



The Day's Other Face

[Lucretia Indrid, 2025]

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The events that took place in Bremen Pennsylvania the early spring of 1972 made no entry in the county or state records. This is because there is no Bremen Pennsylvania, though the fate of its fictitious denizens was in fact mirrored in that of its real life counterparts whose location is a matter of official secrecy. The year and choice of location are not wholly arbitrary, however, indeed both were selected to invoke feelings pertinent to the story beyond the bare facts. Picture the scene; Appalachia – black country in the guttering days of the coal fire era, Nixon on the radio, instruments of death shuddering in the bowels of leviathan train cars deep in the country night. Snow lying thin and wet on the ground. Soil and hedgerows and lonely roads under the watchful bulk of mountains that haunt the horizon. Black branches rattle over darkened bungalows beyond the city limits. The flickering sign above the liquor store, the only light in town. Close up it’s filthy, spattered with mud and windblown leaf detritus, its casing the graveyard of a myriad dead insects, but to the stranger who shambles through town on an unfortunate night in March, it is like an angel; fantastical luminescence – power beyond substance. And down below, under the sodden earth, something moves – its trembling baritone weighing ominously upon the dreams of every sleeping soul, and taking root there like a

fungus.

The stranger was of no consequence to the story, though in the days and weeks to come Bremen Pennsylvania and the surrounding countryside would see its share of unfamiliar faces. He was, I can divulge, a travelling salesman, whom we'll name Mr. Harrison. Harrison, though subject to intense suspicion in those fraught first days, would eventually be absolved of complicity in what would come to pass by becoming, in fact, one of its first and (by common acknowledgement) worst-suffering victims.

In his delirious final testimony, Mr. Harrison would insist that on the night in question, and at the time which majority consensus places at precisely twenty minutes after midnight (Bremen was not a late-sleeping burg), he had heard nothing at all beyond the wind, and the thrum of his idling Ford Ranchero. His account would differ little from that of Morris Elsept, the liquor store owner's son minding the counter while Elsept sr. slept off a long afternoon at the VFW, or Chrissy Feldman the librarian, wired on ice tea, fixating on a passage of Mark in the original Greek, or Deputy Lt. Doherty who'd been surveiling the stranger from the blackened interior of his squad car at the time of the event.

By a peculiar coincidence, that we know the timing at all is something we owe to Mr Harrison's nephew Pete, also a salesman – also in his own way a victim of these events. The younger Harrison had passed through the town the previous winter and made a killing on cheap Japanese alarm clocks, sold at considerable markup to the good people of Bremen – quality intel he would pass on to the elder Harrison at Thanksgiving that same November. Of the sleeping souls who, in near unison, awoke in that mutual paroxysm of nauseated fear, and of those, the ones whose constitution permitted them to survive that first night, and of those, who'd obliged the younger Harrison in late fall and now possessed the presence of mind to mark the time on the glowing green displays that illuminated their nights from bureaus and vanity tables (and figured out how to set them); would give a figure close to the official time of twelve twenty two.

For those who survived the initial shock, the first actual effects seemed – for many – as inconsequential as they were singular: not a soul in Bremen Pennsylvania would return to sleep that night. Nor would they know sleep until death or medically-induced coma would bring a merciful occulsion to the terrible new reality in which they found themselves that pale morning in early spring.

Another curious detail, little remarked on by investigators and all but absent from the official account, is that by mutual acknowledgement, there had been zero collective realisation that anything beyond the ordinary had taken place until a full day and night after its happening. That not a soul on that first night had once in all those sleepless hours walked to their window and marked the fact that almost every other window on their street was lit like their own, as if reacting to a simultaneous impulse to drive out the night. It was later learned that even family members as little as a hallway or a door apart kept secret their lonely vigils. They would simply greet each other with haggared expressions and rueful excuses over breakfast, privately ascribing their condition to a myriad of worldly causes, consequence of whatever poor habits and mundane traumas their lives had already inflicted. For the next forty eight hours they would speak not a word, holding their sleeplessness closer than sin.

