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Ghost of the Guy Who Threw the Haymarket Bomb

by Tim Brown

One May night, back in the days before Stark bought his van, we were walking south on Halsted Street, on our way to Greektown where we planned to buy our dinner at Zorba's Restaurant. Stark said he was going to order a gyros plate; my lips smacked in anticipation of buying myself the perch fillet sandwich. At \$1.75 it was the best deal, because instead of a McDonaldsesque square of ground-up fish, you got an actual fillet that extended beyond the ends of a hot dog bun. Stark carried along his boom box which blared out a demo tape that he and his band, The Total Strangers, had recently made.

"Hear how Rudy the Roach is dragging there?" he asked, not expecting an answer.

Suddenly, as we were about to cross Randolph Street, some thing like an oversized acetylene torch flame flared up across the intersection.

"What the hell is that?" Stark asked, startled by the column of blue flame.

"I don't know. Maybe a gas main burst," I said.

"Should we check it out?"

"I don't know," I said. "Sometimes it's best to leave stuff like that alone. You wouldn't want your face burned off, would you?" But we walked across the street despite our doubts, drawn as we were to this weird, fiery plume.



"I've seen some strange shit on Sangamon," Stark said, "but I never saw any shit like that." The light by then had coalesced into a very definite form which was floating about three feet off the ground.

"Stark, I think it's like a ghost," I said as the form came further into focus the closer to it we walked.

"What do we do?" Stark asked while reaching down to

reminded me of how grease from ham-burgers cooked on a grill drips down into the coals. The smell enveloping the area where we stood definitely was not barbecue.



stop the tape.

"It can't be; there's no such thing," I said. And yet there we were—face to face with a ghost.

The ghost didn't seem directly to threaten us, so we stood there in front of it, agape, our senses nevertheless recording every particular. The overall form glowed and bobbed up and down. Its outlines were human, at least insofar as the head, neck and shoulders were human. Beneath its shoulders and arms, however, the form ended in a gooey curlicue. Off the tip of this curlicue flaming drips were dropping to the sidewalk, where they promptly burned out. The sizzling sound this made, and the four

to five second intervals,

though; rather, it was one I didn't recognize. The nearest approximation I could think of was burning hair.

Indeed, the ghost's face was surrounded by curly hair—curly locks on his head and curly muttonchops. He wore a white shirt with an open tabbed collar and a linen vest which hung off his shoulders, clothes I figured were from the nineteenth century. His trunk, clothes and all, melted into this flash-fried curlicue.

"Holy shit!" Stark whispered, as the

eyes of the ghost, which previously were closed, opened. I suddenly had abdominal cramps, the pins and needles kind which normally precede diarrhea.

When he looked as though he was about to speak, I frantically waved at Stark to get him to surreptitiously tape record whatever was said. He slowly fingered down the side of his boombox to push in the play and record buttons, all the while never taking his eyes off the apparition. What follows is a transcription of Stark's recording; a paranormal psychologist at Northwestern University since has declared it to be the only authentic instance of a ghost talking on tape. He even wrote a journal article about it, which has brought Stark and me a small measure of notoriety, but no money yet—I can't be sure that there was any conspiracy, but I think the lack of offers from the mass media to cover our story is due to unpopularity of certain political beliefs the ghost expresses.

GHOST—You are dressed in the manner of workingmen. In what trades do you work?

STARK—Ah, uh, I'm a computer operator.

GHOST—A computer? Is that a new type of machine?

STARK—It's, uh, like a typewriter.

GHOST—Ah, yes. And you?

SPUNGKDT—Uh, umm, I'm a proofreader.

GHOST—An honorable profession. Do you work in a printing house?

SPUNGKDT—Law firm.

GHOST—Bah! I've got nothing good to say concerning the law.

SPUNGKDT—Neither do I.

STARK—You a ghost?

GHOST—Indeed I am. It truly is ironic that I, a man who spent his entire life scoff-

ing at the supernatural, have ended up in death as a ghost.

SPUNGKDT—W-why are you here?

GHOST—I'm here, so far as I can glean, to atone for a grave misdeed. Ghosts bring to mind all manner of devils, gods and hobgoblins. But neither devil nor god has spoken to me. Rather, I have some vague feeling intruding on my being which has alerted me to my present fate: that



I'm damned to haunt and roam Haymarket Square.

STARK & SPUNGKDT—B-but w-what d-did y-you d-do?

GHOST—I am the villain that threw the bomb into the delegation of police at what came to be known as the "Haymarket Affair"—one

hundred and three years ago tonight.

STARK—I wish I could line up all the cops who've hassled me and toss a bomb at their knees.

GHOST—By this statement, and yours a moment ago regarding the law, I believe we all three

share a distaste for the local constabulary.

SPUNGKDT—Them, my boss, our landlady, the phone company, and especially snotty tellers at the bank.

STARK—They're all out to throat you.

GHOST—A conglomeration of the very men of whom you speak once caused my throat to swell in anger much as your throats are swelling now. I'm quite saddened to hear that such corrupt and evil men live in your day, one hundred years into the future.

STARK—They always have and always will.

