

## 17. INTERSTATE ROUTE SEVENTY

My name is Billy Walden. I've lived in Georgia all my life. I graduated from college recently. And I needed something to do. I wanted to contribute to the world. To give back to everyone for all that they've done for me. All those people who helped me get through college.

I've been working on being a writer. I took creative writing classes in college. I've written stories for the college literary journal. I even have written part of a novel. But none of that is real. I was doing some research for a story on serial killers. And it seems that there has been a string of murders that have occurred along Interstate Seventy. That freaked me out. Of course, there are that some people know about all the intimate details of these killings. They have read the true crime books. They know about the lives of such characters. This is all too weird for me. I can barely watch a horror movie without losing my composure.

Once I complete my research, I think about the colossal waste of time in celebrating these characters. I need to do something more. I will become a guardian angel who travels the highway and does all that he can to help the potential victims. I am not a vigilante. I'm not trying to track down the killers. I want to help the poor girls.

I've saved enough money from my delivery jobs. I have a good car. I am ready to go. I get a GPS and a good map. I pack up some clothes. I am ready to hit the road.

Since I do a lot of my work at night, I don't have much of a chance of learning about these cities along the way. I sleep a good portion of the day. Then I'm off again to do my work!

Large cities like St. Louis and Kansas City punctuate my journey. But much of the time is spent going through farmland and small towns. I make quite a few stops. It is not as if I have any specific destination. I need to stop to take the pulse of my highway.

The world is spiraling downwards. It is a terrible thing. I reach my hands into the darkness and try to rescue the lost souls.

Just like a criminal investigator, I have developed a profile of the potential victims. I scour the rest stops for girls who might fit the model. They travel with their fear. They wouldn't attempt such a perilous road if their starting point wasn't fraught with equally threatening experiences. Their home lives are dominated by rapacious amateurs who attempt to copy the torturous methods of the road-weary professionals. No doubt, appalling successes at home drove these monsters onto the highways for further victims. The poor girls think that they are escaping their personal horror, but they are only running straight into a more menacing tornado.

I need to remain alert. Occasionally as I pull into a rest stop, I see a girl dart into the obscurity. I can't let such an opportunity to go waste. I need to get to her before she is lost forever in the cruel night.

A warm cup of coffee and words of comfort is sometimes enough. Many of these poor creatures are so hardened by their lives that my words are not sufficient. They don't really heed my warning to avoid the other travelers. For many, their life blood has become the rides offered by wayward truckers. I can only watch as these events transpire. Maybe, a few of the girls will be more vigilant and my work will not have been in vain.

I enter my vocation with a sense of innocence. I try to pass this feeling along to my fellow human beings. But there is an air of cynicism which influences my efforts. There is no

clear end to what I do. If I relent, there is a greater chance that the monsters will discover their opening. I need to always keep my eyes open. I am so tired!

Why do horror movies freak me out so much? I think that it's just an extension of the obsession with the gruesome details of reality. If they could, these horror fans would rub their bodies in the blood spilt by these maniacal killers. The horror viewer does not want simply to watch garish re-enactments of real crimes. They want to witness the real thing. The more extravagant the depiction, the more that they believe they are closer to the action.

These are people who are mystified by the events in the world. They see governments act with impunity. Militaries brutalize the citizenry. It makes no sense. Serial killers help them act out basic justice on the world. They delight in the torture. It makes them feel more powerful. And when the killers face final justice, it ends the cycle and make the viewers feel inspired.

The fans identify with the sense of danger experienced by the victim. They root as she fights with the sadistic killer. But there is also a strange comfort that the terror is inflicted on someone else. The more brutal the killer, the more entertaining the film. The cheers just egg him!

If you compare recent horror film, there is something that is so disgusting in these portrayals. As the killer uses his big blade to cut up his victims, the viewers become more and more excited. Pure ecstasy.

The suggestion of violence used to be just enough. If you look at the shower scene in *Psycho*, the blade never actually touches the body. Now, each stage of the cutting provides further enjoyment for the fan. How can this be anything else than perversity?

