

April 2016 issue #26

Dreamscapes of the Wicked

Short Stories, Flash Fiction, and Poetry

> Featured Artist NOISTROMO

Featured Author Alex Woolf 'The Remington'

Featured Author Jon Olson 'Marrow'

### Contents

### **Fiction**

- 4 Pigs Jon Olson
- 9 Shave and a Haircut C.A. Viruet
- 16 Sea Ate Nine Calvin Demmer
- 19 The Dark Alp: A Baker Johnson Tale Terry M. West
- 24 Strung Up Kevin Holton
- **29 Teeth** Delphine Quinn
- 35 The Worms Turn Denzell Cooper
- 40 Weaver L. E. White
- 46 Cinema Delicti S.E. Casey
- **52 Pain** Mark Steinwachs
- 54 The Shifting Sands of a Dream Maynard Blackoak
- 68 The Clean House Alex Woolf
- 74 The Bendy Man! Nicky P. Gardiner
- 78 Homecoming at Hemlock High Jill Hand
- **85** Lilith Paul Edward Fitzgerald
- 90 Sova's Pet T.A. Bechel
- 98 Deluded Soul Neal Noakes
- 102 Malaki Winnona Vincent
- 108 Fear Otis Moore

### **Poetry**

- 55 Dream Perchance to Vengeance Maynard Blackoak
- **57 Taunted** DJ Tyrer

#### **Features**

- **59** An Interview with Jon Olson, Author of *Marrow*
- **61** An Excerpt from *Marrow*
- 112 An Interview with Alex Woolf, Author of The Remington
- 115 An Excerpt from The Remington

### **Artwork by NOISTROMO**

- 3 Hell Lord
- 8 Creature
- 18 Monster Bug
- 23 Demon
- **54** Horned Monster

- **56** Mutant
- 58 Infected Zombie
- **67** Demon 612
- 77 Undead Biomech
- 120 Monster

### 121 Credits



## **Pigs** | Jon Olson

Sleep was something that Jenkins found hard to come by. Just up the road from his trailer was Old Man Fredericks's farm. The smells from that place were bad enough; damp hay and tons of shit lingering in the air.

He sat in his reclining chair, extended the footrest and closed his eyes.

Most of all, it was the noises that drove Jenkins bat shit.

Those fucking pigs were constantly grunting and squealing.

*Not anymore.* 

His clothes, skin and hair still smelled of smoke, reminding him of camping trips to the beach with Beth when they still dated.

He grinned, replaying the image of the barn going up, the flames dancing over it, consuming the structure and its occupants.

Jenkins flicked at his jeans, noting the dry blood soaked into the denim. It had only taken one swing with the first piglet to kill it, smashing it on the asphalt. The second piglet, however, was tougher. After three hard whacks against the road it still squealed, despite blood pouring from its split skull.

The piglet tried to dart off when he had set it on the ground. Jenkins had to snap all four of its limbs to keep it from running away. He then stomped the piglets head until it caved in, leaving a mix of skin, bone, brain and snout.

It had been great.

Sleep quickly crept up on him.

My god it's quiet.

\*\*\*

Jenkins couldn't remember a sleep as relaxing as the one he had just had. Stretching, he released a big yawn. His body was relaxed, rejuvenated and-

He was in a bed.

Looking around, he quickly realized that he wasn't in his living room. Where the fuck was he? He threw the covers back and climbed out.

The king size bed dominated most of the bedroom. A wooden dresser painted white stood against the wall to his right and a simple desk with a lamp to his left.

Feeling uncomfortable, Jenkins headed towards the door that was slightly ajar, noting the light spilling in through the gap. He pulled it open and could see a spiral staircase. The room that contained the staircase was dark but at the bottom was another open door which was the source of the light.

Jenkins began to make his way down the stair case when he began to hear a sound.

When he reached the bottom step, he stopped.

He knew the sound.

A pig was grunting in the next room.

Jenkins stepped off of the staircase and walked through the doorway.

He was standing on a balcony where an adult pig was on all fours, sniffing around the railings. Just to his right was a glass case that said 'Break in case of fire' that held a hose along with an axe.

Beyond the balcony railing was complete darkness.

The pig stopped sniffing when it noticed him and met his gaze.

If Jenkins thought the grunting and squealing was bad, what he heard next was almost too much to bear.

"Hello there," the pig said.

Its voice was grotesque and terrifying. Even though it spoke words, it was a poor attempt at mimicking a human, as the sound was still pig.

Jenkins could not speak.

"Oh come on now, don't be shy. Why, we've been neighbors for so long we're practically best friends. My name is Howard." The sound of the pig's tongue rolling over its teeth as it pronounced each word made Jenkins cringe. "I'll save you the trouble of asking. Yes, you are dreaming."

Jenkins turned to leave but the doorway he had just entered through was gone, replaced by a brick wall. He reached out and tried to push the wall out of the way to no avail.

"It won't budge," Howard said. The voice changed, darkening. "You're in here with us."

Looking around frantically, Jenkins remembered the glass case. Without hesitating, he punched through the glass and grabbed the axe.

"Oh, come on now, buddy. What are you doing with that?"

Jenkins swung the axe as hard as he could bringing the blade down on the top of Howard's head. The blade punched through skin and bone, before coming to a stop in the brain.

The pig screamed.

It was an awful sound, much worse than the spoken words, resembling a human wail distorted by pig vocals. Jenkins released his grip on the axe and covered his ears.

Within seconds the screaming stopped, replaced by laughter. Howard stood up on his hind hooves and clutched his belly with his front, gasping for breath as he laughed.

"Oh Jenkins," Howard said as blood ran down his face. "Do you really think you can hurt us here in our own domain?"

"It's just a dream," Jenkins said. "It's just a fucking dream."

"Just keep telling yourself that buddy. We all love a good laugh." He gestured beyond the balcony railing as light slowly dawned in the darkness.

Jenkins saw movement.

As the light grew brighter he saw them.

Pigs.

The pigs were scurrying around back and forth on a carpeted floor that was enclosed by old wood paneled walls. Covering his nose, the air quickly became thick with the smell of pig shit and something else. It was familiar yet he could not put his finger on it.

"What do you think?" Howard asked the axe still embedded in his head.

Jenkins clutched his temples and shook his head. "It's time to wake up. *Wake up, Jenkins.*" "Sorry, buddy..."

"One two three WAKE UP!"

Howard's voice darkened even more. "You're here for the whole show." And he laughed.

Reaching up with its hoof, Howard dislodged the axe and tossed it off the balcony. Jenkins realized that the pigs on the floor were no longer scurrying around. Their movements were more deliberate and less animalistic until they stopped altogether.

The room went silent.

One by one, the pigs looked up; each one of them seeming to stare directly into Jenkins's eyes. The shit smell was dissipating and the other aroma cut through, becoming more distinct. With every set of eyes on him, Jenkins recognized the smell.

Burning flesh.

All at once, the pigs began screaming.

It was deafening and even more horrific than the lone scream when he had buried the axe in Howard's head. As he watched, the pigs' skin began to sizzle and bubble up into blisters, roasted by invisible flames.

The screaming penetrated into his body, making it even more repulsive than it already was.

"Wake up..." Jenkins muttered.

Howard laughed even more and flipped himself over the balcony railing. He landed on the floor below where he began to merge with the other pigs. Their skin fused together, absorbing one another.

"What do you think, Jenkins?" Howard asked, growing in size as he assimilated the others.

Aside from the screaming, there was a wet sucking sound as if someone was pulling their foot out of thick mud. Although the bodies were absorbed, all of the pigs' heads remained facing out in every possible direction.

It was massive.

There standing before him was an ungodly being comprised of burnt and charred pigs. It stood on two legs with faces pressed out. Howard acted as the *head* and was at Jenkins's eye level.

"There is no waking up from this, my friend," he said. "You see, we're Tormentors. We feed on the enjoyment that people get out of heinous and cruel acts. By taking the forms of the tortured, we invade the dreams of the torturers and exact revenge. It's why we exist. Or looking at it another way, it's how we get our kicks."

The mass raised its arms.

On the end of each one was a piglet. The piglet on the left had a split skull. On the right, the piglet had no head; just a gory pulp of pig flesh. Jenkins recognized both of them as the ones he killed on the road.

He turned away, screaming, looking for a way out.

The mass reached over the balcony and grabbed him by the legs. It yanked hard, tripping Jenkins onto the balcony floor. Lifting him into the air upside down, it held him for a second.

"Ready?" Howard asked.

Without waiting, the mass whipped Jenkins into the air then swung down as hard as it could. Jenkins hit the carpeted floor with a muffled thud. He hurt from the impact, but didn't feel any serious injuries.

"How about another try?"

Again, Jenkins was raised into the air and smacked hard against the floor. This time, pain exploded through his body as he felt his right shoulder and rib cage shatter upon impact.

He cried out, gasping for air, blood filling his mouth.

All of the pigs began to squeal with delight. The mass lifted his broken body up again but this time held him close.

"It's been a slice, buddy, but we've worked up a bit of an appetite."

The mass pressed Jenkins against its body as the many pig mouths began to bite at him, tearing into his flesh and ripping chunks away.

\*\*\*

Jenkins opened his eyes.

He was sitting in his reclining chair in the living room of his trailer.

Just a dream.

Sighing a breath of relief, pain exploded through his body.

The entire right side screamed in agony. He could taste iron as blood filled his mouth. Looking down at his front, his chest and stomach were torn open with his entrails slipping out onto the chair and floor.

As he raised his head, he looked out the living room window where he could see a face looking in at him.

It was Howard.

Grinning, he licked his lips and said, "Oh we're not done yet, buddy boy. We're called Tormentors for a reason. You don't get to wake up from this one."

The squeals of many pigs filled the room as one of the mass's arms smashed through the front door, reaching toward Jenkins.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Jon Olson is a Security Checkpoint Coordinator at the Halifax Robert L. Stanfield International Airport. As an author of horror and dark fiction, Jon also has a passion for science fiction and comic books. A proud member of Pen of the Damned and the Horror Writers Association, he resides in Eastern Passage, Nova Scotia with his wife, their daughter and three cats.

Twitter: <u>@jonolsonauthor</u>
Blog: <u>http://www.jonolsonauthor.com</u>



## **Shave and a Haircut** | C.A. Viruet

The only thing Henry had ever experienced akin to remorse was the feelings of terror he felt in a dream.

Staring into a mirror, he took a moment before putting the straight razor on his throat. He ran through the same thoughts he had every dream. I could just grow a beard, I could use some of that hair remover gunk, I could use a cheaper razor that wasn't so sharp. Nothing changed. Carefully he ran the razor over his shaving cream covered skin. The white cream disappeared as his razor passed in even strips from one side of his face to the other, revealing smooth skin underneath. He put the razor over the last patch of shaving cream and began his final pass. The cream, his skin, and visceral peeled away. He couldn't stop. He screamed as his hand automatically finished its pass. His veins and carotid artery were bare, wrapped around thin pieces of muscle barely concealing bone. He kept screaming as he put the razor under the tap water, and as his artery exploded. His screaming became audible now and woke him from his sleep. Even with his eyes open, it was not over. Henry saw in front of him the bathroom mirror covered in bright red blood, with a continuous spray hitting it and splashing all over the wall, sink, and floor. He slammed his eyes shut and opened them again, springing up in bed. Clutching his throat, he looked around the room, reassuring himself that the nightmare was over. He rubbed the beard that had grown over his face and neck during the four months the nightmare had tortured him. He hadn't shaved, and yet it he still dreamt of the razor every night.

Henry got up and got ready for work. Before stepping out the door, he stopped to check himself in his hallway mirror and ensure his uniform was wrinkle free. The brown shirt was perfectly ironed and tucked into equally perfect brown pants. His leather belt looked as good as new. His tan nubuck boots showed minimal signs of wear. This was how he liked to look. Henry felt that a neat uniform was key to keeping his 'person suit' impenetrable. For ten years it had worked. Not one of his victims ever thought twice about opening the door wide for the delivery guy. Henry checked his pants one last time and then looked into the mirror to practice his smile.

"Shit."

One word was all he could muster. His face was covered in a wiry red beard with streaks of gray. Dark bags hung below his eyes, puffy and purple. A blood vessel had ruptured in his left eye, its red splotch disrupting the white of his eye and kissing the blue. His lips were dry and cracked. His skin was pale. His hair was longer than it had been in years. Thick gray and red hairs had begun to tangle together. Four months of recurring nightmares had led to sleep deprivation, and a ghastly appearance. Henry was disgusted with himself. He never let himself go, up until this point he had been a perfectly unidentifiable wolf in sheep's clothing. He took a deep breath.

"Today I fix this."

As if in response, Henry saw the black handled straight razor in the mirror. He blinked. *Just my imagination*, he thought.

Henry clocked into work and headed to his truck. He was running a bit behind and didn't have the time to stop and grab coffee in the break room. He rushed past the open door of the break room and saw his coworker, Olivia, standing next to the coffee pot. He smiled, and hustled towards the loading dock. Henry grabbed the tablet from one of the loaders and began looking at his route for the day. He would have to be quick if he was to make it to the barber shop.

"Hey Henry, don't leave without this."

Henry looked up from the tablet. Olivia offered him a travel mug, a big smile spread across her face. Henry smiled and reached for the mug.

"Thanks I need it. You look very nice today."

Olivia laughed. "I look nice in my brown uniform?"

Henry looked her up and down playfully. "You sure do, something about the scuffed up boots and pink camo phone holder. Not to mention your eyes and ability to deliver coffee."

Olivia blushed slightly and smiled. Henry had been flirting with her for months, slowly laying the groundwork for a date. The last one she would ever go on in his mind. *Today I fix this*, he thought to himself.

"Henry I think tonight you should take me out to dinner and a movie."

He smiled again, this time out of genuine surprise and happiness. He didn't even have to do the asking, she was making it easy. "Absolutely. Meet me here at six; I'll take you out in that hot uniform after I finish dropping off my load. We'll get more time out that way."

Olivia looked around cautiously. She gave Henry a peck on the cheek. "I'll see you then."

Henry was able to get a little more than half of his truck emptied by lunch. He pulled up in front of the barbershop with plenty of time for a haircut and shave. The morning had gone well, but once he began walking toward the shop door the thought of his nightmare began to creep in. Henry shook his head before opening the door, as if shaking off the bad thoughts of straight razors. The barbershop was mostly empty, and his regular barber was standing by his empty chair.

"Hey Boss, long time no see."

Henry took a seat. "Haircut and a shave please. Sorry about the mess on my face."

The barber looked over Henry's face, "Nothing I haven't seen before. I can just trim it up for you and make it look nice if you want. I'll cut your hair first and then let me know if you still want to get rid of the beard." Henry nodded in agreement.

After his haircut, his face was wrapped in a hot towel. Henry closed his eyes.

Henry listened as feet lightly tapped the linoleum floor around him and the barber began setting up his station for the next task. He heard one thing after another get moved, placed and dropped onto the small counter in front of the mirror. The barber gently took the hot towel off of Henry's face. Henry opened his eyes. Looking down at him was the decayed and gray face of the first woman he had ever killed. Her eyes were milky white, her nose mostly gone, leaving a gray and red hole. Stringy brown hair hung down in clumps from her nearly bare scalp. She smiled, her smile matching the gapping half-moon cut across her throat. The cut Henry had put there with a straight razor he bought at a specialty shop. The same one was still on the counter at his

home. Henry couldn't help himself when it came to trophies. Not until he saw her face completely did he scream.

"Hey, wake up Boss!"

Henry opened his eyes as he pulled the towel from his face and threw it to the floor.

"Fuck, I'm sorry; I was having a bad dream."

He leaned over in the barber's chair, his head in his hands.

"It happens. Take a deep breath, it's just me in here don't worry."

Henry sat up. "I'm sorry." He looked over at the barber's station, a little cart and small counter with a mirror mounted to the wall. "What the Hell..." the words were barely audible. Henry's eyes grew wide; the counter was covered in black handled straight razors. The same type he had used to kill his first, the same one that tormented him in his dreams.

"What the Hell is all this?"

The barber looked over at the counter. He shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know, maybe the guys messing with me? Lay back so I can finish you up."

"Just trim it up please."

\*\*\*

Dinner was going well for Henry. Olivia was impressed that he went out of his way to get a haircut and trim his beard, the conversation was flowing nicely, and her body language was telling him he might get what he ultimately wanted. Olivia leaned across the table after the plates had been cleared and grabbed one of Henry's hands.

"This is a lot of fun. It reminds me of my first date with my high school sweetheart. Of course it took him a lot longer to get to where you're going."

Henry kissed her hand.

"This has taken me months of flirting and begging with my eyes, don't discount my effort."

Olivia smiled. Henry smiled back and kissed her hand again.

"Who was the first girl you were ever with?"

Henry was surprised by the question. He thought about his first. She was his first kiss, his first time having sex, and his first kill all in one night. He was nineteen at a party in the woods. He could not picture her face as it was, only as he saw it in his dream at the barber shop. He shuddered thinking of the decayed face looming over his own, a gaping wound as large as her mouth in her neck. He couldn't remember her name.

"Was it that bad?"

Henry chuckled and tried to act normal again.

"We met at a party, we were both drunk. I don't even remember her name."

The lie came easy, as they always did. He wasn't drunk. He knew he had to work to get rid of the body. Being drunk would have made it harder.

Olivia's expression changed. Henry couldn't discern if she was suspicious or disgusted or both.

"What? It happens, kids are stupid, and I was stupid."

Olivia squeezed his hand.

"It's OK, just sad. I get it. Let's skip the movie and just go to your place."

\*\*\*

Things moved quickly. They walked into the door and Olivia threw herself at Henry, and before he knew it they were in bed. She was a rough with him and he liked it. It signaled a struggle to be had when it was time for him to get his true pleasure.

Olivia lay in bed, propped up on one elbow looking at Henry.

"Can you get me some water?"

He jumped up quickly and bowed, "Yes my lady. First I have to pee."

Henry walked into the bathroom next to his bedroom and opened the medicine cabinet. His piano wire was neatly wrapped up and tucked inside a small box. He held it for a moment, and then put it back. He looked down at the counter and stared at the straight razor. *Tonight, I fix this*.

Henry appeared in the doorway with a glass of water and a bowl of ice cream. His hands were full and he was trying hard not to spill anything. He looked even more exhausted after sex then he did when Olivia first saw him that morning.

Henry handed Olivia the glass of water and sat in bed with the ice cream. He had managed to hold both the bowl and the straight razor in the same hand, and after handing the water over was able to put the razor down on the bedside table. He looked over at Olivia, she was sitting up, with her legs swung over the side of the bed, and her back turned to him. She drank half the glass in a few quick gulps.

"You sure were thirsty. Want some ice cream?"

She didn't answer. Henry put spoonful of ice cream in his mouth. In the second he had looked down to get the perfect bit of chocolate ice cream, Olivia had retrieved a revolver from her purse and now held it in his face.

"Do you remember me?"

Henry shook his head no.

"You delivered my sister's birthday present. I answered the door on my way out for a bike ride. I came back and she was gone. They found her body two states over in pieces."

Here hands were shaking, she started crying. *I can fix this*, he thought as he lunged across the bed and slammed her against the wall. The revolver went off but Henry was full of adrenaline and didn't know if it had hit him. He slammed her hand against the wall once and Olivia dropped the gun, he struck her once in the temple and her body went limp. Henry flew to the bedside table for his cellphone. Everything was ruined. She had fired a weapon in a neighborhood. All he could do now was call the police. His hand picked up the straight razor instead.

"What the fuck?"

His body was moving independently. He looked at his hand and tried to will it to drop the razor. He started to walk to the bathroom.

"No no no..."

He covered his face in shaving cream, and began to shave. In the mirror, the face of his first victim appeared, the nameless woman, smiling as her neck wound mimicked her expression.

She wrapped her hand around his and guided it down his face and neck for two passes. On the third Henry watched helplessly as his hand moved the razor down to just below his Adams apple, then all the way to the left side. With a gray desiccated hand helping it along, the razor plunged deep into his neck. Blood began to spray on the mirror. The woman smiled and sniffed the air with the ragged hole in her face, with just enough nose left on top to indicate a wiggle. Henry sawed through his own neck as far as he could with the razor, flaying muscle and cleaving veins. The cold hand on his own began to feel less cold as the blood flowed from him. Halfway across his neck, he dropped to his knees. With his head leaning on the bathroom sink, Henry lost consciousness as he watched his spotless tile turn red. In the darkness he remembered the woman's name, Meredith.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** C.A. Viruet is a wife, mother and veteran who writes as much as she can, but horror is her favorite genre to write. She has been previously published in the Dark Chapter Press anthology Flashes of Darkness and the Women in Horror Month anthology, Eight Deadly Kisses. You can find her on Facebook.

Facebook: C.A. Viruet



# Sirens Call Publications



# www.SirensCallPublications.com

Nina ~ @Sotet\_Angyal

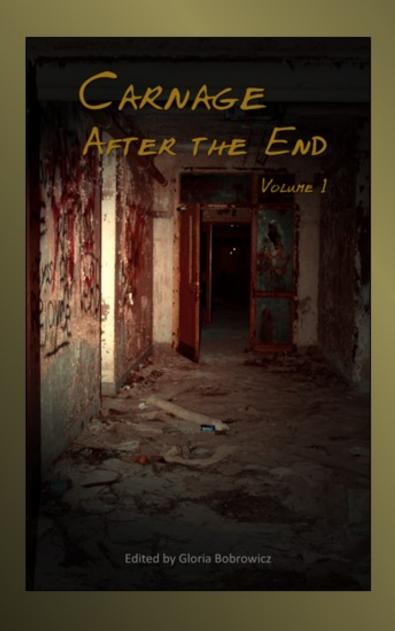
Julianne ~ @CdnZmbiRytr

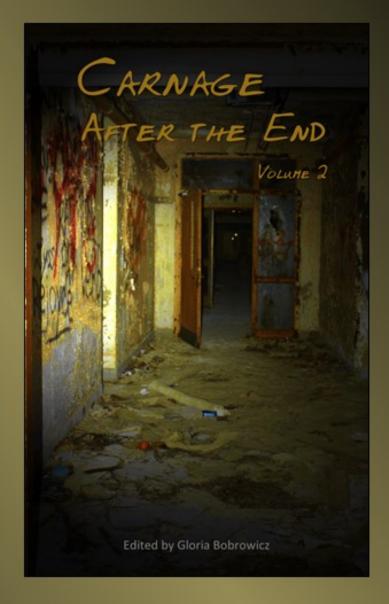
Gloria ~ @GlorBobrowicz

Sirens Call Publications ~ @Sirens\_Call

sirenscallpublications.wordpress.com

In a world where society has collapsed and terror lurks around every corner, no one can be trusted and nothing can be taken for granted...





Available on Amazon,
CreateSpace, Barnes & Noble,
Kobo, Smashwords, and the iStore

In a world once ravaged by a terrible war, Katra is a hunter...



Available on Amazon, CreateSpace, Barnes & Noble, Smashwords, and the iStore

## **Sea Ate Nine** | Calvin Demmer

For months the nightmares of being lost at sea would find him in the small hours. Fighting wave after wave, he battled to keep afloat, as the undertow pulled him away from land. In the deep ocean he would lose the battle and beneath the water he would go. His lungs would flood. He would not die. Instead, he would drift in currents as tranquil as clouds. A large shape would move in the distance. He could never see it clearly, but on occasion he heard the voice.

It didn't speak. It was more of a call and was unlike anything Grover Jenkins had heard. It boomed and not even the ocean currents could stifle its magnificent force, which would send Grover reeling backwards. It was so powerful his vision would distort and his brain would rattle so hard within his skull he feared internal hemorrhaging. He was thankful that this behemoth only said three words every time, for another word more, and Grover feared that either his head would explode or that every bone in his body would shatter.

```
"Sea."
"Ate."
```

"Nine."

That was what Grover heard. He did not understand what was expected of him from the three random words, but one night at work they revealed themselves.

Grover had entered the building, removing his raincoat, missing the soothing patter of the rain outside. The lonely security guard at the front desk greeted him and told him that only elevator C was operational this evening

"Oh," the security guard said. "You must stay away from conference room eight. There is some head office meeting going on there."

"There many people?" Grover said, straightening the name tag on his green janitor's top.

The security guard looked at the register. "Nine."

C, eight, nine, Grover thought, not sea, ate, nine.

The feeling of a sheet of ice draping over Grover forced him to clench his thighs and grip the counter to prevent himself from shuddering from the cold. The enigma decoded, the puzzle solved, and the mystery unraveled. Lucid thoughts pumped throughout his mind, making cocaine seem like candy.

"Everything all right?" the security guard said.

Grover nodded.

Grover knew what needed to be done.

Finding weapons around an office building was not easy. Fortunately, he was able to find a baseball bat in one of the mangers' offices and a sharp knife in an office kitchen. After entering the conference room and locking the door behind him, much to the dismay of the nine people seated around the large, oval table, Grover found that the tools he had acquired did the job capably.

Grover did what needed to be done and made his way to the nearest bathroom.

He stood in front of one of the large mirrors, but closed his eyes before he could focus on himself. As eyelids shut, the darkness moved down the walls like a thousand spiders, devouring tiles as if they were crisps. It consumed the bathroom. Grover knew that time was an illusion and felt no urgency to open his eyes. The copper smell of blood tugged on Grover's tether to earth's realm.

Have a look, he thought. Come on, have a look.

Grover opened his eyes and looked at himself in the bathroom mirror. Blood splattered his blue overalls like an abstract painter with an obsession for reds. He dropped his gaze. In his right hand he still clenched the baseball bat and in his left hand he saw the sharp knife glimmer beneath the harsh white bathroom light. Both objects were covered in blood.

It's almost done, he thought.

After placing both the bat and the knife into a gray sports bag at his feet, he made his way to the cream countertop in the bathroom. He switched on one of the taps and splashed some of the water on his face. The relief ephemeral, Grover needed more. He placed a plug in the washbasin and ran the tap.

That's better, he thought, watching the basin fill.

Satisfied, he closed the tap and dropped his head into the washbasin.

With his head submerged in the water, the cacophony of sound waves that traveled through the air ceased. Though he could not see that which had so often spoken to him during nightly hours, he found calm. Here, clarity reigned. Grover knew he had to complete the duty that had been bestowed upon him.

The hard part was done.

He cleaned himself as best as he could. Nodded at his reflection in the mirror and picked up the gray sports bag.

Passing the half-asleep security guard with ease, Grover made his way towards the beach.

There, he walked towards the ocean. He noticed how strong the sea was, and in his peripheral vision he saw waves crashing against rocks on his left. When he was near enough he opened the gray sports bag.

He took out the first of the nine human hearts he had obtained in the conference and tossed it into the sea.

When he had thrown the ninth and the last of the hearts that were in the bag, he smiled at his accomplishment.

He looked to the rocks on his left and saw that no more waves attacked the land.

The sea was well fed, for now.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Calvin Demmer is a crime, mystery, and speculative fiction author. When not writing, he is intrigued by that which goes bump in the night and the sciences of our universe. His work has appeared in a variety of publications including Sanitarium Magazine, Morpheus Tales, and Devolution Z.

Twitter: <u>@CalvinDemmer</u>

Website: www.calvindemmer.wordpress.com



# The Dark Alp; A Baker Johnson Tale | Terry M. West

"Thus fortified I might take my rest in peace. But dreams come through stone walls, light up dark rooms, or darken light ones..."

\*\*Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu\*

New York City March 9th, 1927

The candle was snuffed and sleep carried me away. I am one who has never been able to entertain himself in a *dream*. I always recognize it as a falsehood; a marionette theater where the strings are ever present. I have trained myself over the years to guide and control my sleeping mind. But even with such a resistance in place, I still travel this dark area cautiously for there is pain to be exploited here. One who has lost such as I have, a beautiful wife and daughter, can be crippled in this setting should a vulnerability be discovered.

I cope in the waking world the best I can. I distract myself from it. I lose myself in my vocation and studies. When there isn't work or research to occupy me, I drink and warm myself at night with women who are as inebriated and lost as I. I have been labeled a drunken wastrel and a lothario. I won't challenge either charge.