Perhaps as prelude to the biblical tone that the events would take on in popular consciousness of the town (uncommonly pious even for the place we're calling Pennsylvania), or maybe simply because that second morning happened to fall on a Sunday, but it was the monsieur of the local Baptist Ministry, a Pastor David Mesquigea – a man by all accounts the most sober soul in town – who would be the first to blink. His confession took the form of a quip, a vain attempt to go out on a lighter note following a weighty sermon on the story of Lazarus, setting the foundations for the Good Friday address he would never deliver. Accounts

vary, but it was words roughly to the effect of “and may everyone get a good and early night tonight” that really set the thing in motion. Parishioners on the front row later remarked on how, in that moment, his face fell. As if, even before finishing the sentence, the fateful implications now stirring in every soul present were somehow transverberated back onto him, his last, disconnected words alluding to Mrs. Mesquigea’s predilection for coffee and late night talk shows swallowed up in the tortured silence of denial’s unravelling.

With the breakdown of secrecy came a certain plurality of experiences. It was as if, relieved of a personal hell and still yet to reckon the magnitude of the one they now shared, there came a resurgence of settler era individualism, manifesting a will to render suffering their own. Yet among them, a number of convergent threads would nevertheless manifest, giving those earliest, desparate attempts to pin a coherent narrative onto the unfolding event a distinct local character.

Like much of rural Appalachia, Bremen’s surrounding territory was threaded with cave networks whose many mouths were still then unmapped, their secret hunger haunting the untrodden forest depths. And like so many places of this nature, its history, distant and not so distant, was the site of a myriad tragedies known to befall the intrepid or careless. It was therefore little surprise that in that doomed quest for meaning, suspicion would turn all but immediately downwards, to that unseen world beneath their feet.

It was two sisters, Margaret and Miranda Dumont – lately mourning their brother Mitford Dumont, the ill-celebrated amateur caver, thirty two summers dissappeared – who would propose the first of these subterranean narratives. This was on the second night, after a tumultous town meeting the following evening over whose four hour duration theories ranging from Soviet satellite weaponry to pesticides recently cleared by the FDA and used liberally throughout that summer had been bandied about before an acrimonious cessation shortly after midnight dispersed the three hundred attendees to nurse individual agonies at home or at the bar. The sisters were not among those present, but their niece Janie-Lenore Garfield – departing the meeting shortly after nine – had checked in at the Dumont estate, finding them in rapt conversation, evidently having their own version of the debate still raging over at the town hall. Janie was dead before a state-level investigation could be initiated, but her diary would later attest, verbatim, to the following statement: *in our dream we heard Mitty under the ground, and in our vision we saw him, and its image was glowing like a movie projector in the dark of our room but lighting nothing around it. His mouth and his eyes was full of clay and the long tubers of plants that reach that far down and farther. They had taken him and pierced his skin in a million places so that they was like hair, thin and white, and there were so many that not an inch of him weren’t covered, so that the whole of him was like the pelt of some awful polar bear. Yet he still screamed, ‘cause he no longer needed his mouth to scream – the scream was so strong in him that the tubers let it out him through their filaments and bore it to the surface. And all he said was we never should have left him in such a terrible place.*

The sisters Dumont were found dead in their fruit cellar at noon on the fourth day, where both had apparently died from the effects of extreme exhaustion and pulomnary complications brought about by damp. They’d died some six hours apart – Margaret collapsed against the north wall by the coal chute, Miranda three feet below ground in the hole they’d dug together from the dirt floor under the house. It would not be until after nightfall they would be found. But this time not by the niece but David Mesquigea himself, checking in on the elderly parishioners.

