

BRUSHTOWN STORIESEverybody Loves Anne Swann

From the files of Detective Dankent, police inspector. I was on vacation in Cragsmore the scenic home to 10,000 crags. They even had a famous crag that looked like a crevasse. My pop used to own a shack in the area and he'd take me there crag fishing on holiday weekends. Crag fishing involved tying a moth to a string and then letting it fly around until a bird ate it and then you'd hook the bird and laugh at it for being dumb. Well pop would laugh I'd be more what's the word - traumatized. But after a dinner of roast acorns - acorns is what he'd name the birds we caught -- pop would make me sleep on the roof of the shack in a case a meteorite fell from the sky. I was supposed to catch the meteorite and save the shack from harm. When I'd ask him how to do this he'd toss me a ratty oven mitt and say "die trying." Ah the sweet memories of youth.

So every so often I'd live the mid-sized burg that I called home I'd come back to our shack and visit the crags. But this particular trip I'd find no joy in escarpments. A local girl - Anne Swann - had run away. She was one of those girls who was loved by all. A high school senior who was head of the Nerd Society and the Jock Club. She was valedictorian and homecoming queen. She also won the Miss Slope pageant last year and was in the running for Miss Pointy Peaks a poorly named beauty contest named after Poinsettia Peaks the famed suffragette who died on Big Melons Mountain. Huh, never really thought about that name either. It's all kinda ... well, that's crag country for ya.

Anyway Anne Swann had run off leaving only a note that said: "Byeeeeee." Spelled B-Y-E-E-E-E-E. The use of 5 e's was definitely a cry for help, at least according to her father Ernie. I knew Ernie Swann from my childhood shack days. He'd been Cragsmore's Mayor but now was retired. He made his fortune selling something called re-goat to the army. Really made bank on that, so then he built a bank of monitors that monitored banks. It was called Monitor Bank Bank Monitor Monitors Limited. He knew I was a police man back in the mid-sized burg that I called home so he asked me to help.

I agreed but when I went to the local sheriff he was none too pleased. "I don't know how you do it in the mid-sized burg you

come from but here in Cragsmore we do things a little differently," he said in his odd nasally lilt. "Here in Cragsmore we like lager, none of your fancy mid-sized burg IPAs. A little too pale of an ale for us. But then again you mid-size burgers like being pale. All that indoor fun like air hockey and skeeball. Only ski we have is sans ball." He droned on but I skipped out just as he began talking about how people like me always skip out while people like him are talking. Nuts to him. I didn't need local Joe Law's help. Detective Dankent is a one man investigating force.

My first instinct was to stand on Main Street and yell at cars if they'd seen Anne Swann. This proved harder than I thought as they'd raised the speed limit. I'd barely get out a "have you seen -" before a sedan would blast past me. Nuts to cars. I didn't' need local Joe Car's help. Detective Dankent is a one man investigating force. So I got my brain cooking: If I were a popular teen girl who ran off where would I go?

Of course! Murlow's Gator Land - a large alligator farm on the edge of town. But I soon found out that Gator land was closed because it actually had no gators only crocodiles. And also because Murlow was feeding the victims of mafia hitmen to is faux-gators to pay off a gambling debt. Murlow was now living in the parking lot of the foreclosed property in an airstream trailer. I banged on the door.

Murlow, a thin man in overalls, stepped out. I asked him about Anne Swann. He said he liked her. She'd come around and they'd make prank calls to the local pizza parlor. They'd always call up and ask for tacos. The owner Vito would get so angry. Mostly cause his name was Vito Taco and the place was called Taco's Pizza. Finally out of desperation Vito put tacos on the menu. But they were really calzones that he called 'Italian tacos.' But he only did this because he thought there was all this demand for tacos. But it was really just Murlow and Anne prank calling him. Poor sap bought all these ads and banners saying: "we now got tacos." But nobody wanted tacos from a pizza place and the place went bankrupt. Motive. Maybe the note was staged and Anne hadn't run off but got got! Maybe the extra e's were a clue. 5 e's. 5 ease. Easy. Easy 5. Five is 3 plus 2. Plus is a cross. The cross. The symbol of Christianity. And the bye. Bi. Two. The Father and Son. Son. Sonny. Sonny and Cher. Share. Sharing. So Christianity plus sharing. Who shares Christianity? The Pope! And where does the pope live? A palace. And if you

rearrange the letters in 'a palace' you get: Ace La Pa. And Ace La Pa was a small village in the foothills of Sicily best known for being the location of the first pizza parlor. Game, check, mate Vito. You just couldn't resist. He was definitely guilty.

