

The Sirens Call

February 2014

Issue #13

W.I.H.M 2014

*Works of Horror:
Short Stories, Flash
& Poetry written
by women*

*Comparative Flash
Fiction - One Photo,
Two Stories of 300
words each*

*Feature Interview:
Angie Gallow, author
of 'The Coven'*

*Photography by
Dark Angel Photography:
Abandoned or Forgotten*

www.SirensCallPublications.com



Contents

Editorials

- 3 Why Do I Support WiHRMonth? An Editorial – Nina D’Arcangela
- 4 Why Do We Need Women in Horror Recognition Month? An Editorial – Julianne Snow
- 5 Women in Horror: An Editorial – Gloria Bobrowicz

Fiction & Poetry

- 7 Rosary - Magenta Nero
- 10 Dolls of Bourbon Street - Rivka Jacobs
- 14 Immortality - Cassandra Webb
- 16 The Gift - Linda Harris Sittig
- 20 Testing - Nina D’Arcangela
- 22 Depravity Cavity - Foinah Jameson
- 27 Bound - Miranda Kate
- 28 The Spark - Claire Riley
- 32 Abasteron House - Paula Cappa
- 35 Gluttony - Andrea van Lit
- 40 The Worry Dolls - Hope Schultz
- 41 The Lady in Mourning - Marija Electra Rodriguez
- 45 The Game – Julianne Snow
- 47 A Mermaid’s Kiss - C L Raven
- 52 No One Blamed the Dog - Laura Ring
- 54 The Seduction - Roh Morgon
- 58 The Other Child - K.Z. Morano
- 61 The Threshold - E. F. Schraeder
- 66 I Am Darkness - L.A. More
- 68 Frankie’s Day - E. A. Irwin
- 72 My Heart’s Desire - Mari Wells
- 75 Home, For Good - D.M. Slate
- 79 Seeing - Gloria Bobrowicz
- 80 Baby Makes Three - Shenoa Carroll-Bradd
- 82 Inkwell of Blood - E. A. Irwin
- 83 Battery Displacea - Brittany Warren
- 84 Dark - Lori R. Lopez
- 85 Slice - Emerian Rich
- 86 Deadbeat - Alesha Aris
- 87 Mummy’s Boy - Caylee Slansen
- 89 Stuck - Tabatha Stirling
- 91 Lady in Red - Megan Stewart
- 95 Waterlogged - Jenn Monty
- 97 9 Mystery Rose - Eden Royce
- 102 The Scientific Method - Rebecca J. Allred
- 103 Goodbye, Alice - Arriane Kerr
- 107 The Doctor’s Appointment - Shawn Arntson
- 110 The Promise - Rose Blackthorn
- 114 Mr. Squeak - Georgina Morales
- 116 Dissection - Eli Constant
- 119 Shadows in the Rain - Gerri Leen
- 122 Oakwood - Angeline Trevena
- 126 Survival – LE Jamez
- 127 Cups and Helmets - Elaine Pascale
- 131 Dog Eat Dog - Suzie Lockhart
- 134 The Dead Thing - Lori R. Lopez
- 139 Reunion - Cara Michaels
- 141 Tumbling Down - Lori Safranek
- 145 Hall of Twelve - Rebecca Besser
- 147 Inside Out - Marjie Myers
- 151 Wretched - Candy Burke
- 153 Watch It Weep - Selena Kenworthy
- 156 Burial Rites - Katie M. John
- 161 The Perfect Gifts - C.A. Verstraete

Features

- 90 Comparative Flash Fiction
 - The Cull - Julianne Snow
 - Have Nots - Nina D’Arcangela
- 162 An Interview with Angie Gallow: Author of *The Coven*
- 164 An Excerpt from *The Coven*

Featured Photography: Courtesy of Dark Angel Photography

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 15 Sloatsburg | 53 Tuxedo | 106 Basking Ridge |
| 26 Morris Canal | 65 Hillsdale | 113 Easton |
| 34 Tall Man | 81 White Bridge | 150 Barngate |
| | 101 Lopatcong | |

168 Credits

Why Do I Support WiHRMonth? An Editorial

Nina D’Arcangela

This February marks the fifth annual Women in Horror Recognition Month. Why do we even need one? Do we, as women, feel a need to toot our own horns and exclude the male gender for a month? Do we really do something so extraordinarily special that we deserve more recognition than the men in our genre? Do we need a whole month to ourselves because it’s just one more thing we need to have?

The answer to all of those questions is *NO*.

The reason I support Women in Horror Recognition Month is because women, just like men, work very hard at their craft. Whether it’s in the film industry, a television studio, as an artist, author, or any other element of the horror realm, we work damn hard at it and deserve recognition for our efforts. Not because we’re women, but because we’re putting everything we have into what has captured our minds and imaginations – *horror* – and this is a terrific way of celebrating it.

To all the women out there who are succeeding to some degree in their chosen corner of the macabre: Congratulations!

To all the women out there who are doing their damndest to succeed but feel they’re still fighting an up-hill battle to gain notice: Congratulations to you too for not giving up!

No one, man or women, should be handed their dream on a silver platter – and that’s not what Women in Horror Recognition Month is about. It’s about supporting each other enough to encourage all of us to keep trying. I, for one, am very proud to be lumped among the many striving for success, and to earn recognition for what I do. And I’m very proud to be supporting the women who are putting themselves out there every day to make their goals and ambitions a reality.

If you’re interested in what twenty-nine (I made my own leap year) of those women have managed to achieve within the publishing world, drop by my blog ‘Spreading the Writer’s Word’ (<http://ninadarc.wordpress.com/>) any day this month to meet a different extraordinary woman who has kicked, scratched, pushed, punched, and shoved her way past the obstacles that life puts in everyone’s path to make a part of their dream come true.



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: [Sotet Angyal, The Dark Angel](#)

Why Do We Need Women in Horror Recognition Month? An Editorial

Julianne Snow

This question has come to the forefront of my mind often these past weeks as I've been organizing the Dark Media Online coverage for Women in Horror Recognition Month and as I've read the submissions for this issue. At times, I look on the acronym WiHM and it seems like a catchphrase, something the community tosses about in January and focuses on in February, but then forgets in the first few weeks of March. Technically it's not a bad thing, just an observation.

With the focus on the ladies in the month of February, there is heightened sense of visibility, something that likely would not have been achieved any other way. But does that visibility actually gain us anything? Why does there need to be a month set aside to shine the light on the work of women?

I can only speak from my own perspective and it all stems back to my formative years. Some of my literary loves started with recommendations. Who gave me those recommendations? Librarians. Don't get me wrong, Mr. Conner, Mrs. Maher and Mrs. Street were invaluable to me in many ways, but their education in horror and science fiction was lacking at times. Sure they knew the 'greats' – King, Poe, Lovecraft, Bradbury – but that's where their knowledge ended. Not that I blame them, despite the fact a librarian should know it all, there is such a thing as taste and preference.

In fact, I can remember picking up a Christopher Pike book in elementary school and having Mr. Conner tell me it wasn't for me, stating it was a little too gory for my mind. Looking back now, I'm not sure if he was saying that because I was a girl, or because I was only in Grade 4. Little did he

know I'd been devouring Stephen King since Grade 3 and could definitely handle the subject matter contained between the covers of *Scavenger Hunt*. I signed it out anyway and then asked him to bring in more by Pike in the coming months (I already knew he wasn't going to bring in King, despite having been asked more than once). He did, but I think he did it begrudgingly.

If I were to pause to question why he was less than thrilled to satisfy my demands for decent horror reads, I'd say it had a lot to do with what he felt I should be reading. I was constantly pressed with Roald Dahl, Charlotte and Emily Bronte and Lucy Maud Montgomery, and there's nothing wrong with any of those choices, but they weren't what I was interested in reading.

And if reading's not fun, you're less likely to do it. If I hadn't been persistent in searching out those books and authors (keep in mind the internet really wasn't readily available back in the mid to late 80s the way it is now) I would never have found them.

So what bearing does all of this have on Women in Horror Recognition Month? Well it helps to answer the question of why we need it. Sure, it's a great way to highlight the work of women in the creative industries, but it also serves as a reminder that the minds of young girls need to be kept open. That reading is a good thing, a beneficial thing to the growth of a young mind. And that horror, while not for everyone, has a place. If we don't help to highlight the works of today, they'll be forgotten and not introduced to the generations of tomorrow. That's why we need WiHM – for the women who will come after us.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Julianne Snow is the author of the *Days with the Undead* series and the founder of Zombieholics Anonymous. She writes within the realms of speculative fiction, has roots that go deep into horror and is a member of the Horror Writers Association.

Twitter: [@CdnZmbiRytr](https://twitter.com/CdnZmbiRytr)

Blog: [Days with the Undead](http://DayswiththeUndead.com)



Women in Horror: An Editorial

Gloria Bobrowicz

Welcome to our second annual issue of Women in Horror; the year has gone by quickly hasn't it? I am especially excited to see the talent of our female horror writers showcased in this eZine.

There is still a higher number of male horror writers in our writing community than women, but the gap is narrowing as we see more and more women entering the genre. Walls are breaking down, gone are the days of having to pen your story as a man to be accepted. Times, they are a changing... and that's a very good thing. I am seeing both men and women crossing genre lines.

The important thing to remember is to go with the flow of your passion. Write what you want and send it out. What good is a story still sitting on your computer? I hear many people say their day job, raising a family or any other number of reasons get in the way of their writing; they don't have the time or they are too tired after all of their other responsibilities are finished. If you have a real passion for writing, you will find the time. There is nothing better or more satisfying than getting that initial idea, an inspiration for a future story.

I read so much for inclusion, that for a while I lost focus on reading and writing for pleasure. I now make the time to do that. Excuses are just that, excuses. You're better than that.

Now get writing, ladies.



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](https://twitter.com/GlorBobrowicz)

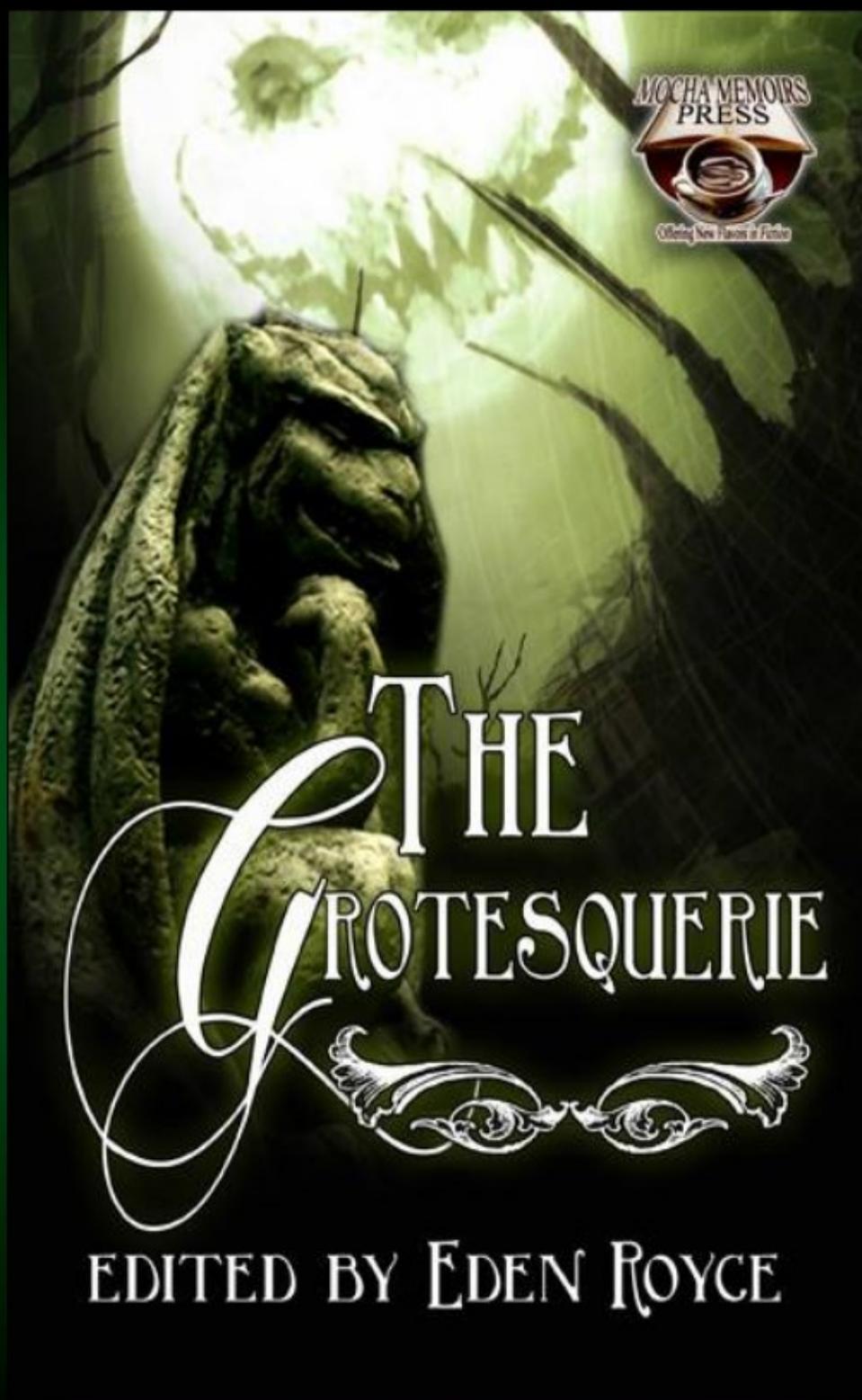
FB: [Gloria Bobrowicz](https://www.facebook.com/GloriaBobrowicz)

Sirens Call Publications

PURVEYORS OF DARK & EDGY FICTION

www.SirensCallPublications.com

Within these pages, beauty becomes deadly,
innocence kills, and karma is a harsh mistress.
The Grotesquerie is now open...



Available in print and ebook from
Mocha Memoirs Press

Rosary Magenta Nero

I find the poor wretch in the tomb like so many who have come before her. Always when a fresh one arrives my fingers sigh a tired prayer over the rosary I wear. I pick the teeth from the remains. It is so long and heavy now, this chain of macabre glamour, wrapping my neck several times.

