

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE:  
Another adventure with J.D. Rogers and his buddies,  
“The Cool One” and “Chickslayer.”

## House of Blue Lights or the three idiots

by J.D. Rogers

On a fall Saturday evening that was quite cool but not frosty cold, my first cousin Steve “The Cool One” Porter, Marty “Chickslayer” Wilson and I decided to investigate a local legend, the “House of Blue Lights.” This was not a place where blues legends like B.B. King, Wes Montgomery or Muddy Waters played, nor was it a place that our band, the fabled Hand-me-Downs, had on our list of venues to conquer as we dreamed of rock-and-roll stardom.

No, the House of Blue Lights was a place where a woman’s body was kept in a glass coffin. Rumor was that when she died years ago, her husband put her in the glass coffin and displayed her in their living room. Over the years, her white hair had continued to grow and was waist-length now. Her fingernails were over ten inches long, and her face and hands were decomposed to the point that she had zombie-like features, thus needing no makeup for her role. We had heard that she wore a white gown and there was usually a red rose placed on top of the coffin.

Supposedly, this is what one could see if one was able to sneak up to the house and peer in at the coffin through the living room window.

Getting to that window, though, was very, very dangerous.

As the story goes, the still mourning husband was rumored to have chased people off his property with a shotgun. Many a slow runner had their backside peppered with rock salt while trying to sneak a peek through that window. Oh, yes, the house was surrounded with blue outdoor lighting.

If the three of us were successful in our mission, we would be the first among our friends to conquer the House of Blue Lights. What a score that would be. Why, there might even be some girls who wouldn’t mind being seen in the daylight with us after that extraordinary feat.

Yes, this was just the sort of legend that three teenagers who were testosterone-crazed, non-shaving, know-it-all high-school males would be drawn to like bugs to a bug light.

That night I had the keys to my father’s brand spankin’ new orange and cream 1968 Chevrolet C10 pickup truck. It sported an automatic transmission with a 350-cubic-inch engine. She purred like a lion and ran like a cheetah. The bench seat had plenty of room for three tall and skinny guys.

We drove through a cloudy and moonless Indiana night to challenge natural selection on the north side of Indianapolis, a city known as “The Crossroads of America” with an endless amount of manufacturing jobs at that time, and which was once home to the Miami and Lenape Indians. They were gone by the 1820s.

The radio was tuned to WIFE-AM playing the latest in rock-and-roll when we parked the truck at the bottom of a driveway that would lead us to the House of Blue Lights.

We quietly closed the truck doors, becoming one with the night as we slithered through the woods like serpents chasing prey, stopping just out of sight of the driveway.

The excitement had us so amped up that every nerve ending in our bodies was supercharged. We whispered to each other: “There it is! Holy moly, it’s true!” “Can you believe it?” “Man, this is going to be sooo cool.” Each step we took venturing toward the house sounded earth-shatteringly loud to my ears.

We were about to leave the cover of the woods and step out onto the lawn when the front screen door squeaked, announcing the appearance of a man on the front porch. We hit the ground hoping that we’d melt into the cold, damp earth. I was so glad we were wearing dark clothing instead of, say, my madras pants with some fluorescent-colored Tom Jones shirt.

“I know you’re out there, you miserable little (blankety-blank-blanks).”

His voice sounded as if he was standing right over us, but I wasn’t looking up to see if that was true. No one was moving. I had to fight the urge to break and run, but froze when I thought, was that a shotgun? After what seemed like eternity, we heard the front door close.

Running blindly back through the woods, no one said anything until we got back to the truck.

“Oh my god, was that close or what?”

“Does anyone need to change their drawers?”

We laughed while catching our breath.

At this point, any sane individual would have counted their blessings—no rock salt in our behinds—and driven home. Of course, that wouldn’t be us. We were teenage hormonal-driven males who had a badge of courage to win that night. In simple terms, we were “the night of the walking brain-dead.”

It was decided that we’d drive around and find another way onto the property, maybe from the back side.

We hadn’t driven far when we found ourselves in the middle of some new road construction—overpass, new intersection, etc. My cousin “The Cool One” pointed out a road up at the top of the newly graded slope to our right. “That road up there might take us where we want to go,” Chickslayer agreed.

The slope had a gentle grade to it and we covered the 100 yards or so with no problem. Once we turned left onto the old road, I decided to kill the headlights so no one would see us from below.

I was running 10 to 15 miles an hour in the dark on an unknown closed road when “ka-boom,” the front of the truck drops forward, pitching us toward the dash. Then, just as quickly, we were thrown back against our seats.

“What the heck was that?” Chickslayer yelled out.

“I don’t know,” I said, “but I’m pushing on the accelerator and we’re not moving.”

The truck engine just roared.

