, even the floor mats were gone. Everything had been taken down to bare metal!

And another piece of the puzzle lay on the ground just outside the truck's open door. It was a lunch pail, empty except for some kind of button stuck in the corner; as if someone had wanted to be sure the lid wouldn't close completely!

Sheriff Keene shook his head. All he had were a dozen questions and not a single answer!

After putting in a call to the County Coroner and a second for 'back-up' to help close off the area, there was nothing left to do, but wait.

They walked over and got back in the patrol car, both to confused and nervous to even speak. The only sound to intrude on the silence was the static and squawking coming from the car's radio.

Unfortunately this was so loud that neither of them heard the odd scraping noises made by something as it started to crawl up and over the rocker panel, through the open rear door, finally hooking it self on the back of their seat.

By the time backup arrived, all they found were two vehicles scrapped clean and a crushed lunch bucket.....

THE END