That night, I went in to slumber with less armor, for I had a distance to travel. As black sleep slowly faded into the bright noise of imaginings, I found myself in a place I had never been before. I stood before the Wetterstein Mountains in Germany. Zugspitze was its highest peak, and a rather sour-looking castle rested on its brow.

I had seen this snow-capped wonder before in pictures, but not with such a gloomy building perched at the top. So of course, I ascended toward it. And though I knew this rock as merely a construct with no true sharp edges, still I exercised caution.

The climb was a blur. Muscles that should have ached did not and I scrambled upward rather quickly. The palace at the top looked similar in scope and design to Neuschwanstein Castle, but imagined as a blackened shadow version. Its towers jutted into the air crookedly and corpses were skewered on its iron tips. I had to smile at the melodrama. I walked through phantom snow that still chilled my feet and I had to cover my face from the whipping air.

The grand wooden doors engraved with designs of Pagan creatures pushed in easily, and waiting for me in the greeting room was the host of this exquisitely murky kingdom. The creature sat on a chair majestic enough to be a throne. The demon was small in stature, less than a metre tall, and it was covered with dirty brown fur. It had Elvin ears and a huge ravenous mouth filled with yellow teeth that glowed of their own accord. The thing's eyes were black coals devoid of any kindness or sympathy. They sparkled with a horrible lust. The beast wore a pointed Tarnkappe that would have passed as either a low end wizard hat or an unnecessarily ornate dunce cap.

"Well, as I lurk and torment. If it isn't the esteemed Baker Johnson," the creature said with a cackle. "It is amazing what my nets seize."

"You are an alp," I said, approaching for a closer appraisal. "A nightmare demon."

"Yes. And a rather hungry one at that," the creature confessed. "That we are here together means that I am perched on your chest at this moment, ready to stir your pain and feast on your blood. I have to tell you, Mr. Johnson. You are an exception for me. I usually feed on young girls. The fear in them is so, so large. They dread like no other. It's the emotion that seasons the blood, you understand. And in female children, fear is an all-encompassing and irrational thing. It's clumsy. Primal and powerful. I wouldn't normally target a man such as you. But how can I possibly refuse the flavor your torment has to offer?"

"My anguish is rather diluted at this point, don't you think? I have abused every form of contrition I can think of," I said.

"But still you long for more lashes. You have never allowed the pain to soil *this* place. If you wish to wallow in it completely, my good man, you need to accept the magic that the dreamscape has to offer and let the nightmares do their job. Shall we discuss the tragic passing of your wife and child? You ignored both so heavily, Baker. Surely they left the living land feeling no love for or from you."

"This is a carousel ride I am quite familiar with. Honestly, it is such a predictable tactic. I really do wish you and your kind were a bit more original."

"Well, then, we shall have to probe further," the alp said. "Your parents could provide some grist, yes? We have all night and I am willing to dig deeply."

"My parents may not have been the warmest, but there is little for you to employ on that front."

"Oblivion usually guides you away from the brightly-lit neighborhood of *dreams*. When is the last time you had a proper nightmare, my boy?"

"Not since childhood," I admitted. "I suffered night terrors on a large scale. My uncle taught me the technique of *lucid dreaming*, though the term wasn't coined until 1913 by Frederik van Eeden. I sleep with a dog-eared copy of *A Study of Dreams* near my pillow."

"I don't know what has made you prone to my visit this night, but it is time to salt the meat," the demon said, his words moist with drool.

Behind the alp, in a large wall mirror, I caught my reflection. I was dressed for the city and my pinstripe suit and bowler hat showed the wear and filth of my climb. I had dark facial features that evoked my late uncle's image more than either parent. My probing eyes gave me the same haughty evaluation that I gave others. While I was there, I noted that I was due for a haircut.

Abruptly, the mirror darkened around me and I glowed, as if lit by an opera house footlight. My reflection began to pale and the color of the living drained from me. My vitality spilled out from my very pores, and I withered. My eyes saddened and then grayed. I was a spirit. A ghost. And in this state, I realized just how cold and lonely an existence it must have been. I felt now for the phantoms I chased. I knew there had to be others in this black purgatory,

but I had no way of communicating with the dead or the living. I was trapped in nothingness. And then it dawned on me that I had been a ghost for some time, alone in its misery, though life still animated my tired bones. I was a moaner and a haunter, fueled by regret and sorrow. Unwilling to move beyond it. And then came the whispers. The voices of the dead were a million miles away and yet as close as my pain. When I heard my wife softly say my name in a lifeless tone, I knew I had to bring myself back or I'd be lost.

"When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight," I recited with tightly shut eyes. I quoted from *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran. I repeated it a dozen times before using the mirror again. I was back to the dream.

I lowered my vision to the diminutive fiend in the chair. I sweated and panted, but still spoke with bravado, as unconvincing as it may have sounded. "Well, that was a pathetic attempt."

"Please. You are spent already and the water is only just starting to simmer," the alp said with a foul grin. "Everyone has a switch, Mr. Johnson. I think we have found yours. You are an intelligent man, but you have little tolerance for the pain I can cause. You should have let the dreams do their job. My feast will be great. It will be an honor to cast my shadows in your nightmares."

"Let me clarify something. This is my dream? Correct?" I asked, having caught my breath.

"Stalling, are we?" the alp assumed. "It won't reward you."

"I am a curious sort, demon. Even at your mercy, I'd liked to know the workings here. So again I ask; is this *my* dream?"

"Of course. Where else could I affect you, dear fellow?" the alp said. "You are quite the trophy. So many demons long to put you on the rack. I'll be celebrated for this."

"Yes, I would imagine. But before that, entertain me just a tad more. What do you know of me?"

"You are Baker Johnson," the alp said. "You are a psychical researcher who lost his daughter to a fever and his wife to suicide. You are a self-destructive and egomaniacal yob and every demon in hell has sworn against you. You know too much about us."

"Yes, but also tell me this... am I German?"

The alp blinked in confusion. "No, of course not. You are English."

"So, if this is *my* dream, why are we here, on the Zugspitze, and not on the Bowfell? Why does this fortress resemble the Neuschwanstein Castle and not the Herstmonceux?"

The alp took a second to absorb my words. "That's neither here nor there, really."

"But I think it is," I said, walking closer.

The alp hissed and snapped its filthy teeth at me, but I remained calm and smiled back at it. "There's a reason that we are surrounded as such. The alp is a demon of *German* folklore. You haven't invaded my dream. I have invaded *yours*."

The alp scoffed, but then his eyes grew fearful. "You haven't the ability."

"No? Okay then. Rouse my pain. Draw the blood from my nipples. I won't oppose you."

The alp grinned evilly at first. But then it grunted and was unable to rise. "I can't move," it said.

"That is because I am sitting on your chest in *your* sleep chamber. Figuratively speaking," I said. "A woman in my building, a *German* woman, came to me for assistance. You have been plaguing her daughter. Zelma Achen is the child's name. But you won't torture Zelma again. The girl sleeps with a small mirror on her chest and a broom beneath her pillow. She is a very bright flower. She reminds me of my child. *Ramona*. So you can understand why this would merit my intervention."

"How can you accomplish this?" the alp demanded, genuine terror commingling with a curiosity that had to be sated.

"I am a prize you can't resist. All I had to do was lower my defenses a bit and I knew you'd let me in. Always be sure what side of the net you are staring from."

The hairy little bastard licked his rough lips. "Surely we can come to an understanding," he proposed. "We can resolve this like gentlemen."

"There is no reason to negotiate with a nasty little bugger like you. Especially since you are in *my* snare."

I pulled the lemon from my jacket pocket and shoved it into the alp's slimy, protesting mouth. I then pulled a Bowie knife from the same pocket. I had traveled lightly with the only tools I required. According to legend, the lemon paralyzed an alp. The knife served a darker purpose.

The fiend's black orbs fattened with dread.

"Those nasty eyes of yours are the source of the misery and sickness that you inspire. They'll have to come out, I am afraid. I don't know the length of time it will take for you to recover, but I trust you won't be visiting my building again."

I cut the eyes from the creature and I was able to decipher a curse or two that escaped from around the lemon. I left the castle of misery after the demon was broken. I climbed back down the mountain.

I kept traveling until I awoke. Keeping dreams at bay was always exhausting. But sparring that night with the ugly little alp actually left me refreshed and uplifted. Somewhat.

My bed was lonely and cold, but it as well as my brandy snifter wouldn't be so come nightfall. I wouldn't be stalking demons in my sleep, which meant I'd be free to carouse and dull myself. Outside my building, I heard people drive, walk and work. The city was stretching awake.

It was time to resume the painful march of a life that would not give off a reflection.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Terry M. West is a horror author and filmmaker. His work has appeared in various places for over twenty years. His is best known for the titles Night Things and What Price Gory?.

Twitter: <u>@TerryMWest</u>
Website: <u>www.terrymwest.com</u>



# Strung Up | Kevin Holton

Raleigh Andersen listened closely, not to the orchestra, but to the wasted sack of fetid garbage sitting fifteen feet away. Why Leslie ever put Jackson in as a first-string oboist in *his* production was beyond him, but he wasn't about to entertain someone else's nepotism. Besides, Leslie was screwing the fat bastard, and now Jackson was part of a world-renowned symphony house, drenching the seats in his pig sweat with a smug grin stretching his oversized cheeks. Thank God today was only a rehearsal, and not a real performance.

Then it hit: a faint rasp of a mis-drawn bow across shuddering strings. Raleigh smiled and continued to conduct, faster, angrier, speeding the tempo, his hands wild through the air as Jackson missed a note, then another. The other players were, as always, his puppets, and this time, their dance was to hide Jackson's symptoms just long enough, to the point where it would be too late for him. Raleigh's timing was perfect, as it always was, and right as the players froze for four beats of silence, Jackson let out a half-gurgle, half-grunt, his bowls exploding into his pants.

The players nearby him were understandably alarmed, jumping away as he doubled over, the sound of him hitting the floor doing nothing to mask the unrelenting assault of wet flatulence and intestinal growls. That's what Raleigh's concoction had been designed to do—for the first wave. But the second would be starting in three, two...

A violist screamed against the sound of rapid thuds as Jackson began to seize, feet hammering the hard wood of the stage. "Go call 9-1-1!" Raleigh said, pretending to rush to the man's aid. He stepped down from the podium, reaching into his pocket to smear a certain powder onto his pristine white gloves, which he then removed. "Flip him over!" he instructed, and the horn section obeyed, as they always did. "We need to make sure he doesn't bite his tongue off," he said, shoving his gloves into his victim's mouth.

It was important not to push them too deep. Otherwise Jackson would suffocate and Raleigh would obviously be responsible, no matter how much they knew of his intent. The compound soaking into Jackson's tongue was the important part. It would bind with the poison Raleigh had sprinkled on the pig's lunch, leaving it untraceable; it would also bind his hemoglobin, cutting off oxygen to his brain. In a way, he *would* suffocate—even as his lungs heaved, bringing in more and more air in a vain attempt to keep him alive.

By the time the paramedics arrived, Jackson was a shit-stained, blank-eyed, blue lipped corpse. Raleigh played the stoic hero—"We tried, we did everything we could, but I couldn't find a pulse. I... I wish there was more I could've done."—and told everyone to take a thirty minute break.

When some idiot from the back of his ensemble protested, Raleigh snapped, "Would you have him die for nothing?" Suppressing a grin, he added, "The break is so that maintenance can clean the stage. Go, breathe, relax, then return. He gave his life for this performance." He turned and walked off-stage, toward his private room, whispering, "I expect everyone here to do the same."

His quarters were designed to his specifications. He'd been with the William Hurst Symphony Hall for nearly fifteen years, and they would've closed after two without his expertise. The only reason he hadn't bothered to force Leslie out and take over operations entirely was because he didn't have the patience for finances and the humdrum of attracting an audience. People should *want* to hear music performed under his command, should *need* to see his hands in action—the fact that those troglodytes didn't flock to the doors was proof of how far society had fallen.

Once in his room, he locked the door, sauntered into his private bathroom, and adjusted his bowtie. In the commotion, it had fallen slightly slack. He wore a full tuxedo every day, even just for rehearsals. They were one more element in his complete control over the gaggle of string-plucking geese Leslie kept hiring. If he didn't keep those slack-jawed, dead-eyed morons in line, no one would.

Still, what to do with thirty minutes, beyond get new gloves? He hated wasting time, but the others would be useless if they didn't have time to regain their composure. The only thing worse than an orchestra with one fumbling buffoon would be one made of fumbling buffoons. He was so at ease, so confident with how flawlessly he'd executed his execution, that he almost nodded off, head bobbing as he sat in his armchair.

Nodding off would've been hazardous, though. It would draw attention. Deciding he needed to move in order to combat sleep, Raleigh decided to make sure the janitors were cleaning the stage correctly. He'd forced Leslie to fire three workers already for using such strong solvents that they brought tears to the eyes, and it would be nice to conclude the day's events with a fourth.

When he got to the stage, he found no one there. The mess Jackson's life left behind was gone, but there were no people—no cleaners, no musicians, nothing. Only instruments resting by empty chairs.

"Hello?" Raleigh called out. This was unusual, but preferable. If he could, he'd be the only one on stage; the conductor was the *real* orchestra, the only truly important part. Everyone else was interchangeable. He walked up to the podium, surveying the empty stage, and turned, facing the absent audience.

Today was a good day, that much was clear. He stepped down and walked over to where Jackson had been sitting, grateful that he couldn't smell excrement or cleaning supplies.

His brow furrowed. That wasn't right. After all that, he should smell *something*. You can't make a scent disappear without leaving a new one behind. Another deep breath confirmed what he was smelling: nothing.

Mulling this over, he bent down to take a closer examination of the area when a *twang* sounded. Crying out, he fell back, hand covering a cut left by a snapped Oboe string. "Insufferable bastard," Raleigh scowled. "Even his instrument is defective!" Standing, he kicked the instrument over, rejoicing in the thud of it hitting the stage before lifting his foot high and bringing it down on the neck, snapping it off.

This created a cacophonic series of snaps and barely-notes, but the noise went on for too long. Turning, he saw the other instruments rebelling, their strings pulling apart, tearing away from the instruments. He swallowed and shook his head, wondering if Jackson's death took a toll on him as well.

A sharp pain in his ankle told him otherwise. He screamed and looked down, but he hadn't been cut—a length of rogue wire had dug into his ankle. Then he realized it hadn't dug, it was digging.

Shaking his leg, he tried to get away, but spurts of red arced across the stage as the invader worming its way inside, ripping through veins and muscles. Reaching down and tugging at it did nothing, it just slipped through his hands. All he caught was blood, and his red-slicked hands trembled as he screamed again.

"Infernal thing!" he yelled, turning around and running as best he could with one leg half-crippled by pain. He couldn't turn back in time. The strings of the other instruments had all risen up, standing end-on-end, creating a writhing cloud of silver curves, and he ran straight into it. They lashed his clothing, tearing it off, while some bound his ankles and wrists. When he opened his mouth to scream again, one quick *snick* sliced out his tongue.

Gagging on the sudden overflow of coppery fluid in his mouth, Raleigh tried to wrench his limbs away, pain echoing in every corner of his body as the wire in his leg reached mid-thigh. Then a few more swirled around and, with a dramatic flourish, began speeding right through him. They drew through his elbows, sliced apart his shoulders, severed his hands and feet, and he recognized these movements, the sweeps and swirls—these detached wires were mimicking his performance. At the assault's crescendo, he almost laughed, because *of course* they copied him. Even the most idiotic beast would be inspired by his performance.

He couldn't make a sound because one last swing removed his head from his shoulders, sending it to the floor with eyes wide and the ghost of a laugh still lingering on his lips. The nebulous of separated strings hung over his pieces for an instant before darting down, piercing his flesh. They replaced arteries and tore through tissues, exploding out of the wounds they'd made and stringing his body back together. Some even wove through his jaw, forcing his teeth up and down, and he watched from behind his glassy eyes as his disjointed body was hoisted into the air.

"Tonight, we have a very special performance," a smooth, deep voice boomed from above. The ceiling peeled away to reveal a black silhouette, accented only by two glowing, yellow eyes and a mouth crammed full of dagger teeth. "Our very own Raleigh Andersen in *The Soloist*, an opera he has been writing every day for the past fifteen years."

His hands jerked up, jolting back and forth through the air in a mockery of his daily performance. What remained of his heart stirred, tried to beat furiously against the wires constricting it, but then, his cords turned him to face the audience. Before him sat a full house, every seat occupied by one of the members of his orchestra, by Leslie and the other imbeciles on the board, by all the critics who dared suggest he wasn't the world's premier conductor.

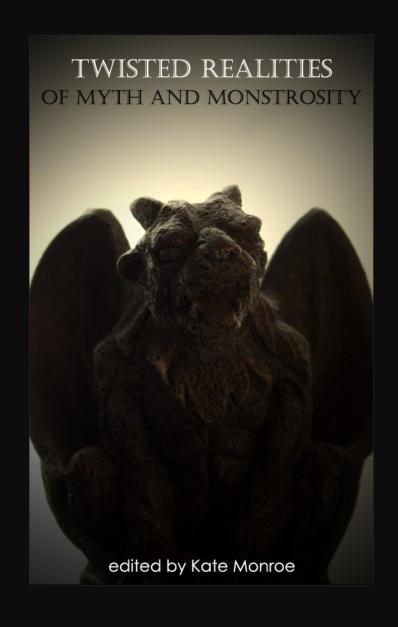
And that's precisely what he was. Eyeing the audience, each member strung through by living string that pulsed and twitched in time with his hectic motions, Raleigh smiled—as both conductor and marionette, he smiled, and wrenched his own wires, performing to the rattle of his own labored breathing until that too finally stopped.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Kevin Holton is a writer whose work has been published with *Sirens Call Publications, Horrified Press, Dark Moon Digest,* and *The Literary Hatchet* whose career is dedicated to all things horror and sci-fi. When not writing, he is a student, voice actor, gamer, Reiki practitioner, and coffee enthusiast.

Twitter: <u>@holtonshorror</u>
Website: <u>www.kevinholton.com</u>

# Twisted Realities: Of Myth and Monstrosity

Available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and iTunes



...an unforgettable time travel adventure based on a true story...



From Kellan Publishing

## **Teeth** | *Delphine Quinn*

The boy's face was strewn with tears and blood, rivulets of crimson mixed with drops of pain and sadness, falling from his small, pointed chin onto his white tee, obscuring the name of a local sports team emblazoned across the front. He sobbed softly, sounds of resigned sorrow and agony, each gasp making his matted blonde hair tremble. His pale face was swollen, giving it the appearance of something mutated, and no longer quite human. His body no longer strained against his bonds, zip ties that held his wrists and feet in place to the wooden chair placed in the center of the metal walls of the storage unit. It was nearing Jerry's favorite part, the moment when he looked directly into a young boy's eyes while the life drained from them, the moment of pure ecstasy when the child realized he was never going to live through this, never see his mom and dad again.

Jerry placed the blue handled pliers against the last remaining tooth in the boy's jaw, a molar, one that would have been lost in only a few years and placed under the child's pillow with glee. He yanked skillfully upward, a sickening crunch followed by a loud pop, as the molar sprang free from its home and was removed from the mouth, followed by a cascade of even more blood, spraying onto the boy and staining Jerry's dark jean coveralls. Jerry smiled, placing the tooth next to the dozens of others he'd already taken, on a metal tray like the kind you'd expect to see at a real dentist's office, not here next to an even more demented version of Orin Scrivello, drenched in blood and saliva, its owner grinning from ear to ear.

Jerry reached over the four sets of pliers which also rested on the tray, to his large, rust colored hunting knife he used for just these occasions. The knife had once been shining silver and new, a gift from his father before he'd abandoned his wife and child in search of greener pastures, but it was now old and worn, a copper smell and appearance replacing its former glory, much like Jerry himself. Someday the police would find this unit, and all the tools of Jerry's sordid hobby along with it. They would enter the cold building and see the cement floor caked in stains which ranged from the deep, almost black of blood, to the foul smelling, yellowing stains of urine from countless boys' bladders letting loose under extreme torture. Jerry knew they'd find him someday, and probably assume that he was some sick fuck who derived sexual pleasure from the pain of young boys, but they would never understand fully. He would never tell them why, just as he'd never told anyone.

The boy's head hung limp, and he didn't struggle when Jerry grabbed his hair and pulled upward, in a similar fashion as he did when removing each one of the child's teeth. The knife slid softly into flesh, leaving a deep wound, seeping down the already decimated shirt the boy was wearing, and nearly cutting his neck in half. As Jerry pulled the knife from left to right under the boy's chin, he made sure to stare directly into the deep blue pools of the child's eyes, watching for the single moment the life actually went out of them. This was his favorite, despite not being what he actually started his murderous rampages for. Jerry had definitely grown to love the act of death in its purest form, and would continue even if his lust for teeth abated and the dreams left him alone. Like the dreams he'd had since he could recall, the act of murder had consumed him.

Jerry awoke with a start, looking anxiously around his small bedroom, using what little natural light filtered through his drawn blackout curtains, and danced in rays of blue interrupting the night's full darkness. His mouth ached a dull throb, and he saw tiny white spots dancing across his vision, like manic dancers, hastily shifting along to the cacophony of painful aches which somehow took on an auditory quality, each moment a sound like nails on chalkboards and the sounds of young children's screams. Jerry tried to reach his hand to his mouth, a feeble attempt at finding what caused his suffering, knowing full well that this had to be another of his nightmares. It can't be. I just killed a boy today and took his teeth. I should have at least a few weeks before the night terrors come back.

His hand wouldn't move, nor would the rest of his body, as if held in place by invisible bonds which he could not break, no matter how he fought. Jerry turned his head, the only portion of his body that was apparently unaffected by whatever it was that held him taut against his bed, and noticed something odd. There was something sitting on his chest, propped up on his blue flannel pajamas, something small and pointed and white. *It's my tooth*, he thought. *It's my fucking tooth and it's this fucking dream again*.

A noise came from his left, just beyond his head, barely out of his line of sight. He strained again to move, sweat breaking out across his body as a reaction to fear or his fighting, he didn't know, but his dark brown hair was slick against his forehead and his grey sheets were clinging to his skin. He could make out his familiar surroundings, his eyes crossing over his desk against the left wall, onto the window which faced his bed, covered with the blackout curtains he'd paid way too much for in a bid to try to discourage the sun's rays from waking him in the morning when he did manage to sleep, and finally over his right, to where the door to the hallway sat shut. He sensed movement and noticed that the curtains had been shifted, accounting for the moonlight which splashed over his body and bed, bathing him in blues and silvers. Jerry never left his window open through the night, never, and this along with the tooth sitting on his chest, the ache radiating from his jaw, and his sudden paralysis actually caused him to slow down, his panic to ease, and his fervor to see whatever was behind him, to lessen. It really is the dream, and if it's the dream then I'm safe. I'll kill another boy tomorrow, and the dreams will stop, for awhile.

Just as he was starting to calm down, and the steady thumping of his heart was decreasing its crescendo, the thing behind him stepped into the light. It was a woman; he wasn't sure how he knew she was a woman, because in the limited light she looked more like a creature than an actual person. She was still partially hidden by shadows, but Jerry could make out a feminine shape, and what light did touch her face reflected on the most brilliantly white teeth he had ever seen. Her figure shimmered as if she was altogether there and not at the same time, and something large protruded from her back, extending outward and upward on either side. She finally spoke, her voice sounding like the tinkling of the crystals of a thousand chandeliers, and the flutter of a solitary butterfly's wings, and making Jerry feel a mixture of joy and desire, like being spoken to by an angel.

"You cannot move," her words simultaneously terrified him to his very core, and yet he craved more of the sound. "You have been stealing from me for quite some time, and I have come to seek damages." The angel-monster stepped closer, and Jerry could see she had something in her grasp, but it was still too dark to tell what. He felt himself drawn to her and yet repulsed, and as he gathered himself, Jerry began to feel his rage start to boil. He'd done everything right, this shouldn't be happening tonight, so soon. Not again.

"This is a fucking dream. You don't scare me, you bitch. I'm the real one here. I'm the one people should be afraid of. I'm the fuckin' bogeyman who makes children suffer and vanish into thin air. You're nothing, just a figment of my fucked up imagination." Jerry lashed out at the thing beside him, unleashing his anger in a barrage of insults and loathing, knowing he couldn't actually strike her with anything but words.

The woman smiled, "They say if you have nightmares where your teeth fall out, it means you're going to lose friends in your waking life. Why does that scare you so," she asked? "You have no friends to lose, after all. And in a few moments," she took another step closer to him, allowing herself to be bathed in the light of the moon, "you won't have any teeth to lose either." Jerry instantly recognized the familiar shape in the woman's hand, as the moonbeams glinted off its metal. *Pliers*.

In all his life Jerry had never known the true meaning of fear, despite having caused epic amounts of it to his victims. Even when he had *the dream*, he didn't actually wake up *afraid*. However, the moment he felt the cold clamp of the pliers against the edges of his front incisor, he finally felt it. It was short lived however, as she jerked her ghostly looking arm downward, and with an all too familiar earth shattering crunch, and pop, the feeling of inconceivable pain overwhelmed his other senses, and that was all he knew.

The shimmering, almost there, female worked quickly and efficiently, like a well oiled machine, and with an even more seasoned technique than Jerry himself had, removed each tooth from its place in his jaw, and placed them into a dark cloth bag, one by one. Jerry swore to himself he wouldn't cry, wouldn't scream, wouldn't beg for mercy, but that washed away about halfway through her work, and he deteriorated more with each tooth pulled, into a bumbling, bloodied mess. The pain was like he was chewing a mouthful of razor blades, each second driving more and more metallic agony into his gums. How he wasn't suffocating on his own blood, he didn't know, but he began to wish he would. Anything to stop his suffering.

She tugged his final molar, seeming to take her time with this last one, and Jerry's vision was becoming a sea of reds and blacks, making the woman even less visible than she was already. His whole body tensed against his bonds, and he found himself again begging for death or mercy, at this point he didn't care which.

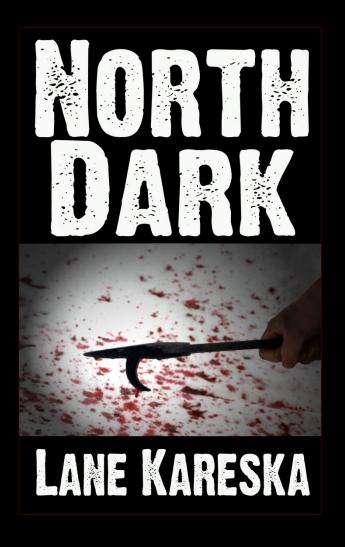
"Your debt has been repaid," she said, placing the last tooth into her bag, "Your teeth for the teeth you took from those children, and in doing so, from me." She shifted, turning to face the window, and for the first time he could see the appendages that stretched outward from the middle of her back were wings, or some bastardization of wings. They shimmered like the rest of her body in the light, like a soft cloud shifting with the movements of the wind, one moment

being almost visible, and the next looking like fog. She reached down to what would have been her waist, where she had placed the bag of his teeth, and retrieved another cloth carrier, unclasping it from her person, and tossing it onto his chest where his first tooth had once laid. It landed with a soft thud, accompanied by what seemed like metallic clinking, and when he looked up from it, back to where the woman stood, she had vanished.

Jerry found himself able to move again, his hands reaching for his violated mouth to feel, to confirm, that she'd really been there, that she'd really taken all his teeth. But deep down, Jerry knew this was no dream, and the constant stabs of agony which left him a sobbing heap and a permanently disfigured man, were enough proof for a thousand lifetimes. He sat up, coughing blood and spittle across his pajamas and bed, like water spraying forth from a fountain, and grabbed the bag. He opened it and inside were 32 coins. One for each tooth.