Horror is often mixed with sex. The punishment for pure desire. The slasher is driven by a more extreme passion. He feels things more than anyone else. He remembers what everyone else has forgotten.

These movies are like crime photos. Ultimate degradation. There is no redemption for the victims. The fans are collectors of these ghastly images. Their brains get turned on by such titillation. It is erotic in the sense that the limits of satisfaction are stretched by the elements of violence. The bizarre mix aggravates the conflicts within the self. The viewer becomes addicted by seeing these blood-curdling images.

Special effects allow the film-makers to exaggerate the gore. The exploding body parts. The crushed limbs. The broken bones. We are led along the steps of a histrionic anatomy lesson.

The fans stare helplessly because they are so turned on. And their satiation forces a refashioning of the body to accommodate even more intense stimulation.

The viewers bring an encyclopedic fascination to their viewing. They have a battery of questions that rival a seasoned detective. Each new inquiry put them closer to the scene. They value every minute detail as it testifies to the supreme metaphysics of gore. Even at the microscopic level, there is a picture of the dementia. And the sum of all these infinitesimals is a crushing universality of grisly-detail. How grotesque! There is no escape.

They immerse themselves in the world of the killer because it is so pleasurable. They will not admit to the same motivation. But they want the same result. The killer is simply a stand in for their secret wishes. And punishment adds another layer of perversion.

The law will not yield. It is not there to maintain order. It spreads the chaos with such exactitude that there are no inhibitions on the part of the watchers. They give in totally.

Exploring the fictional crime scenes, the analyst sees how the fans are always begging for more. The film makers can barely keep up. The mind of the fan races faster than any serial killer to the destination. You sit in the theater, and you know that your enemy is among you. He is watching you. And you are watching him. Both of you are participating in the cult of the serial killer. Bring it on!

“Is it too late to change?”

“What?”

“You’re looking for these killers. Do you really think that you can get them to change their behavior?”

“I’m not looking for killers. I’m looking for potential victims. I’m trying to warn them. I want to save them.”

“If you just stopped the problem at the source, it would really make a difference.”

“I think that would be too difficult. Just the odds are against me. Sure, I can find loads of girls who may need my help. But it’s a lot less probable that I’m ever going to run down a serial killer.”

“What if you did?”

“I haven’t thought about it too much. My job is in the saving business. Reaching people who can be helped. These killers may be too far gone for me to do anything.”

“You don’t think that you could reason with any of them.”

“I wish that I could. But the reasoning process is all part of their modus operandi.”

“How is that?”

“They pretend to be normal.”

“Pretend.”

“They try to make their victims feel at ease so they’ll drop their guard. Then they strike.”

“Do they really have that much stealth? Don’t you think that they just wait until their victims are alone in a dangerous place. Then they just act with brutality. No style. Just sheer force.”

“Why do you say that?”

“I don’t think that there is some kind of complex motivation. They show that in the movies. The killer is a genius gone wrong. And he is trying to use his wits to defeat the police. In actual fact, it’s much simpler than that. These characters elude the public eye. There are so many occasions for them to do that. And then they just do what they do. No big deal.”

“You are studying their personality.”

“Not really. At first, I was interested in them. But there isn’t anything to wonder about.”

“Don’t their psychologies reflect those things that we hide in ourselves?”

“The complex theories really don’t explain it.”

“What about the profiles?”

“Sure, they reveal some details. A lot of that process is after the fact. There are these links, but they don’t help in prognosticating what is going to happen.”

“How can you do any better?”

“I’m not. But if I see a girl trying to hitchhike, I can intervene.”

“Doing what?”

“I can give her a ride. I can offer her a couple of bucks.”

“Why should she trust you?”

“I’m not a killer. She’s got to know that.”

“But you’re this guy who stops her on the side of the road. And you fill her with this story about a serial killer. She’s going to think that you’re one crazy motherfucker.”

“I’m not like that!”

“How does she know?”

“I know. You know!”

I need to sleep. It is a constant darkness!

“I love you, and I want to be with you!”

“I can’t be with you. I can’t stand those leering glances that you give other women. The expectations that you have for my life?”

