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and the *CHUPACABRA SERIES*

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## LEGEND OF THE CHUPACABRA

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The author excels at putting his characters in new and stranger situations.

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With dramatic reunions and heart-pounding action, *Legend of the Chupacabra* reads like a movie - vivid descriptions, great dialogue, and a killer ending.

*--Bibliophilic Book Blog*

# **LEGEND OF THE CHUPACABRA**

**Michael Hebler**

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**For Rich**

*(who can support like no other)*

Sample file

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P.S. - Thank you

# **LEGEND OF THE CHUPACABRA**

~ **Book VI** ~

Sample file

## CHAPTER I

It was night. In the fifty years of her life, every night had been the same. The fire from the center of their small village would flicker light, bouncing off the sides of their scattered dwellings and highlighting the long blades of surrounding grass before becoming swallowed by the intense darkness. They would eat and dance and tell stories of their day or of adventures from ages past. Then, once the fire slept, so would her people; retiring to their homes with full stomachs and heavy eyes. This night had begun no differently, but it certainly would not end the same. Tonight would be the first, and last, of its kind.

Tree Cradle watched the hypnotic blaze dance to the drum's beat. Not only had the patches of snow that once lay around the fire pit's edge long melted, but the pyre's heat kept Tree Cradle's breath invisible in the frigid air.

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She firmly gripped her black stallion's reins while keeping their distance from the others, as instructed by her proud father, Chief Eagle Claw, who always stood boldly erect and exuded tenacious courage. Any white man who traveled north of the Oregon Trail and into Montana Territory to do business with the Assiniboine never had any confusion about who the tribe's chief was once they laid eyes on Eagle Claw. Even now, when he was most unlike himself, there could be no doubt.

Tree Cradle continued to watch with much intrigue as the chief spoke incoherently to the fire, as though addressing a deity, and seemingly oblivious to the ceremony occurring around him. Eagle Claw's nine chosen women, the most fertile of the tribe, stood motionlessly nearby. Each held a clay jar, and encircled the fiery centerpiece while the chief's nine chosen men, his greatest hunters, painted for war and covered in the blood of the animal's head he carried, danced with the fire to the same drumming beat. The men weaved between the stationary squaws then crisscrossed around four lumber stilts that supported a platform ten feet above the inferno's edge.

Tree Cradle's gaze followed the glowing embers the flames spat as they lifted towards the star-filled sky, and then died upon reaching the high terrace. The scaffolding was a magnificent sight. Even as the men prepared construction, she knew it would be, for it was its purpose that made the structure impressive.

Her eyes stopped on her one-year younger brother sitting

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on top of the platform. Storm Cloud was focusing all his attention into the darkness of the frigid wilderness beyond when Tree Cradle was invaded by an overwhelming sense of doubt about the forthcoming ritual--a feeling she was unaccustomed to experiencing. A strong and loyal conscript should not have such reservations. Tree Cradle forced the weakness out and regained her clarity. There would be no more of that.

As Storm Cloud pondered the upcoming ceremony, he did not fail to see the expression of forgiving cross his sister's face. He, too, experienced the same moment of vulnerability, but his weakness had not been exposed by the fire's fierce glow, and therefore, remained his secret. Storm Cloud did not question why he shared this moment of uncertainty with his sister since the answer was clear: it was unlike their father to place his trust in an outsider he had never known or heard stories about. Moreover, this mysterious man conveniently appeared in the days before he was needed, as if he were a spirit whom they had summoned. But Atraco was no spirit, he was very much a man; an extremely old Pniese shaman who had lived more than one man's lifetime.

Storm Cloud shifted his eyes from the darkness to the old man outside his father's teepee, watching the ceremony's arrangements with considerable interest. The magic and wisdom Atraco carried happened to be exactly what Eagle Claw needed

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to seek his revenge, and solely for that reason did the chief put his faith in the old shaman without any hesitation. It had been while Storm Cloud searched for virtue in the unseen horizon that he experienced the unsettling prophecy which tested his father's cause. Tree Cradle's apprehension had to have been similar. She and Storm Cloud always had a bond unmatched by any other, and shared kindred thoughts. Her anxiety would have been derived only from the mystery of the unknown yet to come, as did his, and not from a fear of their father's rash decision.

