

## Clued In

## Redheaded Peckerwood by Christian Patterson

## SARAH P. HANSON

IN THE 1930S the British authors Dennis Wheatley and J.G. Links devised a novel type of murder mystery. Rather than write dence-cigarette butts, locks of hair, crimescene photographs-intended to engage the gating the crime, whose solution was sealed in the back of the file.

It was in the same spirit that the Brooklyn-based photographer Christian Patterson, 38, set out to tell the true-crime story

1958. Patterson's limited-edition artist's book Starkweather's confession letters, traced discursively across 90-odd photographs.

Patterson likes to send his works' viewers on their own journeys, perhaps because he first saw Terrence Malick's 1973 film Badof the way he himself came to photography. lands, loosely based on the Starkweather-With no formal art training, the Wiscon- Fugate saga. "I was blown away," he says. of Charles Starkweather and Caril Ann sin native started taking pictures when he "It was like a moving-picture version of the Fugate, two Lincoln, Nebraska, teenagers moved to New York, using the camera to exphotography I was enamored of at the time."

who went on a two-state killing spree in plore the city. After encountering the work of William Eggleston in a volume at St. Mark's Redheaded Peckerwood, released to the Bookshop, he phoned the Eggleston Artistic a whodunit, they supplied a dossier of evitrade this month by London's Mack Books, Trust, in Memphis, and struck up a friendbegins with an envelope containing one of ship with the photographer and his son, Winston, who is the same age as Patterson. "We reader as an active participant in investi- from the archived original, and spirals out bonded immediately," says Patterson, who moved to Tennessee in 2002 to assist in digitizing Eggleston's archive. It was there that













Thus inspired, Patterson visited Nebraska over five consecutive Januaries, the month when the crimes occurred, tracing the fugitives' path. "Fifty years later there was only so much I could see or find," he says. But this "finding the presence in the present," as he puts it, became as much his subject as the crime spree itself. The photographs he took, bathed in the colors of midcentury middle America—Jell-O-mold green, carbon-copy salmon, bleached bigsky blue-form the core of the book; they are complemented by period documents and im-

not identified. "I want people to look at the work and feel that there's something to discover, to figure out," Patterson explains.

In Peckerwood, as in his first book, Sound Affects, which was published by Edition- resonances. Whether atmospherically ab-Kaune in 2008 and chronicles eerily unpeopled corners of Memphis's music industry. Patterson demonstrates a knack for synecdoche. An oil stain on concrete (Starkages. Crucially, the archival pictures are convicted killer's life, ("It looks like the phone lights what is still unresolved, MP

you'd hear the worst news in the world on," Patterson notes.) Studio stills of such objects as a house of cards, a spilled bottle of shoe polish, and a dirty plush dog carry multiple stract or forensically precise, they teeter between delicacy and violence.

In the end, Patterson says, the enigmatic nature of his mixed photographs provides weather's first victim was a gas-station at- an analogue to the fundamental unknowtendant) resembles the outline of a body; a ability of the victims' thoughts and the killvintage telephone crisscrossed with wires ers' motives. By reopening the case and evokes the jolt of electricity that ended the mingling fact and fiction, Patterson high-

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