Pastor Dave’s visit had been as much a mission of mercy as it was an appeal to calm. While the Dumonts had been engaged in the secret nocturnal labours that would reuinte the three siblings under the earth, the town had already seen the first of a series of civic interventions of an altogether more dramatic cast. Around 5AM, a self-described “posse” – consisting of naval engineer turned drunk Robert O’Beiron, his brother in

law Cleobald Garfield, highschool senior Andy Feldman and boon companion, highschool drop-out Niall “Frenchie” Corday – had blown up the radio tower. The flames would rise high into the early morning sky, a false dawn refracted in the descending fog that so muffled the sound that some among the unsleeping crowd filling the street at the foot of the hill (known locally as *Radio Point*) likened it to a ghost ship, or some other artefact of phantasmagoria that had lately taken hold in the popular imagination.

Many of those gathered at the foot of Radio Point would in turn take inspiration from the *Posse*’s daring sabotage. Dawn found a handful of Bremenites – among them the now cut-adrift DJ Garton Mead – gathered at the gates of the abandoned chemical plant. The plant had at that point been out of action for six years, its vacant concrete lot sprung with weeds. However, the site was still host to long-term disposal and containment teams, with an on-site office still wired for power, and latterly the appearance of nesting birds had brought in additional attention from a nascent EPA. It was also, until two years prior, under military security. So while, for all intents and purposes, a dead appendage of the Military Industrial Complex, enough white coats and trim fatigues haunted the facility to mark it for a legitimate target.

By ten AM the crowd had grown up to three dozen, with more still drifting in from the desultory town hall and Rotary Club. And though the numbers already far exceeded the capacity for the authorities to contain, it would be a further hour until it found sufficient will to act. Some say the call to storm the complex came from Garton Mead himself, finding in the expectant masses a voice uplifted by supernatural means to heights stronger than he’d ever known in all his years of broadcasting.

They would spend, in all, less than half an hour ransacking the vacant facility before dissipating around one PM after not a single arrest. When later asked, participants had confessed that while convergent ideas – scientific and political – had congealed into what resembled at least the *sense* of a theory implicating the plant in their common malady, the actual rationale amounted to basically checking it off the list. A list expansive and still growing. Yet despite this flare of common will and perhaps three other equally viable targets still standing around town, the actions of the townsfolk would devolve into a plurality of sporadic actions, not unlike those of the Dumonts. These would be enacted in isolation and without overt rationale: a hit and run on the post office, a hijacking of the church bell for upwards of an hour, a dozen abortive suicides and about half that number of successes. But, commendably, no murders.

It was on the morning of Good Friday, a full week after the *Onset*, that local authorities decided to call it in. When a combined team of CDC, FBI and (once again) EPA agents from their respective regional bureaus arrived on the scene, the town they entered into, though markedly reduced in population, was not the site of desolation they had anticipated on hearing the deputy lieutenant’s comprehensive and at least moderately coherent report. Shops were open, garbage collection and the bus services to neighbouring [...] were running, the local school was well attended and anyone questioned expressed a unanimous intention to attend mass that evening. In short, public life in Bremen PA, was, it seemed to the investigators, going as well as it ever had.

Shortly after this preliminary assessment was made, agents on the ground also quite unexpectedly learned that with the sudden abatement of civic unrest, the insomnia, and the pall of leaden horror it cast over the town had overnight been lifted by forces unknown. While the physiological and cognitive fallout of the last few days was still resolutely manifest – and there was not a soul whose eyes did not harbour some unspoken rawness of the nerves – each soul in town reported a more than healthy night’s sleep. Call transcripts will bear out that this detail was not mentioned in the Lt. Doherty’s curiously somber phonecall to the Emergency Bureau offices in Pittsburg little under five hours before teams arrived at the scene.

With the cessation of both nominal cause and visible effect, and thus the *event* itself, it seemed that while mystery loomed as implacable as ever, the state of emergency was for all intents and purposes now concluded. And were it not for the stubborn professionalism of one Dr. Emmeleine Haller of the EPA, the combined response team would likely have called it a day entirely. So it happened that a skeleton staff of three two-person teams from each respective agency remained installed in a shared office in the parish hall to conduct follow-up investigations to the best of their abilities. As with a number of the townspeople themselves, early consensus favoured an airborne contaminant scenario.

