

ONE

Goatish

One could describe Lumby as one would describe, with unreserved fondness, one's own small town in our vast and diverse country: quaint, with enough quirk to make it interesting. It is a town that holds strong to the belief that the oldest apple tree in the country is firmly rooted on the corner of Cherry Street and Farm to Market Road, and a town that reacted adversely when one of its more entrepreneurial youths put the tree up for auction on the Internet a few years back.

It is also where, one winter, the Chatham Press distributed its annual calendars, which inadvertently showed the preceding year's holiday dates, so although the twenty-fifth of December remained sacred, most other significant religious and historical celebrations were off by as many as six days. The residents of Lumby, though, decided that it might be interesting to be out of sync with the rest of the country for just one year, so for the next twelve months, followed the written word to the letter.

And finally, Lumby is a town in which the greatest pastime is reading the Sheriff's Report in the local paper.

Sheriff's Complaints

SHERIFF SIMON DIXON

March 23

9:42a.m. Woman from Hunts Mill Road reported a bat hanging on her screen door.

10:55a.m. Lumby resident requested that her grass be measured by front walk.

1:13p.m. John Morris reported two dogs trying to down a steer. He shot at them, chasing them off.

1:15p.m. Reverend Olson reported three bullets going through stained glass windows at Holy Episcopal.

3:39p.m. A Lumby

caller reported that two draft horses had wandered into his pasture.

4:17p.m. Caller reported that aluminum ladder stolen yesterday had been returned bent.

6:43p.m. JoEllen McKee, 44, was arrested for disorderly conduct at Jimmy D's. Bond: \$115.

10:01p.m. EMS responded to a report of a man having a diabetic reaction and in a semi-conscious state.

10:22p.m. Received report of a burning bush on fairgrounds property. LFD dispatched.

11:22p.m. Pickup vs deer. Pickup wins.

11:58p.m. Moose damages car State Road 541.

Sheriff Dixon is as steadfast and dependable as the paper in which his name appeared that day. For more than a dozen years he has been the patient guardian of the residents and activities in and around Lumby. A brick of a man, with a tall, solid body and square shoulders, he demonstrates as much kindness toward the innocent children as he does firmness toward those who jeopardize the tranquility of the town.

In his younger and, as he readily admits, more foolish years, his only focus was his career advancement during the years he spent in the Seattle police department. He ultimately became the youngest lieutenant in the department, spending most waking hours at the downtown station. When not in uniform, he dedicated his few nonworking hours to either police study or physical improvement. He was, overall, a very disciplined and focused man.

Until he met Anna, who came into his life one summer when she was in the fish market, smelling salmon. Within weeks they were good friends, and they became inseparable by the end of the summer. In late August, Anna returned to her hometown ten hours away to continue teaching, leaving Simon alone and, for the first time in his life, unmotivated.

During the following year, when Simon visited Anna in her small town, he came to embrace Lumby's pace and "unique way of life," as Anna called it. That second summer Simon asked Anna to marry him, and they began to plan their future together. Job prospects looked limited after Simon's first conversation with Sheriff Dumont, who

explained that the “Lumby police department” was, in fact, one person who worked part-time until just two years prior.

However, Simon was quickly able to get a position in Wheatley, a small city south of Lumby, and bided his time until Dumont retired. During those first three years he and Anna bought a small home off Loggers Road and had a son and then, eighteen months later, a daughter, who has the same dirty reddish-brown hair and dark brown eyes as her mother.

Within a year of little Sarah’s birth, Dumont announced his retirement, and Simon accepted the town council’s offer to become Lumby’s second sheriff in its unblemished history. And so Simon came to learn patience from two new forces in his life that he held dear: his children and the quiriness of the residents of the small town of Lumby.

“And how are you this morning?” Simon asked, walking into the station shortly after seven a.m. that early-spring day.

“Fine, Sheriff,” Dale answered, as he does every morning. Dale Friedman was hired four years prior, doubling the town’s police resources from one to two.

“Anything to report?”

“Rob Steadman called a few minutes ago. Seems there are two goats locked in the bank vault that are enjoying a breakfast of ten- and twenty-dollar bills. Can’t get them out until the vault timer allows entry at nine.”

Simon smiled, shaking his head as he occasionally

does when he hears about some of the town's stranger mishaps. Patience and humor.

"Anything else?"

"Principal Harris called earlier to report that the nine-foot catapult built by Mrs. Escher's tenth-grade class had been moved from the back parking lot to the football field."

