



DEAD & DYING

Poetry, Short Stories,

«I Flash Fiction

featuring the author's

own death!

300 Word Comparative Flash Fiction

Artwork by Author and Artist, Karen Runge

Interview with Greg McCabe, Author of 'The Undying Love'

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Karen Runge - The Haunted Bridges Series

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Karen Runge: The Haunted Bridge Series Elmore, Ohio (USA)



This bridge is said to be haunted by a motorcyclist who was beheaded in an accident on the bridge. There's an urban legend about seeing the headlight come toward you if you cross the bridge at a certain time of night, or on the anniversary of the accident.



The Fascination with Death: An Editorial

Julianne Snow

You know I have to say upfront that I'm not entirely sure where this is going to take me but I feel it's something I need to explore. That means you're coming along on the ride with me – unless of course you stop reading now, but since you're still here, I'm thinking you might just see this crazy thing through...

So what's the fascination with death? If you're wondering why I've asked you this question it comes from a place within me that asks the same question of myself. Take a minute and look at the different forms of entertainment around us. Can you tell me the name of the last movie you saw that didn't have a death in it? The last book you read? The last time you watched the news and didn't see something atrocious involving death? Okay, that last example isn't a source of entertainment but it is one of the outlets we pull our ideas for entertainment from. And don't feel bad, I'm as guilty as they come.

My favourite movies are full of death: Identity, Cloverfield, The Usual Suspects, The Wizard of Oz, the list really is endless. Sure they're not the main themes, but where would we be in The Wizard of Oz if Dorothy's house hadn't landed on the Wicked Witch of the East?

Even my favourite shows are about death in one way or another. The Walking Dead, The Killing, Dexter, Dead Like Me, Six Feet Under, Survivor, Big Brother... Okay the last two are reality television but think about it for a moment – it's about a competition where if you lose, the money is dead to you. It's an odd concept that's for sure, but one that I think is helped along with the language that is used; when Jeff Probst talks to you during your first tribal council he says – "this is part of the ritual of Tribal Council because in this game fire represents life. As long as you have fire, you are still in this game. When your fire's gone, so are you." See! Death in the game is the equivalent to being voted out!

And don't get me started in literature – classics, romance, science fiction, fantasy, horror – all of the genres are inundated with it. Not a bad thing – it's obvious that we consume it, but why? Is it because it gives us a chance to come to terms with it?

I can only answer the question for myself – I have a fascination with death because it adds something to my entertainment of choice. Whether it's intrigue, horror, a twist or pure emotion, death can add a little something you simply can't achieve any other way.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Julianne Snow is the author of the *Days with* the *Undead* series. She writes within the realms of speculative fiction, has roots that go deep into horror and is a member of the Horror Writers Association. Julianne has pieces of short fiction in publications from Sirens Call Publications, Open Casket Press, 7DS Books, James Ward Kirk Publishing, Coffin Hop Press and Hazardous Press as well as the forthcoming shorts in anthologies from Phrenic Press and others. *The Carnival 13*, a collaborative round-robin novella for charity which she contributed to and helped to spearhead was released in October 2013.

Twitter: @CdnZmbiRytr Facebook: Julianne Snow

Life, Death and Blackjack: An Editorial

Nina D'Arcangela

So you're sitting in a dimly lit back room, smoke fills the air, the muted sound of people drinking and laughing along with crappy jukebox music filters through a closed and guarded door. You're sitting at a whisky stained table covered in worn-out felt. You're one of five players sitting on stools with a stone-faced dealer standing across from you. You've been watching the cards pass by, and think you have a pretty good idea of how they're running. Most of the faces have been played, and the high numbers have been showing up as a forty-sixty split until now. You're holding sixteen; sitting on two eights. The safe money says stand, the rulebook says play the sixteen and hit, or take your chances and double down – split your eights and play both hands hoping for a ten or one of the few faces left. But the dealer - let's call him Jack - is showing fifteen, so he has to hit. That makes your sixteen a pretty sweet bet, but do you want to play it safe, take a chance that the dealer doesn't draw a six or lower? Two of the three players to your right got greedy and bust, the other is holding at seventeen, but a lot of little cards have hit the table between chump number one and chump number three. Guess what, you're chump number four and Jack is looking right at you waiting for your signal. You think you know what you should do; you're fairly certain what your next move will be. You look at your cards one last time and...

Yup, that's how life works. You do all you can to run the odds in your favor, and then some dipshit flicks the overhead lights on and it all ends, just like that. Game over. And you – you're still sitting there with your two eights not knowing what might have happened.

Now if I was the one sitting at that table, and Jack was looking at me, I would have immediately doubled down given the number of low cards the shoe just coughed up. I would toss caution to the wind and go for an eighteen or perhaps even a nineteen if the gods chose to bestow an Ace upon me. Moral of my story: it's not how long the game lasts, it's how much fun I have while playing. It may not be the safe move, it may not even be the smart move, but it's the gutsy one, and I don't plan to let life drift past because the odds weren't in my favor.

Every now and then, take a chance – risk going bust and you might find yourself raking in all the chips. You'll never know unless you try...

Happy New Year! May 2014 bring you success and happiness in whatever manner you choose to measure it. :}

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Nina D'Arcangela is a quirky horror writer who likes to spin soul rending snippets of despair. She reads anything from splatter matter to dark matter, and is an UrbEx explorer who loves to photograph abandoned places, bits of decay and old grave yards. Nina is a co-owner of Sirens Call Publications, a member of the writing group Pen of the Damned, and the owner and resident anarchist of Dark Angel Photography.

Twitter: <a>@Sotet_Angyal

Blog: sotet angyal.wordpress.com



Dead & Dying: An Editorial

Gloria Bobrowicz

Have you ever thought about dying? Really thought about it? How would you handle it? If you knew you had a terminal disease, would you embrace the time you have left on this earth and try to do all the things you've put off until 'tomorrow'? Would you celebrate the good things you've experienced or would you be the kind of person that thinks 'why me'?

Most people are afraid of dying, it's a scary thought. Dying is a fact of life. We are all going to die; we begin that journey from the moment we take our first breath. I personally think we should make each day we are on this earth count. My wish for each of us would be that we could look in the mirror and like what we see. Hopefully we haven't wasted time on petty issues or things that don't matter while focusing on the really important things. And that we treat others with the respect we want others to show us. Finally, I hope we limit our regrets and are proud of the decisions we've made.

From what I understand, we only walk this path called life once... unless of course you believe in reincarnation. Some folks believe we are reincarnated to learn from past lives and hopefully fix our mistakes in the next.

I don't know if I believe in that, but if I do come back, I'd like to be rich, talented, on the best seller list, and drop-dead gorgeous; but with my luck, I'd probably be a tree that gets cut down to make a foot-stool for someone who's rich, talented, on the best seller list, and drop-dead gorgeous!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Gloria Bobrowicz has been a huge horror fan since early childhood. She loves books related to true crime – particularly the serial killer variety. Watching the movie 'Night of the Living Dead' or some of the older horror movies such as, 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers', 'The Thing from Another World', or 'War of the Worlds' with a bowl of popcorn is her idea of relaxing. Gloria is a co-owner and the Editor-In-Chief of Sirens Call Publications.

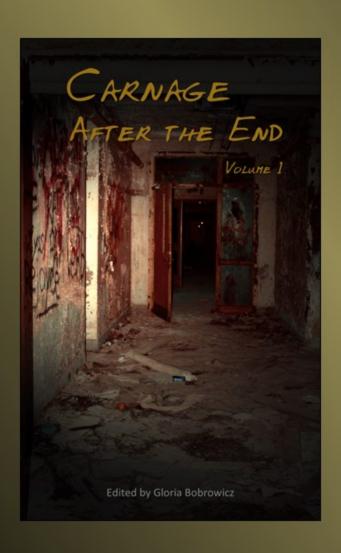
Twitter: @GlorBobrowicz FB: Gloria Bobrowicz

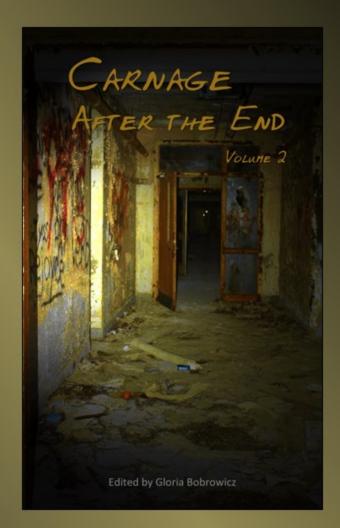






In a world where society has collapsed and terror lurks around every corner, no one can be trusted and nothing can be taken for granted...





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Kobo, Smashwords, and the iStore

The Last Word Lori R. Lopez

I'm the kind of writer who can forget about food and drink, submerged in a sea of contemplation without break for many hours. The entire day when uninterrupted. Ordinarily I have that kind of focus, and I've wondered if this will be the death of me... to write something that refuses to release its stranglehold until it's done or I keel over, whichever happens first. Is it possible to drown in your own thoughts? Or 'hack' oneself to pieces? Could I wither away from deprivation while immersed in a premeditated literary coma, mentally shut off from the world?

I am also the kind of writer you notice, who deliberately neglects to blend into the background. I have style. My words are meant to be savored, read again, read aloud. My brain often wars whether to scrawl with poetic license or record the witty scramble of inclinations that fill my prose. I have been accused of one bleeding into the other, and my words do bleed for they are alive. They are both my darlings and my dickens; where they collide, emotion and color splash the page, turning black and white to red, I dare say purple. I am not afraid to paint by letters outside the box without a net, and some despise this. I've received vile insults. It took many years to gain widespread attention. I showed the critics! Now I must fear that a crazed stalker may wish to do me harm. You cannot be loved, it seems, without being hated. That is the opposite side of the coin.

Tonight I type a death scene in First Person, which requires me to don the character and describe the snuffing out of life's candle as if through my eyes, experiencing the moment, and it has caused me to reflect upon my actual demise. How would I rather go, quiet or with a bang?

I think I'd prefer to see it coming. But that might be the cruelest form if indeed it were the end and there was nothing I could do. As usual, I cannot decide. I am one of those people who cannot pick one. There is no easy answer, no good choice. Perhaps living to the fullest could prepare me. Feeling satisfied. Perhaps that is the best way to win against Death. Besides living, of course. I jot a note to start doing so. Tomorrow. Live. If I'm still alive.

The majority of us envision a peaceful conclusion, surrounded by loved ones. Expiring with a gentle sigh. But not today. Never today. That's the thing. Are we ever truly satisfied? Isn't it human nature to want more and cling to life, yearning to survive?

Tonight I must imagine a far less happy ending. Horror demands it. And I am a horror author. I draw a blank. Facing Death isn't easy. I need to write something, anything. There's a deadline.

The page on the screen is intimidating. That hasn't changed. Nostalgia surfaces like a fish leaping at the moon. Wish I could crank paper into a typewriter and pound out the story. It was a comforting racket once upon a time. Atmospheric, profoundly more real. The process has been diminished from a machine-gun rattle to a softer, almost soothing, click of keys. And a virtual page you can't rip out and crumple, toss at the wastebasket and miss.

Wastebasket is right. I grimace at how wasteful it was, even now as I breathe what could be my next-to-last breath. Or the breath before that. Sometimes I forget to breathe. A person could die of that too. I'm getting paranoid, I realize, as if depicting my death might bring me bad luck!

No need to worry. Barring a freak accident, I'm not likely to do myself in. I'm not going anywhere for days, so that eliminates the cliché of getting flattened by a bus. It's wise to avoid clichés altogether, unless they are made more interesting. What if a bus loses control and plows into my house? Just in case, I'll avoid the living-room. Along with other danger zones, like the shower and light-sockets. I have no stairs on which to break a fall with my neck. I should be okay, if there isn't an apocalypse or nuclear disaster looming around the corner. Provided no band of ruffians breaks down my door. And if I don't die in my sleep. I'm an insomniac, a tad bleary from lack of rest. I might doze off and never wake up. Or my face will bash the desk and I'll die of a nosebleed, a concussion! At least I write and edit on the computer; no manuscripts to print out and risk a lethal papercut.

Seated here I feel safe, in control. It is a comfort to believe I will kick the symbolic bucket at my desk doing what I love. A smile flickers. Yes, that would be my choice. Later, much later. I don't plan to retire. I'll write until I drop. Now that's a happy ending! But where's the horror?

My mind is still a blank. I tend to have tiny sugarcube-sized lapses, not cumbrous writer's blocks of marble or limestone. Drumming my fingers, impatient, the clock ticking (it's digital like the page on my computer screen, so the ticking is figurative, a mere memory), I catch sight of a hangnail. I know better, know I shouldn't, but I pull it. Who can resist? This one's a bleeder. It gushes. Great, when I thought I was safe! Being out of tissues, I grab the nearby roll of toilet paper on the edge of a cluttered table and unwind a ream. I might be a little dizzy and weak from loss of blood. Swathing my finger with a thick temporary bandage, I shake a wounded fist. "You won't get me that easy!" I declare.

Typing is more difficult with the clump of paper padding one digit, yet I stalwartly record my every thought and deed. And then it hits me like Thor's Hammer: I'm already writing the tale!

A muffled thud beckons my awareness. Just as I'm getting into it, concentrating, inspired, there's a distraction. Tapping halts, yet the narrative voice continues in my head. "Typical," I scorn and rise from my chair. I have to investigate. It would be worse to let whatever it is sneak up on me.

Approaching the living-room, dim except for a lamp, bulging eyes sweep the perimeter. My ears are tuned for the slightest sound. It occurs to me, belatedly, that leaving the comfort of my desk makes me vulnerable to another sort of casualty, a fatal blow entirely unforeseen. I'm not sure I can deal with that. Better return to my sanctuary and wait for it.

My steps retreat then freeze, distinguishing a subsequent thud. This one is close. Very close. In fact, it's behind me.

Eyelids snap shut. I'm afraid to confront the unknown, a coward at heart — which, speaking of which, is banging a bass-drum in my chest. What if it stops? Or suffers an attack? That can happen! Braincells frantically seek an alternate route, mapping the layout of my surroundings. I brace to run, eyes narrowed, and dash for the kitchen to the left. Grabbing a large metal spoon from the stovetop, I whirl and swing it at an unobserved target, hoping it isn't someone I would regret clobbering.

It isn't. Anyone. The improvised club fans air. I'm alone. Except for a new thud in the direction of the living-room. "Look, I don't like playing games," I warn, "unless it's across a board on a table... conducted in a civilized manner... with rules and everything!"

No reply. Well, that's not surprising. I tried to smack the intruder's face with a big spoon. It wasn't exactly a greeting, or an invitation to tea. It was quite impolite. I panic, predicting repercussions. Maybe I should put down the utensil and surrender, attempt to bargain or beg. I could plead insanity! Timidly, I lower the serving spoon to a counter. Then raise it in anger. I'm not a mouse! And I'm in no mood to die.

"Let's talk about this," I suggest.

No intelligible response can be discerned. Instead, I detect a guttural howl that assures me of two things: I do have company, and my guest isn't human.

Fantasy can be a lot scarier than reality, fabricating the most awful of dreads. In my mind the trespasser towers eight or nine feet tall, as broad as a Yeti on steroids, and hairier than Houdini (I tend to pun badly when nervous). Inhaling a deep gulp of oxygen for courage, brandishing the spoon, I charge beyond the archway to the living-room that I should be trying to avoid. "Okay, you asked for it!" I blurt, a bit awkward.

Had I years to dwell on the past, what follows would be vividly recalled in the future. Alas, I'm convinced it is curtains for me. The beast I glimpse, however, leaves me gaping in mute astonishment...

After a shocked hiatus, the narrative thread continues. By now the creature has vanished. I'm staring at an empty patch of floor. The carpet is linty. A shame I didn't pause during my pause to vacuum. It is here the true horror commences.

Between the sofa and a wall emanates a humming vibration that causes my eardrums to wrench painfully under pressure. The spoon falls. My knees buckle. I sag to the rug. Clapping hands over ears, I squint at the fiend scurrying forth to challenge me. Describing it as simply grotesque would be an injustice. The nasty ranks at the top of the list in the Ripley's Believe It Or Not Hall Of Fame Guinness World Record Book for grotesque. There is a keen difference. Let me attempt to spell it out. If you can picture a grungy slime-oozing bone-faced tentacle-nosed spider-limbed cuttlefish, you'd have a vague idea what I am referring to. Not to mention its black talonesque toenails, pointy yellow teeth, pink and green ear tresses, orange eyebrows and whiskers, and glowing white sunken orbs. Hold everything; make that turquoise toenails, chartreuse ear locks, lime-green brows and whiskers, and glowing burgundy orbs. It can change color! And shape! The hideous blobular atrocity on eight bent appendages grins in skullish amusement, facial arms flapping, then sprouts a striped dorsal fin and transforms to a five-legged crustacean with a furry mammal head. I ponder how scientists could have missed it. The garish anomaly must be from Outer Space.

Cautious, I retrieve my spoon and straighten. I have no idea what else to do and stand before the creature in awe. I love monsters. I suppose I might rank being eaten by one as my second choice. But again, I'm in no hurry. Although I do need to chase it back to wherever it's from. I consider opening the front door and letting the neighbors cope with the problem. Who cares what they think? No, the thing is in my house for a reason. This is my destiny.

The doorbell rings. I hate that bell. I hate the phone ringing, hate any disruption. That's why I live alone. I made the decision years ago to put my career and dreams first, instead of my family. My sons had to find their own way in the world, same as me. I didn't have encouragement and support as a child. Why should they? We're all too busy to take time for each other, like when they were growing up. There was never enough time, and it passes so quickly. I thought there would be time, someday. It was like that with my mother. I don't even have time for regrets. Blinking to clear a misty veil, I march to the door and yank it open, curious who could be bothering me, forgetting to check the peephole. I'm not expecting a delivery. And if I were, they don't deliver packages at night. Unless commercialism has changed the policy to meet demands. I tend to miss news and current trends.

The man on the stoop has an odd expression. I recognize it well. He's a fan. Whether seeking an autograph or to stalk me, showing up at my door is incredibly rude. The latter can turn dangerous, and get uglier than the beast in my living-room. That reminds me. Flinging a hand forward in dismissal, I utter a hasty appeal to respect my privacy. The crimson wad of tissue paper sails to ping his cheek. "A souvenir." I slam and bolt the door in chagrin. I have other issues: the monster, and a deadline — I need to kill myself off within three hours.

Plucking a brim from a rack, I tug it on to look my best. I'm a hat-lover too. I should be wearing one.

"Oh! My finger stopped bleeding," I am pleased to report. Ignoring fervent knocks on wood, then staccato rapping upon a windowpane, I stroll to the monster. A fist clutches the lengthy shaft of the spoon as if wielding a sword. I am not a horror author who revels in gore. I have no intention of hurting the creature except in self-defense, but it doesn't need to know that. I hoist the spoon in a threatening pose and shout, "HAAA!!!"

The monster has fashioned itself into a spiral conish critter armored with shell-like feathers. Four pairs of stubby wings flail. A tripod of short legs support the frame. Three suction-feet rapidly stomp to the rear of the house. I pursue, herding him by stamping my own feet and waving the spoon. I'm not sure why. The story is blazing its own trail, squish-popping toward a peculiar conclusion, much as a life can do that fails to go according to design. I charted a course for the stars and reached them, yet it appears my path has taken a bizarre and quirky twist in the finale.

Glass shatters. Footsteps crunch after me. The monster flees into the bathroom. I arrive, panting, and discover the chamber bare. My senses scream and I spin. The hallway is vacant. "What the heck?"

I search the whole house, rummaging closets, peering below beds, certain the fan is hiding. He was real!

After all... I am to die alone.

Shakily I walk to my office and sit at my desk. Fingers tap the keyboard, typing lines, paragraphs. Translating mental images onto pages that don't exist without electricity. Swallowing, chilled, I read what I have written then close the file without saving it. I can't publish this story. The protagonist and antagonist are both me. Was I ever known, ever famous, or is that a delusion?

The clock strikes Midnight.

In the end I am killed by my own prose. Deleting the words could not erase the fact they were typed. My heart spasms, shredded by dejection, precisely as I wrote it. Death has the last word.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Lori R. Lopez wears hats. Under the hats lurk secret unsavory furtive things that go bump in the night and slither beneath your toenails as you sleep. Her titles include AN ILL WIND BLOWS, CHOCOLATE-COVERED EYES, THE MACABRE MIND OF LORI R. LOPEZ, JUGULAR, MONSTROSITIES, and DANCE OF THE CHUPACABRAS.

Twitter: @LoriRLopez

Amazon Author Page: http://www.amazon.com/author/lorirlopez



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Karen Runge: The Haunted Bridge Series Ashland, Ohio (USA)



This bridge (more a tunnel) is said to be haunted by a woman who hung herself nearby, and also by children who died in a fire at the local orphanage.



The Urn D. Jonathan Brudie

Farmland and fields are filled with the remnants of life. The bitter chill has taken over and the autumn wind shakes the trees. The tree's that once danced with a radiant and colorful sway, now stand barren and naked. Perhaps a solstice of renewal takes them over? The whistling breezes clamor together in an epiphany of death. It is so cold, so cold.