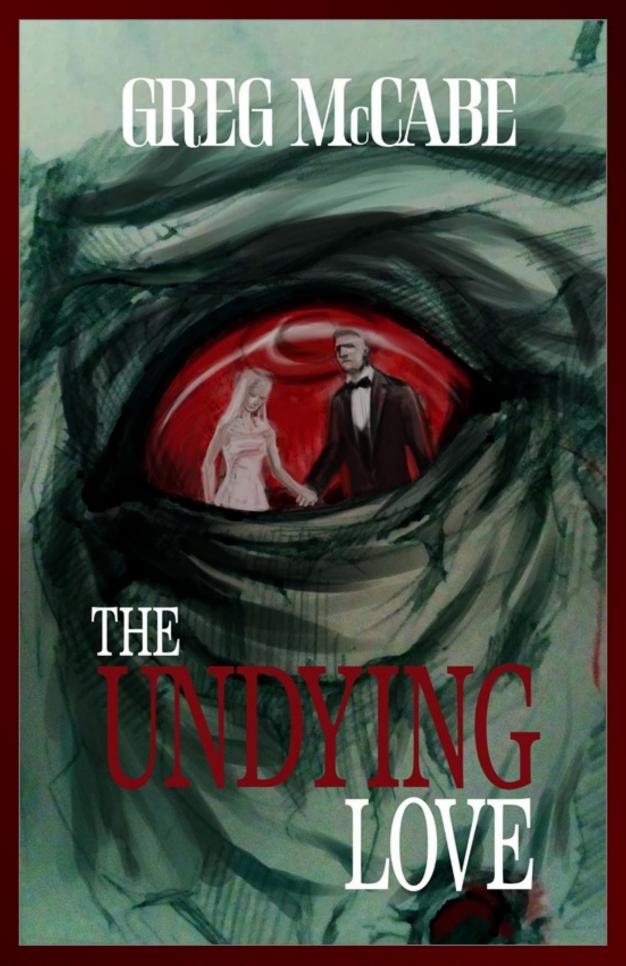
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Delphine Quinn is a new horror author who is currently working on a collection of shorts she hopes to self-publish in May. She lives in the states with her fiancé and her cat (who she loves equally, despite what her fiancé thinks). She is very grateful to finally be pursuing her dream of writing, and though she is terrible at social media, she tries.

Twitter: <u>@DelphineQuinnx</u>
Facebook Page: <u>Delphine Quinn</u>

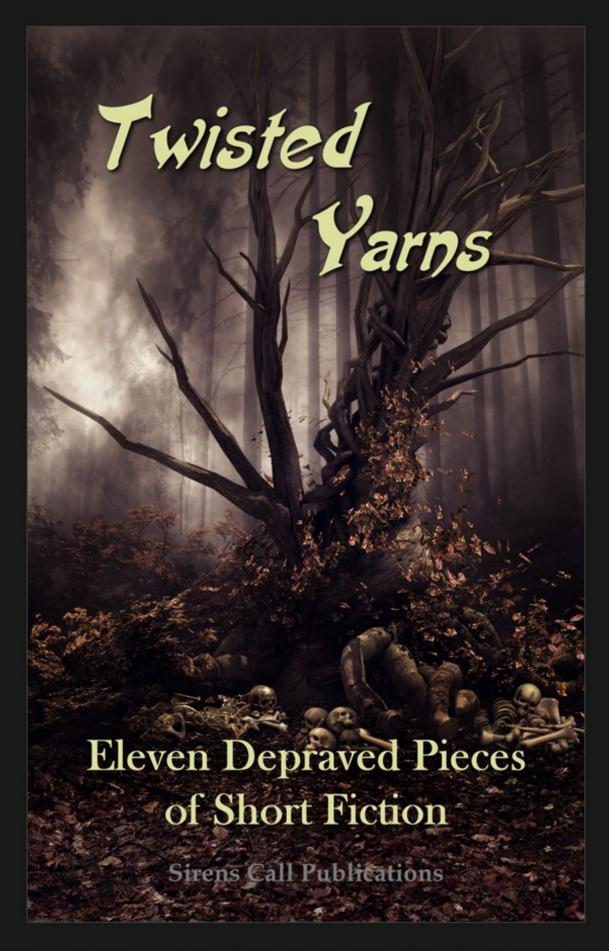


**North Dark** Lane Kareska

Available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and iTunes



Available on Amazon, CreateSpace, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Smashwords, and the iStore



AVAILABLE ON AMAZON, BARNES & NOBLE, KOBO, AND ITUNES

# The Worms Turn | Denzell Cooper

The rain had been coming down for days now, pissing all over the yard, turning it into a quagmire of muck, interspersed with mushy, brown grass. Tack worried about the freshest grave. He stood at the window, listening to the rain thundering against the glass, trying to decide whether to go out there.

I should check.

It'll be OK. It'll be OK.

But what if someone comes by?

Nobody had been to the house in twenty years. Not alive. Not except Tack himself. The grime had built up, the walls had broken down, so that only the kitchen was any longer usable, and even in there a musty smell of mildew and unwashed flesh hung in the air and spilled from the walls.

What should I do?

Tack turned, sighed. "I should go check." He leaned against the sink. "I should go check, Mother, just to be sure."

His mother was silent.

She had been silent for twenty years. Empty sockets stared back at him from the darkness of her cupboard. The light never reached the cupboard. Not properly. Occasionally he saw her shoulder, or the raggedy end of her dress, but mostly it was just the eye sockets.

Tack cocked his head on one side. His face softened as he mimicked her voice. "Just don't be long, Thomas. I don't like it when you're gone."

"I won't be long, mother, I promise."

"You were gone for hours just the other day. I was worried about you."

"That was different. I was with a girl."

"Girls? You're too young for girls."

His lip quivered just a little, but he clenched his jaw tight. He wanted to tell her what Samantha had been like, but he felt embarrassed talking about it. His voice was clipped when he spoke. "I won't be long."

\*\*\*

Tack squelched through the mud, his bare feet sinking and churning up big glops in his wake. He had to pick his feet up high just to make the trudge to the end of the yard, where the graves were. Rain soaked through his shirt, sticking and freezing it to his back.

At least the rain kept the birds away. Tack didn't like birds. Birds were basically dinosaurs, ancient and evil. If he looked up he could see them, dark shapes moving among the branches of the trees at the edge of the property, but they weren't coming any closer. He didn't like to look at them. Just the thought of them made his skin crawl. Once, there had been a bird in the house, flapping and screeching and crashing against the walls. He had closed up that room, locked it tight, and ignored the fading screeches as the thing died. He never went in there again.

As he came up close to the grave, it was clear that he had been right to come out here. The

rain was washing soil away. He caught a whiff of the familiar smell of rotting flesh, and covered his nose with his arm, edging closer until he could look down on the man. He was still whole, not eaten by the worms yet. Brown water and grit streaked his spectacles and tangled in his sparse, grey hair.

Why are you doing this?

Tack grabbed the spade, tugging it free of the ground, and set about reburying the man's face. He could hear his voice inside his head, begging. Pleading.

Please... stop...

But they all begged for their lives at the end. They were cowards. Bullies were always cowards. You had to stand up to them.

I don't know you... please...

You had to face them, or else you deserved it if they got you first.

Please... please, I don't want to die. Oh God, somebody... I don't want to die. No. No!

By the time he'd finished, Tack was exhausted. Working in the rain made the digging difficult and made him gasp for breath. He stood and leaned on the spade, and that was when he saw it, lying half buried in the new soil at his feet. All he could see were talons, and that made him suspicious, but there was something about the golden metal, wet and shiny from the rain. He had to see.

When he pulled it out and rubbed away the dirt, he almost dropped it.

It was a statue of a bird.

\*\*\*

Cleaning it up was a difficult job. Tack kept turning his face away to avoid looking at it while he scrubbed it in water from the well. He wanted to get rid of it, to throw it back into the ground or hurl it into the back of his mother's cupboard, but every time he tried, his hands just held onto it, refusing to let it go. So there was nothing to do except clean it.

He liked the shiny metal, but avoided touching the eyes. They were too much like birds' eyes, staring and accusatory. Like Samantha's eyes. Tack found that he could hold the statue in one hand, lying its back against his palm so that its outstretched wings reached further than the tips of his thumb and little finger. That way he could scrub it with the brush and have no chance of accidentally touching the eyes. He didn't know much about birds, but he thought it was a crow or a raven or a magpie – one of those birds that look like murderers.

When he was done, he set it on the side facing away from his corner of the room, then ate an apple that he had taken out of one of the bins in town.

Then he sat in his corner, wrapped himself in a blanket, and watched his mother's eyes as he fell asleep.

\*\*\*

Tack awoke to see vast sky overhead, but it wasn't the sky he was used to. This sky was purple and green, with swirling clouds that looked like intestines. He knew that it was a dream, but it wasn't like any other dream before. As he looked around himself, he saw four pillars of dull red stone, not round like he would have made but angular. Square but not quite perfectly square.

The ground beneath him was made of white sandstone tiles, each of them different sizes, but all squared so sharp at the corners that he thought he might cut his feet on them.

He stood and looked out beyond the pillars, but there was only desert as far as the eye could see. He had to squint against the brightness of the sun reflecting from the sand, though there didn't seem to be a sun in the sky. None of the pillars cast shadows, and neither did he. Some steps led down from his platform, but he didn't want to take them. It felt like this might be the only safe haven in this dream.

A shadow passed overhead.

Tack felt it, a cooler patch along his back than there had been before. He snapped his head around, but there was nothing there. No shadow. Can a shadow even exist if it's only felt, not seen?

"Hello?" His voice echoed against the red pillars, and bounced back up from the ground. It seemed to come back to him from beyond the desert, but it was his voice. Gradually it stopped echoing, then there was silence for a heartbeat.

He heard the screech of a bird, distant, away over the horizon, beyond where the sand undulated like some sleeping monster. The screech didn't echo. It flew past with a rush of wind.

Tack looked around for somewhere to go, somewhere to hide, but there was nowhere.

Birds come from above.

There was no roof to the structure, only the four pillars and the ground of tiles. The screech came again, this time closer.

Tack wanted to wake up, but his mind wouldn't let him. He felt the shadow pass behind him again, and heard the screech. He froze. It was right there, behind him, inside his mind. He could feel the sweat on his brow. He wanted to close his eyes.

I don't want to see it.

The thought was ridiculous. He knew what it was. The bird. But what if it wasn't? What if it was something else? Something that the bird had been before it was a bird? He could hear its talons scratching in the sand, then against the tiles. He could feel its shadow cooling his back.

"Samantha," he said, not knowing why he said it. But he felt the thing laugh, or did he hear it? He could smell its breath like burning coal. "No, please. Please stop. Go away, leave me alone!"

It drew closer, ever closer, and Tack knew that if he just turned his head a little he would see it, or her, or whatever was behind him. He closed his eyes.

"Mother! I don't want to die here. Not here. Not alone!"

\*\*\*

There was silence for a long time before he dared open his eyes. When he did, he was back in his own home and the rain no longer fell outside. He pulled the blanket up tight around his neck and stared into the darkness until his vision adjusted and he could once again make out the black pits of his mother's eyes.

"Mother, I'm scared," he said.

He waited for an answer, but for the first time in his life she just stared back.

"Tell me that monsters aren't real."

She said nothing.

"It's just a bully," he said. "You have to stand up to bullies. You have to face them." Somehow the words felt flat coming from his own mouth, rather than hers.

Then he noticed it, the statue, watching him. Looking in his direction. Facing him.

Tack felt his lip start to quiver.

He dared not close his eyes.

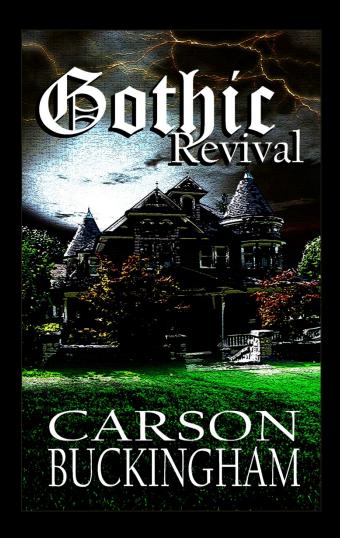
He dared not fall asleep.

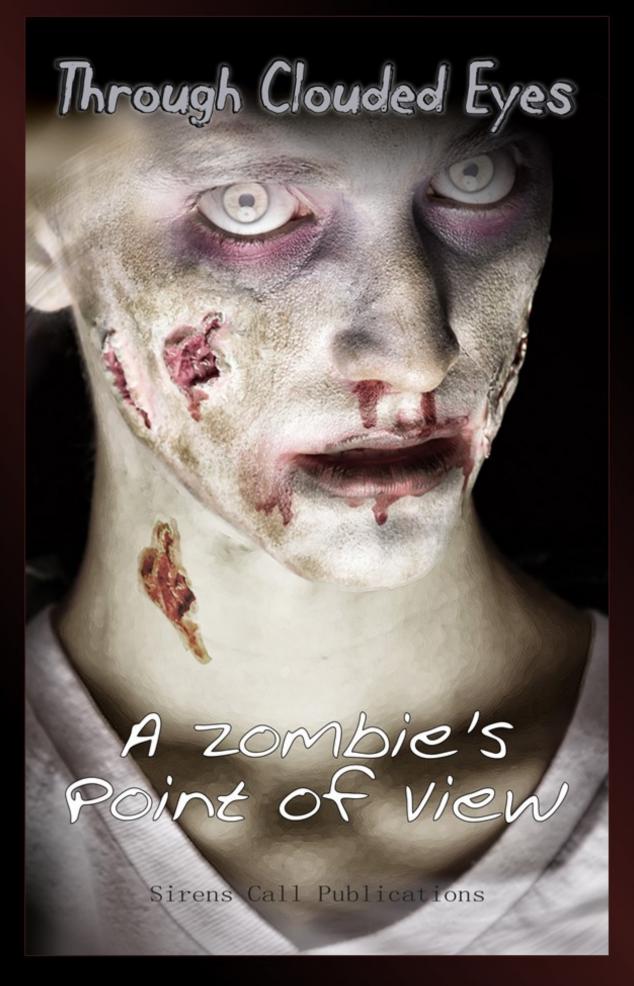
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Denzell Cooper tells stories of visceral and psychological horror and fantasy. His work has been published in the Sirens Call Publications anthology *Mental Ward: Echoes of the Past*, as well as various magazines. He lives and works in Cornwall, UK, and when he's not writing or reading he can often be found searching for ghosts in the dark places of the world.

Twitter: <u>@DenzellCooper</u>
Website: <u>www.denzellcooper.co.uk</u>

# Gothic Revival Carson Buckingham

Available on Amazon, and Smashwords





Available on Amazon, CreateSpace, & Smashwords

### **Weaver** | *L. E. White*

"Can this thing really do it?" Max asked. "Can it really make my dreams come true?"

Dr. Thomas Pattington straightened up, pushing out his thin chest and lifting his chin into the air. "Can it? Can it? How in the world can you question me so? You question my very soul when you question the validity of my word. Why you even question my character."

The young man looked up from the table and squinted one eye at the short man's red face. "Can you blame me? Dreams aren't real."

The little fellow smiled a gap toothed smile that looked more appropriate to a jack-olantern than a doctor and shook his head. "My good man, dreams are as real as we wish to make them. You are the one who makes them real; this just helps you do it easier."

Max looked back down at the little box. It was made out of cheap, thin wood and looked like a tiny cedar chest. The bronze latch rubbed where it had been installed at an angle to the hasp and it left a shiny streak rubbed into the metal. He opened it, and looked at the cogs and gears which seemed like a dozen watches had been pried apart and shoved into it. A small brass key stood on one side, waiting to be turned.

"Like I said," Dr. Pattington continued, "when you are ready for bed, you turn the key three times, no more, and then come morning, your dream will be made real."

Max looked at the old man and frowned. There was no way this trinket was real. There was no way that it would work. There was no way the old fart was any sort of doctor either. It didn't matter though. It was just like the lottery. Max couldn't win if he didn't play. As he reached for his wallet he mumbled a single word. "Dorris."

\*\*\*

Max sat at his kitchen table, ignoring the mangy little monster that sat beside his boot wagging its tail. The old plate had a bright yellow smear on it beside the greasy lines and little wooden sticks that were the bones of his dinner. Beyond that stood a forest of empty aluminum cans. He had a book in his lap, tilted so that he could stare at it.

"Dorris," he said, slurring the name. When he did, the little dog hopped up, putting its muddy front feet on his leg.

"Get off." Max smacked at the dog, which jumped back out of his reach. It whined, but didn't stop wagging its tail.

"Go lay down Dorris. Go to bed."

It ignored him, just sitting and staring.

Max turned back to his high school year book. To the picture of the beautiful brunette he had loved. He traced his finger along the big picture of her crossing the finish line at a track meet as he drained another can. "I love you," he said, slurring the words as the alcohol did its job. "I love you and I want you back."

He cracked open that last can in the cooler beside his chair. The can died in one long pull before Max dropped it on the floor. "Three," he mumbled while turning the key. "Three my ass."

Max leaned his head back, taking a deep breath before struggling to his feet. He had intended to go upstairs, but he didn't make it past the couch.

Dorris the dog walked into the living room and rubbed her nose in his hand before curling up on the floor beside his fingers with a little sigh. It didn't have anything else it could do, both bowls were empty.

\*\*\*

Max looked around him, at the empty bleachers of the stadium. The state championship banner he had won hung beneath the announcer's box. He was wearing his practice jersey, and the ball was in his hand.

"Still holding your balls?"

He snapped around and felt his heart stop. Dorris was standing on the track behind him. Her hair was pulled into a tail, ready for a run. She was wearing a loose shirt with the wildcat mascot on it and a pair of running shorts that revealed every inch of her legs. He licked his lips, remembering how they had felt. "God," he said.

She smiled with one side of her mouth, quirking up the edge and knowing that it drove him nuts. "You think God has something to do with this?"

Max stepped forward and wrapped his arms around her. He crushed his mouth against hers and tasted the green apple chapstick that she loved.

"I missed you so much," he said. Tears started running down his face and he gasped when she blurred out of focus. He squeezed tighter, making sure that she couldn't get away. "I love you. Oh God I missed you."

Dorris pushed him back a little, smiling as she did. "Did you really?"

"Of fucking course I did."

She laughed and stroked her fingers down his cheek. "What part did you miss the most?"

Max snorted and let go enough to wipe his face with one hand.

"Was this what you missed?" she asked. Pointing behind her.

He didn't know when it had happened, but they were standing beside each other in front of the old drive-in. The picture was of them dancing at the prom. Max was in a tux, the first of two times he had ever worn one.

"Yes," he said.

"Are you sure? Maybe this is more like what you were thinking of?"

The couple on the screen were holding hands. They looked at each other, smiling, as Max put a ring on Dorris's hand.

"Yes." He whispered the word, fighting to keep watching instead of crying and blubbering.

"I don't think so," Dorris said. "We both know that this is what you were really missing."

Now the movie went darker, but that didn't keep it from being clear. Dorris was on her hands and knees in front of Max. He had his hands on her hips, holding her in place while he pounded into her. Seeing this, Max reached over and took her hand. "I miss that too. So much."

"I figured." Dorris didn't let go of his hand, but a second later, she was standing a few feet in front of him, facing him. "But even then, I think this is more like what you miss." The movie continued, and the Max on screen had grabbed a handful of her hair. There was a dark hand print on her ass and she was crying.

"Isn't that what you really miss?"

"I'm sorry," he said. "I won't ever do that again. I promise."

Dorris's cheeks seemed to cave in, adding shadows to the side of her face. Her hair began to flutter out on all sides of her, the way it would if she had been walking into the wind."You mean like that time?"

The movie now showed Max standing over Dorris. She was on the floor, crying and holding her cheek. "I told you to have dinner ready when I got home," he yelled from the screen. "How many times do I have to fucking tell you what I want?"

"Or like this time?"

"Please don't go through this," Max said, but the picture changed again. Now he had her bent over the table, holding her face down by her hair as he lashed her ass with a belt.

"I was bleeding down my legs right then," Dorris said. "Lucky for the picture the jeans hide it."

"I swear I won't ever do that again," he said. "Just come back. I swear."

"Oh I see. You must mean you miss this then."

Now in the movie, Max had Dorris pinned against the wall. He had her down on the ground and she was choking as he forced her to service him.

"You remember that night don't you sweetheart? That was the night you beat me unconscious after I vomited on the floor because of how you were choking me." Dorris grew. Her body stretched, arms and legs getting thin, like the spindles on a stair railing.

He covered his face with his hands. "Please don't. Just come back. I miss you so much. Please."

"Right Max," Dorris said. This time, when the picture changed, it showed the couple driving. "You miss me and want me back."

He tired to say the word no, but he couldn't make a sound.

The picture showed them driving and him yelling at her. She was crying, and had her hands over her face.

Max shook his head and tried to turn away, but they were surrounded by movie screens. All around him, thirty foot tall versions of himself as he took his and off the wheel and punched Dorris. He hit her hands, and she jerked back. Then the door on the car came open and Dorris wasn't in the picture any more.

Max fell to his knees, sobbing. He covered his face with his hands and wept until a soft hand touched his wrist. He looked up at Dorris, then screamed and fell away.

"What's the matter? Don't like looking at what your love did to me?" one side of her face was purple. Part of her cheek was gone, torn off by the asphalt when she had slid. Her teeth peeked out through the hole, and Max noticed that one of them was missing.

"Right," she said. "I don't remember if you knew you knocked out a tooth when you beat me for bouncing the check book so that your debit card was rejected while you were out with the boys."

Max started scooting backward, dragging his ass along the ground like the dog did. "Stay back."

"I thought you missed me?" she asked. Each word came out with a lisp because she had bitten off the tip of her tongue in the fall. "I thought you wanted me back?" Her face began to stretch. Her chin dropped until the tip was just above her navel and her eyes fell back into her head. "You missed me so much you even named your dog after me."

Max bumped into something, and looked up to see that he had backed into Dorris. She was standing behind him and he could feel the sharp pain below his shoulder where the broken leg jammed into his skin.

"We both know you did it so you could continue to kick me when you were down, even while I was gone. But I'm with you now baby," she said. "You and I will be able to stay together forever. We have so much to catch up on." She bent over and reached down, dragging her finger up from his belt to his chin. Dorris drug harder as she went, and Max hissed in pain at the scratches that started at the bottom of his ribs. "I missed you too, but this time things are going to be a little different."

\*\*\*

- "What happened to him?" the paramedic asked.
- "We think he had a heart attack in his sleep."
- "No I mean why is he all torn up?"

The cop pointed to a small pet carrier on the table. "The dog was shut in here with him. It started eating the body."

"Oh hell no."

"Yeah." The office shook his head and tucked his phone back into his pocket. "He should have fed the poor thing before dying in his sleep."

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** I am a happily married father of four who lives on a family farm in southern Indiana. I have published multiple stories so far under the by line of L. E. White, with my work being included in collections from Hazardous Press, Sirens Call Publications and Under the Bed Magazine. I publish new fiction every week on my blog.

Blog: <u>leonardewhite.wordpress.com</u>

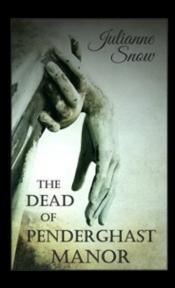


Available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, iTunes, and Kobo

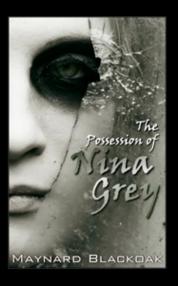
## PHRENIC PRESS PUBLISHING INTELLIGENT, CREATIVE FICTION



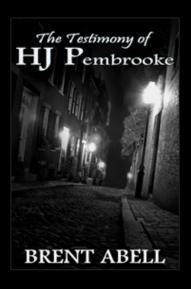




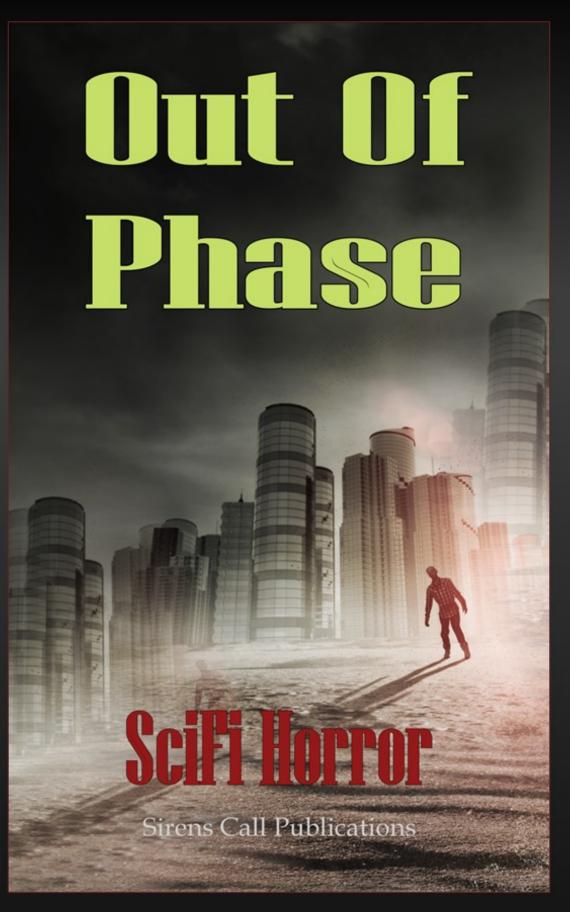








**EXCLUSIVELY FOR SALE OR BORROW ON AMAZON** 



AVAILABLE ON AMAZON, BARNES & NOBLE, KOBO, AND ITUNES

### Cinema Delicti | S.E. Casey

Goddamn these drugs.

I don't know exactly how they conspired to trick me into yet another predicament, but they get the blame based on past performance. While I am not under the influence at the moment, the drugs are still at fault. Sobriety isn't a state of mind, only an interruption of fixes. Experiencing the world in another condition—whether euphoric or numb—triggers a compulsion back to the high or low. However, these musings are terribly ill timed considering my present straits.

One man is hitting me while another holds me in place. The one punching me, I'll call him Carl because he looks like a Carl, is a remarkably thin man, his elastic physique seemingly made entirely of gristle and sinew. I have only known him long enough to know but one of his talents: a viscous left hook to the body. The other man is bigger than Carl in every way. His bulging muscles have those little, crooked veins that pop away from the surface. I have no idea what this means physiologically except it comes from working out a lot. I name him Buff Doe for obvious reasons.

In one of those counter-intuitive instances of life, I wish Buff Doe was the one hitting me. Fucking Carl packs a punch, his lanky arms exploding into me like a well-oiled whip. Buff is so bulky, as strong as he may be, he could only manage to push through a punch lacking any flexibility. Indeed, he is an uncomfortable sight, his neon blue golf shirt looking two sizes too small. His resting biceps already straining the cuffs of his sleeves, he would probably tear through them even attempting a weak jab. The shirt is so tight it could have belonged to Carl. Maybe he mistakenly grabbed it after...

Before I could get to the punchline, Carl delivers a vicious body blow. His sneer almost convinces me he can read minds. I forgive him for that one—it was to be a mean-spirited and insensitive joke. But this isn't the real me, again it's the drugs to blame.

The fourth man in the room is yelling himself hoarse. Alan Painter is his actual name, I remember it written on the check he handed me months ago. The pain makes it difficult to focus on his complaint, but it's clear that he's not a fan of my dry-walling skills. However, I have no idea what his specific concern is—the walls look damn good. Sure, I cut a few corners, the drugs I was on make it impossible to remember which corners, but this reaction is a little much.

Another ripping body blow just under the ribs sucks the air from my possibly collapsed lungs. It isn't only the power Carl generates, or his marble-like fists, but he keeps hitting me in the same goddamn spot. Whatever organs the southpaw has smashed together beg for relief that I can't get with the dimwitted bodybuilder holding me up. The pain and promise of more focuses me on the specifics of the homeowner's complaint.

There is a foul stench in the house that started after I finished hanging the sheetrock. I can smell it too, and it *is* vaguely familiar, but I can't identify it. The odor reminds me of a vacuum with its suggestion of emptiness, but that makes little sense. Nothing exists in a vacuum so I'm pretty sure I have never been there to smell it.

However, my airtight alibi comes out as a slurred moan. I have a premonition that Carl is about to plow another left into the same spot he had been tenderizing for the last half an hour. Abandoning another attempt at speech, I insistently point to the place in the wall where I had put it. Somehow, now I know exactly where it is.

Goddamn, Carl is really persuasive.

