

HSA-127: The Harlequin
by Quixerotic

Interview Transcript

May 18, 2018

Interviewer: Agent Randolph

Interviewee: Mr. John Carson

Subject: The events of the Carnival Fire of 1964 in regards to HSA-127

I don't remember the actual date. I know it was November, probably either the fourth or fifth. That's as close as I ever managed to nail it down. Lacy and I went to a Halloween party at Connor and Maddie Stevenson's house on the 30th. Halloween itself was on the Sunday, so it wouldn't do to have folks out carousing and drinking. Not that anyone approved of it on the Saturday, but even back then puritanical ideals didn't stretch too far into the night. The preacher dropped in at the Stevenson's, too. Early enough to avoid seeing anyone drunk and obliging them to blush the next morning, but late enough to give the church's tacit approval to the things that toed the line. Apple bobbing together or carving a pumpkin. Those things don't sound salacious, but this was rural Georgia in 1964. Having your fingers tangle up with a pretty girl's as you mucked out the innards of a pumpkin was an infield double by today's standards.

I'd been around the diamond a few times by then, most of those with Lacy. For propriety's sake, she lived with her parents up at Kelly's Bridge while I lived in a rented apartment in Sandtown. Hard to call either place a town, but between the two of them, Sandtown had the post office, the general store, and so forth. Kelly's Bridge was so named because an old fella named Kelly built a bridge across the creek north of town so that he could get away from the sinners while still managing to get the horse and cart into town to trade. That was a hundred years before they replaced the timbers and added some concrete to make the bridge service cars as well as carts, which was lucky because I didn't own a horse, let alone a cart.

Lacy and I met teaching at the high school in Sandtown. She taught Chemistry, and I taught History. God, she was pretty. First time I saw her, she had on a robin's egg blue skirt and a white blouse. They met at her waist in a figure that put Marilyn to shame. Blue eyes to match. Red curls a shade darker than her lipstick. I tripped over my own feet as I walked over to meet her. If not for Cynthia — I'll get to her in a minute — I would have fallen face first into her cleavage, which was a move usually reserved for at least a second date.

We hit it off immediately. I like to pretend that I look distinguished these days. Back then, I had the vanity of youth to keep myself fooled. I'd spent the four years previous working as a farmhand while I put myself through school. That left me with a deep tan that I wouldn't ever fully shed. Lightened out my hair, too. I peaked right at six foot two according to army docs. So there I stood, looking peak 1950s America. Shame that it was already the 60's. Felt like I'd missed something that wouldn't ever come back. Probably wasn't there in the first place. Certainly not for everyone who didn't look and act like me.

Lacy was the first woman to disabuse me of the idea of what is now called the Patriarchy. I was introduced to her as a coworker and immediately shoved my foot in my mouth by assuming she was a grade school teacher. When that caused the others around us to shift

uneasily, I pivoted to assuming that she taught English or Home Economics. As I said it, I watched the spark I'd seen in her eye fade to a dull sheen. It was the practiced glassy stare that she gave to all the dolts of the world who couldn't see past their own noses. I knew then that I wouldn't stop trying to charm her until I could make that spark come back.

I won't pontificate on the many different ways I tried to win back a spot in Lacy's heart over the year that followed. In the end, I think two things did it. First, I helped to resolve a spat between one of my students and a girl he was sweet on. Seems strange to think that I owed the small success of my love life to a good word put in by Butch Ludowitz, but kids have a way of speaking plainly that eludes adults. Secondly, I punched a bigot in the face.

It was Georgia during the Civil Rights Movement. No shortage of peaches or assholes. Local alderman by the name of Ezra Whittle dropped in to give a small speech to the school faculty. These kinds of things happened on occasion. School board would host a dinner and invite some speaker. Usually they had some ulterior motive. In this case, it was to speak out against the concept of desegregation. *Brown v Board of Education* had been on the books nearly ten years already. Atlanta had already done it. Georgia's state legislature had put down the new law — Ah, still a history teacher deep down. All that's beside the point. Ezra Whittle started running his mouth. I don't remember exactly what he said, but I remember the way he smiled at me when I walked up to that podium. I remember that smile because I would see it again on the harlequin's face, and every night since. Whittle only had a flicker of it. Like he'd heard the setup of the joke. He never got the punchline though. I could throw a mean right hook. Between me and the floor, Ezra whittle lost two teeth and had a mild concussion.