I'm dying in this hospital bed and I cannot awaken. The doctors and nurses move, in and out, and say I'm hopeless. Hopeless, is that what I've become? Maybe they fail to see my slight twitching every time a nurse touches my hand. Nobody sees the tiny glimmer of life and consciousness within me.

"David? David can you hear me?" Comes a familiar voice from somewhere in the distance. I can hear, but God I can't respond! I try and I try, but nothing shows. My wife Crystal sits over me, touching my forehead and crying. I cry too, sobbing so loudly within my head. I want to touch her, comfort her, but I can't.

Crystal is escorted away as the doctor prepares to discontinue my life support, and as the physician watches me convulse it is only then that he realizes their mistake. My eyes bulge open and stare at him, burning into his mind. Quickly they try to revive me, but it's too late.

I've gone to blackness, forever, or so I thought.

Drifting, torment and release: swirling nightmarish things. Like fighting a bad flu, my mind seems lucid again, and I can feel my feet and fingers. I'm standing in the dark but I don't know where to go. "David, I love you!" I hear right next to me. It's Crystal! Her sweet voice echoes in the pitch darkness. Thank God I'm not alone!

I reach for her in the black. My hands grope from side to side but I hit nothing but solid walls, and scratch at them. Where is she? I can stand now and walk, and I can hold her in my arms, but she is gone somewhere. I stumble and scratch and crawl, searching for her. That's when I hear it, footsteps coming. I sit close to the wall and listen and scratch.

"David? Are you there?" She speaks.

I scratch, lightly, from within my urn.

The Urn!

The place I was imprisoned.

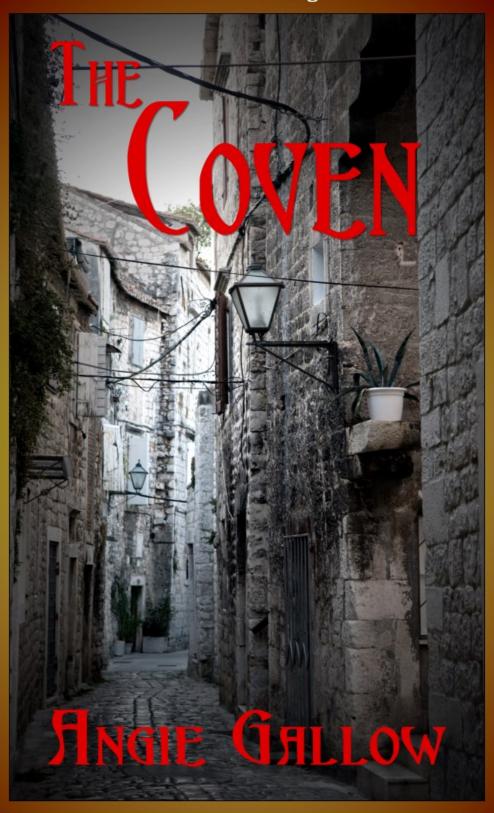
ABOUT THE AUTHOR - I have a passion for writing, and try to dabble in all the ways I can. I also make films, do graphic art, music and other things, but writing is particularly special to me. I've been previously published in a Fiction Writers Publication anthology entitled "Flash It!"

Author Page: https://www.facebook.com/djonathanbrudie

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After a gruesome betrayal, Vampire Sebastien Vilmont is flung into a whirlwind cat and mouse gave of survival.



Available on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, iStore, Smashwords & Createspace

Eighty-Sixed on Ninety-Five Kameryn James

Idiot.

This was bound to happen. I feared and yet expected it ever since moving to Massachusetts. Millions of us cram the highways each morning in a state the size of a shoe box, apparently driving to the same place to work. Every day I face an aggressive moron either in a hurry, more concerned about being on the phone, or simply not yielding to oncoming traffic. Each day there is someone willing to side swipe a vehicle or cause a pile-up just to get one more car length closer to their destination.

Thus, today I found myself painfully peeling my eyelids open after the world suddenly spun around, only to find a grey veil blinding my vision. Unable to move at first, I remained still, trying to recall the exact details of how the car sharply stopped and why I could not feel anything. I envisioned my place in traffic: me ahead of a pick-up truck hauling piping. A BMW emerged in my rearview mirror, zipping around cars, switching lanes, and causing a candied apple red car to swerve towards me from the right. I grunted harshly when the hit punched the breath out of me and my body jerked to the right, pulling the steering wheel helplessly along. The muscles along my spine strained with resistance.

The sounds deafened me to my terrified soul. Horns blasted. Tires screamed against concrete. Metal howled and crunched as it caved under the impact. Glass exploded and showered into the cab. Objects bounced off the ground with ringing clangs. And a low whistling, as if something was hurling through the air. All of this happened nearly simultaneously in a symphony of chaos.

The crash from behind lurched my car violently forward, followed by an abrupt stop. A *pow* sounded from the steering wheel and my face plowed into the airbag.

The airbag. That's what blocked my vision. It deflated slowly, allowing me to see the tail of an SUV just a couple feet in front of me.

Dammit. My beloved cyber green Volkswagen Beetle was probably totalled. Today's packed lunch and contents of my black messenger bag were strewn all over, and my glasses lay God only knows where. I'd probably make the 'traffic on the three's' report in the news station, if my radio still worked. Volkswagens boasted about their safety, equipped with several airbags and almost two feet of impact room under the Beetle's hood that separated the engine from the driver. Yet, I was still surprised at how easily I squeezed through the crumpled, glassless remains of the driver's side window. I toppled onto the ground, sprawled atop glass shards that sprinkled the concrete like sugar. I rose, bracing myself for the carnage around me. Ruptured engines hissed smoke and steam. Groans and cries for help faintly rose above the initial eerie silence and shock. At least three twisted chunks of metal previously known as cars piled into each other and more vehicles were scattered about, spun around backwards or sideways. Debris like glass and pieces of bumper or side view mirrors were thrown all over the road. Curious drivers and passengers from other cars strolled onto the scene in a daze. A couple dialed 911 on cell phones.

I realized the humane thing to do was check on the guy in front of me. I turned towards the SUV, ready to peek in his window and see if he was hurt or not. Yet this driver had the same idea about me. He stumbled out and rubbed his head, dazed and shaken. He then approached with a look of concern on his pale face. I opened my mouth, wanting to tell him that I was miraculously unharmed. But he appeared not to notice me standing there and stepped closer and closer. I held out my hands to stop him.

I watched in horror as my hands vanished effortlessly into his chest, followed by my arms. His form swallowed everything else in my eyesight as he kept walking, and my face pressed into his neck. A rush of warm life surged within me and he was gone. He had walked right through me, as if I was not standing there between the smashed hood of my car and his back bumper.

The realization would have chilled me, but I felt only numbness.

I made to gasp in fear and scream, yet no air entered my lungs and no sound ripped from my throat.

I turned back towards the Beetle, where SUV man ducked slightly and peered through the warped opening that was my car window. He cupped his hand over his mouth and backed away. Normally, my chest tightens like it turns to stone or a lump swells in my throat when I am anxious or face what I view as impending doom. But neither sensation stirred within as I stepped up beside my crumpled car. I stood there, staring at me still inside the cab. My body neither rested on the broken seat nor slumped over the steering wheel.

What? How was I standing here, yet see myself still in the car?

Then I saw it. I saw what happened, what caused the clanging sound and the low whistling, for something did hurl through the air and shatter my back window.

One end of a pipe lodged into the base of my skull, tilting my head down in a bloody hump. Crimson streaked my brunette hair and pooled on my favorite striped scarf. No amount of Volkswagen airbags would save a life from such flying debris.

O-o-o-o-oh. I'm dead.

But wait! I have a son to raise and a future daughter-in-law to criticize and then grandchildren to spoil as I grow old and cranky with my husband! I wanted to cry as I pictured my man and adolescent child without me, and everything I would never experience in this world. This just was not fair! Where was that damn BMW? A creeping memory of emotions like outrage and grief stirred in my conscious lightly like a shadow. A failing impulse to charge towards the driver responsible for this carnage and tear him apart fluttered in my spirit. But the tears did not blur my eyesight or trickle down my cheeks. No sobs rumbled within me. I did not move. For death had also taken my sorrow, rage, fear, and all colors of my precious emotions, just like it snatched away my life in only a moment.

The demolished and broken cars, the bystanders, the cries and blood all faded, but not to blackened oblivion. Luminous pearly white bleached out everything.

And this world tumbled into distant silence.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Kameryn James is an author of mostly short horror stories. When not writing about folklore or zombies, she faces the true-life horrors of commuting in Massachusetts to her day job.

Facebook: www.facebook.com/kameryn.james.5



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Assisted Dying Miranda Kate

We all pray it'll come quickly, don't we? That we'll go without any suffering - and young too, so we don't have to go through the indignities of old age. I mean who wants to sit around waiting to die alone in a house or nursing home? In truth none of us want to go at all - or none of us want to be aware of it at least - but for many that doesn't happen. I was no exception.

I'd felt the lump in my throat for months, thought it was a virus or something, but when I went to the doctor he sent me to the hospital. It turned into throat cancer, and being in my 60's, divorced and living alone, a hospice was the best place for me.

The tumour blocked my airways, so a trachy tube was installed. I couldn't speak and food came via an IV, so it wasn't much fun. But as a smoker, there was no one to blame but myself.

I would lie in my bed and read, or stare out of the window, wasting hours lost in memories, enjoying their rose-tinted view. And sometimes, if I was lucky, one of the orderlies would take me out in a wheelchair for a stroll.

It was one of these orderlies that some would say I made the mistake of befriending, but it turned out that their sadistic nature was exactly what I needed.

It began one morning when I woke unable to breathe, finding him standing over me, his finger blocking the airway tube. I clawed at his hand and he whipped it away, apologising profusely, but not before I caught the smirk on his face. As my chest heaved up and down I could only stare at him and wonder what his game was, while watching him continue with the check up and insert a new feeding bag.

The second time he did it for longer. I didn't react at first, simply opened my eyes and studied his face. He didn't blanch; in fact he smiled, until I pulled his hand away.

Later that morning the nurses were unable to find a reason for my vitals to be down. Being deprived of air might be one, but I wasn't going to tell them that. Instead I contacted my notary to make sure my will was in order.

The third time I was waiting for him. He arrived in the evening, the unusual hour indicating his intent. I took his hand and put it by my throat, but he withdrew it at first; showing me it was his decision and not mine. I could only implore him with my eyes.

This time I resisted the urge to claw at his hand, but it was hard. I remember grabbing at his white coat and the warmth of his hand on mine as he took it and pinned it to the bed. Then I was gone - released.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Miranda Kate is a British expat living in Holland, who by day is a freelance editor, and by night a writer of dark, disturbing real life fiction. Primarily a novel writer, Miranda enjoys exploring her writing through flash fiction, finding a certain satisfaction in the end result.

Twitter: <a>@PurpleQueenNL

Blog: Finding Clarity www.purplequeennl.blogspot.nl



Sirens Call Publications

Karen Runge: The Haunted Bridge Series Crybaby Bridge (Exact location unknown), USA



This is a 'Crybaby Bridge'. There are hundreds of these around the world. All of them are said to be haunted by the kids who were murdered or lost off the side of the bridge. So-named because at night, you can hear the sounds of the baby crying, and/or a woman weeping.



Death Comes To Us All Julianne Snow

I wake to the smell of smoke, claustrophobia washing over my senses. I cough, trying to expel the acridness from my lungs; my body only succeeds in sucking more of it in.

I reach up to cover my mouth, my left hand comes up short against a hard surface. As I slide my palm upward, I can feel the roughness of it and smell the subtle scent of pine over the smoke.

As I panic, I wonder where I am. I can tell I'm lying on my back, but have no idea how I got this way. My hand reaches my face and I clamp it over my mouth and nose, trying to filter the smoke through my trembling fingers.

My lungs don't cooperate, sucking in heaving lungfuls of tainted air. I know I'll likely die from its inhalation, but I make the choice to not give up. Yet. Even with all the cards stacked against me, it might not be my time...

My right hand begins to explore my prison in an attempt to find some means of escape. I pull the neckline of my dress over my nose, thinking to use both hands in my search, and am surprised to find myself wearing my most formal of outfits. My mind wanders for a moment as I remember the last time I wore it: my father's funeral.

The day had been a sad one for some, but I look back on it fondly. An odd reaction some might say, but my father and I never got along. And it was for good reason. I had felt the force of his fist at the bottom of a bottle more times than I cared to remember.

Bringing my brain back to the moment, I try to figure out why I'm wearing it. The dress that is. Too formal for a night out or a day at my menial job, it made no sense.

I move my legs, hearing the clack of heels on the surface beneath my feet. Nothing is making sense to me. My mind feels foggy and it isn't helping me figure out why or where...

I feel it for the first time. The heat washes over me and while it's not uncomfortable, it warms my panic-stricken nerves. And it makes sense given the smoke crowding the air from the space around me.

At least my powers of deduction are still working. Heat typically accompanies smoke. Not that it makes me feel better. In fact, it triggers the opposite effect as my panic rises. I smile. A peculiar reaction for sure, but one I cannot seem to help. I feel like I've lost my mind.

What is going on? Nothing is making any sense... Why am I dressed for a funeral and trapped inside a box?

It hits me like a tonne of bricks. I'm in a box. And it is probably on fire. But why?

The question niggles at the back of my brain as I struggle in earnest against the sides of the box. My mind might be playing tricks on me, but I swear the sides are getting hotter. They burn as I push and scratch.

I hear the crackle and think I'm going crazy. If only I could wake up all of this would be over. I would find myself at home, in bed, hazy from a night spent tossing and turning in a nightmare. I plead with my mind to rouse my body but from the lack of light peeking through now open eyelids, I know I'm not dreaming.

The brightness blinds me for a moment. Then realization sinks in. My prison is getting brighter and I can now see the confines of the box. I can make out the rough surfaces, the splinters primed for attack if the opportunity arises.

I start to fight against the boundaries of my confinement, feeling the heat begin to rise. The first lick of the flame on my ankle causes my legs to recoil toward the farthest side of the box.

The searing pain imprints on my mind as it singes my already frazzled nerves. The agony robs a few breaths from me as I struggle to pull my legs away from the blinding heat. But I cannot pull them far enough away and I feel the painful lick of each flame as they climb up my legs.

My mouth opens and I scream – a terrified, pained howl of anguish. It sounds foreign to me, like I

am removed from the situation but I feel the strain in my throat as I swallow more of the blistering smoke. Tender tissues scorch, ending the shriek in short order.

The wooden surface below me becomes unbearable and I squirm in response. But I can't get away. There is no room, no place to go. I'm trapped.

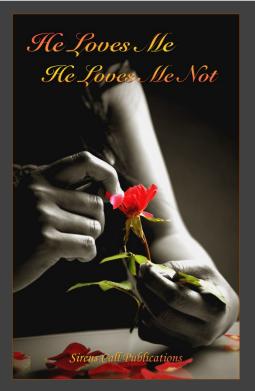
I begin to fight, tears vaporizing before they can fall down my cheeks. The pain is intense until that moment my brain hides the agony of it from me. Then blissfully it's over. I can feel the fire bubbling my skin, but I can't feel the pain. It's peaceful and euphoria swims over me. My arms drop back to my sides and I feel the odd sensation akin to wind, but I know it's the flames. Eating me. Consuming the flesh I need to exist.

I smell my hair, the awful burnt smell I will never forget. My lips feel chapped and when I try to wet them, my tongue dries in response to the flames.

Then darkness. I am aware of myself and then idyllically unaware. I wish I could tell you the moment I ceased to exist but I can't. It's just over.

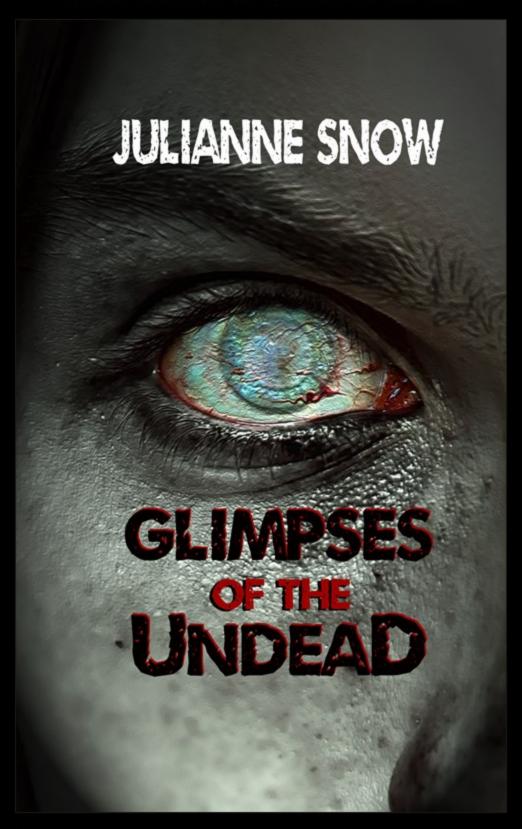
ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Julianne Snow is the author of the *Days with the Undead* series. She writes within the realms of speculative fiction, has roots that go deep into horror and is a member of the Horror Writers Association. Julianne has pieces of short fiction in publications from Sirens Call Publications, Open Casket Press, 7DS Books, James Ward Kirk Publishing, Coffin Hop Press and Hazardous Press as well as the forthcoming shorts in anthologies from Phrenic Press and others. *The Carnival 13*, a collaborative round-robin novella for charity which she contributed to and helped to spearhead was released in October 2013. Be on the lookout for her contributions to a number of collaborative projects to be announced shortly.

Twitter: @CdnZmbiRytr Facebook: Julianne Snow



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Giver Brent Abell

The black masses dotting the x-ray say it all, I'm dying. And by the sizes of those things, I'm just about done.

I know the doctor tried to make it sound like I had a chance, but I know better.

I've told all who I've helped they were going to be ok. I looked them in the eyes and I alleviated their fear. Did they feel better at the time? Yeah, they felt better and they were cancer free. Sitting here now, staring at my oncologist, I feel the scream welling up from deep within me.

Really kind of poetic, I'm being eaten by the disease I've spent most of my adult life fighting against. I suppose if I believed in a religion I could blame karma or God for turning on me the way my cells have, but I only have myself to blame on this one. Dozens of good turns deserve something other than this doesn't it?

I helped them though, I helped those who sought me out to survive and now the price is mine to pay.

"Brent, are you sure you're ok?" I hear Dr. Wilson Frank ask me. I try to focus on his voice, to show him I understand, but all I can muster is a slight nod.

"I can't... I can't even begin to, I don't know Wilson, I thought I'd be ok like grandpa always was." "But you're not Brent."

I stand and he reaches out, grabbing my arm and stopping me before I can begin walking away. I turn to face him and I look deep into his eyes and my reflection gazes back at me.

"Look, we can fight this Brent. We have options," I hear him say, but the words mean nothing to me now.

"No, we can't fight it. The method of attacking the cells is gone, I'm spent. The well's gone dry." "Brent, we have to try."

"I don't want to, I've had a good run and now I just want to cash my chips in and go home."

He looks at me and I can see sadness in his returned gaze. I want to tell him I'll be fine, but he probably would dismiss any words I speak that weren't about the pain I'm in. Right now, a fire burns through my veins and my body feels like I've been set ablaze. I expect to look down at my arm and watch my flesh sizzle and blister. Instead, it's the same pale skin and freckles. In fact, I believe I've turned a duller shade of whitish-gray.

Dying sucks.

"I'll be back next week and we can run the tests again," I say and close the office door behind me. Standing out in the cold November evening, all I want is a drink.

I try to watch a movie, but knowing I only have a few days left really puts a damper on things. Not even the rum and cola in my hand can bring me the joy it once did and this is probably the most shocking and depressing development of all. Still, I cringe and think back to the ones who are better because of me. I remember being bitten by a dog when I was five and its teeth didn't hurt near as bad as the cancer eating my insides. Shit, I'd take a hundred of those dogs stripping my bones clean compared to what I have to endure right now.

I take another sip and think. Thinking back to how I used my gift, I tear through my memories and everything my grandmother told me about what I could do. Growing up, I knew what my grandfather could do and that gene was passed to me. Right now, I can see his eyes closed forever in the casket. I can still feel the kiss of his dead flesh as I touched his cheek and wept.

I've followed him to the grave before my time.

I've fallen because of his curse.

But, I think I found a way out...

Vera Strange thinks she's alone, but I can hear her breathe I'm so close. The late night news covers the sound of my sneakers as I creep through her house in the dark. I watch her sit there and even though she is cancer free, she hacks and wheezes with each breath she takes. She doesn't deserve to keep going. I should have seen it when I cured her. I should have seen how useless she is. What made me think saving an old woman was honorable or right? I'm young and have more to give than her.

I should survive.

The television clicks off and she rises from her chair. Slowly, she shuffles toward her room. I'll give her a few minutes before I go and do what needs to be done. The hallway amplifies the sound of her toilet flushing and the sink turning on. Why can't the old bitch lie down and go to bed?