Alan Painter of the messy signature grabs the sledgehammer leaning against the coffee table. He points to the indicated section of wall. I nod in confirmation. He adjusts his grip obviously unfamiliar with the heavy tool and, despite his well-laundered tracksuit, physical activity in general. He winds up and arcs the sledgehammer around his body not unlike a golf swing. He punches a hole in the cheap sheetrock unwittingly missing a stud by inches.

I'm relieved that the first strike doesn't bring the whole thing down. Maybe I'm a better handyman than I thought. Painter winds up for a second strike. Buff Doe would be perfect for the job, but the room is frozen in anticipation. Buff isn't volunteering, Carl isn't hitting me, and I don't feel any pain. There is no thinking, no moving, no acting—a rare space opens where there is only *being*.

This peaceful pause is the warm comfort of faith—the joy of the waiting room. Considering the unknown is a respite from the overbearing present and haunting past, an escape from sorrow and regret. However, it is a thin bulwark. In its very recognition, before any of its nirvana can be consciously enjoyed, self-awareness brings back the misery.

With a semi-circular smile of sledgehammer sized holes punched into the wall, the slab of sheetrock hangs precariously on a single nail. One good shot at the top will bring it down. I stay silent, but Carl points out the obvious.

I hate Carl.

Painter hesitates. The holes in the wall are so profoundly empty it appears as if absence itself is oozing out. The annulling discharge might have convinced me that there is indeed nothing behind if the despairing smell hadn't intensified. The four of us look to one another to determine if the same rapturous dread has been similarly detected. In another counter-intuitive occurrence of life, we read each other's frightful concern, recognize the feigned calm that nothing is amiss, but convince ourselves that this bad acting reflects more the truth than our own instinctual terror.

A half-hearted swing collapses the wall revealing the narrow space behind. The light in the room is slow to penetrate the shadows. Instead of the darkness being banished, the stubborn gloom congeals and slithers free. Rearing upright like a cobra, it trembles clearly upset with being locked away for months. At first glance the creature glows, but actually does the opposite. Its unctuous blankness is the weird non-color of a photo negative, a rainbow turned inside out.

Silent as absolute zero, the stinking void unfolds like angel wings. In a stilted leap, the twin flaps curl around Buff Doe. Or is it *into* Buff Doe? The big man isn't swallowed rather occupied. Buff offers no resistance. With an appalled expression, he breaks into a flash sweat, the veins really popping off his throbbing temple. I look to see what Carl's reaction is, but he is nowhere to be found. I hear a door slamming in the distance.

Goddamn, Carl is really smart.

Only when I realize that no one is holding me up do my legs give way. Fucking Carl. I'm not sure which kind of luck keeps me from banging myself unconscious on the glass coffee table, but I miss it by a whisker. Falling forward, I twist my head so my nose isn't driven into the floor. I hit hard jamming my neck past its ninety-degree swivel limit. A bolt of electricity shoots down my legs immediately followed by no feeling at all which is ironically much worse. Furthermore, my hyper-rotated neck gives me an uncomfortable view up through the table glass of Buff Doe's self unwound in excruciating detail.

As for Painter, he is mired in a spectral quicksand. A hazy, suspended picture show that trails the vacuous creature—a shadow of a shadow—plays about his legs. While this holographic movie doesn't seem to have any physical properties, nonetheless it tethers Painter in place. He still has hold of the sledgehammer, but is too mesmerized by the cinematic phenomena to use it. My Stockholm syndrome kicks in as I can't help but to wonder: what would Carl do?

The right thing—swing for the fucking fences.

Done with its efficient soul-decomposition of Buff, the dreadful creature turns to the anchored homeowner. It unfurls itself into two horrid halves. This dismal Rorschach test descends onto Painter in a way that it seems to arrive before it leaves having moments of being nowhere at all. It's like a slightly out of order flipbook, some blank pages mistakenly mixed in, being shuffled too slow.

Painter is furiously unexisted. I recall its perpetual foul humor: no wonder I walled it up in the first place. But I can't move now, my legs unresponsive, my adrenaline glands shot from years of abuse.

Welding an unknown substance stolen from a bottomless pit, it finishes leaving only a thin residue for all of Painter's years and being. It skips over to where I lay, clearly aware of my presence. The stench is dispiriting, an odor convincing me that happiness is an unattainable myth, any prior reminiscence of such cruel, false memories. I can't imagine what ugly nightmares even the slightest redolence must have stirred in Painter all these months. I wonder what food at his dinner table was made to taste like. And what souring effect did it have on sex with the wife?

Playing dead won't work. Considering its ability to negate existence, death is but a trifling technicality. Despite not being the slightest of threats, it picks me up and tosses me against the stairs. Why does it play with me of all people? I land on the exact spot where Carl had been hitting me. As little consolation, my neck pops back in proper alignment. The whiplash is a bitch, but somehow I don't blackout able to push myself upright against the grade of the steps.

With no more moves to make and nothing to look forward to in life anyway, I give up. Being sucked into the icy darkness is a seductive fate. I taunt the null beast. It takes the bait unzipping like a jacket and rearing up before me. I lean forward eager for the annihilation. In a violent flipbook jump, it throws itself at me curling up in a tidy ball at my feet.

I remember more about the creature. In another counter intuitive stumble, for all the mayhem that it is capable, it wants to be a pet. It reacts terribly to those who cower or fight

against it, but is helplessly submissive to commandments and orders. Snuggling against my legs, it passively shoots me up with its reeking needles of oblivion. The unknown drug courses through my body, sucking me into a narcotic thorn pile. More of my memory defogs, I have felt these raw and unsettling effects before. Faster and faster I fall through a familiar sea of freezing barbs. Drowning in a frigid nightmare, there is one saving grace...

It's better than sobriety.

The noir picture show that shadows my pet comes into focus. It is a dystopian dream world, my newfound comprehension possibly aided by the drugs. However, I'm not sure the relationship between the injective pet and the hovering movie. Is there some cause and effect—a master and servant role perhaps? Or is there another dynamic between the two, no words yet created to describe?

Through a scratchy picture window I view an inverted Hellscape, or perhaps a bloody future. Despite the popping static of an unsteady connection, I watch the surreal passion crimes committed on desperate streets, towering psychedelic sculptures of suffering, and trembling disaster events. It's so cold and colorful that it stings the eyes. Only when I rub them do I realize that I am crying. Recent affairs have marooned me in this lonely spectator role again. The lunatic opiates shooting into me reveal a sad truth that in each of our run-ins I must have commanded it to consume me, neither fighting nor fleeing, but begging to be erased. My mastery over it stems from an utter hopelessness. Fueled by the blankness pumping into me, I remember all that I have lost, all who I have left.

I start to laugh... it's better than sobriety.

Once again, in the front row of a black comedy of my making, I imagine Buff Doe pixelated and streamed through the movie portal. He is reconstructed inside-out on the other side, stumbling on ligament and bone over razor blade streets. I direct him to the role of the sensitive buffoon, the corrosive, fetid air pricking the exposed receptors and nerves no longer buffered under skin and hair. I giggle at a similarly inverted Painter, his glistening heart broken out of its cage. The frigid temperatures ice the blood barely insulated under the cell-thin capillaries now on his outside. The frozen plasma scrapes the veins on their winding trip back to the rotten apple-shaped heart. Attempting to warm himself he staggers into one of the set's open fires. However, these props too have been reversed. Painter is robbed of a hot death, the flames blistering him with a searing cold.

But I've seen these same funny movies many times before. It's nothing new, a bad habit I should drop. Like a dog reading my body language, my drowsy pet stirs in objection. I need to disguise my intentions, although it probably doesn't care only wanting to be told what to do. It should be an easy lodestone to shrug off. What bad luck I must have for it to still be with me after our many encounters.

But although I want to, it isn't to blame for the suffering of Carl's punches. I gave Painter my card for referrals, willingly offering my name, number, and address despite what I had walled in his home. This thing is no millstone; there is something in me that refuses to quit it, something that desires a vacant seat in the theatre of the absurd. What deficit makes me crave this impotent

ghost life, inconsequential to the real world choosing instead the narcotic fantasies of a celluloid abyss?

To extricate myself from this null affair, I not only need to kick the addiction, but avoid the relapse. Maybe I need to find some substantial occupation or sport, or to cultivate a mutually satisfying relationship to keep me away from the high. But this is hard work, not to mention time-consuming. Maybe I'll start with having a beer or two with Carl, reminisce over the innocent times of an hour ago.

Whatever my path, the next separation needs to be for good. I will have another chance, my pet begging for instructions. I will bury it deeper and make sure to cover my tracks next time. It should be easy, the next minor construction job not too hard to find for the cheapest name in the book.

But another thing I remember—it doesn't fall for the same trick twice.

Unlike me.

Goddamn these drugs.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** S.E. Casey is a speculative fiction writer living on the fringes of New England. His existential short stories and poetry always seem to wash up onto the lonely shores of *Hell is other people*. He has recently been published in several horror magazines and anthologies as well as self-publishing several stand-alone short stories.

Twitter: <u>@thesecasey</u>

Website: secaseyauthor.wordpress.com

**GAPE**Aiden Truss

Available on Amazon,
Barnes & Noble,
Kobo,
and iTunes





### **Pain** | *Mark Steinwachs*

I follow the men over the trench wall, shells explode around us as the Germans return fire. I see their men—boys really—charging at me. Bullets take out the soldiers around me as I return fire.

A German is repeatedly kicking one of my men, but everyone rushes past the two, absorbed in their own fight to survive. I get to him as his boot strikes the man on the ground again. I fire my rifle at close range, knowing my shot will end his life. My foot slips on the blood-soaked ground and my shot isn't true. The bullet explodes in his knee, shattering it. He falls to the ground and over the cacophony of battle I hear him scream. Regaining my balance, I take the last few strides and swing the butt of my rifle up, catching him in the jaw. He topples over backwards and I stand over him.

I raise my rifle and his gurgled moans fill my ears. He opens his mouth once more, but instead of a sound, a smoky black cloud comes out. The world stands still as the cloud takes shape, a dark mass begins to form as I watch a featureless being that reaches for me. I'm unable to move, waiting for the end to take me, my final day in the trenches. Its hand touches my chest and I feel a jolt surge through me. I look down expecting to see blood, instead I watch as its hand disappears and I feel it begin to fill me.

The world roars back to life and the German looks up at me, his eyes wide. I slam the butt of my rifle into his ribs, hearing them crack. He wails in pain as shapeless black tendrils of smoke escape his body and enters mine. A rush unlike anything I have ever felt courses through me. I rear back and hit him again. He cries out louder, more smoke fills me, feeds me.

This time I smash it down into his face. The two of us are engulfed in a black cloud. His last moments are my first.

Pain

The smoke clears as I stand in front of a Japanese soldier tied to a chair. Sweat is pouring off him from the oppressive heat of Guadalcanal.

"Sir, the Nip won't speak," my sergeant says.

"Leave us. He'll talk."

The young Marine leaves and I walk behind the soldier tied to the chair. "You will tell me everything I want to know," I say in perfect Japanese. Before he can move, I slam my fist down into his shoulder, dislocating it.

He grits his teeth, stifling his anguish. His body betrays him as the wisps of smoke snake from his dislocated shoulder and into me. Closing my eyes, I savor the taste of his pain.

"Your kind are so much more fun than the Germans," I say as I pull his injured arm straight, then snap it at the elbow. "Now start talking."

Words tumble from him as black smoke envelopes me.

Pain.

Opening my eyes, I struggle with the ropes that bind me to the chair. I slowly lift my head. My son stands in front of me.

"I knew this day would come," I say. "I'm no longer strong enough to control the being inside me."

The world spins and for a brief moment it's like watching a movie, seeing both people in the scene, then the move completes itself and I'm now looking at my father sitting on the chair I tied him up in.

Slipping the brass knuckles on my hand, I know it is time to take my rightful place. My fist arcs forward connecting with his jaw and I watch teeth fly from his mouth. His head jerks sideways and his body goes slack.

A dark, cloudy hand emerges from his mouth as it pushes free of its vessel of over twenty years. I stand rooted in my spot. I feel it watch me even though it has no eyes. Its hand extends to my chest. I feel a spike of electricity fill me.

My father's eyes open, whiter than I have ever seen them. I begin to pummel him, smoke erupts covering us.

Pain.

I'm in front of a Viet Cong soldier, just like my dad stood before his enemies in WWI and WWII. This is my life, one I learned from him.

He is strapped into what we have dubbed the Electric Chair for its resemblance to its namesake. Turning from him I walk over to the table and pick up a large needle. His eyes are on mine as I step close to him. His body is broken in too many places to count, but I had left his face untouched.

"Now start talking," I say in perfect Vietnamese.

I slowly push the needle into his eye. He wails, spittle hitting my face. I keep pushing. My heart is pounding. I've never tasted anything this visceral before. Thick black smoke covers my body and enters me.

Pain.

I open the door to my dad's bedroom. The medals from his time in the Marines are displayed proudly on the wall. His stories about our family play in my mind. The framed picture of his men standing around the Electric Chair, the one thing he never spoke of. But now I know the story. A pain so perfect. I look down at him sleeping and raise my baseball bat.

\*\*\*

My eyes pop open and I sit up in bed, covered in a cold sweat. I look at my calendar tacked to the wall. Today's date circled in red—Leave for Boot Camp.

I get out of bed and grab my bat. Ready for my legacy to begin.

Pain.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Mark Steinwachs is a roadie who retired to shop life and is now GM at Bandit Lites in Nashville, TN. Over a decade traveling in tour buses plus time as a United States Marine, and a rave DJ/promoter has given him a unique outlook in his storytelling. He writes in the wee hours of the morning trying not to wake his wife and two kids.

Twitter: <u>@authorMarkStein</u>
Facebook: <u>Author Mark Steinwachs</u>



### **Dream Perchance to Vengeance** | Maynard Blackoak

Dreams of bloody shadows Roaming the night Images of misdeeds Haunting my sight

Living has always been A selfish desire Lives have I ruined In a quest to acquire

The shadows are closing On these eyes of mine Vengeful spirits Seeking justice divine

Scythes appear above me Piercing the dark Slowly they descend Striking their mark

My blood spills
Splattering my dream
Lost in a nightmare
My head cannot scream

The vengeful gazing Looking down on me Their eyes gleaming I can only bleed

Images fading
Shadows return to the night
A dream never ending
Never to awake from the fright

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Maynard Blackoak is an author living in Oklahoma. The greatest influences in his writing are the works of Poe and Dickens. He draws inspiration from the sounds and shadows of the night and processes them through the splintered windmill of his mind to create his tales.

Twitter: <u>@MaynardBlackoak</u> Facebook: Maynard Blackoak



### **Taunted** | DJ Tyrer

She comes every night And every night plays the innocent Smiling sweetly, offering excuses But every time betrays him Determined to destroy him Tempting and taunting Leading him astray Dragging him to disaster Prompting him to self-destruction Seeking oblivion for them both Seeking solace in non-existence Then when daylight comes She hides away Hidden deep within his mind Within dark, hate-filled recesses Filled with self-loathing That kernel of himself The stuff of dreams – nightmares That knows the truth His every flaw and failing And exploits them without mercy Hoping for that final end An eternity of nothing The end of them both

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** DJ Tyrer is the person behind *Atlantean Publishing*, was placed second in the 2015 Data Dump Award for Genre Poetry and has been published in *Cyaegha*, *Carillon*, *Frostfire Worlds*, *Handshake*, *Illumen*, *The Pen*, *Scifaikuest*, *Sirens Call*, *Tigershark* and *Anthology 29*, and online on *Staxtes English Wednesdays*, *Poetry Bulawayo*, *Poetry Pacific*, and *The Muse*.

Twitter: <u>@djtyrer</u>

Blog: <a href="http://djtyrer.blogspot.co.uk/">http://djtyrer.blogspot.co.uk/</a>









### An Interview with Jon Olson, Author of Marrow

Recently Phrenic Press, an imprint of Sirens Call Publications released a short story titled *Marrow* by author Jon Olson. We decided to sit down with Jon and ask him a few questions and here's what transpired...

Sirens Call Publications: Welcome Jon! Why don't you start off by telling our readers about yourself?

**Jon Olson:** I reside in Eastern Passage, Nova Scotia, Canada with my wife and daughter. To pay the bills, I work as a Screening Checkpoint Coordinator at the Halifax Robert L. Stanfield International Airport and have been in that role for 9 years. I'm a graduate of Saint Francis Xavier University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History.

I've been writing stories since an early age but it wasn't until 2012 when I began to take it seriously and actually start submitting my work for publication. My first published piece was called "Sightseers" that came out in *The Sirens Call - Issue #4*. Since that time I've managed to become a member of the Horror Writers Association and Pen of the Damned.

### SCP: What made you decide to become a writer?

**Jon:** I've always been a creative person. Early on, in the first grade, I took an interest in creative writing that continued all the way up through high school. The idea of telling a story in any of the mediums was appealing, whether through words, film, music, or comics. For the longest time growing up, the plan had always been to get into comics as I was also keen at drawing. I dabbled in it, self-publishing a few horrible black and white photocopies in junior high that will hopefully never see the light of day.

Once I hit university, however, priorities changed as they do and I fell away from writing and drawing creatively.

It wasn't long after graduating though that I was bitten by the creative bug again. I started reading more fiction and began writing my own. With the encouragement of a few coworkers I began taking it seriously and started submitting my stories for submission. I haven't looked back since.

#### **SCP:** What is *Marrow* about?

**Jon:** *Marrow* stems from my time working for a commercial logging company in the summers I was in university and is a monster-running-amok tale. Commercial loggers ignore the warnings from Aboriginals and accidently unleash an ancient horror from its prison. The creature, of course, is hungry and sets about looking for nourishment.

### SCP: What is the one thing you'd like readers to know about Marrow before they read it?

**Jon:** *Marrow* in its early form started off as a story about Sasquatch harassing the harvesters. As I began writing it, however, I realized I couldn't figure out a logical reason for Sasquatch to be

going after them. I switched gears and tried working it into a werewolf story but I just felt that I couldn't bring anything new to the table in regards to the shape shifters. It wasn't until I was watching *Alien 3* which didn't have the best effects and as a result, the Alien moved with a certain amount of jerkiness in some scenes. Those scenes helped to visualize the image of a new kind of creature.

### SCP: What is your writing process? Do you consider yourself to be a planner or a pantser?

**Jon:** I'm definitely a planner. A few times I tried flying by the seat of my pants, but throw Attention Deficit Disorder into the mix, and you have an eventual train wreck. At the same time, there's definitely a balancing act when it comes to planning. There have been numerous occasions where I would get carried away with the planning and end up losing interest in the story. I don't necessarily follow the outline or plans I come up with down to the letter and will allow some freedom if needed.

### SCP: What is the hardest challenge that you have faced as a writer?

**Jon:** Having Attention Deficit Disorder has been the main challenge. Sitting down and plugging away at a story takes a lot of willpower and focus, especially if it's a longer piece requiring a few days of writing to finish.

### SCP: In your opinion, what sets Marrow apart from other stories?

**Jon:** The creature is an original beast which brings with it a brand new set of questions for the reader regarding the creature—any weaknesses it may have, or if it can be stopped at all. Werewolves, vampires and zombies are some of horror's great monsters but at the same time, as readers, we know their weaknesses and how to stop them. That common knowledge takes a bit of the fear factor away.

### SCP: Are you reading anything right now, or have you read anything recently that is worth mentioning?

**Jon:** I recently finished Hunter Shea's *They Rise*, which was a fun thrill ride with lots of suspense and well written action scenes. I just picked up Ian Woodhead's *Scorched Flesh: Vine of the Earth Book 1*. I'm only a few pages in, but it already has me hooked.

### SCP: Who are some of your favorite authors? Favorite novels?

**Jon:** I'm definitely a fan of Stephen King and Clive Barker. *Salem's Lot* and *Rawhead Rex* are two pieces that I count as favorites and will read at least once a year.

To be honest, the authors who have made the most impact on me are comic writers. Scott Snyder, Grant Morrison and Alan Moore have spun some amazing tales that truly captivated my imagination. Snyder with *The Wake* and *Wytches*, Morrison with *Arkham Asylum: Serious House on Serious Earth* and Moore with *Swamp Thing*, *Watchmen* and *V for Vendetta*.

### SCP: How do you define success as a writer? Have you been successful?

**Jon:** Making money doing what you enjoy would be fantastic, but for me, success is a complete stranger telling you they read your story. Whether they liked it or not isn't a big factor, but we obviously want them to have liked it. The notion that someone was interested enough to read/buy/download your story and then tell you what they thought of it is an amazing feeling. And yes, in that regard, I would consider myself successful.

### SCP: Do you have words of wisdom about writing that you want to pass on to novelists and writers out there who are just starting out?

**Jon:** Learn to listen to editors. If they're suggesting to you that something should be changed in your submission, take a look and understand where they are coming from. They have the same goal as you: to put out the best possible piece.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. We've all been there before, starting out and not knowing where to go to make the first step. Most experienced authors are more than happy to answer a few questions for anyone just starting out.

Lastly, have fun with it.

### SCP: Anything else you'd like to share?

**Jon:** I would like to thank Sirens Call Publications for the interview and helping to launch my career back in 2012, the Pen of the Damned for constantly pushing me to improve as a writer and their continued support, and special thanks to Phrenic Press for releasing *Marrow*.

### Thank you Jon!

#### And now for a little selection from Marrow...

Once he was out in the cut, Tony felt at home. In a swift motion, he guided the harvester head toward a tree where it latched on to it. A high-powered chainsaw whined to life and cut the tree off at the base in a matter of seconds. The head then turned to its side while delimbing knives reached around the tree. Two feed-rollers hugged the tree tightly and then turned to feed the tree through the delimbing knives. Branches were sheared off and once the desired length of tree had been fed through, the feed-rollers stopped. The chainsaw then cut through the tree and the desired length fell to the ground. The process repeated until the entire tree had been cut. A harvester working full tilt was spellbinding to someone who could appreciate harvesting technology but it was horror to a tree hugger. To Tony, it was a beautiful sight; especially since the more trees he cut, the more he got paid.

Tony had been working the controls for close to two hours when he became aware of the pressure in his bladder. He bent forward and tried to position his legs in a way that wouldn't push on the bladder but it was no use. He maneuvered the harvester head gently on the ground and leaving the engine running, he opened the door of the cab and carefully made his way down the side of the harvester. He decided to hop down the last two feet to the ground but one of his boots landed unevenly on a freshly cut stump and he fell, twisting his ankle in the process.

"Son of a whore!" he yelled out his voice quickly being eaten up by the trees. He rotated his ankle and decided that it wasn't broken. He slowly stood up and tested it out. His ankle throbbed but it supported him. He unzipped his pants and began to urinate on the tree stump.

The sun was just above the tree line casting long shadows over the areas that Gordon had already cut. The fallen trees and stumps created mutated and deformed shadows giving the cut an uneasy character. Tony thought nothing of it though as he zipped up his pants and climbed back into the cab.

He drove the harvester closer to the tree line he was cutting and was about to grab onto a particularly thick and large spruce tree when the harvester suddenly lurched to the right side. A loud scraping sound pierced the cab and then the left side suddenly dropped back down to the ground.

"Holy shit!" Tony yelled as he opened the door to the cab and climbed back down.

Tony performed a quick walk around of the harvester and he soon found the cause of the lurching and scraping. A large rock had been dragged out of its resting place by the harvester and now sat just behind it with white and yellow paint scrapes over it. Nearly three quarters of the rock was covered with darkened soil and a few salamanders scurried off to find refuge elsewhere.

Tony climbed up into the cab and grabbed a flashlight. Jumping back down, he was careful not to land on a stump this time. He got on his hands and knees and shined the flashlight underneath the harvester. Tony could see deep scrapes and dents from the rock but there didn't seem to be any real damage. He looked back at the rock and something caught his eye.

Underneath the darkened soil, there appeared to be some scratches. He wiped off some of the soil and came to the realization that they weren't scratches but carvings. There were some figures drawn, one of which was very different from the others. Not wanting to waste too much time, he took his phone out and checked the GPS. He saved the location in his phone, took two pictures of the carvings before sliding the phone back in his pocket. He returned to the cab and resumed cutting.

The rhythmic bellowing of the engine helped Tony to get into the groove of cutting again and he forgot all about the rock. Darkness crept up fast and he switched on the floodlights attached to the outside of the harvester, giving him a good ten-foot radius of visibility. The rock he had driven over soon fell behind into darkness as he moved the large machine forward.

\*\*\*

A scale-covered hand with three fingers and a claw on each side grabbed onto the rock pulling the rest of its body out of the hole in which the rock used to rest. With no eyes, it existed in darkness, but a strong ammonia smell filled its sharp nostrils. Crawling on all fours with an incredible agility it soon came across the source of the ammonia smell. Pushing its nostrils close to the ground, the smell was recognized as human and it immediately became ravenous. A strange and loud noise piqued its interest. Cautiously, it began to search out the source of the sound...

### Marrow is available exclusively for purchase or borrow on Amazon



Available Exclusively on Amazon

### The Shifting Sands of a Dream | Maynard Blackoak

The midnight hour approached, bringing with it an uneasy feeling that squeezed Albert's mind. Dreams of late had become an ordeal of survival, much more than the usual nightmare that frightens a person into consciousness. These dreams were more of a horrifying struggle against a terrible man beast stalking him throughout the night in his sleep. Though the hideous creature had yet to cause him any harm, in the back of his mind he knew it was only a matter of time before its hungry jaws feasted on his slumbering flesh.

Mustn't sleep. He instructed with desperation in his head. I've got to hang on until dawn. I can't face that dream, that beast again. I just can't.

With a deep sigh, Albert felt himself acquiescing to the fatigue smothering him with a heavy blanket of exhaustion. His eyelids seemed as if an anchor was pulling them shut. He attempted to stay the tide of sleep by propping his eyes open with fingers but even they proved no match for the pall of slumber falling over him. As hands fell to their sides and eyelids sank, he realized sleep was overtaking him. The man beast would be hunting in his dreams once more.

With the last vestige of consciousness, his hand reached for the alarm clock next to his bed. If he could not avoid sleep, perhaps he could limit its length and reduce the amount of time given to his would be assailant.

The alarm will wake me up. I can avoid that thing for an hour until it does. He assured himself as sleep carried him off into a terrifying world.

\*\*\*

Swept away into the vortex of a dream, Albert quickly found himself outside his house, staring at a full moon that dripped blood red beams of light on the land. There was no sign of the creature who had tormented his sleep yet there remained an awareness of its savage eyes watching him from the cover of darkness. A brief notion to dart back inside the house and barricade the door leapt into his brain but without knowing why, he knew it would be to no avail. He would once again be forced to use all his wiles to elude the dreadful man beast.

I know it's out there somewhere, watching me, waiting to get me. I need to find a place to hide that I haven't tried yet. He opined, scanning the area for a place to elude the creature.

The sudden cracking of a branch followed by the sound of rustling brush set his feet scampering toward a wooded area across the dirt road in front of his house. A hasty backward glance brought the silhouette of the foul and loathsome beast into sight. The shadow it cast was that of a man but the comparison ended there, at least in Albert's mind. He had never seen the man beast, just its shadowy form. Nevertheless, in his thoughts, there was a knowing that the appearance of the murderous creature was gruesome and terrifying.

Covering ground as fast as his legs could carry him, he paused to check on the man beast's progress before entering the mass of twisted elms and gnarled oaks. The creature's gait was slow and deliberate but the distance between them had closed to less than ten yards. Albert puzzled over the perplexing situation for a brief moment, and then darted into the cover of the woods.

Zigzagging around trees, trying to shake the man beast, he took frequent glances toward his pursuer. Each check of the creature showed its pace to be that of a slow lumbering gait yet the gap continued to close. Even more troubling was the beast had seemed to know every twist and turn Albert made before he made it. Each time he changed directions, he noticed the beast had already countered likewise. It was as if the man beast could read his thoughts.

In the face of the baffling and discouraging circumstances, Albert persevered, attempting to shake the terror that stalked him ever closer with each granule of sand that slipped in his dream. Sweat saturated his terrified brow as his lungs screamed with every heart pounding breath. His legs, fatigued and sore, began to slow. The only hope to which he could cling was the alarm clock sitting next to his bed, knowing that in a very short time it would blare an annoying sound, certain to disturb his fright filled slumber.

