

Monster  
By Michael Danese  
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On a warm spring Sunday afternoon, George Mantee is slumped in his recliner staring at his television. While almost everyone has a flat screen, George is still carrying the flag of the cathode ray tube TV. He's watched them since he was a kid and doesn't see any reason to stop now. He worked overnight at Walmart where he is a security guard. He came home, slept, got up and had a bite to eat, and now he plans to sit in this spot until his next shift begins tomorrow night. He's seen "The Philadelphia Story" several times before, but he can't resist watching the charms of Kate Hepburn work their magic on Jimmy Stewart and Cary Grant.

George is in his late 50s, his once brown hair is now gray, at least what's left of it. He's put on a few pounds, but still considers himself to be in pretty good shape.

He was just dozing off when he was startled by someone pounding on his door. He jumped up so fast that he got a little dizzy. He made his way to the door, which was still under attack.

"George Mantee, this is the state police, open the door now or we will break it down!" said a man on the other side of the door.

When George opened the door, he was taken aback by what he saw. Several policemen were in front of him. Behind them were three police cars with their lights flashing, a news van, and reporters with video and still cameras shooting him standing stunned in his doorway.

The policeman said, "I'm Captain William Swanson with the state police. We have a warrant to search your home and devices for images of child pornography!" he said, brushing by George and entering the house.

The whole time the media was relentless, shooting video and photos and firing questions about kiddie porn and how George was involved. George was escorted by two other policemen and put in the back seat of a cruiser and whisked away.

When George got to the police station there were more media people shooting him leaving the police car and entering the station. They continued to fire rude and upsetting questions.

George was taken into an interrogation room and soon two detectives entered and sat across from him. "I'm detective Janice Evans and this is my partner, Jack Gilfoy." Evans is tall and thin, probably in her late 30s. Her blond hair is pulled back and her blue eyes burned a hole in George's brain. Gilfoy is a short, stout fellow in his 40s with a bulging belly trying to escape from a too-small sports jacket. Evans continued, "I assume that you know why you're here?"

"No, not really, am I under arrest?" the dejected man responded.

“Not yet,” said Evans, “we got an anonymous tip that you had child pornography in your home and on your computer.”

“Apparently the newspapers and TV stations got the same tip.” added Gilfoy.

“That’s crazy ...who? Why? Crazy ...” George said as his voice trailed off.

“We don’t have answers. Do you want to say anything more on the subject?” asked Evans.

“Yes, I’m innocent! I would never ...” said George.

“I assure you that we will get to the bottom of this as soon as possible.” added Evans.

The two detectives escorted George to a holding cell where he spent the night.

In the very small town of Milborn, this was huge news. The local news broadcasts on every network led with the story and showed the footage of George being taken from his house and brought into the police station. The next day both local papers had front page stories and large photos. The story even got picked up by USA Today, CNN and FOX News. There were interviews with neighbors and coworkers including minute details about his entire life and career.

The more in-depth stories started at the beginning. George was a police officer in Milborn for many years. He lived with his wife, Marie in a small but nice house near Main Street. They both grew up in Milborn and married soon after high school. Mary worked in the local real estate office as an assistant. She was attending college online to be an accountant someday.

“They appeared to be a happy couple.” a neighbor added.

After several years, George attained the rank of Sargent. Some thought he would soon be Chief.

Then tragedy struck. He was racing to a scene of a reported domestic violence; the siren was blaring and his lights were flashing. Then suddenly a child ran into the path of his cruiser. He hit the four-year-old girl straight on and she was killed instantly.

“It was so terrible, the whole town attended the funeral of that poor little girl.” commented another neighbor.

From that day forward George was never the same. Everyone knew that it was a tragic accident, but, of course, he blamed himself.

It wasn’t long before he started drinking. Instead of going home he went straight to Morgan’s bar after his shift. Eventually Morgan began calling Marie to come and pick him up, almost nightly.

One night George decided to head home, and on the way he ran a red light and T-boned an oncoming car. The 19-year-old girl that was driving wasn't hurt, but she was certainly hysterical.

"He ran the light and smashed right into me!" she cried to the responding officer, who couldn't help but smell the whiskey on George's breath.

"He blamed himself for the little girl's death, started drinking, hit another girl, then that was it for him." continued the first neighbor.

George was charged with a DUI and lost his license for six months. That quickly led to him losing his job.

For the next several months Marie saw where things were heading with George. She became involved with a younger agent at the office. She eventually left town with him and they set up a business near Pittsburgh. Divorce followed and George continued his downward spiral.

"When she left him, it was a final gut punch." added another neighbor.

George continued to find solace in the bottom of his whiskey bottle. A few months later, some of his old friends from the force had an intervention and pretty much forced George to join AA at his church. Pastor Jim, another old friend, became his sponsor and soon George found himself on the road to recovery. He eventually thanked each of his friends individually for the intervention, telling each that he was sure that they saved his life.

"Who knows where he would be today without the church and AA." added the neighbor.

This recovery led to George getting the job in security at Wal-Mart. It was a good fit and George was happy with this development. He liked working nights, where he didn't need to interact with other people. Plus, it also alleviated his desire to drink, since he ended work in the bright morning.