Finally, the bathroom is silent and I see the light extinguish in her room. Carefully, I move through the hall and crawl through her open door. I try to stay quiet, but the pain is unbearable. Cringing, I moan as a wave of nausea crashes through me.

"Who's there?" I hear her ask as she shot up in her bed.

I force the pain back in my mind and try to hold my breath. She rolls around on her bed and the lamp clicks on flooding the room in its soft glow. Its light shines right on me.

"Brent?" she sounds shocked.

"Sorry Vera, I needed to talk to you," I say in a smooth calming tone. I have to stay calm so she can be calm.

"If it's about what you did for me, I thank you. After watching the way my Glenn died of the cancer, I didn't want the pain."

"I know, that's why I took it from you."

Steady. I stand up and I look at her sitting in her bed. Tears dot the corner of her eyes and I feel pity for her. She doesn't deserve what I'm about to do, but on the flipside I don't deserve it either. She reaches out for me and I take her hand. It feels cool and fragile in my grip. I draw her closer and I wipe a tear away. I smile and lean in close.

Her eyes widen as I suck at the air in front of her face. She struggles and tries to pull away as I breathe in the life I gave her. The golden mist hangs in the air between us and I see realization cross her face. Inhaling deeply, I take back what is rightfully mine.

Vera starts to convulse and I release her. Her body crumples to the bed and I gasp trying to catch my own breath. I stare down at her body and she starts to shake uncontrollably. Small black lumps burst from her flesh and cover her forearm. Her eyes turn a milky white and her chest heaves in short bursts. The cancer is catching up for lost time I suppose.

Better her than me.

Her breathing turns shallow and she sounds like a dying fish. Lung cancer is a bitch. Her body goes still and I watch Vera take her last labored breath. I close my eyes and the pain subsides. Part of my death sentence has commuted, my execution delayed. I can feel the cancer begin to lose its fight with me and start regressing.

My idea worked.

Now, I must go down my list and hunt down the others who received my gift and reverse what's been done to me. I have to get the pieces of my life back.

Vera's eyes stare at me in death, accusing me of killing her. I guess in a way I did kill her, but all I did was let nature take its course. Is it any better that my death means she lives? I'm only setting the natural order straight and returning balance to our destinies. Still, I feel sorry for her. I took her life away, but I needed my life back. Reaching down, I close her eyes and walk away.

Looking down at the list of addresses I jotted down, I turn and leave.

I have work to do.

"Ah, Brent, please come in and have a seat," Wilson motions for me to enter his office.

The nurse hands him a thick file and she retreats back to her desk leaving the two of us alone. Wilson sits down and flips through the files. Every few seconds, he'd flip a page and glance up at me before continuing to the next page.

"Your test results came back negative. Since we met last week there has been a change. Brent, you're cancer free," he states flatly. He doesn't look up from the files.

"Well, that's great," I mutter and realize my hands are shaking.

"I'm not sure how you pulled it off, but these death certificates from the coroner are pretty enlightening," he says and finally lays them down.

"Hey, I'm in remission and I have places to go, so I'll see you later Wilson."

"I want to know how you gave it back to them, how you reversed all you did to heal them. If your grandfather had the ability as healer, I never heard of him doing it."

Sweat breaks out across my brow and my heart races.

"I was dying! What was I suppose to do?" I scream at him.

"You have something I can't explain. I knew your grandfather and he never, ever would have done this to the very people he tried to help!"

"I'm not my grandfather! He could expel the disease from his body! I can't do that. It stayed and rotted me from the insides. It was killing me to help them," I exclaim. My blood is boiling and I can feel my face grow hot in anger. Guilt fills me and I hate what I've done, but I couldn't do anything.

"So you killed them?"

"No, I made everything right again. I gave them the instrument of their death back. I put everything right again."

He looks at me and hangs his head low. Slowly, he closes the file and glances back up at me. Inside, I still want to smash my fists into his face, to make him feel some sort of pain. Maybe then he'd be more sympathetic.

"You stole the gift of life they were given. You stole their second chance," he says and walks around the desk.

"What about my life? What about this fucking curse of mine? Maybe I wanted to live and have a second chance. I wanted my chance back."

"No second chances," he whispers in my ear and I feel something slide into my side, just under my ribs.

"Wilson?" I utter. I back away from him and see the blood drip from the scalpel in his outstretched hand. My second chance blooms on my white tee shirt and forms a puddle on the floor.

"You killed them. You're a monster."

Dropping to my knees, I look up at him and black creeps in around the corners of my vision.

"I didn't want to die," I mutter to him and fall to the soft brown carpet floor.

I can hear him sob. Maybe he realizes he's no better than me now.

No second chance for me either.

So cold.

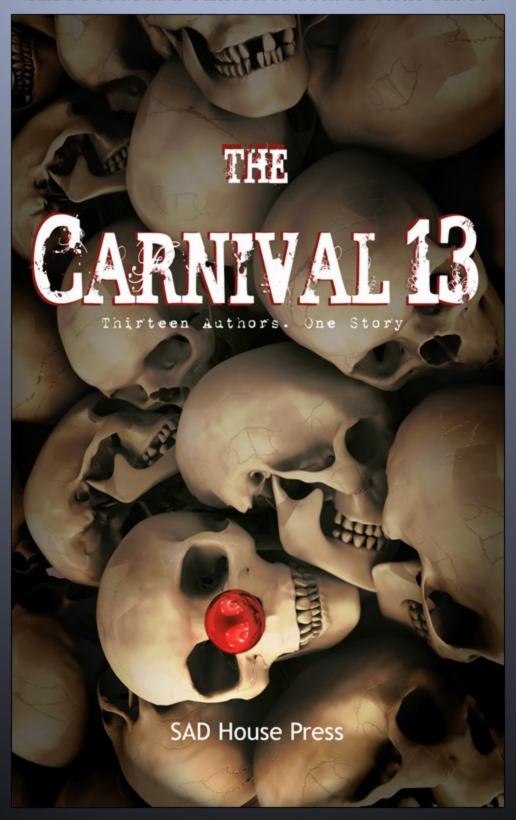
Fuck.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Brent Abell resides in Southern Indiana with his wife, sons, and a pug who devours the souls of the non-believers like they were snackies. He works full time, but has found time to be published in or have tales coming out from multiple presses and eZines. In Memoriam, his debut novella was released in October 2012 from Rymfire Books. You can hang out with him for some rum, a cigar, and all the latest news at his blog.

Twitter: @BrentTAbell

Blog Site: http://brentabell.wordpress.com

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Tall Boy Kurt Schuett

People often speculate over their own deaths; they do this jokingly when sharing cocktails with friends, especially as they age, or sometimes it's behind closed doors with one's psychiatrist while sedated with two milligrams of Xanax. For me, my expiration began several years ago at our family's lake house.

I killed my son when he was ten years old. I accidentally ran over him when he was waterskiing off our family's boat, *The Big Red*. I was drinking; actually, I was completely wasted, and I couldn't see his little body bobbing over the wake when I took a big turn coming back around for him with the tow rope skipping across the water behind my stern. Charlie's head hit the fiberglass bow without me even knowing it, the sound so similar to the *chop*, *chop*, *chop* of water meeting boat when bouncing through the waves. It wasn't until he got caught up in the rotor blades of the boat, his little unconscious body split and ground like a piece of raw cubed steak thrown into a blender, that it even registered. Both Julia and Anne screamed at me to cut the engine as the remnants of his orange *Finding Nemo* lifejacket wound tightly around the base of the propeller.

The day started off with a perfect eighty degrees and full sun at what family and friends now refer to as *Lake Calamity*. The A-frame house was a picture-perfect size for my family and me to *get away* from the hubbub of big-city living, especially since it was only forty-five minutes west of Chicago. My wife, Anne, always packed the best lunches for these planned days—salami with cheddar on rye for me, PB and J for her and the kids, and even some soft Alpo for the dogs. The treasure box stocked full of enough iced beverages to serve a small fleet of thirsty sailors was always my contribution. Yes, I have to admit that the fear I constantly imposed upon my family revolved around those aforesaid beverages, usually in the form of *cans*, because I was, and am for eternity, an alcoholic.

Too often, personal demises are labeled as journeys instead of individual events. Bottom line, I'm stuck in hell for eternity, and that's my unremitting fear. What scares me even more is the realization that I know this damned afterlife won't ever change for me. Here, there are no reddish devils with trident-styled pitchforks chasing me up and over fiery lava rock. Neither is there any form of trepidation toward eternal thirst; I had a lifetime's worth of drinking, so being dry is actually a blessing. Instead, my personal death is a nightmarish reincarnation of that fateful day, a longing and constant reminder that death is inevitable and doesn't repeat itself for good souls, but for *real demons* like me, it does.

"Daddy, I got the rope pulled in," Charlie said.

"Okay, son, good work. Now come on back here and help me take her out."

Charlie complied, using my lap as a booster seat to see above the wheel. I cupped his hand over the throttle, guiding him while backing the boat out of our docking space. My wife Anne and daughter Julia were busy packing the coolers underneath the front seats of the boat.

"Steady goes it, Charlie. Nice and smooth, not jerky," I remember directing him, but his eyes fell on the shiny bullet canister sitting in the cup holder.

"What kind is that, Daddy?" he asked.

"That, Charlie, is a tall boy. When you become a tall boy yourself, you will know all about it."

"Oh, I see," Charlie replied. "I don't like the smell."

"It's an acquired taste, son," I said. "Now take us out, okay," I directed while pilfering a greedy pull of PBR, still hiding my bloodshot eyes behind the lenses of my mirrored Ray-Bans.

After we took half a dozen laps around the circumference of the lake, we dropped anchor opposite the side of the dam. Anne and the kids swam while I monkeyed with my cellphone, snuffing out three to four beers in the process. Eventually, Anne and the kids came back aboard, and we ate our picnicked lunches, passing the bag of white cheddar popcorn around while listening to *The Stones* on the Bose.

"Dad, can we still go waterskiing? There aren't too many boats out, so I think it'll be safe enough," Charlie said.

"I don't want to ski today!" Julia whined.

"You don't have to go, sweetheart," Anne said, looking my direction for reassurance.

"Of course you don't have to ski if you don't want to," I said. "But don't get jealous of your brother when he is bragging at Vacation Bible School about all the waterskiing he did this weekend," I said, attacking Julia with a barrage of tickles and giggles. "You all let your food settle for a few, and then we'll start skiing in a little bit."

Ever since my heart attack at age sixty, the *killing day* replays itself out, time and time again in this netherworld. Except in my snapshot, the one definitive difference is the driver of the boat. Instead of me driving, it's Charlie, and he is pounding silver cans and driving *The Big Red* in continuous and everlasting circles, the wind driving his coal-colored hair in the opposite direction. A blood-encrusted circus grin is painted across his face, his razor teeth enormous and protruding out his visage as a calloused laugh projects itself in warped sound waves across the rise and fall of the created swells. The burnt oil odor mixed with gasoline awards an ominous stench that chokes the air, and I can always smell it as I bob in the water with my safety-orange *Finding Nemo* life preserver. And the worst anxiety stems from the voice that emits itself out of Charlie's head, always relentlessly shrieking the same thing. It's my voice coming from his lips, driving itself through the poisoned air, "I don't like the smell, Daddy, but I know you do! Guess you have to be a *tall boy* to understand, right."

Those are the last words I ever remember hearing, and it continuously happens right before Charlie drives over me, splitting my forehead in two amid the laughs and giggles of Anne and Julia sitting aboard ship, two greasy red splotches tattooing the deck boat's bow like the bloodshot eyes of an alcoholic.

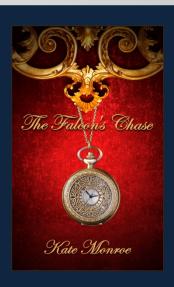
The liquid sleep put me into the grave, but Charlie keeps me there.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - In addition to "Tall Boy," Kurt Schuett's latest work includes a Southern Gothic ghost story titled "Calamity James," a work that was just nominated for the Pushcart Prize, and Insurgency, his debut novel being released summer of 2014. Currently, he is entering his seventeenth year as an English teacher. Kurt lives in the northern suburb of Libertyville, Illinois.

<u>Twitter: https://twitter.com/kurtschuett</u>

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/kurt.schuett.7

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Karen Runge: The Haunted Bridge Series Avon, Indiana (USA)



There are dozens of different versions of the story surrounding this one, but all involve the sounds of people crying on the bridge at night. Most commonly attributed to workers who died in accidents during the construction of the bridge.



Dreams Gloria Bobrowicz

"I'm sorry to tell you this Ms. Bobrowicz, but your test results came back positive for a form of breast cancer known as Ductal Carcinoma In Situ. We feel it would be wise to perform surgery as soon as possible." I was devastated by the oncologist's words. "But rest assured the survival rate when detected this early is very high — ninety-five percent in fact. There is an opening in my schedule for next Tuesday, will that work for you?" Will it work for me? Of course it will, get this malevolence out of me as quickly as possible!

"Yes, Doctor, that will be fine," I replied in a calm, controlled voice.

"Good, the nurse will schedule all the necessary tests, and set up the procedure. And, Gloria, I don't want you to overstress yourself between now and then. DCIS is rarely fatal at this stage, so hang in there and I'll see you next Tuesday morning." He smiled as he walked out the door.

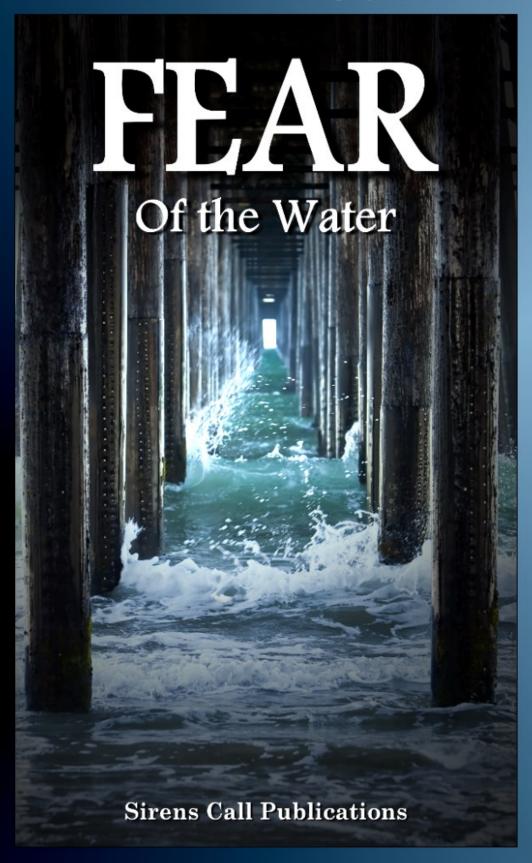
"Yes, Doctor," I muttered to the empty room.

The night before my surgery, I had the strangest dream. I dreamt I was in the cold, dank basement of the hospital preparing for surgery. The pre-op room was filled with the dreadfully ill; pallid people who stared at me as though they craved the warmth of my flesh. I tried desperately to pull the curtain closed as tightly as I could around my small changing area, and hide from their view, or hide them from mine – I don't know which. The stress of my situation took its toll on my bladder, and I realized I needed to find a rest room. Try as hard as I could, I couldn't catch the attention of a staff member to ask for help; they were all too busy taking vital signs and attending to the bizarre assortment of patients who only seemed to lust more for my warmth the nearer I approached. Somewhat unsure, but in urgent need, I left my belongings behind and ventured into the hallway to find either a nurse's station or the restroom itself. The thin hospital gown I was given to wear was open in the back, forcing me to clutch the scratchy, uncomfortable garment around myself. The hallway was barren, not a soul in sight, but the restroom was clearly marked. I padded my way over to it and tried to pull the door open – it was locked. I shouted a *Hello* that echoed back to me. Unnerved by the experience, I returned to the pre-op room hoping once more to persuade one of the assistants there to help me, but when I entered, it was abandoned – everyone, everything, including my belongings, were gone. Not a soul was around.

As I left the room, I again stepped into the hospital hall to find someone to help me. The corridor was strangely quiet; eerily calm even at this early hour. As I began to walk, the ceiling light above me started to flicker, and sizzle, then popped as it extinguished with an ungodly popping sound. Glass sprayed everywhere. Freaked out, I began moving faster. As I passed under each overhead light, another loud pop would sound as it blinked out and spewed shards onto the floor. My terror mounted, and I ran gaining precious few steps on the shadows racing at my heels. Glancing behind me, I saw each of the lights I managed to outrun explode into the approaching nothingness. My breathing became jagged as I ran faster. Reaching the end of the hallway, I pounded on the unmovable door and screamed for myself to wake up. Nothing happened; I was trapped in the dream. Clutching my gown in a near strangle hold, I turned and looked up. The last light began to sizzle and flicker before it too erupted in a blazing cacophony. As the darkness enveloped me, and the ghosts of the flickering light danced behind my eyes, I realized that this was not a dream – it was my end.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Gloria Bobrowicz has been a huge horror fan since early childhood. She loves books related to true crime — particularly the serial killer variety. Watching the movie 'Night of the Living Dead' or some of the older horror movies such as, 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers', 'The Thing from Another World', or 'War of the Worlds' with a bowl of popcorn is her idea of relaxing. Gloria is a co-owner and the Editor-In-Chief of Sirens Call Publications.

Twitter: @GlorBobrowicz FB: Gloria Bobrowicz Not afraid of the water? Perhaps you should be...



Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, iStore, Smashwords & Createspace

Oh, Murder of Mine Joshua Skye

There are times I have slipped into a fog, unable to escape the thick cloud of writer's block on some project I'm working on, yet I feel that I must write. It's a compulsion. I don't have a choice. Like the sex addict's yearnings or the serial killer's graven desires, I have to write. I have to put words down. There is no escape.

I open my laptop, listen as the things inside of it come whirring to life, things I don't know about, things I'll never see, things that matter only when they work as they should or fail in their task. Most of the time, I am ambivalent about them. Do they matter in the grand scheme of my creation? My scheming would still create without them, I'd simply use pen and paper. Alas, I've gotten used to the laptop, the whirring, the keyboard beneath my fingertips and the glowing screen with darkened shapes spelling out my story.

What do I write? I write of death. At first, her death, a friend I no longer know.

She fell, the world spinning around her in a blur of color. Red. Orange. Yellow. Green. Blue. Purple. It seemed, for a moment, like a dance with a specter. Her invisible partner lost his footing, dipped her just a little too far, and down she went, bouncing off the gravel. A cloud of dust billowed up around her. She breathed it in, coughed, choked, felt the gritty smear of dirt across her teeth. She licked it away, worked a lather in her mouth, foamy, frothy, thick and sticky. She turned over and spit it out. The foam appeared beneath her in the shape of a witch riding a broom. Her mother. Her lover. Herself in repose. In a coffin. Her own death.

I read the words over and over and over again. The first time, I read it in my normal voice, effeminate, low, barely a whisper. I want only myself to hear it. The second time, I add an accent, British, erudite, as though I'm reciting a Shakespearian sonnet in high school English class, the students before me faceless, nameless, and they couldn't care less. Red. Orange. Yellow. Green. Blue. Purple. They're not worth my colors. The third time, I pretend I'm a vampire from Transylvania and I give the words a ridiculous inflection as though "I von to suuuck joo blawwwd." My roommate hears and he looks at me like a spider. Why does he have eight eyes? I should squish him with a rolled newspaper. I do not repeat it a fourth time. What would be the point? Fuck it. I delete it.

What to write? I write of his death, my roommate's death. He turns his spider gaze away from me, back to the repeated sports program he watches when we're between seasons. What a tool, an obnoxious tool. How should he die? I ponder it.

He squeals as the noose tightens around his throat. Fashioned from his girlfriend's black hosiery, one part tied to the shower nozzle so he could lean into the tightening of it as he runs his left hand over his naked body, moist with perspiration, pinching one nipple, squeezing his balls, tearing tufts of pubic hair out. The scent of gun gray lubricant lingers in the air so heavy he can taste it, but maybe it really is on his lips, the slime of a wayward touch. He is lightheaded, the world spinning, colors bursting in the darkness shrouding his world. Red. Orange. Yellow. Green. Blue. Purple. He whimpers. The noose tightens, his feet slip on the white of the tub as he ejaculates A little death. It almost took him. It could have taken him. He was lucky. That time. In two days a similar stunt in his closet will kill him. His brother will find his body.

I read the words over and over and over again. The first time, I am loud and proud. I gesticulate as I scream them, a disrespectful teenager craving attention in the mall. My roommate is not pleased, he growls like a dog from across the room and turns the television up. What a tool, an obnoxious tool. I must get him back. I produce a bullhorn from the depths of my closet, there's still life in the battery from a year ago two days from now, when I used it to scream obscenities at little old lady anti-abortionists outside of the women's clinic downtown.

The look on my roommate's face is priceless. His eyes are wide and his mouth hangs open like the

legs of a dog in heat, tongue dangling, dangling and dripping foam, frothy, thick and sticky foam. Gross. What a hog!

"Once again, louder you wimpy creampuff. I dare you," he says.

