

# FATE'S ARROWS

Florida Folk Magic Stories, Book 4



A Novel

By

Malcolm R. Campbell

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“Everywhere. . . there were pines, their long needles shimmering in a faint wind under the hot subtropical sun. In the country there were empty dirt roads, rutted by mule carts. In the towns sprawled rows of unpainted shacks without windows. Ancient Negro women sat fanning themselves with palm leaves as they stared drowsily from rickety porches at their zinnias and coral vines and heavy-scented honeysuckle bushes. Moss-draped oaks and lacy chinaberry trees shaded sandy dooryards. Scrawny dogs, the flies buzzing at their noses, slept among ragged-feathered chickens pecking for scratch feed. Locusts whined from tall magnolias with the steady pitch of power saws. But mostly there were those pines and the tang of their resinous branches and the dark straightness of their trunks. All of it looked like the south of the novelists and the poets, heavy with antiquity, romance, and misery.”

—Gloria Jahoda, *The Other Florida*

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## **One: First Arrow**

GOD DIDN'T LIKE him much.

Pondering this and resplendent in his purple robe with a blood-drop cross, Robert "Robin" Beauregard Smith walked home alone along Winding Way Avenue on Christmas night 1954 from a Klavern meeting held to install him as the Exalted Cyclops. Unease mixed with ground fog lingered around the street lights of the post-World War II neighborhood of ranch-style brick homes; premonitions hung like strange fruit from the ancient trees.

He walked alone because his younger brother Carlton and his daddy, the former Exalted Cyclops, spoke against him before the election, hurried out of the den, and fled in the family's 1953 Buick Roadmaster Skylark immediately after the Master of Ceremonies presented their new leader with the words, "Klansmen, greet your excellency."

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The large, black Labrador barked at the night before Link Rhodes got the leash attached and the screen door open. The dog surged out until the choke chain stopped him, though not before he pulled Link halfway outside. Stumbling across the threshold, he slapped on the spotlights seconds before the screen door slammed on his fingers.

“Duke, look at me.” When he had the dog’s attention, he said, “Sit. Hush.”

Link scanned the large, fenced-in back yard for varmints.

“See, no sneaky raccoons or possums, so what frosted your tail tonight?”

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Black on black, the archer stood in the chimney’s shadow on the roof of an unoccupied two-story bungalow across Pine Street from Link Rhodes’ house. The intersection of Winding Way and Pine Street was brightly lit by a streetlamp tucked up next to a huge shortleaf pine draped with Spanish Moss. The tree’s twin stood in the bungalow’s back yard, providing easy access to the spacious roof. Neither the Bear 64-inch Kodiak II bow nor the quiver of cedar arrows with bodkin broadheads caught in the branches on the way up.

The archer adjusted the leather arm guard, nocked an arrow that could change a man's life path and waited.

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When Robin reached the intersection he shouted, "I know you're here, Carlton. You're easier to track than a skunk. Here's a tip for you: get rid of that queebo Northwoods Cologne. I'll allow that Northwoods works a spell on Patricia and makes her claw at your britches morning, noon, and night without shame, but it makes the rest of us sick."

He paced between the pink sasanqua camellias at the edge of Link's front yard and the pine tree catty corner across the intersection in Pete Smith's side yard.

A black cat ran across in front of him toward the dark bungalow.

Link's dog started barking again.

"Good boy, Duke," he whispered. "You see my brother, Duke? Duke?"

Robin drew his Smith & Wesson .38 Special out from under his robe and followed it into the camellias. "Best come out before I start shooting, brother," he said. When there was no response, he strode into Pete's yard and stood beneath the pine. "Come down out of there, you hear? You think Spanish Moss can stop bullets? You think you can speak against

me at the meeting without a serious need for atonement?”

When Robin backed into the roadway a Port Orford cedar broadhead hunting arrow with three true spiral white and grey barred feathers pierced his right shoulder, kissing the collarbone. He dropped the handgun as he fell backward on top of a manhole cover.

Link Rhodes saw him fall.

“You dead, Robin?” he asked as he knelt down to take a look.

“Not yet.”

“A lot of blood here. This son of a bitch went right through the middle of your blood-drop cross. Bullseye. Your blood and Christ’s blood stirred up together. You’re getting saved for sure.”

“Getting saved hurts like hell,” snapped Robin. “Now run inside and call the cops. Tell them Carlton did it.”

“I didn’t see Carlton.”

“You smell a whore hound?”

“Yes.”

“There you go.”

Link shrugged and ran toward his house.

“Is that you, Duke? Here Duke. Come, come. God doesn’t like me much, Duke, but He’ll boogie down so that before I leave this darkening world, Duke, I’ll damn well hug my amazing grace like a lover. Sit with me. Aw, good dog.”



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Hidden below the ridgeline of the house, the archer saw a black Chevrolet Bel Air arrive. It had a single flashing red light on top and the words “Torreya Police” on the sides. Officers Jim Nesmith and Vernon Jones got out. They tore open the front of the robe and cut away the fabric around the arrow, then used the excess to create a doughnut-shaped pad to help stabilize the arrow with adhesive tape. Duke watched closely but did not speak. They cut the arrow shaft with bolt cutters so they could fit Robin into the back seat of the squad. Jones put Robin’s handgun in a bag. They executed their scoop and run in a matter of minutes. Rhodes emerged from his house, watched them go, said something to Duke, and went back in the house as the sound of the siren grew faint in the night.

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As the archer climbed down the shortleaf pine into the bungalow’s back yard, several more police cars arrived. The officers fanned out into bushes and shadows and banged on the doors of every house—whether lighted or dark—for their neighborhood canvas.

They weren’t quiet: “I bet some kid found a JC Higgins archery set from Sears under the Christmas Tree.” “Any word from the hospital yet?” “We need to close this case before those

nasty Tallahassee reporters descend on us.”  
“The Klan will close it if we don’t.” “You got that right.”

The archer changed into old clothes in an unlocked tool shed, hid the bow and quiver of arrows, and toted everything down Winding Way toward Apalachee Street without attracting any attention.

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Prior to the morning roll call, Chief Rudy Flowers consulted (unofficially) with his mother Jessamyn—thought by many to be a solitary witch walking the crooked path—because she read Tarot cards, grew herbs, and generally “knew things.”

“The Creator is using his mysterious ways to punish the Klan,” she told him. “The case is already cold.”

Flowers left that information out of the morning briefing when he told his day shift officers to “kick over every Winding Way tool shed for hard evidence before the press hit the fan.”