George had no idea that the world had learned his entire life story while he slept in his cramped damp jail cell.

A guard woke him at about 7:30 am with a breakfast tray.

"Hey, when am I getting outta here?" queried George.

"I don't know anything. You're where you deserve to be anyway." said the guard.

"I'm innocent!" proclaimed George.

"Tell it to the judge, and don't talk to me anymore, ya pervert!" retorted the guard.

George pushed the tray away and slumped back into his cot.

At about ten o'clock, Detective Gilfoy came to his cell, opened the door and told him that he was free to go, that they didn't find any evidence in his home or on his computer.

"That's it? It's all over?" asked George.

"Yep. Over. A squad car will drive you home." said the policeman.

"No 'sorry' or 'I guess we made a mistake,' no comments at all?" George said getting angry.

"The car will pick you up out front." said the detective.

George was quickly escorted to the front where they gave him his belongings and he headed to the waiting car. There was no conversation as they traveled. It was obvious that the policeman had no desire to talk to George.

When they pulled up to his house, George was washed over with every emotion: anger, fear, disgust, embarrassment, self-pity and finally rage. The house had been pelted with eggs and windows were broken. Someone had spray painted "MONSTER" across the front of his home in big, bold letters.

"This is an outrage! What are you guys gonna do about this? Vandalism and worse!" exclaimed George.

"You'll have to call it into the local police. It isn't a state police matter." answered the policeman.

George climbed out of the cruiser and walked up to his house, picking up the morning paper on his way. He went inside and looked around. Through tears and disgust, he swept up the glass on the floor and put some cardboard over the broken windows.

He made some coffee and toast and made the mistake of reading the paper. That made him even more upset.

He took a shower, then decided to just watch TV to try to forget. He was still a bit thrown off with his sleep, and he nodded off in front of the flickering TV.

He woke up a bit disoriented, then every memory from the past 24 hours rushed back. He ate a TV dinner and headed to work.

As he walked through the store he could feel the eyes of everyone on him. Some people made comments, and many didn't even bother to lower their voices. "Pervert, child molester, pig, vermin ..." he was mortified. As he was about to punch in, his supervisor grabbed his timecard.

"Hey, sorry there George. I don't think it's gonna work out for you to work here no more." said Pete. Pete was a short, plump guy in his mid 30s. He wore round glasses and a blue apron. His greasy hair stuck out around his blue cap.

“Pete, come on! I wasn’t charged, I’m innocent!” pleaded George.

“I know, but I gotta think of the other employees. And, people bring their kids to this store. It doesn’t matter, people will think what they think …” said Pete.

“That’s ridiculous! This will blow over in a day or two, what am I supposed to do?” asked George.

“That isn’t my problem, now please leave by the back door, I gotta shift to run.” said Pete, wielding the only power he’s ever had in his life.

George left, knowing that this was a lost cause. He went home and plopped himself in front of the TV.

The next morning he was reading the paper, looking for anything about his case. On page five there was a short story, just a few quick sentences buried amongst the police report listings. He read it out loud. “George Mantee released – no evidence found. After an extensive investigation and search of his house and computer, there was no evidence of any crime. Mr. Mantee was released the next morning.”

“That’s it?! No evidence found?! Why don’t they splash that on the front page!” George said in a rage. He threw the paper across the room and into the trash.

After he had some coffee he went out to see how he could improve the look of his house. He brought the hose around and, with the help of a scrubber and a pole, was able to remove most of the egg stains. He had some white paint in the garage, and painted over the unsightly graffiti. The color wasn’t a very good match, but at least it obscured the writing. He then removed the broken panes of glass and temporarily (or at least he thought) covered the holes with some plywood.

Wherever George went, the supermarket, gas station, coffee shop, he could not escape the stigma. He quickly found that once you step in the cesspool of kiddie porn, even if it is flung onto you, you can never shake the stench. The finger-pointing continued and the shunning, accusations and rumors festered. It continued to get ugly for him.

The other day he was walking down his street and a neighborhood boy of about seven fell off his bike in the street near oncoming traffic. George dropped his grocery bags and rushed over, picked up the boy and drug his bike out of the way of a truck, probably saving the kid’s life. A woman ran over and snatched the boy from George’s arms screaming, “Stay away from that boy, you pervert!” George walked away quickly, not even bothering to retrieve his groceries.

He tried to find another job, but there were no doors open to him. Even in the nearby towns, everybody knew him, or of him. His money was beginning to run low. A few weeks later he decided that he would sell his car. He drove it to the city where he could be just another person.

The car was pretty much a junker, but he was happy for the few hundred dollars that he got for it. While he was there he went to a restaurant and had a nice, peaceful meal. He loved having the ability to not be noticed. He took the bus home and decided to sell his house and move to the city and start a new life. Surely he could find some sort of job there.

By now the house was an eyesore, but it was all that he had. Unfortunately, no local realtor would associate themselves with a sex criminal, guilty or not. The house was probably close to worthless anyway. He considered just leaving town, but he had nowhere to go.