Urging his mind to will his body to continue the flight, he pressed on weaving his way through trees and brush. The grotesque man beast stalked less than five yards away, still closing the gap despite never changing its pace from that of a slow-footed lumber.

How the hell does he keep getting closer? I run. He just walks. It's not possible. He wondered in thought. That damn alarm better be going off pretty damn quick or I'm going to be up shit creek with a monster on my ass.

Another glance at the shadowed man beast revealed it had come to a halt. It stood in its tracks, regarding him in such a stilled manner that caused Albert to tremble. The distance had closed to less than four yards. Perhaps, he thought, that was close enough for the beast to pounce.

"Damn!" Albert cursed aloud, noticing that even at a standstill; the man beast was still gaining on him. "This isn't possible. How much longer until that damn alarm goes off."

"The alarm will not be going off anytime soon. I made sure of that just as you went to sleep," a voice with a hauntingly familiar ring to it responded from where the man beast stood.

Taken aback, he slowed his gait to a walk. The beast had not spoken in the other dreams and its voice was known to him. Still, he simply could not match it to anyone he knew.

"Who are you? Do I know you?" Albert quizzed the creature in a guarded tone.

"You know who I am, Albert," the man beast replied. "Why don't you come over here so you can see who I am?"

"Uh. No thanks. I'm pretty sure I'm safer not knowing."

"But you've known me your whole life."

Albert came to a halt. "There are only a handful of people I've known all my life and you don't sound like any of them."

The man beast took a deliberate step forward. "Then you're leaving out someone."

Albert stepped backwards awkwardly, nearly tripping over a fallen limb. "Even so, none of them would be chasing me through the woods trying to hurt me."

The creature released a sinister laugh. "Are you sure I want to hurt you? I mean, have I ever done anything except chase you?"

Albert mulled over the man beast's questions for several moments. It was true the creature had not harmed him but it was also true that all his dreams had abruptly ended before it had the opportunity. It had doggedly pursued him for several nights in a row. If its intent was not to do harm, then why did it persist with the chase?

"Are you going to hurt me?" He inquired with a smirk.

"Obviously," the man beast replied in an incredulous tone.

"Then you're going to have to catch me," Albert avowed and then turned to run. "I've

avoided you until I woke up before. I can damn sure do it again."

Having resumed zipping through the woods, Albert recalled a place he had not visited in several years. It was a shallow cave along the bank of a dried creek bed only he knew about. He had discovered it one day while out hunting wild turkeys and never told another soul about it. If there was a safe place to hide until he awoke, that was it.

He adjusted his course and cast a backward glance to check the gap between him and his pursuer. To his amazement, the man beast was nowhere in sight. He stopped briefly and thoroughly scoured the area for his antagonist. Still, there was no trace of the creature. Had he managed to escape its pursuit or was it merely toying with him? Albert could only assume the latter to be the case and recommence running toward the cave.

Not far from the dried creek bed, something caught his shin just below the knee, sending him tumbling face first into the ground. He rolled over in time to see the shadowy form of the man beast pounce on his chest. Thick streams of frothy saliva dripped from its mouth, landing on his terror-stricken face but he still could not see the creature's appearance through the dark shadow that shrouded it.

With a savage fury, the man beast began tearing into Albert's flesh with its teeth. Blood spurted in nearly every direction as he screamed in pain. His face twisted in agony and splotched with blood, he pleaded with the assailant for mercy. The creature issued a fiendish laugh.

"I think it's time you find out who I am," it stated with a devilish lilt.

The man beast craned its neck, positioning its head inside a blood red moonbeam. Slowly the shroud of shadow began to melt away, revealing the last face its victim had expected to see.

\*\*\*

Albert awoke in a strange room. Several leather straps held him pinned to a bed. Intense pain radiated from several places on his body and there was a strong taste of blood in his mouth. As he struggled against the binds that prevented him from moving much more than a fraction of an inch, a nurse strolled into the room, carrying a chart. A sardonic grin slowly crept along her lips. "It seems you had a bad episode in your sleep last night, Mr. Fish. You attacked yourself and ate your own flesh."

Her eyes blazed with contempt and the tone in her voice dripped with approbation as she completely ceased putting up a phony façade of caring. "It still isn't what you deserve for what you did to all those innocent children, you sickening old bastard."

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Maynard Blackoak is an author living in Oklahoma. The greatest influences in his writing are the works of Poe and Dickens. He draws inspiration from the sounds and shadows of the night and processes them through the splintered windmill of his mind to create his tales.

Twitter: <u>@MaynardBlackoak</u> Facebook: <u>Maynard Blackoak</u>



### The Clean House | Alex Woolf

You just cannot get the staff these days. The latest cleaner the agency sent me is fat. I ask you. How can a fat guy clean? I stand there in the kitchen watching him as he fetches the mop and the bucket and the floor cleaner. His bulges are visible beneath the fabric of the white cleanroom suit I supplied him with. It looks like it might split each time he bends down. He starts mopping the floor and as he mops he says: "This place, Mister Beamish, it's so clean. I could eat my dinner off this floor. Are you sure you need me here?"

I don't like it when they talk, especially when they talk such patent nonsense. They don't understand. None of them do. They can't see the filth. They say, *Oh, Mr. Beamish, this house is so clean. I can see my face in the tiles! I could eat my dinner off the floor!* Or maybe they *can* see it, but they choose not to, because they're lazy. Yes, they're lazy, and stupid. People who clean for others are invariably the lowest form of life. They're the flops, the failures. They've probably lived in the dirt so long they don't even know what clean looks like.

"Of course this house isn't clean," I tell him. "It's filthy. Can't you smell it?"

He stops mopping – which I do not like – and sniffs the air. "Yeah, now you mention it, I can smell something. You got a sewage plant nearby by any chance?"

A sewage plant. What utter rot they talk!

"Just – just get on with your work," I tell him. "When you've done the kitchen, do the lounge, then the hall, then the bathroom and the study and the bedroom. In that order. And remember I'm paying the agency by the hour, so no breaks. None at all."

\*\*\*

That night I have the dream again. Something has come into my house. It arrives like a syrupy black shadow that slowly spreads itself across my walls and floor. I can hear it and it's the papery whisper of millions of fly maggots, newly hatched in the putrefying innards of a corpse. I can smell it and it's that same corpse, after a week spent in the heat-trap of a car.

I climb out of bed and swiftly cross the polished tiles of my bedroom. I enter the bathroom, pull the cord, and cool white porcelain gleams back at me under the halogen spots. In the hall, everything looks crisp and fresh, like a brand-new supermarket aisle before the food and the customers arrive with all the germs they carry in with them. That's the way it looks, at least, but my ears and nose tell me different. My floors are all tile and strip pine. My surfaces are marble and granite and imitation leather. They are cleaned every day. Dirt cannot find a home here, and yet it has. I can smell it. I can hear it, like some noxious brew bubbling away beneath my feet.

The bubbles turn to rumbles, and it makes me think of a filthy giant baby blowing muddy water through a straw, or some dreadful, gassy stomach. In the kitchen, the taps on the sink are vibrating. Filthy, stinking brown water is welling up through the plug hole, spilling out across the stainless steel. I can hear myself start to whine. It's my panic-sound. *Go back!* But the foul liquid keeps on rising.

\*\*\*

I wake up. It's morning. The sunshine is pouring through the slats of my blinds, chucking razor-sharp slivers of dazzling light across my white bedspread, my white floor tiles. Are those dust motes afloat in the sunbeams? Where are they coming from? This house has no opening windows. The outside air is filtered and purified by the A/C system before it can enter. I have a vestibule that works like an airlock. There is no carpet in this house, no upholstery with a nap, so it can't be fibers. I'm in the midst of pondering this conundrum when it occurs to me that the doorbell is ringing. It's been ringing for a while.

The cleaner.

I put on my disposable paper gown and slippers, pad into the hall and press the intercom. There he is, beaming inanely into the door camera. I buzz him in, then go and shower.

There's another shower-room adjoining the vestibule for the cleaners to use. In there he will find a set of disposable undergarments, a cleanroom suit and a clear, polythene bag for his clothing.

I'm in the hall waiting for him as he comes out the vestibule. His fat pink face is framed by the elasticized hood of the cleanroom suit. "Did you shower?" I ask him.

"Sure did. Just like yesterday, Mr. Beamish. I'm clean as a baby."

I'm repulsed by the image – dirty, stinky, germ-laden things, babies, forever soiling themselves.

"You didn't do a good job yesterday," I tell him. "The house still smells to high heaven. And I saw dust motes in my bedroom just now."

"Dust motes, Mr. Beamish? You can't do anything about that. That's just dead skin cells coming off your body."

Dead skin cells. What complete bilge!

"I'll have you know, I abrade myself with pumice every day. There are no dead skin cells on me!"

He cocks his head and studies me in this queer way that I don't appreciate one bit. "Yeah, that would explain your shine, Mr. Beamish. You look almost..."

I wait, dry-lipped and utterly appalled, for whatever it is he thinks I almost look.

"... polished. Yeah. Like one of your worktops."

"Shut-up!" I snap. "Just shut-up and get on with your work! I don't pay the agency to be insulted by people like you."

"Sorry, Mr. Beamish."

I watch his fat backside waddle towards the cleaning cupboard.

"Come back here, I want you to use a new product today," I tell him, indicating a package that arrived yesterday in the post. I split the box's taped seam with a scalpel, haul out a 5-litre can and shove it into his arms.

"Chem-Kill Industrial Strength – All Purpose," he reads from the label. "O-M-G, Mr. Beamish, are you serious? Look at these ingredients: monoethanolamine, butoxyethanol, caustic trimethylmethane. This is chemical warfare in a bottle. It's making my nose bleed just looking at it."

"You will use it on all surfaces," I tell him.

"If you say so, Mr. Beamish."

\*\*\*

That night I have the same dream. Something has entered my house. What is it? A monster? I don't know, but it's the essence of everything I abhor. It appears like a shadow that coats my rooms with its greasy film, making everything slightly sticky. I can feel it dragging on the soles of my feet as I walk across my bedroom floor. In the hall the wall lights reveal a fine coating of dust, fibers and hair adhering to the surfaces. It's nauseating to see the glossy black smoothness of my polypropylene table and chair roughened by this visible crust.

The smell – which is always present in my house like a troubled spirit, but usually quite faint – is now intense enough to burn the hairs off my nostrils. The fat cleaner must be to blame. He has brought foul matter into my home. I specifically told him not to use my toilet except for urination, and to re-bleach the bowl after every visit. If he wants to defecate, he should do it off the premises. He will suffer for his disobedience.

The rumbling starts. It's like last time, only much worse. It's an arrhythmic thudding, a hollow discordant clanging, and it's emanating, as before, from the kitchen. I rush in to find the taps on the sink are shaking as if in the grip of an invisible maniac. As I'm standing there, a frightful farting noise starts up beneath my feet and a huge brown fountain erupts from the sink. Untold quantities of rich, coppery, vile-smelling liquid gushes over the worktops and cabinets and cascades onto the floor. There it pools on my white tiles, like the watery anal discharge of some sickly subsurface leviathan. The smell is indescribable as the pool spreads towards my feet. I gag, I whimper...

\*\*\*

I wake up. The sun lies in neat slices on my white bedspread and my white floor tiles. The sticky residue of my nightmare is gone. The fetid, meaty stench has shrunk to the usual faint whiff, a nostril-wrinkler, no more. I stumble to the kitchen, scene of last night's shitquake, and stare at the pipe work beneath the sink. I tap it gingerly with a slippered foot. Everything appears normal.

The doorbell rings.

The cleaner. All this has to be his fault. I press the buzzer to let him in. When he emerges from the vestibule ten minutes later, I pounce.

"Did you do your business in my toilet yesterday?"

"No, Mr Beamish. You told me not to, so I didn't."

"I don't believe you. Nothing else could account for the stink in this house."

"You may have a problem with your drains," he tells me. "Perhaps there's a blockage. You should call a plumber."

Plumber. What tripe he talks.

"I do not need a plumber. What I need is a cleaner who actually cleans instead of spending his day filling my house with the noxious emanations of his bowels."

"That's not fair, Mr. Beamish. I work very hard for you. Every day I come here and scrub and polish your perfectly clean house. Last night I even lost a clump of my hair in the shower, thanks to that toxic cleaning agent you made me use, but you won't hear me complain. No, sir. I show you respect. And perhaps you ought to show *me* a little respect, too, and lay off some of the abuse. It might help our relationship."

Relationship. What utter arse-dribble.

"I don't want a relationship with you, you fat fool. I just want you to clean! Understand!"

His face looks like it's been slapped. "Yes, Mr. Beamish," he says quietly, and he wobbles off to the cleaning cupboard.

\*\*\*

That night, in my dream, I cannot even enter the kitchen. I cower at its borders, watching as the entire room boils with liquid excreta. It froths up from the sink like hot brown lava. It spreads its hideous gloopiness across the countertops, spilling over the sides in viscous curtains to form a lake the color of burnt sienna. Steam is rising off the surface and I'm crying and choking from the reek. "Go away!" I retch. "Leave me alone!" But the horror is unending, as if hell itself has uncorked its anus and disgorged a thousand years of pent-up diarrhea into my kitchen. "Why…?" I croak. "Why me? Why here?"

"This is where I live, Mr. Beamish!" a voice thunders from the innards of my pipes. The voice is loud and deep, but it sounds exactly like that lard-ass of a cleaner.

"This is my house, you devil!" I have to scream this because the whole house is reverberating with a bass-note hum that's growing more powerful by the second.

"You should take care where you build, sir!" rumbles the voice. "You didn't check who might dwell beneath."

"You have no right! I try to keep my house clean and you pervade it with your infernal stink."

By now I'm clinging to the door frame, which is shaking like everything else to the thudding, pounding tremors that seem about to shatter the foundations of my home.

"Clean is an illusion, my friend!" roars the voice in the pipes. "Clean is a flimsy citadel built on feces! Clean is your refuge from reality. Climb back down into the cesspit where you belong!"

Then the kitchen floor starts to crumble. The tiles, slick under their smelly brown glaze, crack and fall into a hollow chasm that has opened up beneath them. The noise is immense – grinding, crushing, pulverizing. Clouds of choking dust drift through the miasma. Finally, when the din has stopped clobbering my senses, I open my eyes to find the kitchen has disappeared and I am dangling over a swamp of shit.

Oh no! No no no! I slap my hand over my nose and mouth. Nothing my nasal receptors have been subjected to thus far can remotely compare to this!

There's a buzz about the place. Peering down into the swamp I see billions of tiny glittering wings and shiny bodies feasting on its walls. A vibrating megalopolis of flies.

There's a small brown lake at the bottom. The cleaner's fat face floats to its surface. He's lying in the lake on his back, smiling up at me. Soupy brown water froths out of his mouth as he burbles: "Come on in, Mr. Beamish, the water's lovely."

\*\*\*

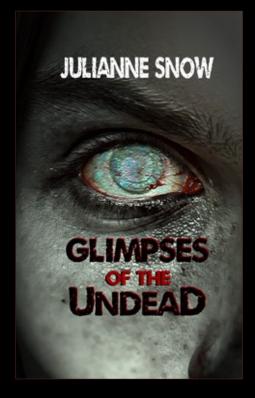
I wake up. The sunlight is dazzling. It shines down on the stinking swamp where I've lived for so long. Somewhere nearby lies the corpse of the man I killed. I can see his fat face protruding above the mud. The flies are buzzing around what's left of him. I close my eyes and try to go back to sleep, wishing only to get back to my dream of the clean house.

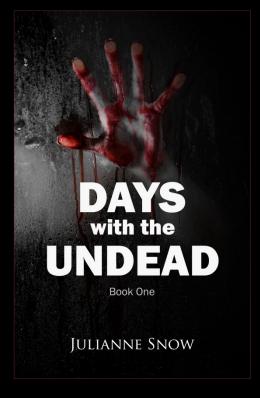
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Alex Woolf is the author of 16 commercially published novels. They include *Soul Shadows*, a horror novel about cannibalistic shadows, shortlisted for the 2014 Red Book Award, and *Aldo Moon*, about a Victorian ghost-hunter. He is also the author of numerous short stories. His most recent novella, published by Sirens Call Publications, is *The Remington*, about a typewriter that develops a will of its own.

Twitter: <u>@RealAlexWoolf</u>
Website: <u>alexwoolf.co.uk</u>

# Days with the Undead: Book One & Glimpses of the Undead Julianne Snow

### Available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and iTunes







AVAILABLE ON AMAZON, BARNES & NOBLE, KOBO, AND ITUNES

#### The Bendy Man! | Nicky P Gardiner

Jacob ran. He ran out of the cabin and jumped over the intervening hedge. He caught the bushes with his left foot and felt his shoe tug off but didn't turn to retrieve it. He had to get away. His heart was pounding as he got to his car. He fumbled his keys, fighting to get them in the lock, casting his gaze all around himself. All he could see were the trees of the forest and his remote cabin he had fled from. That had been a place he holidayed, a place he felt was always safe. He couldn't see IT yet. The weird thing was he had seen IT every night for the last two weeks, yet here it was in the middle of the day. The cold clarity of day was all the more chilling as it didn't hide the nightmare. Finally, he got in the car and as he turned his keys in the ignition he spared the cabin one last look; the door was open and he could see straight inside. At first he didn't see IT until it turned face-on, twisting where its waist should be to face him so that its top half came into view. The BENDY MAN - that's how he referred to it in his waking hours, and to all that would listen. But they called him mad, so he had stopped telling them of the night terrors. It smiled at him, its lower portion turned to face him going from what appeared to be a slim line, less than a finger wide, to the full shape of a human. It moved towards him, but moved in a more fluid motion than the human body was capable of, as if it had no joints like a human. Its legs simply bent out towards Jacob, the body following like a weird wave. Even its arms and hands followed the same weird fluid pattern; its extra-long digits making its hands look even creepier.

Jacob hit the gas, tearing off as he floored the accelerator and racing away until the creature could not be seen in his rear view mirror. He realized he was gripping the steering wheel far too tightly and breathed deeply in a conscious effort to relax, but panicked again when he saw the bendy man unfold from behind the rear of the car and slip through the rear window somehow it had gotten under the car.

Jacob screamed and awoke sweating.

The Bendy Man heard the man called 'Jacob' awake screaming. It was like music to his flattened ears. He heard him prattle his concerns wide-eyed to his wife, almost hysterical, and it smiled to itself. She thought it was a bad dream. She thought it would pass, and she urged him to calm down. But it wouldn't pass. In truth, Jacob had some sixth sense, that much was clear to the Bendy Man. It would seem and he could sense him under the bed. If Jacob would look he wouldn't see him, for he lay flat, holding on to the underside of the man's bed on the bottom of their mattress, mere inches from where they lay asleep. He could hear their breathing. He grinned wickedly. Originally he planned on just killing the man, maybe his wife as well, but when he realized this one could sense him, he decided to prolong it and to savor the moment. He had lain there, night after night, terrorizing the man. It was delicious; like playing with one's food, it was to be enjoyed and not rushed. Of course, The Bendy Man was a title given to him by this victim. He'd had a name once but it was irrelevant. He had been much like Jacob, having a wife and kids. He had claimed the others that had laughed at what had happened - they'd all died screaming or crying. It wasn't so funny to them all now. They had all stood and seen his body. He'd died badly in life, literally squashed flat on a building site when a crane had dropped a skip

full of material on him that had weighed tons. He was left a bloody bag of skin and broken bones on the floor. Most workers were horrified, but Jacob and the others had laughed. Maybe it was nervous laughter as they hadn't laughed at the time, but a few weeks later... that's when the first jokes were made in the canteen, it had been Pancake Day and someone had made a jibe about his unfortunate demise.

"Hey! These look just like someone we used to work with," they had mocked.

It was like a torrent after that, everyone out-doing each other. Jacob, being the witty one, had taken the lead. That's why he was last to die. That's why he had to suffer. Bendy Man was not aware what his own name had been in life, not anymore, so he was happy for the title given to him. He was not aware of when he first came into being. He was aware, however, of what they had all said. Jacob was crying again and Bendy Man smiled; it would be a long night.

Bendy Man watched Jacob go to work. He was having a bad day and he'd barely slept last night. When he eventually nodded off, Bendy Man reached one of his flat arms up from under the bed; his long fingers touched the sleeping man's face, startling him awake before the offending hand had slipped back below the bed into the darkness. As Jacob readied his work gear and flask, Bendy Man slipped out to the car and slid underneath, gripping on to the flat surface. It was not long until they arrived at the work site - the site that had ended Bendy Man's mortal life. Bendy Man felt anger. Not at what had happened, no, but at the things that had been said. It was dark outside as it was only 5am, and as Jacob, his prey, checked in to the site, Bendy Man made his way to where he knew he would be heading.

He waited until Jacob made his way to the roof of the building. He had watched him do this like a ritual every day. It was perfect up here, all dark and alone. Jacob only came here for a sly cigarette as he wasn't meant to smoke anywhere on site. Bendy Man watched Jacob look out at the dark sky, fighting against the sleep that tugged at him. It was as he made his way to the steps to go back down that the Bendy Man unfurled himself from near the door, blocking his escape.

"Hello Jacob", he hissed.

"Hi..." Jacob began, thinking it was another co-worker before halting. He backed up, recoiling in terror. The cigarette fell from his mouth into a puddle on the roof top.

"OH GOD! NO!"

Bendy Man nodded, savoring the taste of the man's fear.

Jacob pinched himself as if wanting to awake from a nightmare, and began to cry and whimper. When he realized he was actually awake, the big burly builder lost all composure. As he realized that the thing that had haunted him for nights on end was made manifest in the real world, he pissed his pants.

"Not so funny now, is it Jacob?"

"What?" Jacob whimpered back tears streamed down his cheeks.

"You LAUGHED at me," screamed Bendy Man, raising his arms. They curled unnaturally like the broken flattened things they were.

"What? No! Who the Hell are you?" Jacob said.

"WHAT? YOU don't know? You of ALL people who mocked me and made my death a laughing matter!" Bendy Man clenched his elongated alien-like fists together in rage.

"Jack?" Jacob asked timidly. "Is that really you? But you're dead?"

Jack, yes! Bendy Man remembered, Jack had been my name. But then he remembered the other taunts; FLAT JACK, JACK SPLAT and a host of other cruel names. He wasn't remembered at all for his life, as a co-worker but only for the nature of his demise.

Raging, he ran at Jacob who backed up away from the nightmare that loomed towards him. He went too far, and in his haste fell over the rail. Jack looked over to see the man holding onto a protruding scaffold pole with one hand straining to hold on as his body hung over empty space - they were at least thirty stories up.

"Help me! Jack, please?"

Jack leant over, bending not at the waist but gradually all along the length of his flattered form but giving the same desired effect. He looked into Jacobs eyes.

"Jack died. There is only the Bendy Man". With that, his elongated fingers gradually bent those of Jacobs back, starting at the smallest digit counting them "1...2...3..."

Jacob fell screaming. Bendy Man watched him go, smiling widely when he heard the crash as he hit the floor below.

"Well, that wiped the smile off his face," he said, relishing the triumph and thrill of the kill.

He would kill again, of course. It brought him such pleasure. And there were always those who deserved to die. Those who deserved nightmares. Those who deserved the Bendy Man under their beds...

"The Bendy Man is in your head"

"The Bendy Man hides under your bed"

"Here he comes you're going to die"

"So he better not hear you cry"

"The Bendy Man is in your dreams"

"The Bendy Man can taste your screams"

"The Bendy Man is under YOUR bed..."

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Nicky P Gardiner is the author of a series of ghost novels called the 'Deadly Shades' series. Book 1 'The Showman and the Shade' was written whilst Nicky was chronically ill. He has since published book 2 'Shades of Vengeance' and is working on the third installment in the series. Local news papers described his writing "A stylish storyteller with a strong ability at creating characters."

Twitter: @NickyandDavina



#### Homecoming at Hemlock High | Jill Hand

Fiona was making a poster for Friday's pep rally when Chrissy Bartlett, Hemlock High's perky head cheerleader, came bounding up to her in the school cafeteria. "That looks great," Chrissy said, watching as Fiona used a black magic marker to color the robe of the school's mascot – a hooded skeleton that held a sickle in its bony fingers.

"This is going to be the most awesome pep rally ever," Chrissy bubbled.

To demonstrate how awesome it would be, she shook her black and orange pom-poms and turned a cartwheel.

Mrs. Victor, the cafeteria monitor, poked her head out of the kitchen where she'd been chatting with the cooks. These were three sisters who wore tall, pointed black hats as they stirred the day's special in a bubbling cauldron. Mrs. Victor told Chrissy there was no horseplay allowed in the cafeteria. "If you want to jump around and turn cartwheels, do it outside," she said. "Just look out for zombies. There were some hanging around out by the soccer field earlier."

Chrissy tossed her shoulder-length blonde hair and gave her pom-poms a shake. "I can't go outside. It's too sunny. I'm a vampire, remember?"

Mrs. Victor shook her head in exasperation. "Sorry, hon, I plumb forgot that you got bitten by that mysterious Romanian exchange student who turned out to be a vampire."

"That's okay, Mrs. V. Gee, wouldn't it be awful if zombies crash the pep rally? They're so gross. What do you think, Fiona?"

Fiona Creel woke up with a start, blinking confusedly. She'd nodded off in the middle of the day and had a vivid dream, about Chrissy of all people. Fiona was seated in the comfortable leather chair behind the desk in her office at her renovated eighteenth-century farmhouse in Colts Neck, New Jersey. It was an attractive room, one that she felt did justice to her status as a best-selling author of young adult fiction. The antique mahogany desk was wide and gleaming. The floorboards were the original pumpkin pine, waxed to a high gloss. On the walls were framed posters advertising the Hemlock High books – five of them so far. Perched on the edge of a wing chair sat Courtney, Fiona's assistant, who was anxiously regarding her, pen in hand, a legal pad in her lap.

Courtney repeated, "I said, 'What do you think?' Is it a good idea?"

"Sorry, I must have dozed off," Fiona told her, sitting up straighter. "What were you saying?"

Courtney said she had an idea for a new Hemlock High book, one in which bullying would be the central theme. "The shape-shifters could be bullying the witches, or vice versa. What do you think?" She looked at Fiona half-expectantly, half-fearfully. Courtney was a mousy little thing with no self-confidence, which suited Fiona just fine. Fiona liked being around people who lacked self-confidence. It made her shine that much brighter. And Courtney, with her dull brown hair cut in an unattractive pudding-bowl bob, and her Shetland sweaters and knee-length plaid skirts that made her resemble a frumpy librarian straight out of a nineteen-fifties comedy, was valuable to Fiona because she had no idea how smart she really was.

Fiona pursed her lips and put her head to one side as she pretended to consider the idea, although she knew immediately that it was brilliant. Bullying was a hot topic right now. She nodded her head grudgingly. "Possibly. Why don't you write something up and I'll take a look at it. Do you think you can have the first three chapters for me by Monday?"

Courtney looked as if she was about to explode with excitement. "Really? You like it? Oh, my gosh! I'll work on it through the weekend," she babbled.

Of course you will, Fiona thought. You don't have anything better to do on the weekends.

She'd steal it. That went without saying. She'd rewrite whatever Courtney gave her, making small changes here and there, and send it off to her publisher, who would ask for a completed manuscript in six months, if Fiona thought she could have it ready by then. That would be no problem, not with the eager Courtney at her beck and call. Fiona stole all of Courtney's ideas, not that Courtney minded. She was too much in awe of her employer to mind. Fiona wore beautiful clothes and she knew all sorts of famous people, other writers whose work Courtney had studied in college, but movie stars and musicians too. Fiona had allowed her to serve canapés and drinks at one of her parties once, and she'd met Bruce Springsteen. It had been the high point of her life.

Fiona Creel was well aware that Courtney had a girl crush on her, and she used it to her advantage, as she used everything valuable that came her way. Fiona was the author of the hugely successful Hemlock High books for young adults. Teens were crazy about the Hemlock High series, in which adolescent werewolves and vampires and witches formed cliques and went on dates and grappled with homework assignments and peer pressure and all the other problems faced by regular high school students.

