

—A CHAINSAW EXECUTION

by Stephen R. George

A chainsaw execution is an ugly, messy thing. That's the point. At least, that's what my brother Grayeyes says.

To deliver a death so horrendous that it can never be forgotten. Its aftermath to linger in the minds and affect the actions of those who witness it; but even more so, to affect those who only hear of it. In their minds to take on a significance far beyond its admittedly ugly reality. The details, blown up to nightmare proportions, become the thing itself. Those details are what really matter, says Grayeyes. Putting a chainsaw to somebody who deserves it, if anybody can ever be said to deserve such a death, is one thing, but putting the saw to somebody who does not, that is pure genius, that is the poetry of kings. Those are Grayeyes's words. That is the kind of death that resonates forever. It makes the condemned a figure of nearly unbearable pity; it makes the executioner a figure of terrifying legend.

The man tied to the chair in the garage of the derelict North End house was named Lisandros. He was the leader of a Chicago gang called Tráiganos. Lisandros was Hispanic, maybe Mexican or Puerto Rican. I couldn't tell. They all look the same to me. His skin color was nearly the same as ours. We could have been brothers. Maybe we all looked the same to them. All us redskins.

His eyes were impossibly black. In one a tiny flaw glowed like a nugget of gold, and beneath that eye a deep scar on his cheek curved like a crescent moon. If not for the scar, he would have been a handsome man. Tráiganos had expanded north of the border a month ago, cutting first into our cocaine, and then into our prostitution. My brother had called for a meeting. Lisandros had been foolish enough to accept. Now he sat bound in a chair at the back of a derelict garage, in a country not his own, looking from Grayeyes to me to his own four men who were standing at the back of the garage with shotguns pointed at their heads.

Lisandros, like my brother, was a small man, wiry, muscular. His power came from his eyes, burning, focused. Those eyes moved slowly from my face to Grayeyes's face. If he knew what was about to happen, he gave no indication. There was a tattoo on his neck, just visible above his collar: a black skull with its tongue reaching out of its mouth and slithering into one of its eye sockets. They said Tráiganos means "Bring us." Bring us where? Bring us what? I don't know. We all had something like that. On my right forearm, as on my and brother Grayeyes's forearm, as on all our men, was a dream catcher. A dream catcher is supposed to catch the bad dreams, to let the good ones through. When I was a child on the reserve, I had one hanging above my bed.

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I remember staring at it as I listened to my mother cry for hours in the dark. I have never known one to work.

The atmosphere in the garage was thick and sour, as if the air had become heavy like stale cigarette smoke. It was as if a bad spirit had come in there with us, was hovering at the edges of things, waiting. Our voices seemed to echo, sounding not quite like us, as if the walls were made of tin.

“You want a piece of what’s ours, you’re going to pay with a piece of yourself,” Grayeyes said to Lisandros.

He bent down and picked up the chainsaw from the floor. Lisandros’s expression did not change. He must have known what was coming.

“You can do this?” Lisandros said to Grayeyes.

“Fuckin’ rights I can do this.”

Grayeyes looked to me. I shook my head.

He spoke to me in a low voice. “Don’t you chicken out now, little brother. We don’t come down hard on this, we never hear the end of it.”

“He doesn’t deserve this,” I said.

Grayeyes grinned. “That’s the point.”

He pulled the starter cord and the chainsaw roared. One of Lisandros’s men screamed. He was clubbed with the stock of a shotgun and collapsed to his knees. My brother Grayeyes didn’t notice. He turned to Lisandros, stepped closer, and brought the blade down on his shoulder. Blood sprayed, the saw roared.

It went on for what seemed like hours, but was only minutes. Cutting a man to pieces with a chainsaw is not an easy thing; not to watch, not to do. I could see that even Grayeyes, who has no heart, was troubled. More so, because Lisandros would not die, not right away. Without his left arm, he spat in my brothers face, the clear spittle clearing a sheen of blood down Grayeyes’s cheek. Without his right leg, he laughed, a high cackle that cut through me more than the roar of the saw.

The only screaming in the room came from those of us who watched in disbelief, including me. When it was over and Lisandros was finally dead and quiet, the only sound was the retching of Lisandros’ men, and ours.

My brother let the chainsaw die. He dropped it on top of the pieces of his enemy. He turned to face us. In the light from above, his eyes flickered, points of flame in his blood-soaked face.

I thought he was going to speak, but it was one of Lisandros’s men whose voice broke the glassy silence.

“Let me bury my brother,” he said.

His eyes were on mine. I turned to Grayeyes. Grayeyes nodded.

We unbound the four men. Silently, they gathered the pieces of Lisandros.

Grayeyes kept a foot on one of Lisandros’s arms, the right arm. “This I keep,” he said. “To remember.”

They picked up everything else. One by one they left, until all that remained on the floor was a sea of blood.

Grayeyes surveyed his abattoir. “Burn it down,” he said.

And we did.

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