Except that he was innocent. And also dead. He'd had a massive heart attack eight months previously. I checked out his grave. No sign of any sort of vampirism or zombism. He was dead and buried. I put a large rock on the grave just in case but I doubted any ghoulie was going to come digging out from those six feet down. Fine nuts to him. I didn't need local Joe Pizza's help. Detective Dankent is a one man investigating force. So I pondered a ponder -- why would a good girl like Anne Swann feel a need to make prank calls, prank calls were the domain of tuffs and punks?

I decided the next best thing to do was get a drink down at the Craghole a dank little bar of ill repute. Originally the Craghole was a gay bar until the gays got together and built a better bar and now it was just patronized by a bunch of lousy straights. I got a mug of whiskey and a shot of varnish - the house special. I was snout deep in my hooch when the sheriff came sauntering over. "Well, well solve the case you mid-sized burg slicker? So you can go back to enjoying your chain restaurants and commuter parking? Whoo boy I guess we crag-hicks should all retire cause you showed us with your fancy big box store ways and strip mall dreams. Oh wait you didn't! She's still gone!"

I wanted to give him a few crags of his own with my fists, but that's just what he wanted. He'd love an excuse to lock me up in his Podunk jail. So I just ignored him. He goaded me more but then the bar trivia started and he had to join his cop friends and their team: The Thick Blue Lines. I tried to join a team of three but we got in a fight about Buffalo wings. They said you can have breaded Buffalo wings - madness. So I flipped the table and they kicked me out. I was plenty drunk and plenty angry. Nuts to them. I didn't need local Joe Trivoo Team's help. I yelled to a lamppost. Detective Dankent is a one man -- oh my head. I stumbled down the street. Whatever. I knew all the trivia I needed. Here's a trivia for you, I told a fire hydrant, what bar is the worst. Answer the craghole. Also crickets have ears on their legs. That's some trivia. Why do I know that? I was too drunk to drive so I walked until I was too drunk to walk so then I rolled around on some grass. The grass was wet and

cold and then wet and warm cause I apparently puked at some point.

Then I fell into a fitful sleep. I dreamt about a little duck that got lost from all the other ducks. Then the duck started playing three card monte. Then I was the duck. Then I was the queen of hearts. Follow the queen. Next thing I know I'm being shuffled hard and the cards rained down like so many meteorites or chicken wings. Unbreaded! Then I was walking over crags but they were made of trivia which was a bit too abstract for my tastes but ... Then I see a bunch of kids with no faces playing duck, duck, chicken. Where's the goose, I asked. They said: the swan is gone. I say I'm asking about the goose! Then they all grew wings and flew off their feathers hitting me in the face.

This startled me awake and I found an actually pigeon was pecking my face getting his feathers in my mouth. This is the part where I tell you the dream was the key to solving the case. Wrong. Dreams are just stupid brain garbage that gets dumped on us while we nap. All of that was just weird, useless, and stupid. Like a three-armed, no-legged soccer player without an education. I got off the puke grass and tried to figure out my next move. But just then a little car pulled up. A beat-up old blue something or other. I don't know let's call it a car. This "car" was being driven by none other than Anne Swann. "Get in," she said.

I'd like to say most police work is solved by hard work and intuition but the truth is mostly its dumb luck and complaining until it solves itself. That's what they don't teach you in those fancy mystery novel writing workshops. Anyways the way I hoist my carcass into the passenger seat and she drives off.

Without taking her eyes from the road Anne Swann reached into the center console and pulled out a moist towelette. She handed it to me. I dabbed it on my stale tongue. Lemony - this gal really does have it all together. "I heard you were looking for me," she said. She kept her hands at ten and two the whole time.

"Yeah," I said, "your dad is worried."

"He's worried about his reputation." She pulled into the Super Food Dude the local grocery chain. "I need to get hummus," she said.