The Hemlock High books had made Fiona a wealthy woman. The spin-off merchandise: t-shirts, notebooks, water bottles, action figures, and so on – had made her even wealthier. A movie deal was in the works that would make it so she never had to write another Hemlock High book again if she didn't feel like it, and she definitely didn't feel like it. She was starting to detest Hemlock High, with its cavalcade of smarmy or brooding denizens. Chrissy Bartlett, the bouncy vampire cheerleader, was particularly loathsome, with her peppy school spirit. She wished she'd never created her, not that she had, not really.

Chrissy had come to her fully formed almost ten years previously, when Fiona was an editor at Shivers, a now-defunct publisher whose specialty was paranormal romance books for teens and new adults. A woman named Suzanne Silver had submitted a manuscript about a high school where the students and teachers all were supernatural beings. The writing was amateurish, but Fiona thought the idea was a winner. She sent Ms. Silver an email thanking her for her submission, and informing her that it wasn't what they were looking for at the current time. Then she used the manuscript as the basis for the first Hemlock High book, *Welcome to Hemlock High*. It was an immediate success, appearing at just the right time, after the popular Sweet Valley High series and just as the Harry Potter books were starting to catch on. It helped that the fictional Hemlock High was located in Connecticut and not in England, or the comparisons to

Hogwarts would have been too obvious. It also helped that although there was a certain amount of gore, the general mood was light and playful.

She'd been afraid that Suzanne Silver would contact her and accuse her of plagiarism, but she never had. And really, when it came down to it, she hadn't plagiarized. The words were all her own, she'd just used someone else's plot. How did the saying go? Good artists copy, great artists steal? Fiona considered herself to be a great artist.

And now she'd dozed off in the middle of the day and had a dream about Hemlock High. How irritating. She asked Courtney to bring her a cup of coffee, black, one sugar. Courtney scurried off in the direction of the kitchen as Fiona went online to respond to an invitation from the owner of a book store in Red Bank to have a book signing for her latest creation, *Hemlock* 

High Halloween Carnival. Fiona enjoyed doing book signings, all those adoring fans telling her how wonderful she was, some of them shyly presenting her with little gifts, most of which she later either threw away or gave to Courtney. Being admired was what Fiona enjoyed best about being an author.

There was another email, one inviting her to her high school reunion, her class's twenty-fifth. She deleted it without replying. She hadn't liked high school. The girls were catty and the boys, for the most part, were sweaty lumps. Then there'd been the incident with Mr. DiLorenzo in her junior year. He taught geometry, a subject that Fiona disliked nearly as much as she disliked chemistry. Fortunately, Mr. Cathcart, the chemistry teacher, was a sweetheart. He gave her an A, despite the fact that she failed all the tests. She smiled, thinking about how grateful poor old Mr. Cathcart had been for a few kisses and cuddles. Their mutually beneficial alliance was their little secret. She'd been fond of him in the way she would have been fond of a slavishly devoted old dog that enjoyed having its tummy rubbed. Mr. DiLorenzo was another story.

She'd found a copy of the geometry mid-term exam next to the mimeograph machine. That was back when schools still had mimeograph machines. She memorized the answers and got an A, causing the teacher to become suspicious. He asked her to stay after class and accused her of cheating, which she angrily denied. When he told her that he didn't believe her, she decided to take drastic action. Mr. DiLorenzo was young, and he sometimes made what could be considered mildly inappropriate remarks to his female students. Fiona took a deep breath, untucked her blouse from the waistband of her acid-washed jeans and mussed her hair. Then she ran from the classroom. "He grabbed me!" she screamed. That was the end of Mr. DiLorenzo. It was her word against his. Despite his heated denials, everyone knew that he sometimes said things to the girls that were a little bit, well, suggestive. They had a substitute teacher for the rest of the year and Fiona's final grade was a C-minus, not great, but not too bad, all things considered.

Another email came in, this one from Cathy Burgess, one of the few friends from high school with whom Fiona kept in touch. Cathy wanted to know if Fiona would be going to the reunion. She hoped she was. They had a lot of catching up to do. Fiona wondered if Cathy would be so eager to see her if she knew that Fiona was having an affair with her husband. She considered it to be Cathy's fault. She'd let herself go, and all the cheesecake and ice cream that she liked to eat had gone straight to her thighs. Fiona's thighs were admirably slim. She wrote

back and said that she wished she could go, but she had a previous engagement. *In bed, with your husband,* she thought, smiling, as she pressed send. High school reunions were boring. All those aging people sizing each other up, deciding where they stood in the great game of life. Fiona didn't need that. She knew she was a winner.

She went upstairs to her room to take a nap. She had a date that evening (not with Cathy's husband, with someone else's husband) and she wanted to look refreshed. Arranging herself under the duvet atop her king-size sleigh bed, she closed her eyes and drifted off.

She was in the school cafeteria again. A cute guy approached her, carrying a skateboard under one arm. It was Trey Thatcher, a mixture of nerd (he was president of the debate club) and bad boy (he'd stolen a car once, back at his old school, which had been located in the inner city.) Trey regarded her with caramel-brown eyes and purred, "Hey, Fiona. I was wondering. Are you going to the homecoming dance?"

Something wasn't right. There was something off about him. One of his eyes pointed in the wrong direction and, oh, God! There were big black stitches encircling his neck!

"Maybe I should mention that I'm a zombie now," he said, giving her a sloppy smile, one eye pointing to the wall and the other regarding Fiona in a way that she found extremely unpleasant. "The zombies got me when I was skateboarding in the park. They grabbed me just like you said that Mr. DiLorenzo grabbed you, and ripped my head clean off. Bummer, huh?"

Fiona bolted for the doors, her shoes clattering on the linoleum. Mrs. Victor shouted that there was no running in the cafeteria, but she ignored her and pushed through the swinging doors, skidding into the hallway. *I'm dreaming again*, she thought. *Wake up!* 

Trey came shambling after her. "Fiona? Do you want to go to the dance with me? I promise I won't eat your brain."

A severe-looking woman was studying the announcements tacked to the bulletin board outside the cafeteria. She turned to Fiona and asked, "Is that boy bothering you?"

Wake up! Wake up! Fiona thought frantically.

"I'll have a word with him, if he's bothering you," the woman said. "I don't believe we've met. I'm Suzanne Silver, the new principal."

Suzanne Silver. That was the name of the woman whose idea for the Hemlock High books Fiona had stolen. Fiona stared at her, noticing that she flickered in and out of her vision, one moment transparent, the next solid. *You're dreaming. Wake up!* she thought.

"Full disclosure, because I believe in being open and honest with my students, even nasty little thieves like you," Suzanne Silver said, giving her a cold smile. "I'm a ghost. I was hit by a car and killed when I was riding my bicycle yesterday. When I got over the initial shock, I realized that being a ghost could be useful. I could punish you for stealing my book by haunting your dreams. Oh, yes, I knew you stole my book. I went to a lawyer about it, but he said there was nothing I could do. Now I'm doing something, you bitch. Every time you dream from now on, you'll be at dear old Hemlock High. Forever."

Fiona sat bolt upright in bed, her heart hammering in her chest. She was drenched in sweat and the duvet was all bunched up. Someone was knocking insistently on the bedroom door. "Are you okay? I thought I heard you cry out."

Courtney, Fiona thought, embarrassed. She must have heard me all the way downstairs.

The door swung open and someone entered the room. Fiona squinted in puzzlement. Had Courtney dyed her hair blonde, or was it a wig? It had to be a wig because it was shoulder-length and gleaming. And what was she wearing? Not the frumpy sweater and skirt that she'd had on a little while ago, but a black miniskirt and black leggings, with a black t-shirt that said 'Hemlock H.S. Cheerleading' in orange letters.

Fiona whispered, "Chrissy?"

Chrissy smiled. "I came to see if you were ready to go to the pep rally." She shook her orange and black pom-poms and chanted, "Move to the left! Move to the right! Sit down, stand up! Fight, fight! Go Hemlock!"

Fiona screamed. She screamed so loudly that Courtney, alarmed, called the police. She didn't stop screaming when the ambulance came, or when she was wheeled into the emergency room, strapped to a gurney. She didn't stop screaming until she was sedated in the psych ward.

"I thought you'd scream your head right off," Trey told her at the pep rally. "That would be cool because then we'd match."

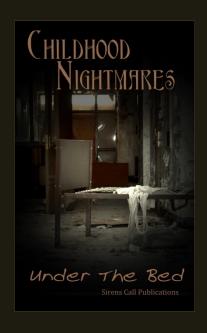
She made helpless gurgling sounds as he slipped his leather-jacketed arm around her waist. On the football field, the marching band struck up the Hemlock High School fight song, "Hemlock High Forever."

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Jill Hand is the author of *The Blue Horse*, a fantasy/science fiction novella based on a true story from Kellan Publishing. Her work has appeared in several anthologies. Recently, her work has appeared in Another Realm, The Flash Fiction Press, Heater, Menacing Hedge, and Nebula Rift, among others.

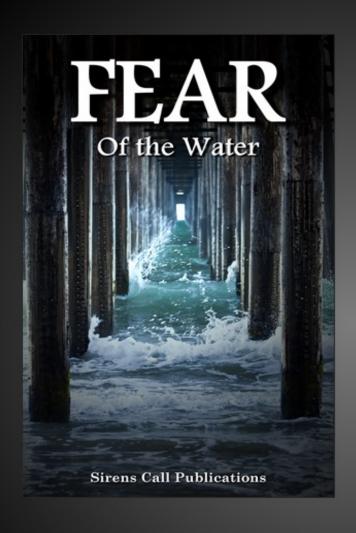
Twitter: <u>@Jillhand1\_gef</u> Facebook: Jill Hand

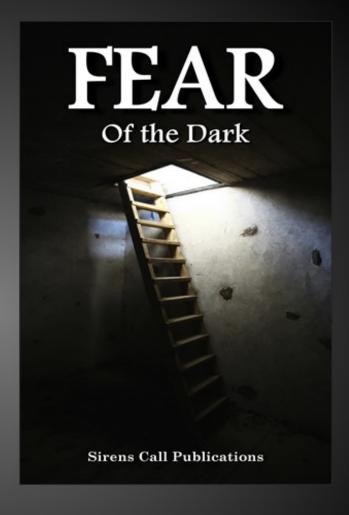
## **Childhood Nightmares: Under the Bed**

Available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and iTunes



# What do you FEAR?





Two Anthologies full of stories crafted to make you afraid to turn out the lights or go into the water...

Available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and iTunes



Available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, iTunes, and Kobo

#### **Lilith** | Paul Edward Fitzgerald

Every night without fail she comes to me. I struggle to see her, fight her off but I can never do anything more than just lay there paralyzed with terror as she comes and does with me as she pleases.

Her name is Lilith. It is endless research that has told me that much. Lilith; she is the first wife of Adam in the Garden of Eden and forgotten demon of the Bible. But having known her so intimately since the time I was a boy I am sure she is not forgotten but simply too feared to speak of for fear she may come, summoned by her name alone.

Lilith was created equal with Adam in God's blissful garden at the great dawn of time and life. Although it's wrong for me to state she was created equally, since that was never God's intention. Women are not equal with men. We, as men, were made as rulers of the Earth. It is in God's image, after all we are created. Women were built to be subservient to us and satisfy our carnal desires. This, too, is why Lilith was created for Adam. However, she wouldn't hear any of it. Upon being told to lie on her back and serve as a wife is intended to, Lilith overcame Adam and insisted that she be on top so that no man shall ever dominate her. It is because of this I'm sure that Lilith could be thought of as the first feminist. Feminism, after all, is just one of the many guises for blasphemous sin against God's will. And so naturally the foul demon known as Lilith could be considered its mascot.

It is a depressingly sinful world we live in. There is no respect for God and his institutions anymore. The rejection of His will is something that is an acceptable social norm. From the Muslims and their impious practices with elephant God's to the sin of homosexual marriage, the world has become corrupt and unbalanced. And it is the female sex who began this whirlpool into the lakes of fire for humanity.

Women have forgotten their place. They were designed to cling to their husbands. They exist for man's pleasure and servitude alone. It is from the feminist movement that other sin was born. It is because of the birth of feminism that men are forbidden to be men and can't even be masters of their own homes without being called abusive or prejudiced. It's feminism that has opened the floodgates for such deplorable so-called minorities to take over and rule with their ungodly beliefs and practices any heretic should be burned alive for. It is because of these stubborn women who insist on filling the shoes of a man that our younger generation runs ramped with young men who believe themselves to be gay when in truth they are forced to sin with one another because women have forgotten their place and purpose of sexual service. And it is because *I realize* and *accept this* that each night Lilith comes for me.

It always happens the same way. I open my eyes, feeling the weight of my body pressing against the mattress beneath me. I cannot move. I can barely breathe. And then I *feel* her enter the room. I dare not look to see her and close my eyes tight so that I may not look upon her. But soon enough I can feel her hovering over me, straddling my helpless limbs as I can only pray for God's presence to banish this demon from tormenting me, his faithful warrior of Christ.

As terror floods my body I must also fight to resist the surge of lust as her figure grinds upon me, daring my newly born erection to reach climax. I continue to pray and continue to

resist her for I will not succumb to her or succumb to being dominated by any woman. It is then I always remember that if I can just curl my toes, perhaps twitch my foot that I will be jerked awake. When I begin to try and awaken myself the pressure on my chest becomes more crushing and the deep, angered, animalistic groans from the demon above becomes almost deafening as if she's screaming at me in an unknown language to just stop fighting it and give myself to her.

My toes curl and I bolt upright in bed. I look about the room to see that the bitch has gone back to Hell where she belongs.

Women; they are all like Lilith these days, you know. With their so-called feminism they worship her and revel in her disobedience, trying to take the place God rightly bestowed upon the male sex. And then a few years ago it finally dawned on me exactly what these feminists were; they were Lilith's ungodly army.

Upon this revelation, as if the voice of God himself had spoken to me it suddenly became completely clear what my goal was and it made so much sense why this demonic, feminist being had fixated on me and haunted me since I was a child. It was because she knew that I was to be God's mercenary in the battle against her and it was I who was meant to bring those sinning sluts to their knees and punish them for their transgressions before wiping them from the face of his holy planet.

It's simple to spot one of Lilith's. That part was always simple. They are everywhere you look these days. They reside in the malls with their timid, mousey husbands tailing behind them like nervous children and in corporate settings where they wear their business suits and berate their male lackeys. They boast proudly their behavior being more offensive shrews in their dealings and daily life than that of Job's wife. And so finding them, as I've said, was not the issue but instead the challenge came in picking those in most need of educating and punishment.

Each time they fight me and only succeed in making fools of themselves in their physical weakness, for man was made stronger than woman. And once I straddle and dominate them as Lilith and *all women* have tried to dominate me and my fellow man, they always resort to bargaining and pleading with me for forgiveness and for their life. Some even have the audacity to call to God in those moments to which I shut their filthy, sinning mouths for daring to call to him for help after a lifetime of rejecting him and his ways. Little do they realize that I am God's answer for I am his vessel and warrior and I am here to smite them, the wicked for their transgressions against him and put them back in their rightful place with man always on top.

I lay in bed after my latest battle on God's behalf and sleep soundly in the knowledge that I have sent another Jezebal, a daughter of Lilith back into her arms to burn forever in the fiery lake of despair. As I sleep my dreams are flooded with images of each whore I've conquered and their final pleas for mercy echo in my ears. I am met with only deep, sensual pleasure reliving their struggles against me as I look down upon them, knowing that I am, as is my birth right, dominating them as they were designed to be.

Suddenly my dreams are once more shattered as they have been all my life by *her*. Her dark presence fills the room and envelopes me as my chest tightens and I can no longer draw a

breath. I feel her violently straddle me and she forces my head to the side, pressing upon it so hard that I feel my neck might just snap.

I am frightened for she seems more powerful than ever. I keep my eyes closed tight and begin to scream my prayers to my Lord to save me. As she assaults me, inappropriately touching me with force I suddenly remember that if I curl my toes, simply curl them or twitch my feet she'll be gone as always.

I beg for the strength of a higher power, keeping my eyes pressed tight and willing my body to move.

My foot twitches and I feel myself jerk awake.

Relief washes over me once more as I thank God for his strength and mercy.

I open my eyes and look upward.

Eyes.

Red, marble eyes star down at me in the darkness as the feminine but frightful figure descends upon me. I try to scream as the figure seems to somehow be not just one woman, but many; the many women that I've known and conquered.

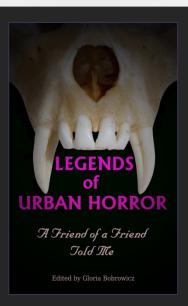
"God!" I scream, feeling my whole body spasm uncontrollably, the screams coming from deep within my very soul. "Oh, God! Please help me!"

She forces my head once more to the side, pressing it down farther as I scream. She grinds violently against me and savagely continues to dominate and ravage me. I am helpless and my pleas for mercy fall on deaf ears. As I plead once more for God to hear me and stop this assault she leans down and hisses three short words.

"We *are* God," she says as my neck finally gives way with a sickening crack and I reach a violent, painful climax knowing I am entering Lilith at long last, body and soul.

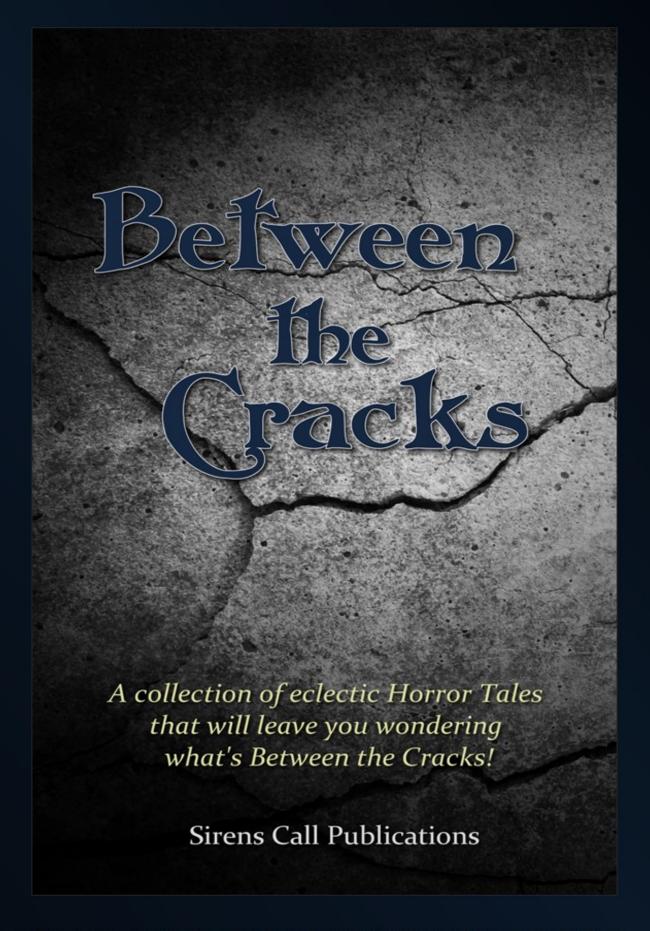
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Paul Edward Fitzgerald has always had a passion for writing as well as a flare for tales of the macabre and the darker side of human nature and the world around us. He feels the best stories are those that come from a place of truth and writes primarily in the realm of LGBT interest, horror, and suspense.

Twitter: <u>@pauledwardfitz4</u>
Facebook: <u>Paul Edward Fitzgerald</u>



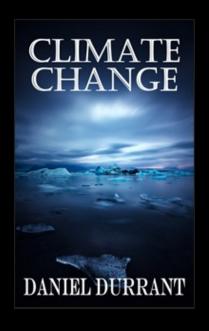
### Legends of Urban Horror: A Friend of a Friend Told Me

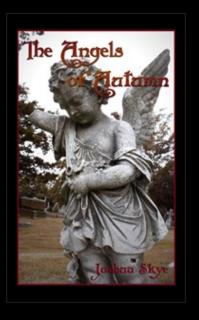
Available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and iTunes



AVAILABLE ON AMAZON, BARNES & NOBLE, KOBO, AND ITUNES

## ALSO FROM SIRENS CALL PUBLICATIONS

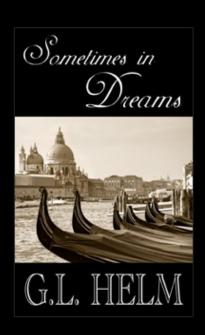












AVAILABLE ON AMAZON,
BARNES & NOBLE,
KOBO, AND ITUNES

#### Sova's Pet | T.A. Bechel

*Drip... drip... drip... drip.* Jazz wrestled his flat sheet away and hopped out of bed. Storming towards the kitchen, trying to gain his balance, he stubbed his toe on the corner of his dresser.

"Son of BITCH!" he screamed as Hendrix, his Boston Terrier, covered his face with his paw. "You stupid fucking... Calm down Jazz," he said to himself under his breath.

He hobbled towards the kitchen as his pinky toe throbbed. The leaky faucet tormented Jazz beyond comprehension. "I just fixed you, I want to sleep!" he yelled, reaching for the pliers and screwdriver from the counter so he could fix the faucet, again.

"Where the hell are the seats and springs I bought. I had them right here," Jazz said, gritting his teeth, slamming his fist on the counter.

From the vibration of his fist slamming, the plastic bag with the seats and springs fell to the kitchen floor. The room was dark. Jazz refused to turn on the light because he knew if he did there would be another night without sleep.

The loud, ticking clock rested comfortably on the dining room wall. *Tick...Tick...Tick.*Before he could pick up the parts to fix the constant dripping, he noticed the second hand starting to slow. Throughout the apartment, the clock's ticking reminded Jazz that time was in control, as the leaky faucet added to Jazz's sleep deprivation.

He noticed that time was almost at a standstill and the teardrop that perpetually fell from the faucet was now frozen in midair.

"Not again," Jazz pleaded as traces of his breath filled the room.

Paralyzed, Jazz stood helpless in his kitchen. The thermostat read ten-degrees Fahrenheit. Faint footsteps became louder and closer as the linoleum crackled from behind.

Unable to move, Jazz was falling into a narcoleptic sleep. His body was trying to offer a myoclonic jerk to wake him but the only thing he could move was his eyes. As each eye felt the body's attempt at waking him, it was sending electrical impulses through the optic nerves, shaking each eye violently back and forth. Then... his eyelids fell like a closing garage door.

The footsteps Jazz heard were now right behind him. Still unable to move, he felt a hot breath on his neck.

"Let me fill you with life," a voice whispered with a screech.

Suddenly, Jazz felt a pierce on his neck and pressure built like something was being pumped into his jugular vein. Before him the kitchen melted and tall, dark trees with bare branches sprouted from the ground. One by one they replaced any visible evidence that Jazz was in his apartment.

The unseen visitor gripped Jazz tightly as his teeth remained buried deep within Jazz's flesh. His stiff body went limp. His apartment was now a bleak forest with sad, lifeless trees surrounding him and his dark visitor. Hundreds of crows perched quietly on the leafless branches, watching Jazz and his attacker.

The visitor whispered into Jazz's ear, "Wake my love, it's time to wake, for the whole world is at stake. Open your eyes, slowly open your eyes and witness the pestering flies."

Jazz's eyelids fluttered open and his body regained voluntary control. The visitor released his grip so Jazz could turn around.

Jazz turned around, the visitor, a man-like creature, towered over him by four inches. His fangs were not shy, resting in plain sight for Jazz to admire. The visitor was shirtless and his skin was covered in white, crackled paint with a red circle carefully placed directly in the middle of his chest. His bright, blonde hair, almost like gold, was evenly parted down the middle and beautifully braided on each side. His eyes were not eyes at all. They were empty, lonely burrows where eyeballs would naturally be.

"This is the fifth damn time you have visited me this month, Sova. Can I just get some fucking sleep, please?" Jazz asked, staring at the circle on Sova's chest.

With preternatural quickness, Sova grabbed Jazz by the throat. Fighting for a breath, Jazz kicked and screamed to remove himself from Sova's deathly grip.

Sova slammed Jazz straight towards the ground as a small, pointed tree stump penetrated Jazz's torso. A section of his large intestine was snagged on the leftover tree as Jazz choked on his own blood finding its way to his esophagus.

Sova cocked his head and screamed, "Your blood now runs cold with worms, now it is the living's turn to BURN! Vengeance is what the dead does need, for they have chosen you to make the world BLEED!"

Forcing words, Jazz was able to say, "I am sorry, I kill for you and only you, Sova!"

Sova, pleased with Jazz's answer, pulled him off of the tree, blood pouring out of the massive hole. He carefully placed Jazz on a patch of decomposing leaves. On the brink of a dream death, Jazz's body in the physical world was still standing in his kitchen, convulsing and gasping for oxygen.

Sova casually flipped his two braids behind his shoulders, standing directly above Jazz. His eye burrows overflowed with thick, bright red blood and mill worms. The blood and worms fell into Jazz's open womb, repairing the damaged flesh and organs.

Jazz sat up, eyes wide open, and took a deep breath. "You asshole," he said, wiping blood from his mouth, "okay I get it. Where is your sense of humor?"

Sova shook his head and picked Jazz up off of the ground. Sova gently wrapped his arms around Jazz's one-hundred-and-sixty-five pound physique and pet his greasy, black hair. "Time to sleep my son, sleep. For I am with you, no reason to weep. Now sleep," he whispered in Jazz's ear.

Beep... beep... beep. Laying his back, Jazz opened his eyes to his cell phone's alarm beeping in his ear. He lifted his head from his pillow only to realize he was back in his bedroom.

Grabbing his phone, he turned off the alarm and started dialing a number. "Come on answer," he said.

"Hello," the woman's voice answered on the other end.

"Holy shit, doc."

"Jazz Crenshaw?" the woman politely asked.

Wiping sweat from his brow, Jazz began smiling. "Yes, doc. Thank goodness you answered. I uh... I..." he stuttered before the woman interrupted him.

"Mr. Crenshaw, how did you get my personal cell? Oh, forget the details. Are you having another manic episode?"

"Heavens no Dr. Langston. Wanted to call and say hi. Yes, I'm havin' an episode. The dream is back."

Dr. Langston cleared her throat. "Okay, was he, oh what do you call him, uh, Sova. Was Sova there again?"

Jazz got out of bed and looked for clothes to put on. "Yes, doc, hold on," he said as he almost tripped over something in the corner of his room. He shined his phone's backlight towards the object. "Holy God Dam!" he screamed. "Uh... doc, I'm gonna have to call ya back."

"Wait, Jazz, did it happen again," she asked before Jazz hit the end button, cutting her off.

"SHIT!" he shouted, hitting the wall in aggravation, "okay, so... I hope no one saw anything."

He ran to the window, looking down from the fourteenth floor. He hurried towards his front door and slowly looked out, surveying up and down the hallway. "Okay, no blood trails, good," he said closing the front door.

His cell phone rang, startling him. He looked at his screen and it was Dr. Langston.

"Yellow?" he jokingly said, answering her call.

"Are you okay, do I need to come over there?" she asked.

"Oh, you can come over alright," he said grabbing his manly hood.

"Okay, now, that happened one time and you pay me for professional psychiatric services not professional escorting services. Since you slept and the dream is back, I am almost certain your lack of sleep allowed you to experience REM rebound. How long was the dream?"

"I know I pay you for this service, I have paid you over a million dollars. Speaking of that, since I killed mom and dad, why don't we ever talk about what they did to us? The dream felt like two hours or more."

"What did I say about saying the word kill on the phone? Jazz, this is serious and your parents didn't do anything to us because there is no US!"

"Yeah, yeah, whatever, you keep tellin' me that. So what should I do? I have had the similar dreams five times this month."

"Okay, just come in today at 1:00 p.m., can you do that without killing any distractions?" Shaking his head, Jazz finished buttoning his shirt. Making silly faces into the mirror, he quickly said, "Sure, doc.'

He hung up the phone and slipped it into his pocket. He slicked his hair back and picked up a picture off of his dresser. It was a captured memory of his mother, father, and him from when he was nine. "Even though you guys locked me in that cage for so many years, I still love and miss ya," he said as he kissed the picture, placing it back on his dresser.

