

## Mystery Meat 11: Schoenberger's Showdown



I dipped my finger into the pool of coagulated blood and licked it clean.

“Just as I suspected,” I said to my man secretary Jimmy Brisket, “jelly donut filling.”

I stood as the sole private investigator in the center of a circle of cops bagging and tagging their way through Schoenberger's Pastry Shop. It is a little family owned and operated bakery specializing in Dutch apple pie, flavored brownies, crème cheese carrot cake, and lemon meringue wedges so perfectly executed that somewhere between the tart filling and whipped froth you taste sin.

A sign in their foyer reads, “If you liked what we did for you tell others, if you did not, tell us.” I imagine there are few complaints as the sweet selection of homemade cookies and cakes have been the centerpieces of Oshkosh family reunions, graduations, and weddings for years.

“This thing makes me feel downright dirty,” Jimmy said pornographically pushing a flaky crusted cream horn into his mouth.

That morning a baker had failed to report for Parkerhouse and Cloverleaf roll duty. The pastry shop was known for its unique selection of specialty breads and a regular queue of customers lingered outside waiting for their pumpernickel and rye. Police offers were dispatched to the scene when a witness reported a burly individual wrestling a bag large enough to stash a body out the back door. Recent restaurant murders had most Wisconsin citizens on edge and every time a cook or waitress was late for work, local law enforcement descended in search of the Fox Valley Butcher.

Boys in blue dusted for fingerprints near warm soft powdered donuts. Chief inspector Landrace warned them, “Come on fellahs, let's not be stereotypes.”

Schoenberger's looks like an alpine chalet with crosshatched windows, scalloped gables, and the homey exterior of a Germanic grandmother's cottage or boisterous Berlin bier garten. One half expects a legion of gnomes in lederhosen to be baking their world famous Kringles.

The Kringle is a magnificent creation that resembles an ox yoke in shape and size. It is a flat ring of dough filled with blueberries, cherries, raspberries, or even pumpkin during the month of October, and glazed with a fine film of white icing. The chocolate éclair Kringle is the most decadent selection and can be used as a tool of seduction, weapon of diet sabotage against a mortal enemy, and sex substitute for the lonely.

An ancient harridan had seen a gentleman in a black and red checkered hunter's jacket pull a parcel behind the establishment at daybreak.

"Sounds like The Logger," I whispered to Jimmy.

The Logger was a prime suspect in the murders. I had staked out his place for months and discovered nothing. His ex-girlfriend, a buxom blond waitress named Betty, had run away from him and my client, an investor in regional restaurants, felt this shaggy individual was the sort of wild man who might just kill where he ate.

A friendly ponytailed counter clerk spoke up, "The guy with the axe, the woodsman, is a regular around here. We sometimes leave leftover baked goods for him to feed his pigs."

I told Jimmy, "A few hungry hogs will easily devour a body in the course of an afternoon, bones and all."

It was time to drive out to the country and visit with The Logger. I asked for an order of elegantly frosted Schoenberger's cupcakes to take with me. The icing job was unusually artful. Images of pansies, daisies, violets, and otherworldly flora were dolloped atop vanilla and chocolate muffins.

"I'll take one of those," I said pointing to a cupcake designed with the comic visage of Muppet Miss Piggy. Those of us in the death business were not without an appreciation of irony.

The Logger lived in a dilapidated barn house on the outskirts of Oshkosh just before the town of Butte des Morts. Magnificent weeping willows obscured rusted farm equipment littering his lawn. A dull-eyed miniature donkey grazed on crabgrass and a pen of sows wallowed in mud while other swine lined up before a trough snuffing legitimate food stuffs or the body parts of bus boys and bakers.

I parked my black '52 Buick outside his place and waited. Biting into the still warm center of a magenta bougainvillea cupcake, I listened to the radio and waited for The Logger to make a move.

At sundown, a bearded man in worn flannel pulled a plastic garment bag across the lawn. His meathook hands wrenched the sack towards the swine herd stomping in wet dirt. The pigs were excited for their evening feed. I slipped a pearl handled .22 pistol into my garter and moved under the obscuring awning of the willow tree to watch what happened.

The Logger dragged his bag into the hog wallow and zipped it open. I imagined greedy vampiric boars tearing into human flesh.

“Stop right there,” I called out, brandishing my weapon.

The Logger started and walked several steps backward, tripping over a pink piglet and landing in a puddle of mud.

I pointed my pistol at him.

“Don’t move!” I yelled, peering into the bag of body parts. Inside was a selection of baked goods. Upon closer inspection, the breads and pies were a few days expired.

Sitting in the muck, The Logger looked innocent. He offered a half-smile and held his hands up. Behind the beard, matted hair, and moth-ridden jacket was the face of a defeated man, a handsome defeated man who might have just been procuring high quality day-old baked goods for his pet pigs.

“I think we need to talk,” I said with the mother-of-pearl handle of my gun glinting in the moonlight.

The Logger reached in the bag for a weapon of his own, a Schoenberger’s sugar cookie.