“You’re the hottest girl that I know. I want to hang out.

“I can’t stand any of it. That may have worked when we had just left college. But it’s not going to work anymore!”

“What are you going to do? Find some other guy?”

“Is that what you want to hear so you don’t have to deal with your own shit?”

“You were telling me that you don’t like how I’ve been treating you. My expectations for you. What do you mean by that?”

“You make me feel that my job is a waste of time.”

“I’m working.”

“Doing what? Selling a painting now and then. Doing a web site. What kind of job is that?”

“I pay my share of the rent. I pay for my food.”

“And I pay for your drinks when we go out. You’ve been wearing the same clothes since we met. You’d probably never wash them if I didn’t do laundry.”

“You are exaggerating.”

“You want to start doing the laundry.”

“And then we’ll stay together. That’s all it takes.”

“What do you think?”

“We could make a list of things that I have to do? And this could help change things.”

“Wow! You’re taking stock in your life and making some steps to change.”

“That makes me feel great!”

“You really think that is happening.”

“What are you telling me?”

“I told you that I’m leaving you.”

“I’m willing to change.”

“Too little too late. It’s not just an idea. It’s a whole way of acting. I have to feel that you’re different. But you haven’t done anything to make me believe you.”

“The list.”

“I was taunting you. And you’re too stupid to know that.”

“We’re going to get nowhere by calling each other names.”

“I’m calling it like it is!”  
 “I can do the laundry.”  
 “It’s not about the laundry. You really don’t want to be with me.”  
 “I told you that I did.”  
 “I want to be with someone else.”  
 “You told me that it wasn’t about someone else.”  
 “It wasn’t at first.”  
 “You’re going to make it about this laundry thing. It’s just an excuse.”  
 “For the fact that I have no ambition.”  
 “I have ambition. I’ve been doing some writing. I have a short story.”  
 “You’ve been telling me about the story for six months. What is happening with that?”  
 “I need to get some new fantasies to change my life.”  
 “I know where to find Dorothy.”  
 “Big mystery. She works at the Steak and Shake on La Vista with Mindy. They’re both  
 in there after school.”  
 “It’s that easy to find her.”  
 “As easy as pie!”  
 “If it’s that simple to find her, do you think that I could find other people that I’m looking  
 for.”  
 “Like whom?”  
 “The girl that I saw in the grocery store today.”  
 “How many people live in Atlanta?”  
 “Millions. But there’s something special about her.”  
 “Wow! Big help.”  
 “I call her Cathy.”  
 “What does she call herself?”  
 “I don’t know. But she looks like a Cathy!”  
 “That is going to help.”  
 “You never know. I have a description.”  
 “Like a missing persons case.”  
 “Do you think that I could get a detective?”  
 “And do what?”  
 “He could make a sketch of her.”  
 “You need a sketch artist.”  
 “Where do I get one of those?”  
 “Art school.”  
 “Great. What if he is using a sketch artist too?”  
 “He’s not looking for a girl that he saw in the grocery store. He’s just going to follow her  
 and wait for a chance that she’s alone.”  
 “Is he going to find Dorothy?”  
 “We both know where she is.”  
 “He doesn’t!”  
 “He could just drive by and see her.”

“But why would he drive by on this street. There are millions of other places that he could go. Does he even know that she lives in Atlanta?”

“He knows!”

“You’re sure!”

“He’s been following her all this time.”

“Where did he find her?”

“He has files. And pictures. He uses the internet.”

“We have to warn her.”

“Yeah, that is going to be easy. We’ll go to the store and tell her that there’s this strange man that’s following her. That should set her mind at ease.”

“She needs to know.”

“You don’t even know her.”

“I’ve seen her around.”

“You’re the one who’s going to end up in jail.”

“We could spend our time watching her.”

“What’s your excuse. This bizarre suspicion that some killer is going to find her. If he finds her, it’s your fault.”