"Don't you worry people will recognize you?" I asked.

"I have a disguise," she replied. She then affixed a blond stick-on dollar store mustache to her lip. "Let's go."

We walked through the aisles of the store pushing a cart with a busted wheel, it would squeak and turn every which way but where we wanted it to go. Just like life I thought. Nuts to you squeaky life. I nodded in agreement to my thoughts I should mail that in to Readers Digest. I looked over at Anne then at all the Cragmarians blithely shopping. No one seemed to see past the mustache to the girl underneath. I guess the old saying was right: "mustache at night sailor's delight, mustache by day you fade away."

Anne Swann spent a long time inspecting all the different types of hummus. I told her she should go back home, but she demurred. She weighed a container of red pepper hummus in her hand. Unsatisfied she put it back on the shelf.

"Look Anne," I said, "everyone here loves you, so we can stand by the chill case hummusing around or I can take you home and you can get all dips you can dab."

"My favorite actor growing up was Dick Van Dyke," she said while keeping her attention focused on the selection of chickpea pastes. "He was always so ... loveable. Then a couple years ago he was out surfing, which of course he was - and he fell asleep on his surfboard because of course he did he's like 80-something years old. And when he woke up he had floated out to sea. He thought - oh I'm dead - and also maybe I phoned in a bit on the fourth season of *Diagnosis Murder*. But then all of a sudden a pod of dolphins came by. And they pushed his surfboard and him back toward shore. He was saved by them."

"So ..." I said, "you want to become a marine biologist or something?" She chose a container of everything bagel flavored hummus and tossed it into the cart. Then we started walking to the self-checkout.

"No," she said, "I'm a Swann and the Swanns have always been lucky. Like Dick Van Dyke. We are successes. My grandfather accidentally crashed his car into the car of a diamond dealer. The diamond dealer had no heir and decided to just give his diamonds to my grandfather. And my dad he invented re-goat. A remote control that supposedly controls goats. But it doesn't. But he sold it to the military for 8 figures because it was the height of the Cold War and the CIA and the government were trying all

sorts of crazy things like MK-Ultra or Project Stargate. Plus they knew Brezhnev was going to visit a goat commune and they thought they could re-goat one of the goats to hump him, which would so embarrassment the Soviets that it would bring down the USSR. Re-goat didn't work, but luckily it was rutting season so the goats were all humpy on their own. Breshnev did get Bresh-nutted, but the Soviets covered it up and had the goats buried in an unmarked grave next to the Romanovs. Anyway, the Feds think it worked so my dad made a mint defrauding the government on a fake goat control remote control." She paid for the hummus and went and sat at a small picnic table outside the store. She opened the hummus and ate it with her fingers.

"That why you made them crank calls? Cause you felt guilty about your family's goat thing?"

"Nah," she said, "I did that cause it was hilarious."

"So what? You're afraid you won't live up to your family? Everybody loves you."

"That's the problem. I'm afraid I'll be a success. And for no good reason. I'm afraid I'll just skate by because everything comes easily to me. My grades, my looks, even this outfit I got it for free because I was the 1000<sup>th</sup> customer at Dressingtons. I don't want to be an easy success. So I ran away."

"There's no guarantee you'll be okay. The world now is harder than ever. There's this whole recession thing. And plus being a woman that's like two strikes against you from the jump."

"Really?" She said perking up. "You think so?"

"Listen kiddo, I think you won't amount to a hill of beans."

"Wow that's the worst thing anyone ever said to me. Thank you." She smiled. "I guess it might not work out after all." With that she took off her fake mustache and suddenly the whole parking lot stopped.

"Anne! It's Anne!" they shouted. People ran up to her crying saying how much they missed her. Pretty soon the whole crowd put her on their shoulders and carried her off chanting her name. Poor kid. They really do love her.

With that the case was solved. I didn't get the credit but I didn't get blamed either. Blamed for spilling juice on the rug at City Hall. Side note I spilled juice on the rug at city hall,

like a lot of juice. Anyway I never went back to Cragsmore after that. I'm not sure what happened to Anne Swann, but I hope in my heart that she's up to nothing and has become a real nobody. This is Detective Dankent pining off. Signing off. Oh let me take that last bit again. This is Detective Dank-

END OF STORY