Abandoned, unconscious. On the slab of stone and wrapped in a shroud of white linen that conceals her from head to tightly bound toes. Yes, she will be reborn, yes she will rise again. Oh how those Above love their own tedious symbolism, the masquerade of faith. Their law requires that she is menstruating when she is delivered, more romantic nonsense. She slumbers within her shell of cloth, soaked and clotted with blood.

I burn incense to revive her. It fills the tomb with heavy, sweet scented mist. As I slowly unravel her, unspinning her cocoon, I marvel at the images printed on the cloth by the blood. Butterfly wings and blooming flowers emerge and strange faces that gaze at me, seeming to pose the question we are not permitted to voice.

She is disorientated of course, her mind scrambled, but she is aware that the offering has begun and she must not resist. If she does I must dispose of her immediately for none may enter this sanctum and live. Her body will be thrown out of the tomb in pieces and those Above will begin their panic stricken weeping and wailing, as they frequently do.

Wisely, this one remains silent. Silent is our journey. Once in the underworld it is too late to curse the gods you have created. I myself have relinquished my tongue, in devotion, in service. Perhaps she is silent because she is yet to comprehend the crude truth that is unfolding before her. She is still enchanted by their stories in which she is the heroine. She has been groomed and trained for this moment. She has no choice but to follow me, I am the Guide.

I light my torch and we begin our descent through the tunnels. We are buried alive here. Our great city is a warren of damp walls clawed out by ancient hands, narrow paths that lead deep within Her, to the most sacred of cores. We crawl like insects, squeezing through cracks, edging along crevices. The air is so crisp it slices into you and the darkness, soft and dense, embraces you so completely that you begin to forget who you are.

I am at peace here. I drift shadowless in the dark. Take my eyes too, my Queen, I have no use for them, I know this maze as if it were indeed my own body.

I lead her to a small cell where she will remain in final preparation. It is there in a puddle of her urine and womb blood, suffocating on sobs and choking on tears, as madness circles and taunts, that she will finally fathom her purpose. The purpose bestowed upon her that she willingly accepted.

She receives no nourishment except for the herbal tea I bring. I pour the bitter liquid over her mouth, through clenched teeth, if she perishes before time it will be I who will meet the Queen.

Sometimes I long to comfort them as they tremble like little animals. Had I a tongue with which to indulge my pride I would say: dear child, fret not, no glory awaits you, you will merely die. When you are nothing, you are free. See how their lies drop away from you like layer after layer of dead skin? I have heard the ranting of your wise men, the priests of Above. "Did you think you could defile and pillage Her body and pay no price?" they leer at their flock, "When famines and plagues, floods and fires failed to teach us what else could the Queen do but demand our very flesh, our very souls?" See how they have wiped their hands of you? How poetic they are! How pitiful their logic! There is no divine mystery, child, there is only the hunger of the Queen and you are the food, prepared like an exquisite dish... forgive me great Queen! It is not the tongue but the mind that plagues us with words.

Finally, this one falls still and silent. She has understood. It is a nuisance when I must call on the assistance of other Guides to drag the woman screeching like a banshee through the tunnels. It is foolish to enrage the Queen further with their fuss. But when our procession is composed, serene, reverent, it is

truly heavenly. It is terror merged with bliss that carries us forward. The heavy folds of my long cloak lapping at my ankles, our soundless steps on cold earth, worn smooth and hard by so many bare feet over time.

Forward now, on the long journey downwards and inwards, deeper into Her body, to Her burning heart.

I light the torches that set the cave aglow. Then I wait at the threshold, the sharp smooth beads of the rosary slip cool through my clasped palms.

Treading slowly the woman ventures into the depths of the massive cavity. Limestone formations loom overhead and rise from the ground, giant spear like teeth.

The earth begins to tremble, ever so slightly, a quiver of excitement building. The woman walks bravely, despite her heaving chest, her breath streaming in and out of her violently, a loud echo in this emptiness. It reminds me of the ocean, one of the few things I miss of the world Above. I close my eyes to see the rising and falling of the waves.

The trembling builds and I press hard on the roots of the beads, tiny red indentations appear on my fingertips, then specks of blood like a holy sign.

A crack, a fracture in the earth that travels quickly, splitting and rapturing. An intense heat emanates from the glowing core beneath. A thunderous burning gush fills the cave, the delight of the Queen. Goddess or demon or some other kind of creature? Something we have created or something that has always been? I cannot say. I do not know. She has arrived to collect the offering.

The woman's flesh has already begun to melt, rolling off her in large droplets. Her mouth is a wide round hollow, burning away to bone. The Queen embraces, She consumes, what remains falls in a heap at her feet. She slips away as swiftly as she appeared and the earth seals behind her.

The ground is steaming and the utter silence that falls once more is a heavy curtain drawn across my mind.

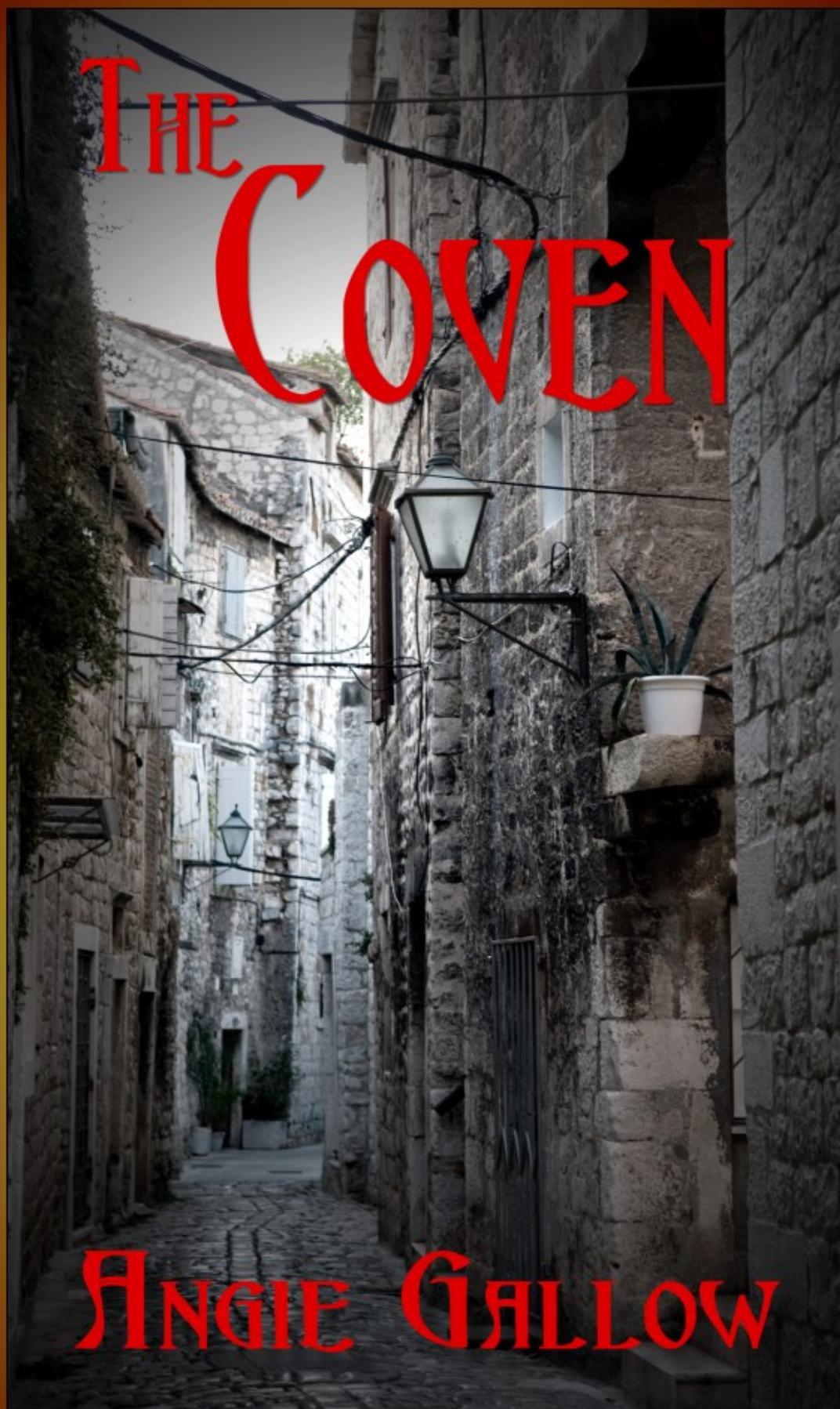
When the earth has cooled I inspect the sludge of sizzling waste. The voiceless screams of your daughters have soaked into my soul, I am weary. If I could form these words, they would slip through and escape my lips but would they be believed? I search for a molar or vertebrae, or some other delicate fragment. Evidence that there exists within us something that endures and survives, something that remains untouched. I lift the rosary over my head, wrapping it around my neck, over and over again it circles me, its weight a familiar comfort.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Magenta Nero is a writer and visual artist. She began writing at a young age and enjoys weaving her fascination for all things occult, arcane and devious into dark fantasy tales, gothic horror and erotica. She was born in Italy and has lived and worked around the world. She currently resides on the North East coast of Australia, with her partner and young children."

Twitter: [@Magenta_Nero](https://twitter.com/Magenta_Nero)

Blog: www.magentanero.wordpress.com

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



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

Dolls of Bourbon Street *Rivka Jacobs*

The night was sultry and wound-tight up and down Bourbon Street. Neon signs dazzled and distracted while nightclub barkers called to passersby, trying to attract locals and visitors alike into their establishments, extolling the virtues of their girls whose larger than life-sized pictures were displayed behind plate-glass.

The recessed entrance to the Marigold buzzed under a flickering yellow light. The thumping and pumping beat of some jazz tune could be heard from the inside. Raymond Thompson paused, resisting the 'talker' as the older man tried to yank open the door and shove him in. Behind him were oncoming patrons, but he held his ground as he stared at the posters on display in front of purple velvet curtains in the window to his right. At the top was his sister, Carol Thompson now known as Coral Belle. She was posed behind her over-sized and colorful sombrero, her naked rear-end sticking out past the brim. He hardly recognized her. Beneath Carol was an image of a woman with flowing dark curly hair, her large breasts barely concealed by fawn-colored pasties thrusting in his direction. *Lillian Swan*, the caption read. The sight of her gave him a chill.

He allowed himself to be pushed into the dark entryway, and was immediately engulfed by the odor of stale alcohol and sweat and the brassy music of a live band. He moved in the dim light with the men around him, to the left and down a carpeted incline. As he reached a sunken plateau filled with tables and chairs he could see the stage and on it, dancing and swaying to a trombone-heavy version of the song 'Some of These Days' was the dark haired woman from the photograph below his sister's.

"Hi, would you like a table, or the bar?" a sharp female voice said in his ear.

Lillian Swan flopped her mass of black curls forward and back again, rotating her shoulders seductively while she slowly unfastened her elegant, low-cut silver-satin bodice and threw it into the wing. The old Sophie Tucker number swelled around her as she lifted her silver-lamé skirt, unhooked it from the side, and swirled it off her body. She was now arrayed in a sequined, multi-colored corset and matching panties, seamed and glistening stockings, and a pair of platinum high-heel pumps. She turned her back to the hooting and cheering audience and bumped her butt to the left and right while reaching around and unzipping the corset from behind. She plucked the garment off quickly, holding it out, her broad shoulders and white, triangular-shaped torso moving sinuously. She sensed the mood of the crowd, knew just how long to keep the tension building. Then she abruptly tossed the piece of clothing, and spun to face drunken applause as her conical breasts with the pointed dark nipples jutted into the blue and red light.

She shook herself vigorously; a man jumped up and rushed the edge of the stage; Gordon the club's burly bouncer had him by the belt and collar and dragged him away. She began to shimmy out of her panties, inching them down her thighs, lowering them to her knees, then with a single motion of her legs in unison, sent them into a puddle at her feet. The trumpets blared, the drums rolled--she struck a three-quarter side-pose with one knee slightly bent, her arms high and wide, her chin up, her eyes half closed.

There were whistles and shouts and clapping. Orange-red velvet curtains swept in from both sides, blocking her from view.

She held her breath, then let it out like a sigh. She relaxed, adjusted her rhinestone-studded garter-belt as she walked confidently stage left, bending to retrieve the pieces of her costume as she went. She could hear the band in the pit, running through chords and preparing the music for the next girl, whom she passed on her way to her dressing room. 'Lassie' was making last minute adjustments to her ensemble, tugging at her reddish fur straps, making sure her tail was attached correctly to the rear of the sparkling bead belt holding up her fur briefs. She smiled at Lillian as the latter sashayed past, heels tapping.

Lillian bit the inside of her cheek to keep from saying anything and managed a closed-mouth smile in return. She hurried to her dressing room, her personal space, and once inside she slammed the door behind her and locked it.

She flung the articles of clothing into a pile on the floor in front of a couch that stood along a wall opposite the door. She sat heavily at her expansive dressing-table, in front of an enormous mirror. She winced at her own smell--perspiration and sour perfume and a pungent tang coming from her private places. She tied back her thick hair and slipped on a headband to push all the frizzies away from her face. She began to unscrew the cap on a jar of cold cream. "Oh my god," she said to her dolls, poised and ready in various places around the room. "Did you see that? It's 1961, for Christ's sake. Lassie?" She guffawed in an exaggerated way as she scooped up a glob of cream and started to smear it over her forehead.

"You did well tonight, Minnie," her Baby Barry doll said as she marched stiffly to gather up the costume. "I still think you should wear pasties again, though."

"Don't be a prude," her Madame Alexander Cissy doll Violet said, straightening out her purple tulle skirt and slithering off the couch cushion. "She has to keep up with the times. And the men come to see her special boobs." She giggled in a squeaky, high-pitched way. "They're shaped like ice-cream cones."

Lillian stopped her slathering to gaze in the mirror at Baby Barry who was about a foot and a half high, with bangs and two auburn braids, and Violet, who was a little taller and looked a lot like Elizabeth Taylor in an evening gown and stole. "You two are incorrigible," she said and smiled. She resumed coating her face.

"We love you, Minnie," Violet piped. "We just like to tease."