They would have fired me, of course. Which brings me back around to Cynthia Newman. She got me the job at the high school in the first place. I think her official title was faculty coordinator, but she ran the place from top to bottom. The principal was an old drunk who kept the job because he was buddies with guys like Whittle. They had the sense to stay out of Cynthia's way, though. I interviewed with her. She helped me find a place. She introduced me to everyone who needed introducing, including Lacy of course. Cynthia had a knack for making you feel like the most important guy in town. To the point that I thought she had her eye on me from the first time we shook hands until I realized that she didn't have an eye for any man.

Small town in the south. Not sure anyone even knew the word lesbian. That knack for making people feel important was developed from years of turning down men's advances. If you liked 'em dark haired and plump, you'd have been hard pressed to find a woman prettier than Cynthia. But at twenty-nine without ever having so much as a boyfriend, folks considered her a spinster in waiting but liked her enough not to gossip too much. It's strange what people turn a blind eye toward. They needed someone to take care of the school. It wasn't "man's work" as such, so it needed to be a woman. But it couldn't be a wife because it took too much time and too many hours spent with men who weren't her husband. Cynthia fit the bill perfectly. Not saying the world would be better organized if it were done so exclusively by lesbians, but Sandtown was for so long as it lasted.

I didn't meet Cynthia's partner until I'd been in town for almost two years. Cynthia told

me that she would have made the introduction sooner, but wanted to let me get Lacy's stamp of approval. I think it was a show of loyalty. Or maybe she didn't want me hitting on her girlfriend. Cynthia invited Lacy and me over for dinner one night, and when I walked into the living room, I came face to face with the single most gorgeous woman I have ever met. It can get confusing when folks call someone other than their wife or husband or whatever the more beautiful person, but with Roxie it was an objective truth. If she'd been born fifty years later, she'd have been snatched up by some agent who would starve her out of her beauty and make her strut down a runway in bad clothes. But she was in her prime in 1964, which meant she had only recently gotten the right to eat at the same restaurants as white folk.

I could try describing her, but Roxie's type of beauty isn't something that can get wrangled down by words. She was tall, could look me right in the eye if we stood nose to nose. She had less hips than either of the other two women, and less in the chest than Lacy. Those are mortal concerns, though. Roxie was ethereal. Her skin shone in the presence of any light. Intellectually, I know it's something to do with physics — photons bouncing off or around the melanin in her skin that caused it — but if you spent ten minutes talking to her, you'd easily believe that it radiated out of her like a pulsing vitality.

So, we had dinner, the four of us. I saw how in love Cynthia and Roxie were. I felt the same thing beginning between myself and Lacy. In the following months we became good friends. The world outside of that friendship was full of hell. Kennedy was shot. A church in Alabama was bombed. Vietnam was raging. Every person kept a calm face, but deep down we all felt how volatile the world had become. I suppose every generation feels that way. But I cling to the idea because I think that's what let it get in. The harlequin. I think that thing could feed off of chaos, and that's how it stepped out of hell and into my life.

■ ■

The word harlequin comes from an old story about a monk. This is in the eleventh century during that great swath of history where seemingly nothing of import happened except the slow drip of progress. The story goes that a monk was traveling between various monasteries and parishes and whatnots to carry a message of great significance to the leaders of the Church throughout France. The monk's path takes him to the French coast where he must camp before carrying on the next morning. He settles down on the windy, cold beach and notices another campfire in the distance. It was not a time when safety was even remotely assured for the lonely traveler, so the monk doused his fire and hid in the brush until morning. He carried on, hurrying down the beach to his next destination until once again, night came. Once more the other fire flared to life, but this time closer. The monk, in his wisdom, sat in the cold scrub once again.