"Who would want a catapult?"

"Probably the same kids who took six chickens from Bill Henry."

"Let me guess: catapulting chickens over goalposts?"

"Seems so. Bill Henry said that all his chickens have been returned, mostly defeathered and shook up, but alive."

"Next."

"One other. Cindy Watford called to complain about the electricians from Rocky Mount. Seems after they did some work in her house yesterday, each time she turns on the kitchen light, the doorbell rings."

"Poor woman," Simon responded. "That must be driving her nuts. Would you call Chris and have him go over and fix it?"

"Already done," Dale said.

"Great. If that's it, I'll be across the street if you need me."

Directly across from the police department is the Chatham Bank, best known, or perhaps only recognized, for being the smallest bank in the state, with reserves of slightly over twelve million dollars. Simon loved this time of morning, when the school

buses were beginning their routes and town merchants swept the sidewalks on the main street. Within a month, the store owners would plant spring flowers in the raised beds that line the road, and the town would be vibrant with colorful blooms and waving banners hung from awnings.

Simon was proud of the town and its residents. Although Lumby lacks the economic benefits of some of its neighboring towns, the little community has steadily grown while keeping the same values as had been instilled by the town's ancestors a hundred years before.

Simon was equally proud of the role he had in Lumby. He had done a good job. During the twelve years that Simon had protected Lumby, only once did his integrity fall short. Had the monastery fire never happened, had "private" conversations that told him to back off never taken place, he would have a spotless record. Even though that was a year ago, he was still haunted by the events of that week, especially this time of year, when the winter was releasing its cold grip.

"The *Post* called to ask for a comment about your goat situation," Simon teased as he approached Rob Steadman, shaking his hand. Rob, the president of Chatham bank, was a man who could make coffee nervous, but he was also one of Simon's closest friends.

"Damn things are eating my money!" Rob said, looking at the security monitor on his desk.

"So, that's a 'no comment,' I assume?" Simon joked. "Should I even ask how they got in there?"

"We're using them this morning for an advertising

campaign, but Mcnear had to drop them off last night. When Dora was locking up, she thought they would be safe in the vault for the night.”

“No doubt,” Simon said.

“And those conniving goats. One actually jumped on the back of the other to reach the lower shelf where there were two money bags that were prepared to be taken out this morning. See, you can see one of them there,” Rob said, pointing out a canvas bag on the

bottom shelf behind the goat’s back legs.

“Where’s the other?”

“Eaten.” Rob paused, still watching the monitor. “The bottom is under the goat’s hoof. They must not like premium leather,” Rob said sarcastically.

Right then the goat on the shelf relieved itself, splashing everything within a six-foot proximity, including the money bag.

“Wonderful,” Rob grunted, sitting down.

Simon became transfixed watching the smaller goat chew a ten-dollar bill.

“I think those are the same goats that ravaged the bookstore last year, and they still look hungry,” Simon commented.

“They shouldn’t be,” Rob said. “They’ve been eating for hours. Must have swallowed thousands of dollars between the two of them.”

“Why not call Dr. Campbell and see if she can anesthetize the goats through the air ducts so they sleep for the next few hours?” Simon suggested.

“Best idea I’ve heard all morning.”

The goat picked up a twenty-dollar bill and began

chewing in leisure. “Really nothing else I can do. I’ll check in later,” the sheriff said, waving his hand as he left the bank.

Simon walked out to see Allen Miller sitting on the bottom stone step of the bank.

Allen turned when he heard the door open. “Mr. Dale said you were here,” he said.

“And what can I do for you, Mr. Miller?” Simon asked, sitting down next to him.

“Can you talk to Billy?”

“Sure, about what?”

“He put a pea in my ear last night.”

“Is the pea still in there?”

Young Allen shook his head. “Mom took it out after dinner, and she gave me an extra scoop of strawberry ice cream.”

“Well, that sounds like a fair deal,” Simon said, leaning into the six-year-old’s body. “Where’s your mom now?”

“She went next door.”

“Well, let’s go find her,” Simon said, taking the small hand of one of his favorite young residents and walking him over to Dickenson’s food store. Allen’s father had died the prior fall from a car crash at Priest Pass, and Simon had made a concerted effort to befriend Allen, and his older brother, Billy, who was beginning to test his boundaries and independence, not to mention his mother’s good nature.

After returning Allen to safe hands, and visiting with Linda for a few minutes, Simon walked back to the police station.

“So, are the goats under control?” Dale inquired.