Challenge accepted, I think to myself. I clear my throat, straighten a non-existent tie and shout the shout of a banshee through that old bullhorn of mine. I rattle the rafters, shake the shakers, and knock the knockers. I do it all with the unabashed gusto of a British nanny disciplining an out of control toddler. I run through the house, do circles in the living room, stand on the stove, and even hop on his bed as I scream my words, words about his autoerotic habits. He does not like this, and it amuses me.

I can see the shock in his eyes turning to anger, a deeply seething annoyance boiling in an out of control furnace somewhere inside his tummy-tum-tum. Steam is billowing from his ears, actual steam. It's gloriously bizarre. I love gloriously bizarre things so louder I scream as I stand right next to him in his recliner, the one he found out by the dumpster, the one his mother helped him carry back to the house because I refused. His face is so red. His eyes are actually bulging out from their sockets. His teeth are grinding together, I can hear them even above my shouting. And when he finally blew I hear his whistle blow!

The bullhorn is pulled from my hands and thrown through the air, tumbling, spinning, and then shattering against the wall. The first punch hits me in my mouth. I feel my lips split open and I taste blood immediately. There are fireworks. Red. Orange. Yellow. Green. Blue. Purple. They burst again and again with every hit. I fell to the floor and my back popped up and down. He was on me in an instant, my big, burly, beer-gutted roomie. Through our clothes I could feel his erection. Could he feel mine?

Punch. Punch. Punch. Spit and words came from him, but I could not understand them. There was a ringing in my ears, deafening. I felt the crunching, my jaw bone shattering into jagged shards piercing my flesh, jutting out through my already ruined lips. A thunderous blow and my left eye was gone, popping from its broken socket, dangling down my bloody face. I could see my ear through the fireworks. When his fingers slipped around my throat, I choked and gagged for a moment before there was an eruption of light. Colored light. A spectrum. A rainbow. Red. Orange. Yellow. Green. Blue. Purple.

I was watching my murder from the ceiling, hovering above the mayhem below with effortless grace. I felt feathery, not just weightless but pliable, beautiful, necessary, angelic. My roommate moved in slow motion, rainbow tracers following his every gesture. My body's face was a spoiled crimson thing, unrecognizable. When it was split in half, fingers prying my broken skull apart with a disturbing ease, the gray jelly inside oozed out like putty over the corner of a table. It blanketed the carpet, swallowing the fibers. A blob.

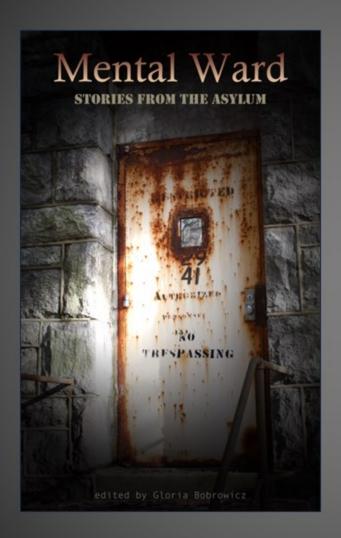
My fingers twitch, legs shivering. Not quite dead, not just yet. I know my disembodiment is a hallucination, some evolutionary thing to comfort me as I die, but I don't want to know that. I want to believe I have a soul, not that I'll just be gone, no longer there like some cheap celestial parlor trick backfiring in front of observant children. Gone. It frightens me so much I get sick. I don't want to die. I don't want to blink out, no longer exist. I don't want to be nothing. I don't want to be the darkness. I don't want to be forgotten. I don't wanna be dead.

Dead.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Joshua Skye's work has appeared in several periodicals and anthologies including The Sirens Call and "Childhood Nightmares: Under the Bed." He is the author of "The Angels of Autumn" and several other acclaimed novels. He lives in Texas with his husband Ray and their son Syrian.

Facebook: www.facebook.com/joshua.skye.7

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

Heading West Tabitha Thompson

I thought I knew pain. I thought having my heart broken by a guy was pain or getting scraped and burned from reckless activities were pain, hell, I thought cramps were pain but they were nothing compared to this. All I see is darkness and there wasn't a light to be found. To me, the darkness became a metaphor for the pain that surrounded me without an escape. I awoke to this darkness and broken glass on what seemed to be a concrete floor and with the slightest movement sent shockwaves throughout my entire body. Although having no sight seemed like a curse, it was a blessing for me so I couldn't see the mangled, bloody corpse my body had become. Lord only knows what happened to my best friend, I pray to Him that her death was quick and painless, I would say the same about mine but I felt that my killer was testing my strength and will. As the glass dug deeper into my skin, possibly having begun to puncturing an organ, thoughts began to flood my mind. What if we didn't have a flat tire, what if our cell phones didn't die, what if we portrayed better judgment?

My soul burned knowing that due to our lack of judgment resulted in this. My best friend and I had planned an amazing spring break weekend in West Palm Beach after travelling from the University of Sarasota to relax with our boyfriends. But we never thought that a joyride heading west could result in so much grief. The glass is now tearing my chest apart, if I try I swear that I could feel the anatomy of my actual heart. The sudden sound of footsteps makes my heart drop, I know he's back. The breath from my shallow chest became shallower, more quiet, more faded as his footsteps grew closer, I knew I was next and he was done with me being his toy. The sharp blades tearing into my thighs, trailing a pool down my legs which made me realize that I'm now naked, felt so much better as opposed to what he had in store. Once the door opened, I saw a ray of light, I tried to cling to a ray of hope for survival but once the door closed I knew the end was near. I muttered the Lord's Prayer as well as a prayer to Him that my family will carry on and be safe. "I could hear your breathing, your pain, your fear, your prayer. Sorry to say like your friend, even the Lord can't save you." Can't believe my last breaths, sights and sounds are with the company of this man who tore my body apart; and the most painful part of this is I thought he was here to protect and serve.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - My name is Tabitha Thompson and I was born and raised in Fort Lauderdale, Florida weighing in at 1 lb. 7 ounces after being born at 6 months so I'm known to my family as their miracle baby. Horror fiction to me is my heart and soul.

Twitter: @TabiCat90

Blog: http://tabithathompson391.wordpress.com/



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

DEAD GIRL TESTIMONY

Patricia Anabel

I am dead
And that's that
Killed by a man
Whose name was Fred.

I wasn't aware, I didn't know, That his obsession This far would go.

We went for a drink, It wasn't a date, I didn't think Till it was late.

I felt weak, My body achy, My hands and knees Were cold and shaky.

He drove me back,
To his place,
I disappeared
Without a trace.

That frosty morning in December
My tortured body
He dismembered.

My torso underground,
My head in the sea drowned,
Limbs spilt miles apart
And he ate my heart.

DAGGER

Patricia Anabel

Oh merciful dagger!

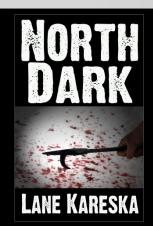
I welcome thee!
I'll let you cut deep
You let me bleed
My black soul will float away
In chanting of curses
For me none will pray
My remains to ashes burn
Scatter in wind
There's no such urn
Which my vampire spirit could contain
Whilst no one being harmed or slain.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Patricia, of Slovak origin, lives in South London. Vampiric and Gothic culture is the main feeding ground for her writing and creating bespoke jewellery. Her poetry and a story appeared in few anthologies of James Ward Kirk publishing and in Gothic Poems and Fiction anthology by Static Movement.

Twitter: @TriciaAnabel

Blog: http://patriciaanabel.blogspot.co.uk/

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



Death Wind Wish

Mathias Jansson

The old ones warned me
when the wind blows
from the ancient cemetery
when you hear the wind whistle
as a bone flute in cracks and slots
when your nostrils fill
with the heavy smell of earth
the decaying compost of rotten life
then make your wish
that the undead will not feel your fear
that they will find your soul
and drag you back
to the town of the dead

Too late that evening I noticed the wind
I realized I was too far away from my safe house
and fear filled my mind
when I smelled the rotten corpses behind

With bleeding finger tips I clawed the soil but in vain they dragged me back to the grave where their black saliva of death drooled over my fresh flesh.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Mathias Jansson is a Swedish art critic and poet. He has been published in magazines as The Horror Zine Magazine, Dark Eclipse, Schlock, The Sirens Call and The Poetry Box. He has also contributed to several anthologies from Horrified Press and James Ward Kirk Fiction as Suffer Eternal anthology Volume 1-3, Hell Whore Anthology Volume 1-3, Barnyard Horror and Serial Killers Tres Tria.

Blog: http://mathiasjansson72.blogspot.se/

Purple Dreams

Nina D'Arcangela

Shallow drifting on purple dreams, sliding into darker shadows. My hair spread about me like a crown floating on the water. Your eyes glittering in the moonlight. My hand caresses, you nuzzle my shimmering wings. Warmth, loving, caring; the sweetness tinges our midnight breeze.

Your gaze steady, hand gently pressing upon my throat. Wavering visions of you, tears falling in silence. A final sigh. My hair spread about me like a crown. Your eyes now glistening in the moonlight.

Shallow drifting on purple dreams, sliding into darker shadows.

Karen Runge: The Haunted Bridge Series Crawford Road, Virginia (USA)



This one is full of history. It's said to be haunted by victims of the KKK, who were killed in the surrounding woods. There are also stories about more recent murders happening in the area.



I Am Death Blaze McRob

Everything swirls around me, a slow motion display of sights only visible to my left eye, my right eye covered with blood. Nothing is as it should be. Colors blend in with one another, there being no distinct boundaries. The rigidity of firm objects takes on a fluid form, much as a rubber raft following the contours of an ever changing wave pattern beneath it, the ocean being its master. Closing my eyes does nothing to change the fabric of normalcy. Yellow spots chase blue ones around in random patterns, and then wham! A bright streak of red erases everything, only to have the senselessness resume. My mind is working hard to make some kind of connection with reality, but the fine line between sanity and insanity is close to being crossed.

It takes a major effort to breathe. Blood comes out of my throat. I gasp for air, choking with every attempt. Is this what it's like to drown? This suffocating feeling, the sense of helplessness, feeling as if every breath is my last. The only difference is that if I'm drowning, it's in my own blood and not in water.

"Easy now, fella. Just relax. We're here to help you. Slow, steady breaths. C'mon. You can do it."

What the hell is happening? Who's talking to me? I don't recognize the guy's voice. I try to sit up so I can look around and see what's happening, but I'm stopped by the pain and some sort of restraints.

"Don't try to move, sir," a woman says. "You'll only bleed more. We're taking you to the hospital. No need to worry."

My clothes are sticky from dried blood. How long have I been unconscious? It must have been quite some time for the blood to have dried like this, and yet there's a lot of moisture, too. Shit, that means fresh blood as well as the old.

I'm ready to ask some questions about where I'm going and what's going to happen to me, but pressure pounds on my chest and blood comes pouring out.

"Quick, we have to get him out of here!" the woman hollers. "Get moving!"

In just minutes, I'm loaded into the meat wagon and we're on our way. People are scrambling all around and over me. They give me shots, wipe off blood, and try to keep my air passages clear, telling me things I can barely hear.

The ride to the hospital is a short one, and it doesn't take long for us to wheel up to the emergency door entrance. Once inside, I'm surrounded by white jacketed doctors, each one having a particular task, it appears. My body is poked, prodded, and humiliated in every way imaginable.

"Are you in pain, sir?" some idiot whizzbang asks.

Of course I'm in fucking pain. And how the hell am I supposed to answer anyone with all these things coming in and out of my throat? Stupidity to the max.

My consciousness fades as my body starts jerking around on the gurney. What the...

"Oh shit, we're losing him! His signs are gone. I can't read anything!"

I can't be gone! The pain is still escalating. C'mon, people! Wake up. Do something.

The paddles hover above my chest. I don't know if they use them or not. Sudden, excruciating pain overcomes me, stealing away all my other senses.

It is nearly dark in the room when I wake, but there is enough light to see an assemblage of medical equipment, most of which I've never seen before. Flashing lights - red, green, amber, blue - are everywhere, creating weird, undulating shadows. Odd shapes and glimmers of light flash across the ceiling and the walls as well. I barely manage to turn my head to look in the opposite direction. I'm in a private room of my own, at the end of the hospital wing where one can see the street. The lights from outside caused by sparsely moving traffic is what I see dancing on the ceiling and walls. It's dark outside too. That means I've been unconscious all day. It's nice they gave me a room with a view, but with any luck, I'll be out of here soon and won't have much time to avail myself of the sights.

Everything still hurts, not just my head, but my stomach, legs, and throat. My breathing is easier, though. Oxygen tubes have been shoved up my nose; they hurt too. They always hurt. Maybe it's because I have a large nose, but the tubes always seem to slip to one side or the other. I shift a little to the side to ease the pain.

Nurses come running into the room and check the equipment. One looks over the top of everyone else and says, "We thought we were losing you again. You must have pulled some of your connections loose. Glad to have you back with us. These last two weeks have been touch and go, my friend."

Two weeks? I've been here for two weeks? That's impossible. I just can't comprehend it.

One of the nurses runs out and comes back with a grizzled old doctor who does the usual looking into my eyes thing, checking my pulse, and all the other things the nurses have already done. It seems like double dipping, but at least everyone's being thorough.

"Back amongst the living, sir. I hope you stay that way," he says. "How are you feeling? Can you talk yet?"

Although it's not easy, I manage to mumble out a few words, not that they sound too coherent. I'm having problems getting my mouth and brain to act on the same wavelength.

"Don't talk any more than you think you can handle, but how the hell did you manage to get into this condition? It looks as if you've been beaten, but with what and by whom?"

"Hit and run," I say, remembering everything, but afraid to tell the truth.

"Whoever did this looks as if he wanted you dead."

"Maybe, huh?"

He shakes his head and walks towards the door, motioning for who I believe is the nurse in charge to come with him. The others put me back together again and depart as well, leaving me with one nervous looking young nurse. Something is on her mind. I'm not really in any kind of shape to question her on the matter, so I wait for her to get the courage to force it out.

"I really hate to ask you this, sir, but we've been having some trouble getting information about you," she says.

"What do you need?" I ask.

"You've been here for two weeks and you haven't had any visitors. None. A few of your co-workers have called, but...well, your wife...your wife hasn't called or come down. We only know you're married because one of them told us you were. Who makes the decision on what happens to you? I mean, she is your next of kin. Surely she cares about you."

Shit! I should be used to this by now, but this is a new low, even for her. Two weeks and she hasn't cared enough to visit or even talk to the doctors.

I try my best to laugh, but I'm sure it comes up short. My being in here has given her more opportunity to pursue her other amorous adventures.

"You'd have to know my wife to understand." That's all I say. No need for anything else.

More nervous shuffling from my young nurse, "Who decides, then?"

"I decide: if I don't make it, give my body to science. I've already filled out paperwork. Ed, my coworker, is my power of attorney."

"You knew your wife would act this way?"

"I knew."

"I'm so sorry. No one should die alone."

"Sometimes we don't have a choice."

She reaches down and gives me a kiss on the forehead. Her eyes are moist and she turns in a hurry to hide them.

Before she reaches the door, I say, "Thanks for caring." She turns and winks at me, then leaves. I'm left to the solitude of my room again. More time to think, to be alone while the pain whips around me. One thing about physical pain, though. It takes away some of the mental stress; it hurts to think that all a man has after sixty years of existence is suffering. As hard as I have battled the cancer inside me, winning three times before, it's back again; this time it's. I've always taken a different approach to fighting it, never going for chemotherapy, because... well, because that would have meant I would have been weakened and unable to provide for my family. They always came first, even my wife. I never considered allowing them to cut into my skull and removing the tumors. Better to use my radical anti-oxidant, mega doses of garlic, and running beyond the limits that a healthy man is supposed to be able to achieve to beat the odds. Yes, I used the testing equipment at the VA to gauge my progress, even enduring the rocket engine like sound of the MRI machine while it probed and tortured my mind. I did all of this and thought I was winning. Damn it! I will win!

"So you think you're going to win, huh? You delusional fool. You are the fool of fools, the idiot of all idiots. They're asking what to do with your worthless carcass. Would they do that to a man who had a chance of surviving? You're going down, and you're going down fast!"

A hooded man attaches himself to the voice and attacks my mind and body. Pressure builds in my chest, reaching new levels of pain. His laughter escalates as I start flopping around on my bed, the machines I'm hooked up to begin going haywire. The oxygen tubes are roughly jerked from my nose and blood begins pouring down my already raw throat. My heart starts beating a crescendo of pain to match that of my head. People pound on the door trying to get in, but the door won't open. The bastard has somehow managed to lock it. His hideous laughter threatens to shatter my eardrums and his stench seems to invade every cut and scrape on my body, making them burn even more.

Life drains from my body as the door finally opens. I try to talk, to tell them what's happening. No words form...

The room becomes a hive of activity, people move around in a blur. White coats blend with the multicolored outfits the nurses wear: flowery tops, Looney Toon shirts, and cheery solid colors. All speeding around me, yet I can barely move. I'm going down in a hurry. The abyss awaits. One wrong move now and it's all over.

Bright lights cutting through the darkness of moments before show more than I care to see. Blood is everywhere. White jackets are covered in its russet tint, surgical gloves and masks little use against its spatter. The defibrillators are back again; although this time they might be here for naught.

The doctor's hands come down, the paddles taking forever to reach my chest, forcing me to writhe in agony with my present pain, yet at the same time preparing me for the anguish to come. I'm slipping fast, then the electricity shoots through me, causing me to arc up as if I'm ready to meet my maker. A few seconds pass, nothing. He zaps me again. This time my breathing becomes easier, but the pain is beyond comprehension. God, please: no more! Enough pain. My limit has been reached.

"He's back, Doctor," one of the nurses says.

"I don't know what's holding him here," he says. "He can't have anything left. It's impossible."

A new bed is wheeled in, and as soon as the blood is removed from everything, I'm stripped down naked once more and they wash me as well. In a few minutes, the room looks pretty much as it did before this episode into the nearness of everything that could have been.

One by one, the doctors and nurses leave the room, near darkness returns, and with it, the ominous shadows casting their creative selves onto the surrounding walls. A dancing light appears on the ceiling, holding still, pulsing with intensity. I am too exhausted to look outside to see what the source might be. But the light beckons and I have to answer its call.

It's the car! The one lingering in the recesses of my mind. It tried to kill me when this whole mess started. It's parked across the street by the parking garage, sitting in the shadow of the building. The hooded man is sitting on the roof of the killer machine, dangling his legs to the door handles. He looks my way, but he's too far for me to see his face. I'm not really sure I want to see his face. It must be evil. How could it be otherwise? With the torment he put me through, he...

Oh, my God! It all makes sense now. Or does it? My mind is spinning, trying to piece this insanity together. This man is the body behind the voice. They are one and the same. But how? What's happening? Have I gone completely stark, raving mad?

The machines surrounding me start making a weird sound, a steady monotone. In no time, the room is filled with hospital staff. The paddles come down, again and again. Nothing happens.

"What's the time?"

"2:34 A.M., Doctor."

"Call it - 2:34 A.M. He fought hard."

The doctor pats me on the shoulder and pulls the sheet over my head.

I lie there for a few seconds wondering what's next. There is no light to walk to, nor are there any spinning black entities as I might have expected. There is nothing. Only silence.

The car revs up and I feel my incorporeal self rise to look at it. I understand now. For so long, I fought it. No more.

I leave the hospital and walk across the street to the car. The hooded man slides down and I stare into his face, a face I did not expect to see. I look into the face of Death, and I see my face. I am Death. We join and become one.

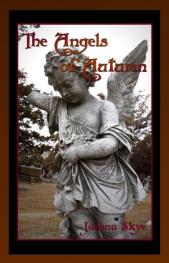
The car: a gorgeous creation. In 1968, I owned this car, complete with red, orange, and yellow flames appearing to leap out against its black body. My car once more.

Death drives a '68 Buick.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Blaze McRob has penned many titles under different names. It is time for him to come out and play as Blaze. Join him as he explores the Dark side. You know you want to.

Twitter: @WyomingBob

Blog: http://www.blazemcrob.com/



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One Photograph: Two Points of View 300 Words ~ Comparative Flash Fiction



Echoing Rhythm Nina D'Arcangela

I hunt fairly – no shotgun, no rifle, no blind from which to fool the creature. I hunt on foot with a long bow, the arrows I tip and fletch myself. I hunt to feed my family, not for sport or the right to brag. With each kill, I offer a token of gratitude and respect to the spirits – the soul of the animal just slain, and the one who helped guide me to it. No part of the animal goes to waste. The meat is eaten, the skin used to clothe my children, the bones too small for other purposes are whittled to adorn the women as a sign of faith that the spirits will always provide.

A branch cracks, my eyes track the sound. With barely a movement, I nock the arrow, raise my bow and, with the breath of a whisper, I release. It flies true, but the creature turns before the tip can pierce its flesh just above the heart, wounding not killing. I track it to where it struggles. No longer able to climb the snow covered hill; the buck slips onto its side, weakened but kicking. I wait until it stills, then kneel to slice its throat not wishing it to suffer needlessly. But I act too soon. In a moment of pure panic, it thrashes and gores me upon its rack, then tosses me a dozen feet away.

