

CHAPTER TWO

MARY AND THE MYTH COUNCIL

Bellevue was just like any small town in America. Born at the end of World War I and burnished to a pristine finish in the 1950's, it was everything America represented, not just to the world, but to itself. Somehow, Bellevue withstood the onslaught of franchise culture; nary a Starbucks or Walmart to be found. It existed in its own little bubble, seemingly insulated, indeed shielded from the goings on of Hollywood to the west and Washington D.C. to its east. Bellevue's history and indeed its existence, was something of a mystery. Nobody outside Bellevue ever heard of the small hamlet and in fact, not even Bellevueians could determine which state of the union they were actually in. And, yet, in spite of these unanswerable simple questions, Bellevue was just like any other small town this side of the Mississippi or any other side for that matter.

Bellevue High was your classic mid-century to modern American high school. With one major exception. Sure, it had its cheerleaders and football team and class president, but one thing it didn't have was fear of school shootings. And, that wasn't because they had a top notch security team on 24/7 guard, it was because, like everything else in Bellevue, it wasn't connected to the outside world.

Its residents didn't watch the news and the Internet they interacted with was one of complete kindness and civility. Everything about Belleview High School was planned and designed right out of the modern American fantasy handbook.

Shutting the door behind her of a post-Colonial mansion, Mary Spensor – 16 years old, picks up a nearby watering can and feeds the daisies lining the drive the precious holy water they desire and deserve. She has a dancing lilt to her manner, as if she's listening to secret music in her head. The school bus arrives down the road and, with her school books in tow, runs to catch it. Finding herself in a plume of black smoke, the bus takes off once again and one gets the feeling this is her daily ritual. She quickly snaps out of it and skips and walks down the street towards school.

Hundreds of Belleview High School students funnel into the main entrance, like so many fire ants trying to get back into their hole on time. Just above that entrance reads a banner: "BELLEVIEW HIGH SCHOOL CHRISTMAS HOOPLA & BLOOD DRIVE!" Mary runs up to the school, not able to squeeze into and through the mass of grey sweated seniors, sophomores and freshmen, finally reaching the double doors as they seem to purposely shut in her face, followed mockingly by the school bell.

In front of a full classroom of rapt attentive teenage students, the teacher writes: “Edgar Allen Poe” on the blackboard, and turns around to face his legions precisely as Mary sneaks in through the back door. Mr. Braithwaite makes a personal note of that and carries on, punctuating his feigned indifference with a direct inward push of his nose glasses.

“Edgar Allen Poe’s ‘The Tell Tale Heart’ was an allegory for which personal emotion that we all share?”

Two dozen hands reach to the heavens with coordinated enthusiasm, but “Mr. B” zeroes in on one student, whose book happens to be held upside down. Sensing a disturbance on the horizon, the entire class shifts their focus on one girl.

“Mary? Perhaps you’d like to answer the question.”

Mary, startled from a daydream, stands up, straightens her dress, cups her hands together like they were protecting a mouse.

“Edgar Allen Poe’s ‘The Tell Tale Heart’ is about guilt. Inner guilt. The beating heart is a metaphor for our conscience to always do the right thing.”

The entire class breaks out into vicious laughter, pointing at Mary like she was some circus freak. All but Johnny Turnbridge, a bookish student, whose innate good looks are twisted by his enormous prescription goggles and black waxy hair. Henry T. Braithwaite looks at the rest of the class with scorn until they do what's good for them as they take in his authoritative gaze and immediately go silent, their heads down in prayer-like obedience.

"Very good, Mary. That's right!"

The school bell rings and as everyone jumps up to get the hell outta there; the teacher reminds them of their homework.

"Don't forget, Odysseus next week! And, I want to see your papers on The Glass Menagerie as well!"

The army of the grey sweated student body makes their human wave out the school doors like they were escaping torturous boredom. When they're clear, Mary appears once again, alone. Jumping back into her positive mood, she skips and walks down the tree-lined quiet suburban Belleview streets towards home.

Hiding behind an oak tree is Johnny Turnbridge, who suddenly jumps in front of Mary, stopping her progress with a giant: *"BOO!"* Bemused but not befuddled, Mary wags her finger at him in charming admonishment.

"Johnny Turnbridge! I should've known! Don't you know it's bad taste to sneak up behind a girl and scare the bejeebus outta her? I'm surprised Mrs. Larson let's you on her gothic choir practice."