Preliminary examination of chemical compositions in the water and soil, as well as plant and animal life (itself evidently unaffected), proved inconsequential. Nevertheless, one distinct irregularity was noted by investigators: surface soil in the radius of the affected area was found to contain abnormally high quantities of copper and zinc. Though itself not immediately identifiable as a causal factor in any known health conditions, it alone was sufficient to give investigators pause, and attention was diverted to establishing its origins. This was shortly thereafter established as particulate fallout from the construction of two new and still largely uninhabited residential developments in the town's north and eastern peripheries completed that summer. Here, remnants of the pulverised metals were in places still visible on the ground.

Further investigation established that the superabundance of these materials was attributable to the fact that a kind of mesh of zinc and copper threads had, for reasons unknown, made up an embedded sub-layer in the MDF boards that had been used as a core component in the prefabricated walls and ceilings of the new houses. Haller et al. reached out immediately to the contractors charged with the development, but were troubled to learn that not only was no one involved at any stage of the design or construction of the residential development (save a handful of the more observant joiners) aware of the materials' presence, but owing to a suspiciously opaque supply chain through which the MDF had come to Bremen, none would ever ascertain the reason behind its incorporation.

Furthermore, architectural and construction specialists, when consulted, were unable to even speculate as to any function which the prohibitively expensive and oddly specific inclusion of these materials could possibly serve, although one did point out that to be surrounded by them might produce certain unusual acoustical and electromagnetic phenomena, but was able to elaborate no further. Indeed, Sandy Elsept, who along with her eighteen month old daughter Claire had been one of the few Bremenites to take up residence in the development, had remarked several times to friends and colleagues that the walls in the living room had *a certain way of screwing with your head when the radio wasn't there to block it out. When it wasn't also screwing with the radio, that is.*

Meanwhile, the FBI contingent were busy taking statements from a cross section of Bremen's population. To those they interviewed, their stated rationale was to establish a picture of events in the days leading up to the incident, looking for hints of activities that might indicate foul play. Privately, it was actually far more concerned with the possibility that what they were really looking at was a case of mass hysteria, a hypothesis growing in strength as the contamination scenario spiralled into confused irresolution. Their notes – which are copious – though comprising an interesting portrait of smalltown Pennsylvania life and its many strata of concern, tradition and civic affectations, contained nothing of any substance or note that could precipitate the kind of rupture in smalltown life witnessed that fateful spring.

What their notes omit for reasons of professional credibility is the unsettling impression they gained when taking these statements that both were at a loss to wholly comprehend. *They were all just so uniformly candid – almost to the level of theatre, like a pastiche of that small town honesty we hear about when people want to counterpose it with the city. And it didn't feel like a front, that's the wildest thing. They were*

*responsive and obliging, but articulate, too. They would venture specifics, analyse, make questions of their own. You got the idea that they would give any answer you had a question for, and gladly. But that's it: if you didn't have the question it didn't exist, and neither of us could shake the idea that it – whatever it was – definitely existed. Like there was this invisible barrier that fled from the light, and could move indefinitely.*

The Bremen investigation would continue for another two weeks, but with a dissipating set of leads and a population manifestly unconcerned that a low-level apocalypse had so recently befallen their town, even the handful of staff left over found themselves eventually without any good reason to stay. Thus the events of that spring in 1972 would come to a peculiar anticlimax. Nevertheless, it would find a curious epilogue in two final incidents – one tied to events by direct circumstance, the other by vague supposition, yet still darkly compelling in its implications.

