

## A Lake So Bound With Ice

It is February, and the world is changed. In the zoo at Lincoln Park, the footpaths are silent and pristine, frosted by bitter lakefront wind. The diamond-sharp click of a student's camera takes a brittle slice of the morning, leaving plenty for the next person who comes along. A full twenty minutes will pass before another living soul disturbs the quiet - a jogging fanatic, bundled under wool, who with blurred vision and leaking sinuses is too busy battling nature to observe it with much reverence.

This is Illinois. This is Chicago. This is a community area three miles square, tucked between the listless winter pulse of Clark Street and the solemn sprawl of Lake Michigan. The zoo is closed in principle, but the city leaves the gates open from sunrise to dusk for the enjoyment of those who can stand it. All but the hardiest mammals have retreated inside. Those who remain huddle in torpor under shaggy coats. Only the polar bear swims unperturbed, and of course the wolves are out.

They are red wolves, who in warmer months remain almost completely out of sight at the far end of their enclosure, obscured by brush from hordes of curious children. Now, with the trees bare and no other animals around, they venture into the open, trotting in solemn files from one end of the habitat to another. A patient and quiet observer can watch for hours without spooking them back into seclusion. It is a rare and precious kind of solitude, found only here and in cemeteries.

Freely available zoo pamphlets highlight the critically endangered status of *canis rufus*, hunted nearly to extinction, condemned in rural communities as livestock predators. No doubt many such accusations have been true, but the decimation suggests a blood zeal on the part of the

American farmer outweighing what even a hungry wolf pack could muster. Even so, the term "critically endangered" only takes into account the number of a species known to be left alive, and not such factors as the potential of an animal to destroy its own kind.

Around ten in the morning, with the first exercise wave cleared and the truant art students yet to arrive, park security alerts 18th District police to a disturbance. Responding officers Bosko and Delaney find a scene that manages to draw a small crowd even in the penetrating cold. An unidentified young man has been attacked inside the zoo's wolf exhibit. With no other persons seen exiting, the victim seems to have arrived alone and entered the habitat without coercion. The enclosure fence is approximately twelve feet high, made of reinforced hurricane fence and no great chore to scale for anyone reckless enough to try it. In addition to severe lacerations, blood loss, broken ribs, and a possible spinal injury caused by his leap from atop the fence, the victim removed all his clothing before starting to climb. The day's weather clocks in at a stony twelve degrees Fahrenheit, with a seven degree wind chill factor.

Assistant zookeeper Norman Kranz, who discovered the attack in progress, notes in his statement that most of the animals shied away from the interloper, as would be expected of captive wolves, but the senior female went for him with unusual aggression. Had there been one or more young cubs in the pack, this response to intrusion might have been expected. At present, the zoo's wolf population consists entirely of healthy, self-sufficient adults. After sedating the she-wolf in question, Kranz was able to enter cautiously and drag the bleeding, unconscious, naked youth to safety, where he did his best to cover the shuddering body with the discarded clothes and coat he found nearby. Also recovered is a small, dark green backpack, which the stranger appears to have

brought along with him.

Prompt emergency attention at St. Joseph's Hospital on Diversey keeps the young man alive, but the trauma of his various injuries will require close monitoring. With the patient stable but semi-comatose, doctors are leery of any long-term prognosis. Hospital staff cooperate with Detective Kathryn Dante, whose assignment to the case follows a minor bureaucratic debate over the unidentified, but not yet deceased, subject. With limited personal effects and no driver's license, the patient is identified by his Ameribank Debit Plus and Chicago Public Library cards as Damien Fell, twenty-six years old, last known address a garage apartment in Avondale, last known employment with city park services. A call to a Park District branch office confirms that Fell is employed seasonally for custodial duties, chiefly in and around the public grounds of Kosciusko Park, Palmer Square, and Belmont Gardens.