I put the truck in park and opened my door to get out and investigate the situation. I stepped into the dark, falling three to four feet to the ground.

Would you believe it? The road construction crew had removed the culvert. My father’s truck was hanging in the air by both bumpers. Don’t ask me how that happened because we’ve never figured it out.

With all four wheels hanging uselessly in the air, Marty and Steve started pushing on the back of the truck. I was behind the steering wheel providing words of encouragement, like “push harder.”

I was giving gas to the engine so that when they freed the truck’s back bumper, I’d just power her up and out of the ditch. You bet. The truck never moved an inch.

We were all standing by the side of the truck when we were engulfed in a bright white light. This wasn’t caused by an incredible plan that one of our single-watt brains had conjured up. When we turned to face the light shining up from the road below us, there manning the spotlight was a “brown wrapper,” also known as a “County Mountie,” but best known as a Marion County Sheriff.

He started laughing hysterically through the PA system in his car. Racing up the slope that we had just traveled, with his red lights flashing, I thought I might be in yet another B movie.

As the laughing officer stopped in front of us and climbed out of his car, he asked, “Which one of you idiots is the driver?”

I could feel a few eyes on me as I sheepishly said, “I am.”

He then said, “I’ve seen some stupid things in my day, and I do mean *stupid*.” Laughing again, he added, “But you—you win the cake. You do have a driver’s license?”

“Yes, sir,” I said as he started laughing again.

Marty got the registration out of the glove box for me and the three of us gave the officer our driver’s licenses.

That’s when I noticed his name tag for the first time—“Officer Sweet.” Oh, jeez, we’re done. He was the one deputy whose reputation ran far and oh so wide. We’d heard things like “When Officer Sweet stopped a teenage male, he might impound the kid’s car, have the car disassembled while looking for serial numbers of stolen parts, and/or issue multiple citations, etc., etc.” I could hear the jail door closing now. What would my obituary read, or would there even be one. After all, it was my father’s brand-new pickup truck hanging in the air. He just might have me sent to a pauper’s grave. These sorts of shenanigans make a father wish he’d gotten a vasectomy.

My lips were starting to quietly quiver out a prayer, one most of us have made at one time or another. I know I have on many occasions, like while lying in a fetal position on the bathroom floor, meeting other local law enforcement, or very, very, *very* angry girls’ fathers. A “let’s-make-a-deal” prayer of sorts.

After Officer Sweet ran a background check on us, he said, “No warrants on my three idiots here.” He gave our licenses back and asked, “How do you plan to get your truck out of here?”

I had no idea, nor did my evil-doing sidekicks.

“That’s what I thought,” he said as he got back in his squad car to call a tow truck.

While we stood in his headlights with his roof cherries flashing, another County Mountie pulled up on the road below us, turned on his red lights and started to laugh through his PA system. Unfortunately, he had attracted more gawkers, whose cars were moving slowly on the roadway below us, so I was oh so glad when he and the gawkers drove on.

When the tow truck finally arrived, Officer Sweet walked over and talked to the driver as he got out of his truck. Then they both walked over to us and the tow-truck driver asked, “Which one of you idiots was driving?”

I could feel all eyes on me again, including Officer Sweet’s.

“I was,” I replied.

“You got her hung up pretty good there.”

“What’s it going to cost?” I asked.

“How much you got?”

We counted up maybe eight dollars and change among us.

“Boys,” he said, “I don’t work for nothing, but this here is one of the funniest things I’ve seen in a long while. I wish I had my camera with me.”

Then he asked, “How did you do this? Just didn’t notice there weren’t no culvert there? That the road is closed? I am glad you did venture out tonight so I’d have me a good laugh.”

Officer Sweet said, “That’s why they ain’t going to jail tonight.”

“Give me your money and I’ll get you out,” the tow-truck driver laughed as he turned his truck around to the pickup.

“Oh, by the way,” Officer Sweet asked, “you boys weren’t trying to get to the House of Blue Lights, were you?”

After an awkward silence, the three of us mumbled, “Oh, no, no.” “House of what?” “No, sir.”

“That’s good,” he said. “Tell you what. Since you provided me such amusing entertainment tonight, if I never see you around here again, I’ll let this pass. Deal?”

The three of us quickly responded, “Oh, yes.” “You bet.” “Yes, sir, yes, sir, yes sir.”

With that, the tow-truck driver easily placed my father’s new truck on all four wheels on the ground.

Everyone examined the pickup truck and was amazed that there was only one noticeable ding. The bottom of the front fender on the driver’s side had a small bulge. I never mentioned this to my father, nor he to me, but I saw that ding every time I walked in front of that pickup.

We never saw the glass coffin or its tenant at the House of Blue Lights. I wonder if that legend still breathes life. Or is it lost to history like my youth (but not my sense of adventure).

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