"Now what am I going to do with you?" he asked the corpse in the corner of his bedroom as Hendrix was lapping up the blood that leaked onto the floor. "Oh, good boy Hendrix, good boy. You make daddy so happy," he said, patting Hendrix on the head.

After leaving his apartment he made a stop at apartment 14 C.

He knocked on the door lightly with his index finger's knuckle. "Oh, Tonya, you home?" he asked with a smile as he tried looking through the peep hole.

"Just a minute," a man's voice shouted.

"Who the hell is that?" Jazz mumbled under his breath.

You could hear the deadbolt unlock and then the chain door guard was removed. The door slowly opened with an annoying creak. A man peeked his head around the half opened door. Furious, Jazz's brow crinkled as he breathed in and out of his nose.

"Hey, man.. What's up with ya?" this mysterious man said to Jazz.

Doing his best to remain calm, Jazz smiled. "Hey what's up, brah. Where is Tonya at?"

Before he could answer, Tonya's unknown house guest opened the door all of the way. "Come on in, man," he said waving Jazz in with one hand.

Jazz started looking around the room, hoping to find Tonya. He did a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree canvas of the room to come back to the man intruding in on what Jazz thought was his territory. The man stood up to Jazz's nose, which made him five-foot-nine.

"My name is Tony, man," he said, extending his hand to shake.

Jazz's heart beat uncontrollably. The vein on his head looked to be alive as the blood rushed quickly through his body. He could tell Tony was stoned. "Tony, huh?" he asked the guy, "My name is Jazz Crenshaw, I own the building."

Tony smiled and laughed as he attempted to keep his eyes open and attentive. "Yeah, man... Haha... I heard a lot about you. I think it's cool, ya know, Tony and Tonya."

Jazz's fake smile turned into disapproval. His eyes fueled anger. His heart pounded so loudly that Tony could faintly hear the organ at work.

"Tony... Tonya. How... cute," Jazz said as his head twitched and his nostrils flared. He walked towards Tony, slowly. He accidentally stepped on a bag of nacho flavored tortilla chips and then the television's remote control. The television turned on as it blared some heavy-metal guitar riff.

"What's up man? Why do you look so mad? Center your chi, bro," Tony said as the music played in the background.

Jazz grabbed Tony by his throat, pinching his thumb and fingers around his larynx. Gagging, trying to remove Jazz's grip, Tony's eye became dilated with fear. "You slimy, pestering fly!" Jazz said looking Tony straight into his soon to be soulless eyes.

Suddenly, the room darkened and the temperature dropped. Jazz saw his breath.

"SOVA!!!" Jazz screamed as his eyelids fell again and he was suspended in Tonya's living room.

The heavy-metal music slowly faded out and the forest started growing sprouting up quickly. The crows were perched on the branches but this time they all were singing their song. *Ca.caca... caca... caca... caca.* 

Tony disappeared and out of nowhere Jazz was slammed to the ground. Sova stood above Jazz and began slamming his fists on Jazz's face.

Back in Tonya's apartment, Jazz's body was convulsing as his jaw kept moving from left to right, making a loud clicking noise.

"You desecrate my wishes. I offer you salvation and purpose in a misguided, desolate world! You kill for Me! In my name. Your instincts have been led astray," Sova screamed as he continued slamming his fists on Jazz's face.

Jazz put his hands up in defense, "I am sorry," he said spitting out blood and teeth, "I will finish Tony in your name. I... I..." he said before Sova interrupted him.

"Stones will kill a man by his own hands, but I control the dead and the living lands," Sova said.

Shaking his head yes, Jazz said laughing, "Yes, Sova. But do you always have to give me poetry rhetoric."

Jazz left the forest and was back in the apartment, clinching Tony's throat.

Jazz lifted Tony off of the ground with his one hand tightly holding Tony's neck. "You will be set free by the command of Sova!"

He slams Tony on the coffee table, rendering his killing ritual in the name of Sova. Tony's eyes twitched as Jazz played an air guitar solo in sync with the heavy-metal thrasher music that filled the apartment.

Jazz flipped Tony on his back, and took both of his thumbs, digging them into Tony's eye sockets. Tony screamed so Jazz took one hand, grabbing Tony's throat. A swift jerk and Tony could no longer scream because of his now absent vocal cord.

Jazz took his attention back to Tony's eyes. He took each thumb and index finger and used them like tweezers to grip each eyeball. He ripped the eyes out, optic nerves and all as they dangled with disconnected veins dripping on the white carpet.

"Yessss! For Sova! You are free." Jazz screamed as he put his trophy in his back pocket. He dabbed His finger in the puddle of blood, and drew a circle on Tony's chest.

Jazz's phone rang, "Dr. Langston, I presume," he said answering his phone.

"Jazz, it is 12:30, you going to make it by 1:00? What are you doing?" she asked.

Wiping the slimy pieces of human flesh on his pants, he smiled. "Dr. Langston, I will be there and I am finding my circadian rhythm you could say."

"Wait, are you going to make it to the office?"

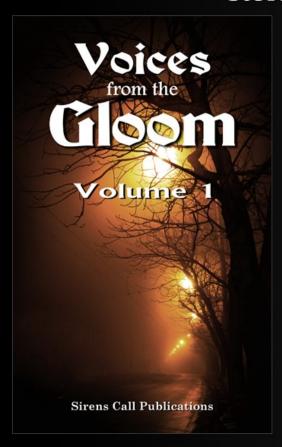
Jazz took a deep breath and said as he exhaled, "Yes. We will both be set free. I will see you in thirty."

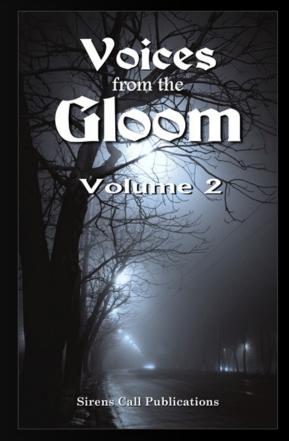
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** T.A. Bechel, an Illinois native, is an author of horror/thriller fiction. A father of four, two girls and two boys, he is not shy about sharing his past struggle with drug

and alcohol addiction. He even wrote an autobiography recounting the real life horror he faced in active addiction. Nearly four years clean and sober, T.A. Bechel writes any chance that he gets.

Twitter: <u>@tafiction</u>
Facebook: <u>T.A. Bechel</u>

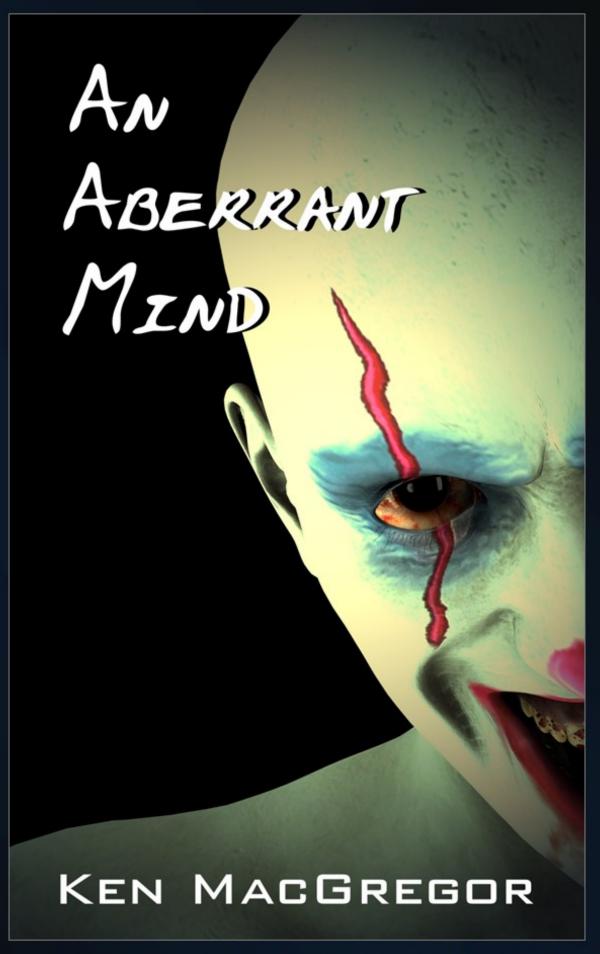
## Eclectic collections of spine-tingling stories...





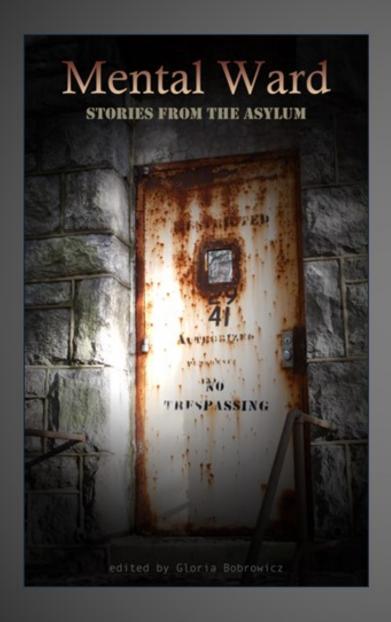
Available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and iTunes

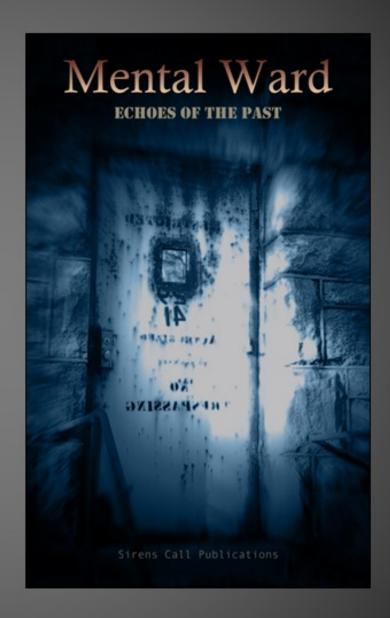
ABERRANT is defined as unusual, abnormal or different...



Available on Amazon, CreateSpace, and Smashwords

Sanatorium, mental ward, psychiatric hospital - they're all the same. Places where the infirm, the crazy, and the certifiable go for treatment... Or what passes for 'treatment'.





Available on Amazon, CreateSpace, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Smashwords, and the iStore

#### **Deluded Soul** | Neal Noakes

The city swirls with ash, the monsters wings are spread as is stands tall in the rain. And the hero wakes. He sees something in the mirror, and wonders what it was. A flash of movement and gone like smoke.

The imagery grows stronger the second night, the hero feels his doubt setting in, as the thicker ash swirls. The rain falls, red like blood and the monster spreads its wings. In his bedside mirror, next to the picture of himself, he thinks he sees something again, but surely not!

"I have come to find you hero, from my throne in Hades," the creature spreads its wings; its teeth glisten with blood. The hero wakes in a cold sweat.

The creature stands before the hero this night, its wings cast of stone, it turns its fearsome head and smiles, long sharp teeth glisten with blood.

"I have found my portal my way to your world, you are afraid and are right to be," the monster chuckles, eyes glowing in the purple night. The creature lashes out at the hero and the hero wakes again.

No bruising or bloodshed, but the hero cannot win.

The monster is there again, this time they are floating, a river of blood passing underneath. On the walls hang the faces of foes fallen before the hero, monsters and deviants all. But the monster smiles, tasting its coming victory.

"I have watched you triumph, hero, I have watched you fail," the monster smiles, the pictures melt away, and change to the faces of victims failed. The dead eyes of the ones he couldn't save.

The wall opposite begins to melt and the hero wakes. He drinks heavily, sobbing gently.

The city glows green with a violet sky this night, the monster holds the hero by the neck and projects into his eyes what he has done.

The arguments with lovers, the falling out with friends, the need to be a messiah. The monster smiles, its eyes wide and yellow, "My Name is Pride, your deadly sin, tick-tock, time is running out, hero."

The hero wakes, bruising on his neck, sores in his mouth, a darkness in his heart.

The monster soars above as the hero skulks below, the sky bleeds black as the light flicker blue, the hero is harried, his heart pounding audibly, the city shakes with each pound, the rock and brick changing to bone and back, flesh forming and reaching out, the screaming of voices.

"Do you hear them hero? Do you hear the ones you've failed, hero? But are you truly a hero?" He stops, the man who *thinks* himself the hero, he sees himself, stood at the foot of the church, crying, he follows this spectre of self into the church.

The priest is screaming at him to get out, he stands watching his old self and the priest, he pulls out a knife and stabs the priest... it is where it had begun, his lie.

The priest lay bleeding, asking why and the monster smiles, "Because, Father, this man was a monster, he hunted those he could excusably kill, that he would not be vilified for, but then the hunger got to him."

He wakes, abhorred to know what he did and why he did it. Recalling the rage he felt, the anger he's known, the inconsequentialness of his own life. He remembers how they celebrated his logo, the red R, when he first felled a maniac.

Then he remembers when he started to leave the brand for different reasons.

The monster stands above R, his wings spread, whip in hand. Eyes glowing green and yellow, a swirl of power, anger and fury.

The monster reveals R, another spectre gone, a woman bearing child, smoking in the hall. He confronts her, tells her he knows best, tells her that he knows what is right, she slaps him... he pushes her down the stairs.

He stands over her body, next to a spectre of self, he watches as the woman reaches up for help, and the spectre of self steps on her throat and watches the light drain from her eyes.

The man turns, the sky above purple, the city before green, yellow and blue. The monster steps out, its wing of stones and flesh spread out, memories flicker in the wings, as if projected from a time before.

"Tell me hero, tell me killer, do you regret the things you've done, how you started with a need that fit what society wanted, then you grew hungry still and began to lash out. Do you regret what you think you knew about who you were, for everything was a lie you told yourself so you could sleep at night?"

The man stands still, shakes his head, looks at the monster. "Why? Why show me the cruelty in my actions, why not show me the good I have achieved?"

"You are not the victim," the monster smiles, its teeth crooked, sharp and yellow. "You are the monster here."

"I am only a product of my..."

"NO!" The monster roars, then chuckles. "Nobody makes you cruel, nobody makes you evil, it is what you are, but this is why I torment you, for your pride won't let you see the truth." The beast closes its wings and steps towards R, his eyes fill with fear, he feels the pain in his stomach.

Looking down he can see the blade sticking in his gut. He wakes, blood welling in an impossible wound he sits up, looks to the mirror, in his hand a knife, sat behind him the winged monster, smiling, laughing.

The smiling laughing demon of pride raises his hand, R follows – bringing the knife to his throat.

"Do you feel remorse for the lives you took?" the demon whispers.

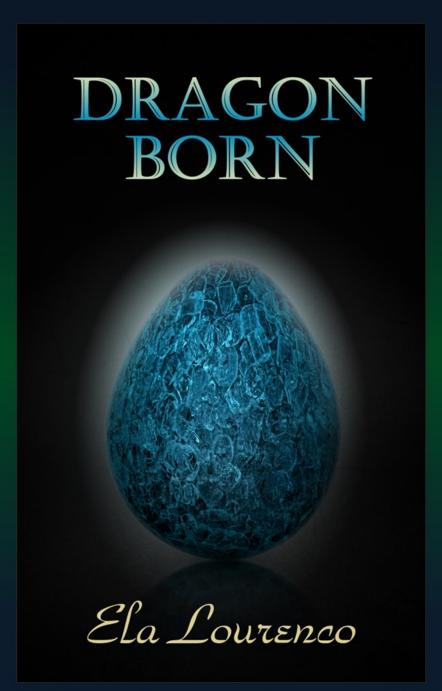
"No," R replies, and the blade opens his throat, as the demons smiles.

"Such a shame, swallow your pride and I'd have let you live, guilt is a funny thing."

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Neal Noakes is a 30 something writer from Reading England, who has a deep passion for fantasy and folklore, as well as being an avid reader and gamer. Neal has several books coming over the next two years, and many more projects in utero.

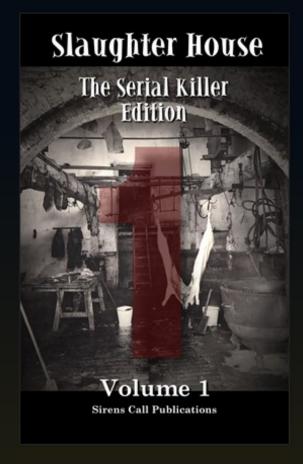
Twitter: <a>@neal\_noakes</a>

Facebook: facebook.com/nealnoakesbooks



Available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and iTunes

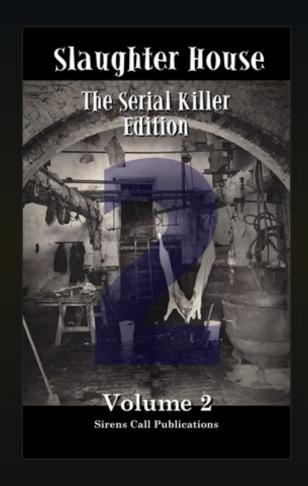
### Slaughter House: The Serial Killer Editions



Slaughter House
The Serial Killer Edition

Volume 3
Sirens Call Publications

Three Volumes of Incredible and Captivating Stories of Those Compelled to Kill...



Available on Amazon, CreateSpace, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Smashwords, and the iStore

#### Malaki | Winnona Vincent

The lightning struck outside the window. The tree next to the window exploded. Eugene sat up and looked out through the window. The world outside was desolate at first, then became a swirling mass of colors running together. Eugene was there again! Malaki had called him home to play another of his games.

"Very good Eugene! None of your whining, where am I? None of, what did I do Malaki?" The evil deep voice whispered.

"Would it do any good?" Eugene asked.

"Well, no!"

"Then why should I? Besides, I have finally learned that you enjoy my whining. So I have decided not to try and not please you anymore! You will torment me and cause me all the pain you can anyway, no matter what I do."

"Oh, good boy! Finally growing up? You are what forty something now out there in the real world as you humans like to call it?"

"I don't know something like that."

"Oh come on, you don't know, really! Well, do I need to refresh your memory? Let's see where do we begin?"

"Why are you asking me? This is your game!"

Eugene jumped as something bit him and tried to move his hand to kill it. He could not move anything. The thing that had bit him was now eating its way through his skin. Eugene bit his lip so as not to cry out. He looked up at the rotting wood ceiling above him and tried to concentrate on a bat that he saw in the corner.

Then he felt a second and third bite on his legs. Looking down he could not see what they were. He felt the pain intensify as each of them ate through his skin and began burrowing under it

"Like my newest pets. They are something I picked up on an island not far from New Zealand. They are known to the natives as the soul seekers. They are a form of leech that burrows under the skin and roam around the inside of you until they find an organ they like. Then they slowly eat their way through it.

Eugene closed his eyes and concentrated on Malaki's voice. The pain from the things burrowing around inside of him was getting worse. Then there was a pop and it stopped.

"Well, I see it did not take them long to get through your outsides. Know hopefully the next time I call you in for a game they will have laid eggs and I can collect a few grubs. That is one of the drawbacks of these little pets. They usually kill the host before the young are old enough to collect. I, however, have every confidence in you providing me with a fair amount of the little darlings."

Eugene realized he could move again. Sitting up he looked at the bloody holes the soul seekers had left on his legs. He looked out the window and the swirling colors had stopped, now there was a silhouette of a city against the moon.

"Now getting back to your age? Let's see you were born in the Philippines in a small village. You killed your mother at birth. Your father wanted nothing to do with you. He left you laying in a puddle of afterbirth hoping you would die before anyone found you. Unfortunately, one of the village women heard you. Gathering you up she took your pathetic little body to elders. The seeker was called in and refused to go near you. You were supposed to have been taken far from the village and left on the rocks for a jungle demon to find. But as you very well know that did not happen.

Oh well, then the real story of your pathetic little existence started. The day the priest wandering by on a pilgrimage found you was the beginning of the downfall of the monastery. It took you exactly three months to destroy them all. The sad thing was you were not even trying. Do you remember how old you are yet?"

"Not really. What do you want from me Malaki?" Eugene sat up and tried standing. His legs throbbed and he felt something moving around inside. The pain made him sit down.

The bat that had been hanging upside down in the corner made a strange screeching sound. Eugene looked up just in time to duck. The Bat fell and spun around transforming into something that looked like a Harpy but the face and chest was not. It swooped over Eugene and perched on the metal headboard. Its long dirty claws grasping onto the metal rail. The thing folded its wings back and the putrid stench that settled over the bed almost made Eugene gag. In fact, for a second, he did and spit up bile on the bed!

"Malaki," Eugene gasped fighting back another mouth full of bile. "What have you been eating? You could gag a maggot at a hundred yards." The stench was so bad Eugene wiped the tears out of his eyes.

Eugene looked up at the thing perched on the headboard. It took a moment to realize that what he had thought were feathers on the chest were actually spiders crawling over the chest. They were catching maggots that were in the chest itself. The chest was covered in decaying wounds that the maggots were feeding off of. Eugene now knew what the putrid smell was.

"Well well, Malaki someone tear your heart out?"

Malaki reacted so fast that Eugene never saw it coming. A dirty claw lashed out and closed around Eugene's neck. They both vanished together. The next thing Eugene knew he was flying through the air hanging from one of Malaki's claws. Then Malaki let go and Eugene was plummeting to the ground.

There were voices and loud banging as Eugene sat up in his motel room. He was on the floor and he was naked. The holes in his legs were still oozing blood and the way his neck burned he knew it was pretty well clawed up. The pounding got louder. Then the manager's voice joined the banging.

"Hey Tim, have you left yet or are you still in there!"

"Just a minute! I have to find my robe." Eugene pulled his robe on and went to the door. The manager was standing there with a clipboard in hand.

"Hey, Tim," he said as Eugene answered the door. "Just wanted to catch you to be sure you were still leaving tomorrow."

Eugene looked at the beady-eyed little weasel. More like he was hoping Eugene had gone to work so he could get in here and snoop around. Eugene had been here for over a year. Registered and working as Tim Richards and now it was time to move on. Tim Richards would die tomorrow along with most of the retirement home where he had worked for close to a year.

This was beginning to irritate him. Ever since he had given the manager his notice he had done everything he could to get into Eugene's room. One more reason he needed to move on. Right now the real Tim Richards was thawing out in the shower. Eugene had most of his precious things in a storage locker but the most precious of his trophies and memorabilia were in the room also. No way was this little weasel getting in here to nose around.

"Yes, I am leaving tomorrow. I will turn my key in before I leave for work tomorrow."

"Yea, well I already have someone who wants the room so I was wondering if I could have someone start cleaning the room tonight while you are at work. That way when you go tomorrow I can call the guy and hand him the key."

Eugene wanted to reach out and grab the manager and smash his head into the wall. Instead, he smiled a sick twisted smile at the man and quietly said, "That will not be possible. I am paid up until the day after tomorrow. You are already getting the room a day early. So No! I will not allow anyone in here while I am gone." He slammed the door in the manager's face. He was glad that he had changed the locks when he had taken the room. Still the guy was just sneaky enough to force the door open while he was gone.

Eugene went to put some clothes on when the pain in his abdomen made him sit down for a moment. Dam that Malaki. Whatever these things were they were really working on his insides.

A little while later Eugene was dressed and ready to leave. He had decided to push everything up a day except he would come back to the room tonight. The bus ticket was for tomorrow evening and he was not going to change that. Nothing upset Eugene more than a spur of the moment change in plans. He was meticulous in planning things out. When something popped up and caused sudden changes in his plans it caused a lot of problems.

Eugene reached under the bed and pulled out a case. Taking the top tray out he chose a small group of surgical tools. Laying them on the bed, he put the case away. He would have a little fun with the manager before he went to work. He shook with excitement. Sometimes a change in plans could be a good thing after all.

He went to the closet and pulled out a large plastic sheet to cover the bed so the blood and body parts could be cleaned up easier. Then the world started shifting around him and a high pitched screeching sound started. Covering his ears Eugene screamed against the sound.

"Dam you Malaki, not now can't you see I am busy!"

"Oh my, did I disturb something?" Eugene was standing naked on a rocky ledge in front of a cave. The sky was churning a yellowish-gray color. The barren rocks seemed to be taking on their own life forms in the half-light.

The rock above him on the ledge reached out with one long claw and piercing the skin on his neck raised him up for a better look. Drawing Eugene to it a dozen tiny scorpion demons ran down the long claw and over his body. They stung him and pulled a piece of his skin off. One found the bloody holes in his legs and went in to investigate.

Eugene cringed in pain as the scorpion followed the path of the Soul Seekers. Where they had entered into him instead of a pop there was more of a ripping tearing sound, Eugene screamed. A few minutes later his throat felt like it was on fire. He opened his mouth and the scorpion demon crawled out of it carrying one of the Soul Seekers in its pincer. Crawling up to Eugene's head it sat there a second. Its stinger lashed out and struck him in the eye. Then it disappeared with the rest of the little demons back up the long claw. Blood trickled down Eugene's face and he could feel his eye swelling shut. The claw holding him swung him outward off the ledge and then hurled him forward into the cave.

"Well," the voice seemed to float all around Eugene in the darkness. My little pets are not quite ready to come out yet. They are doing well, though. Now let's see where were we? Ah yes about your age. We left off at the monastery."

"Malaki what is with you? Why are you fixated on my age and the past? Yes, I destroyed the monastery! I have done a lot more interesting things than that in my life. They claimed from the beginning I had no soul! I was just a hollow shell. But you know what; I would not have been able to enjoy the things I have done if I had not been born like this. Hell Malaki, I even scared the demon that possessed me when I was five! Remember that?"

There was a hideous cackling sound coming out of the dark. Something wrapped around Eugene's arms and legs and pinned him to the wall of the cave. A low soft light appeared and cast an eerie glow over the cave. Looking around Eugene noticed the walls were a giant pulsating membrane. There in the corner something shimmered and swirled. Then Malaki appeared this time as a huge goblin.

As Malaki walked towards Eugene something pierced his wrist. Looking at his arm here it was pinned against the wall he saw that a serpent had bit into his wrist. The venom was already working its way through his arm, turning it black and making it swell.

"Enough, "Malaki said to the serpent. "Only his arm, remember?" The serpent drew back and the venom slowed down stopping at his shoulder. Eugene watched with his one good eye as his arm finished turning black and swelling. Then it burst open and began pouring yellow poisonous slim down his side.

"Ah yes, the demon!" Malaki said stopping in front of Eugene. "Let me see, you were playing with the ghouls in the cemetery and trying out the taste of rotting flesh when it attacked you and thought it over poured you. All the while you were excited to see what new adventure it would take you on. Poor, pathetic demon. Once it discovered how empty and cold it was inside of you and that you delighted in spreading terror and pain even more than it did! Well, I think that was the first time a demon begged a priest to destroy it."

Eugene laughed and looked into Malaki's dark empty eyes. He noticed the walls were changing again. They fell away into emptiness and the darkness engulfed them. There was a howling sound somewhere.

"You know the sad thing was the priest blamed the demon for everything I had been doing. From pouring the ground glass into the bread dough to skinning the stray cats alive. But I think that deep down inside he knew it was me. He was just hoping he was wrong. Now are we through here I have some things I want to get done!"

"No, we are not done! Eugene who am I?"

"What? You are Malaki! I mean what the hell is with you! "

"No! Who am I?" Malaki stepped so close to Eugene's face that his ugly Goblin nose touched Eugene's. Eugene looked deep into the black hollow eyes of the thing in front of him. Then somewhere in the back of Eugene's mind, a thought stirred.

"You are me!" Eugene screamed.

The darkness exploded around them. They both became mist and began swirling together. The soul seekers grew large and then disappeared into the mass. Eugene opened his eyes in the hotel room and laughed!