"Ah gee, Mary! I was only trying to get your attention and ask you if you wanted to go to the Belleview Blood Drive with me this Saturday night! I'll pick you up in my dad's new super-doooper roadster. It'll be so cool!"

Mary stops walking and so does Johnny. She looks at him like she's gonna punch him. Instead she swings her books to his chest, followed by another finger-pointing session.

"You behave yourself, Johnny Turnbridge and maybe you'll get your wish! I'm not stupid the way everyone in school seems to think I am."

They start walking again. All the while, a black raven with an eye-patch trails behind them, jumping from tree to tree, keeping a close eye. One close eye. Obviously.

A Yortsite candle brightly burns, illuminating framed and faded black and white photographs of a wedding, children and grandchildren. Moishe Rosenbaum, mid-fifties New York Jew, places a framed picture of his wife Sadie next to the candle, kneels and prays in Hebrew, reciting the Jewish Prayer for the Dead.

“B'olmo dee'vro chir'usay v'yamlich malchu'say, b'chayaychon uv'yomay'chon uv'chayay d'chol bais Yisroel, ba'agolo u'viz'man koriv; v'imru Omein.”

He gets up and moves to the window of his drab one-room apartment. He lights a cigarette, looks out at the hustle-bustle of the busy small town, and blows smoke like a disapproving dragon.

“Oye. How the hell did I ever wind up in Goyim Heaven?”

The smoke permutes into an ellipse which winds its way down the cobblestone main street towards the Gothic Bookshop, where inside, Johnny Turnbridge tries to explain the value of his inventory to a very old customer.

“I'm afraid that's the closest you're going to come in finding a first edition Poe anywhere near that price, Mrs. Pendegast.”

The Belleview Gothic Bookshop's vivid green exterior belies the collection of literary antiquities displayed therein. The small dusty corner shop boasts "Rare Editions" and "Hard to Find Classics" through its big picture window, facing the Belleview Butchers and Belleview Five and Dime and thereby reflecting their respective craven imagery of cow carcass and support hose, which superimpose against the bookshop's eerie presence. From the inside, the bookshop looks more like a disorganized dorm room than a book store. Johnny helps a seventy-five-year old woman.

"Can probably knock off ten bucks for ya', Mrs. P"; he leans in, whispering his secret. "Whadda-ya say, Ellen? Everyone knows the Gothic horror books are all haunted by their characters, but Poe" ... (looking left to right) ...haunts his own books!"

Mrs. Pendegast smiles and leans in. *"You know, Sonny...I just read them for the intimate descriptions of naked bodies."* She suggestively winks, making Johnny visibly uncomfortable. She exits the shop, carrying a book size brown paper bag under her arm as if were porn, steps over a homeless man and walks down the street and waving hello to the florist and the butcher before disappearing around the corner.

The Belleview Five and Dime is a local institution which was built by the founder of Belleview, Horrace "Two R's" J. Porter, of which there is a statue of him directly across from the shop, in the center roundabout.

STATUE OF HORRACE J. PORTER

The tarnished bronze statue stands over 20 feet high. Porter is portrayed as a Founding Father should. Standing next to stack of Christmas gifts, holding an American flag in his hand, his stern face showing no ounce of mercy. He proudly looks up towards the sky, and vaguely in the direction of Soldiers Mound, the highest peak visible from Belleview, and a popular make-out spot for the teens. Christmas shoppers go in and out in a hurried pace through the doors as carolers sing Joy to the World.

A chorus of three men and three women joyfully sing to their lord and savior and suddenly stop. They look around and huddle. Nodding in agreement, they resume in perfect harmonious silk.

“Merry Christmas, Mary....”

They hold the last note, and look towards the front door of the 5 & Dime. After a moment, they look at each other and sing again.

“Merry Christmas, Mary....”

Still nothing.

“That girl would be late to her own funeral!” spouts one of the carolers.

“Yeah...fuck her!” concurs another.

All share a look of acknowledgement and resignation and open their song books

to another page.

“Good King Wenceslas looked out on the feast of Stephen, When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even. Brightly shown the moon that night, though the frost was cruel, when a poor man came in sight, gathering winter fuel.”

Mary exits the shop, dressed like a snow fairy, holding too many shopping bags brimming with Christmas gifts. And like the vision of Christ’s Mary, she stops for an extreme close-up, revealing she has “virgin-for-life” written all over her mug.

“You wouldn’t believe the bargains!” she proudly proclaims to everyone’s scorn and indifference. *“Merry Christmas everybody?”* she asks sheepishly.