GHOST—There is a tone of cynicism in your words.



STARK—The 1980s are cynical times. Look who's president.

GHOST—I see we haven't yet abolished that office. Pray, who is the president?

STARK—You don't know?

GHOST—History ended for me at my death, so I have no memory of time passing after that unfortunate event.



August Spies and Albert Parsons, two leaders of the anarchist movement, speak.

Around a quarter past ten the last speaker, a German named Samuel Fielden, hastily ended his talk when a great gust of wind and rain blew up. As he descended from the speakers' wagon, several score of police marched up

Des Plaines Street. Clubs at the ready, they pushed the crowd backward on top of itself, boxing us into the canyon made by the Crane Works like Indians before a massacre.

Bonfield's lackey, Captain Ward, shouted that he and his men planned to break up the meeting, peaceable though it was so far. Not wanting to succumb to the McCormick strikers' fate, I shouted back "Like hell!" and I threw the missile into the middle of the policemen's ranks.

After the bomb exploded, its concussion still reverberating through my chest,

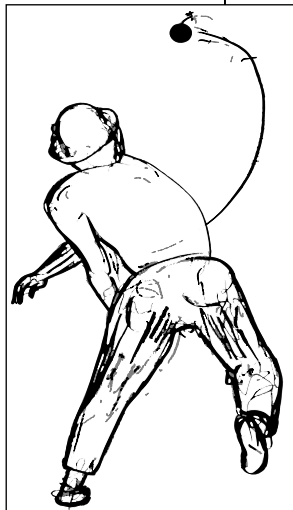
whatever hiding places we could find. To their very great credit, none of the fellows with whom I escaped ever came forward to give the police my description.

SPUNGKDT—So that's why you weren't ever identified.

GHOST—That reason, and the fact that the police never took any notice of me like they had of the leading speech makers and writers whom they singled out for the hangman's noose.

STARK—You keep saying "leaders." I didn't think anarchists had any leaders.

GHOST—Yes, definitely. There was a very great number of factions in the anarchist movement, each with its own leader. Those who belonged to the Knights of Labor were considered by



pavement and opened fire on the crowd. Demonstrators ran pell-mell out of the smoke and filtered into the nearest alley or street. From the vestibule where I was shoved by the police and from where

I threw the bomb, I escaped by running east along Randolph Street with some of my fellows. Behind us, bullets zinged through the air like so many angry bees, horns and wasps. To give an idea of the ferocity of the battle, one journalist reported that a wall closest to the clash had nearly two hundred bullet holes chewing it apart.

When we were several blocks away, the sounds of a furious riot still reaching our ears, about twenty of us bid hasty farewells to one another, and we disappeared into

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GHOST—Yes, definitely. There was a very great number of factions in the anarchist movement, each with its own leader. Those who belonged to the Knights of Labor were considered by

everyone in the labor movement to be the most forward-thinking. Parsons and Spies were the most revolutionary of the Knights and the most eloquent.

SPUNGKDT—Card-carrying



communists, huh?

GHOST—Pshaw! Spies and Parsons, those so-called anarchists, in truth possessed what I would call Socialist beliefs. I quit their bunch because they were such talkers—talking at picnics, talking at parades, talking in meeting halls, always talking, talking, talking. As if picnics and parades would succeed at overthrowing all the capitalists and industrialists, yellow-jacketed cowards who would have their mercenary armies shoot you dead if you dared raise your voice in favor of shorter hours or safer conditions.

STARK—Sounds like Spungkdt and me—neither one's a real joiner.

GHOST—After I quit the Knights, I joined the Lehrund-Wehr-Vereine, a German-speaking club devoted to the pursuit of skill with firearms. Like me, my fellow members disgustingly threw down their picket signs and became men of action. In our meetings at the northwest edge of the city, I learned how to shoot pistols and rifles, and I was taught the techniques of manufacturing dynamite bombs.

STARK—You keep saying "leaders." I didn't think anarchists had any leaders.

GHOST—I wish it were more! I read the bomb killed

a total of two. Eyewitnesses said that the police, those blithering idiots, dove into alleys and covered under shop awnings shooting at their own men. This fact accounts for the rest.

STARK—So why did you do it?

GHOST—A multitude of reasons. But not for the reason that was proclaimed at the Haymarket Seven's trial by Mr. Grinnell, the prosecutor: that the inflammatory words which Spies, Parsons, &c., wrote or spoke incited me to throw the bomb.

Oh, it was true I saw a handbill they printed up announcing the meeting that contained the infamous line, "Workingmen arm yourselves and appear in full force." But, though I did see the handbill in question, working as I did in a printing house along Fifth Avenue, only a couple hundred were printed up, and Spies did not distribute them to the general population. Words or no words, I planned all along to bring my bomb, and I planned to throw it, too, if my fellow workers were threatened by the police.

It also was true that most, if not all, of the men on trial had spoken publicly of using force as a means to attain our ends. It appeared we would be forced to take up weapons against the capitalist classes, for peaceable means such as the ballot did not work. Witness how the city fathers stole the 1878 aldermanic election from Parsons, who ran on the Workingmen's Party ticket and won the most votes.

