

BURYING THE LEDE

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“The truth is rarely pure and never simple.”

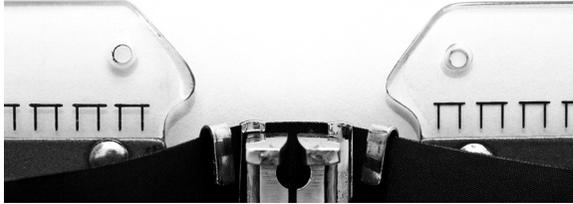
— *Oscar Wilde*

bury the lede

To "bury the lede" is to begin the article with background information or details of secondary importance to the readers, forcing them to read more deeply into an article than they should have to in order to discover the essential point(s).

Cotter, C. (2010). *News talk: Investigating the language of journalism*. Cambridge University Press. p. 167

Chapter 1



It was simple. The couple had to die. The killer didn't know why and didn't care. He got the call with all the information he needed: who, where, when, and in this case, how. It was just before midnight when he drove the stolen 1993 Chevy Malibu to the couple's farmstead. Snow was falling steadily, but the near-zero temperature prevented the flakes from sticking to the windshield. Even with the wipers off, they just blew past. However, the wind-driven snow in the headlights made it difficult to see the gravel road. The man behind the wheel was pleased. He knew the way to the farmhouse, but the snow would lessen the chances of him being seen.

At the bottom of a long hill, the metal rails of an old bridge passed the car windows as the hollow sounds of the wooden bridge planks resounded through the floor of the car. After a brief *ka-lump, ka-lump*, he was back on gravel, climbing out of the valley. He peered into the snow, knowing the farmhouse lay at the top of the hill. As the car reached the crest, the road curved around a grove of trees to the right. The man slowed and turned off the headlights,

creeping past the mailbox to the entrance of the lane. He turned, moving slowly to ensure the snow had not drifted too deeply across the lane. Halfway to the house, under the bare, looming branches of a huge tree, he stopped.

He shut off the engine and opened the driver's door. No interior light came on. The bulb lay on the passenger seat beside him. He turned and pulled himself out of the open door, standing to his full six feet, three inches. The brown work shoes felt cold and uncomfortable as they compacted the thin layer of snow. He stepped briskly to the rear of the car and opened the trunk. A light popped on. A mistake. "Shit," he said softly through clenched teeth. Anger flashed through him, and he instantly pushed the trunk lid down again. He quickly told himself to stay in control. Forgetting to remove the trunk light was a minor error. The rear of the car faced away from the house, so it was unlikely to be noticed from inside. He glanced over his shoulder through the snow to the road. No cars could be seen in either direction, so no harm was done. Besides, even if he was seen from a passing car, at this distance it almost certainly would aid in the deception. It occurred to the killer this would be especially true if he was wearing the kid's jacket. Not putting it on sooner might be considered mistake number two. The man wanted to curse again but held his tongue. It wasn't easy to control his frustration. These were blunders, and he had vowed there would be no blunders.

Slowly his calm returned. He re-lifted the trunk lid a few inches, reached through with his gloved hand, and twisted the bulb from its socket. He raised the lid to its full height, and in the relative safety of darkness and blowing snow, slipped out of his leather jacket. The wind blew right through his shirt and he quickly grabbed the yellow NAPA windbreaker from the trunk. The nylon material, stiff from the cold, did little to warm him, but he pulled it on and snapped it to the neck. He reached back into the trunk and removed

a long, narrow case made of cheap vinyl. Corroded metal and the cold made the zipper difficult to maneuver, but he managed to open the end far enough to extract the rifle.

He shook his head in disgust. No self-respecting sportsman... hell, no man he had ever known would fail to provide at least basic care for his weapon. It was an old Remington .22 caliber single shot rifle – the kind fathers had been buying for their 12-year-old sons for generations of Christmases. It looked like it hadn't been cleaned since the first of those generations. He pulled a pen light from his pocket and knelt in the snow behind the car. A quick but close inspection of the rifle convinced him it would fire but reinforced his opinion of the loser who owned it and the piece of shit car from which he took it. *Pathetic*, he thought as he loaded a cartridge in the chamber and dropped another handful into the right pocket of the yellow jacket. He raised one eyebrow in mild surprise when the bolt opened easily and slid forward smoothly as he pushed the cartridge home. *It will do*, he thought, as he pushed the trunk lid softly down onto its latch and trudged through the snow toward the house.

A wooden porch wrapped around two sides of the house, serving the front door on the east and the back door on the south. A single light fixture hung by a wire stretched between the house and a small outbuilding. Its soft yellow light brought the snowflakes to life, dancing to the rhythm of the gusts of wind. The lane turned and widened on the south side. It was obvious the east door was seldom used. He walked past it and turned right, not hesitating as he moved into the light flickering across the south side of the porch. A quick examination of the stairs convinced him to sidle past them. Instead, he raised one leg high, found firm footing, and lightly pulled himself up onto the oak flooring of the porch. The boards creaked, but no more loudly than the shed or barn boards protesting the relentless wind. He paused only an instant to peer through the porch door, and then he

turned the knob.