*“Who is this guy?”*

*“The one that she needs to get off!”*

*“Always a dirty story!”*

*“Do you always forget who you’ve told your intimate details to.”*

*“You get a kick looking in my windows.”*

*“You could use curtains.”*

*“That doesn’t make it an invitation.”*

*“I thought that it was a curtain call.”*

*“Someone is going to have to save Dorothy!”*

“I’ve stared at your ass sometimes. I feel as if I know something secret about you. Like your hidden personality.”

“Why do you think that I even gave you the chance to speak that stupid sentence of yours?”

“To let me know that you’re in charge.”

“What does that mean when you tell me that I have *an awesome ass*?”

“It give me a rush just to look at your ass. I want to grab a hold of it.”

“Is that all? Do you want to tell me something more than that. Should I take a look at my ass so that I might better understand it. Or just I just give it a nice grab on my own. A pound of flesh for a pound of flesh.”

“What’s the deal?”

“I give you my body, and you give me your love?”

“Sounds fair.”

“It does to you!”

“What would your propose?”

“That you cut off the offending limb.”

“I tried that, but it grew back.”

“I would ask you to cease the offense, but that would give you the advantage.”

“What’s your problem?”

“I gave my youth to you. You might as well have killed me.”

“But I didn’t. I didn’t kill you.”

“That was a choice. You’re admitting it.”

“Why are you playing the bitch?”

“Because I do a better job at it than you do. I’d like to see you walk around in a pair of high heels.”

“I would. But heights scare me.

“Anything that points straight up in the hair.”

“I’m not saying that I can’t take it lying down.”

“You were asking for it up the ass earlier.”

“I can take it any way that you can dish it out.”

“You’ve been dishing it out a great deal recently.

”So now you are telling me that you can take it. That goes against your reputation.”

“I didn’t build my reputation on being nice to girls.”

“So you’re going to get in a mud wrestling contest with one of your buddies.”

“Isn’t this reducing my greatness to slapstick?”

“You had a chance to do it one better.”

“You were the one who was telling everyone that I’m some kind of killer. What do you have against me?”

“Not my body!”

“But you have a great ass.”

“How about a great smile?”

“You have that too.”

“Do you make it a career of cutting so deep?”

“I do what I have to do to survive.”

“Where did you learn that mantra? In the cradle!”

“I said some quite brilliant things in the cradle.”

“Where you start, you must end up.”

“Is this some kind of showdown?”

“What do you want it to be?”

“Nothing at all.”

“Why didn’t you walk away when you had the chance.”

“I thought that I could get a kick out of humiliating you.”

“I never did anything to you!”

“Nothing that you noticed.”

*“We’re supposed to be much further along at this point.”*

*“Have they found Dorothy?”*

*“I don’t want someone telling me that they’ve just found her body.”*

*“She has a great body.”*

*“You can repeat that a million times, and that won’t make it so.”*

*“You can contradict it a million times, and that still won’t make it not so.”*

“*I don’t know that it makes a difference if I can’t touch it.*”  
 “I saw his car roll into town. He got off of I-285 at La Vista Road.”  
 “She’s working tonight.”  
 “It’s a school night.”  
 “She needs some more money. A concert or something.”  
 “That girl works all the time.”  
 “He doesn’t know where he’s going. He’ll never find her.”  
 “All hell is going to break lose.”  
 “She’s a smart girl.”  
 “He has total control.”  
 “She can run faster than he can.”  
 “He has the darkness on his side.”  
 “What is he: a warlock?”  
 “He’s not going to hurt her.”  
 “Are you telling me that she has nothing to worry from him?”  
 “He’ll never find her!”  
 “He doesn’t need to find her.”  
 “*We’ve got the sketch back from the artist.*”  
 “*Great. Now we can find Cathy.*”  
 “*You’re going to ask everyone in the city if they’ve seen her.*”  
 “*It’s a start.*”  
 “*By the time that they find her, it will be way too late.*”  
 “*But they will find her.*”  
 “*That goes without saying.*”  
 “*We’ll just move everything back in time.*”  
 “*So we’ll have a chance to get to her before it’s too late.*”  
 “She’s an actress.”  
 “I’m not going to speak French for you.”  
 “You’re looking for this girl. Everyone know that she’s an actress.”  
 “*What am I supposed to do now?*”  
 “*There is nothing to do.*”  
 “*I feel as if I have a special connection to her.*”  
 “*You do. She just has to realize that!*”  
 “This is her picture. Where is she?”  
 “She’s here, there, everywhere!”  
 “I can’t get a straight answer out of you.”  
 “He’s either getting it all around, or he’s starting to question his sexual identity.”  
 “Did you see the *butt touching machine*?”  
 “At a certain point, you realize that the machine does a better job than a human.”  
 “The machine learns nothing new!”  
 “But it never conks out!”  
 “Perpetual motion.”  
 “You know it, baby!”