On the third night, the monk could bear it no longer. He waited for the following flames to appear, but hours of darkness passed and he saw none. Finally believing it safe enough, he kindled a small blaze only to find that he was not alone. As the fire roared to life, the monk startled back from a figure dressed in black robes that glimmered with strands of red that marked it like streaks of blood. The figure wore a mask over his face and sat hunched over with a truncheon balanced on one outstretched palm.

Frightened, but holding to his good charity, the monk offered the stranger food and water, but the stranger did not accept. The stranger did nothing, in fact, other than sit opposite the monk at the fire, leering blankly from behind his mask. The monk finally grew impatient with the stranger and demanded either to be robbed or be left alone. Not even this provoked a response. With no recourse, the monk took his bedroll slightly further on into the grassy bank and attempted to sleep. He failed in the attempt for most of the night, but succeeded finally in the early hours of dawn.

Not long after, a horrible whooping and shrieking dragged him from his stupor. Quickly, he gathered his things and hurried to be on his way. As he emerged back onto the beach path, he saw the stranger from the night before still sitting in the same position, but now with his head raised. The mask had changed, too, from a steel visage of blank expression to a lip stretched grin. As the monk scuttled backward, the truncheon in the stranger's hand tipped slightly to one side, finally obeying the natural law as the flanges of iron tipped toward the ground and the handle flew up. The stranger's free hand caught the truncheon and flipped it easily in his free hand as he stood. Then he laughed, a high pitched giggle suited to a mad girl, and it was echoed by the shrieking howls from down the beach.

The monk saw monsters. A giant with his fingers whittle down to bone dragging a cudgel through the sand. A witch with her eyes sewn shut and her lips pulled over and through her teeth playing a harp. A pair of satyrs barking out some type of song between blasts on the flutes they carried. And a dozen other horrors all marching in procession to catch up with their leader. The monk knew then that the harlequin was the harbinger of his doom. Naturally, he turned and ran, and the harlequin followed. The story ends on the idea that the monk is cursed to run forever so long as he does not confront the demons with the word of God that he carries.

I think the root of the story has some truth in it. The monk's demon was an oncoming force of evil that saw the world hanging in a balance. On one side, the head of the truncheon, a brutal weapon meant for control. On the other side, the handle which could be a sense of order, restraint, or control. While the 11th century probably doesn't seem significant, it happens to be when the Great Schism occurs. The Holy Roman Church splits down the middle. That is likely the news that the monk carries, and it is indicative of the larger sense of uncertainty during those times. The potential for chaos as factionalism would lead to conflict, violence, and ultimately war. Another time when the walls are thin, you see.

So why in this story does the harlequin harry a man of god with the threat of violence or debasement. I think because that was the monk's fear. My fear was different and I haven't been direct about confessing it. Naturally, I was afraid of nuclear war, of riots, of gas shortages driving people to looting. But those were problems outside of my life, outside of Sandtown. My fear was much more insidious.

You have to accept that nine-tenths of me loved Cynthia and Roxie like they were my sisters. But one-tenth couldn't shake off an upbringing that said the right way of things was man and wife and that every other way about it was wrong. Which of course made the idea appealing. When I sat at that first dinner with my girlfriend and our two lesbian friends, I wish

that I had spent the night marveling at how wonderful it was to be in the company of friends. I didn't, though. The girls chatted, and I let my mind wander. I saw the way Cynthia's hand gripped Lacy's while they laughed together, and I found myself wondering if they'd ever kissed. I wondered what it would look like to see Roxie's beautiful face diving between Cynthia's thighs. I wondered how long Lacy would watch before deciding to join in. The scene played out easily in my thoughts until I was watching a threesome of gorgeous women writhing together on the dining table before me. Lust. Covetous lust, at that. But the more I let myself enjoy the idea of feeling three different mouths on my cock, the more my fear grew.

