

*Part science fiction, part mystery, part history, "So Gunther called him Elf Man" is a dark story of evil. One Gunther is a prisoner of fate: born of a family whose violent deeds have attracted the attention of an alien.*

## **So Gunther Called Him Elf Man: A Grass Clan Curse**

By W. J. Hein


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So Gunther  
called him  
**Elf Man**

A Grass Clan Curse



W. J. HEIN

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**Chapter 1**  
**The Nightmare Southern California**  
**September 2020**

On a late afternoon in 2020 during the height of the COVID pandemic, Gunther Grass drifted between sleep and wakefulness, a twilight zone of semi-consciousness. Bathed in COVID sweat and fever, he hallucinated apparitions in the shadows of his bedroom. Was he imagining the female figures with knives circulating above him? the ones dissembling back into the recesses of the room?

Gunther fell asleep, and the recurring nightmare came back again: in a horse drawn wagon with his father; in a dark wood, mostly devoid of sunlight. Around a bend a figure appears; a man with a heavy black beard and a black felt hat. A boy is next to the bearded man. The boy has only one eye. The bearded man is gesturing wildly in their direction.

His father's face is alabaster, and he cracks his whip on the horse's rump; their wagon careens over the road. Gunther is terrified. At the end of the road Gunther sees a hazy figure floating in the air, but as the apparition gets closer, Gunther sees a face with distinct elven ears. In the latest COVID fueled dream, the face of the elf is close enough to breathe a sickly-sweet miasma that envelops Gunther.

Gunther awakened before dawn and struggled to get out of his disheveled bedding, shivering with sweat, reeking of filmy sickness and an unwashed body. Stale air dominated the bedroom. He stumbled to the tiny bathroom and urinated a dark yellow stream. He sat on the bowl, his head spinning.

He rose and walked very slowly down the hall to the kitchen. Hardly able to stand, he swallowed some tap water in a dirty glass and dumped a can of chicken rice soup into a pot and turned on the burner. He collapsed in his kitchen chair until the soup warmed up. He stared out from a window into the blackness. Outside a Santa Ana wind was blowing and the windowpanes rattled. A stray branch carried by high winds hit the side of his house with a scratching sound. Out in the darkness, lean coyotes yipped. Scrawny rabbits huddled in their burrows.

Gunther hobbled back to his bedroom; his lungs congested. He wondered if he was truly going to die. *About time*, he thought, laughing to himself.

### Chapter 3

## Charles Manson Memories

### Chatsworth, California

*Grass in delirium, he thought. I'm serious, I'm delirious. Someone stroked his beard. Or was it me? Did a small hand reach out? Is he here, the elf? Has the elf arrived at last? Welcome, Gunther thinks. I've been waiting my life for you. Here is your opportunity, at long last, to kill me. Hell, I am at death's door anyway, the portal to whatever awaits, another world, or nothing. Evaluating you, elf, I think I greatly prefer nothing. The big sleep versus being in the throes of some grim world where you, elf, are the king. Whatever you've attacked me with all these decades, it can't be a pretty fate.*

By 1948 Heinrich had landed a job working at Hughes Aircraft. He had exceptional mechanical ability, and postwar California was gearing up for a huge economic leap. Heinrich married the same year, and had a home, first by the Chatsworth Reservoir, and some years later, a larger home by the Santa Susana hills. It was here in 1957 Gunther, the only son of Heinrich and Martha, was born.

In later years, Gunther would ponder his childhood and try to piece together fragments of memories, memories that might be of little or no significance to a kid but emerge later in the reflection of maturity. Who was his father really? The tall thin patriarch with the crew-cut blonde hair, the steel blue eyes, the perfect German that Hitler himself, the dark Austrian of questionable genetic past, would exalt as a pure Aryan. What was the general appraisal, psychologist in training Gunther, and his conclusion was the presence of darkness, covered up,

hidden in deep recesses, hidden behind the mirror of middle-class rectitude? The man behind the lawn mower, at the door greeting the neighbors in a tidy house, waving his hand while behind the wheel of an American chrome and metal 50s Ford.