"I know, sweetheart," Lillian Swan aka Minnie Weinstock answered. "I loves you guys!" She glanced at her image in the mirror--a face stared back all white with dark holes for a nose and eyes. She began plucking Kleenexes to wipe the goop off.

Nina Ballerina in her pink and white net tutu and delicate pink toe shoes, tottered in a pirouette from her place next to one of the sofa legs. "Can I comb your hair this time?" she asked.

But Heddy Stroller, who was an imposing two-feet tall in her plaid school-girl dress, white socks, and black patent-leather Mary Janes, was already goose-stepping in Lillian's direction. "Sorry Nina, but that's my job, and you know it!" her tinny voice insisted. She reached the dressing table and looked up. "Are you ready now, Minnie?"

"Sure, that's fine. Do you need any help up?" Lillian asked removing the last of the makeup and cream. She yanked off her headband and pony-tail holder.

"No, Minnie, I'm a big girl, I can do it myself," she chirped, and launched herself in a single leap, grasped the vanity's cloth apron with her pudgy little plastic hands, and hauled herself onto the surface. Her legs scissored and her arms swung to and fro as she reached for the hair brush that sat at Lillian's right hand, in front of Juanita the Mexican corn-husk doll with her twirling rainbow skirts and little straw head with two black dots for eyes. Juanita had no mouth, and only sticks for limbs. She had belonged to Carol Thompson. As did the two Catrina dolls who leaned with their backs against the mirror.

"Carol liked to collect stuff from south of the border," Lillian said, studying the two *Calaveras Catrina* figures as they shifted a bit and flounced their green and orange, full-length dresses, their teeth clacking and their carved, skull-faces gleaming. Tiny bone fingers flicked delicately as both adjusted their crocheted necklines over pearlescent ribs and collar bones.

"Too bad for her," said Tommy Bangs who, along with Nat and Stuff, was advancing toward the door. They were only fourteen inches high, but they were tough guys and took care of things no one else wanted to do. "Someone's here," Stuff announced.

There was a cracking knock, the door knob jiggled. "Lillian, Lillian are you there?" A voice called through the painted wood. "It's Theresa, some guy is here, he wants to see you."

Lillian froze, feeling a rush of anger. She exchanged looks with Heddy and the Catrinas, and via the mirror, made eye contact with the boys, Violet, and Baby Barry. "I don't meet with men in my dressing room," she shouted back. "You know better than that, Terry."

The Catrinas began clicking their teeth rapidly. The chubby, wide-eyed faces of Stuffy, Nat, and Tommy Bangs began to twist and crimp and contort into snarls.

"It's not like that," Theresa's annoyed voice yelled back. "This guy says he's Carol's brother." There was a pause, a hint of whispers and some kind of hasty conversation, then, "He says his name is Raymond, Raymond Thompson. He wants to talk to you about Carol."

Lillian closed her eyes in pleasure as Heddy--clutching the brush handle with both arms--ran the bristles through her tresses. "Not now," she called.

There was a short rapping sound, as if someone were using their knuckles, and a male voice intruded, "Miss Swan, please. You were Carol's roommate. No one knows where she went, where she is. She disappeared a month ago, and none of her family has heard from her. Can I just ask you some questions?"

Violet put her tiny, molded hands on her curvy hips. "Well, he's almost as annoying as she was," she said.

"What did you say?" Raymond shouted.

"Go away," Lillian answered. "I don't see visitors after a show. I don't know anything about Carol or where she went off to."

They all remained motionless, silent, hovering, waiting to see what would happen next.

There was an angry exchange of words in the hallway outside the door. There were sounds of a confrontation, a commotion. Then, "Lillian, doll, it's Gordon here, whadda ya want me to do with this guy?" boomed through the walls and wooden barrier.

Juanita fell sideways, her stick arms crossed in front of her.

Lillian clenched her jaw and her hands became fists. Heddy toddled back a few steps, holding the brush upright like a flag. In the mirror, Lillian could see all her little friends had frown-faces and were rotating their heads to the left and the right. "You know I don't receive men in my dressing room after a show!" she bellowed. "Get him out of here. I don't know where Carol went."

They waited. They heard scuffling noises, thumps and a thud. Then all was quiet except for the distant throbbing of drums and keening of horns.

Lillian exhaled loudly. "This just makes me very upset," she said, tears filling her eyes. "I don't know what they think I am. I am not a whore, you know?"

Heddy stroked her cheek, and Nina and Violet hugged her legs. "We know, we know, Minnie," they said.

"Minnie," Stuffy said, tugging at the silk on her left ankle, "don't cry." His face had transformed and he appeared very concerned. Tommy Bangs and Nat joined him. "Do you want us to take care of it? Tommy asked. "We're true-blue. We'll keep you safe, like we've been doin' since we fixed your old man for what he done to you."

Lillian smiled sweetly and sniffed, groped for a Kleenex while gazing with love at the upturned little faces that expectantly waited for her to speak.

Heddy resumed grooming Lillian's hair. "Let us take care of the problem," she suggested. "Like we did the last time." She snickered with a sound like nails scraping a blackboard. "It is so much nicer having an apartment to yourself."

Lillian shrugged. "Okay. But be careful," she said. She bent over and started rolling down her stockings. She kicked off the high heels. Diminutive fingers reached and grasped and pulled, tugging her nylons off her toes. Nina Ballerina carried one shoe to the closet, Baby Bary the other.

Heddy jumped down to the floor. "I'll get your undies, skirt, and blouse," she said as she strode on straight legs to a chest of drawers.

The Catrinas bounced up and down on the table surface, their skull-teeth still clattering. They hooked arms and circled each other in a dance, their white, skeletal hands waving yarn-flower bouquets.

"Well, I'll take whoever wants to come home with me now. The rest of you--join me when you're done," Lillian Swan said. She unfolded herself slowly, rising to her feet, watching her reflection, admiring her figure as she stretched. "You guys are the best!"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - I grew up in Miami, Florida, and have lived in West Virginia for thirty-five years. I have a master's degree in sociology and another in mental health counseling. I went back to school in my fifties to earn my BSN. I'm currently an RN specializing in psychiatric nursing. I have one grown son, who lives in Philadelphia. I published several stories in the 1980s, then stopped writing for a number of years. I resumed writing in 2009. I have been lucky enough to have a stories published in The Sirens Call February 2013 issue, "Women in Horror," the August 2013 issue, "Monsters," and the Sirens Call eZine issue #11, "Revenge."

Twitter: [@RivkaJacobs](https://twitter.com/RivkaJacobs)

Mental Ward: Experiments is Currently Accepting Submissions!

The elevator doors open, the lights are flickering, the gurney is wheeled into a dank, dimly-lit hallway well below ground. Does the Doctor have the patient's best interests at heart, or is something more nefarious going on? How does the staff figure out what treatments are most effective and which are not?

In our other two Mental Ward collections, we asked you to tell us what happened above ground in the institute itself; what memories of the past were trapped in the abandoned hallways; now we're asking you to tell us what goes on behind closed doors. The secret experiments that are feared and whispered about among the patients.

Tell us what greed, the corruption of power, and the desire to be remembered will drive a Doctor to do the unthinkable to the unfortunate patients left in their care.

Tell your tale from whatever perspective you'd like, just make sure the story you tell is a depraved one.



Submission Deadline: April 30, 2014

Word Count minimum: 4,000 words

Full guidelines on www.SirensCallPublications.com

Immortality *Cassandra Webb*

The babe stirred and opened his eyes. He wasn't yet old enough to focus on anyone or anything, but Joseph still felt that the tiny creature was staring at him and his heart fluttered with anticipation.

He shuffled in closer to the crib, almost hitting his knee on the many taps around the base of the frame. The same type of taps used at the winery, Joseph thought. Then without thinking he reached across with one finger and gently nuzzled the fleshy side of the baby.

Joseph's mother slapped his hand away. "Wait," she whispered.

There were twenty people moving carefully around and past the newborn. Twenty sets of narrow villagers eyes taking in the miracle of new life with fascination. Joseph was the youngest and this was the first time he'd seen a baby so young. He lingered by the wooden crib, one specially made with low sides so everyone could offer their blessings, and seek blessings in return.

Joseph's mother nudged him back as the baby's mother entered the room.

"Wait," Joseph said.

"Hush," his mother hissed, trying to discreetly pull her son towards the door.

The baby made a spluttering and gargling sound, but the rest of the room remained silent, their attention on Joseph.

"We should name him," Joseph said.

The baby's grandmother entered the room, drying a knife on her apron. She didn't look 'grandmotherly', no one ever did. Joseph wiped his hand down his face, it felt young but since he turned sixteen a wrinkle had formed across his forehead. He sighed with relief. He was still meant to be there. He was an adult, though his over protective mother would have the rest of the village see him as a child forever.

"He should have a name," Joseph reaffirmed. Butterflies battled in his stomach. Some fighting to just have the ceremony over and get back to his studies, whilst others wanted to treasure this moment forever.

"It's up to you," the grandmother said, passing the knife the mother.

The babe's eyes slid shut, and the little thing slid into sleep.

With the knife turning slowly in her hand the mother considered her newborn child. His delicate lips and flushed cheeks, his little fingers wrapped tight around the edge of the ceremonial cloth. He was perfect, and she was glad to have carried him and birthed him. He was the next generation of life in her village. Their survival was her creation, and now in her control.

The edge of the knife slipped on her finger and a tiny slice welled up with blood. She licked it off.

"Well I have better things to do today," the priest began, "and I don't mind leaving the headstone blank, most of the others are."

Around the crib twenty villagers linked hands and silence returned to the room.

The mother moved quickly. Joseph didn't see the blade run through the infant's skin amongst the rush of villagers that dove towards the tendrils of blood as they ran through open taps to open mouths.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Cassandra Webb is a chocaholic writer from the small coastal village of Narooma, Australia. She is also a writer of children's and young adult fiction, fantasy and picture books, and creative non-fiction. She grew up in rural and remote Australia and remembers riding horses, working with helicopters and being homeschooled. Now on the coast with her two children she enjoys the beaches in summer and the nearby snowy mountains in winter.

Twitter: [@caswebb1](https://twitter.com/caswebb1)

Website: www.cassandrawebb.com



The Gift *Linda Harris Sittig*

Sweat ran in rivulets from her armpits to her waist.

What the hell? She pulled up her tee shirt.

She hadn't perspired this much since high school, but the clammy wetness caused her to jump in the shower.

That episode happened a few weeks ago, and she hadn't thought of it since.

"Christ, it's a nursing home day," she muttered aloud. God, she hated old people. They smelled like piss, they drooled when they ate, and all they talked about was their last bowel movement; if they could even remember it. *I'd rather be dead than get decrepit like that.*

Her ninety-year old mother-in-law lived cocooned in a high-rise retirement facility that kept the elderly from being a visible burden to society. Carole only accompanied her husband on visits because he gave her Sarah Coventry jewelry as a trade-off.

Today's visit turned out to be predictable, just like all the others.

"The food here is terrible, and so is the incompetent help," her mother-in-law scowled. Then she pointed an arthritic finger toward one of the staff members who had just entered the dining room. "See that one? She's stealing from me, I know it. My hairbrush is missing; she took it for herself."

"That's ludicrous; no one steals someone's hairbrush."

"Stop defending them, Carole. You don't live here; you have no idea how horrid this place is. I hate living here among all these old people who do nothing but bang their walkers around all day.

But you're one of them!

"Take me to the ladies room, or else I'll just pee here in my diaper."

Carole eyes darted over at her husband, who threw his hands up in the air. *Like hell I will.* "Nurse? Can you please take her to the bathroom?" The whole place gave Carole the creeps, but the bathrooms were off limits – she refused to step foot in any of them. Every time she left the building, she doused herself with antibacterial gel.

The next day Carole began to apply her new eyebrow defining powder when she noticed her eyebrows looking fuller than before. She stared in her magnifying mirror and yes, they had filled in. *Guess I don't need the fancy eyebrow product after all.* She opened a drawer and tossed the cosmetic into a bin with numerous other 'used only once' purchases.

At a visit two weeks later, her mother-in-law told Carole to buy her a new bra. "Just pick one up in my size from JC Penney, but don't spend a lot of money on it," the old woman commanded. Carole agreed with annoyance, having to add the old lady's demand to her own to-do list.

"You go wander around Sears' tool department," she told her husband once they arrived at the mall. "I'll get the bra for your mother and then I'm going to stroll over to Lord and Taylor for myself."

Inside the plushy L & T dressing room she disrobed, tried on some new lingerie, and peered in the mirror. *What was this?* Her breasts weren't sagging as much as usual. OK, they weren't the perky tits she had as a teen-ager, but the pair wasn't giving in to gravity. Weird, but nice.

As the weeks tumbled by, Carole began to notice a revitalization of energy. Last night she practically jumped her husband in bed. The wild sex verged on pornographic, and she wore him out.

"Hey, honey, where did you learn those moves last night?"

"I honestly don't know," she replied. "They just popped into my mind."

"Well, keep 'em coming."

After he went out to putter in the garden, she walked over to the phone to call in a mani and pedi appointment for herself at the local nail salon. For some reason, she glanced at the calendar and saw the circled dates of the nursing home visits. They'd been going there almost every week for the past two and a half months.

When she sat down at the nail salon station the technician examined Carole's fingers. "What are you doing for these nails? They're healthier than ever before."

"Nothing different than usual." Carole closed her eyes to relax as she sank into the pedicure chair and let the warm scented foot bath rush up to her ankles. Suddenly she realized that certain things actually were different: her eyebrows, her breasts, her nails, and her energy. *Maybe this is that post-menopausal zing I've read about.*

Then, after the next visit to the nursing home, Carole's gray hair began to return to its younger brunette coloring without the help of any dye or tinting. She went back to the family calendar and scrutinized the nursing home dates. Each visit coincided with some part of Carole's body beginning to appear younger.

Oh dear God, is this crazy? Could there actually be a connection between the new energies and the nursing home?

When the day of the next visit came, she decided to experiment. "Honey, I'm not feeling well. How about you go alone today? I don't want to bring any of my cold germs up to your mother." Her husband left without her.

The next morning she woke early, dashed into the bathroom, and scrutinized every part of her body in the mirror. Nothing had changed. She was the same as yesterday. Then she wondered about her husband. She tiptoed back into their room and carefully pulled back the bed sheet. Same thinning hair, same age spots on his hands, even his penis looked its age.