This conclusion gave Storm Cloud strength for what would come next, and he was confident that his sister had reached the same conviction on her own.

Tree Cradle's grin tightened on the reins when Eagle Claw pulled out a large hunting blade and turned it up to Storm Cloud. His gaze passed over his son and into the crystal sky where the spirits looked down upon them. The ritual had begun.

The drumming did not stop, and the dancing continued uninterrupted as Eagle Claw held the large knife to the heavens as an offering.

"From my heart, I pray to the spirits. I ask for your comfort. A powerful evil destroys my people. I pray to the spirits for my people."

Eagle Claw lowered the blade. He pointed the tip towards Storm Cloud.

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“A gift for you. Last son. Storm Cloud.”

He redirected the knife to the sky.

“I ask safety for my people. I ask comfort for my people. I ask wisdom for my people. Hear my prayers, spirits, and I give gift for yours. I vow always faith for the spirits. Accept my offering. I beg for your wisdom with offer of life.”

Eagle Claw’s hands did not tremble as he quickly brought the blade down and plunged it into his own stomach before ripping the steel violently out of his gut.

Atraco watched with muted approval.

Tree Cradle and Storm Cloud did not flinch at their father’s self-mutilation. They concentrated on their higher purpose that cast a shadow over any grief. Both also found great comfort in knowing that their father was not the one to die. Not yet.

Blood poured out of the chief’s wound, cueing the squaws to form a ceremonial line at Eagle Claw’s feet. With their jars ready, each dancing warrior paired with a woman. It was Raven Child and Mighty Wind who were the first to concoct the sacrificial mixture. Raven Child caught Eagle Claw’s blood with her jar, while Mighty Wind poured the mountain goat’s blood out of the beast’s skull into the same, creating a broth that Eagle Claw lifted into the air, once ready. He presented the bequest to the spirits, calling the goat spirit forth with the offering of its own powers of agility and energy joined with his powers as chief, and then spouted, “Goat, I give sacrifice for your wisdom.”

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Eagle Claw took a sip from the jar and swallowed. He, then, poured the rest of the contents into the fire.

Storm Cloud stood at the edge of the platform. He gazed down at the flames still flipping about as the burning mixture sizzled and sparked.

With bated breath, everybody watched to see if the goat spirit had been properly deceived. Eagle Claw did exactly as instructed by Atraco. The Pniese's instructions were to simply ask the spirits for their wisdom and protection; making sure to keep all truth from them. Deceit from a heart filled with rage and hatred was the only way to conjure revenge; the requests for help needing to be as treacherous as the act of revenge itself. The one responsible for Loud Fire's death would suffer mercilessly before dying.

The strength of the fire changed; the flames whipped about like a blistering weapon, and the escaping smoke blackened. It was happening; the goat spirit had been fooled into accepting the offering.

Storm Cloud continued to gaze over the edge as the thick smoke began to take the shape of a mountain goat. It rose into the air--as common smoke would--but gave the illusion of the goat charging towards him. Once he and the entity met, Storm Cloud took a deep breath and inhaled the smoldering spirit. The moment the possessed fumes filled his lungs, it took every ounce of self-restraint to suppress his urge to cough, but Atraco had

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warned him ahead of time of this egregious mistake as it would release the spirit back into the universe, never to return. He only needed to wait a short time before the smoke spirit would find its path and seep into his body like a cancer; and the old Pniese had been right. He could feel his need subside as the spirit began to take control.

The moment the smoke spirit had been born, the black stallion became restless. He and Tree Cradle had lived most of their years together, and she thought of Black Wild as family, as he did the same of her. So it was with considerable ease that she was able to calm her four-legged brother by stroking his elongated nose and looking him in the eye to let him know all would be fine.

