

The Roman Twin

by Jackelope Random

Peter Roman never knew that he had a brother, who was also named Peter Roman. Except for vague memories of bulrushes, which he attributed to Cecil B. DeMille movies, he could remember very little about his early life. So, if he ever heard of the Reverend Peter Roman crucified in the town of Cinnara, he did not know that this other Reverend was his brother.

A young couple unable to conceive had plucked Peter Roman from the orphanage in Cinnara, and taken him far away to the city of Heart Valley. They were offered both twins, but declined, citing their limited funds. The nuns in charge of the orphanage had hated to break up a set, but they desperately needed a new smoking room, and so let the future Reverend Peter go. They kept Reverend Peter for themselves, and took on the job of raising him into a fine priest.

The Cinnaran Peter Roman's tale is well known. But, in case the reader is not familiar with the incredible events of two years prior, this short summary must suffice:

Etan Miller, a young loner with a violence problem brutally murdered the popular girl Katherine "Kitty" Miller. He had imagined her his girlfriend, and felt betrayed when she went out with Woodstock, an orphan who worked at the local Soda Shoppe. After this death, the owner of the Soda Shoppe disappeared, and a man claiming to be a writer and the son of the long dead owner appeared and took over the day to day duties of running the once-popular teenage hangout.

For the first week after the murder, no one could find a clue, until the seventeen year old Sam Shiel followed a hunch. He found Etan Miller hiding in his aunt's attic, chewing on her bones. How Shiel deduced this hiding place and the identity of the killer is still a mystery. However, this earned him a job as detective not a year afterwards, when visions of the Mother Mary began to appear to Cinnarans at night.

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At first, Sam Shiel could not see the visions. Where the Virgin appeared to others, he saw only a whore. However, as he investigated, and struggled with faith, he came to accept the appearances as real. His opinion on religion changed completely. As he was working on his case he found circumstantial evidence that the Reverend Peter Roman molested the children of Cinnara. This led to a trial, where the Reverend was condemned to death by hanging from a tree. His innocence and Shiel's delusion only became apparent as lightning struck and Peter Roman collapsed into the abyss.

Reverend Peter Roman of Hearts Valley did not know any of this. He only knew a few things, and all the rest were shadows on the wall. He knew of the absolute power and dominance of God. And he knew how to speak. He made his living through his oration, traveling with a circus. All week he would stand outside the circus picketing it and cajoling attendees with rants and raves about the fiery pits of hell, and on Sunday the circus would close. One tent would be left up, and inside that tent the Reverend would speak before a packed audience.

The circus owners saw this as a good scam: people would feel better about going to the circus if not going to the circus could be tied in with religious fundamentalism. But these same people would appear like clockwork on a Sunday and pay good money to hear about the icy cold hells they would find themselves in if they didn't live the moral lives they didn't live.

But Reverend Peter Roman felt sick. He liked the traveling, as it reminded him of old preachers like Billy Sunday, and the old revival circuits. But he disdained the circus, and the shallow people who would go to a whorehouse on Saturday, and then show up to his tent revivals in their best suit on Sunday. No one could say the Reverend was immoral, for he kept strictly to what it said in the Bible, which was the only book he read.

It was the third Sunday of the fifth month, as the Reverend

reckoned it, for he kept no watch. He stood in front of a packed tent, looking out at the painted whores and their husbands as well as the brothel workers. Rage stirred through his stomach, and he made a fist with his hands. He tried to choke back his hate as he delivered his sermon.

"The hands of God is upon us. It is invisible and waits to take even the basest sinner and show to him the true horrors of Hell. Any one of you may be called, any one of you may be snatched from this life and tested, like Job. But will you have the faith to see your Christian life through to the very deepest reaches of blackness? Will you—"

Sam Shiel was tried for murder, when testimony from all three boys he allegedly raped proved he only played with them, trying to engage in the community as a good church father. He was sentenced to three years in the town prison, and many people felt he got off light. "Throw 'em in with Miller" many people said. The new owner of the Soda Shoppe was not one of these, and went constantly to visit the incarcerated sleuth.

He was working on a book about the murder, one to tell the final unbelievable story as only he could piece it together. In this book, it is alleged that the former owner of the Soda Shoppe had been dead for nineteen years before the murder, but continued working at the shop due to a family curse. Not many took the book serious, noting that its limited printing was financed by the writer himself.

Even after he finished the book, he visited Sam Shiel in jail, talking with him every day. He planned to write a sequel about the Shiel case. However, that chance never came. He was murdered, sliced through the cut, when Etan Miller escaped.