No, my reasons were not because of deeds: the horrendous deeds robber barons like George Pull-man, Marshall Field, Cyrus McCormick and Philip Armour perpetrated against my family and my fellows.

When I was a child, a tremendous tide of anti-German Know-Nothingism washed over the city. Worried over the increasing numbers of foreigners moving to the city, whom they accused of stealing work away from native-born Americans, these men had the city government fire all the foreign-born workers in the various departments at City Hall. My father, a man who spoke fluent English as well as German, and who was justly proud of his job as a city

clerk, was one. He never recovered from the broken heart they caused him, and he died only a little while later, jobless and penniless, thereby leaving me to pursue a printing apprenticeship rather than affording me the chance to finish the higher grades and possibly attend the university.

And after the Great Fire of 1871, these men and their cronies pocketed millions of dollars in relief money the workers of other cities sent the workers of Chicago to help rebuild their homes and places of employment. A dozen years had past, yet the disgraceful living conditions suffered by the vast majority of the city's population had not improved one iota. About six months before the Haymarket Riot occurred, hundreds of starving men, women and children protested outside the Board of Trade building on the eve of its dedication. Safely locked inside, I'd wager that even with a near-riot happening beneath their windows, the men sitting on the Board of

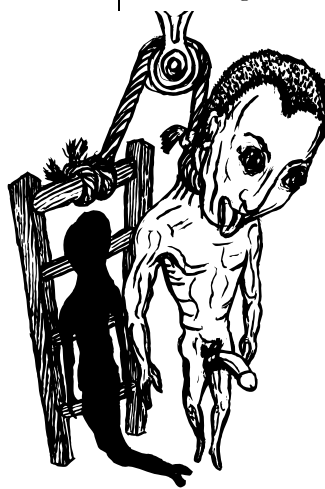


words and no action? GHOST—That is correct. No matter, since the trial was a fraud and a sham. No witness ever positively identified any of the men as the bomb thrower, and, although the

Thieves never tasted one ounce of nausea as they gorged themselves on duck and quail spooned up from their twenty-dollar-a-plate ceremonial dinners.

In short, it became quite clear to me that words were of little use when dealing with such greedy, cowardly men; only a bomb such as the one I threw at the Haymarket would send the message that we workingmen meant to improve our lots.

SPUNGKDT—So your impression is that the guys who were hanged were all



perhaps after all, words are mightier weapons than dynamite bombs.

But, alas, I chose a different fate, a very dishonorable one by comparison. For the rest of my life I kept my secret to myself; I even withheld from my wife the fact of my crime. I already have related to you the pride I feel for my act, but I feel a great amount of shame as well, since I let four innocent men go to the gallows in my stead.

The trial came down to words, and words alone: did or did not the anarchists declare their intentions of overthrowing the existing order? But, with headlines like one I remember, which read "Damn All Anarchists To Hell," the verdict handed down by the court was a foregone conclusion.

SPUNGKDT—And all this happened in a country which prides itself on its Bill of Rights.

GHOST—Precisely.

STARK—You ever regret throwing the bomb?

GHOST—Never for throwing the bomb. That was a decision I made as an individual. Independent action for a just cause, even a violent action, is always a thing for which a man can pride himself. That's true anarchism.

However, a very tremendous guilt has lain over me for never turning myself in to the authorities. Even Albert Parsons's heroic surrender to the court, when he came out of hiding to stand trial with his comrades, did little to sway my mind. Had I come forward, I possibly could have saved the accused from being condemned.

If I had been a braver man, I might have shared their notoriety, too; instead, I remained alive and well, but history forgot me, or rather history remembered me as an anonymous character. The men who were hanged for my action soon came to be called the "Haymarket Martyrs" and achieved world-wide fame because of the heroics they displayed in their last moments on earth. Standing on the gallows, George Engel went so far as to declare, "This is the happiest moment of my life." On account of that statement he shall be remembered and loved by all workmen everywhere for as long as men care to remember the brave words and deeds of heroes like him. True, he never raised his hand against his foes, yet,

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The whole night long I had

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Such a mixture of feeling is like eating a holiday meal every day—filling up to the point of discomfort by turkey, dressing and pie. Unfortunately, I never could loosen my belt enough to relieve my discomfort, nor could I ever fully digest my shame.

That, I suppose, is why I have returned one hundred years later, for I have the blood of innocent men on my hands as well as the blood of two policemen.

SPUNGKDT—Maybe you wanted to save yourself so you could throw another bomb sometime. Maybe you wanted to keep the Movement going and all that...

He didn't respond, however; instead, the ghost of

the guy who threw the Haymarket bomb was enveloped in that weird blue flame again, followed by thick white smoke which dispersed after a minute or two. With that, Stark turned off his tape recorder, and we headed back to our loft, no longer hungry, which accounted for us being out in the first place, but feeling a queer mixture of panic and exhilaration.

And later, I couldn't sleep.



terrible nightmares peopled with goblins, demons and ghosts, only they were dressed in dark blue suits like bankers, lawyers and brokers.

The End