The last of the buck's strength exhausted, we stare into one another's eyes across the blood spattered blanket between. Beat by agonizing beat, both of our hearts find synchronicity, the rhythm of each echoing the other in a slowing staccato. I try to ease it with my stare but see the fear it holds for its young, a mirror of what my own eyes must betray.

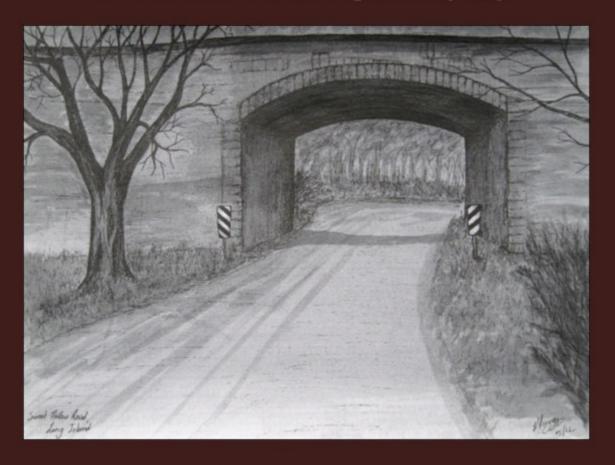
Aftermath Julianne Snow

Red. The colour of my blood. Spilled across the pristine white, it scares me. What happened to me? Where am I? Looking to my left, I see Frank, lying on the ground, still. I reach out my hand, tentative. Not sure I want to know his fate yet, I hesitate before pressing my palm against his arm.

Hard. That's the feeling his flesh communicates to me. My mind knows what it means, but it resists. I hit him in earnest, trying to rouse him, but I only succeed in hurting myself. The pain washes over me, reminding me I'm still alive. With my senses reengaged, the discomfort of my injuries rush to the forefront of my mind. The ache intensifies until it burns — my nerves all suddenly alive again. Tears freeze on my cheeks, building up in icy layers. My body is racked with sobs, the force of them bringing bubbles tinged with blood to my lips.

I look to my right at the mangled mass of metal that used to be our car. Glass litters the ground around me and I see the crimson swath my body cut through the powdery layer of snow before coming to rest. It amazes me I survived the impact, even as my mind struggles to recognize my survival is not guaranteed. I roll onto my side, knowing I need to get off the ground but something stops me. My hands flock to my sides, feeling for obstacles. Coming up hard against a jagged edge, I follow the length to its source, finding it skewered through me. My blood is hot on my chilled hands and I know I'm done. One more cough racks my frame and I feel it deep within. My blood seeps deeper into the snow as I fade into nothingness...

Karen Runge: The Haunted Bridge Series Sweet Hollow Road, Long Island (USA)



Haunted by the ghosts of several young boys who were either murdered or who committed suicide on/near the bridge.



Seeing Is Believing Mark Cassell

Simon told us about seeing the darkness and none of us believed him. You know the type; the drunk bloke at the bar, the guy you have to at least acknowledge when you're up there getting drinks. Towards the end, I don't think he once took a shower. Or washed his clothes. Kev and I had always called him Sad Simon.

It began several weeks ago as he sat on his stool. He was excited about laser eye surgery. He announced it to the entire pub, which was weird because none of us knew him; usually he remained quiet, sipping his one drink of the evening. He'd saved up enough, he told us, he'd been wanting it for years and was finally going for it.

Apparently, and this had him in hysterics when telling us, he'd opted for enhanced night vision. That didn't mean he'd be able to see in the dark.

The next night he sat there wearing sunglasses, his head high. When he removed those glasses I saw his bloodshot eyes, demonic. It was the surgery. He said there was some light sensitivity but could cope, so we shouldn't worry. With eyes burning behind those shades he explained the elation at being able to read his bedside clock. None of us cared. Kev and I continued to mock the poor bastard behind his back.

Jenny was the first he spoke to, one to one. I overheard something about a darkness that follows us. She was a good looking girl. She had a tattoo on her wrist; it was a yellow circle with a smiling face inside, nothing special.

Sad I never got to ask her about it.

A few days passed, and when Simon came into the pub he was grubby like he'd been sleeping rough. Since the operation this was the first we'd seen him without sunglasses. His eyes were still as red as you'd imagine the Devil's would be.

Simon's outburst filled the evening, shouting about the darkness he saw. Everywhere, he said, all around us. The landlord ignored him, didn't even tell Simon to quieten—I'd seen our landlord shout down every potential troublemaker. I guess Simon must've spoken with him, changed him in some way so he wouldn't throw him out.

The way I think he changed Jenny, too.

That was the same night Simon touched me. The back of his hand brushed my knuckles as he pushed his empty glass across the bar. My vision briefly darkened and the overhead lights seemed to flare. And that was what changed me. Why me, I don't know.

Last night when Jenny came in, she wasn't her usual self. She didn't even acknowledge me and it was then I realised I liked her. Though her tattoo still smiled at me.

The first time I saw the shadows they warped the air behind Jenny's head, a shimmering cloud of grey. She stood in the corner near the juke box watching a game of pool. The darkness flickered and inside there was something else, difficult to see.

The pub was packed and no one else saw it. I knew it was only me. My hands shook and when I set my drink down it almost spilled. Jenny's eyes were sad and it was as if her face reflected shadows. I squinted as the darkness shrank then vanished. It was as though it gave up trying to show me something.

I watched her for awhile, puzzled and thinking of the exchange she'd had with Simon. What was that he'd said about a darkness that follows us? She went to the ladies room.

Kev, sitting beside me, didn't see anything. He was busy eyeing some girls as they walked to the bar. And there was Sad Simon, his eyes burning into mine. His mouth twitched at the corners. He knew. It was only me and him.

"What is it?" Kev asked me.

Pulling my gaze from the man at the bar, I focused on my friend. A darkness seethed behind his

head too, only there was a faint image within those black wisps; his face dripping blood.

My breath snatched and I coughed. I tasted smoke and like a TV switching off, the image vanished. I pushed my glass away and closed my eyes.

Kev said something else but my personal darkness blocked him out. When my eyelids parted, there was Simon still staring at me. Shadows were behind him now. They showed me his face, his eyes pouring blood, his flesh peeling and curling away.

My stomach catapulted and I thought I'd be sick.

Just as it had with Kev, the vision snapped off.

There was a strange silence in my head, the urge to spew subsiding. I dragged an unsteady hand down my face.

A door slammed and the sound yanked me upright. It was Jenny staggering from the toilets. Behind her, the shadows had returned but this time it was different. It wasn't only me, others now saw them. People screamed, leaping from their seats; stools and tables upturned in a collection of thuds and crashes. Everyone charged for the exit, shoulder to shoulder, pushing others out the way. Their cries filled my head.

Billowing like curtains, the coruscating darkness bunched up and folded around Jenny. Her face twisted and she thrashed in its embrace. Her piercing scream ripped into the chaos of the fleeing crowd. The shadows collected, pulled at her, and in seconds her body vanished.

Only the shadows remained. Their surface shimmered like a diesel spill.

My head swam as blood roared in my ears.

Kev shouted something, started pulling at my clothes. He pushed me towards the door. My legs failed me and I sprawled across the table. Drinks soaked my shirt.

The shadows whirled and something white pushed outwards, reaching for me and Kev. It was an arm, and I recognised the smiling face tattoo. There was only Jenny's arm, nothing else of her, stretching from the darkness. She clutched something.

A knife. Ornate and magnificently crafted.

Still without seeing the rest of Jenny, the shadows surged. Her arm rigid, the knife pointed forward. Kev shouted, shoved me sideways, and the knife thrust into his face. Jenny's fist pumped the knife in and out. The sound of that blade stabbing, sucking and splashing into his screams overtook the cacophony of everyone's escape.

Kev collapsed in a red mess. Life rushed from him and pooled around his body. His leg twitched then was still.

I snatched my eyes away. The shadows were receding, shrinking into a tighter darkness. Jenny's hand still clutched the knife as the shadows closed around it. Only her arm remained, just above the elbow, hanging in the air.

With a crunch and red spray it dropped, thumping to the floor.

My vision blurred and bile rose to my throat.

The fingers still clamped the knife, the tattoo smiling at me.

I think I whispered her name.

The blade, glistening red, sparked as if something ignited. Flames spurted from the blade and caught the carpet. Spreading outwards, catching the furniture. Unnaturally swift.

Simon now stood beside me. He held two broken bottles and rammed one into each eye. His blood splashed me and I blinked it away.

My stomach was ready to lurch upwards.

He twisted the glass into his sockets. That grinding and slurping sound was all I heard. He yanked

them free, threw them aside and dug fingers into those twin holes. The mess oozed down his face. It dribbled over his gaping mouth, down his neck and soaked his clothes. He tugged at flaps of skin and peeled them away.

I remember the sound as they slapped the floor.

Simon muttered something but the shouts of the remaining few to leave the pub drowned everything. That, and my heart stampeding my skull.

Finally I rushed for the exit, fire biting my heels. I lurched into the street, coughing and tasting smoke. Chest heaving, hands on knees, I spat.

When I looked up I saw the crowd around me. Their eyes tore me down. And playing in the air behind their heads were the shadows. It was only I who could see that darkness. Whether it was tomorrow, next year, or fifty years' time, I saw their death. One was a fiery plane crash, another was peaceful but alone in a care home. There was cancer and diabetes, and all kinds of disease. There were car crashes and cycling accidents, there was a mugging and a stabbing...but not with that ornate knife Jenny had.

Death surrounded me.

I sprinted home.

That was yesterday. And that darkness is still there now, flickering behind every person I meet. My mother, my father—I know how they're going to die. No matter where I go those shadows exclusively reveal how everyone dies.

This morning I went into the bathroom and looked in the mirror. It was instinctual. Inside the shimmering folds of darkness that floated behind my head I saw myself holding that beautiful knife—the one Jenny used on Kev's face—and I am thrusting it into my abdomen. I twist it, pull it out halfway and then push it further in. Blood pumps over my knuckles. My jaw is relaxed and I do not scream. Nor are my eyes closed; they are like black marbles. It's as if they focus on something, or perhaps some where, else.

I fall to my knees. My shallow breath fills one last red bubble while still that knife continues to work its way inside. My eyes remain open.

The shadows embrace me.

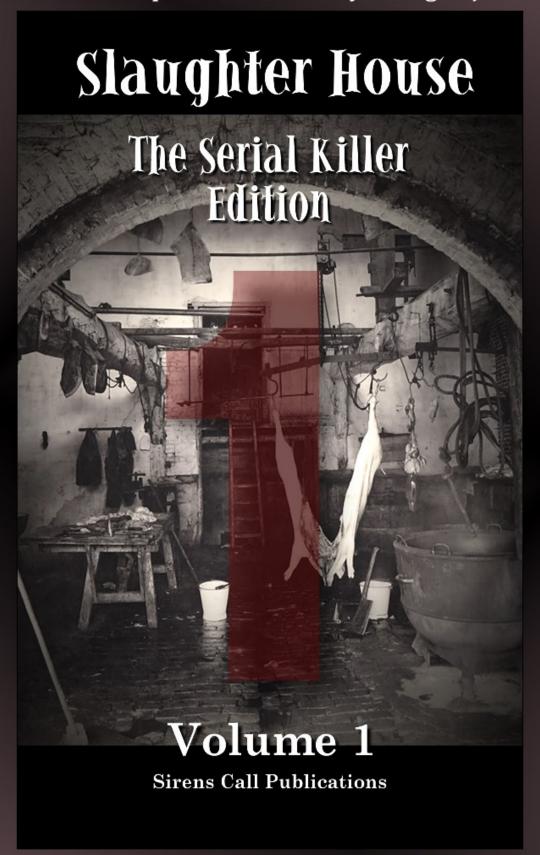
ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Mark is a British author and often dreams of dystopian futures, peculiar creatures, and flitting shadows. His stories can be found in several anthologies, and next year will see his Chaos Halo Series as a regular feature in an eZine. He is writing a supernatural horror novel, The Shadow Fabric.

Twitter: <a href="mailto:omnowed:omnow

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What drives someone to become a Serial Killer? Eleven authors spin tales of atrocity telling us just that.



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Feast of Kryfifi Patti L. Geesey

I heard them echoing in my ears, the footsteps of misfortune. They manipulated the very pit of my stomach until the sour acid climbed its way into my throat. A gnawing pain rushed through my stiffened shoulders. Fear had taken over, immobilizing me. I stood frozen in the hotel corridor as the sounds of my impending doom drew nearer. They were just around the corner ahead of me. I had nowhere to hide, and no way to escape the evil that lurked ahead, so I remained motionless.

The footsteps quieted, but the jingling grew so lurid that it pierced not only my eardrums, but my very being. Atrocious memories from a day in my childhood infested my mind giving me a moment's distance from my existing dilemma. However, lost in thought, the ability of protecting my body from the gripping danger left me wide open and unaware of my forthcoming calamity. I suddenly felt a biting sensation upon my right leg underneath my kneecap. Too frightened to look down, I stared into the dark eyes of the malevolent man standing before me.

"It is time," he said with a menacing grin.

"Time," I paused as tears streamed down my face, "time for what?"

Before the stranger could reply, a shrill scream came forth from my parted lips. Bearable no more, the throbbing pain triggered my collapse. Face to face I came with the four-legged beast. Blood stained the white fur surrounding his mouth. Gnarling sounds festered from deep within it, as he glared hungrily into my eyes.

"It is time for the feast of Kryfifi. He's waited many years, dear Patti, many years, to feast upon the flesh and bone of you. Ever since his first taste of you, he craved your scent, your zest." The man finally spoke.

Using the heel of his boot, the man held me down, as his rabid beast grasped hold of my sweater, ripping it to shreds. He bit down, clasping his incisors into the exposed fleshiness of my tender stomach. I reeled in pain, trying to get loose, but it only forced the feasting to continue. The teeth clasped on to my brittle bone below as his eyes glared directly into mine.

In my weakening state, my mind wandered back to the day in my childhood once more. The knit scarf that was neatly placed around my neck that cold winter morning, the visit to the elderly relative of my best friend, the white curly-haired beast that attacked my innocence; it was *this* rabid beast that scarred me for life!

I drifted in and out of consciousness as the beast continued to devour my being, lastly biting my neck. I took my final breath as the translucent light shone brighter. I was at peace as the smell of death swept over me.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - I was born in Lansing, Michigan, and raised in Mount Joy, Pennsylvania. My writing started at age nine with poetry. Upon adulthood, I ventured into short stories, flash fiction, and novels. I have poetry and flash fiction published in varying anthologies. Currently, I am writing a supernatural novella, and a women's fiction novel which will both be completed in 2014.

Facebook Author Page: https://www.facebook.com/pattigeeseyauthor



Sirens Call Publications

My Only Friend, The End Dan Dillard

I am forty-one years old. I am a father, husband, son, and brother...all of those other things. I held a good job and made decent money. I have friends and my children are both excellent students that have friends of their own, lives of their own, dreams of their own. I want to be a good person...something I wasn't always in touch with. It never occurred to me when I was a child, when I was a teenager, when I was a young adult that there would be consequences for my actions. Not punishment, being grounded for coming home late or even jail-time for drug use or drunk driving—real consequences. Consequences that stick around forever, things you have to live with on the inside...and things that would one day walk me to the door and kick me out of this party. I am forty-one years old and I am dying.

It is true what they say, you know. Your life does flash in front of your eyes before you die. This isn't a good thing. What you see is everything, but only the good times flash. They pass by in a single strobe, as if you got them right the first time. What lingers are the questionable moments, the times when you should've acted but didn't, the things you should never have said or done, but did. The mistakes are up there on a giant screen, the Power Point slide-show from hell, and you have all the time in the world to examine each one. All the time in your world anyway.

Those things are eating at me now, the same way the doctors talk about my stage four cancer eating at me. I'm not so sure those moments in my life *aren't* the cancer inside. It isn't made of rogue cells that have ravished my organs due to some medical anomaly, but my regrets that have turned on me, angry about my blatant misuse of this life and this body. That is what is devouring me from the inside out.

If I close my eyes and concentrate, I can hear them crawling around...

Chewing...

Crawling again.

I can see them, their faces like animals from some dark jungle. They aren't animals. I know that. They are demons. Demons of my own invention.

That's why I surrounded myself with noise when I was still at home. Music, television, I even opened the windows and listened to passing traffic. Anything was a distraction, but those distractions were fleeting, more means of ignoring the inevitable—of burying the past—of not watching the slideshow. I'm here to tell you that you have to watch because it's your only way out. Death has a way of making you lie still and pay attention to those monster faces, to your demons...those faces are only mirrors belonging to your past.

The hospital is different. I don't remember coming here, not this time. That's why I feel this will be my last trip. It is sterile and cold, with only the mechanical sounds of pumps and the digital beeps of monitoring equipment. It smells like sickness.

A hospital should smell like coffee and bacon, warm cookies, holiday spices.

The faces come and go...white lab coats and green scrubs, but all demons. All me. Something is different this time, something vital that I've never felt in a hospital before. There's no urgency, no rushing doctors or nurses, no technicians waking me in the middle of the night. They let me sleep, and they watch--appear to be waiting. I know what they're waiting for as I wait for the same thing. I can only imagine in their eyes, I look dead already. To them, I am a chunk of half-eaten meat on a tray that needs to be bused from the table so another slab can take its place.

Move your ass! Folks are waitin'.

Though I am lying here like a lump, I still know in the back of my mind what is happening to me. I still feel the pain of being eaten. I welcome death, but I know he's holding out. Death has me on the back burner because I'm meant to suffer. He is simply following his recipe for my misery, a written procedure for getting what I deserve. Add two dashes of mental anguish, a pinch of discomfort, a cup of paranoia, three tablespoons of fear and then simmer indefinitely.

I've been near catatonic now for two days. I see the doctors occasionally. They flicker a penlight across my eyes and look for me in my hollow eyes. I'm still there, just beyond their reach. They check my vital signs and talk to my wife and kids about making me comfortable for the end, but that isn't what I want. What I want is for the lights to go out, for the sound of the hideous chewing noises to end. There is no comfort in waiting. The end is my only comfort.

With so little sensory input from the outside world, I am left to feel those demons moving around inside my skin. I can smell their hot breath and taste blood. They are attacking my liver, my lungs, my brain, rotting them and turning them black...always though, they leave just enough alone so that I can still perceive, and that is the cruelest thing of all.

Or so I thought.

I think the noises are finally quieting. I think the feeling of those beasts crawling from one of my organs to the next has stopped and I hope my penance has ended. I hope I can finally move on to whatever lies after life. Whatever lies lie ahead. Will there be more of the same? Better? Paradise? Hell? I'm ready for it, whatever it is.

Paid in full. Time served. Check please—don't count on a big tip.

What I hadn't counted on was this. There's a slow fade occurring. My eyes are open, yet the world around me is in tunnel-vision, viewed through a cardboard toilet paper tube. That tube grows smaller and the image beyond, hazy. The smells and sounds of the world are doing their equivalent disappearing acts.

What comes next is just this: continued pain, right up until the end.

My only friend, the end.

I know now that the end brings no hope, no answers, no paradise...only nothing. I will simply end and *that* is the cruelest thing.

Now, instead of chewing noises, I hear chuckling. Someone—Death?—is laughing at me. An eternal prankster having his last guffaw at my hope, my upbringing, my expense. He is still laughing when the light goes out for good and the demon faces are gone, still laughing when I can no longer smell anything, still laughing when I can no longer remember, still laughing when the pain stops...until the laughter is all that is left. There is no more me, no sense of self, no sense of anything. There is only a joke to which the dead are privy, and that the living don't find funny.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Dan writes from his beat down laptop in Bloomington, Indiana. He likes his horror with a splash of the supernatural and his characters sarcastic and full of personality. His wife is the navigator as they fly around the universe on this rock and the kids provide the entertainment and imagination.

Twitter: <a>@demonauthor

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Pen of the Namned



A collection of horror writers that explore pain, horror and angst through poetry, muse, and short stories every Tuesday.



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Steam Nina D'Arcangela

Standing in the steam filled room; I can almost taste a metallic tinge filling the air. I know it's my imagination, there's nothing to taste, nothing but the salty tears that flow endlessly down my cheeks. The hot water has been cascading from the shower for the better part of an hour now, but still I'm fighting the urge to step into the spray. The blade I placed on the edge of the tub is still in its packaging; I was too frightened to open it, to be honest with you.

The anguish, it never ceases, I keep waiting for it to. I keep waiting for the moment when my own worth will kick in and force me to strike back; for reason and logic to wipe these sickening thoughts from my mind. But I am anything but lucid at the moment.

I should drive; just get in my car and go anywhere – anywhere but here. I should get as far from this room as possible, my sanity, my life, depends on it. But try as I might, I can't make myself leave. Each time I reach for the door handle, my arm grows weak and falls back to my side, my hand unable to do anything but clutch at the clothing I'm trying desperately not to remove. I know once I undress, I'll step into the darkness I'm struggling so hard against. Darkness masked as salvation.