As if choreographed and rehearsed, all the citizens on Main Street, mothers walking their prams, shop owners in the middle of business, even the horse from the milk truck join in, singing her theme tune.

“Merry Christmas, Mary. Merry Christmas, you. You’re our little fairy, We, the Citizens Belleview. We are the butchers, Mary. Undertakers too. We’ve watched you grow up scary, A frightened lamb in the zoo.

And we want you to know, Mary. Even though you’re quite thick, That even the freshest dairy, Can make one quite sick.

Merry Christmas, Mary. Merry Christmas, you. You’ve suffered unnecessary, Even though you’re not a Jew.

Oh, quite contrary, There's a cross around your heart, You're the all American girl, And we don't give a fart.

Merry Christmas, Mary. Merry Christmas you. You're the coal mine canary, In a shaft out of view. And we want you to know, Mary. Even though you're not dead, You're the oyster, not the pearl, And you haven't yet bled. This is what we just said. Merry Christmas, Mary. Merry Christmas, you!"

"Merry Christmas, Mary!"

Everyone cheers and then goes about their business as usual. Moishe, lost in thought, takes one final puff of his cigarette and tosses it out the window to the street, muttering to himself: "*Goyim Heaven...*" He closes his window, just as a filthy hand reaches into the beggar's cup, pulling out the cigarette, to the awaiting mouth of the homeless man. A smile of relief overtakes his face. Looking up towards God: "*Thank you!*" Suddenly, he is awoke to the reality of the situation: All his paper money in his cup is now on fire.

Moishe goes to the closet. Inside are dozens of silk Chinese blazers. He pulls out one and puts it on, then looks a himself in the mirror, adjusting his Yalmulke. He picks up an already opened envelope, pulls out the letter and reads. After a beat or two, he takes a deep sigh, puts the letter back in the envelope, looks at himself once more in the mirror. At first, he sees himself, a 50-ish New York Jewish transplant, but then. His face morphs into the most evil of beings ever imagined here on Earth or elsewhere. His eyes turn a

deep blood red, his face fades to the palest of whites, his ears grow points, his tongue develops a vipers point, his upper and lower teeth sharpen to fangs, and his nose stays the same. He looks at his reflection and innocently ponders.

“Vat am I...some sort of montsah?”

He tosses the envelope on his bed, grabs his coat and hat and exits the room.

The envelope is addressed to:

Moishe Rosenbaum

6151 Little Main Street

Bellevue, No State, No Zip Applicable

And from:

The Eternal Revenue Service

69-71 Rivington Street

Shoreditch, London

EC2A

United Kingdom

The roar of a million typewriters increases and increases...

The nondescript office building sits between two pubs on Rivington Street in Shoreditch, London, England. North London precisely. The building is unlike any other

Georgian or Edwardian leftover so littered throughout ancient turned modern London. With the one exception that this particular building is quite tall. In fact, if one were to stand across the street and follow the building upwards, they'd hardly notice it is so tall, so many floors, they go up and into and beyond the clouds. But, everyone's too busy looking down on their phones these days to even notice.

Inside is the grand reception. A ginormous front reception area, comparable only to Grand Central Station. Hundreds of workers mill about, going from one point to another, most with serious looks on their face. At the center is a switchboard phone bank, as the phone absolutely rings off the hook. A receptionist with a bee-hive wig and half-glasses answers a flurry of calls.

“Myth Council of Earth; please hold. Myth Council of Earth; please hold. Myth Council of Earth; please hold. Myth Council of Earth; please hold. Myth Council of Earth; How can I help?”

A drunk man answers on the other end of the line.

“Yes...(hick-UP!)...Me and me mates are in a bit of a verbal punch-up down the pub...(HICK!)”

The switchboard continues to ring, to which the receptionist tells the man...

“Could you please hold...”

“But, it's my round and...”

“*Sorry sir,*” she puts him on hold. “*Myth Council of Earth, please hold,*” she switches back to the man. “*Yes, sir. Sorry to keep you waiting. How can I help?*”

“*Yes, as I was saying; it’s my round if I can’t name the Seven Dwarves. And, I say there is a Dwarf named ‘Stinky,’*, but Ben (HICK!) there claims there is no dwarf named Stinky, but there is one named “*Jehoshaphat.*” *I think that’s wrong...*”

“*I understand, sir,*” says the receptionist, cutting him off. “*Please hold one more time. Sorry.*” She puts the man on hold, turns and rolls her chair at great comical speed to her co-worker (another woman in a bee-hive wig and half-glasses) at the other end of the very long reception desk. She confers with the other receptionist.