By the end of the meal, I was certain of one thing. In my scenario of sapphic lust, there was no place for me. I was an ornamentation and little more. Worse still, I was resented for my masculine insistence. Such fear opens the door for dark thoughts. Perhaps Lacy was already extremely talented at tonguing pussy, but wanted to live another life, too. She wanted the husband to appease the worried school board or maybe to snatch out a child for the muff-munching coven. Ridiculous all these years later, but if you could step back in time to my thoughts during those weeks leading up to the incident, you wouldn't be able to find a single rational thought in the miasma of doubt. Remember also, that I was a young, inexperienced fool. Sex to me was a huffing, pleasant ten minutes that, despite my relatively progressive opinions, still carried a great deal of stigma. Toxic passivities that I wasn't even cognizant of like the idea that a woman should have an orgasm, but she shouldn't enjoy it *too* much because that would make her hysterical or unfaithful.

I was as much of a vortex of potential chaos as the world around me. That doesn't make me special, nor does it explain why the Harlequin came to me instead of someone else. It only explains that I was a possibility among other possibilities, not exceptional. Nevertheless, it came.

••

The local church in Sandtown didn't approve of Halloween. Took them until the 80's to come around on that idea. Even so, if you slap a couple of gourds on the banner, you can disguise a costume party as a harvest festival pretty easily. As respectable teachers from the local high school, we were volunteered to help coordinate the town festival that year. Cynthia was chairperson, after all.

Most of our planning took place in the old school gymnasium that happened to sit at the far end of the town square. The carnival itself would spread out across the square itself with a stage at the far end where they'd have pie contests and hog showings. Maybe even some live music. To help keep things lively, we contracted a traveling fair company. One the town had used a few times before. So far as I know, the company still exists and the Harlequin's appearance during that time was coincidental.

Even so, when I look back, it's hard not to see the carnival as an essential part of how the creature came to us. I first noticed the Harlequin early on that day. I volunteered to help the carnival crew set up the dunk tank. I mainly wanted a break from talking about things like ticket prices and attendance numbers. I spent so much time around women that a day's actual labor

was appealing. Once we got the tank up, I noticed the Harlequin. At the time, I thought him just another performer. He was juggling pins while barely moving. The iron mask with its cheshire grin and vacant eyes looked straight ahead as the pins flipped and swirled over his head. Later on, I would realize that he never reacted to anything around him as I watched. A crate of iron stakes for tents tumbled out of the back of a truck making a noise that would wake the dead. The Harlequin didn't miss a beat or move an inch. He kept juggling until I looked away, and then he was gone.

The day went on. Crew retired to their trailers on the edge of town. The other volunteers and vendors got everything ready for the next day and went home for to their supper. The only people left were my gaggle of women, a few crew members checking different parts of the ride equipment, and Herbert the night watchman who was well on his way to a doze even as the sun set. Lacy and I were nailing together little signs while Cynthia and Roxie stenciled on arrows or other directions. It was our last task other than getting them staked in the ground. We were all tired, but in good spirits. The women didn't hear the soft padding of footsteps as the Harlequin came into the gym. I did, so I saw the creature patter into the room like a ballerina chasing a butterfly. He stopped as though hitting a cue, and the air in the room seemed to draw toward him. The women didn't notice until the creature giggled.

“Need help finding something?” I asked, not yet frightened, but still unnerved.

The thing's head flicked toward me. It's hollow, iron face grinning, it said, “I have come to play a game. The game of fates.” With that the Harlequin brought a hand from around his back and flourished a deck of cards. Tarot cards or something like them, I suppose. “Will you play?”

Maybe I had the choice to say no. Maybe it would have happened anyway. Maybe something worse would have happened instead. In that moment, the world peeled away. I'm not sure anything outside of the gym existed anymore. We had been snatched out of reality and into some other place where the air was strange. Tension filled it like invisible wire that would cut you to ribbons if you tried to resist its pull. “Ah, sure,” I answered. “Why not?”