This led her to wonder if the nursing home affected her only if she actually spent time there. Whatever the connection might be, she intended to ramp up her visits. Soon the lines in her lips began to fill back in, and her skin became smoother. She dropped about ten pounds and joined a gym.

Then a phone call came – her mother-in-law had died in her sleep.

Crap! Now what will I do? The only alternative was to volunteer at the nursing home. When she explained the idea to her husband, supposedly as a tribute to his late mother, he appeared touched by her thoughtfulness.

The following week they went to talk with the care coordinator, who was delighted to acquire a new volunteer. "We welcome all the help we can get here. And these elderly folks, they always appreciate company. This ain't no spring chicks' home, so don't go getting yourself attached to any of them. Someone's always checking out, if you know what I mean," the woman winked.

On the third week of her volunteering, the coordinator asked if Carole would mind taking on a special client. There was an elderly woman name Gloria Dupree who was in good health and lived on an independent floor, but had asked for some companionship.

Carrying the apartment number written on a slip of paper, Carole took the elevator up to the twelfth floor, nicknamed the Penthouse because of the views. She knocked on the door and it was opened by an older woman impeccably dressed in a fashionable light blue silk suit with a string of pearls around her throat. Real pearls, Carole noticed.

"Do come in, dear."

"You must be Mrs. Dupree."

"Just call me Gloria. Would you care for some tea?"

"Yes, thank you. That would be nice." As Carole ventured further into the apartment she noticed the woman had exquisite taste in furnishings as well. Nothing here cheap, the entire presentation was classic and refined.

The two women sat down together on a small chintz sofa, balancing their tea cups of bone china, while sampling little goodies from a lead crystal plate.

"This tea is delicious, Gloria."

"I'm so glad you like it and that we are finally getting to meet each other. I've watched you in the dining room when you came to visit your mother-in-law."

She may look like she's in great shape, thought Carole, but her mind must be confused. Carole never remembered seeing this woman before. "Well, Gloria, I'm glad to be here visiting you."

Gloria smiled, a rather unusual smile, more of a Cheshire cat grin.

"Can we talk about the gift?"

"Oh, Gloria, I didn't bring you a gift. I just came to talk. I'm sorry if you expected a present."

"Oh, you brought it all right, dear."

"I'm not sure I understand what you're talking about."

"Really? Oh, I think you do. How old are you, Carole? In your 60s? But you look so much younger."

"Thank you. I work out twice a week."

"Do you now? Come Carole, we both know it's not the gym."

Carole paled. *What was this old biddy hinting at?*

"How old do I look, Carole? 70? 80? I'm actually 98, but no one would know that because I kept myself looking younger, too. At least I did until several months ago when suddenly the gift stopped working."

Nausea began to rise from Carole's stomach, climbing up to her throat.

"You see, Carole, you've stolen a gift that is rightfully mine. Your mother-in-law often commented how her daughter-in-law was looking younger at every visit. Since the magic had left me, I suspected you were the usurper."

"Whoa, Gloria..."

"The problem is that the gift can only present itself to one person at a time. Only one of us can be the receiver. And to tell you the truth Carole, I'm not ready to give it up."

Carole felt her throat tighten. *Dear God, who was the crazy person now?* Suddenly she realized that her throat really was constricting. "Gloria ..." she gasped. Then she began to frantically claw at her neck.

"It's all right, dear. I was a nurse when I was younger. Your tea contains a subtle poison. It will only take a few moments more, and then you'll simply stop breathing. The autopsy will show you had a seizure, not so uncommon really. The drug itself leaves no trace."

The teacup fell to the floor as Carole's body jerked like a marionette and then slid like an eel to the carpet. Gloria bent over, leaned down to hold Carole's face in her hands, and sucked in a large breath of Carole's lingering life force. A moment later the catch lights disappeared from Carole's eyes.

Gloria waited a full 15 minutes before picking up the phone and calling down to the front desk. "I'm afraid an unfortunate incident has just occurred. Can you send a nurse to my apartment, right away?" She sat back, content with the knowledge that the gift would return.

Then she moistened a napkin and dabbed at the tea stain on her Persian carpet. *The bitch was clumsy as well as greedy.*

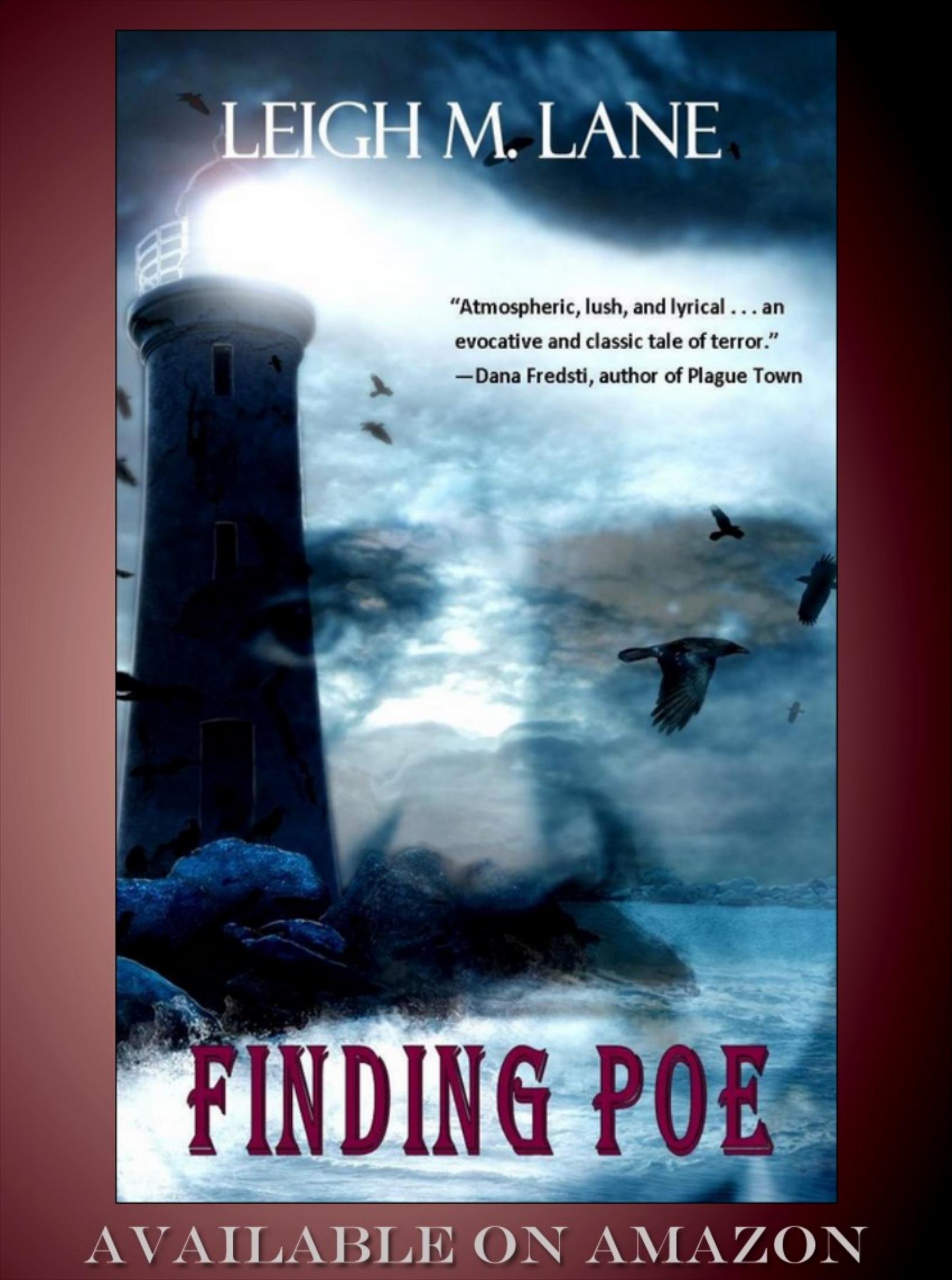
A knock sounded at her door. She walked over, checked her appearance in the hallway mirror, and expertly reapplied her lipstick.

Appearances had always been her strong suit.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Linda lives and writes near the northern tip of the Shenandoah Valley. Recognized by the Virginia Press Association with two certificates of merit for her 20 year newspaper column, her short stories and articles also appear in several anthologies and journals. Passionate about strong women, she pens a monthly blog in which she pays tribute to women who have made a difference in this world. *Cut from Strong Cloth* is her new novel about one such woman in the American Civil War.

Twitter ID: [@LHSittig](https://twitter.com/LHSittig)

Blog: www.strongwomeninhistory.wordpress.com



LEIGH M. LANE

"Atmospheric, lush, and lyrical . . . an evocative and classic tale of terror."

—Dana Fredsti, author of Plague Town

FINDING POE

AVAILABLE ON AMAZON

Testing *Nina D'Arcangela*

Tearing free of the straps binding it to the table, it slams its muscular body against the one-way mirror and snarls, "What have you done to me?" Its hideously deformed jaw and engorged tongue make the words nearly indecipherable. Saliva drips down the glass, its claws scratch angrily at the slick surface; the creature fights in vain to smash its way through three feet of impenetrable barrier.

From the other side of the glass, the doctor stands dead still, staring at the monstrosity thrashing against the window mere feet away. After an elongated pause, he orders, "Open Room Two."

Without hesitation the operator does so.

As the door slides smoothly upwards into the wall, the staff can see a young woman crouching in the corner shielding two small children. Filth and vomit stain her T-shirt and jeans; their terror is palpable.

The monstrosity slowly swivels its head toward the open doorway leaving clumps of gelatinous flesh sticking to the glass; lips peel from its gums, a chunk of cheek clings to the surface, one eyelid ripped cleanly from its face. Sniffing the air, it abandons its attack on the window and drops to all fours, senses focusing on the three new beings invading its territory. After judging them no threat, it rises slowly to its full grotesque height.

"Excellent instinctual response. Specimen eighty-seven has locked onto the victims without provocation," the doctor recites into the digital recorder he is holding. Folding his arms across his chest, he waits with the others in the control room – watching silently.

Still a good ten feet from the open doorway, the young woman clutches the children as she tries to push further back into the wall. Shaking uncontrollably, she can do nothing but shield the children's eyes and wait.

The creature in the main chamber strides menacingly toward them. One clawed talon on the doorway, it ducks beneath the opening to Room Two.

"Switch to video feed." Monitors in the control room light up and display varying angles from within the multiple small chambers.

Pausing just inside the doorway, it sniffs again, fuller, stronger this time. Its vicious watery gaze assesses the three huddled forms before it. A slight distraction – pounding on the wall to the right. The young woman glances; the goliath never wavers in its stare. The pounding is frantic; another woman's voice howling in desperation from what must be a room next door. '*God, is there another of these things?*' The thought flicks through the young woman's mind.

Encouraged by her fear, it moves forward quickly, plucking a screeching child from her grasp. The woman in the other room seems to go mad; scratching, shrieking, thrashing beyond the wall.

Dangling the boy before it, the thing draws a long breath from the child's mouth. It smells the boy's blood, his vomit; it smells his fear. With one hand still holding the head, the other clawed fist shreds the boy's body from its neck.

Snorting at the young woman clutching the girl, the monstrosity dangles the boy's head above its mouth. Still looking her in the eye, it pops the child's head like an overripe melon with its clenching maw. It chews; it swallows.

Lowering its own head in challenge, it flicks out a claw and rips the young woman's T-shirt, sniffing at the putrescence staining it. Frozen in shock and fear, she does nothing. It grins. Reaching down slowly, almost gently, it lifts the remaining child from her numb limbs. The little girl struggles and begs; she tries to grab onto her would-be protector. There is nothing the young woman can do. She watches as it sinks its teeth into the squirming child's midsection, splattering offal across the entire chamber, covering her in the little girl's drippings. Chewing with slow delight, it continues to stare at the young woman cowering against the wall. It smells her rank terror; it sees her eyes dim as her mind slips to a distant place. It watches as her body goes limp then spasms uncontrollably.

All the while, the wailing from the room next door grows more incessant.

Awareness dawning, it recognizes the ability to reason, not simply act on impulse. It likes this feeling. Malformed knees bent backward, it leans down and flicks the young woman's head to the side.

It has a thought: useless.

It has a feeling: mild agitation.

It hears a sound.

Turning its head, it recognizes the scent that accompanies the untamed agony coming from the other room. Smiling, it abandons the useless mass of jittering flesh on the floor, and draws a gore smeared talon across the wall. The sound calms for a moment... only a moment... before the maniacal pounding and ear-splitting shrieks begin again.

It leaves Room Two, returns to the table in the center of the main chamber and stares with smug satisfaction at the one-way mirror. It believes it has won.

"Seal the chamber. Gas it." The doctor orders. He then speaks into his digital recorder.

"Eighty-seven has shown marked improvement with cognitive awareness, careless brutality, and its ability to identify its own DNA. But it still does not choose to kill the stranger. Is it showing a degree of compassion?" He clicks off the recorder, tapping it against his chin while glancing up at the monitor showing him a single view of Room One.

Flicking the recorder on once more, he continues, "The reason for the test subject's failure is still unknown. She should have been able to breach containment by now, saving her offspring. End session eighty-seven."

Rubbing his exhausted eyes, the doctor turns to the others in the control room. "Let's clean this up, and get her sedated as quickly as possible. She's already gestating two new fetuses from number eighty-eight. We don't want to endanger them anymore than we have to."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Quirky little horror chick who likes to write soul rending snippets of despair; reads anything from splatter matter to dark matter; an UrbEx explorer and professional photographer who loves to explore abandoned areas, decrepit buildings, purportedly haunted places and old graveyards. Nina is also the Social Media Coordinator and one of the co-owners of Sirens Call Publications as well as the owner and resident nut job of Dark Angel Photography.

Twitter: [@Sotet_Angyal](https://twitter.com/Sotet_Angyal)

Blog: [Sotet_Angyal, The Dark Angel](http://Sotet_Angyal_The_Dark_Angel)

*Death lurks around every corner,
and each wary step
Henry takes draws him
deeper into the mire...*



Carpe Nectem

Book one of the
Songbird Trilogy by

Kate Monroe

Available on Amazon

Depravity Cavity *Foinah Jameson*

The man looked around at the sterile, white room empty of any adornment save for one chair and a paper-covered examination table, and squinted under the bright fluorescent lighting. His shoes squeaked against the tile floor as he made his way to the chair.