Gunther would prod his dad for stories as Gunther learned about Germany and World War II. Gunther's buddies would joke about his dad being the Kraut enemy when they played war games. Try as he could, Gunther got little out of his father. Heinrich rarely spoke German, and he never took any vacations back to his homeland. Heinrich's prewar lifetime was a mystery Gunther could never unlock.

After terrible things happened later in Gunther's life, he wondered whether events in his past had caused or contributed to his misfortunes. Gunther was not paranoid or a conspiracy theorist by nature, but it did not escape him that he was often near the locus of crimes and disasters. Bad luck? Doubtful. Too many coincidences, too much foreshadowing of evil, too many connections to gloss over.

Charles Manson for one. Age eleven, Gunther remembered, the summer of 1968. Smog obscuring the hills, hot days, sun and particulates, a patchwork of dusty dirt trails on his Schwinn bicycle, the Manson family girls in the back of Ralph's Supermarket on Topanga boulevard.

The Manson girls, teenagers on acid, spaced out refugees from the hippie revolution, caught up in the general chaos of the 60s. Girls who left families, some dysfunctional, some middle-class respectable, all of them looking to belong somewhere. Gunther, lugging some candy and bottles of Coke with friends, hearing noises in the alley by the side of Ralph's, seeing long haired,

wild looking girls in bell bottoms hoisting each other into dumpster bins, shrieking when edible food discovered, laughing and swearing, noticing the boys and giving them the finger, and sticking their tits out; dirty girls collecting the stuff and dumping the goods in a Volkswagen van and driving away to the Spahn ranch.

August 1968. Just a few miles north of Gunther's home was the Spahn movie ranch, a cluster of western type buildings used for the TV show shoot ups little Gunther would often watch on the black and white Emerson. By 1968, the movie ranch had fallen into disrepair after old man Spahn purchased it.

Up in the hills, huge boulders surrounded by chaparral and sagebrush, small, twisted oaks in the canyons, dead grass and dirt, caves hidden in dark places, home to rattlesnakes and coyotes, and in the summer of '68 the Manson family. Wild-eyed, charismatic ex-con Charles Manson, all five feet two inches of him, possessed with the gift of collecting wayward boys and girls. Beguiler and teller of stories, would be songwriter and musician, kicked out of Beach Boy Dennis Wilson's home, brought to the Spahn movie ranch by acolyte Susan Atkins (photo of her with arms and legs spread out, skinny and spindly and witch-like by the Santa Susana Pass Road).

Stories and scatterings of information on the Chatsworth streets below the Santa Susana hills. Tales of wild dancing and parties. Tales of nighttime rituals, some wild stories, some false stories, feeding on a kid's imagination, bored on long summer days, egged on by older teens who lied and claimed to have joined in the wild parties. Kids getting their courage up, craving a little adventure. Parents admonishing the kids to stay



in the neighborhood only making them more determined to see what was up on that old decrepit ranch.

A plan hatched with Billy and Joey. Take the bikes up the Pass Road to the south of the ranch. Bring some baloney sandwiches and Twinkies and a carton of lemonade and strap them to the bike basket and haul ass up there. Ditch the bikes and sneak up on the ridge overlooking the ranch. Bring Billy's Dad's binoculars and investigate. Maybe those hippies would be doing something interesting. Maybe they would see some Satan worshipping they overheard from Mom gossiping with the neighbors.

The boys, excited and adrenaline pumping, the bike pedals flying, ignoring the late morning heat, climbing up the Pass Road, the occasional truck driving to Simi Valley, honking. Gunther, sweated up already, cowboy hat on his head, jeans and tee shirt, Keds sneakers, homemade slingshot tucked in the Schwinn basket. Billy, practicing his swear words and Joey pulling alongside to tell a dirty limerick about Barnacle Bill the Sailor. Later, after dropping the bikes, Gunther trying to top Joey with a dirty candy story—something about Oh Henry taking Mary Jane around the Powerhouse and something about a Baby Ruth emerging at the end, he dimly recalled.

The boys were telling each other to shut up already, they were getting closer, and who knows there may be some sentinels and lookouts from the hippie tribe on the rocks. Be ready to retreat, Joey says. They might capture us, tie us up and set us on fire while they worship the devil.