According to the prison officials, Miller simply walked out of the prison. No one could believe it, but the tapes showed just that. He went through no doors, ran nowhere, but simply walked out of the prison. Many in the prison believe in his demoniacal powers, but the official explanation is that he slipped through a secret doorway which has yet to be found.

The police started looking for him as soon as they noticed he

escaped, with all officers warned of his extremely dangerous status. One officer might have not heard that call, as a crumpled car was found off the side of a dirt road leading to Cinnara. The officer, an African-America, bled to death in a nearby ditch. The ambulance arrived just too late, and his last words were "The eyes, terrible brownness, sad no soul."

It was clear that Miller intended to go back to the site of his murders. A copy of the Soda Shoppe owner's book was found in his sell, notated through with angry markings. The descriptions of the murder scenes were crossed out. Miller penciled in drawings of Woodstock splattered against the wall and Kitty's gruesome decapitation. A napkin with a sketch of Cinnara showed the plan of attack. First, Miller would enter the high school. Then, he would make his way down the street, pausing to admire the tourist shop well known for giving seedy abortions. After this slight delay, he would go through the home of one of his old teachers to arrive behind the Soda Shoppe. Then, he would kill. The napkin said this is what was at first assumed to be a red pen, but later found to be Miller's own blood.

The Cinnara police were informed, as well as the governor. Soon there was not an entrance or exit to the walled city of Cinnara not covered by a multitude of guns. The residents were forbidden to leave their homes. But Miller still managed his strike.

Reverend Peter Roman could stand it no more. He stopped his speech. He felt a fire burning through him, a hatred for humanity and all the weaknesses of beings not perfect before God. He stood a long while, staring at the congregation. Then, he slowly spoke.

"The end is now. You may think that it is not for a yew years, or a few centuries. But it is now. We are living in the end times. If not a one of you comes clean, purely clean, within the sight of God today, then you will be cast into the Lake of Fire. Damnation eternal!

But do you people care? I ask again do you people care?"

A few people rose at this, and shouted Yes Reverends and I Dos. But he waved his hands in the air frantically, as if cutting them

down.

"You don't care. Not a one of you. These are the end times. I say this every week, to a whole weeks worth of sins. You, there, in the red dress, I saw you pawing that young boy last night. And you, banker, businessman, respectability incarnate. Were not you laying with a circus whore?

"No. Do not protest the point. You are all sinners. Johnny takes money from his schoolmarm, who looks the other way because she is fucking his father. Fucking his father. Fucking. Do I have to say it filthier than this to get to you people? What do I have to do? Stab your eyes and take them down to the very pits to show you, to show you what I saw.

This is not some show, some entertainment for your Sunday, that you might feel the more moral for. This is not theatrics, is not the circus, is nothing so filthy and vile. The Lord is not an Actor. This is the reality of your souls hanging in the balance.

"I pray, I pray now to God in front of all of you that one, maybe even one of you sinners, finds in them self the strength to repent. Repent for all you have down, you blasphemous serpents! Well?"

He stood in silence for a moment, catching his breath. Not a single audience member dared move. Their eyes watched his mouth carefully, in close attention. No one rose, nor moved.

"Not one of you? I renounce you, and this den of thieves. This world, this world is a New Jerusalem for those who can make it. And though I may preach and preach, not a one, not one of you may be taught.

"Is it my responsibility, then, to counsel you? To tend to your spiritual malfeasance when you bring it before my ears? No. No, a thousand times no. You have been given aid and aid and chance and chance again."

The Reverend picked up his Bible, and slammed it shut. He stood for a moment, before yelling into the crowd.

"Physician, Heal Thyself!"

He stomped out of the tent, to thunderous applause.

Sarah Liddlesmith and Wilhelm Rathar made a pretty pair. At least, they thought so, when they managed to curl up on a couch for a few minutes without parents shouting. They thought so at school as well, and this was all they thought. No literary analysis nor mathematics could be ever so important in their minds as their little cocoon world of forever love. Many young boys and girls go through this, and think that the golden romance will last forever. For Sarah and Wilhelm, this wish became reality in the worst way possible.

On an early spring day, the kind where gray hangs in the air but the promise of blue every so often cracks through, the two of them made a scene in English class. The teacher, some new younger hire, with a penchant for off the wall analysis and disdain for the canon, began his lecture by drawing a K an I and Widow's Daughter in a triangle on the board. He droned and on about the importance of slitting the wrists as opposed to decapitation and disembowelment. Most everyone in the class found the subject fascinating, but the two lovers found it dull. They preferred to play footsie with each other, and write dirty notes.