“So, what kind of doctor did you say you were? And why do you have an examination room in the back of an empty building?”

“People see what they want to see. Plus I need the space; I collect things.” The woman smiled, and then winked. “On the table, please.”

“Oh, okay.” He sat down, hyper-conscious of the way the room echoed, enhancing every sound that he made. “But what kind of doctor?”

“I’m a --” She thought for a moment and then said, “Midwife. I help deliver women in difficult situations.”

He arched an eyebrow. *This is insane. It was too easy. She’s perfect.* The paper rustled as he fidgeted. *Why is she just staring at me?*

“Don’t be nervous,” she said. “I’m just observing for the moment.”

“Observing what? I don’t even know why I came here.” *She knows.*

The woman arched an eyebrow, and then smirked. “Because you thought you’d get laid.”

The man broke out in a sweat and started to get off the table, but paused. “This was a mistake.”

“No...I don’t think so. We met for a reason. But do you even remember my name?”

He rolled his eyes. “Look. We had some drinks, it got cozy, and here we are. It was a misunderstanding on my part. My bad. So while I have a little dignity left, I’m going to call it an evening.” The man smiled, a shy little slip of the lips to lower her guard, then hopped off of the table keeping his left hand stuffed deep in his jacket pocket.

There’s still time...she’s perfect. Slow it down. Just come a little closer...

“Don’t be ridiculous,” she retorted. “I’m quite sure that I can help you with your problem, *Lady Killer.*”

“It was a joke. It’s just a phrase. You seemed intrigued. I was just trying to strike up a conversation at the bar with you. I don’t have a problem.”

“Then let’s finish our conversation,” she said as she sat down on the chair. She was beautiful and petite, pale as bone china, and her long, black hair and dark eyes were a striking contrast to the absence of color in the room; he was transfixed.

His head felt swimmy, and his body was tingling as he stared at the woman who was staring back at him intently. He felt like he was being stalked; the sensation sent a little thrill through his chest.

Black, he thought. *No, obsidian.* It’s all he could focus on; wide, dilated pupils in deep black pools of malice.

What? The man shivered. *Where did that come from.*

“Lilitu,” she said, leaning forward. “My name.”

“What? Oh, yeah. I remember,” he lied. “What’s my name?” he asked back with a flirtatious grin.

“I don’t care.”

“My name is Adam,” he slurred, suddenly very dizzy.

Lilitu stood up and took a remote control out of her pocket.

“Of course it is.” She smirked as she pushed one of the buttons and a panel slid open on the wall next to him. A cloth-covered tray appeared. “I suggest you sit back down.”

A wave of vertigo-laced weakness washed over him, and Adam buckled against the table. “Wow, that last shot is hitting me pretty hard. Can I have a glass of water or a cup of coffee or something?” Adam flopped back onto the table, his hand still stuffed into the jacket pocket, clenched and spasming

painfully around the blade handle of the scalpel he kept there. He was trying to hide his panic as more dizziness set in. He could barely move.

“Adam, I’m afraid water or coffee won’t do the trick,” she said as she adjusted his legs so they didn’t dangle, and then strapped them down. “You see...I drugged you, you naughty, naughty boy.”

“You bitch!” He pulled the scalpel free of his pocket, but fumbled and sliced his own hand as he made a weak lunge for Lilitu. She laughed and grabbed his wrist in a vice-like grip, twisting until there was a loud crack, then crushed the bones in his hand. She eased the blade free with a satisfied smile. He screamed in rage and pain.

“Oh hush. Again with the naughty. No one can hear you anyway.” She brought the scalpel to her lips and licked the drops of his blood from the blade. A little shiver ran through her body. “So dark...”

Lilitu set the scalpel on the tray, balanced with the blade edge facing Adam’s face.

Taunting, teasing whore!

“I should have cut you open before you even got through the door,” he said as he tried to sit up. Lilitu slammed Adam back down on the table and held him there with preternatural strength while she applied straps across his chest. She bound his hands with more straps.

“I’m going to gut you,” he growled.

“Oh, I don’t think so, Adam. I think your gutting days are over. But I’d like to talk to you about it. Take a peek into that depravity cavity you got there.” Lilitu tapped his forehead with her index finger, the long, tapered nail at the end gleaming wickedly in the light as her finger came away with a spot of blood. “Mesmerizing, isn’t it? The color, the consistency, the smell...”

She waved the finger under his nose, amused when he flinched away. Lilitu smiled and revealed a row of fangs, running her tongue slowly over the deadly points for emphasis.

“You have no idea who I am, do you?” she asked.

Adam glared, and struggled against the bindings. “A dirty whore who is gonna be ripped apart when I get free of this table.”

“Wow, haven’t heard *that one* before. And mankind thinks I’m a bad seed.” Lilitu snorted.

“Thousands of years I’ve been portrayed as malevolent, evil, deranged, particularly vengeful. When in truth you, human, are the stain on paradise.” She patted his chest. “Still no clue?”

“You’re crazy, lady. You drugged me!”

“Oooh, so angry.” She tsk-tsked him, and Adam realized the game had gotten away from him.

“Okay. Can we start over? I’m just a little drunk, okay?” said Adam, trying to turn on the charm.

“Why don’t you unstrap me, let me go, and we’ll call it even. Just a little misunderstanding between new friends. I won’t remember a thing...” He winced as the shattered bones in his hand ground against each other, but the pain kept him focused. “I’m not even mad about my wrist.”

“You’re a serial killer, Adam. There’s no misunderstanding at all. You were going to slit me open with that scalpel, rut around in my organs...defile me!” Lilitu’s body started shimmering, changing, growing. She arched her back as two black wings erupted and unfolded from between her shoulder blades. “And what’s truly funny here is that you have absolutely no idea how much you have messed up tonight. The irony of it all.”

Adam started struggling against the bindings, jerking and trying to rock the table, as Lilitu spread her wings. “What the fuck are you?” he screamed.

“I’m Lilith, you moron.”

“I thought you said your name was Lilitu?” Adam stopped struggling, and stared.

“It is. I’m known by many names. History rewritten over and over and over again through millennia by petty, fearful, cowed, meat bags. Frankly, it is exhausting sorting through the muck and vile orations of your species.”

Adam squinted at her and then leered, licking his lips as he looked her over from head to toe.

"Well, then we're on the same side," he said calmly. "Let me go and get back to my work."

Lilitu burst out laughing. "The drugs should have worn off by now, so you must really be this stupid. Same side?"

"Lucifer."

"You're one of those." She rolled her eyes, and then hopped up on the table where she sat straddled on his abdomen. "Listen to me, meat bag. I am not the devil's consort. There is no devil. No one all-encompassing ruler of hell. In fact there is no hell. It's just darkness and cold and nothingness when you die, whether you were good or bad, it doesn't matter. Evil is organic. Life is your heaven or hell.

"The spark that created at the beginning, the grand alignment of energy and power, sentient and expansive, well it moved on and left us all behind." She cupped his face in her hands. "In the beginning it was beautiful. It was peaceful. Your species evolved with potential. But there's a short circuit somewhere. You can be enlightened or depraved, even both, but your base nature is deviant, whatever floats your boat in the free will department, right? I've probably gone a little schizo myself over the years."

"Fuck you," Adam snarled. *Almost there.*

He was slowly working his arm free from one of the bindings, pushing, pulling at the strap as Lilitu spoke.

"Really? That's all you've got? I've delivered this grand revelation, denied your justification for your *work*, and all I get is a *fuck you*?" Lilitu rested her cheek on his chest. "No questions? No pleas for mercy? No apologies? No pop culture isms from *Paradise Lost*?" She reached up and ran her fingers through his hair.

"Milton was a mad man in the sack, by the way. I did love scrambling his brains before he wrote that book." She sat up with a sigh. "Right. So I'll ask you questions then."

"Let me go." He tried the charming voice again.

"That won't work on me, Adam. What happened to you?" she asked. "What makes that crazy voice in your head tell you to do things?" She traced a finger over his eye. "What did you see?"

"Will you let me go?" His hand was almost free.

"Probably not, but what have you got to lose? Confession is good for the soul." She glanced at the scalpel and smirked. "How's that binding coming along?"

With a burst of speed, Adam yanked his hand free of the loosened strap, and reached for the scalpel. As he slashed at her, Lilitu launched into the air and then came down hard on his broken wrist with her boot, using the hand as a pivot for a back flip off of the table as she tucked her wings. She landed, snapping her wings open with a flourish, and had an amused look on her face as she stood with her arms crossed over her chest.

Adam howled and then began hacking at the straps across his chest, cutting through the bindings like they were paper. He cut the straps on his legs and then yanked his mangled hand, slippery with blood and torn tissue, free of the binding. "I'm coming for you, bitch!"

"Give it your best shot, dick." Lilitu spread her arms and exposed her chest as Adam charged. He brought the scalpel down in a deadly arc, but Lilitu flexed her wings and rose backwards, delivering a kick to his head that knocked him to the floor.

"I love it when they fight back," he said, wiping blood out of his eye as he stood back up.

"So do I."

Adam lunged and grabbed her foot, yanking her down to the floor, but he couldn't hold the scalpel in his other ruined hand. He thought he had her pinned underneath him, but she arched her back and tossed him off like a rag doll. Lilitu pounced, then pinned him with her knees.

"This is tedious. I'm done playing." She shoved his head back and sank her teeth into Adam's neck.

He went limp instantly as she drank, each tug and pull of teeth on flesh sending a shiver through his body. He felt her in his mind, prying open his memories -- *his mother the whore...her visitors...the dark place in the shed...the sound proof walls that kept the screams and crying silent.*

Lilitu reviewed each kill that he'd made over the years: the first, his father's dog, the last a sad little runaway, thin and hungry, her life taken in the middle of a lonely desert. Each depraved act that had carved a chunk of his soul away to leave an empty cavity behind, Lilitu made him relive.

Lilitu released her hold and sat up with a sigh. "Oh, Adam...you've seen so much for such a young meat bag." She stood up and retrieved the tray from the wall. With a flourish she removed the cloth to expose a row of scalpels, pliers, and glass vials. "Open your eyes."

Adam's eyelids fluttered open, and he recoiled. He was in his mother's shed, the bad place where he huddled in the darkness after his father's special time. But it was different. The smell of blood and suffering was there, but the walls were lined with rows and rows of shelves filled with glass vials.

"No," he whimpered. "I don't want to be here." Adam closed his eyes and shuddered.

"Then don't be. Leave and lock the door behind you. But what's been seen can't be unseen." Lilitu picked up a scalpel, and then set it down, opting for Adam's own blade instead.

"I love irony." She pried open his eyelid, inserted the blade behind the eyeball and levered the orb out of the socket. His vision split in two : he watched Lilitu removing his eye, and also saw himself through the orb that she held between her fingers. Surprisingly, it wasn't painful.

"Like I said...I collect things." She yanked, and the eyeball ripped away from the optic nerve with a satisfying scream from Adam. She dropped the eye into a glass vial, and stood to place it on one of the shelves. "Stop screaming. It's just an eye, you sick bastard. You've done worse."

"Am I going to die?" he asked, disappointed that the game had ended.

"Of course. Everything dies. But for now I'm going to make you live. You don't deserve the release of nothingness. You had a choice whether or not to be this way -- a rotting wad of sickness, you knew it was wrong, but you liked it too much.

"I've locked that door, taken the pleasure away; it will be painful now to remember. And you WILL remember, Adam; a constant show every time you close your one eye. A film loop running over and over in that phantom hole I exposed." Lilitu crouched and peeked inside of the empty eye socket.

"Now that's a depravity cavity." She poked her finger into the hole. "Let this be a warning. Don't look for the key." Lilitu launched into the air and burst through the roof, exposing the night sky. "See you soon, meat bag."

Fuck you, Lilitu.

He poked his own finger into the hole, fingering the lock, pushing and probing until the pain started.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Foinah Jameson lives in Portland, Oregon with her husband, two Norse Gods disguised as her daughters and a menagerie of used animals. She can be found nightly on her back deck, typing and cackling madly as dark, comic tales come to life in her laptop. Foinah has published three short story collections, and her novel, *Mostly Dead Melvin*, will be released in September 2014.

Twitter handle: [@FoinahJameson](https://twitter.com/FoinahJameson)

Author link: <http://www.foinahjameson.com>



Bound *Miranda Kate*

Christa was getting into her car when he approached her. She was still on campus, so when he asked, "Excuse me, can you help me?" she just assumed he was a new student. She turned with a smile, saying, "Sure", but hadn't expected him to grab her and smother her face with a cloth.

She came to with a pounding headache, finding herself almost naked in the back of a van. He was sitting up front and turned when she moved.

"Hey doll, you awake now? How about some fresh air?" He pulled out a rifle and pointed it at her. "We're gonna play a little game. It's called 'run rabbit, run'." The yellow toothed grin he flashed at her made her feel queasy.

He opened the van doors and pulled her out by the legs, throwing her on the ground. She remained there too scared to move causing him to raise the rifle again. "Come on, doll, on your feet. Show me what you got."

She struggled to stand; eyes fixed on the gun, the cold wind cutting across her, making her shiver and cling to herself. He laughed and started shooting at the ground around her making her jump, yelling, "Come on, doll, RUN! Show me that tight little bunny tail 'a yours." And she did, with ears still ringing from the ricochet.

She ran through the wood, branches whipping at her face, heart pumping, and adrenaline keeping her upright as she stumbled over tree roots and bumped against trees, straining to see everything behind her in a glance. She could hear him calling. He didn't seem out of breath. It crossed her mind that this wasn't the first time he'd put someone through this. She just kept going, praying for deliverance and hoping it would arrive before her lungs gave out.

When the road came into view she thought her prayers had been answered. She turned onto it; sure that someone had to drive along soon. But during one of her glances back she lost her footing and went down, sprawling in the dirt. And he was there in seconds having only been a couple of steps behind her.

He dragged her to the edge of the road and put her up against a tree. She didn't see much point in resisting, knowing she was spent. His foul breath warmed her ear as he leaned against her, tying her hands behind it. He took his time, gyrating on her, and she knew it wouldn't be long before it became more than just a dry hump.