Salvation, what salvation? Is it salvation to give up, to quit, to stop fighting? But what else is there to do when fighting gets you nowhere but here – alone, in a steam filled room. I'm trying, really I am. I'm struggling to make sense of my life and why it matters to anyone. I'm trying not to hear the resonate scream of my own inner voice as it continually reminds me what I am to this world. Nothing. I want to believe that I'm something, that I'm wanted, needed, chosen – but in fact, I'm none of these things, I'm constantly diminished by those who know me, who use me; then emotionally battered for trying to rise above the pain. I slip the top button of my blouse open, the others follow slowly as I beg my own hands to stop; it flutters to the floor like a discarded petal.

Used and broken by everyone else's needs, and my ever-present need to be recognized, there is a gaping void within; nothing left but the shell of what was once me. I have no significance; my only value is to serve the needs of others who claim they care for me. But they don't care; with care comes respect, with respect comes value – I have no value, not to them, not even to myself. I tolerated it, I let this happen, I let them steal what was once me, and it hurts too much to keep allowing it.

Wracking sobs drag me to the floor. Against my own will, I begin to remove my boot. Anger rises to flash through me; I let it and fling the boot as hard as I can at the door. I only sob harder when I see the chunk it has gouged out of the beautifully restored wood. I hate myself more, if that's possible. Removing the other boot, I let it drop where it falls.

Drawing my knees to my chest, I wrap my arms around them, rocking back and forth. Tears soak my jeans, the wetness against my flushed skin makes me cry that much harder.

I lift my head and stare toward the door once more; I can barely see through swollen lids. My left eye stings badly. I briefly wonder if you can detach a retina by sobbing uncontrollably. Does it matter, I think to myself. Does anything matter?

My neck snaps back toward the shower curtain, my knees slip from my grasp; I begin mewling softly as tears flow unchecked to mix with the moisture filling the air. I begin to unbutton my jeans – softly, barely, I whisper the word no to myself over and over again as I wiggle out of them.

Covering my face with my trembling hands, my head falls forward until I'm crumpled in a ball pressed between the bathtub and the vanity. *Please*, I beg myself, *please don't do this*.

Rising to my knees, I reach a trembling hand toward a towel and lay it upon the floor to keep the tiles dry and clean. Shaking with hysterics, I stand and finish undressing.

Clutching the shower curtain in both hands, I fight with every ounce of willpower I have left to not pull it aside, to not step into the welcoming release. I don't even realize I've already done so until I feel the searing water pelting my skin.

No, please, not this way – just not this way. How will they understand? I think to myself. My mind answers in the most caustic manner possible. Do you mean the ones who drove you to this, the ones who don't care enough to see your pain, the ones who don't value you for who you are, but only for what you can do for them?

I shudder at the thought that even my own mind is willing to betray me. Sliding down the cool tile wall, I land softly on my knees; the scalding water pounds upon my back, my neck, my head – my arms.

My arms, they look so frail; beet red from the searing water with veins bulging blue beneath the skin. I look at the mark inked on my left inner wrist. It's meant as a reminder that there is always hope, always a reason to endure if you look hard enough. I'm looking, but all I see is a blot of meaningless words; as meaningless as I am.

My forehead rests upon the cool enamel of the tub. My tears still flow endlessly, my stomach clenching from hours of uncontrollable bawling. I don't think I can do this, I don't think I can keep living like this – something better is meant for me, but that something is nowhere to be found, it's not a part of this life.

Without consciously knowing it, my right hand reaches for the razor and pops open the plastic case. Three blades slide out and I fumble to retrieve them, the sound of my own begging echoes in the basin.

I don't want to die.

Curled in a fetal position, I stare through the steam, through glinting tears, past swollen lids at the sliver of metal in my hand. Nearly convulsive, I bring the blade to my wrist and desperately try to find meaning in the words there. I think of all the things my life has brought me, the pains I've suffered, the moments of joy that somehow always managed to end up tainted and ruined. I lay there a ruin myself, useful to no one – just a pretty bauble, and finally clarity strikes me. What I've been begging for these last hours comes in one swift stroke as I open my arm from wrist to elbow. Before my strength leaves me, I transfer the blade to my left hand and make a much less refined cut on my right arm.

Lying there at the bottom of the tub, water pounding on my naked body mixing with the red tinge of my blood, the shakes finally begin to subside. The room grows quiet as the last few heaving sobs leave me, stillness at last. And there it is, what I'd imagined all along – the metallic tinge filling the air. I can taste it, I can smell it, I can feel it all around me. For the briefest of moments, I stare wide eyed in contemplation, more alive than ever before.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Nina D'Arcangela is a quirky horror writer who likes to spin soul rending snippets of despair. She reads anything from splatter matter to dark matter, and is an UrbEx explorer who loves to photograph abandoned places, bits of decay and old grave yards. Nina is a co-owner of Sirens Call Publications, a member of the writing group Pen of the Damned, and the owner and resident anarchist of Dark Angel Photography.

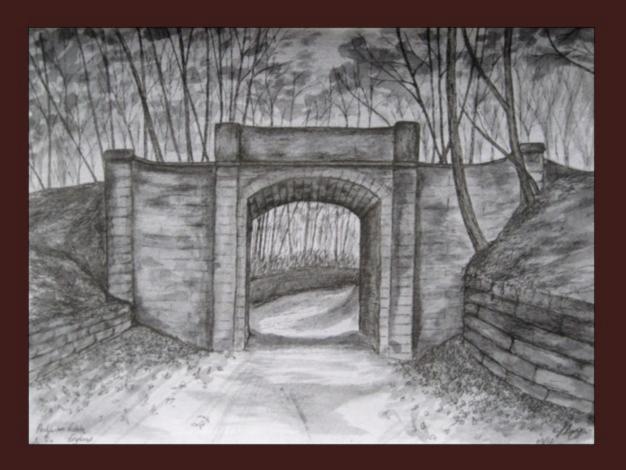
Twitter: @Sotet Angyal

Blog: sotetangyal.wordpress.com



Sirens Call Publications

Karen Runge: The Haunted Bridge Series Peckforton Estate, England



Haunted by a ghostly horse and carriage. There's a long history here, so it's hard to find any consistent facts about why it may be haunted.



A Wretched Turn of Events Maynard Blackoak

There was an especially thick darkness that fateful night that set my mind to thoughts of dread. It was apparent that my accustomed late night stroll down the lonely dirt road would be like no other I had ever taken. Just how different it would be, I was yet to discover.

Under the moonless sky, I plodded through the heavy mists that distorted my vision of the twisted elm limbs into sinewy arms, reaching out to snag me in their clutches. Of course I knew that to be merely the frightened ramblings of a vivid imagination. Still, in the back of my mind I felt ill at ease, putting that theory to task. With cowardice being the better part of valor, I kept my gait to the opposite side of the road.

Approaching the bridge that spanned No Name Creek, the snarling sound of a wolf on the prowl set the hairs on the back of my neck to standing on end. Piercing through the blanket of misty darkness were two blue eyes that sent cold shivers racing along my skin.

I had always been told that the last thing one should do when presented with such a situation was run. A calm deportment without a display of fear would dissuade the beast from pursuing. After giving the situation a careful evaluation, I mumbled to myself, "To hell with that."

In one smooth motion, I turned and began sprinting in the opposite direction. As my feet carried me to what I hoped would be safer ground, I took several anxious, backward glances to determine if the wolf had given chase. To my surprise, the road was wolf free. I would have smiled, but for the large rock laying in wait for me. The toe of my shoe clipped it at a dead run, sending me tumbling headlong into a patch of tall weeds.

Lying on the ground, gasping to put wind back in my deflated lungs, I heard the faint sound of footsteps creeping toward me through the dried brush. I turned my head just in time to see the tall weeds part, and a pair of ravenous eyes sizing me up for a meal. The beast had indeed pursued me, but from the side, under the cover of the brush.

It pounced upon me with its cavernous jaws opened wide. Thick, frothy saliva dripped from its mouth onto my cringing face. The last thing I remember was the gaping mouth full of pointy teeth ripping through my flesh. That is until I found myself here, at the Pearly Gates of Heaven.

"That's the honest truth, Saint Peter, of how I came to be in this shape, standing, so to speak, before you seeking admittance." I stated my cause for the better quality of the hereafter.

A perplexed expression jacketed Peter's visage. His eyes bounced from my file to me, and then back to my file. "Yes, Maynard. This is all well and good. I must admit the scales most certainly balance in your favor... Still, we have the issue with your unsightly appearance. Now mind you, we frown on any manner of discrimination... But we've never encountered a delicate situation like yours... I mean never before has a pile of turds sought to enter Heaven."

Despite the exemplary life I had led, I could tell my eternity had yet to be decided. I was at a loss. I knew my appearance was repugnant and would create some raised eyebrows at the very least and some outright protests of disgust, at worst. Still, I could not help but believe that God, being no respecter of human status or appearance would have directives in place for situations such as mine.

Granted, my condition far exceeded the norm. However, there had to have been some in worse shape than myself. "What of all those people that had suffered grisly fates that had flattened, twisted and rendered their earthly bodies a gruesome, malformed mound of flesh? Are they denied admittance because they look disgusting?"

"Ah, but those people had been restored to their former selves by the time they had reached me. That is of course, unless they had been slated for the unpleasant side of eternity."

"Excuse my language, but why the hell wasn't I restored to my former self?" I demanded to know in a sharp tone.

Peter shook his head in frustration, as his brow furrowed with ignorance. "I can only assume that you somehow slipped through a crack. No pun intended. It could be that one of our inexperienced angels erred in the performance of their duty."

"Slipped through a crack? An inexperienced angel screwed up? Pardon my language but, Jesus Christ, man. This is Heaven, not the brainless shit heads down at the Department of Motor Vehicles," I retorted in anger.

"Perhaps, Maynard, if I return you to Earth, you can die again. Maybe then you will be restored to your prior self?" Peter offered in a conciliatory voice.

"I say do it. We're certainly not getting anywhere like this."

No sooner had I given Peter my approval, I found myself in the middle of a busy street. Judging by the amount of traffic, I was thoroughly convinced that I would be flattened in short order. Hopefully, after I experienced my demise once again, the issue of my appearance would be resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

I had sat, so to speak, waiting to be crushed under the weight of an automobile throughout the day and well into the night. All manner of vehicles had sped over and around me without having struck me. It would be an understatement to say I had grown despondent. When I had not wished to die, a ravenous wolf devoured me. However, as I desired nothing but death, nary a scratch had been inflicted upon me.

The next day had proceeded in much the same manner, a few close calls, but nothing of any deadly substance. I had also fared no better the day after that or the day after that and so on and so forth. In fact an entire week had passed without so much as a glancing blow.

Depression began to smother my hopes of ever being restored to my former self. Then out of the blue, a stray dog wandered out into the street. It loped casually to the spot where I awaited a second chance to enter Heaven. After sniffing me for several moments, the hungry canine consumed me like I was a fine steak dinner.

"Well Maynard, you have to admit that you were restored to your former self. Unfortunately, it was your most recent former self," Peter remarked, shaking his head in disbelief at seeing me before him in the same disgusting form.

"Look maybe we can reach some sort of compromise here. Perhaps, I can be housed in one of Heaven's suburbs? Maybe you could create a section that is reserved for those in my predicament?" I suggested, hoping to settle the issue of my eternity without further ado.

Releasing a wistful sigh, Peter declined my suggestion with an emphatic shake of his head. "The suburbs are reserved for those who have been accorded a saintly status. Your file does not reflect that level of dedication. As for your idea to create a section for those in your unique position, that would not do at all. Even if by chance more came to me in your condition, we just can't have an entire section of people like you. It's just too unseemly to even consider. Plus couldn't you just imagine the horrid smell of an entire section comprised of turds?"

I was beginning to believe that a solution, acceptable to both parties, would never be reached. It seemed that while I was willing to negotiate, the guidelines of Heaven remained rigid in their wish to deny me entry.

My level of aggravation grew, as I begin feeling as if I was butting my head against an immovable brick wall of unfairness. It was not my doing that had left me in this condition. I was the victim here, a victim of an angel that had failed to perform their job properly that was compounded by bureaucratic nonsense.

"Then you tell me, Peter, how the hell do we rectify this situation?"

The pious saint exhaled with a dispirited sigh. "All I can do is send you back to Earth, and hope for a better result."

Though I did not believe it would bring resolution to the impasse, I consented to being returned for another chance at being restored to my former self.

I stood, in a manner of speaking, before Saint Peter once more, still bound in my body of dung. I had been returned a grand total of seven times. While the causes of my demises had varied from being eaten to being pulverized by a street cleaning truck, the end result was always the same. I had been sent into the hereafter as a pile of turds.

"No more return trips to Earth, Pete. I think it's safe to assume that your people will never get it right."

"Yes, I'd have to agree with you, Maynard. This situation is most distressing. Most distressing indeed," Peter responded, shaking his head sympathetically.

"I'd say it's sailed well past distressing, and right into the face of downright maddening." I issued my estimation of the situation in a scathing tone. "I'm beginning to think I'd be better off in the other place. At least all that fire and brimstone would mask the horrid stench that surrounds me."

Peter gazed upon me with an understanding smile perched upon his angelic face. "Oh no. We can't do that. Your record clearly shows you to be vastly overqualified for the other place.

"Perhaps if you were step aside to allow me to service a few of those in line behind you, a solution will come to me?"

"I'm a pile of wolf turds here. I can't step aside or in any other direction. If you want me to move, I suggest you get a pooper scooper or use your hands."

Peter's face wrinkled with abhorrence at the notion. He cast his visage upwards in a silent plea for divine assistance. As he stood in a quandary of stilled confusion, an elderly man who had overheard my dilemma stepped forward.

"Pardon me for intruding upon your conversation, but I think the solution to this problem is rather simple," he stated in a polite comportment.

Turning his gaze toward the man, Peter flashed him a congenial smile. "Please wait your turn, Frank. I'll be getting to you shortly."

Rolling my eyes, metaphorically speaking, I was perturbed by the manner in which the man, claiming to have a viable solution, was summarily dismissed. It seemed to me that no harm could come from listening to what he had to say regarding the matter. Maybe a few minutes would be wasted if his idea was unacceptable. Given the wearisome stalemate that had persistently blocked my entry into the hereafter, a little wasted time was inconsequential.

"Now just wait a damn minute here, Pete. I want to hear what ol Frank has to say. It seems logical, given our current impasse, that every idea be given a forum."

Peter glared at me with a heated visage, as if I had spoken to him with insolence. "That would not be proper protocol. We have procedures that must be followed. We cannot simply disregard them because of logic."

I would have begun pulling my hair out by the handfuls, if my form had accorded me hands and hair. My maddening dilemma had arisen because of a lack of procedures in place to deal with my circumstances. Suddenly, an idea from an outside source cannot be considered because it is not proper protocol. "To hell with you and your inadequate procedures...Frank can tell me his idea and you can stick your head up your ass to keep from listening to it."

Frank hemmed and hawed, as his eyes jogged from me to Peter's chagrinned countenance. "Well, it seems to me that the whole problem is that you're a pile of turds and due to an oversight you were never restored to your human form. Peter here, being someone with a great deal of heavenly authority, could fix that by speaking it to be so."

Had I a face, it would have surely become awash with fury. If Frank's estimation was indeed correct, all the turmoil I had endured since my first death could have been avoided by a single proclamation. "Is that true, Peter? Do you have the authority to correct the mistake that forced me into the hereafter as a pile of shit?"

It was Peter's turn to hem and haw, as he grasped in desperation for a response. "That's not the point. Any high ranking, heavenly representative has the ability to restore you to the proper form...But it's not our job."

"You mean to tell me that I have gone through the indignity of existing as a pile of turds, seven pointless deaths and our countless hours of discussing how to resolve my situation...all because it wasn't your job to correct the mistake that left me to dwell, as a glob of wretched smelling shit?"

A reluctant nod affirmed the infuriating reality of my circumstances. It was at that point, I wished for a fan and a willing hand to hurl me into its spinning blade, as a demonstration of the explosive anger that brewed inside me.

"Fix me, Peter...Fix me this instant!"

Peter's shoulders slumped, and with a snap of his fingers, I was back to my old, human form. As I strolled through the Pearly Gates, I cast one last reproachful stare at the bureaucrat who doggedly guarded the entry to the hereafter with his pretentious protocol. I may have come to him as a rancid, pile of turds, but it was he who proved to be the one with shit for brains.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Maynard Blackoak is a freelance writer living in the backwoods of Pawnee County, Oklahoma. He draws upon the sights of neglect and unusual sounds around him for inspiration. A bit of a recluse, he can often be found strolling through an old, forgotten cemetery or in the woods among the twisted black oaks and native elms under the light of the moon.

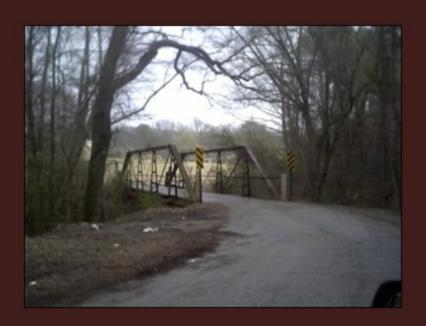
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Karen Runge: The Haunted Bridge Series Gadsden, Alabama (USA)



Haunted by a strange light — the stories behind it vary, but all in some way involve a young woman who was killed in an accident on the bridge one night while walking home with a lantern.



Checking Out Early Ken MacGregor

The gun is a surprise. I mean, in a library, everything is free, so why would anyone need a gun in here? Of course, people steal DVDs from us, too and I don't understand that either.

I'm no stranger to guns. I owned one briefly, before I had kids. I know how to shoot, though I'm not a particularly good shot. Also, I've had them pointed at me twice: once while working in a Stop&Go and once behind the wheel of a cab. Both times, I kept my cool and handed over the money.

I lifted my hands over my head now, keeping my face neutral. I held the man's gaze over the barrel, despite the magnetic draw the gaping hole held for my eyes.

"What do you need?" I asked him in a calm and quiet voice. "How can I make this go easy for you?" The man shook his head. He was sweating; it was January in Michigan. I kept my hands up and my eyes on his. He shook his head again; sweat droplets flew from his face.

Behind me, I could hear Karen picking up the phone receiver and knew she would be dialing 911. The gunman's eyes flicked in her direction.

"Hey," I said in the same calm voice. "Do you have a library card with us?"

"What?" the man asked, his eyes returning to mine.

"If you don't," I went on, "you can get one. It's free for anyone who lives in the area. Then you can borrow things for free. The library is here to help everyone, sir. We're very forgiving, too of past transgressions."

"What's that?" the gun barrel dipped maybe an eighth of an inch.

"Transgressions? It means mistakes." I could hear Karen whispering into the phone. To my right, a patron I had seen often poked the top of her head over a low bookshelf. I couldn't remember her name.

"That's good," the man said. "That's real good, 'cause I'm making a lot of them today."

I could hear the large clock over the desk slam through the seconds, clack, clack, clack, clack. The gunman's thumb flipped the safety off; I hadn't known it was still on. He tilted his head slightly to the left and a look of profound regret passed his face. The man's shoulders shrugged ever so slightly and he pulled the trigger.

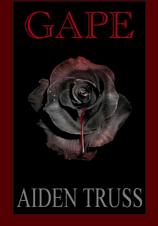
I was thrown back into the filing cabinet behind the desk. My chest hurt. My legs wouldn't hold me up and I slid to the floor.

I sat there as the world got dark and wished I'd had another chance to tell my kids I loved them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Over forty of Ken MacGregor's stories have appeared in anthologies, magazines and podcasts from Sirens Call Publications and others. Ken is a member of The Great Lakes Association of Horror Writers. Before getting shot, he lived in Michigan with his family and two scary cats.

Twitter: <a>@KenMacGregor

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/KenMacGregorAuthor?ref=hl



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Karen Runge: Artist and Author

A little bit about Karen:

Karen Runge was born in Paris, France, in October 1983. The daughter of a diplomat, her family lived in France and then Gabon before returning to their native South Africa when she was at the age of two or three.

She is a short story horror writer, and sometimes artist. Her stories have appeared in Pseudopod, Pantheon, Sirens Call Publications, and a few other places. She is also set to appear in the July 2014 issue of Shock Totem.

This is the first time any of her artwork has appeared in a magazine.