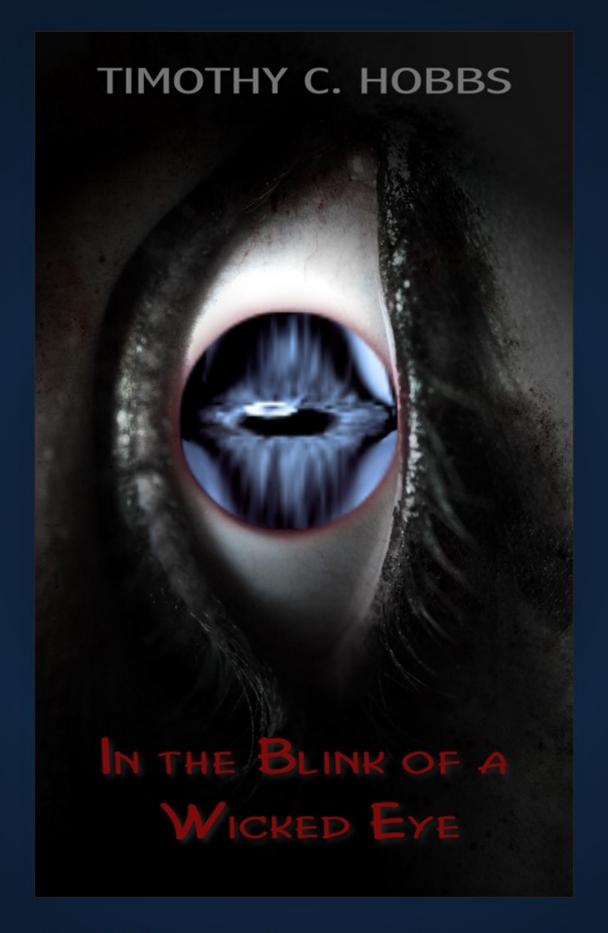
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Winnona grew up in the Los Angeles area and moved to Northern California in the 70's. She became interested in writing before she graduated from High School. Winnona recently completed the NaNoWriMo, write a book in a month challenge. She currently enjoys writing short stories for publication. Horror and Fantasy stories are two of her favorite types of writing.

Wordpress: <u>adragonsdreamblog.wordpress.com</u>



Nora's Wish John Mc Caffrey

Available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and iTunes



Available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and iTunes

#### Fear | Otis Moore

"Tell me again why you are so afraid," the ass of a doctor asked me as though I was a liar.

I glared at him through squinted eyes trying to shield the pain of the continuously brightening lights. "I wish I knew. Dark, sleep, life, honestly, I really don't know. Everything in my life seems to make me have the dreams."

"Why did you try to kill yourself? Are your dreams that bad?"

"Try, I didn't try to kill myself. I died. Killing me was a success. But, the outcome was not what I was hoping for."

"What do you mean? Being afraid of so many things, is death not one of your fears?"

"Dying was the only answer. At least I thought it was. Now though, I know I was wrong; terribly wrong. There is a place far worse than the nightmares that haunt my very existence."

"Are you talking about 'Hell'?"

"My whole life, I was told of a place you go when you die if you are a bad person. Stories of an eternity in a burning fire, Satan ruling the underworld and demons tearing at your soul. The Hell I found in death was far worse than the story book Hell. There was no fire. No demons were there and if Satan was there, he certainly didn't care to let me know."

"You said that when you woke up, or brought back from the dead, a feeling of relief came to you. It was a relief that, in a sense, too was unbearable. What did you mean speaking these words? Do you remember saying this?"

"The feeling, the unbearable feeling, I still feel the same. When I was dead, there was nothing. But, it was a conscious nothing. The lack of sound was deafening. The loss of feeling was painful. The air I breathed was suffocating. Darkness was there but then again, it wasn't. My own screams were void. But, I can remember tearing at my own flesh trying to feel something. No pain, no emotion, there was just nothing."

"The unbearable relief then, after going through what you describe, why wouldn't you be happy to just be back in the world?"

"After the experience of nothing, anything is more than I can handle. The light, the noise, it is all just too much. But now, I know there is no escape even in death. We are all just trapped in a circus of fear in everything we are or do. Life itself is fear."

"What was the last thing you remember before you cut yourself?"

"The nightmare was worse that night than any other night. I can remember being chased by something. I guess you can call it the boogie man. I don't know any other way to describe him. Every other night, it was the same. I would run until exhaustion over took me, then I would wake up. But not this time though, no matter how fast I ran, I wasn't fast enough. That night, the boogie man caught me. Faster than anything I had ever seen before. He wrapped me into a darkness that twisted my body into a wrenching pain. Screaming and fighting, I could not get free. Then, it was over. I remember jolting from the sweat soaked bed sheets to the cool floor. The exhaustion of the chase still clinging to my aching body; a realness to the nightmare followed me from my sleep. Fear still enveloped me."

"Were you able to calm yourself at all?"

"Yes, I remember sitting back down on the bed, staring at the flashing red numbers on the clock. 12:00 flashed as though the power in the house had just come back on. I had no idea of the actual time. I stood and walked to the bathroom just across the hall, the light flickered as it slowly came to life and a greeting of my own reflection shined in the mirror in front of me. Looking at myself, I could see me, but in a sense, it wasn't me. It was as if I were on the other side of the mirror looking at myself. I could see me laughing as I picked up the razor and held it to the mirror. I looked down and my hands were still resting on the sink. A look into the mirror though, I was still laughing with the razor gripped tightly in my hand. I can remember screaming as the slash of the razor sliced across my neck and chest. Then, the nothing was there."

"Your neighbor, in the apartment across the hall heard your scream. I suppose her calling the police is what saved your life."

"She didn't save my life, she saved my death. I was supposed to have been gone already. Now, I am stuck here in a nightmare that haunts me day and night. I am afraid of everything. This is not what you can call life."

"Well, John, our time is up for this session. I want you to do something for me tonight. When you get ready for bed, sleep or not, I want you to unplug your clock, plug it back in and let it flash just as it did on that night. Stare at the clock for the approximate amount of time as you did before. Get out of the bed and go to the bathroom. Look at yourself in the mirror and tell yourself that you are not afraid. Tell yourself that you are in control and will not let fear control you anymore. John, you can fix this. You just have to take back the control."

"At this point, I don't even know what control is, but, okay."

As I made my way back home, I tried to stay huddled into my own space, trying to prevent anyone or anything from brushing into me. As busy as the sidewalks are at 5:00 in the afternoon, that is nearly impossible to do. By the time I entered my apartment, I could feel the tears swelling into my eyes. The mere feeling of being alone was as terrifying as being in the streets with a crowd. I had nowhere to be. Nowhere in my life was without fear.

Alone, I sat on my bed staring at the clock that was begging for me to get on with my task. The doctor said I can fix this. I reached down behind the night stand and unplugged the clock. A small spark flickered as the electricity lost connection. Before plugging it back in, I sat on the bed and stared at the blankness on the digital timer. Nothing was there. I had the ability to bring this thing back to life and make it work again. I had that power. Maybe the doctor is right. Maybe I have the power to bring myself back to life again.

Slowly but confidently, I bent over and plugged the clock again into the wall outlet; with a small spark, the clock began to flash the hauntingly familiar red numbers. I fought a smile that came over my face and made myself believe that I did have the confidence to do this on my own. I stared at the clock until the last flash before the zero became a one. The bathroom was my next step.

As I made my way across the hall, I intentionally left the lights out to prove to myself that I was not afraid. Until I got to the bathroom, I left all of the darkness behind me. I flipped on the bathroom light and it flickered to life as I approached the mirror.

It was me standing there staring back at myself. I moved side to side to assure myself that it truly was me. Every motion was mimicked in unison as it should. My mouth cracked open and sound emerged.

"I am not afraid! This is my life and I am in control!" I screamed at my reflection with intent of becoming my own person again. "This is my life and I will not let you keep me afraid!"

I smiled at myself as the words echoed in the tiny room. I was going to be fine. As I turned the water on, the welcoming sound of the draining water was music to the deafening silence. I bent over to splash water in my face and clear my eyes.

"YOU ARE MINE!" The reflection in the mirror became the darkness that I feared so long. Screams of terror erupted from within my soul as the darkness of the boogie man engulfed me and the burning pain splintered into my nerves. Scream after scream I tried to break free of the pain, until finally...

I fell from my bed in a soaking sweat, tears streaming down my face, it was another nightmare. I looked to the clock in hopes of seeing the time. The flashing red numbers '12:00' told me that the fear was never going to end. My life was, *fear*.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Otis Moore was born in Louisville, Kentucky on November 7, 1979. He was raised In Somerset, Kentucky where he now lives with his wife and their blended family of nine children, tales of tragedy and terror are never in short supply. With such a large family, inspiration for the next book or story is never too far away.

Website: <u>www.otismoorejr.simplesite.com</u>

Facebook: Otis Moore Jr



# Now I Lay Me Down To Reap

Available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and iTunes



AVAILABLE ON AMAZON, BARNES & NOBLE, KOBO AND ITUNES

## An Interview with Alex Woolf, Author of The Remington

Phrenic Press, an imprint of Sirens Call Publications recently released *The Remington* by Alex Woolf and decided to sit down and ask him a few questions about the novella and his writing. Want to find out what Alex had to say? Keep reading...

# Sirens Call Publications: Welcome Alex! Why don't you take a few moments and introduce yourself to our readers?

Alex Woolf: I am a commercially published author of 17 novels and numerous works of non-fiction. My background is in publishing, and I was an editor for many years before I decided to become a full-time writer. Most of my books are aimed at children and young adults, and when I'm not writing, I travel around the country visiting schools, giving talks and conducting workshops. In my spare time, I enjoy writing short stories, often with dark, edgy themes, many of which have been published by Sirens Call. I live in North London in the UK with my wife, two children, two cats and a gerbil. I'm a keen tennis player and love going for long walks and cycle rides.

## SCP: What made you decide to become a writer?

Alex: I wanted to be a writer before I could write. As a young kid I would spend hours by myself playing with toy soldiers in the attic of my family home. It was only years later that I realised I was actually telling myself stories, turning these plastic figures into characters in the sagas I was constantly inventing. As I grew older, I switched to drawing, filling up notebooks with graphic-novel style adventures involving enormous spaceships and bizarre alien worlds. By the time I was ten or eleven, I started writing my first stories. Around then, my parents became involved in a cult and they sent me to a horrible school that sucked all the confidence and creativity out of me. Maybe for that reason, more than twenty years would pass before I regained the self-belief to return to my childhood dream of becoming a writer. By that time I was an experienced editor of children's non-fiction, and I came to realise that I was at least as good as many of the authors I was editing. In 2001, I took the plunge and resigned my job to become a professional writer. At first, I wrote children's non-fiction as that was what I was known for. However, I continued to write fiction in my spare time, and in 2011 I was thrilled to have my first novel published. I have been very fortunate in attracting commissions for both fiction and non-fiction and continue to earn a decent living doing the thing I love most.

#### SCP: What is *The Remington* about?

**Alex:** The Remington is a comic fantasy about a man who discovers that he doesn't really exist – or maybe he does. It's complicated, and has quite a lot to do with an old-fashioned Remington typewriter. Reviewers have called it 'a metafictional treat', a 'parallel-universe drama' and 'Tristram Shandy-esque'. First and foremost I hope it's an enjoyable tale that readers will find

both amusing and thought-provoking. For more of my thoughts on the story, see my blog post: http://alexwoolf.co.uk/the-remington/

# SCP: What is the one thing you'd like readers to know about *The Remington* before they read it?

**Alex:** Nothing. Like the story's hero, Howard, I want them to be a blank slate, a tabula rasa, with no preconceptions or foreknowledge. I advise them to make themselves a cup of tea, or some other beverage of choice, find themselves a comfy chair and look forward to half an hour of pleasurable and stimulating entertainment.

# SCP: If you could cast *The Remington*, who would you choose to play your main characters?

**Alex:** For Howard, I would want an actor adept at playing the bemused everyman. Someone like Martin Freeman, Jesse Eisenberg (see his performance in *The Double*) or John Turturro could do it very well. Evie could be played by someone a little kooky, like Helena Bonham-Carter. For Hettie you would need someone strong and practical – Allison Janney from *West Wing* springs to mind. The role of George would need someone with good comic timing and an impeccably posh English accent. I can't think of anyone better for this role than Hugh Laurie (see his performance as Bertie Wooster). The typewriter should be played by a typewriter, preferably an 1878 Remington. I'd want the film directed by the Coen brothers or Terry Gilliam.

## SCP: What is the hardest challenge that you have faced as a writer?

Alex: Being asked questions like that — and then spending far too long thinking about the answer. In a nutshell, the hardest thing about being a writer these days is getting down to it. I don't think I'm alone among contemporary writers in facing the problem of distraction. The world of the Internet is very good at finding entertaining ways of diverting you from your chosen task. I've even had to go into self-imposed exile from Facebook simply in order to get some work done. The thing is, I love social media, and I'm sad that I don't have enough time for it. As far as writing is concerned, I have never found it a challenge. I don't even know what 'writer's block' is. When you are on a deadline, you can't afford luxuries like that. So it's not writing that I have a problem with, it's everything else.

# SCP: In your opinion, what sets *The Remington* apart from other novellas of the same genre?

**Alex:** *The Remington* plays around with the whole idea of fiction. It has fun with such questions as what makes a good fictional character, but it manages to do this without ever breaking the fourth wall. In other words, the reader can enjoy thinking about these concepts while remaining immersed in the story. I suppose this might be one aspect that sets *The Remington* apart. It's also the only tale I have yet come across in which a typewriter plays a central role. And the other

things you get with *The Remington* are a sweet romance, a tense subplot involving a people smuggler, and loads of terrifically bad weather. I'd call that pretty good value for 99 cents.

## SCP: Who are some of your favorite authors? Favorite novels?

**Alex:** Oh hell. Too many! Perhaps I should set down the books and stories that have been most influential to me as a writer. These are, in no particular order: *Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka, *The Unconsoled* by Kazuo Ishiguro, *A Perfect Day for Bananafish* and *For Esmé with Love and Squalor* by J D Salinger (possibly the two most perfect short stories ever written in English), *Metropole* by Ferenc Karinthy, *Carrie* by Stephen King, *Slaughterhouse 5* by Kurt Vonnegut and *Catch 22* by Joseph Heller. There are many, many other books and authors that I love and admire, but these ones touched me very deeply, perhaps because they don't shy away from – in fact, they embrace – the darker and madder aspects of the human experience.

## SCP: How do you define success as a writer? Have you been successful?

Alex: For me, success as a writer is creating a story that perfectly conveys the original vision that inspired it. In that sense I have not yet been successful – though I will keep trying to my dying day. The thing about stories is that they mutate as they are being written. I am proud of many of the stories I've written, but they're never quite what I intended when I started out. Words can be beautiful, but they are imperfect devices for the communication of meaning. For example, I have seen landscapes and sunsets and churches that have brought tears to my eyes, and I would dearly love to be able to describe that feeling in words, but I'm not sure that is possible. What comes out may be beautiful in its own way, but it's never the same. In material terms, I have achieved success as a writer, and make a decent living doing what I love. But in artistic terms, success remains elusive, and this will probably always be the case. I just hope I never give up striving for it.

# SCP: Do you have words of wisdom about writing that you want to pass on to novelists and writers out there who are just starting out?

**Alex:** See above. Keep striving to translate that vision into words. Also this:

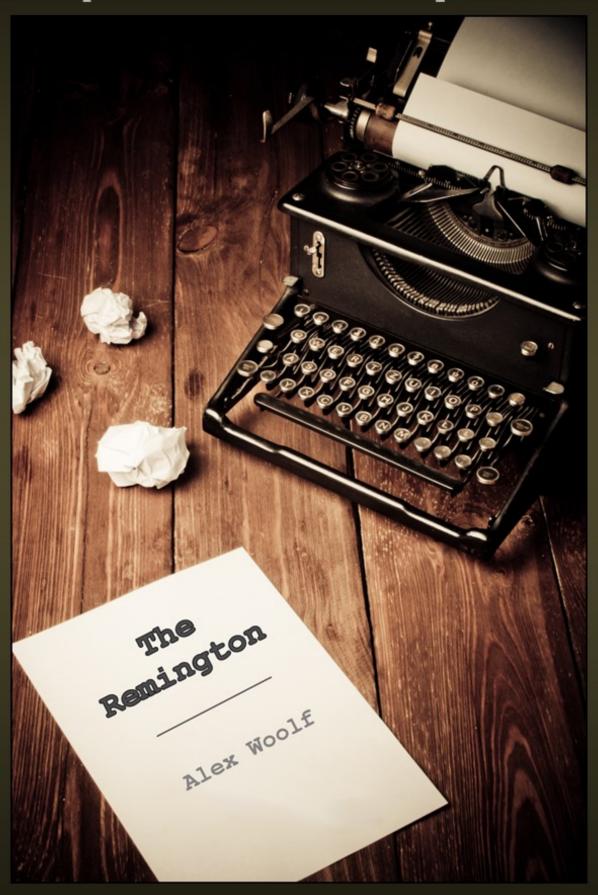
- Don't forget your readers, i.e. the poor sods who have paid good money to wade through your prose. Make sure you give them maximum value.
- Read, read. Read the authors you love, but also go outside your comfort zone. Try out new genres. It doesn't matter if you don't like a book. You can learn as much, if not more about writing from books you hate, as you can from books you love.
- · Avoid using a long word where a short one will do. We're not show-offs, we're storytellers.

#### SCP: What should readers walk away from your novella knowing? How should they feel?

**Alex:** Far be it from me to tell readers what they should know or feel. I hope they feel that enjoyable buzz you get from a satisfying story. I hope also that if they ever happen to encounter an antique typewriter, they will treat it with a healthy degree of caution.

#### Thank you Alex!

"...A splendidly comic tale that taps away at the keys to the creative process, whilst juggling parallel plots with a brilliantly deft touch..."



Available Exclusively on Amazon

## And now for a few lines from Alex' The Remington...

If he was noticed at all, Howard Protheroe did not live long in people's memories. Half man, half ghost, Howard's character, or what he revealed of it, lacked sufficient weight to leave a footprint on the landscapes through which he travelled. He was the man with the basket in the late-opening supermarket, surveying the meals for one; the grey figure at the bus-stop with no identity separate from the queue he formed a part of.

Physically unexceptional, his complexion was of a hue that was inclined to blend into—or at least fail to clash with—any given background. At the office where he travelled each day, people had trouble remembering his name, or even what he did there. If he had opinions, he kept them to himself. He radiated blandness, as if the Good Lord had created him merely so that others could look more fascinating in his company.

But, to be fair to Howard, a person is only as interesting as life allows him to be. It's events, after all, that make a man, and events seemed to avoid Howard as they might a bad odour. If anything remarkable happened in his neighbourhood, you can be sure that Howard would be somewhere else at the time. He had never been the eye-witness on the six o'clock news, or been vox-popped in the street by a roving camera crew. Even the local salesmen and religious callers seemed to give old Howard the cold shoulder.

And yet is it possible that there was more to Howard than this? After all, he had a heart in his chest that beat as strongly as any man's. He had thoughts, presumably, and feelings, and eyes that sometimes brimmed with tears at unexpected moments. Maybe he just needed waking from his living dream, or for fate to come a-calling one day and—against longstanding tradition—throw a few events in his path?

Sometime around his thirty-third year, that is exactly what happened. It occurred one Saturday—a Saturday which began like any other in Howard's life—with a walk in the park. The park was his local one, situated at the top of his road and then some sixteen paces east. Noting the hoary look overhead, Howard had sensibly taken along his brolly. He congratulated himself on this foresight when, not ten minutes into his walk, there came a peal of thunder, which sounded to Howard's ears not dissimilar to the clearing of a very large person's throat.

It was about then that he saw the dog. Well, what he actually saw was a fluffy brown bush detach itself from the trees and float off into the field. Howard removed his glasses, wiped off the steam, then replaced them. The bush was now clearly a dog: actually quite a sleek-looking creature, not bush-like at all. It was bobbing along with a strange sort of gait, coming in his direction. Howard had no idea what make or model of dog it was, being a non-doggy person, though he could not fail to notice it had some kind of malfunction in the leg department. He waited for the pooch to pass him by, as all creatures, human or animal, habitually did, and was quite taken aback when the canine came to a halt in the middle of the path, and looked up at him in a head-cocked, nervous kind of way. Howard, being unused to such behaviour, stopped also, and looked down at the dog.

"Well," said Howard.

"Woof," said the dog.

As conversations with strangers went, so far this was one of Howard's better efforts. He decided to take things a stage further.

"Well well," he said.

This elicited a small whine and a rather sheepish-sounding woof from the four-legged one.

Howard felt flecks of rain on his hands and cheeks, and concluded reluctantly that he could not afford to continue with this repartee. To tarry any longer in such an exposed location, would be to put out a welcome mat for any kind of viral or bacterial infection that happened along. So he decided to bring matters to a close.

"A very good day to you," he said, bowing to the dog. Then he raised his brolly and continued on his way.

Two minutes and fifty-three seconds later, as he was opening his front door, Howard heard a noise at the gate. He turned to see the little brown dog blinking up at him through the rain. Its front paw—evidently the one giving it trouble—was raised from the ground in the manner of a supplicant. The dog whimpered a little, then gave a bark. It never took its eyes off Howard.

And what did Howard do then? The first thing he did was frown. And then he hummed a bit—a habit of indecisive people. And finally he invited the dog in. Well—as he explained it to himself later—it was raining quite heavily by then, and the little mutt looked about as bereft of friends as Howard himself.

\*\*\*

The day Howard met the dog was—for those with an interest in such things—Saturday the 24th of April 2004. Exactly three weeks earlier, a man walked into a typewriter shop in a large city three hundred and forty miles to the south. Why mention such a fact? Well this is where a little patience is called for on the part of the reader, for despite appearances to the contrary, these two events—canine encounter and man entering shop—were connected, intimately connected in fact, as shall in due course be revealed.

The man's name, by the way, was George Durant. And on his thirty-fifth birthday, a dangerous notion took hold of him: he decided he wanted to write. George was a man of particular tastes when it came to literature. He was a great admirer of antique authors, an admiration matched by an almost equal antipathy towards modern ones. Why, he asked himself, didn't people write books the way they used to, with a solid plot to get your teeth into and not too much frilly-frolly stuff about thoughts and feelings? He put the question to a well-educated bloke at the local university. The man waffled on for some time using words like *zeitgeist* and *post-modernism* until George began to feel rather dizzy.

While accepting that some of what this man said must be true—by virtue of the fact that you didn't get so many letters after your name if all you did was speak utter piffle (even if that

was what it sounded like)—George decided to develop his own theory about what he called the 'modern disease'. His theory went something like this: the tool a man uses to write with is an extremely important and very underestimated influence on the quality of his work. Michelangelo, for example, could not have carved David with a pickaxe and a shovel. In much the same way, a piece of writing done with, say, a quill and ink is likely to be very different from one composed on a personal computer. It followed from this—at least in George's mind—that a large part of the blame for the 'modern disease' could be laid at the door of today's word-processing computers. The trouble was that it had made writing too easy. People could type at the speed of their imaginations, putting words onto their screens before they had time to check they were even worth putting there. And if they didn't like those words, they could delete them. Or if they liked them but thought they would be better placed somewhere else, they could move them. And all of this could be done in a flash without any fuss or mess. Antique writers had no such luxuries. The process of writing was slower and more painstaking, and the idea of moving text would fill an early writer with ink-stained dread! A disciplined approach was essential for these authors. Sentences were first composed, thought about and edited in their heads before being committed to parchment or papyrus or whatever. All of which took some graft, as a consequence of which they had no time or energy to do anything but tell the story. And a jolly good thing too, as it turned out, was George's view.

Having got this far with his theory, George decided to put it to the test. He already knew he wanted to write, and write in the early style. And, if he had any faith in his own theory, the thing to do to guarantee success would be to write with an early writer's tools. Having toyed with and then abandoned the notion of a quill and ink on the grounds of it being just too damned fiddly, he fixed on the plan of using a typewriter. For George, typewriters were the very essence of what real writing was all about: all that clacking and ringing, noise and motion—well, it gave the impression of great industry, befitting the birth of any work of consequence. There was nothing smooth or easy about your old-fashioned typewriting machine. If you typed too fast the keys would jam, there was no 'cut and paste' option, and there was always the chance that the ribbon would get tangled or need replacing. Writing on one of those contraptions must have been a tough and sweaty experience, not unlike the honest toil of your average manual labourer. It made George feel quite humble and lumpy-throated just thinking about it.

So without any further ado, he set out to buy himself a typewriter—the older and more antiquated the better. After some searching he chanced upon a shop in a tiny backstreet of his home city. From the window display it was clear that the shop specialized in typewriters and nothing else. There was everything on offer there, from primitive bakelite jobs to the final generation of electronic machines introduced just before the PC revolution swept in during the 1980s. George entered the gloomy interior of the shop, causing a little bell to tinkle just above the door. He approached the small, bespectacled man behind the counter, and with a preparatory clearing of the throat, announced his desire.

The man peered at him over his spectacles. "Then you've come to the right place," he said in a piping voice. "I've got any number of old and antiquated machines here. I've got Barlocks,

Caligraphs, Coronas, Crandalls, Edisons, Franklins, Granville Automatics, Ingersolls, Lamberts, Munsons, Noiseless Portables, Pittsburg Visibles. Was there any particular one you were looking for?"

The question threw George. He had no idea the purchase would be this complicated. He cleared his throat once more. "No, not really. Just—you know—one that types, sort of thing." Then he smiled. "I'm going to write a book y'see."

"I see," said the man, nodding slowly. "Well then let me ask you another question: how much do you wish to spend?"

George laughed, partly out of relief. This one was much simpler. "'Oh don't worry about that, old chap," he said heartily. "Money is no object. I've got the trust fund y'see." Then he considered this for a moment. "In fact the pricier the better. What I want is something with real historic value. Perhaps one that was owned by some early writer of renown, that sort of thing."

The shopkeeper's brow furrowed. "If you really don't mind spending a bit, I do have something that may interest you. It's a Remington No. 2, part of the original 1878 product line, and a real rarity. This was the first typewriter to type both upper and lower case."

"Sounds splendid," said George. "Was it owned by anyone famous?"

"Not that I know of," answered the man, "but it does have a rather curious history. It must have been taken abroad at some point in its early life, because it was bought by a collector in a market stall in Persia in the 1920s. We've no idea of what happened to it before then. The collector was an odd one alright, an acquaintance of my father's as it so happens. He claimed the typewriter had a strange characteristic. Almost a will of its own, was how he put it. He said it would only type the things it wanted to or approved of. Said he'd be typing away quite merrily, writing a letter to a friend or some such thing, and then he would decide to type something that perhaps wasn't quite honest or truthful, and the machine just seized up, though he swore there was nothing mechanically wrong with it. Said it happened too many times to be a coincidence. Ridiculous of course. The old boy finished his days in a mental institution, so perhaps we shouldn't pay too much heed to his opinions. But it's a good legend all the same, don't you agree, and one which perhaps makes it worth something extra, for those who care about such things."

George agreed it was a very good legend, and when he saw the typewriter he was very pleased with that also. With its sturdy black frame, its four rows of keys and rubber roller, it was a perfect fit with his romantic image of such a machine. The price was four figures, but George did not blink. He happily wrote out a cheque, and was soon on his way back home with his new purchase sitting proudly in the passenger seat of his car...

#### The Remington is available exclusively for purchase or borrow on Amazon



#### Credits

# **Fiction and Poetry**

T.A. Bechel Maynard Blackoak

S.E. Casey

Denzell Cooper

Calvin Demmer

Paul Edward Fitzgerald

Nicky P. Gardiner

Jill Hand

Kevin Holton

Otis Moore

**Neal Noakes** 

Jon Olson

Delphine Quinn

Mark Steinwachs

DJ Tyrer

Winnona Vincent

C.A. Viruet

Terry M. West

L. E. White

Alex Woolf

## Featured Artwork

NOISTROMO

#### Featured Authors

Jon Olson Alex Woolf

# Copyright © 2016 Sirens Call Publications All rights reserved

All stories are the intellectual property of their respective authors. Sirens Call Publications has been granted permission by the authors denoted on the page of contents to print their works in Issue #26 of The Sirens Call. All characters and events appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Artwork is reprinted under the expressed permission of NOISTROMO.

All Advertisements are property of SCP Designs, with the exception of the NOISTROMO Ad.

#### License Notes

This eZine is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This eZine may not be sold, reproduced, or reprinted in any format if you do not hold the copyright to the individual work in question. Thank you for respecting the hard work of these authors.