Tree Cradle twisted her head back to the ritual, saw that the smoke spirit was gone, and Storm Cloud's body was beginning to relax. She wondered if Black Wild would continue to listen to her when the next eight spirits were called.

Water Stone and Talking Bear were next. As before, Eagle Claw's blood seeped into the jar while Talking Bear poured the blood from his bear's head.

Eagle Claw lifted the jar containing the powers of defense and transformation, calling to the bear spirit, "Bear, I give sacrifice for your wisdom."

He swallowed a single mouthful of the blood mixture

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then threw the remainder into the fire. Again, the blood spoke as it burned and the waves of the flames grew more intense.

Storm Cloud readied himself, now with the understanding of what was to come next should the bear spirit accept the offering.

It did.

The flames released another cloud of smoke that transformed into an earthly bear. Once more, the spirit rose towards the sky, charging at Storm Cloud as though he were its prey, only to be sucked into the young man's body with one long breath.

Tree Cradle had guessed correctly; Black Wild did not like the bear spirit's summoning, and he had not been as easy to tame the second time, but they both would have to endure since they were bound and could not leave. Each had a purpose for being there, as the wandering shaman had previously inculcated.

Atraco looked on with pride as the other spirits were called, accepting the invitation to join their brothers inside the willing soul of a young man who had more guilt in his heart than love. Eagle Claw had listened well when it was suggested which spirits had the most powerful gifts and the greatest wisdom to execute his deepest desire. Like the last time, this Great Spirit would be given the power of healing and elusiveness from the snake, the steadfastness and rebirth from the coyote, and strength and cunningness from the mountain lion. But unlike the previous, it would travel with greater speed, thrive on more than just the

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weak and young, and not share the same limitations. Even while Atraco warmed himself with the thoughts of his own successful deception to the Assiniboine, his new Great Spirit was being given stealth and moon magic from the owl, intuition and guile from the rabbit, and swiftness and sight from the eagle. This new creature would become the most impressive, but not until the gifts of one more spirit were given--the most unique of them all. Should this spirit grant its wisdom and favors as expected, the new Great Spirit would soar above any other, giving birth to a creature he longed to see unleashed on this world that lay in waste--a land stolen from him by the white man who murdered his people with their weapons and diseases. For many, many years, Atraco lived as the sole remaining Patuxet and considered it a great honor to avenge his people on any man who now called himself American. However, this new Great Spirit would not be strong enough until the final spirit had given its favors of camouflage and death.

It was when the duped chief nearly faltered from his loss of blood that Atraco began to doubt the ritual would come to completion. But as he watched Eagle Claw's desperation for his own revenge temporarily win his battle with consciousness, he regained his confidence in the simple-minded leader.

The final couple approached their chief. Wind Song pressed the jar against Eagle Claw's stomach to capture as much of the dwindling current as possible. The chief jolted from

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the pain that momentarily hindered his will to fight on, while Dashing Stream used his hands to tear the head off his bat and squeeze into the blend what little blood the small beast offered.

Mustering all his remaining strength, Eagle Claw held the heavy jar to the starry sky and muttered, “Bat, I give sacrifice for your wisdom.”

He took a sip and threw the remains into the fire, then toppled to the ground, knowing nobody would come to his aid despite a desperate need for help.

Tree Cradle forced herself to concentrate on the fire, ready to speak of comfort and support to Black Wild for the last time. She prayed that he would still listen, although sensed his trust weakening as fast as the life of her father.

The flames sizzled and popped. Atraco unknowingly held his breath as he waited for the bat spirit to respond. Suddenly, and to his delight, the inferno swerved and stormed. It spat out the most intimidating shape he had yet to see.

Storm Cloud prepared himself as the smoke spirit soared towards him. It took all his will and strength to breathe in this final possession. Not only were his lungs on fire, but he had limited knowledge of this foreboding creature. Though only having to travel into the mountains to find one, bats were not

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indigenous to these grasslands and had seldom been encountered during his brief life. But being the man he had become, Storm Cloud sucked the smoke inside and filled his lungs without a moment's hesitation.