The sound of a car reached her and hope bloomed in the pit of her stomach. Someone called out and she strained to answer, but the man responded first.

"Hey guys! Come and help me strip down this bunny I just hunted."

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: [@PurpleQueenNL](https://twitter.com/PurpleQueenNL)

Blog: <http://purplequeennl.blogspot.nl/>



The Spark *Claire Riley*

It starts with a spark, a flash deep inside my brain. A slow hum of light stirs me.

Like a match being struck and igniting the kindling in a fireplace, the black hole that is my existence slowly begins to burn with a single glow of fire. A warm radiance, almost a softness behind my eyes, wakes me from my slumber. I am aware of nothing, and yet everything all at once, as my thoughts begin to come to me in dribs and drabs. I stretch out toes and fingers, sounds slowly beginning to filter through to me. The world is a muffled abyss to my tired ears.

I was sleeping so peacefully. Please leave me be.

The burning, slowly at first, begins to seep through and encompass my limbs, making them twitch—a liquid flexing my clogged-up veins like fat from a pig. Sleep relinquishes the hold it still has over me and my eyes begin to flutter until eventually they open.

I see blackness. I feel blackness. I am blackness.

Now free from sleep, the pain has begun. Like fire ants it comes steadily marching onwards, trailing hot lava paths of pain over my body—a burning cesspit of despair, torturing every orifice. My fingers, my toes, my calves, and my thighs—they all burn in slow agony, almost a torture. However, none hurts more than my stomach. It feels as if I've never eaten. Like food has never been a part of my life. But it has; I remember eating. I remember food upon my lips, moisture upon my now flaccid tongue.

Pain reaches across me, pulling my body in every direction. It hurts. God, how it hurts.

Fear grips my heart, and a hunger builds. I think of all the foods that I have ever consumed in my life—a cake, a pie, a pizza, some fries—but none fills me with happiness; not even the memory of food can sedate my growing appetite. And none make me want to eat them to make this wretched pain go away. My thoughts linger on a food once consumed, a food I once turned my nose up at: a steak. Meat—the red wetness seeping across my plate and infecting my other food. Oh how I had complained then. But now . . . now I would eat that steak, the blood dripping from my lips in a waterfall of pure ecstasy, and I would suck on my fingers until they were dry of every last drop of that succulent blood, and then I would devour that flesh in one bite. My jaw snaps open and closed at the thought of devouring the flesh.

I twist, grunting as I try to free myself from my confines—pushing, and pulling, scratching and banging at my prison. A noise much like a growl escapes my dried-up throat; it both frightens and intrigues me. The burning pain is ever growing, alighting my skin with new pain at every touch. I scream out in frustration, banging on a wooden roof above me, begging to be set free, but little more comes out than another tortured growl.

I hear a crack and a groan, and my hand mercifully slams through the wood above me. My fingers grasp on nothing but soil as it rains down on my face. I reach up with my other hand, panic coursing through me as I struggle to free myself.

I have to get out.

With both hands I pull the wood apart, sending more soil and insects cascading over me like a waterfall of death, and at last the gap is big enough for me to push my way through. I dig and dig, until my decrepit muscles ache and I'm choking on the soil. My face finally feels the blessing of cool air upon it as I crawl out of my wormy hole, and I cry out—a garbled sound a mixture of agony and despair, when what I feel is pleasure. I continue to drag myself free from my hole, arms and legs flailing to protect my broken body from the pain that courses through it when I realised I am not at all intact.

My body is covered in sores, skin peeled back in places to reveal bone. My fingers are broken, bent and misshapen, my chest concaved as if I have been run over by a ten-ton weight.

I squeeze my eyes closed and pray: Pray for death. Pray for life. I pray for whatever this is to end.

This nightmare. This pain. This horror film I'm living in.

Then it dawns on me that I'm not in physical pain. This pain is inside of me. The wounds I see do

not hurt. I touch a finger, watching as it dangles uselessly, and I grip it and pull tentatively until it snaps clean off. I want to laugh, the sight is not humorous at all, but anxiety is frothy at my mouth, the confusion building to a crescendo. I open and close my eyes. They feel dry and scratchy. I look about, seeing others like me escaping from their underground prisons, intent on stopping the all-consuming pain that ravishes their battered bodies. Some have fared worse than I—bigger limbs are missing than a finger; a more thorough state of decomposition overwhelms some of them.

I blink to clear the soil and bugs from my vision, and push myself upwards until I am standing on unsteady feet. Withered muscles struggle to hold me upright and fragile bones creak upon the weight. The beat of the sun on my back reminds me of something—something which I cannot grasp. This does not feel like me, like my life. Perhaps it's not.

I look down at my hands, dirty and grey as if rotting away. Yet I feel strong. The pain is like kindling to my inner fire, growing and burning brighter with every second. I feel myself slipping away, the pain taking over again, like another version of myself.

I look at the others again. We all stand in our spots, puzzlement and intense hatred covering our faces in a mask of rotted glory.

I am hungry.

Disgust for these people, these others, bubbles to the surface. They feel the hunger too. I can see it on their faces. They are drawn to that which I am.

I lift my nose to the air and a scent like no other fills me—the most decadent and exquisite smell I ever thought possible. It both excites and frightens me as it caresses my soul. I look to the others as they do the same, each one of them mimicking a wolfhound on the scent of its prey: a sniff, and a growl, and a clumsy step forwards.

My stomach gurgles in retaliation. I want it, whatever it is. I want it.

I stumble forwards, my feet being uncooperative and my arms flailing around me. A growl erupts when one of the others gets too close to me. I try to shout and tell them to move, but my tongue is a dried-up slab of meat in my mouth and I can't form any words. A growl seems to do the trick, as the other moves away from me after a cursory glance. Nevertheless, we are all aiming for the same thing. But I have to have it.

My pain is more.

My fear is bigger.

My anger is growing.

I push and charge onwards, eager to get to the food source before any of these others. I stumble around the side of a tall building, the smell of meat and blood and brains growing stronger and sending my insides into spasms of pain and pleasure all at once. The others are close behind. Fuck it, I'll share if I have to, just as long as I get some of it.

And there it is. I want to weep at the sight of it. The most beautiful thing I have ever seen.

People. Their screams are like music to my ears. They can run, but there are many of us now and they can't get away from us all. With mob mentality, a person is tackled to the ground, and we are pushing and shoving to get to them. To get to their flesh. Their meat and their bones.

Jesus, that's what I want. Flesh. Meat. Blood and bones, and...yes, I want it. I want it to stop this pain. I squeeze past a man in tattered clothing, dodging a mouth that tries to bite into me. Blood has covered the ground where I kneel; it soaks into my clothes and makes me drool. Leaning over, my hands tear away clothing until I see flesh—soft, white, supple flesh that I instantly sink my teeth into, letting the blood spray to the back of my throat. I swallow wave after wave of the life giving essence as I bite down and pull at the thick slab of flesh in my mouth, trying to free it from this person, feeling the storm

inside me growing with each swallow.

The blood isn't helping, and as I tear the thigh muscle away, the sinew dangling from my teeth and gums, I know that this flesh is only making my hunger grow.

But I can't stop it now. I want more. This other me, this monster version of me, wants me gone. It batters at me to run and hide because it is about to do unimaginable things to these people.

My thoughts and memories of my previous life begin to slip away like the tide on the shore. The new me is taking over, and its urges are simplistic.

It wants more of this flesh. It wants to eat. To kill. To destroy.

I stand and stumble away, leaving the pack of others to continue in their feats, but even some of them have come to the same conclusion that I have.

We need more.

I lurch forward, intent on finding more people to eat, my mob of the dead following in my wake. Together we will conquer them all. For I am a zombie. A dead soul. And I have no fear.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Claire C Riley's work is best described as the modernization of classic, old-school horror. She fuses multi-genre elements to develop storylines that pay homage to cult-classics while still feeling fresh and cutting-edge. She writes characters that are realistic and kills them without mercy. Claire's the author of "Limerence," "Odium," and "Odium Origins" and a proud contributor to the upcoming anthology 'Let's scare cancer to death.'

Twitter: [@ClaireCRiley](https://twitter.com/ClaireCRiley)

Website: www.clairecriley.com

Flash Fiction Challenge!



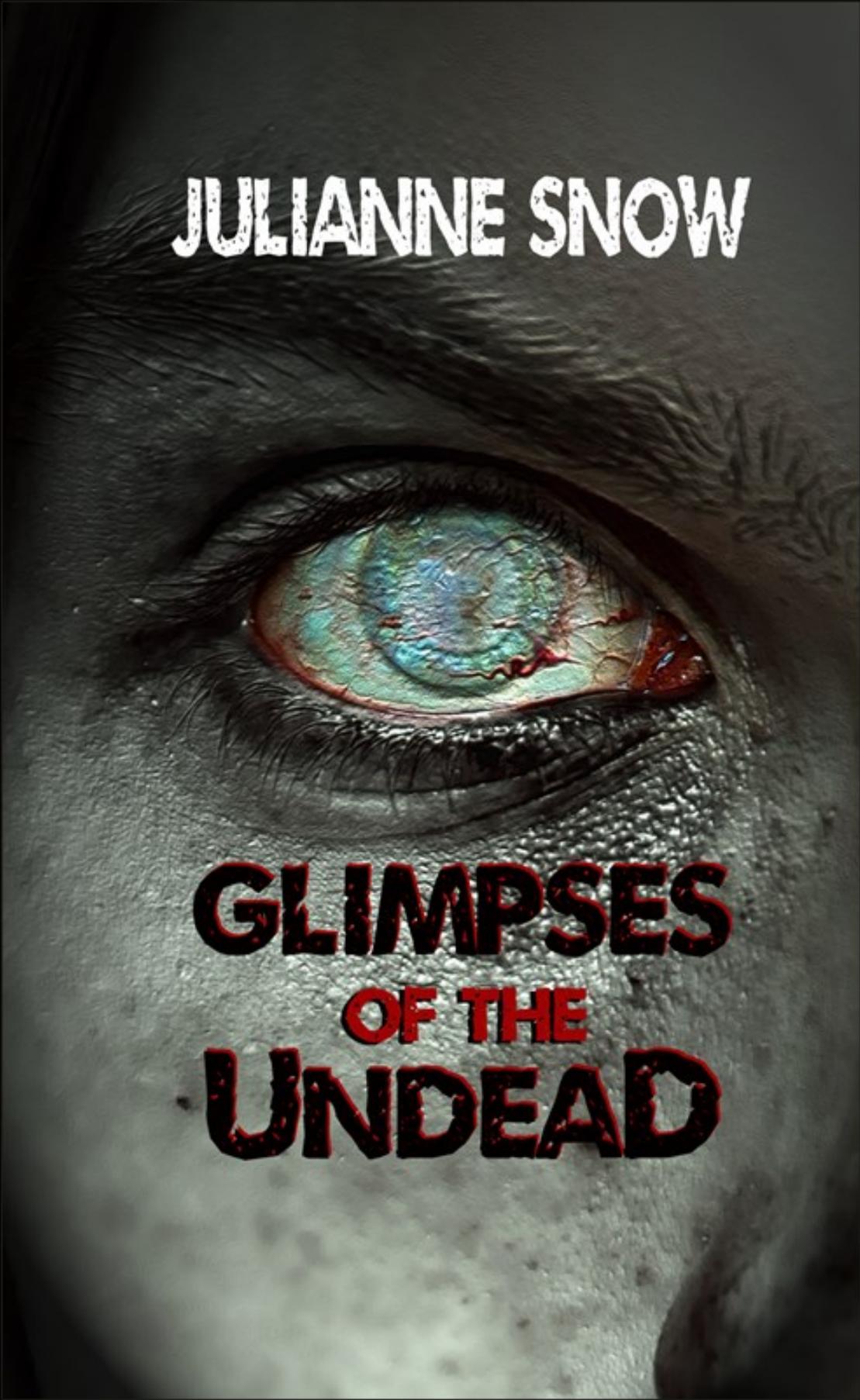
Sirens Call Publications is holding a Flash Fiction Challenge! You see the photograph to the left Well we're challenging you to write a 400 word flash—no more, no less—using the picture as inspiration. The top three flash, as judged by us, will be featured in the next eZine and each winner will receive either a \$10 Amazon Gift Card or a print copy of one of the books from our catalogue—their choice of course!

Interested?

Write your flash and send it to us at Submissions@SirensCallPublications.com, letting us know the submission is for the challenge by naming your file 'EZINE14_FlashContest_StoryTitle_AuthorName

A COLLECTION OF SHORT FICTION...

JULIANNE SNOW



**GLIMPSES
OF THE
UNDEAD**

**AVAILABLE ON AMAZON, CREATSPACE, BARNES AND NOBLE,
KOBO, SMASHWORDS, AND THE ISTORE**

Abasteron House *Paula Cappa*

“The fall of noon.” That’s what Grandfather called it. I never really understood how noontime could actually fall, but he liked to say it that way. “Evening rises,” was another. “Morning booms,” he’d greet the day.

My childhood summers at Abasteron House by the sea were filled with colorful sunsets, juicy blackberries off the backyard vine, and sea-lavender abundant in my bedroom. Late at night, Grandfather would wake me and point to the window.

“See the waves shining under moony light. Observe! The shivering flakes of night.”

Poetic, yes, but Grandfather was a genealogist. He tracked family origins, tracing ancestry back through the centuries. He especially enjoyed the history of angels and demons; he spent his life teaching the evolution of their mythologies from primary cultures to the Age of Reason.

“Look, Davida,” he’d say sweetly. “The sea’s wind leaves ancient face prints on the windows. There. Do you see them?” I never saw any faces, just salt-caked streaks. My name is Davida Kipling Livingston and everybody called me Kip, except Grandfather.

“What were you dreaming, Davida? Did Duma protect you?”

Duma is the angel-prince of dreams and awarded the job of guarding us against nightmares. One day Grandfather asked me to paint a picture of Duma. I had just turned fourteen and drew the angel with spiky blond hair, gigantic green torch eyes, skull-faced, and dressed him in a black tuxedo jacket with guitar-shaped hips. Purple and black background gave it a punk-rock-star quality that I adored. Grandfather wasn’t pleased. What did he expect, wings? He did. So I added a bunch to Duma’s back, designed like jail bars with chains and padlocks.

