

COACHWHIP CUT-OFF BRANCH

*He threw me on the needle bed,
and on my dress he lay
he held my hands above my head
and I commenced to pray.*

*I cried My God, I am your child
send your angels down
Then feelin' with my fingertips,
the bottle neck I found*

*I pulled that glass across his neck
as fine as any blade,
and I felt his blood run fast and hot
around me where I laid.*

"Caleb Meyer", lyrics by Gillian Welch

SOMETHING'S WRONG

A man is dead; a town elder named Jesse Sharpless. He got his throat slit by a broken bottle and his second wife did it. Her name is Dinah.

Nobody knows for sure what happened but Dinah is young - real young - and was not fulfilling her duties as a wife. Jesse was patient, but Dinah says his patience ended one night when he came to her drunk and full of sin. He forced himself on her, she panicked, and Dinah killed him with his own liquor bottle after he wrestled her to the ground.

PRIDE

Senior wife Sister Madeleine sure didn't make it easy for Dinah. Twenty years her senior, she was jealous of her beauty and threatened by her husband's obvious obsession with her. Madeleine filled Dinah's head with horror stories of the marriage bed, pregnancy, and childbirth.

Sister Dinah was terrified of consummating her marriage and refused to have any sort of relations with Jesse. She is also in love with Madeleine's son, David.

Brother David, Madeleine's grown son, is in love with Dinah, who is his father's widow, and technically his mother.

Sister Carmel does not respect her senior wife Anne or her husband, the Steward, who cannot satisfy her, and seeks her pleasure elsewhere.

INJUSTICE

A combination of Madeleine's terrible tales, Dinah's inexperience, and Jesse's sinful lust has resulted in a tragedy.

David and Dinah are a perfectly suited couple only two years apart but cannot marry, or even court.

Carmel denies her husband the respect and love he deserves.

SINS

Faithlessness and Deceit: David and Dinah are meeting in secret to court, plot, and consort with demons.

Faithlessness and Worldliness: Carmel is more or less openly having an affair with John Bad Teeth, a local ranch hand, Mountain Person, and unbeliever - three strikes against him in the eyes of the town even before he's caught in the arms of a married Faithful woman.

Violence: The head of the household is dead. In David's arms, Dinah says it was a miracle from the King of Life that she could reach that broken bottle. The more time that passes, the less sorry she is.

Disunity: Madeleine never accepted Dinah, and now the entire Branch is divided over what to do with the girl. About half want to turn her over to the T.A. as a murderess, and the other half want to ignore the whole affair as a sad accident. Madeleine, every inch the righteous widow, was stirring up hatred and anger toward the girl, who is "living care-free in our midst, soaked in my dear husband's blood" - until she came down with whooping cough. Now she's quarantined and bed-ridden.

Apostasy: The kernel of a cult has formed around Sister Dinah.

DEMONIC ATTACKS

The demons are causing the Faithful men in town to obsess with acquiring second wives. They don't really need to demonically influence the women to illustrate that this may not be the best idea. Martial relations are strained in every family.

FALSE DOCTRINE

Dinah has come to believe that POLYGAMY IS WRONG.

CORRUPT WORSHIP

Dinah and David spend their secret time together praying and selectively reading from the Book of Life to support their new-found doctrine. Sister Carmel Craybeck, junior wife of the Steward, occasionally joins them.

FALSE PRIESTHOOD

As a secret couple, Dinah and David are reluctant to search out more potential cultists. They have recruited Sister Carmel, however, who is an unsatisfied second wife of the Steward. That's it for polygamous families in town, but there are plenty of angry, unsatisfied women.

SORCERY

Dinah wants to shut Madeleine up, and the demons have obliged by giving her whooping cough. They have sent the town leaders feverish dreams filled with unbidden lust and multiple wives, all packaged as gold-tinged messages of approval from the King of Life.

HATE AND MURDER

None yet, although Madeleine would like to see Dinah whipped or worse, and Dinah, flush with demonic power, won't hesitate to kill if necessary. Once Carmel and John Bad Teeth's affair is made public, he will almost certainly be lynched. He's already widely disliked and unwelcome in town for no really good reason.

WHAT DO THE TOWNSPEOPLE WANT FROM THE DOGS?

The Steward, Bynum Craybeck, wants the Dogs to issue some minor punishment to appease the more hot-headed, and then marry the Sharpless wives to him. He thinks he's ready for four wives, and the King of Life's been agreeing with him ever since Brother Jesse was killed. Somebody has to take them on, after all. He also wants them to chase John Bad Teeth out of town.

Sister Anne Craybeck wants the Dogs to straighten out her junior wife, Carmel, who is behaving scandalously. She also wants them to cure the Steward's humiliating impotence.

Sister Carmel Craybeck wants the Dogs to divorce her from her husband, the Steward.

Sister Dinah Sharpless wants the Dogs to forgive her for killing her husband. She wants them to agree that polygamy is sinful and a terrible mistake.

Sister Madeleine Sharpless wants the Dogs to cure her whooping cough. She wants them to harshly punish Dinah. She wants them to forgive her for her hateful words and cruel lies.

Brother David Sharpless wants the Dogs to marry him to Dinah. He wants them to find a new husband for his mother. He also wants them to convert John Bad Teeth so that his friend can marry Sister Carmel eventually.

John Bad Teeth wants the Dogs to make the town stop hating him. He also wants them to stop his friend David from getting too involved with Dinah, who is a crazy woman.

WHAT DO THE DEMONS WANT?

What do the demons ever want? Chaos and ruin. Bring more women into the cult, destroy more families, discredit the core doctrine of polygamy.

WHAT DO THE DEMONS WANT THE DOGS TO DO?

Forgive the tender, misguided waif that is Dinah Sharpless. Re-write a bunch of rules to allow her and David to be happy. Help Carmel wriggle out of her marriage to the Steward.

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE DOGS DIDN'T COME?

Dinah's cult would gather momentum, she'd marry David, Madeleine would die, and the infection would quickly spread to other towns.

WHO'S WHO

Steward Bynum Craybeck, 48, Wealthy postmaster and millwright

Sister Anne Craybeck, 35, Bynum's senior wife

Sister Carmel Craybeck, 21, Bynum's junior wife and a cultist.

Sister Madeleine Sharpless, 39, senior wife and widow

Sister Dinah Sharpless, 16, priestess and murderess, junior wife and widow. In love with David.

Brother David Sharpless, 18, Madeleine's son. Ranch hand and cultist. In love with Dinah, his "second mother".

John Bad Teeth (or Oconnenic), 23, Mountain Person Unbeliever and ranch hand, David's best friend.

WHO'S DEAD

Brother Jesse Sharpless, Counselor and horse rancher.