The others pretended to continue their work as I moved to sit at a table. The Harlequin joined me and rapidly dealt out the cards in three rows, two of six cards and a single card placed between the two lines. “The cards tell an interesting story,” he said. His voice was high pitched and strained, but quiet. “The thirteen tell the story of a person's life when they stand at a junction. The rails, these cards here and here, are the choices the person makes. The person, of course, being you.” With that he turned over the center card to reveal an image of myself in the fashion of a playing card. My top half looked exactly like I did during the day, while the bottom had me in the motley of a court jester. In both sides, the art detailing my face was accurate down to the individual eyelashes.

At this bizarre presentation, I merely grinned. Obviously it was a trick. The clown had been watching me earlier that day, so it was no surprise that he could find time to develop and draw out a good likeness. I feigned surprise for the sake of Lacy and the others, but they

remained uninterested. I suspected then that something was wrong. No matter how committed you are to work, when a clown walked into the room you pay attention. The Harlequin continued the game by jabbing a finger at the first pair of cards in opposition. “Choose,” he ordered me.

With a showy debate and confident smirk, I tapped the one closer to me. The fool’s posture didn’t change as his hand deftly snapped the card up and put it back down face up. It showed a woman holding a pair of cherries in her palm. The woman was naked, and my only thought was that this performer would need to stay away from most people with this particular set of cards. As I considered this, the Harlequin spoke, “The Fruits of Fertility.”

As he said it, I felt a strange heat in my balls. I shifted uncomfortably, but thought little of it at the time. “Listen, buddy, what kind of game is this?” I asked in a whisper. The Harlequin didn’t answer except to wave his hand over the arrayed cards. A stole a peak at the overturned one again. The woman in the artwork looked suspiciously familiar. I ignored it and reached across to tap the next card.

“The second is the Evocation of Spirit,” the Harlequin said as he revealed the card. It depicted three women, all naked, writhing together. One of the women was clearly the object of interest. She reclined on the plush carpets with her legs spread as the other two women worshiped her breasts and pussy. My eyes strained, and my head ached as I tried to reconcile what I knew of the world and what I was seeing. The pictures themselves were alive. I wasn’t looking at peep show drawings, but at three women in the throes of passion. Little by little, my mind allowed me to understand that I knew them. Once I crossed that threshold, I turned my gaze from the picture to see my Lacy and her friends.

The inside of the gymnasium had changed. A large cushion had appeared in the center of the room. Shadow pressed against the ring of light illuminating the Harlequin’s game and the stage he’d conjured for the debasement of my friends. On the cushion, the three women slowly undressed one another. Their eyes burned with lust as more and more clothing was stripped away. Lacy was the first to shed her garments altogether, pulling away her bra to release her heavy breasts. Cynthia and Roxie dove on them like starved vampires. In doing so, they raised their naked bottoms up to my view. The sight was the most sinful thing I had ever seen. Lacy with her head thrown back in a gasp as the two beautiful women licked and sucked at her nipples while their naked asses and pussies wiggled vainly for stimulation.

“What is this?” I asked. I did not have an explanation in mind, but I was not a big enough fool to think that I was still in the world I knew. “What have you done to them?”

The Harlequin’s blank face didn’t offer an explanation either. His hand repeated the gesture over the cards. “Your next choice.”

Unable to stop myself, I grabbed the next card and turned it over myself. I jerked my hand back as I saw another lewd image. It called to mind fertility statues recovered from prehistoric dig sites. A squat, round woman with breasts the size of her torso and an ass sticking

out to match. The Harlequin didn't have to explain. I already understood because I could see the glimmers of similarity between the card and each of the three women. I watched without taking a breath as they started to change. The two pert asses plumped into thick bubble butts. Their gravid cheeks wobbled as they moaned and flopped over onto their backs as their breasts quadrupled in size. Lacy, too, emerged from under their hungry mouths as her tits ballooned from cantaloupes to watermelons. What little clothes they still had on snapped or tore away as their bodies expanded into lush, seductive softness. I was treated to the sight of swelling labia, the thin lips turning into juicy cushions that would eagerly welcome any cock.

