

Rob Smith

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# McGowan's Call



## **McGowan's Call**

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# Hatteras

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While the rules of life in small towns vary from region to region, there is a universal regulation that *locals* are prohibited from telling the *imports* where the land mines of public opinion are buried. In Hatteras, an import is defined as any person not legally installed as a resident within forty-eight hours of birth. The forty-eight hour rule was instituted as a concession to the fact that there is no hospital within the city limits. Everyone suspects that those fortunate enough to be born at home are the real locals.

Davis McGowan had served as pastor in a number of small towns before landing in Hatteras, Ohio. He was aware that being liked was as good as it could get in a place where he would never really belong. The city was built on a high bank of the Ohio River and had withstood the ravages of flooding and, as some would tell it, the flow of pastors through the manse of the Presbyterian Church. Tonight he was less concerned with his social status than the weather forecast. The report called for the season's first Alberta Clipper which

would drop down from Canada and bring Arctic air and sub-zero temperatures.

"Beth," he called to his wife, "do you have any real attachment to that old Boy Scout sleeping bag that you used to take to camp?"

"Not really," she answered. "What do you want it for?"

"It's supposed to get really cold tonight, and..."

"You're worried about Brodie," she said, cutting him off. "How are you going to get him to take it?"

"I thought I'd put the trash out early," he answered.

"It is nearly the Brodie-hour," she observed.

Brodie was one of the features of Hatteras. The locals all knew his story and advised walking a wide circle around him. Still, many were moved to pity for this homeless man whose paranoia made him lash out against those who offered even a kindly gesture.

Like most people, Brodie was a creature of habit. At dusk, he would walk through the alley that ran behind the church and the manse where the McGowans made their home. He cut a strange silhouette in his daily pilgrimage to find an unlocked door or wind-sheltered corner near some abandoned shop. For a while, open doors were common enough, but the old Francy Building was being renovated into apartments and the new owner was meticulous about security. Brodie was severely bent over and walked like a miser scanning the ground for wayward pennies. His long arms extended behind his back as a counter-balance. Dogs usually bounded along with him. Rumor had it that they were

his sleeping partners on cold nights, dozing in a heap like  
litter mates warding off the cold weather.

...excerpt from Rob Smith's *McGowan's Call*