“Not quite,” Simon answered.

“How much money is gone?” Dale asked, just as Scott Stevens walked in the door.

“Money—stolen in Lumby?” Scott asked excitedly. Scott Stevens is the lead reporter, of the two reporters in town, for the local paper, and is always looking for a story. The young man should be, no doubt, let loose in New York City, as the slow, sometimes humdrum life of Lumby doesn’t offer the excitement and chaos that Scott believes his type of reporting needs. Born and raised in Rocky Mount, he never had the opportunity to venture far from home, and took the job at the paper only because of his father’s friendship with William Beezer, the owner.

But he sends out resumes every now and again to various papers, all in large cities, just waiting for a job offer to be made. He has been waiting for more than six years now. It has been rumored that he was offered a few jobs along the way, but no one has directly asked him why he is still here in Lumby.

The townspeople can sense his degree of restlessness through his writing, which serves as a barometer for his level of frustration to be reporting on small-town events. Scott has been known to exaggerate the facts, or, on at least three occasions, totally fabricate a front-page story to “liven up the place a little.” However, Mr. Beezer finally pulled his fiction-written-as-fact plug when he ran a three-column exposé entitled “Mafia Connections Implant Cocaine in Local Cows.”

“Hellooo?” Scott said, after getting no response from Simon or Dale.

“No money was stolen,” Simon calmly explained.

“So, what money is gone?”

Simon didn’t especially like Scott, but always admired his tenacity, although misguided at times: very ferretlike. “I need to return some calls, Scott. Why don’t you come back in a few hours?” Simon asked politely.

“I saw you walking out of the bank, that’s why I came over.”

At times, Simon thought, there are disadvantages of having the police station, the Chatham Press and the bank at the same intersection in town. This was one of those times.

“No comment,” Simon said.

“Fair enough. I’ll be at the bank if you want to be quoted,” Scott offered as he walked out the door.

Hearing Scott’s voice, Dennis Beezer looked up as he was just stepping into his car, which was parked in front of the police station.

“You’re out chasing news awfully early this morning,” Dennis said.

Scott sauntered over. “Same old, same old,” he said with a shrug. “Lumby’s just not a hotbed of illicit activity these days. How are things down at the *Sentinel*?” Scott liked Dennis, who was many years his senior and, being the editor of the largest newspaper in Wheatley, could someday be in the position to hire him—a fact that Scott always appreciated.

“Same old,” Dennis concurred.

“I assume you’re not in town to see your father?” Scott asked, never hesitant to turn over any rock to

find any worms he could write about.

Dennis laughed. “Your assumption is correct,” he said, shaking his head. Although his father, William Beezer, owned the Chatham Press and *The Lumby Lines*, he had not talked to his father for decades—more than Dennis cared to remember. As they were in the same profession, social and professional etiquette would occasionally require a handshake or a polite, albeit strained greeting, but no other words were shared between them.

When Dennis and Gabrielle, his wife, and their young son, Brian, came to Lumby eighteen years ago after living in Central America for a short time, Dennis extended an offer to introduce his father to his daughter-in-law and grandson, but William said nothing, and when Dennis paused during that brief one-way conversation, his father quietly hung up the phone. A year afterward, Gabrielle sent William an invitation to the grand opening of her restaurant, The Green Chile, but it went unanswered. So, no, he thought, he wasn’t in town to see his father.

“Well,” Dennis said, getting into his car, “I need to head off. Have a good day.”

“Hey, would you give me a call if something opens up at your paper?” Scott asked.

Dennis was always amazed by Scott’s unabashed brazenness. “I may forget, Scott. So best you call the paper every month or so, and if you hear of a position that interests you, you can call me to discuss it.”

“Will do,” Scott said as Dennis started his car.

Then, as he did every weekday morning, Dennis

turned left onto Farm to Market Road, which connects Lumby to Wheatley, thirty minutes to the south. The drive is one of the most beautiful in the country. After leaving Lumby and its small farms on the outskirts of town, the expanse broadens to a large range of gently rolling hills that gradually drops down to Woodrow Lake. To the west, some distance away, the rolling terrain gives way to the extraordinary Rocky Mountains.

Only occasionally on his drives would Dennis take note of Montis Abbey, an old stone monastery five miles south of Lumby, which had been vacant for at least a year. He would see the blackened, scarred remains of the flames that consumed much of the building. He then would think about the fire and wonder how his son, Brian, grew up to be a teenager who totally lacked good judgment and moral fiber.