He hung it upstairs in his attic study. But I knew he didn’t love it like I did.

At precisely the fall of noon, every day, Grandfather would walk the sand dunes along the upper beach. With the sea rocking and seabirds calling, I’d watch him from the attic study window. It was a hatched window at the top of Abasteron House and the view pulled the eyes out far and wide. I felt like God up there, watching Grandfather grow smaller with each step. Why did he walk at the fall of noon? He never failed this devotion, not even in the rain, or during storms. He’d come back, his face all flushed, eyes bright. Did he meet someone there? One of his imaginary people?

Aunt Agatha, his sister, told me Grandfather had imaginary friends all his life. Dream people—friends he brought alive into his waking life. “Don’t ask,” she warned.

One day I secretly listened at his attic door. *Rizzle-rizzle*. When I heard this hissing from Grandfather’s study, I dared not enter. Menacing growls, odd flapping. My heart jumped; my legs trembled. *Scraaaaatch-scratch*. *Rizzle-rizzle*. I imagined witch-men with long tails in suits of fire, hideous claws, their bones twisted, their gaping mouths gurgling. I backed away.

“Mice,” Grandfather explained.

Abasteron House was an antique, built in 1874 by a sea captain, but mice? “No way, Pops.”

When the *rizzle-rizzle* transformed into shrieks like some fowl attacking its prey, I cried into my pillows. Next day, I poured my anxiety out on canvas, painting the sounds into pictures of these witch-men.

“No,” Grandfather said, examining every stroke. “You’ve got it all wrong, Davida. They don’t look like that. You listen to too much rock music.”

At his insistence, I spent the day listening to Chopin’s piano concertos. “Now, draw again, please,” he instructed.

I spent hours at the canvas, letting my mind wander, letting the brush and paint create images from the concertos. Suddenly there was a golden staircase by a river with vine-wrapped trees. Some kind of wild ghost-gods floated down the spiral steps. I was astonished. “Who are they, Grandfather?”

“Pioneers?” he suggested.

“No they’re not pioneers!”

“No? Who then?”

“Are they ... your dream friends, Grandfather?”

He laughed. “No, my pet. They are *your* friends.”

I began living with Grandfather after my parents died. He more than filled the loss during my teen years, college time, and now as an adult. The day he died, Grandfather walked the dunes at noon, the winter sun tilting over his head. I watched him from the hatched window. He shuffled along, his heart slow and failing.

My whole life, Grandfather had forbidden me to walk with him at noon. We’d walk on the beach but only at sunset. This cold day, I challenged that command and ran out of Abasteron House. Wet sand shushed under my feet. Seabirds screeched. Great horned shadows hung over the dunes like ghouls.

I caught up to him and slipped my arm into his. “Grandfather, you’re trembling in this icy wind. I came to walk you home.”

He stopped and looked at me. “You can’t do that.”

“Of course I can. Lean on me. You shouldn’t be out here alone.”

He looked out to the grey sea. “I’m never alone on the dunes. But, I can’t leave her now. Who will watch for her?”

“Watch for whom?”

“I don’t want to miss her. I’m sure she’s here.”

“Who do you come to see here every day all these years?”

“Abasteron.”

“Abasteron? The angel of the fifth hour after sunset?”

“You remember your lessons well, Davida. Do *you* see her?”

“Grandfather, I see no one here.”

“She’ll come. Abasteron guards night. She visits day.”

“Is she ... one of your dream people?”

“Will you watch for her, Davida?”

“Of course. Come home now.”

Hours later he passed peacefully, his last words whispering “Abasteron.”

I stayed on at Abasteron House. I painted, listened to Chopin’s concertos, and walked the dunes. Like Grandfather, I never actually saw the angel Abasteron. The attic study grew silent—Grandfather’s dream people all gone now. Then one night, under the moony light at my window, I dreamed of a firehawk, hooked wings, boney claws, greedy teeth plunged out, grinning with rage and flying at me from the shivering flakes of the night.

Rizzle-rizzle. I bolted awake. Great horned shadows advanced.

Abasteron House is the prequel to Paula Cappa’s novel *Night Sea Journey, A Tale of the Supernatural*.

This story was originally published by *Every Day Fiction* in March 2013.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Paula Cappa’s short fiction has appeared in *Whistling Shade Literary Journal*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Every Day Fiction*, *Fiction365*, *Twilight Times Ezine*, and in anthologies. Her novels include *Night Sea Journey, A Tale of the Supernatural* and *The Dazzling Darkness* (Crispin Books of Crickhollow Books), which won the Gothic Readers Book Club Choice Award for outstanding fiction in 2013. She writes a weekly blog, *Tales of Terror*.

Twitter: [@paulacappa1](https://twitter.com/paulacappa1)

Author web site: <http://paulacappa.wordpress.com/author/>



Gluttony *Andrea van Lit*

Sandra waddled along the cracked concrete path toward the red brick mailbox. Stretch leggings chafing against her inner thighs, she stopped every few steps to catch her breath and relieve the pressure. Grinning in triumph, she reached the mailbox; as though the short distance traversed was proof her weight wasn't an obstacle. Her smile widened as she spied several catalogues in the mail; reading junk mail was one of her guilty pleasures. And what was this? A thick cream envelope with no stamp and no return address lay between the catalogues. She fished it out and ripped it open, letting the shreds of paper fall to the ground.

Congratulations Sandra Healy. You are the randomly selected winner of a free meal at the new and exclusive restaurant Gluttony, located at 13 Paradiso Lane, Ravenswood. Please present this letter at the door. This offer is valid until the fifth of August.

Irritation vied with glee. Today was the fifth of August. Determined not to pass up the opportunity of a free meal, Sandra padded back to the house. She had a taxi to book. Then she'd call Artie and gloat. Assuming he was home.

She wiped the sweat off her brow as she paused to open the aluminium fly screen door. She'd left several messages for Artie over the last month, but the stubborn old goat hadn't called her back. Just because she'd joked that they were both gravitationally challenged. She'd thought it rather clever, but he'd gone ballistic and then slammed down the phone.

It had taken time, but she had learnt to love herself, curves, dimpled thighs and all. Embracing the role of the jolly fat lady, she floated along, cracking jokes and having a good time. Wistfully, she wished that Artie could find the same self-acceptance. Perhaps then he would see her as something more than a friend.

Entering the cool hallway, she rested against the doorframe. Just a quick snack, she promised herself, and then she'd make those phone calls. She headed toward the kitchen, eager to try the new salt and caramel flavoured ice-cream waiting in the freezer.

Easing out of the taxi, Sandra felt a twinge of disappointment. The small corrugated iron building had an exposed bulb dangling above the doorway, highlighting the word *Gluttony* which had been painted a garish red on a plain wooden plaque above the door. Dull light spilled out onto the dark pavement from the two small cracked and dirty windows framing the doorway.

New and exclusive my ass, she thought as she headed toward the front door.

As she reached for the handle, the door silently swung inwards.

"Good evening madam. Do you have a booking?"

Sandra straightened her back and tossed her wavy auburn hair. Standing in front of her was the most delectable man she had ever seen. For a moment she felt the urge to kiss his lips, which reminded her of ripe, plump strawberries, and run her fingers through his thick black hair. Her gaze travelled further downwards. Wearing a collared white shirt which stretched tight across his wide shoulders, and tight black pants which emphasised narrow hips, she felt a tingle of desire. Restraining the girlish giggle, which was trying to force its way out of her throat, she met his eyes.

For a moment they appeared black with the pupil a tiny pin-prick of red, and then he blinked his eyes. She found herself staring into warm, brown puppy dog eyes.

Shaking her head and smiling at her over-active imagination, she passed the letter across. As he scanned through it, she nervously smoothed down the navy blue jersey dress which clung to her frame.

"Welcome, Sandra. Please come in," he requested with a smile.

Stepping inside, she gasped at the contrast. Rich red velvet drapes lined the walls and thick black carpet covered the floors. A small crystal chandelier dangled from the ceiling, casting a gentle glow over

couples sitting at circular tables which had been tightly packed into the tiny room. The steady hum of chatter and the clink of glasses filled the air.

“My name is Oki and I will be your waiter for the evening. Are you eating alone, or will someone be joining you?” His smile widened, as though he already knew the answer.

“It’s just me, myself and I, tonight,” she said with a chuckle.

“I have the perfect spot for you. Follow me.” He turned and strode toward the door at the back of the room.

Tottering after Oki in her tight navy blue court shoes, she glanced at the other patrons as she passed by. In the soft light, they all appeared to be well-dressed, young and good-looking. There was something about their faces though; their features were too even, the skin pulled too tight. For a moment as she stared at a young man with wavy brown hair, dressed in a tuxedo, she could have sworn she saw something slither under his skin. Gnawing on a rare steak, he lifted his head and smiled at her. Blood dribbled down his chin.

“Sandra?” called Oki, holding the door open.

Forcing her legs to move as fast as they could, she stumbled through the doorway. He gently closed the door and stood next to her while she caught her breath.

“Did you see that?” she gasped.

“See what?” he responded with a patient tone.

“That man’s face. It was moving. Like there were maggots crawling underneath,” she said, shuddering.

“A trick of the light perhaps,” he responded smoothly, leading her to a large table set up in the middle of the empty room. He pulled out a wooden chair, and she squeezed herself into it. God, how she hated chairs with arms.

As he walked across to a side table, she glanced around the room. The décor was much the same as the front. This must be reserved for private functions, she thought smugly. She had the whole room to herself.

Returning with a menu, he deftly passed it to her and then laid a napkin across her lap.

“Oki, does this free meal include drinks?” she asked hopefully.

Bending over the menu, she heard the hiss of impatience in his voice as he responded, “No. As per the letter you are entitled to one free meal.”

Staring uncomprehendingly at the menu, she decided to lash out and indulge herself. “This reads like gobbledygook to me. In French is it? Since I can’t read it, I’ll have one of each,” she said brightly.

“Very well.” He inclined his head and gently took the menu from her.

She admired his loose-limbed stride as he walked toward what she assumed was the kitchen.

Twenty minutes later he re-appeared carrying a tray of red steaming bowls. Sandra moistened her thick lips in anticipation as a mouth-watering aroma wafted across.

“Mmmm. It smells divine,” she said as he placed the bowls in front of her.

He burst out laughing, startling her with his reaction. Wiping his eyes, he said, “I wouldn’t call it divine. Wickedly delicious is more like it.”

Flashing a grin at her, he deposited the last bowl then left the room.

Grasping her cutlery like weapons, Sandra dug in with gusto. Each dish consisted of meat which had been cooked using different techniques, and utilising various herbs. She didn’t recognise the dark meat, but it tasted like chicken. Smacking her lips and groaning in pleasure, she barely noticed when Oki arrived with more bowls, stacked them in front of her and then disappeared.

She ate and ate. Cramming the food into her mouth, she gobbled it down, until every last morsel was gone. Sighing with satisfaction she lay down her knife and fork and rested her hands on her distended stomach.

Sandra idly watched Oki stride toward her.

As he stood over her she beamed up at him. "Thank you. The meal was superb."

He gazed down on her with a predatory smile. "I think you mean meals."

Suddenly her throat felt dry.

"You were entitled to one free meal only, not thirteen. Now you'll have to pay."

Sandra balled her hands into fists. "No," she said shaking her head. "The letter said a free meal, and that's what I've had. You're not getting any money out of me!"

"Who said anything about money?" He laughed, grabbed her arm in a vice-like grip and dragged her to her feet.

She felt her skin crawl at his touch. His hands felt cold and slimy like dead, rotting fish.

"Let me go or I'll scream," she threatened, trying to tug away.

"Scream away," he said. "The walls are soundproof." He jerked her toward the kitchen.

"No," she shouted.

She fought back the only way she could. She dropped to the ground, trying to use her bulk to hinder him.

With inhuman strength he hauled her along the floor inexorably toward the kitchen door.

"Let me go," she squealed like a stuck pig, her arm feeling like it was being wrenched out of its socket.

He paused in front of the door and released her. Groaning, she cradled her throbbing arm against her chest. He bent over her, and she felt one of his sticky hands wrap around the back of her neck.

"Get up," he said, tightening his hold.

Whimpering and shaking, she crawled on her knees. Grabbing hold of his trousers she tried to haul herself up, but the material wasn't strong enough. The cloth ripped apart. She would have fallen back, only the pressure of his hand on the nape of her neck kept her in a kneeling position.

He shook his head, tutted, and snaked his arm around her waist before easily lifting her to her feet. Keeping his hand on her neck, he propelled her forward. She pushed the door open and stumbled through into the kitchen.

Her breath caught in her throat. Standing by the kitchen sink was Artie.

At least she thought it was Artie. The glasses were his, the mop of curly hair, and she recognised the green dress shirt she'd given him last Christmas. But could this bag of bones standing in front of her really be Artie?

The Artie she knew was pudgy, with twinkling eyes, and a wry sense of humour. The version standing in front of her was emaciated, dirty torn clothes hanging off his frame, and his eyes, the mirror to his soul, reflected a barren, empty wasteland. A chain ran from the ceiling down to the dull grey metal collar clamped around his throat and his wrists were shackled to the grey steel sink.

As she watched, he listlessly pulled a dirty plate from the sink, sponged it clean and set it on a rack. The clanking of chains was like an endlessly repeating soundtrack.

"Artie?" she whispered, wrapping her arms around herself.

Artie stared vacantly ahead, not acknowledging her presence in any way.

"Teivel! Daemon!" Oki yelled.

Sandra stared around the kitchen. The metal table in the middle of the room was covered with gristle and smeared with blood. Slow cookers, deep fryers, ovens, and microwaves lined the bench along

one side. On another wall an enormous knife rack was mounted, and three machetes hung next to it. She let out a squeak as she noticed blood dripping from one of the machetes onto the white tiled floor.

A moment later two men, identical in appearance to Oki, entered the room from a side-door.

“This is the new dishwasher. You can throw the old one out,” he instructed them.

One of them took a key from his pocket and undid the chains at Artie’s wrists and the collar from around his throat. For a moment Artie stood swaying on his feet, and then he dropped to the floor, just a pile of bones and a few rags. One of the men threw Artie over his shoulder and left the room.