The teacher began an important point, and strode up and down the aisles. He snatched a note away from the two students, and read it. He crumpled it up and threw it into the trash. Without another word, he simply told the lovers to stand in the hall.

Come on, let's ditch this," said Wilhelm.

"We'll get in trouble," said Sarah.

"We already are."

Without any answer, Sarah followed Wilhelm out the door. They snuck across the asphalt parking lot, and over the bridge that connected the island isolated high school with the rest of the town. As they reached the other side, they noticed a man with a green parka watching them.

"Come on, let's get out of here," said Wilhelm, taking his girlfriend by the arm. He led his girlfriend down into an alley. They began to make out. However, the sound of a large boot slowly pounding forward on pavement stopped them, and they looked up to see the man in the parka. He did not smile, and his brown eyes

seemed only to reflect the alley. He held a switchblade in his hands.

Wilhelm told Sarah to stand behind him. He stepped up to the assailant. But the assailant simply slashed his throat. Then, slowly, step by step, the man advanced on Sarah.

As the Reverend retired for the moment into his room on the bus, he turned on the radio. A scurrilous story of far away places, that only indicated the modern greed, led Peter Roman to turn the channel and listen to the news. He found it just as bad, telling of murder after murder, sin after sin.

The man with the parka held something in his hand, squishing it, as he ambled down the side streets. He carefully stepped into a yard, and picked up a large rock. Smashing the window, he entered the house, and lay in wait for the owner.

It did not take long, as the school let out when news of Miller's return was quietly relayed to the principal. The police guided children home, and left teachers to their own devices. Mister Stimon Eal, the schools main English teacher since just before the Miller murders, took his bag and went home. He slowly turned the key, and entered his living room. As he did, he remembered the scene only a few years prior. On a gray day, very similar to this one, he came home to find his girlfriend packing. She left him because he was emotionally cold, he said. But what he remembered most was that first feeling of dread as he opened the door.

Then Etan Miller stepped from the shadows. The teacher tried to say something, tried to run, but could only lamely stare at the psychotic rapidly approaching him. The killer grabbed his former teacher, and snapped his neck. Then, with his boots, he stomped the corpse until blood spurted out the ears.

The police never found a motive for this murder, and later books on Miller's crimes speculated wildly on the topic. One of the more believable assertions came from Miller, *The Full Story*, where it was asserted that "the most likely motive is jealousy. As is well known, Miller held an unhealthy attraction towards his aunt, his caretaker.

The teacher, Mr. Eal, had dated the boy's aunt for a while, and taken a special interest in keeping the boy out of trouble. A boy like Etan Miller is likely to resent this, and in the case of Miller, the brutality is all the more expected, in light of the deaths of his first two victims." The Cinnara police force, however, can not find a single piece of evidence that points towards this interpretation of events.

Miller was soon caught by the police, however. But only at the end of his itinerary. They played catch up since they received the information, and had arrived at the teacher's house only minutes after the murder. They raced towards the Soda Shoppe, the last stop on Miller's tour of his hometown. However, as they arrived, a large explosion destroyed the building. Bits of human flesh could be seen flying into the distance.

Miller stood, waiting for the police to arrest him. Only when they brought him back through the security at the state prison did they find the breast he cut from the little girl. When they asked him why he escaped, and what he intended to do, he simply looked down and said "Malt does more than Milton can..."

Reverend Peter Roman collected his things and stuffed them into his single traveling bag. If he did not wear his collar, one would not know that he was a priest, and mistake him for the last of the traveling salesmen so romanced in the nostalgic myth of the nineteen fifties.

After his tirade, he went to the man in charge of the circus, Kilroy. The boss offered him double salary, if he could keep spouting these allegorical nonsenses. But Peter Roman refused. After three years with this shame of an outfit, he knew he needed to move on in life. To settle down. Find a wife and raise children. And could only do that if he went back to the main church and received an appointment as minister to some small town. The main office assigned him to Hearts Valley.

On his first day at his new church, he gave a sermon about redemption. The small, tightly-knit community loved it, and

welcomed their new pastor. A young woman with a plain pearl necklace caught his eye, and came up to him after the sermon. They were soon married.

When he was written up in the paper one Sunday supplement soon after their marriage, there was one small note at the end, which read "Reverend Peter Roman is not related to the late Peter Roman caught up a few years ago in the series of tragedies that befell the town of Cinnara." They never retracted this mistake, as no one ever knew the truth.