“*Sorry. Remind me please where I send inquiries for man-made myths? Was it the Department for Fictional Reconciliation?*”

“*Well, it all depends,*” answers her co-worker. “*If it’s of an adult nature, such as Cupid or Venus, then you want to route them to the Department for Romantic Interlude. If it’s more at the family level, such as Pinocchio, Harry Potter and all that Hollywood crap, then the call goes to the Department of Childhood.*”

“*It’s a drunk calling from a pub.*”

“*Oh, one of those, eh?*” The co-receptionist nods her head in the direction where the first receptionist started and they both roll back together at great comical speed. The co-worker reaches over and disconnects the caller. “*Trust me...The Myth Council is no*

*match for the fantastical imaginings born of alcohol. No sympathy for the human race!
That's our credo!"*

The phone still ringing like mad; the receptionist tends to business again. *"Myth Council of Earth, please hold...Myth Council of Earth, please hold..."*

On the 711th&1/2 floor, a woman's ass sways back and forth timed perfectly with a stopwatch's tick tock, as she makes her way down the 711th&1/2 floor hallway. Mannered like a 1960's airline stewardess, and carrying a black portfolio, Miss Abigail Williams, Chief Assistant to the Myth Council's Main Dude, makes her way to a very important looking office door, with a brass plaque reading: "DECISIONS"; she knocks as she goes inside.

The office is way too big and fancy (in a stark way) for one man. The accountant, dressed in a pale black suit, white shirt & thin black tie, sits at his very messy desk, dictating into a vocal tube, which is connected to an ancient dictating machine. On the desk is a large red button with the word: "**RETIREMENT**" written on the side. Oh, and there's an ostrich wandering around the office for no apparent reason. The secretary walks in. The Ostrich peers out the window.

"Have a seat, Miss Williams, give me a minute. Thank you."

Miss Williams puts the portfolio on the desk and has a seat. The Accountant

continues his dictation into the tube.

“And...where was I...Oh, yes...further to our conversation, your honorable sir, it is with deep regret that due to recent unexpected budgetary considerations, we are unfortunately not in the position at this time to fund your idea for a Job Fairy. We look forward to your next idea, blah, blah, blah, thanks for thinking of us, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera...(pausing to think)....And, give my best to Michelle, Sasha and Melia.” He puts down the tube and turns to Miss Williams.

“Okay, Miss Williams. What's on the agenda today?”

Abigail Williams hands Fenster T. Turnworthy the portfolio, he scans it over, shaking his head in disbelief.

“No, no, no, no...no, no, no, no...”

Miss Williams tries to interrupt. *“Sir...”*

Turnworthy closes it and looks eye to eye with Miss Williams for the briefest of moments; he then stands up as if a dignitary randomly entered the room.

“They can't do this! They can't do this I tell you!”

“But, sir...”

“I have been with the firm now for nearly 50 years. And in all that time, sure, myths were cut due to various reasons. Everything from Elton John being straight to OJ being framed, to Iraq secretly harboring Weapons of Mass Destruction, to Simon Cowell being a music expert, to those damn...Birthers! But, this...this is just reprehensible!”

“But, sir. The cost v profit analysis of this perennial myth is simply off the charts in terms of annual projected loss. In fact, every year, the deficit on this particular myth is growing and growing and growing...EXPONENTIALLY!!!”

The Accountant swings around, getting right in her face.

“But, kill Santa Claus? No way. It's just not going to happen!” Shoving his executive chair backwards, he frightens the ostrich and stands up. *“The myth of Santa Claus has existed on Earth for nearly...”* Extending his hand to the side; snapping his fingers.

“128 years, 8 months, 3 days, 12 hours, 12 minutes and....17 seconds.”

“Thank you, Beavis.”

Beavis “Rooster” Maximumium is a very very very old man. Perhaps 500, 600

years old; we don't know. He stacks old and dusty books into impossible and pointless Jenga-like stacks.

"Not at all, sir. It's my job. And it's now 24 seconds."

"Sorry?" inquires the accountant. Beavis continues.

"The myth of Santa Claus is classified as a Perpetual Myth, and therefore continues its run into Eternity. 31 seconds."

The accountant checks his pocket watch.

"Yes, you're quite right....Tell me, Beavis. And, how long have you been with the firm?"