The First was a private affair, related secondhand. Early evening on Christmas eve that year, one Genevieve Mead – daughter of the still very much employed broadcaster Garton Mead – had appeared at the house of a college friend in Boston after taking a Grayhound all the way from Pittsburg. Articulate despite her profound distress, she related an incident in which she'd come home from an illicit meeting with an old highschool friend (the aforementioned Andy Feldman). Not wishing to alert her father of her late return she'd gone out back, knowing she could make a quieter entry through the screen doors to the conservatory the Meads typically left unlocked. However, passing through the alley she'd caught a glimpse through the kitchen window and into the curtained living room where Garton was sitting up, apparently going over papers. Knowing the jig was up, she returned back around to the front and come in the main door. But when she did come in, it was to find her father lying on the couch, a blanket pulled up over him, as if asleep some time. As she stepped closer, Garton had stirred, cutting off a snore with a start and, through dazed apologies, looked over to where the clock on the wall now read 4AM, remarking, blithely: *all good sweetie, I gotta be at the station to cover morning traffic in an hour anyway.*

Genevieve, evidently inheriting Garton's famed talent for improv, had made a coy apology of her own and offered to make coffee. The next thirty minutes Genevieve recounts in a daze. Pouring the coffee she sat down opposite from her father, making awkward smalltalk about classes in Boston and plans to move in with friends off campus. Then at a certain point she'd looked up, and, locking eyes with him, she described how the question hung in the air, words finally failing her, before Garton did something unexpected.

*He winked at me* – Genevieve's statement continues – *like it was some private joke between us. God alive I'd heard tales of some real weirdness happening while I was away getting ready for midterms but it never really hit home 'til that moment. This place was just so shit boring next to Boston I either didn't believe the rumours or downplayed them in my head. Just drunk, small-town antics; fuck knows we've seen enough of those over the years. But this was something else. I'd told myself this was Bodysnatchers shit, that this "weren't my daddy" or whatever and talked myself out of it. Or thought I had – right then it all came back but I knew it different now. That however fucking gonzo he was acting this \*was\* him, that nothing was different and that everyone just agreed to be in on the secret. But he knew I wasn't, and what shocked me was that that didn't seem to matter.*

Genevieve had seen her father off at the door, run upstairs to watch his car disappear down the road, then run to the garage to collect the bike she'd not rode in three years before setting off as fast as possible in the opposite direction.

The Second incident was very much a public thing, witnessed by dozens. It took the form of a speech delivered by a candidate [whose name and further particulars have been redacted (or judiciously altered)] in

the Democratic caucus for the 1972 Pennsylvania Gubernatorial elections. During a speech delivered during a tour of the counties in the spring of that year, the candidate experienced a momentary lapse in concentration. In the middle of a by then well rehearsed section addressing national security, his speech took a sudden detour into a somewhat idiosyncratic article of political philosophy, remarking:

*What is a body politic? Huh – we covered it in civics 101, back in my college days. We might have read of kings and nations and organs of state being one and the same. But do we ever think about that beyond an analogy? And does that analogy, if it ain't any more than that, does it hold up? The body of state is democratic, but the bodies that make it are flesh and blood, and they adhere to a principle that knows no ideology. But these are indivisible – so how does that work? Politics is changing, and the bodies, and the brains that are really only body parts themselves, they're changing with it. Or at least, those bodies that are bodies politic. They must be both. This is the same the world over – you hear about the Politburo over in Russia drinking themselves to death, steely eyed on pills and nicotine, you hear about the Shah and his viziers, smoking great pipes of that same marijuana our government's waging a war against right now. I can only imagine what Mao Xedong and his boys are on. That's jus the rule now. The political animal must function without sleep, whether you're Leonid Brezhnev or your average Joe or, Hell, me! For it is that they must see the democratic state as both a body politic and a body natural. See the things we can and cannot see. See the vague shapes that fly in the night and the dark spots that hide in the dawn. They must see the day's other face, and know the night by name.*

The speech was cut off shortly after these final remarks were delivered. A tape recording of the event was immediately (and illegally) seized by members of the candidate's security detail. However, by some quirk of fate, the recording found its way into possession of one of the two FBI personnel who'd been in Bremen that fateful spring. That agent, before an equally suspicious turn of events saw him disappear while on a journey to Minnesota, was able to turn up, amongst other things, the candidates financial records which, in amidst a series of otherwise nondescript transactions, shows a hotel bill for one night dated Friday March 2nd, Bremen Pennsylvania.

Though, of course, not really.