

**THE LOST  
EPISODES OF  
REVIE BRYSON**

**BRYAN FURUNESS**



Black Lawrence Press

For Shelly

*Section 1*  
*Crucifixion*

## Chapter 1

The year I turned twelve, I believed I was the second coming of Christ. I have a good guess about how I came up with this idea, but it's harder to say what sustained the belief beyond an initial *What if?* Nothing about me suggested divinity. Apart from my overdeveloped imagination, I was a pretty normal kid: skinny, buzz cut, prone to daydreams, but still a B student because my teachers preferred my occasional catatonia to the spastic violence (bloody knuckles, wet willies) displayed by my classmates.

The fact that I had lived for eleven years without so much as a hint of holiness did not dissuade me. After all, the first Jesus didn't find out his true identity until he was twelve.

According to my mother, anyway, who made up Bible stories.

Actually, she claimed that her stories were chapters of the original Bible that hadn't made the final cut, but even I could tell she'd made them up. Her "lost episodes" were mostly about the boyhood of Jesus, but they featured cars, steel mills, and transistor radios among other artifacts not generally associated with life at the outset of *Anno Domini*. Her Jesus watched *Cheers*

while halfheartedly strumming his electric guitar. I might not have grown up in the church, but even I knew that Christ did not come of age in the mid-eighties in Paris, Indiana.

Still, her lost episodes were not easily dismissed. My mother's imagination was a swirling galaxy, and her stories were spirits moving over the face of the deep, calling forms out of the void. Wild as prophecy and seemingly just as coded, her stories told a truth deeper than reality.

She never actually told me I was the second coming—not in so many words—but nevertheless, this was the message I took from her stories. Her Jesus felt as real and recognizable as a lost twin. It never occurred to me that she might have modeled Jesus on me. I was certain I'd been modeled on him.

Summer evenings, while my mother watched videos and my father gave private golf lessons, I sat in my darkening bedroom and listened for the voice of God in the distant wail of trains. Headlights from passing cars streaked across my bedroom wall like comets, those old harbingers of fate. Laying my hand on an alphabet puzzle, I waited for Holyghost to guide me, like Ouija.

Whenever I considered my destiny as the second coming, my scalp prickled wildly. In fact, my whole body felt charged with electricity, individual hairs rising like antennae to receive the signal. In those moments that I understood as a foretaste of my divine power, I would be tempted to try out a miracle—just a small one, like turning bath water to cherry Kool-Aid—but I held back because I knew this tingling wasn't the real

thing. Not yet. These little bursts of ecstasy were sent to gauge my readiness, like tests of the emergency broadcast system.

The feeling could come over me anytime: while I was tying action figures to bottle rockets before sending them to their glorious, fiery demise. *I am the Lord; feel my wrath.* Or caddying for my father. *I walked among you, and yea, you knew me not.* Or when my mother was telling me about the Adventures of Holyghost, a name she pronounced as one word, like Superman. *Anoint me, Holyghost.*

Did my mother know the effect her stories had on me? She'd grown up reading palms at county fairs and flea markets; she knew the human condition inclines toward faith. "You don't have to make people believe," she'd told me more than once. "You just have to let them."

The old part of Paris, where we lived, was a spread of sooty ranches for teachers and mill workers, though there were fewer of the latter every year. Each layoff at the mills in nearby Gary was said to be the last one—*now* they were efficient, *now* they could compete with that cheap Japanese shit—until the next last layoff a few months later.

But even as blight ate through Gary, new subdivisions sprang up around the larger Calumet Region featuring houses with three-car garages and in-ground swimming pools. Low taxes and depressed real estate values made the Region an idyllic bedroom community for Chicago, or so the new billboards claimed. A lot of regionnaires resented the growing population of FIPs (fucking Illinois people), but FIPs were

good for my father's business, what with laid-off mill workers not exactly chasing him down for a private lesson to straighten out their slices.

But every real estate boom, no matter how successful, has its washouts. A few blocks south of my house was an aborted development that everyone called Napalm Alley, because it looked like scorched earth. The developer had barely managed to clearcut the parcel and pave a few roads before all his heavy equipment got repo'd.

Most adults called the site an eyesore, but for my friends and me, it was a soundstage for the movie that was our lives. The beauty of Napalm Alley was its blankness. *Terra rasa*. It could become anything. On the empty roads, my friend Woz and I mounted bicycles and jousted with giant Tinkertoy lances. We conducted experiments, such as belching into an empty tennis can, then sealing it up quick and tossing it in a shallow hole. "Ten years from now," said Woz, "we can dig it up and smell that very burp."

And Napalm Alley, with its paved roads and relative lack of obstacles, was the perfect location for my mother to teach me how to drive.

Apparently, giving your keys to an eleven-year-old was not unusual where she grew up, south of Paris in the ocean of corn that seemed to make up the rest of Indiana. "All the farm kids drove," she told me at the start of my first lesson. "Now give her a little gas."

I was not a farm kid. My only driving experience had been the bumper cars at Kiddieland, where I routinely got my car stuck in a corner for other children to ram with glee. Now I

was behind the wheel of a two-ton station wagon. I was a little nervous.

“This is okay with Dad, right?” I said.

My mother snorted like I’d made a joke. Which meant he wasn’t going to ask, and she wasn’t going to volunteer anything.

My father enjoyed having a family, I’m pretty sure, but he didn’t want to get bogged down in the day-to-day details. For her part, my mother cooperated by giving him only the broadest description of our home life. She might tell him, for instance, that we’d watched a movie that morning. Did he need to know that it was a home movie, one that we’d been shooting over the past month with her 8mm camera? Did he need to know that she played Nell Fenwick, while I played both Dudley Do-Right and Snidely Whiplash? Or that, earlier that week, the neighbor’s Weimaraner had gotten so excited by my mock-assault that it jumped the fence to attack my mother’s petticoats, and I ran inside the house as my mother got dragged across the backyard, all the while keeping her hand pressed to her forehead, mouthing in an exaggerated fashion, *Where, oh where, is my Dudley?*, even as her fellow actor was standing at the kitchen window, cracking his knuckles in terror and shame, more Snidely than Dudley, until at last the dog gave up and slunk away, looking embarrassed and confused?

No. That was more than my father could bear to know. We kept him from the knowledge as much as we kept it from him.

In the car, my mother reminded me that excess caution hurts as many people as recklessness. “Hit the gas,” she said.

“It’s not like this heap is going to accelerate out of control.”

I fed the car a little gas. Very little. The needle nudged up to twenty. That was school-zone speed, right? Surely the police wouldn’t allow you to go a killing speed around little kids. The needle still pointed at twenty when I initiated my first left turn.

The tires squealed. Panicking, I clung to the wheel of the station wagon like I was piloting a ship through a gale.

“Easy there, McQueen,” said my mother. Her voice was so calm that it seemed to belong to a different situation, one that didn’t involve our back tires painting an arc across the asphalt.

After the wagon came to a rocking halt, we got out and looked at the skid mark. My right heel bounced like the needle on a sewing machine. We almost died, I thought. I almost just killed us.

Not that my mother appreciated how close to flaming death we’d come. “That’s called a fishhook,” she said, in the same way that someone else might say, “Oh, look. A woodpecker.”

A week or so before my twelfth birthday, I walked to the Lutheran church across the highway to see if I could get better reception on my prayers. The front doors were unlocked and the sanctuary was empty, but I thought I might get in trouble for walking into a church uninvited, so I hid by lying down flat on a pew.

We weren’t churchgoers. Sunday mornings were a busy time for my father at the Broadmoor Country Club, and my mother took pride in never having set an alarm clock since