*"You spend all day on the computer inputting passwords. Imagine if there was a password of all passwords. You could use that to access a secret bank account."*

*"She is a secret bank out."*

*"You're just inputting her."*

*"No, it's more of a handshake. I'm trying to contact her."*

*"More of a reach around. I'm trying to get around her."*

*"More of a getting around. She's getting around."*

*"Am I warm yet?"*

*"You are smoking hot!"*

*"Do you want to have sex?"*

*"Yes!"*

*"Do you want to give me your wallet?"*

*"Yes!"*

*"Do you want to get down?"*

*"Yes."*

*"Do you want to give me back what I gave you?"*

*"Yes!"*

*"When do you say no?"*

*"When you really want me to say yes. This is all a game. I get you to expect yes. But I'm not really giving you anything in return."*

*"He was part of this Hollywood S&M subculture. They used the same tools; they used the same girls."*

*"They never escaped. The girls."*

*"These guys were famous. Talk show hosts, movie directors, novelists. They tied up the girls, and hurt them. Some of the guys liked to experience pain. They got tied up and beat. Or strangled. Released at the point of climax. Their tolerance for pain grew. But the threshold of asphyxiation did not. More of them died of unexplained causes."*

*"In their sleep."*

*"You die, then you sleep."*

*"Prescription drugs and deep sleep."*

*"You get girls that easily. You might as well be doing away with them."*

*"It makes me jealous just thinking about it."*

*"What are you going to do about it."*

*"I'm going to close my eyes and pretend that it didn't happen."*

*"I'm having a really bad day."*

*"I could massage it and make it all better."*

*"You would just be postponing my bad day to some bad day in the future."*

*"If you transform a bad day into a bad day, does that make it a good day?"*

*"Or a really, really, really bad day!"*

*"Tell me the secret."*

*"You have to find things in your life that you like to do. And do them again and again."*

*"I could do that. Write things down that I hear other people say."*

*"But you need a pattern. A better idea behind it all!"*

“Life is random. It’s like being hit by a comet. It only hurts when you move!”  
 “Why are you staring at everyone?”  
 “I just arrived on the planet earth.”  
 “That girl has really long legs. She’s hot.”  
 “They’re all going to leave in a while. And I’ll still be staring into space.”  
 “*See that girl over there. She’s on TV.*”  
 “*She’s from outer space.*”  
 “*No, she just uses a lot of drugs.*”  
 “*I need to finish this before I go to bed.*”  
 “*This is what makes the planets revolve.*”  
 “*Grease, a good lube job!*”  
 “*I don’t even know where to put the grease.*”  
 “*In the hole.*”  
 “I’m trying to figure out the love thing.”  
 “Something is going on between them. A frictionless connection.”  
 “No static, but all electricity.”  
 “*Did he find Dorothy?*”  
 “*Dorothy got in a car with some guy. But there are so many guys that she knows.*”  
 “*They’re taking reservation on her love lake.*”  
 “*I’ve got a boat to do some sailing.*”  
 “*Make sure it’s a safe trip.*”  
 “I thought that you were so brilliant last night. All your jokes were so funny. Then I got home, and it just seemed plain silly!”  
 “You’re not a very good host.”  
 “I want to be nice. But you are going to have to be a whole lot funnier if you want to play this place again.”  
 “I could show you my pickle collection. You’d really crack up.”  
 “Just crack my pickle in your show.”  
 “*You’re either working or you’re not.*”  
 “*I’m working, but I’m not getting the cash to show.*”  
 “*You’re money ain’t no good here.*”  
 “*I’m a shy man, but I carry a big pickle.*”  
 “*Not for long.*”  
 “*I’ve spent all night counting pickles.*”  
 “*Here one goes again.*”  
 “*I choose not to!*”  
 “*You’re really pickling me up!*”  
 “*No one sympathizes with your predicament.*”  
 “*My Pre-picklement!*”  
 “*You’re looking really sexy.*”  
 “*It’s not what it looks like, it’s what’s what it is!*”  
 “*What’s what it is.*”  
 “Nothing is colder than the morning air when you’ve been up all night.”