The spirit quickly found its way to its brothers, and Storm Cloud felt it leech onto every muscle and bone, just as the others had done.

He felt very little remain of his human spirit.

The possession was complete, but not the sacrament. To everyone's relief, all the spirits had accepted the offerings.

Eagle Claw gazed up to his son who nodded that he was ready. The chief soundlessly motioned to be helped back to his feet.

Tree Cradle stayed put as she was still under instruction, but the loyal people who surrounded her father rushed to his side and lifted their leader off the ground.

Once Eagle Claw's legs were steady, they let go to kneel around the fire and hunker into position.

Eagle Claw signaled to his son that it was time as Atraco faintly smiled behind his back.

Storm Cloud spread his arms out like wings and, willingly, toppled over the platform's edge to dive into the blazing inferno. The tribe allowed the crashing wave of burning embers to bounce off them while Storm Cloud silently lay in the center of the fire. He let the heat peel his skin and meld his body with the spirits'

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while indistinctly hearing his father speak, “Hear my prayers, spirits. I give this sacrifice for your wisdom and your power.”

Eagle Claw gave the signal and those of his choosing quickly pushed and shoveled dirt into the pyre. The blaze began to weaken as each man and woman worked feverishly to douse the flames.

In moments, the fire was extinguished, but the tribesmen were not finished. They continued to push dirt into the pit as previously instructed, not stopping until Storm Cloud was wholly buried in his own grave.

Every remnant of the roaring inferno was now gone; the smoke vanished in the air, and winter’s chill reclaimed its territory.

The tribesmen backed away from the burial. No one cried or mourned; they only turned to enter their homes without speaking a word.

Tree Cradle remained where she stood with Black Wild at her side--who still was not as forgiving. They both watched Atraco rise and slowly make his way to her weakened father, silently wishing the shaman was not so old and would move more quickly. The newcomer finally reached Eagle Claw just before the chief’s legs buckled, then held onto him and supported his weight. It was an incredible undertaking for such an elder, but after witnessing the magic of this night, Tree Cradle could not be surprised.

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As the ancient Indian guided Eagle Claw back to his teepee, Atraco turned to Tree Cradle and dug his eyes into hers. She shivered under his stare as her moment had come. She could not fail.

Atraco and Eagle Claw disappeared inside her father's home. She turned to the mound where her brother laid, and welcomed the silence and the breeze from the moon, as both seemed to wash away all the horrors she had witnessed. However, the night was not over as Black Wild reminded by wildly bucking and neighing, earning his well-deserved name.

Tree Cradle used the last ounce of comfort Black Wild would accept before turning back to Storm Cloud's grave.

Restless movement stirred beneath the mound.

~ ~ ~

Atraco laid Eagle Claw down next to the linen-wrapped corpse of the chief's eldest son, Loud Fire. Much to Atraco's advantage, Eagle Claw had a hard time accepting his son's untimely death, to the point that the chief would even be able to convince his youngest son to sacrifice himself for the honor of his brother. It had not been difficult to sway Storm Cloud to do so since the younger brother partly blamed himself for Loud Fire's demise. Such unbearable grief always came in handy. Once upon a time, Atraco may have struggled morally for his

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actions, but that time was too long ago to remember. Even then, he would never have pitied the Assiniboine, who had welcomed the white man into their folds with open arms, trading with them and treating them like equals. Of course, after the events of tonight, those days would be no more.

As Atraco gazed proudly at the Assiniboine Chief who resisted death, a resounding protest was amplified by Tree Cradle's horse immediately followed by an unearthly, animalistic screech. It had been born.

The piercing noise, loud enough to wake the entire village, trailed off into the distance as it sped away.

Eagle Claw's eyes suddenly shot open upon hearing Black Wild's galloping hooves chase after their newly made creation.