With no known family to notify at present, Fell hovers alone on the brink of responsive consciousness. Until he is able to answer questions, there is time to probe background. In case there are more substantial charges than criminal trespass and animal endangerment in play, Detective Dante means to be prepared. She begins looking into arrest records to establish personal history and acquaintances.

Her partner, Detective David Kostner, performs a routine search of the little green backpack, which from outward appearance alone suggests its owner has been living rough. The cheap material is stretched, weathered, torn and possibly chewed to the very point of rupture. Nonetheless it appears fully loaded.

Damien Andrew Fell is first noteworthy as a longtime ward of state foster services. Paternity

is uncertain, his most likely biological father, Ward Andrew Fell, listed as deceased prior to the child's birth. His mother Helen Marie Shaugnessy, various aliases, has a history peppered with misdemeanor drug charges and check fraud. According to poorly Xeroxed records, Damien Fell was either surrendered or taken into state custody at the age of three months. The predictable account of a turbulent upbringing follows, with no greater event than the disorderly conduct, truancy and minor vandalism common to his lot. Nothing noteworthy appears on the rap sheet until a string of vagrancy arrests, the first at age nineteen. Fell began drifting with a posse of street nomads whose main pastime was unsanctioned camping on private property. They were into partying naked and all-night hallucinogenic jam sessions, with a goodly measure of property damage mixed in. Fell himself has managed to duck any serious charges up to now, but his recent meetings with police have been increasingly strange. The derelicts have a reputation over western Cook, Dupage and even Will counties. No community wants a modern-day Manson family roaming free. About six months ago, Morton Grove police received a call from an equestrian stable with a dozen privately owned horses in residence. Person or persons unknown had broken into the barn, opened the stalls and sent the animals into panic. The responding officers arrested the members of a semi-nude group freakout, Fell included, on a wooded riding trail at the back of the property.

After subduing the trespassers, the neighborly cops helped recover as many horses as could be quickly found. The last was located just before dawn, hobbling, dehydrated, unwilling to let even its keeper approach at first. The horse was badly lacerated around the ankles and belly, consistent with a coyote or stray dog attack. Despite local efforts, there are usually a handful of

predators roaming the deeper forested parts of the property, reports landowner.

Had there been evidence of human hands in the mutilation, and not just a great stinking pile of circumstantial evidence, Judge Gallner of the Second District Court in Skokie might have brought the heavy gavel down on Fell's whole bunch. The caprices of local justice having swung they way they often will, only six of the seven were sentenced. Most landed thirty days apiece, while one pulled a harsher stint of a hundred and twenty, no doubt for possession of some kind. Fell, always a background figure in these raids, walked free with a steep but manageable fine.

Since that incident, Damien Fell, sometime groundskeeper, citizen of no particular standing, appears only once or twice more in public record. The most remarkable is a violent altercation outside a bar on North Pulaski, which pits the young man against four of his former cronies from the Morton Grove affair. A major rift in the merry tribe seems undeniable. Dante wonders about Fell's gentle treatment by the Skokie judge, and what testimony he might have given to secure it.

Kostner discovers how Fell has passed his time since the falling out. Inside the bag is a curious assortment of books, bearing stamps from libraries all over the city - Wicker Park, Roosevelt, Edgewater, and the cavernous Washington branch on State Street. There are even a few volumes from Evanston libraries, which requires a subscription for non-residents, or a resourceful shoplifter's hands. Once on his own, Fell was clearly consumed with a sudden mania for knowledge. Despite the eclectic range of subjects, there can be little doubt that he has been searching for something specific. The titles suggest little to the detectives, besides a wasted intellect - Marie de France's *Bisclavret*, The *Satyricon* of Petronius, Alban Butler's *Lives Of The Saints*, *An Anthology of Folklore and Myth from Norse to Navajo* (J. Hieronymus Pettibone, editor). There

are also scholarly works on exorcism, the Donner Party, cannibalism and clinical porphyria.

"Man alive," says Kostner. "This kid is into some weird scenes."

Dante has been brewing fresh coffee. She pulls up a chair and slides a cup over to him. "You think he reads all of it?"