The Haunted Bridge Series

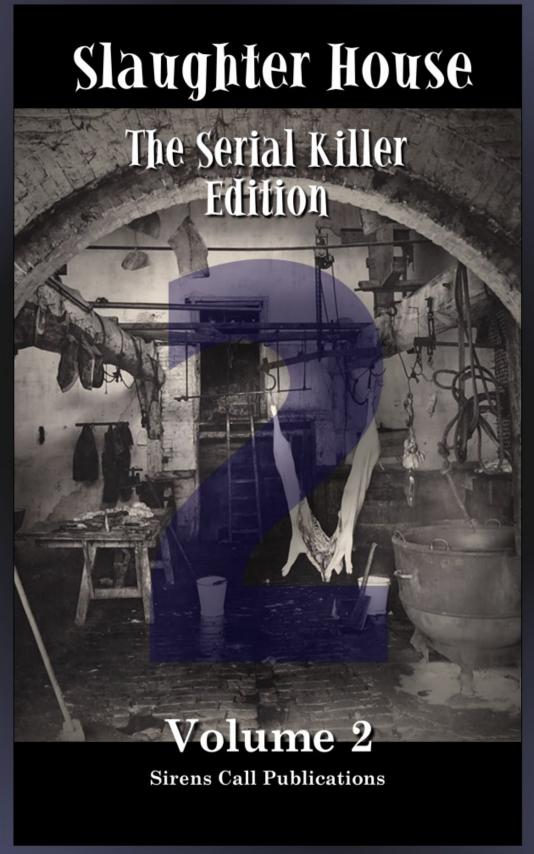
In Spring 2012, I set myself the challenge to complete eight pen and ink drawings. Since I needed something that I could actually think about while I



worked, I decided to draw some of the world's more famous haunted bridges. I washed the paper in diluted ink, and then built up the tones. The drawing itself was done with whatever gel ink pens I had handy, sometimes doused again with ink wash to create shading or effect. Since I couldn't visit the bridges themselves, I worked from pictures I scratched up on the internet.

For more information, visit her at karenrunge.wordpress.com

What drives someone to become a Serial Killer? Eleven authors spin tales of atrocity telling us just that.



Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, iStore, Smashwords & Createspace

Scarlet Grounds Gary Murphy

I guess I can't really say much about my death except two things, (1) it was sudden, and (2) it was quite painful and bloodthirsty.

Now, as I hover over the landscape below, I see the full extent of the outbreak and my heart sinks. Chaos reigns, that's for sure, and as I drift and glide over tall buildings and sometimes even through them – as if they are not even there, these tough and solid structures – I see and realize the Apocalypse came way too soon, when the world was not ready, and now that the world's little wars had ended, people started joining hands. And also so damned close to Christmas where I would spend precious time enjoying the vacation with my beautiful wife Sarah, and my six-year-old, Rebecca. Now that doesn't look possible, seeing as daddy has been devoured by selfish zombies stalking the towns and cities across this desolate land, where dreams were dreamt, and that was all, where dreams would never come true – or at least, not in my case.

So this is my death. Funnily, I had always imagined it would be something like this, the departure of spirit from body and its ascension into the skies, but you don't really know until you experience this shit, and believe me I might be wrong in saying it's the same for everyone, but I didn't expect the warmth of being or ease of movement through the heavens, or indeed, the new sharpness of view that enables you to see all that happens below with immense clarity of vision. I feel like a soaring eagle up here, and if this is my death, I have to forsake family life, the love of my wife and daughter, and just carry on, take it from this juncture forwards and look to my uncertain future, wherever my wings will take me.

But I need to spend a little time here and investigate some stuff. Just for myself...

As I make my way back to my murder scene, I notice I am moving quite slowly and deliberately through the open air, and not with massive speed. No faster than the highest speed you could maybe achieve riding a bicycle on the road...at a gentle, steady pace. The warmth of spirit astounds me, akin to having a snug cotton blanket encircle me, and it keeps me safe enough from the breeze. It's actually December now and usually cold but not anymore, or at least, not for me, anyway...I'm absolutely loving this feeling and this wholly, liberating sense of freedom of the skies, for now I get to know what it's like, in a silly sense, what it's like to be your simple everyday bird. I'm as free as a sparrow and I love it. But I'm still dead, and know I'll miss my family, even if the future promises I'll soon forget them. Yet I do not wish to forget. I'd much rather remember my loved ones, and I selfishly fantasize over somehow hatching a devious plot to take them on this long ethereal journey into the vast nowhere with me. It's funny, even though I'm slowly falling in love with my new sense of being, I wouldn't wish it on any single mortal.

I had been walking home after picking some blackberries to take back to make homemade wine. It was early in the morning and Sarah and Rebecca were still asleep in bed. As I made a shortcut by climbing a fence that led onto the town's soccer field, I noticed quite a crowd had gathered on this particular field in the sporting complex, and they were running about, dodging and weaving madly, and from the distance where I was I couldn't make out exactly what was going on. So stupidly I put my head down and decided to walk straight through the furor, thinking, if I keep my head down, say nothing, they won't put two and two together and realize I'm trespassing on the complex grounds.

Mistake one, putting my head down instead of keeping it up and acknowledging this strange brood gathered here, for if I had kept my head up instead of stupidly keeping it down, I would probably have had a slim chance of making it home to my loving family and a fair dosage of blackberry wine the same evening.

I didn't notice what was happening around me due to this head-down blinkered effect, but I was aware these people were shouting, screaming and hollering quite loudly, but also incoherently, and to me I thought they were just drunk, perhaps in the throes of an early morning booze bender, because to

me it just sounded gibberish. Some moaned, and groaned...but these moans and groans I knew referred to my presence on the field amongst their number, and I become vaguely aware they were somehow communicating amongst each other, discussing in no uncertain terms how I came to be there, and probably how I was trespassing on their property.

Then my nightmare began in earnest, for it was here one, then two, then many others began running towards me at great speed until eventually it turned out a full-scale assault on my person. The first one tackled me and took me to the floor as the others stood around and watched. I looked at my aggressor's face and was shocked to see how pale, but also how deformed, it was, for it was here I recognized he was indeed a monster, a zombie.

Oh, I had seen the movies, read the books and even laughed at these authors who claimed something like a zombie apocalypse could actually happen in futuristic times, but that's it, I had laughed, I had never weighed up the pros and cons of it really taking place, and simply because of that, my ignorance, I was paying the price.

My first initial reaction was to scream and try to push the damned thing off and run away. Run, run, run and never stop running until I got home, checked on my wife and kid, and then rang the cops. Yes, surely the police could do something? I would discover later that the cops or any of the other multivaried armed-forces were vastly outnumbered.

The bite the zombie young man took from my exposed neck was the single most painful thing I had ever experienced in my whole life up until then.

Yet it didn't end there, for as the bodies lurched forward and accosted me, it dawned on me everything I had watched in those horror movies, in those books and magazines, could, and had, come true. Zombies, I would later discover but would never know how, had overcome the country, and apparently spread throughout the world like the wind blows, and I, and probably tens of thousands, were their latest victim. It was a bloody mess and a baffling case for the scientific community that had perhaps predicted it, but overlooked any recent possibility of it ever sweeping the globe on such a massive scale.

One of the horrible bastards looming over me reached its hand down and, as I opened my mouth to protest, delved two fingers into it and I tasted zombie for the first time. I wanted to puke, but the pain diverted thoughts of puking, as zombie mouth after zombie mouth closed around parts of my body and devoured me.

That was how I become one of the Living Dead.

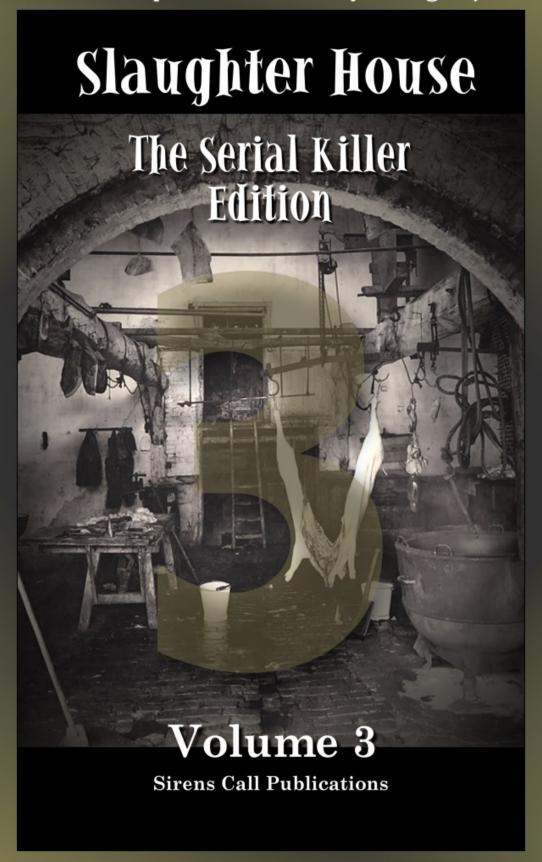
But...not exactly, because these Living Dead are, actually, really dead, and in that I mean they are without spirit. Their souls have been each delivered to the heavens above, and now, as I float over the towns and cities, I wait patiently for my true deliverance, which I truly know will come soon. I look down on the chaos and murder below and see no end. I see the end of the world...an irreversible end to the world. I see the crowds rushing, fighting and dying, terrorized and terrified, but now as with so many others, we can smile and be happy.

This is my death.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Born 29th January, 1969, G K Murphy (or Gary), lives in Egremont, West Cumbria, UK, where he writes full-time. He is the author of the 'Wide Awake and Dead' Series of anthologies, and collected works 'Spawned by Eden', and vampire novella 'BloodZone', and new and recent 'Hellish Redcap'.

Twitter: @gazvespa
Facebook: Gary Murphy

What drives someone to become a Serial Killer? Eleven authors spin tales of atrocity telling us just that.



Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, iStore, Smashwords & Createspace

Fear the Darkness Robert Friedrich

Sunday, October third. 6 p.m. another rainless day...

There I was again, sitting in front of the laptop and writing as the buildings around me obscured the sunset. Don't get me wrong, I loved my work environment, even though I have been living with my parents again for the past three months. Had to leave my apartment and the city I lived in for a decade nearly.

Everything became so much harder ever since the 2011 revolution here in Egypt, and the chaos continues. Work opportunities dropped, income lost its original value and life became more difficult than ever. The main issue was that the chaos did not settle, it continued on and on and still does. I doubt it will stop anytime soon. In the pursuit to better their lives, the people here just ravaged and ruined it.

Anyway, there I was writing my next book. Publishers finally decided that they wanted a piece of me and my work so I aimed to get it done. However once I started to yawn whilst writing, nothing more would come out for the rest of that day. That was the nature of things with me. I tried to spend as much time as I could with my love, who lives abroad, or talk online to friends and fans and people in the same field. Yes, of course I also had time for family.

That is how my days passed in this belligerent country and surroundings. I held no power over the events and remained neutral. Life continued and I was finally doing what I wanted. I was writing my books and stories and lived as best as was possible. But I never lost my target, the other thing I desired with all my being; to leave this living hell and move back to my country.

I know, we all sometimes live in our personal hell and want change. The amount of suffering and contempt in this world no longer surprised me, and there are others who viewed it the same way. One could say that Sartre's quote; "Hell is other people" was literally taking on the form most people got from it rather than its original meaning.

The following days continued in the same tone. I literally kept the happiness inside while the darkness not only lived around me, but everywhere else. One day however, things were a bit different; the family went to sleep earlier. So early in fact, the sun didn't even set yet.

I sat in my chair as I always did, while my sixth book became my only interest. Frenzied I smoked and wrote the culmination of my next novella. The black metal music played in background created a really nice ambience and my imagination was flying in full power. The sun handed over the night and shadows fell upon the city. Since everyone else was sleeping and I was still focused on my work, the dark managed to fill the entire apartment. The only light was my screen.

I didn't feel the darkness and was typing like crazy. I was so focused I barely realized the time or the true reality that surrounded me. The music stopped, yet I continued. I was so set on finishing this book that everything else around me basically didn't exist. And literally out of nowhere, came my downfall.

"Robert, what are you doing?" a voice asked out from the dark hallway outside my room. It was my mother who just woke up and silently stood outside my room and watched my deep immersion. Darkness shrouded everything and I didn't see who called me. My focus broke and I literally freaked out as she startled me. She did not know I hadn't heard her approach. To me however she appeared out of nowhere and once her voice reached me, my fate was sealed.

I jumped up from my chair in fright, and I still trembled as I sat back down. My head fell onto my laptop as my heart could not take the shock. At first it seemed I was fooling around after being scared, but I was not.

My heart gave out on me and life was slowly leaving me behind. In those final moments I realized, it was not my mother or my focus that was the cause of my demise. It was darkness and the fear it brings along that got me.

Funny, my stories were meant to make others fear the darkness among other things, and in the end, the writing of my story in the darkness proved that intention. I saw no light at the end of the tunnel. Instead the darkness grinned and horrible visions of life and war, one by one, captured my soul...

> **ABOUT THE AUTHOR** - Horror, as genre nearest to his high independence, Robert took it to an entirely new level. Year 2013 was very fruitful, Robert self-published 8 e-books and some of them are available in print as well: the novella The Darkness Within, short story anthologies Enlightened by Darkness and contemporary poems The Book of Metal Lyrics.

Web: http://robapexenterprise.wix.com/robert-friedrich Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Rob.apex.enterprise



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What are we looking for? Let's equate it to the red-headed stepchild of the family.

What does that mean? It means we're looking for stories of horror that may be perceived as a bit odd or different from the rest. Tales that take two steps to the left of normal instead of one. Peculiar yarns just bizarre enough to straddle the line.

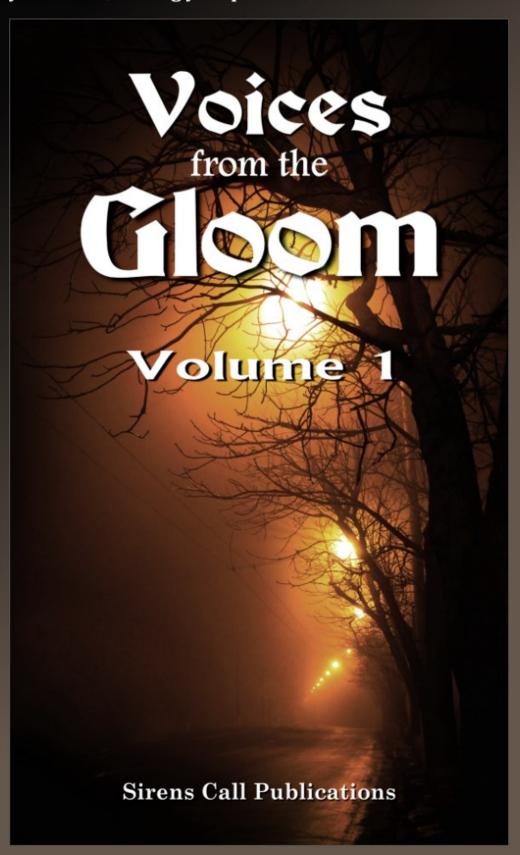
We're not just looking for odd - we're looking for good stories with a unique spin. No horror trope is too tired for this one as long as it's strange enough to grab our attention.

Intrigue us with your eccentric imaginings, and we may adopt your tale as a part of our family of offerings.

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Voices from the Gloom is an eclectic collection of tales that will echo in your mind, forcing you question what is real & what isn't.



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An Interview with Author Greg McCabe

Greg McCabe, the author of *The Undying Love*, recently released by Sirens Call Publications, sat down with us and answered a few questions. Like the stressful situations in his book, Greg persevered and this is what he had to say. Before we get to that, let's learn a little more about him.

Greg McCabe is a proud Texan. He was born and raised in Midland, Texas, received a degree in Speech Communication from Texas A&M University, and currently resides in the Lone Star State. He enjoys spending time with his wife, Mandy, his daughter, Annabelle, and his dog, Walter, as well as traveling, sports, movies, reading, and writing. He enjoys all genres of fiction, but seems to gravitate towards horror and science fiction. The Undying Love is Greg's first book.

Sirens Call Publications: Welcome Greg. What made you decide to become a writer?

Greg McCabe: Since college, I've been fascinated with the idea of writing a novel. I enjoy reading short stories, non-fiction, and poetry, but for whatever reason, have never had any interest in writing in those formats. For me, there was just something about conquering the monumental task of writing hundreds of pages of fiction. After lots of trial and error, I began working on *The Undying Love* in 2009. I worked on it in my spare time and it took a little less than three years to complete and about seven months to get a publishing contract.

SCP: What is *The Undying Love* about?

Greg: I like to think of *The Undying Love* as an epic tale of romance set to the backdrop of the zombie apocalypse. It starts out with a young couple who's wedding is crashed by zombies. The first half of the book is about them running for their lives and just trying to survive the first couple of weeks. The second half of the book has plenty of searing post-apocalyptic drama that all culminates to a heart-stopping conclusion. I'm really excited about it.

SCP: What is the one thing you'd like readers to know about *The Undying Love* before they read it? Greg: It contains adult content.



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

Greg: Definitely a planner. Years before I started on *The Undying Love*, I actually tried to sit down and write a different novel by the seat of my pants. It was a massive failure and I literally was only able to produce a few sentences before giving up out of frustration. What did work for me was handwriting a 10 or 15 page summary of the book along with a ton of story and character notes in a spiral notebook. Then, based off my summary, I wrote a brief description of each scene in an excel spreadsheet and eventually those scenes became the chapters of my first draft.

SCP: How would you like readers to see Jackson?

Greg: I would like them to see him as a man doing everything in his power to protect his new wife from the zombie apocalypse.

SCP: How would you like readers to see the Diane?

Greg: I would like them to see her as strong, female protagonist who remains an emotional rock for her new husband during the zombie apocalypse.

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

Greg: I would say producing the actual first draft. I know... I know... my biggest challenge as a writer is the actual writing, but it's the truth. I love the brainstorming and note taking process at the beginning of creating a novel. And I really enjoy the editing side after the first draft is written. But, the actual creation of the first draft itself is really challenging for me.

SCP: In your opinion, what sets The Undying Love apart from other books of the same genre?

Greg: I really tried to feature the love and romance side of the story. Instead of writing a zombie book with some romance, my goal was to write a romance book set in the zombie apocalypse.

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

Greg: I'm telling anyone who will listen about *In the Rogue Blood* by James Carlos Blake. It's a gritty western mingled with historical fiction. Never have I seen bloody violence handled with such beautiful prose. Also, I just started *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski, and so far I am really enjoying it.

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

Greg: I like Stephen King, old and new. 'Salem's Lot is a favorite. I also really like Clive Barker and think The Hellbound Heart is one of the best pieces of horror fiction ever written. Hyperion by Dan Simmons is amazing sci-fi. My favorite "classic" would be Call of the Wild by Jack London. It's a hundred page book about a dog and it's better than a lot of books I've read about people.

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

Greg: I think just getting published should be considered a great success, but I'd really like a hundred reviews on Amazon.

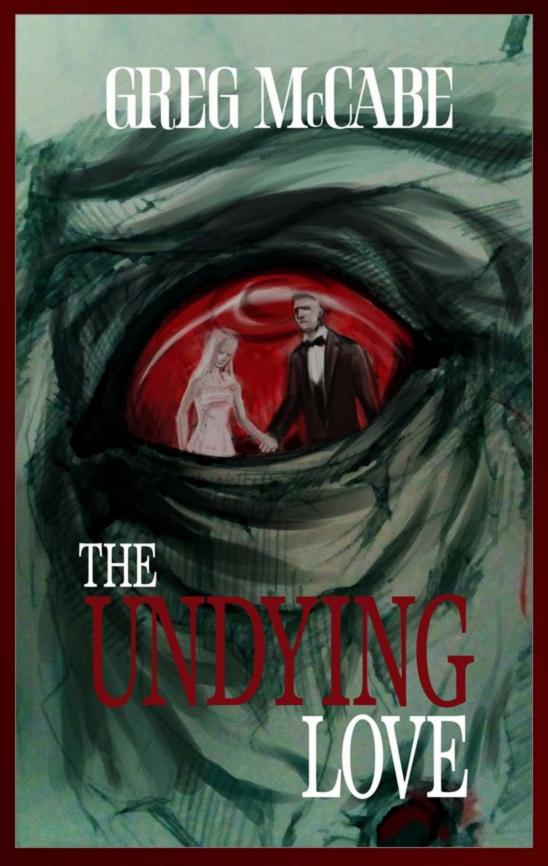
SCP: Do you have words of wisdom about writing that you want to pass on to novelists and writers out there who are starting out?

Greg: Even if it doesn't sound good, just keep the first draft moving forward knowing that you will come back and make it good later.

SCP: What should readers walk away from your books knowing? How should they feel?

Greg: I hope they feel a wide array of emotions and walk away somewhat entertained.

Thank you Greg for taking the time to answer our questions. If you're interested in picking up a copy of The Undying Love, you can find it in either digital versions or in print on Amazon, Smashwords, Barnes & Noble, Kobo and the iStore.



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An Excerpt from The Undying Love by Greg McCabe

1

Right now, my life is perfect.

She smiled at the thought and looked at herself in the mirror. She had dreamt of this day since being a child, but never imagined she would actually look this beautiful. Her hair and make-up were professionally done and her arms were toned from months of sculpting curls. The all-white dress popped against her subtle tan.

Diane continued to study herself in the mirror as she took a sip of her mimosa.

She stayed in the Honeymoon Suite with her mother the night before. They had breakfast sent up by room service when they woke. A Denver omelet for Diane and a big Belgium waffle for mom, but they ended up sharing both plates. After a quick shower, they took the elevator down to the 'Spa/Pool' level of the high-end hotel and checked in for their 10:30 am massages.