Keep your eyes peeled, Billy whispers. Crawl up before we peek over the hillside. Maybe a hundred yards from the ranch

buildings, close enough to see stuff with binoculars really good. Far enough away to run like batshit to the bikes and haul ass away to home.

Gunther positions himself beneath a rock outcropping and cautiously peers out. Then the other boys follow. Maximum stealth, Joey mouths.

Maximum stealth, Billy mouths back.

Gunther sees nothing at first, just tired old western building replicas showing signs of falling apart bit by bit. Maybe there is no one around today. Disappointment. This might just be a dumb waste of a summer day. And then some activity. A door opens, two long haired hippy guys emerge and get into the Volkswagen van and drive off. A few minutes later a short little man strides out, arm and arm with two naked girls. They are laughing, squinting in the sunlight. The boys are dumbstruck. Billy has the binocs and is forgetting the vows of silence. We hit pay dirt, he exclaims. Joey, his mouth opened wide, punches him and tells him to shut the fuck up. The vision of naked girls striding on the dirt road are going to be burned into their collective memories and brought up over and over the next couple of years.

The girls separate from Charlie and pair off arm in arm. After a few minutes of talking, they disappear into old man Spahn's house. Manson heads off to another building and then comes back with a guitar. A few strumming acoustics bang off the hills and he warbles something. The boys have had enough, suddenly scared, not wanting to chance any discovery, frightened by the strangeness of it all. It was Gunther that was

freaked out most by the sight of Charles Manson. He didn't understand quite why, but Manson terrified him.

Gunther remembered Joey later blabbed about it and word got back to his dad, and Dad talked to Gunther's dad, and that was it for the Spahn ranch adventure. Off to a school year, they did not encounter any of the Manson group again. Then, the next year, the murders and the police raid and the newspapers and the TV made a national sensation of it all.

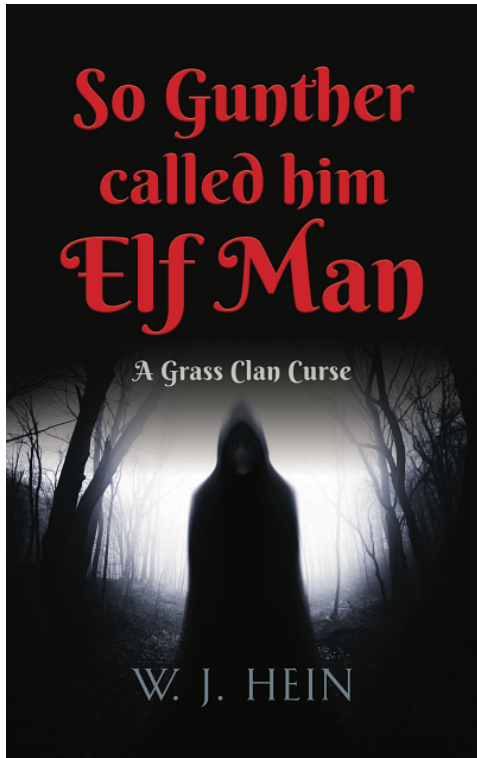
The whole Manson experience, not surprisingly, caused a slew of nightmares on an impressionable young boy. All those tabloids about the stabbings and pigs' blood and the maniacal Manson.

The main dream he had was he was riding shotgun, his father at the wheel of their Ford Fairlane convertible, top opened to a cloudless sky on a hot summer day, driving from his familiar street up a winding road, the homes of his neighborhood disappearing quickly, into a mountainous, treeless, menacing no man's land baking under a merciless sun.

Gunther feels hot breath and a presence behind him. He looks at his father, who seems unaware of anything, smiling absentmindedly. Gunther turns and sees a wiry bearded man with a swastika carved on his forehead. The man grins at Gunther, and reaches into Gunther's shirt, and strokes his chest. The man then removes his hands from Gunther and grabs the steering wheel. His dad stares at Gunther in shock as the Manson man heads them off a cliff. The convertible goes off the road into a vertiginous drop, and invariably Gunther wakes up in terror.

*W. J. Hein*

The nightmares of Manson would return.



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