"I don't think he picks up tail with it," Kostner mumbles into the coffee. Slurps. Hisses as his teeth go sensitive. "One of these books by itself might spell college boy, but the whole reading list says 'Look out, ladies! Rats in the walls.'" He drills a finger into his temple. Dante nods, acknowledging the universal sign for "cuckoo bugfuck lunatic," although the phrase "rats in the walls" is new to her.

At the bottom of the bag is a surprise, a sheet of brown paper crinkled around a thin stack of DVDs. Exchanging game looks, Dante and Kostner both reach for one.

"At least he's got some normal hobbies," says Kostner.

"I wouldn't say that, necessarily," Dante replies once they've had a minute to look.

It is by no means the weirdest porno stash either of them has searched or seized, but it is clearly rough stuff. Entertainment of this kind advertises everything on the cover, hence the brown paper wrappings. Chained, pierced, contorted, each model is caught in the midst of a sound working over. By cane, by crop, by spiked leather paddle, each takes a hard-earned punishment. There is neither time nor cause just now to preview the material, but it all looks to be of the same sort. *House Of Agony. Cruelty Street. Pain Angels. House Of Agony 3.*

"You ask me," says Kostner, "That *House Of Agony* series got too preachy after Part 2."

Dante is digging through the pile for something else. She retrieves a ragged paperback and

sets it down next to the bondage flicks. *Man Into Wolf: An Anthropological Interpretation of Sadism, Masochism, and Lycanthropy*, Robert Eisler, 1948, Spring Books of London. Kostner snaps his fingers several times in a stuttering gesture.

"That, uh... Eisler, yeah! They made me read that, I think, in some psychology class at UIC. Pretty hairy stuff."

Dante nods, but her remains confounded as she studies it.

"You think of something?" says Kostner.

Dante nods again. Shakes her head. "What I'm thinking, I shouldn't be thinking."

A final clue will go overlooked until some hours later, after Detectives Dante and Kostner receive an urgent call telling them to hurry if they have anything important to ask the patient, after they rush to put their coats and gloves back on, after Kostner nearly breaks his ankle on black ice outside the precinct, after he has tried tries eight times to get the the old Buick's engine to turn over in the cold, after the ICU medics have said "hell with it" and called the finish line time for patient Damien Fell.

In a pocket of the dead man's coat, which was taken with him to the hospital, is a small hardback book with the lettering worn completely off the front cover. It is likely that no one involved in the case would have found it useful, but on one page, worried loose from the binding by frenzied study, is a passage inked in an ancient Balkan dialect, here translated:

*"... and the host of them, gathered in company at the  
silence of Mano, shall likewise turn their faces from the  
despised one, that the full darkness of the new moon fall*

*on him, and the sign be on his brow, and from that day be  
he accursed and cast from their midst."*

and under this, a short footnote, here translated from High Prussian:

*Folklore holds that those who practice lycanthropy may,  
in certain seasons, be banished by their own kind. Without  
benefit of pack, the outcast may lose his transfigurative  
powers, thence falling into madness. Neither beast nor  
man shall suffer his company, until he perish by their  
hand or his own.*

Neither the beat officers, the zookeepers, the CPD Detective Division nor the landed gentry of Morton Grove know these things. Damien Fell believed them in his heart, yet if he had been able to tell them all, it would barely rank among the tales told every night by the city's transient souls. Only last week a Metra cop, a good Catholic named Boyle, roused a half-frozen tramp off the rails of the South Shore line below Van Buren. The shivering man claimed to be the risen Christ, and demanded shelter for the night. And behold, about the third hour, twelve or so of his buddies turned up, unsummoned, to post his bail.

*"Who knows what true loneliness is - not the conventional word, but the naked terror?*

*To the lonely themselves it wears a mask.*

*The most miserable outcast hugs some memory or some illusion."*

- Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*

*"And it ain't a fit night out for man nor beast!"*

- W. C. Fields, *The Fatal Glass Of Beer*