Atraco looked down at the man, wondering what it was that was keeping him alive. Then, taking a sharpened pig bone out of his chest pocket, he speared Eagle Claw in his heart. The Assiniboine would try to kill him once they knew of his murder and betrayal, and that was fine. He could die an unburdened man now, knowing that after two-hundred-fifty-years, he had finally accomplished what he set out to do.

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The thick layer immersed the booming township beneath a ghostly cloak. Most Portlanders did not welcome the soupy haze that rolled off the Willamette River just before sundown, but Portland, Oregon was no stranger to heavy fog. There were times during the late autumn to early winter months when a veil of moisture would linger between the town and the sun for days, even weeks. It would leave the community in a spectral haze and keep the city roads from fully drying between rainfalls. However, despite the annoyance that the murky air would keep their land perpetually wet, there were some locals who did appreciate the gloomy cover for its ability to conceal their crimes, as well as any embarrassment of the filthy, and sometimes rancid, “*mudtown*”--as Portland had quickly come to be known. But as was with most settlements, Portland also offered its fair share

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of beauty. For those who knew to go to the top of Council Crest Hill and stand above the milky, fish-scented air would find the breathtaking sight of ship masts cutting through the low fog like knives through butter as they coasted along the river. It was a sight rarely beheld anywhere else in the city, and just about the only thing Jessie Byrne liked about this God-forsaken rat-trap.

On many occasions, after the ships docked on the river shore, Jessie would overhear the sailors compare their dour city to that other popular city of port, San Francisco; going on and on about it being a much cleaner city. They would also marvel about the towering six-story tall buildings and the streets that were smooth with pavement. They made San Francisco sound like paradise, which only caused her to yearn for that alternate life more; the life her ma and pa had always meant for her to have. Jessie could have just kicked those men dead in their nut-sacks for their, albeit unintentional, insensitive reminders. But after nearly six years of being stuck in a grimy pit, she had come to accept the bitter truth that she and Suzanne were never meant to leave this place because Suzanne did not want to leave. In fact, Suzanne did not want to do much of anything anymore; always acting just happy enough to appear not miserable and hardly ever going anywhere, outside of home, but church. Jessie would love nothing more than to blame Portland for Suzanne's unhappiness, but she knew that would be untrue. Suzanne would be just as sad if the train they had stowed-away on--and very

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nearly destroyed--had taken them to San Antonio, Deadwood, or even Timbuktu.

Jessie stepped out of the mud-layered street and onto the wooden planks once reaching the covered walkway. She stomped her feet to loosen the grime before hurrying past the storefronts, as though running from someone or something, but then suddenly paused at her reflection in the window.

Jessie lowered her hood from the black cloak that protected her from the harsh air, taking a short break to fluff her flattened feather headpiece and adjust her uncomfortable bosom. However, once finished, all anxiety of being rushed had suddenly vanished. She glared at the gaudy hat atop her head and wondered if her life might be different if that man had been destined for the city by the sea rather than the city by the river. It was not the first time she had asked that question, so it was not the first time she didn't receive an answer.

A ship's whistle sounded from the nearby port, announcing it was ready to dock, and inadvertently knocking Jessie out of her reverie.

"Great! More dirty bastards," she muttered under her breath, not that there was another soul nearby to hear her if she had yelled her curse; at least, none that she could see within the mist.

Jessie quickly convinced herself to be grateful for the life she was now living, knowing from previous experiences that it

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could have turned out far worse.

She covered her head with the cloak's hood then continued down the walkway, when matters worsened again within steps. Jessie recollected that tonight would be a busy night--their busiest in weeks. Not including the local regulars, a Galleon ship, The Lisbon Princess, carrying over 300 sailors, was scheduled to pull into port, and they would be thirsty and feisty. Luckily, they would not all come to her establishment as there were other businesses some would choose. Jessie hoped that those who did opt for her place of work would keep their discussions limited to catching up with the news such as President Hayes' recent proclamation, or maybe even partake in local gossip such as the disappearances of Albert Moore and Lester Pinney, anything other than the celestial descriptions of San Francisco. Jessie just wasn't in the mood.

