Amber Alert

by

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1

"What the hell is he gonna do with all that mesquite? Nobody is gonna buy it from him," said some ornery traveler, presumably from up north somewhere. The disgruntled townsfolk took offense to the man's work ethic the previous season, so he began taking Sundays off, but the mesquite piled up all the same…

These new folks, though, they did not have the same complaints as the locals. The way they passed by – on and on, day by day, as if they had never worked in their lives – was almost as if someone were commanding them to do their nefarious bidding. They had no reason to be there, so far as anyone could tell, but every time one got shot or one went to prison, two more would show up in their place… No two stories ever matched. No one knew whom they were or whom the man was…

They were not exactly much of a lynch mob – at least not publicly. No one was burning crosses in the front yard. People kept up their appearances... But, in the dark of night, they would act. They stalked him. Every night, they would sneak onto his property when he was asleep and try to break something – sometimes, they succeeded. If he fixed it, they would break two more things – his off-road vehicle, his sports car, and even his well which he depended on for water. The nearest small town with food was over a five mile drive down a highway, so it put the man in a bad position. Some said they were trying to kill him. Couriers and delivery drivers would break his packages right there in the drive before they left…

How the man survived in these conditions was anyone's guess. Rumor had it that he was fighting some war or another on the other side of the continent before moving to the area, and a lot of people considered him some sort of war hero, but even they were extremely tight-lipped about the details. He seemed to take his aggression out on the trees.

Mesquite is pesky vegetation. Everyone knows that. A man could spend a lifetime chopping it all down, only for it to grow right back in four more places four times denser. The thorns are bad enough, but under the right conditions, a second species begins to grow right out of the branches, and its thorns are twice as bad – enough for a man to get a flat tire, if he is not careful.

Some of the locals think he was taking his aggression out on the trees themselves. It would only be natural for a man to need to release some anger, after how those newcomers treat him. Some men buy a punching bag. He bought a chainsaw.

2

The police department received another call from someone down the street from the woodsman. Apparently, someone had sneaked onto his property again in the middle of the night just to dump out a container full of termites on his pile of mesquite, which had been painstakingly covered with an enormous tarp.

"It's at least 10 cords of cooking wood. It has to be worth a small fortune. I don't know why anyone would do a thing like that. It just doesn't sit right with me, OK? Just keep me anonymous." The police handled everything inappropriately, as per usual. While they arrested the offender, whom no one in the area had ever seen before, they decided to cover everything up, like it never happened,

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and they did not seek to make things right with the woodsman.

Several of the officers were rumored to be police from some sort of television program which was portrayed to be fictional. It was difficult to determine if anything about their public perception was reality or a fictional cover story.

3

The woodsman spent another Christmas alone, with no phone calls. People tried to call him, but the calls would just never go through. Apparently, he was famous for some reason or another. People in the area did not know what to think about him.

Maybe if he were lonely enough, he might make a costly mistake. A young girl no more than twelve or thirteen would be just the way to get rid of a man down on his luck. Maybe if they starved her, she would wander over to his home someday while barbecuing… She was beautiful enough to be some sort of beauty queen. Surely, any man would err on the side of beauty. A virgin seemed a small price to pay to get rid of him.

The local police thought it a fine idea and even dedicated several officers to the sting. First, they just had to make the two bump into each other. They had already asked too many loathsome favors of the grocery store. Maybe the gas station would be perfect.

After they had bumped into each other, they moved the girl into a motor home down the street from the woodsman. It was not long, however, before the girl turned up missing. No one ever saw her again. The crime remains unsolved. They say the mesquite trees weep amber for the girl still to this day.