"Well, according to my estimations...I would say: 119 years, 3 months, 1 day, six hours, 12 minutes and..." (checks his pocket-watch) *"precisely 4.24 seconds."*

The accountant is clearly annoyed. *"That's my Beavis. Always there with the facts...."* (back to business at hand) *"Be that as it may, if we close down the Santa Claus program, then who are all the...."* (carefully choosing his words) *"children of Earth going to fantasize about?"* Miss Williams and Bevis in harmonious unison...

“Well, there is Katie Perry, sir.”

The accountant smashes his fist on his desk.

“Little children! For Godsakes!”

The Ostrich turns its neck and SQUAWKS; the accountant continues.

“For over a century, the myth of Old Saint Nick has endured because both parents and children bonded over a unique third-party myth which unites them in a sort of shared childhood and reassures them that there's still hope left in the world....” (a trivial aside) *“And on a guaranteed annual calendar based on the twelve phases of the moon.”*

“Twelve and a half.”

“Sorry?” protests the accountant. *“There are twelve and a half phases of the moon?!”*

This is Beavis’s big moment. For nearly a century, he has been trying to work his way back to Chief Myth Investigator. He fell on hard times after it was revealed he wasn’t actually an Earthling and was demoted to the position of “Unimportant Myth Archivist”. And, now was his chance. A chance to win the hearts and minds of the

powers that be, by impressing them with his incredible knowledge of how the universe actually works.

“No, sir. Sorry. It just hit 119 years, 3 months, 1 days, 6 hours, 12 1/2 minutes and 17 seconds mark.”

“What has?” asks the accountant.

Beavis answers proudly. *“Why, my time with the firm, sir!”*

“You’re quite right!” then the accountant SMASHES HIS FIST on the big red "Retirement" button on his desk. Beavis instantly evaporates in a large puff of smoke, leaving nothing more than his clothes and a book, of which the pages are now on fire. The Accountant solemnly bows his head as Miss Williams instantly darts to the fire and frantically tries to stomp it out.

“Another dedicated worker. I’m very touched.” (back to business) *But, mostly, the myth of Santa Claus reassures ordinary hardworking folk that there still is some magic left in the world.”*

“I hate to be a spoil-sport...” Miss Williams, furiously stomping to put out the fire, peers over her half-glasses. *“And you know how I love the little fellow...He’s so cute*

and sexy in his red and white frilly outfit.” Her shoes catch on fire, making her involuntarily dance. “But to be clear....” She's now trying to put out her shoe by scraping it on a rug. The rug catches fire. Meanwhile, the ostrich has come over and started to peck at her ass, which makes her jump up and down like a maniac. “TO BE CLEAR...!”

“Yes, Miss Williams? Get to the point, will you?” the accountant completely oblivious.

Ignoring the ostrich, Miss Williams frantically looks around for something. She fixes on her boss and her hand starts heading for his head.

“Miss Williams! What on earth are you doing?!”

She grabs his toupee right off his head and slings it onto the fire. It instantly goes out. *“Sorry sir.”* She sits back down at the guest side of the accountant’s desk and continues with business.

“A recent accountancy report has estimated -- quite conservatively I might add -- that Jolly Ole Nick has simply become not just a joke, but in fact an overly commercialized corporate symbol, which benefits nobody but shareholders of every major and minor retailer in the English speaking world...” (as an afterthought) *“And,*

who the hell are they....” (sympathetically) “The fact is, we simply do not have the budget for him anymore.”

“What do you mean, we don't have the budget for Santa!” begs the accountant who is now bald. *“He is paramountly important! He is Saint Nick! He is...”*

Miss Johnson reaches over and turns the page, firmly planting her finger at the bottom line.

“He is losing us money. A tremendous amount of money. If we continue funding, it will be the biggest waste of funding since...since... (snapping her fingers then pointing) The Myth of Y2K!”

The accountant takes it all in.

“And it would most certainly knock out other tenuous myth programs like Cupid and even the Devil himself. And you don't want to go down that road again. Remember the last time we tried something like that?”

“Yes, I certainly do. Satan nearly had my job,” he says in total resignation.

“You bet your sweet burning ass,” Miss Williams replies.

The accountant sits back down with a look of resignation. *“Where do I sign?”*

She points to the bottom of the executive order; Fenster T. Turnworthy signs the document, then dips his seal into sealing wax which he then officially stamps the transaction official. *“Uh...Beavis...Tell me, if you would...”* He slowly swings around his chair and where Beavis once stood, is merely the smoldering remains of his clothing. *“Oh, sorry...”*

The Ostrich creeps up behind him and pecks at the accountant's bald head.