



By J.R. Horsting

El Dorado County, "Old Hang Town," Placerville, California - 1850

A large, dark, twisted tree with one extended, strong branch with odd red leaves is being fitted again to hang another vile criminal, Jed. He revels in his renowned brutality against innocents and how taking each life is like being the Lord almighty. The posse goes about their grim duty, Jed cursing them all the while. Even when hung by the neck, he continues gurgling threats and promising revenge until his final twitch.

The posse laments how they always do that and how it's just unsettling. They've heard that some people cry and beg, but that never happens around here. They look to dig Jed's grave near the tree, but realize they are running out of empty ground. A narrow shallow unmarked grave is the best they can muster. While digging, it is said "Don't seam right... hell, neither was he". Alex, their leader, says, "Let's go."

Placerville, California - 1944

The posse's descendants are still having trouble with evil. Slaying and suicides occur at the old, dying hanging tree in disturbing numbers. They decide to chop it down.

On the first whack of the axe, they're spattered with red liquid and realize the blood like sap is running. Groans and wails emanates from the tree. The axe man loses his nerve as a cloud of bat-like seed pods are released into the wind. Most of the pods hit the street or ground outside of the immense graveyard and disintegrate into black ooze. A child catches a dry seed and puts it in her favorite book with a wicked smile. (The root of all evil by Florence Marryat 1879)

Placerville, California - today

The Smiths, live next to the old graveyard. After a bad accident at the old dry hanging tree, this nearly killed one of their children Alex. Unconscious, Alex had visions of the history of the old hanging tree. A tribe fought brother against brother in a massacre around the tree. Intermixed with robbery, betrayal and hanging after hanging...all ending in death. Nightmares continue for Alex each night after the incident.

Mike Smith Alex's father cuts it down and keeps a cord of wood for the fireplace. He sells the rest. The wood goes fast, with odd people showing up as if it's prized firewood, and some of it is stolen. Thieves are chased off by the family dog Shawn, who loved to fetch, but would not touch one stick from the hanging tree.

When the Smiths light their hearth, the fire moans and screams and whispers curses. Fire and smoke take on a life of its own. Tortured faces, hands, teeth and eyes drive the smoke and fire after them. Ghosts and demons turn their home against them. The Smiths fight a losing battle.

The police respond and are completely destroyed. All is lost until Alex, their eldest son, says, "We've got to put out the fire!" They fight their way back and, dumping water on a screaming fire, they stop the chaos. But now they wonder who else may have the cursed wood, and start to realize it's all about lineage and history. Alex is sure some family trees are touched by evil, and some families are called on to stop it.

The senior class from Alex's school has stolen some wood from the Smiths for the town celebration bonfire. Jeb, the football team's quarterback says, "Now that's going to be one hell of a fire!" as if he unconsciously knows the evil within the wood.

The Smiths work on how the past and the wickedness are at work. Mary, the mother, knows the town history. The dad, Mike, a local fire fighter, knows the people personally. But little sister Ginny is far ahead of all of them, online working through the lineage of good and evil in the town. Alex just seems to know. "Something's coming."

Jumping back and forth in time, we witness their discoveries, as they're interrupted by creepy occurrences in the present that affect them less and less. Alex remembers the town bonfire to the horror of the rest of the Smith family. Resolved he says "Dad, we'll need the fire truck, let's go".

Good people around the town spark their fireplaces with the evil wood to warm the night. The screaming wood frightens some, but many can't hear it over football, news or cooking shows. Demon's made from wood, smoke and fire runs rampant, terrorizing the town. People screaming haunt's the town. Each demon and evil spirit has a special message for the descendant of those who caused their demise. Some face their end running in terror, others are blissfully unaware.

The bonfire is lit. Chaos rips through the enterer town. People are tortured by the twisted perceived wrongs of demons and sprits out for revenge. The Smiths fight their way into town and extinguish the blaze. While being praised, they're unnerved that so many families not it attendance have lineages to the old evil.

The young child who captured the hanging tree seed is now a grand mother. She takes it out of the old, brittle book and plants it in the ground, deep within the massive graveyard. She smiles wickedly as it quickly sprouts into a black stalk with small red leaves.