It was no surprise the door was unlocked. People living in rural Iowa never lock their doors. Even those with enemies feel isolated and safe, with miles of cornfields between them and the nearest town. The door was old and far from silent. As he pulled it open, the wood creaked and a long metal spring squeaked as it stretched. Quickly stepping through, never taking his hand from the knob, he turned and inched the door shut. A shuffle step to the left put him in a deep shadow where he waited, slowed his breathing, and listened. He was in an unheated mudroom with pegs on the inside wall and an old wooden barrel holding a broom and a snow shovel. On the pegs hung coveralls, sweatshirts, a seedcorn cap, and a couple of baseball gloves. There was no sign of pet supplies. *Good.* He had not expected any, and a dog would have been a very unwelcome surprise. A doorway led into the kitchen, beyond which was a wide archway. Through it, he could see the living room. As he stepped through the opening, the aroma changed immediately from farm animals to fresh cream and cinnamon.

He looked for the two young girls he knew were there and could just make them out through the darkness, asleep on the pullout couch in the living room. He tried to step lightly, cursing the work shoes and the old linoleum that crackled with each step. When he reached the archway, he could see clearly the small bodies wrapped in sleeping bags. An old TV set at the foot of the bed was off, but the picture tube emitted just the slightest glow in the darkness. The intruder looked left. The door to the stairway was precisely where he expected it. It was closed. He grasped the knob and turned it slowly. The door swung open silently. He contemplated two strategies from here. Climb as slowly and quietly as possible, risking the certain creaks and squeaks of the worn stairs, or bound up the stairs and end this quickly. He decided on the former and took one step up

the narrow stairway and pulled the door shut behind him.

The upstairs was a single room with slanted ceilings and dormer windows, common in the upper half stories of the old farmhouses that still stood at the centers of some farmsteads. From the stairs, he could look straight up to the ceiling and see the glowing light fixture he had seen through the north window. He silently raised the rifle and gripped it with both hands. The thin, tight-fitting gloves added to his sense of control as he checked to be sure the safety was off and slid his trigger finger into place. As he tensed to resume his climb, he realized the couple upstairs was not asleep. He strained to hear, debating whether to abort. Then a wide grin spread across his face as he realized he was listening to the sounds of lovemaking. This provided a perfect distraction from any other noise in the house. The intruder climbed the rest of the stairs rapidly and confidently. He looked over his right shoulder into the room as he ascended past the edge of the stairway opening. The bed was at the far end of the dormer. He saw the woman first, from the back, and the sight of her nearly took his breath away. She was moving back and forth, riding her husband with an intensity that could have aroused a corpse. Beads of sweat inched down her back. She was so beautiful and so filled with passion. She was so *alive*.

Well, not anymore.

These thoughts came and went without slowing the killer's stride. He knew his only chance of failure would come from hesitating. He didn't.

When he pulled the trigger, slamming a bullet into the blonde woman's brain, he felt a pang of regret. It was not a familiar feeling. The man had killed before. Not often, but enough to know it never bothered him. He assumed it was why his boss always called him first. He could be relied on to do the job, do it right, and not think about it again. No spilling the beans to some babe during pillow talk or to the boys at the Iron Range Tap during a night of hard drinking. Once the

job was done, he simply forgot about it and moved on. He supposed his lack of remorse defined him as some sort of sociopath. Yeah, he knew about sociopaths. He was smart. He read books. He knew he wasn't normal. But then, being a sociopath, he didn't let that bother him. This irony often brought a smile to his face. It was funny when he thought about it. But not tonight. Tonight he had a job to do.

"It's nothing personal," he said quietly as the blonde's head lurched forward and her body was thrown down onto her husband's chest. The man with the rifle moved right along with her, shoving another shell into the .22 as he stepped up onto the footboard of the bed.

The husband had just enough time to squeak out, "Oh my God...what? No! Please..." He clawed at his wife's lifeless body, trying to move. As he thrashed at her, he may have been trying to scream, but the noises from his mouth were muffled, terror seizing his vocal cords. Then even those stopped abruptly as he watched the man drop the gun toward his face. "Oh no, please," his voice rasped.

The killer calmly fired once more, directly into the husband's left eye. The second victim instantly fell silent. The killer reloaded twice more, firing a second shot into the head of each victim. As he headed down the stairs, he caught himself looking at the rifle almost in admiration. The .22 might be a child's rifle, but it was a perfect assassin's tool at close range. It left very little mess, and made little noise. He hoped it had made just enough to wake the girls downstairs. This thought reminded him to pull a ski mask from his back pocket and stretch it over his face. He adjusted the eyes and stepped through the door into the living room.

"Dad?" a small voice called out.

The killer said nothing but walked slowly past the pullout bed, turned right, and continued into the kitchen. He stopped in front of the kitchen counter and pried open the lid on the flour tin. He reached

in his pocket, pulled out a plastic baggie, and pushed it down into the flour. After replacing the lid, he stepped quickly to the porch door, flipped up the switch next to the door turning on the kitchen light, and waited a beat, two beats. He could feel eyes on his back. Smiling inside the mask, he stepped out through the mudroom and into the cold wind. The weather hadn't changed since he had made the drive out to the farmhouse. Snow was still falling. It had the cold, icy feel of a January storm. One last task. With his back to the door, the killer punched hard backwards with his elbow, breaking out a pane of the door. *Best to have it look like the door had been locked*, he thought.