*"He's going to find her!"*

*"She's on TV. She's everywhere!"*

I have a job to do. People to save. Why doesn't anyone take me seriously. I'm not talking about going around in a circle. Ring around the rosie!

*"If they want to go over the cliff, you can't stop them."*

*"If all your friend jumped off a cliff, what would you do?"*

*"I'd push your off for asking such a stupid question. I'm not going off a cliff. No how, no who!"*

*"They are coming for you."*

*"For Dorothy, or Cathy, or Mindy."*

*"One of you lost souls."*

*"We may look lost, but our parents look after our every need."*

*"I meet lovely girls like you all the time. You just leave home in the middle of the night for some unexplained reason."*

*"My mother didn't want to see the reason."*

*"She cares for you. She worries about you!"*

*"She has no idea what I'm about?"*

*"What are you about?"*

*"Sex. Like going around the world over and over and over again."*

*"I can't sleep."*

*"Guilty conscience."*

*"I've got a picture of the missing girl."*

*"Just like the woman on TV. She's not missing. She's famous."*

*"Or she's famous because she's missing."*

*"When I have my love fantasy, you'll be in it."*

*"Is this a casting call for your prick?"*

I have to admit that I recoil at the gore in a horror film. So it is a little much to hear him describe the actual details of the crime scenes. It isn't as if I am really confused about what motivates the human psyche. But the raw images are a little too much for me to deal with. And that seems to be just enough to dissuade me from pursuing this matter any further.

*"In this one case, he is known to pick up hitch hikers. He's left a trail of bodies along I-Seventy. From Kansas City all the way west."*

*"They know for sure that it's one guy."*

*"There's all this evidence. And an FBI profile. Everything."*

*"Really! Who'd be hitch hiking these days?"*

*"There are small towns. Kids running away from abusive parents. Drug addicts with nowhere to go."*

*"This guy just looks for them."*

*"It's easy. Like shooting fish in a barrel."*

*"And no one is doing anything to stop him."*

*"What do you expect them to do? They don't even know who he is."*

*"Even with the accumulation of evidence."*

I wonder if this is simply a ghost story for the new age.

*The constant drizzle has turned into a downpour. I am watching from the safety of my car. I have no intention of getting out. I have been waiting here for a while. It is mid-afternoon, but the overcast skies make it appear as if it is night. No one is going to come up to my car with the rain pelting down like this. But I don't want to lose my place in line. I have to hang here until they figure out what to do with me.*

*"Are you looking for it?"*

*He seems to realize why I am here.*

*"I don't want to waste my money."*

*"No one ever does."*

*But this is different. I just want information. He's not used to this kind of interference.*

*"That may cost a little extra!"*

*"I'm ready to pay."*

*This isn't going to be easy. I know that he doesn't know that much. And as I work my way up the totem pole, I am going to find more resistance to my inquiries. More money isn't going to do the trick. While he tells me what I need to know, I wonder how I can use my wiles to make this easier.*

*"You should just use pictures. You really have no idea what this is about."*

*And he does. Pictures aren't going to cut it. I need to see the thing in itself.*

*"Dream on!"*

*"I am."*

*"All the money in the world isn't going to be enough to get what you're after."*

*I guess that he's used to this kind of thing. People who are willing go give everything that they have for a little taste of paradise.*

*He tries to set me straight.*

*"I don't really like this sort of thing. I'm just going along with you because you're so persistent."*