And more, I knew innately that the changes weren't only superficial. The women were ripe with fertility. I could actually smell it radiating off of them. The scent of their dripping sex screaming at me to breed them. But I still had three cards left.

The Harlequin giggled quietly, though it sounded as if it came from far behind the mask. His fingers unfurled over the table in the exact same gesture as before, but this time I noticed claws. Jagged black things that tore through the gloves of his costume. Those alone were enough to bring a cold fear over me that briefly quieted my lust. Mouth dry and hand trembling, I again tapped the card closer to me. I barely pulled back my finger before the Harlequin's claw slammed down onto the card. The claw tip punctured through the card allowing the Harlequin to raise it up with the face toward me. "The Cuckold."

The card showed me as I was in that moment, sitting rigidly in my chair facing the demon. Slowly the Harlequin faded from the image to show Roxie instead. The card fluttered to the tabletop as I turned to see the scene play in reality. While I had been focused on the game, the girls had become more enthusiastic in their efforts to give one another pleasure. Roxie extracted herself from the others with a wet slurp. Her gratuitously enlarged breasts jiggled enticingly as she moved to the edge of the cushion and spread her legs as wide as she could. Her fingers moved down to her lips and pulled them open, exposing the vibrant pink between her dark folds.

At first, I thought the display was the only trick, but then I saw her clit grow. Roxie's neck arched back as her mouth opened in an unearthly howl. As its pitch rose, the nub grew to the size of a thumb. The pink darkened as it grew. Its shape turned bulbous as it lengthened. Roxie ended her screech by snapping her head back to a natural position. The obscene cock growing out of her was overshadowed by the rictus grin of dark tipped fangs that stretched across her face. She took hold of her new cock and stroked it, issuing out thick globs of clear fluid. Her angelic beauty had been defiled, but the new Roxie was still unearthly. Her wide hips begged to be gripped, her massive tits needed to be lavished with kisses, and her bobbing cock deserved to know the feel of a tight cunt.

When she moved, I saw that Lacy had been positioned as the offering for Roxie's virgin cock. Bent over like a dog in heat, the love of my life arched her back for the demonic cock her friend had grown in seconds. Roxie gripped Lacy's generous hips and sheathed herself fully into Lacy's tight slit. Time dragged as I watched them fuck. Cynthia offered her pussy up for Lacy's entertainment as she allowed Roxie to have her. The shared momentum meant all their swollen

tits bounced back and forth. Cynthia was the only one to offset this by gripping her fat dugs in her hands to roll her nipples underneath her thumbs.

Though it seemed an eternity, I think it lasted only a minute or so. I felt it end as much as I saw it. Roxie's pace turned ragged, and her thrusts became awkward and deep. Her ethereal howl returned as she pulled Lacy hard, slamming their luscious thighs together, and emptied her cum into Lacy's womb. I shamed myself during that moment, too, erupting in my shorts without so much as a stroke. I gripped the table as my body shook and vitality seemed to pour out of me with each feeble pump. My vision dimmed, but when it returned the Harlequin waited as impassive as ever.

"You have two cards left," it said.

Fatigue overwhelmed me as I reluctantly reached across the table and tapped the card next in line. I drew back and saw that the Harlequin's iron mask had shifted from the wicked grin to a leering frown. "What the fuck are you?" I managed to ask.

The card rose from the table of its own accord and turned over in mid air. I would have gasped in disbelief had I not already been teetering on the edge of sanity. The card showed the Harlequin with three other identical figures standing around him. "The Troop Card," the Harlequin said. "THREE NEW SOULS FOR THE LAUGHING CHOIR!"

The thing's voice nearly split my head and stopped my heart. It was a sound of rage and disappointment that filled me with anguish I have never fully understood. When I managed to focus my sight on Lacy, and Roxie, I saw them clawing at their faces. Their screams joined the Harlequin's as soft dimples and wet lips turned to rigid, cold metal. Lacy looked right at me as the mask formed over her eyes. They went out like lights falling to the bottom of the sea. Their violent attempts to stop the change ended.

