



Clarence Buchanan was born in the small town of Marshall, Wisconsin, all the way back when it was known as Bird's Ruin, which is to say a very long time ago. So long ago, in fact, that people around Marshall were amazed Clarence was still alive in the late autumn of 1941. It was a simpler time for a man of ninety-one to finally meet his maker.

They say Clarence was born of fire, and that's true enough. As a younger man, he talked sometimes about the blaze that tore through Bird's Ruin the year he was born, how it gutted the tiny settlement and scattered most of those who survived to the wind. But Clarence had a willful, arrogant father, a man of the woods who was good with an ax and a shotgun. Marshall Buchanan kept his family on, taught young Clarence to fell the tallest trees and gun down rabbits, deer, moose, and bear — anything with four legs that moved and didn't bark or purr at the side of his leg.

The town grew again and Marshall Buchanan, who loved his ax more than any other tool he owned, tried to change the name from Bird's Ruin to Hatchetville,

which seemed to him a very manly name for a town. But to Marshall's bitter disappointment, Asahel Hanchett, an upstart business tycoon, tricked the mayor into something close to Hatchetville, but not quite.

*Hanchettville.*

After that, Marshall and his son moved out into the forest for good and entered Hanchettville only to trade chopped wood for supplies. It was about five years later when the accident occurred.

Clarence should have known better. He should have been more careful. He shouldn't have been anywhere near the clearing to begin with. But he was so excited he just ran and ran until he could hear his father's ax hitting a tree. They'd voted to change the name of the town once more, and Clarence carried the news.

Marshall, Wisconsin. Just like Marshall Buchanan.

How sad that Marshall was also the name of a real estate broker who had purchased most of Hanchettville's assets and had renamed the town after himself.