Until now, he had successfully fought off the temptation to drink, but that rope had come to its end. After a three-day bender, he realized that whiskey wasn't the answer, it was just another problem. He returned to the church and his old AA group. When he entered the church basement where he had felt so comfortable before, the people in the group got up and left when he sat down. Pastor Jim took him aside and said, "George, you know how people are, maybe it's best if you don't come back here."

George had now hit a new low. He didn't know where to turn. On his walk home, he went into the supermarket. He wasn't there a second before he heard a woman pushing a full cart mutter to her young daughter as she saw him, "Let's go back this way honey, we don't need anything in *that* aisle."

From the next aisle he could hear two women talking, almost whispering. The woman with the daughter said, "I saw that kiddie porn guy in the store!"

The second woman said, "You know he's innocent, right?"

"Really? I hadn't heard that!" said number one.

"Yes, in fact, Georgia at the bank told me that Billy Marks was the one that called the cops and TV stations on him, but you didn't hear it from me!" said number two.

"How horrible! Why would someone do that?" asked number one.

"Apparently, he ran over Billy's little sister a long time ago, and he thought that this was a way to pay him back." said number two.

"The poor man. I wouldn't wish that on anyone!" said number one.

After hearing this, George left the store and went home. He sat on his chair just staring into space. After a few minutes he opened his eyes very wide and began to shake his head up and down. He jumped up, inspired by his epiphany. He rummaged through a drawer in his desk and pulled out an old, tattered local phone book. He quickly thumbed through it until he found the listing for the General Bank. He grabbed for the phone that was mounted on the wall and rapidly dialed. "Yes hello, can you tell me if Billy Marks is working today? Okay, thanks, no, no message, I'll stop in. Thanks!"

He went to his bedroom and opened the closet. He reached for a box on the top shelf, opened it and pulled out his Glock 22 and ammo. He loaded the magazine, shoved the gun in his belt, grabbed his jacket then strutted out the door.

On this Friday morning the bank was crowded with people depositing their Thursday pay checks. This was exactly the scene that George had hoped for. He burst through the front door, pulled out his gun and fired a round into the ceiling that caused plaster to rain down.

“Everybody on the floor! Right now!” yelled George. He pointed the gun at the security guard, a chuffy man with a red face and white hair. “And you, slowly remove your pistol and slide it across the floor to me.” The nervous guard complied and quickly laid down on the ground.

“Billy Marks, yell out!” proclaimed George. Hearing nothing, he yelled it out again.

“Do what he says Billy, you’re gonna get us all killed!” said the muffled voice of a woman.

“I’m here.” muttered Billy.

“Slowly get up and walk over here!” said George.

In a few seconds Billy was standing in front of him. He was a tall, thin man in his early 20s wearing an ill-fitting suit and a skinny tie. George pointed the gun at Billy’s head and Billy peed himself. George put his arm around Billy’s neck and held the pistol to his temple. Everyone can now hear the sirens as the police got closer.

George - “Do you know who I am, Billy?”

Billy - “Ye ...yes.”

George - “Is there anything that you would like to tell me?”

Billy – “No sir ...”

George pushed the gun barrel harder into his skull saying, “Now Billy, I’m gonna give you one last chance ...”

Billy – “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I never meant for all that to happen to you!”

George – “Now tell everyone what you we are talking about.”

Billy – “It was me, I called the police and reporters and told them.”

George – “Told them what?”

A voice over a megaphone was heard from outside, “This is the police, the building is surrounded, put down your weapon and come out with your hands up before someone gets hurt!”

Ignoring that, George pushed the gun again, “Told them what?” he repeated.

Billy - “I told them that you had kiddie porn ...”

George – “Why?”

Billy – “Because you killed my sister. I know it was an accident ...”

The voice from outside said, “We are coming in. You must stand down!”

George said to the guard, “You, get up and open the door! The rest of you stay on the floor!”

The guard opened the door and four policemen slowly entered with their guns pointed at George. George stood behind Billy, still with his big arm around his neck and the gun pushing into his head.

The lead policeman, Sargent Pete Quinton, a short, thin man of about 50 immediately recognized George. “George! What are you doing? Put down that gun before you hurt someone!”

George – “Tell him. Tell him Billy!”

Billy – “It was me. I reported him.”

George - “Louder! So everyone can hear!”

Billy – “IT WAS ME! I reported him. I made it up. None of it was true!”

Sargent Quinton – “George, we know you’re innocent, please put the gun down, let’s talk about this!”

George – “Pete, you know me, and you know the truth, but nobody else does! I need to make sure that this news makes the front page!”

Sargent Quinton – “George, I’ll make sure, now let the man go!”

George – “I’ll make sure myself!” He pushed Billy away saying, “Get down kid!” then he pointed his gun directly at Pete Quinton.

In a split second, three of the policeman fired into George’s chest as the Sargent yelled, “No!”

George collapsed to the ground, bleeding from multiple places.

“Call an ambulance!” yelled Sargent Quinton as he picked up George’s gun by the end of the barrel. He ejected the magazine and saw that it was empty. “Just as I thought.” He turned to Billy and said, “This is on you. I hope you’re happy.”



Billy began to cry as the hostages filed out.

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