He glanced at his watch. He had been on the farmstead less than 12 minutes. Probably not long enough for anyone to have noticed the car parked in the middle of the lane, but if someone did, all the better. The car wasn't his. It belonged to that lazy-ass kid who was about to become the third victim of this little assignment.

When the killer reached the car, he turned and looked back at the house. The lone ceiling light in the bedroom shone from the upstairs window, the same as when he had arrived. It was an older, small house, probably built during World War II, when building supplies were scarce and expensive. Shadows in the farmyard jumped left then right, as the wind bullied the yard light on its wire. The killer appreciated the light. It had provided enough illumination to guide him, but not so much that he had worried about being seen. The car was parked nearly forty yards from the house, still in the shadows of the grove, but closer than he would have parked if the wind had not been carrying away the sound of his approach.

As he started the car he wondered if the girls had gone back to sleep, or if one of them was climbing the stairs to the parents' bedroom now. No matter. Even if they called 9-1-1 right now, the nearest deputy sheriff was more than twenty minutes away. The killer knew this to be a fact. He had planned very carefully.

As he drove down Main Street of Orney, Iowa, he saw the empty parking space on the side street next to the bowling alley – right where it had been when he had taken the maroon Chevy. There were perhaps a dozen cars and pickup trucks parked in the entire business district. He quickly turned the car into its space, shut off the engine, climbed out, and shut the door just firmly enough to make sure the latches caught. As soon as he reached the sidewalk, his stride slowed. He knew that now he was free of suspicion unless he created it by the way he behaved.

After taking care of one last piece of business in the back room at the Iron Range, the killer walked the last block to his own car. As he pushed the key into the lock, he could feel the cold tumblers resist turning. He slid into the seat and started the engine. As it warmed, he ran through the list in his mind one last time. The shoes, rifle, and NAPA jacket were back in the trunk of the Chevy; the light bulbs were back in their sockets in the trunk and in the passenger compartment; the ski mask and key were in his pocket but would soon be at the bottom of the well on his aunt's farm. The kid who owned the car was tucked away in the back room of the bar where he would wake up later. Nothing had been left in the borrowed car and nothing else had been touched. He wasn't really surprised to find he felt good. *Why the hell not?* he asked himself, thinking that, like all good soldiers, he had done what he had been told to do. He had done it well and without any unexpected complications. He didn't relish killing, but he was man enough to do the job that needed to be done, pleasant or not. It was no different than Iraq, he thought, except the face of the commanding officer had changed, the pay was better, and it was a hell of a lot colder.

He backed out of the parking space and drove the twenty-five blocks to the edge of town without even seeing another person. *God, how I love a small town*, he thought, smiling and shaking his head. As the glow of the streetlights disappeared in the blowing snow behind him, he turned on the radio. KIOA in Des Moines had a new overnight jock, a woman with a husky voice who was trying too hard to broadcast her sensuality across central Iowa. Her selection of classic rock, however, was just fine. As Roger Daltry sang “Behind Blue Eyes,” the killer leaned back into his seat and relaxed. It would be a leisurely drive out to his aunt's farm and then back home. He knew he would sleep soundly, at least until the call came, rousting him out of bed to tell him two young girls had found their parents dead in their home. *Well, won't I be surprised?* he thought sarcastically, and then let his mind go blank as he drove into the snowy winter night.

Town Crier

Couple Found Shot to Death in Rural Orney Home

Motive, Circumstances Are Mysteries

Tony Harrington, Staff Writer

ORNEY, Iowa – Jerry and Anne Ennis were found dead in the second-floor bedroom of their rural Orney home early Saturday morning, according to Quincy County Deputy Sheriff Daniel Bodke. The couple was discovered by one of their two young daughters, who had been asleep on the main floor of the home prior to the killings, Bodke said. Names and ages of the children were not released.

Bodke, who is the chief deputy in charge of criminal investigations, said it appeared the couple died of gunshot wounds to their heads, but the official cause of death would not be known until after examination by the county medical examiner.

When asked if the killings were a murder-suicide, Bodke said no further details would be released until after officials had a chance to conduct at least a preliminary investigation.

"However," Bodke said, "I discourage any speculation at this point regarding any aspect of the incident.

I also encourage the news media and the public to remember that two young girls have lost their parents. We should focus our attention on supporting and praying for them, and not on speculation about what might or might not have happened last night."

The Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation has been called to assist in the investigation. When asked, Bodke acknowledged the DCI mobile crime lab was already at the scene where the bodies were found.

He declined to comment about the condition or location of the two daughters, except to say they had been taken out of the county and would be staying with relatives.

No further information will be released until the next press conference, currently scheduled for 11 a.m. Monday, Bodke said.

The apparent murders are the first in Quincy County since 2013, when Barbara...