~ ~ ~

The tone from her clanking heels amplified once Jessie turned from the street and stepped into a cobblestone alley, but the sound of her approach was soon lost as she closed in on the back entrance to Duke's Pub.

She opened the door, and the clamor of laughter and intoxication from what sounded to be a hundred men spilled into the alley. Their obnoxious behavior attempted to subdue

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the cheerful music of Bailey Dan and his band of merry banjos. However, even with the competing ruckus of music and chatter, nothing could drown out the final whistle of The Lisbon Princess's arrival.

Jessie made sure the coast was clear before stepping into the back room. She closed the door behind her and hurriedly removed her cloak, discarding it onto an ale barrel next to a pallet of boxed whiskey bottles. Then, before entering the bustling parlor, Jessie adjusted her feathered topper for the last time and coiled her ringlets, giving them a generous tug for bounce.

There may not have been a hundred men in the elongated, slender pub as previously exaggerated, but the joint was nearly filled to capacity. Despite the large crowd and dense layer of smoke that settled between the den of sinners and the high ceiling, it would have been easier to sneak in and appear as though she had not been late, and already working, if her barmaid's outfit had not been so flashy. Jessie always felt self-conscious about parading around in fishnet leggings with a red, feather-lined dress that reached just below her kneecaps; however, the piece-de-resistance was the frilly, low-cut, laced corset. Asking Suzanne to fashion a long, black cloak had not only been to protect her from the damp night air, but also from the embarrassment of being seen in the getup outside the workplace--yet another reason she was one of the few who appreciated Portland's opaque fog.

However, her clandestine presence was over before she

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could set both feet inside the parlor once Bailey Dan and the rest of the banjo players began acknowledging her arrival with wild waves, further proving how her apparel made her stand out. Jessie placed a finger against her lips to signal for the band to simmer down on their warm welcome when a man's hand grabbed her shoulder.

She had been working nearly every day at Duke's Pub for a couple of months, yet Jessie still had not gotten used to being manhandled by every Tom, Dick, and Harry. She spun around on her heel, ready to take the hand and push it down on another man's privates--a devilish maneuver she had done twice already--when Jessie realized the man's hand belonged to Duke McKernan himself; her boss. She immediately understood she had mistaken Bailey Dan's kind warning for a welcome.

"Late ag'in! I'll be dockin' ya," he threatened under his thick Irish accent.

"Then I shouldn't a'bothered!" Jessie spat back.

"Wouldn' be such a botha if'n ya wuz ta live up top wit me, lassie."

"Not in yer fanciest, Daisy."

Jessie watched as Duke's pale, freckled face turned the color of his bright red hair. She knew calling him Daisy would either shut him up or get her a smack in the face; depending on his mood. It was her third day of work when she eavesdropped on one of Duke's drunken conversations with a lonely patron

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about changing his name from Daly to Duke upon arriving in America. It was a fresh start with a new name for fear others might feminize his mother-given name the same way they did back at home in Ireland, feigning mispronunciation of Daly for Daisy. Duke was a solid name, and one to be feared and respected, even by a man who stood no more than four eleven. Luckily for Jessie, Duke must have been in a decent mood because all he did was push her towards the bar and yell, “See ta the customas!” before mingling about.

She bit her tongue, not wanting to upset herself further as the night was just getting started, but that was easier said than done. Still, she needed this job and the perks that came with it.

Richard Hitchcock had lined a row of whiskey shots along the bar ready for Jessie to place on her tray, which she completed with excessive force.

“It’ll make for a longer night if you carry that scowl the whole time.”

Jessie paused and glared at the ‘Nosey Nellie’. “You best clean that up,” she warned, her eyes tilting down to the rising steam coming from the spilt whiskey on the bar. “It’s atein’ through the varnish.”

Richard turned to grab a rag then spun back around to find that Jessie had already slipped away. He heard her shout her spiel from somewhere inside the crowd, “Whiskey shots! Fifty cents! Get’em while I got’em! Whiskey in yer gut, softens