They arrayed themselves in a line. Their masks were all curved into a frown. Cloth spun itself across Roxie and Lacy's bodies. It formed the patchwork motley to match the Harlequin, but large circles were omitted around their breasts and crotches. For Roxie, it meant that her massive cock jutted out. For Lacy, it left her body fully exposed, but I saw that the patchwork left an oval around her naval. I understood it as an allowance for the already conceived child. After a moment, Roxie put her hand on the exposed flesh and drew Lacy to the side where they returned to their grotesque coupling.

Cynthia retained her human face and watched her girlfriend and mine leave with tragic understanding. "Only three," the Harlequin said. I had a grim image of the conceived child growing inside Lacy's belly with a jester's mask already sealed to its face. "Your last card. Cruelty or Kindness."

I debated between the two cards for as long as I dared. I do not know what I hoped to know from staring at the back of identical cards. Nor do I know if my choice mattered at all. In the end, I picked the one closer to me.

The Harlequin turned over the card. It was blank. He laughed. Roxie and Lacy laughed as they fucked. Cynthia laughed as she dropped to her knees and crawled away into the darkness. Other voices joined, the full Laughing Choir. The rattling giggle seemed into my bones and echoed in my thoughts for a long, long time.

When it stopped, I was alone. Terribly, existentially alone. I screamed until I laughed. Then I laughed until my throat splintered and my chuckles sprayed flecks of blood. Finally, I collapsed and hoped that I wouldn't wake.

I did, obviously. From what I learned later on, I was found in the woods by a hunter. I was in horrible shape, dehydrated and malnourished. When I asked where I was and when I was, I was referred to a psychiatrist who explained very calmly that I was in shock and suffering bouts of confusion and delusion.

You see, I couldn't possibly be a teacher at Sandtown High School because it burned down in the Carnival Fire of 1964. Workers from the traveling fair had left gasoline canisters improperly sealed. The night watchman, Hubert, tossed a cigarette that ignited fumes which combusted nearby dry cloth. The fire spread and took most of the town. At least five souls perished in the flames, unlucky Hubert, a local colored woman, two teachers, and the town's beloved busybody, Cynthia. These latter four were trapped in the gymnasium as it was wholly consumed.

Bullshit.

I doubted myself, of course. I wanted to crawl back to sanity and pretend that everything in Sandtown was a figment of my imagination. I managed to convince myself so well that I got a stamp on my medical form that proved me sane enough to go back into society. I was checking out of the hospital when they returned the belongings found on my at the time of my rescue. My wallet, keys, a few pens, a pair of pants splotted with paint, a shirt that smelled strongly of smoke, and a deck of tarot cards.

••

Additional Notes

We conducted the interview from Mr. Carson's care home in Durham, North Carolina. Though advanced in age, Mr. Carson told his story with complete lucidity. Our team's medical evaluation will be included in the file.

The backstory Mr. Carson provided for HSA-127 aligns closely with our own independent research. The entity does not follow the traditional role of our jurisdiction, but in numerous cases, such as the incidents in 1943 and 1947, the sexual aspect features heavily in the Harlequin's manipulations or theatrics. This is the first time, however, that we know of the inclusion of card reading as a method of reality manipulation.

At the conclusion of our interview, I asked Mr. Carson what he believed the final, blank card signified. He replied that he still didn't know, that some times he viewed being spared as the mercy and other times as the cruelty.

Mr. Carson provided us with the deck of tarot cards found on his person after his sojourn in the woods. We have sent them to REDACTED for analysis.

*Addendum
May 20, 2018*

Mr. Carson passed away earlier this evening. The nurse on duty reported to his room to respond to an automated heart monitor alert. She found Mr. Carson staring at a fixed point and lacking color. After several seconds of trying to get his attention, she called for a doctor at which point Mr. Carson began to laugh. The nurse described it as 'high pitched and grating, like a death rattle but a laugh'. Shortly afterward, Mr. Carson's heart stopped.

— Agent Randolph