After an amazing sixty minute massage, the pair headed back up to the honeymoon suite where they waited for the bridesmaids to arrive. The ladies were to meet around noon for their 1:00 pm appointments in the hotel salon for hair styling, manicures, pedicures, and make-up.

Emma and Erin drove together and arrived first. Diane's maid of honor, Cathy, arrived next, followed by Anna, Julie, and Kristen. Last to arrive was Carrie, Diane's only hometown friend in the wedding. The rest were friends from college—seven wonderful ladies in all.

After a couple hours of pampering in the salon, the ladies headed back up to the suite to change into their dresses. From the neck up, they were immaculate, with pristine make-up and hair, but from the neck down, they were sloppy, wearing t-shirts, cotton shorts, and flip flops.

The ceremony was to be held in the courtyard of the hotel with the reception in the ballroom on the second floor. Diane always thought she would be married in a church, but the convenience of having the ceremony and the reception at the same venue was too much to deny. Besides, the courtyard of the hotel was lovely. Located in the Uptown area of Houston, Texas, the courtyard was enclosed by large ivy-covered stone walls. Perfect rows of white folding chairs were split in two by a long red carpet covered in orange and violet flower petals.

The bridal party made it to the courtyard right on time for the 4:00 pm pictures. They were hurried because the gentlemen were taking pictures at 4:30 pm and they certainly did not want the groom to see the bride.

The ushers began seating at 5:30 pm. At 5:40 pm on the dot, twenty minutes until the wedding, Diane sat alone in a small conference room down the hall from the courtyard. She specifically requested fifteen minutes of solitude prior to the nuptials.

2

Diane thought about the first time she met Jackson: New Orleans, Louisiana, New Year's Eve, almost four years ago.

She was in her third year at Texas A&M University and was ringing in the New Year with friends in the Big Easy. The air was filled with the usual odors of seafood and raw sewage, along with the sounds of live music and drunken shouts.

About ten minutes before midnight, Diane and her friends were pushing their way through a sea of partiers. Christopher, one of Diane's closest male friends, recognized someone he knew in the abyss of people. They gave each other a big hug and commented on the coincidence of bumping into each other.

After some brief chit-chatting, Christopher introduced his buddy to the group. At some point, their

cluster of friends had been split in two and Christopher was the only other male among four ladies.

He began making his rounds.

"Kristen, meet Jackson."

Jackson introduced himself and shook Kristen's hand.

"This is Erin and Emma," Christopher continued.

Jackson repeated the same courteous introduction.

"And, finally, this is Diane."

When Diane's eyes locked with Jackson's there was an instant and undeniable electricity between the two. They embraced hands, and for a moment, Diane forgot her name as she drank in his appearances. The first thing she noticed was his height. He was a few inches over six feet, definitely tall, but not so tall he stood out. The next thing she noticed was his smile: big and authentic. He looked like a man who liked to laugh. His face could be described as plain, maybe a little round, and very clean shaven. On further inspection, his face seemed overly smooth, as if he could not grow a healthy beard even if he wanted—a little baby faced. His hair was dark brown and his build was slightly heavy, but he wore it well on his tall frame.

Jackson was certainly not the most attractive man she had ever met, but something about his genuine smile made Diane tingle deep in her lower intestines, like she was about to go down the steep incline of a rollercoaster.

The sublime connection certainly did not go unnoticed by Emma and Erin, who exchanged a sly smirk of understanding.

Once Diane regained her composure, she started making small talk with Jackson. She inquired about how he knew Christopher, soon discovering that Jackson also went to Texas A&M University and was in his fourth year. They talked about their majors and shared simple anecdotes about class and other collegiate endeavors.

Diane and Jackson's conversation was suddenly interrupted when the crowd broke into some sort of chant. It was the New Year's countdown.

"Nineteen, eighteen, seventeen, sixteen..." the crowd hollered in partial unison.

Somewhere around ten or nine, Jackson leaned closer to Diane and put his arm around her lower back. A shiver went down her spine as she realized what he was doing.

He is going to try to kiss me at midnight, she thought as panic washed over her.

Hurricanes and hand grenades blurred her judgment just enough to go with the flow. Without even making a conscious decision, she found herself passionately kissing this man in the middle of Bourbon Street as the crowd around her cheered in the New Year.

Diane's daydream was interrupted by a knock at the door. It was the wedding coordinator telling her she had five minutes until it was time to line up with the bridesmaids.

Her trip down memory lane was taking much longer than expected, so she sped through the highlight reel of their relationship in her mind.

Diane thought about how hard she had fallen for Jackson during the first couple months of their relationship. How she knew she loved him long before it was appropriate to have such a conversation. She thought about all the little trips and excursions they had experienced together: floating the Guadalupe River in New Braunfels; drinking wine in the Texas Hill Country; gambling in Las Vegas; and of course, going back to New Orleans for the two year anniversary of their chance encounter on Bourbon Street.

She thought about how much Jackson made her laugh, how popular he was with his friends, and how instantly well liked he was by practically everyone he met.

Finally, she thought about their engagement. It was one of the greatest days of her life. After a little over three years of dating, they decided to move in together. While they had shared a bed numerous times before, that was their first night officially sharing a home. After a long day of moving, Jackson suggested they go out for dinner to celebrate their new home. While at dinner, a friend of Jackson's came into their new loft and spread rose petals all over the floor, popped a bottle of champagne, turned on some slow country music, and carefully placed a 1.25 carat princess cut diamond ring in the middle of the kitchen table.

She remembered opening the door to a dimly lit apartment, and for a brief moment thought they had entered the wrong residence due to the extreme change in scenery.

As Diane realized what was happening, Jackson was already taking a knee and lifting a box open to expose a ring. He broke into a rehearsed speech. An overwhelming bolt of joy struck the core of her being and she was instantly overwhelmed with tears. She was so overtaken with emotion she hardly remembered any of Jackson's speech. She remembered words like "soul mate" and "the rest of our lives," but that was about it.

She also thought about the love they made that night, and unlike the speech, she remembered the sex vividly. Both were slightly intoxicated from a bottle of Moët & Chandon. They chased each other up the stairs of the loft, undressing and laughing the entire time. Once in the bedroom, they attacked each other like wild animals.

She recalled how Jackson poured himself into the act and how she had reached levels of pleasure never before experienced.

Her fantasy was interrupted by another knock about the time the blood in her cheeks and chest started rising to the surface of her skin.

"It's time, sweetie," the wedding coordinator said in a gentle yet hurried manner.

"I'll be right out," Diane replied quickly through the door of the small room.

She took one last sip of her mimosa, one last sip of her water, one last look in the mirror, and one last deep breath.

Her heart pounded.

3

Down the hall and across the courtyard in an outdoor corridor, Jackson was doing some reflecting of his own. He thought about how much fun he and Diane had together. He thought about her beautiful heart-shaped face, her shoulder length blonde hair, her bright blue eyes and enthusiastic smile.

Jackson thought about the time he had come home from a long day of work just after graduating from college and moving to Houston. Diane was waiting for him, lying on her back in the middle of living room floor. The lights were low, soft music was playing, and two glasses of very expensive champagne were carefully arranged on the coffee table. Diane was sporting a whipped cream bikini.

Jackson laughed and applauded. After quickly shutting the front door he stepped toward her, knelt down, and gave her a passionate kiss.

"Do you like what you see?" she asked with a coy smile on her face. "Would you like a taste?" Jackson obliged, going for the closest breast.

After a few minutes, the couple realized the edible bikini had its flaws. Body heat caused the cream to melt and run down Diane's sides. It became sticky, and after a short time at room temperature the cream started to sour and smell like curdled milk.

After the novelty turned into an annoyance, Diane took a shower while Jackson waited in the bedroom with the bubbles.

The next day, Jackson left work early to make sure he got home before Diane. He had been hatching a mischievous plan all day. He thought about it so much that he was scarcely able to get any work done.

He had everything he needed to execute his plan, except sliced pickles. After a quick stop at the store, he was home and the trap was set.

Diane was driving home from work, listening to an 80's station on the radio. She was tired of all the CDs in her changer. She called Jackson on her cell phone to pass the time while she was stuck in traffic.

She asked him how his day was and what he wanted for dinner. He gave short answers and sounded preoccupied, which irritated her. After a couple more questions, Diane hung up and cranked the 80's station back up. Dirty Diana by Michael Jackson was just breaking into the chorus.

"Dirty Diana, ohhhh, oh," she belted out as she changed lanes and prepared to exit.

She parked her car, grabbed her purse, and headed down the corridor to the small apartment where Jackson was living at the time.

Diane was startled when she first opened the door and then quickly belted out in uncontrollable laughter.

Jackson was lying nude in the middle of the living room floor. The scene was all too familiar. Instead of a whipped cream bikini, Jackson's crotch was covered by an open hot dog bun and his nipples were perfectly covered with two pickle slices. Instead of champagne, two cold beers waited.

After gaining control of their amusement, he asked if she would like a taste and the laughter started all over again.

Jackson jumped in the shower. Instead of waiting in the bedroom, Diane joined him with the beers. Jackson wore a big grin on his face after this particular daydream. He checked his watch: ten minutes until go-time.

Jackson looked around the outdoor corridor; his eye caught some ivy growing up the side of the wall. He thought about how much he loved Diane. He thought about his other friends who were married and wondered if they were as happy as he was.

He enjoyed waking up Diane in the morning. Every time, without fail, she would look up with sleepy eyes, smile, and wrap her arms around his neck. Every time, without fail, it would melt his heart.

An unwelcomed wave of emotion washed over Jackson with this last reflection. He had not been nervous all day, and now, minutes before the ceremony, he was starting to lose it. His eyes became wet and a lump formed in his throat. He fought back the emotions by making fun of himself in his mind. Calling himself a big baby seemed to work.

After regaining his composure, Jackson's mind drifted back toward his beloved. The little quirks were his favorite, like the fact that she slept with her mouth open, chin dropped as low as physically possible. Or the fact she always seemed to have dirty feet. She wore the same shoes as everyone else and bathed regularly. Why were those feet always so dirty?

He chuckled out loud, and then stopped when he heard some feet shuffling toward the corridor.

"Jackson?"

It was the wedding planner.

"Yes," he responded.

"It's time." The wedding planner cleared her throat. "The groomsmen have all lined up. We just need you."

The gate clicked open. Jackson smiled at the anxious looking woman and said, "Let's do this."

4

The courtyard was beautiful. White folding chairs were filled with eager wedding guests. A stone fountain trickled in the corner.

As Jackson walked out of the corridor and into the courtyard, he felt the eyes of the crowd on him and smelled the flower petals under his feet. He found his spot between the preacher and his best man and took a deep breath. He scanned the crowd and met eyes with various friends and family members who smiled and waved in return.

The first few notes of Canon in D hushed the crowd. Parents and grandparents were seated first. Next the bridesmaids walked down the aisle, one by one.

Once everyone had their place, Canon in D finished and Here Comes the Bride started right on cue. Large wooden double doors at the rear of the courtyard opened revealing the most immaculate female specimen Jackson had ever laid his eyes upon.

His cool demeanor was attacked by raw emotion. His heart beat rapidly and sweat instantly formed on his brow which he quickly wiped away.

Diane walked down the aisle with tears of joy rolling down her cheeks. She still felt as confident and beautiful as ever. She could see her friends and family smiling in her peripheral, but her focus was on Jackson, her best friend, her soul mate.

Upon reaching the altar where her soon-to-be husband, a preacher, and fourteen of her closest friends were waiting, Diane was ceremoniously handed from her father to Jackson in exchange for a handshake, a smile, and the commitment of taking care of her until death would do them part.

The preacher began the ceremony, but Jackson and Diane hardly seemed to notice as they basked in each other's eyes, absorbing the love and the moment.

Everything was going perfectly until the large wooden double doors opened unexpectedly.

The wedding planner stumbled up the aisle, staggering like a drunk. Her face was wet and red.

The preacher was getting close to the end of the ceremony, but had not officially sealed the deal. Diane knew something had gone wrong.

Of course something like this would happen during my wedding, she thought. It is still my day, and think of how great of a story this will be one day when my anger wears off.

The crowd of wedding patrons were gasping and gawking. Diane turned to the preacher and said, "Can you just say, 'I now pronounce you man and wife'?"

"Excuse me?" The preacher had a strange sound in his voice and was still unable to take his eyes off the stumbling woman who was slowly working her way up the aisle.

Diane raised her voice a bit this time. "Can't you just say, 'I now pronounce you man and wife'? I'm pretty sure we've lost the moment, if you know what I mean." Diane nodded her head toward the wedding planner.

The preacher shouted over the crowd. "Excuse me, everyone. Jackson and Diane would like to invite you all inside for dinner, drinks, and dancing. It looks like someone's got an early start on the drinks." The crowd erupted in laughter. "But first I would like to say one last thing: I now pronounce you husband and wife. Jackson, you may kiss the bride."

The newlyweds leaned in and exchanged a zealous kiss. Everyone cheered. While their lips were still locked, a piercing scream came from the crowd. Diane and Jackson flinched from their kiss.

During the distraction of the applause, the wedding planner had bitten down on the neck of one of the wedding guests. Bloody skin hung from her mouth.

It appeared the victim was Patty, one of Diane's aunts.

5

Pandemonium ensued.

While wedding guests attempted to pull the coordinator off Aunt Patty, three more people came bursting onto the scene. It was two young men and a young woman, all in their twenties and all appearing to be employed by the hotel. All three wore the same dark brown pants and white button-up shirt. All three had matching bloody hands and faces.

The young lady was missing a large chunk of meat from her left cheek. The taller of the two young men had a portion of his lower lip ripped all the way down to the bottom of his chin exposing bloody teeth and jawbone. The other was missing almost all the fingers on his right hand. It was a mishmash of bloody stumps and knuckles.

The trio moved with purpose and their intentions became clear when they made it to the back row. They pulled a wedding guest to the ground and started ferociously biting the resisting man. It was Rico, Jackson's cousin from Italy, and they were doing more than biting. They were eating. Using their teeth, the deranged hotel employees removed flesh from all parts of his body.

About the time Rico stopped screaming, Diane's aunt stood up from where she was lying. She bled from her neck and had the same dead look on her face as the wedding planner and the three hotel employees. When Jackson caught a closer look at Aunt Patty's eyes, it appeared as if the whites of her eyeballs had turned blood red. The bright redness seemed to swallow up the iris and pupil all together, giving the appearance of fresh blood for eyeballs. Diane's aunt turned and bit the hand of the closest person to her, which just happened to be her husband, Diane's uncle. He screamed and cursed and clutched his hand.

Jackson grabbed Diane by the waist. Without realizing it, they had backed up against the ivy-covered stone wall.

Jackson looked over the crowd to see how he could help. He saw that Rico had stood up and was a horrifying display of gore. His clothes were tattered and blood soaked. He was almost unrecognizable. Locks of Rico's hair were bitten right out of his scalp, some so deep they exposed parts of his skull. Below the neck was no better than above. His belly had been torn completely open and intestines hung from the wound to the ground where they joined a pile of internal organs.

It was all too much.

Jackson almost did not believe what his eyes were showing him. His head became light and he was on the verge of losing consciousness when he looked over to see Diane wobbling on her feet.

She had gone into shock. Diane was pale and her body was tensed up like a statue. Her eyes fluttered. Jackson did his best to take action. Getting his new wife out of the volatile situation became his only priority, but he was so overwhelmed by everything he was seeing. He tried to pull her from the carnage, but she would not budge. She just stood there, pale and terrified.

"Diane!" Jackson screamed at the top of his lungs while grabbing her shoulders and shaking.

Diane exhaled, looked at Jackson, then her knees buckled. She was weak but lucid. He could tell by the look in her eyes she was back.

The scream that Jackson used to bring Diane back into reality also alarmed one of the bloody wedding guests. It was Diane's grandfather. He was on all fours eating someone's stomach when his head darted up and met eyes with the newlyweds.

"Pee-Paw!" Diane shouted.

Diane's grandfather was wearing his gray wool suit—probably the same one he had been wearing since the 1950's.

As Pee-Paw made his way to his feet, Jackson pulled Diane's wrist and shouted, "That's not your Pee-Paw! He has been bitten and infected or something."

Diane still resisted, not taking her eyes from Pee-Paw.

Jackson rubbed his forehead in frustration and spoke in a serious manner. "Look at his eyes. There is something wrong with him. He was just eating someone's belly for Christ's sake. If he bites us, we will turn into one of those things too. We have to go!"

Pee-Paw was only a couple of feet away and looked ravenous. Jackson realized they would not be able to escape without engaging him physically. He certainly did not want to traumatize Diane any further by annihilating her grandfather with a punch to the face, so he grabbed Pee-Paw's shoulders, positioned his right leg behind the old man's calves and simply pushed him down on his back. It was the same move children use on the playground.

Somehow, Diane and Jackson were able to escape through the mayhem without notice. Everyone seemed distracted with eating or being eaten.

When they were almost to the double doors that entered the hotel, Jackson's Italian cousin caught a glimpse of the fleeing couple and gave chase.

"Oh shit, Rico is after us!" Jackson shouted.

Rico was a mess. The bite wounds on his face and head were streaming blood. His intestines dragged behind him like a tethered rope.

The couple made it to the wooden double doors of the hotel and slammed them shut on Rico's reaching arm. They heard the bone in Rico's wrist snap.

"Oh my God!" Diane screamed hysterically as Rico forced his head and torso through the slightly ajar door. Jackson pushed back, pinning him at his waist. Rico thrashed wildly and made loud hissing sounds.

"Grab something to knock him back with!" Jackson shouted.

Diane looked around frantically then picked up a four foot tall decorative vase with intricate lightblue oriental designs and held it over her head.

Still in her beautiful all-white wedding dress, Diane took a running start and shattered the decorative vase directly into the forehead of Rico. Jackson relaxed the pressure on the doors that clamped Rico's body, allowing him to fall backwards. He fell to the ground while shards of porcelain rained down on him.

The couple locked the double doors with two large metal rods that fit into the ground. They ran down a short hallway to the lobby of the hotel. It was completely deserted. Other than a few papers spread around on the ground, the hotel lobby looked normal.

They glanced around and then heard the unmistakable thundering boom of a car crash.

Jackson darted over to the hotel's automatic front doors. Someone in a Lexus SUV had veered off the road and crashed into the valet stand at the end of the circle drive. The passengers seemed dazed and were looking around when a dozen crazed individuals attacked the wrecked car like a pride of lions trying to bring down a water buffalo. They climbed through the windows and sunroof. Three or four people tried to force themselves though the same broken window at the same time. They moved as quickly as their bodies would allow, without regard for their safety, not caring that others were trampling over them or that broken glass was slicing through their ribs and thighs.

Jackson could see the victims screaming and defending themselves as the first round of people made it into the vehicle. The attackers bit ferociously. The victims struggled, but there were just too many assailants. The SUV rocked back and forth due to all the violent commotion. Jackson was almost hypnotized by the rhythmic swaying of the sports utility vehicle.

One of the attackers, a young white lady in a pant suit, crawled out of the back passenger-side window. In her mouth, she carried an arm that had been separated at the shoulder. She looked like a rabid dog with a bone in its mouth. Her hair was matted with blood and she had a gaping laceration across her face. Jackson locked eyes with the blood splattered woman and she hissed at him like a caged animal.

Jackson slowly backed up, turned and ran back towards Diane, who was behind the check-in desk on the phone.

"Let's go!" He shouted.

"Where?"

"I don't know. Those things are everywhere. What are you doing anyway?"

"Trying to call the goddamn police, but it just keeps saying all circuits are busy."

"Let's go grab our keys and cell phones from the room and get the hell out of here."

"You just wanna leave, Jackson? Our parents are out there... our friends!"

"Did you see what was going on out there? The same thing is happening in front of the hotel and could be happening all over the city for all we know. Our entire family could already be dead! It's a fucking blood bath out there! We have to leave now or we're going to be dead too!"

Diane started crying.

"I'm sorry." Jackson put his hand on her back trying to calm her down, as well as himself. "Let's grab our cell phones, find the car, get out of here, and then we will start calling everyone we know and try to rendezvous with them at a safe place."

Diane nodded and they headed toward the elevators. When they got inside the elevator, Jackson said, "maybe we should've used the stairs," after seeing a sign that read 'IN CASE OF EMERGENCY USE STAIRS'.

"What's going on out there? What's happing to everyone?" Diane responded, completely ignoring Jackson's statement.

"I'm not sure, maybe we were attacked by terrorists with some sort of biological weapon or maybe there's a virus outbreak that's turning people into psychos. I don't know, I've never heard of anything like this."

The elevator door opened with a ding and the couple headed down the hallway towards the Honeymoon Suite.

Everything was quiet and seemed normal.

Jackson fumbled through his pocket and retrieved the plastic hotel key. Just before inserting the key, Diane grabbed his arm with one hand and brought the other up to her face. Covering her lips with an index finger, she shushed him.

"What?" Jackson whispered.

She leaned her head closer to the door, trying to listen. "There is someone in our room."



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