“Who are you?” Sandra whimpered as Oki pushed her toward the sink.

She felt Oki’s warm breath on her neck as he leant forward to whisper in her ear. “Surely you recognise us, even without the horns and cloven hooves. Then again, humans are fools. They have only one redeeming feature.” Out of the corner of her eye she saw Oki flick out his forked tongue, and flinched as it touched her.

Her mind grappled with what she’d seen, before deciding that this version of reality was unacceptable, and shut down. She numbly watched as Oki’s twin approached and assisted in attaching the manacles to her wrists. At the sound of the click of the metal collar being fastened around her throat, she snapped back to awareness. In desperation she yanked at the chains, and begged to be released.

Ignoring her, like she was part of the furniture, they walked across to the wall and selected a machete and a knife respectively.

The door swung open. The other man had returned, dragging a naked young woman behind him. Before the door swung shut Sandra caught a glimpse of naked men, women and children, penned up in the room behind them.

The young woman’s eyes were glazed, and she made no sound as he laid her on the table and attached chains to her wrists and ankles.

As blood splattered the walls, ceiling and floor, Sandra started sobbing and then vomiting as she watched the woman being cut into bite size pieces and placed into little red bowls.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Andrea van Lit resides in rural Tasmania, Australia, with her husband and demented mutt named Harley whose jaws are stronger than a crocodiles. Writing by day, and playing music by night, she spends her free time pottering in her vegetable patch and indulging in the odd square (okay, half a block) of chocolate.

**LIFE IS DIFFERENT
AMONG THE DEAD.**

When he is needed to bring in one of the most dangerous creatures for containment, Feast is faced with a decision that may make him the next power source.



Containment
by Eden Royce

Available on Amazon
and Smashwords

Hell hath no fury like a demon scorned...

THE LAST TRACE

a novella of
The Chosen

Death
is just
a kiss away. . .

ROH MORGON

AVAILABLE FROM AMAZON

The Worry Dolls *Hope Schultz*

“These don’t look like the ones Brenda described.” Martha frowned, lifting one of the three inch figures from the box. Brenda had described tiny, brightly colored thread dolls; these looked like they were made of twine. She checked the box, wondering just what link she had clicked on that night, but the return address was worn away.

A sheet of paper inside the box was labeled ‘worry dolls’, and she glanced at the instructions. She touched the first doll’s forehead to her own. “You’re for rent.” Her mind flew to her landlord, who had hinted broadly that he wouldn’t raise her rent if she slept with him. She set down the first, and picked up a second. “You’re for work.” Her job had actually been great until the new supervisor had started; now she just tried to make it through each day. “And you,” she told the third doll, “are for my love life.” Which was in the ‘worry’ column since Kevin turned out to be a two-timing douche.

“The rest of you,” she said firmly, holding all nine to her forehead, “go make the world a better place.”

Absurdly, it did make her feel better. She smiled as she set them down on her dresser and went to bed.

She overslept and left her apartment at a dead run. She hit the office at 8:59 AM breathing a sigh of relief. Irene would have bitched all day if she’d been a minute late. The witch was always early herself.

Except that, today, she wasn’t. Brenda was chatting with Kim, and rushed over to Martha as soon as she saw her.

“Oh my God, Martha—Irene’s been murdered!”

Kim nodded. “Brains hacked out through her nose. Some kind of a mass murderer. It’s all over the news.”

Martha blinked, wishing she had something in her stomach to cushion the image. She walked over to Kim’s computer screen, where the online news was going crazy with the reports. A drug lord, dead. A man who had kept three underage girls in his basement, dead, and the girls freed. A woman acquitted of murdering two foster children, found the same way. The reports went on and on.

“I think...I want to go home,” she said, suddenly queasy. “This is too much, and much too close to home.”

Her phone rang on the way home, Brenda calling with more news. “I thought you’d want to know...one of the people they found? It was Kevin.”

The nausea was closer to panic as she turned onto her street, and crystallized into terror as she saw the yellow police tape around her landlord’s home, next door to her apartment building. She ran up the stairs, fumbled with the keys, and finally made it inside.

She still hadn’t eaten anything, but she rushed through the kitchen into the bedroom, to the dresser where the twelve woven dolls still stood.

Every one of them was covered in blood.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Hope Erica Schultz lives in Central Massachusetts with her spouse, two children, one dog, four cats, and assorted visiting wildlife. She writes SF and fantasy stories and novels that can be considered comedy, adventure, or horror depending on where she chooses to end them. When not writing, reading, or pretending to be someone else, she still works for a living.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/hope.schultz.14>

Lady in Mourning *Marija Elektra Rodriguez*

Journal of Dr. Lorenzo Lombardi, M.D., Ph.D., Psy.D.

During the night of the first of July, Violetta Mendez went into the basement of her house, loaded a revolver, placed it in her mouth, and shot herself.

Her neighbors didn't discover her body for six weeks. One of them remarked that she might have rotted for longer, but the electricity to her home had been suspended and the smell of decomposition grew too severe to ignore.

The police discovered hundreds of bottles of wine scattered throughout her home. In her basement, along with her putrefied body, were three freezers, each filled with human remains. Dismembered body parts. The coroner couldn't determine the weapon used in the murders, only that the limbs had been torn from the torsos.

And I cannot help but feel responsible for her actions.

She came to see me the week before she died, arriving at my office at the same time she did every other Friday. The last person I'd see for the day. She insisted on coming a half hour after the previous patient's departure. Naturally, I objected at first, but she made it worth my time. She came from money, a privileged background, of that I have no doubt.

Although I'd known her for almost three years, I'd never actually seen her face. I often thought of her as the Lady in Mourning. Always wrapped in black, not an inch of flesh visible. Her previous psychiatrist had noted that the black attire was a manifestation of her perpetual grief. I agreed with this assessment, though I added my own: a post-traumatic recluse developing agoraphobia.

She wore a short-brimmed hat draped with a black lace veil always tilted to the left. It bled into her black dress so that none of her face—not even an eyelash—was visible. Her hands were hostages in black lace gloves. I wondered what her skin would feel like if I were to strip her of those gloves, let her flesh breathe.

That evening, the sun had clung to the sky far longer than usual. It must have been the solstice, for it's never that bright in these parts. Madeline, my secretary, had forgotten to close the curtains before she left for the day, and the sun bathed my patient in a gentle amber glow as she sat across from me.

Her small lace hands were intertwined, and a delicate elbow rested on the leather couch. She smelled of jasmine and something bitter, like sandalwood. Her covered face was angled away from me, toward the bottle of port near my window. The wine was an antique—for decoration, not for drinking—but it made me wonder if she had experienced some kind of substance abuse issue in her past. I noted the possibility of a resurfaced addiction in her file.

"Tell me, Violetta, how are you feeling today?" I began the session as I had always done, hoping to make some progress with her mental state. She'd been weaned off antipsychotics and free of institutions for many years now.

"I'm fine, Dr. Lombardi. Just fine." Her voice was soft, feminine, with a faint Catalonian accent. It cut through the layers of veiling lace and lingered on my ears. She never spoke of her formative years, but I suspected that she was the product of a British education. The way she conducted herself, the gentle intonation of her voice, it reminded me of the ladies at Oxford or Cambridge from my youth.

"Of course you are, Violetta." I tried not to sound condescending, but my voice has a tendency to be clinical. Or so my ex-wife tells me. "I want to try a more aggressive approach today. We've been skirting around the issue for enough time now."

Her shoulders stiffened under the black silk dress. Attending weekly counseling sessions had been one of the conditions of her release. I'd been gentle with her up until then, but her treatment had

stagnated and it was time for progress. We had been stuck in a holding pattern for years, a limbo of comfort and half-truths. Time to end the impasse, even if it meant being forceful. There's just something about a gentle female—the thin wrists and softly spoken words—that brings out the brute in me.

The veil shook, and a lace hand searched for a necklace on her bust. Her fingers twisted as though she were fondling a pearl, but there was nothing there.

"I'm not sure about this, Dr. Lombardi. I've been doing so well. Please don't alter our sessions." Her breath was elevated, giving her voice an urgent quality.

She shifted in her seat, and the light caught her veil in a way that I had never seen before. For an instant, her profile was illuminated: the outline of a Botticellian angel, with a delicate nose and sensuous mouth. But then she fidgeted, and her profile was steeped in darkness. She turned toward the port once again.

"I understand that you are anxious, Violetta. That is to be expected. But we are never going to cure you of the delusions if we don't try a more aggressive approach."

"Delusions?" She sounded wounded, as though I had betrayed her on an intimate level. "But I've been cured for some time now."

"Please, Violetta," I began, leaning forward in my chair, my eyes burning into the veil where I imagined her eyes to be. "There's a reason that I'm the best in my field and that you pay me so handsomely for my time. I've indulged you up until this point, and you are an exceptional, exceptional..."

Liar would have been the most accurate label (although utterly unprofessional).

"...patient. But I can see right through the façade. You've learned the art of imitation to perfection. Maintaining such a deception for so long will hurt you, and your mental faculties, in the long run. If we aren't able to make some progress—some real progress—I'm afraid that I'll have to recommend your return to the institution."

"You can't! You can't! You wouldn't dare!" She leapt from the couch, her voice shrill as I had never heard it before. "They are *not* delusions! Everything that happened was *real*! Everything that they did was *real*!"

There it was: the truth. The wound was open, now to let it bleed.

"The Bacchae?" I whispered, hoping my tone would placate her. She inhaled a sharp breath at the sound of the word. Again, she clutched at the invisible necklace, her fingers biting into the silk dress.

I'd never used the term before that day. This particular delusion had plagued her for more than a decade, and I'd gleaned the details from the transcripts of her time at St. Margot's asylum.

She turned her back to me and walked away from her seat, stopping at the bare window to stretch her lace-covered hand against the glass. I could only imagine what she saw through the prison of her veil. The window looked out onto the vibrant city, hedonistic and uninhibited in the evening twilight. Did she envision it dancing before her eyes, while she—trapped in her lace-covered coffin—was stagnant, wasting away, entombed by her tormentors?

"They aren't real, these Bacchae that you're fixated on. They're mythical—women who suckle serpents at their breasts and tear grown men limb from limb with their bare hands. Surely you understand it's only fiction?"

It sounded ludicrous when I said it, and I hoped that hearing it verbalized would have a similar impact on her.

She was silent for a long while, and when she spoke again, her words were soft, the outburst of the prior moment forgotten.

"I've seen them. With my own two eyes."

Her hand remained on the glass, and I could see her body slacken, as if she were unburdening

herself of an invisible weight. She let her fingers slide down the windowpane and come to rest at the bottle of port.

“Those beautiful, seductive women who make wine and honey flow from their fingers. They do exist. I felt the wine—their god—inside me. And it made me do horrible, horrible things.”

Her voice trembled and I could feel her words imbued with remorse. I knew the ‘horrible things’ she spoke of, and I made the critical mistake of resurrecting the violent episode.

“Violetta, you’ve assumed some guilt over what happened to Byron, despite being exonerated by the police. The weapon was never located, but they supposed—”

“There was no weapon,” she spat out. “It was the Bacchae who did it to Byron.”

I paused, softening my voice before I spoke again. “It is quite common to construct a fantasy to shield one’s mind from such events.” I studied her, but saw no reaction to my words. “The police initially assumed the presence of others, but they never found any physical evidence to substantiate the idea.” I leaned forward in my chair. “I have another theory,” I said, relieved that she wasn’t facing me, that she remained at the window.

“I don’t think there was anyone else there that night. But I think Byron did something to you. Perhaps there was an unwanted sexual encounter, or some kind of abuse. In a moment of self-preservation, your psyche splintered and you assaulted him to spare yourself any injury. The propensity for self-preservation is astounding, and—”

“Do you think, Dr. Lombardi,” she said, cutting me off again, her veil shaking and her voice now filled with acid, “that I would do *this*—”

She turned to face me and, in a single, fluid movement, ripped the veil from her face, sending the bottle of wine shattering against my marble floor. The shards spun from the force of her gesture. Port spread across my floor like coagulated blood.

“—to *myself*?”

A small shriek escaped my lips before I could contain it. The sound disgusted me—an unprofessional, reprehensible reaction to a patient.

Of course, I had wondered many times before that day what her face would look like. In truth, I had idealized her physical appearance in my mind. Her butterscotch voice had pervaded my subconscious and formed the image of a nymph under that veil.

But she was not a nymph, not an angel.

Half her face had been ripped away from the bone. Her scalp was uneven on the left half of her head, the side that the hat always tilted toward. The injury extended from her forehead to jaw. The skin was lumpy, thick and porous, as if it had been roughly reattached over the bone.

But most horrible of all was her eye—or rather, her eye socket.

Her left eyelid had been ripped away, leaving the remains of a skeletal cavity. It still terrifies me. When I wake at night, bathed in sweat with my heart pounding in my chest, it’s her disfigured eye that I see, searching my face, imploring me, begging me for empathy. For understanding.

“Now, Dr. Lombardi, do you believe?”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Marija grew up in a delicatessen, with a multiethnic family, where pickling cabbage and knife throwing were taught at an early age. She would scribble stories on butcher’s paper which would then be passed on to unsuspecting customers when they received their groceries.

She lives in Sydney with her husband (*el carnicero*), her daughter, and a bunch of pirate pets.

Website: www.marijaelektrarodriguez.com

When living is hell, is unliving the answer?

THIS FRESHEST HELL



NATASHA EWENDT

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

The Game *Julianne Snow*

Betty raised her arm, brightly coloured ball in hand and hurled it at the stack of cans on the pedestal.

She missed.

“Fuck!” All heads turned in her direction, but Betty didn’t care. She’d been trying to win a silly purple stuffed monkey since earlier in the day. Handing over another wad of cash, she collected her balls from the gap-toothed carney who ran the game.

“Look lady, if you want to keep wasting your money, I’ll keep taking it from you.”

Betty continued to toss the balls at the stack, each time missing the mark. Her exasperation began to show in the way she tossed her hair over her shoulder and the huffing breaths she took every time she missed.

“I’ve got a game you can’t lose at. Do you wanna try that one instead?” The voice was accompanied by a dingy white gloved hand on her shoulder.

Betty looked at the hand and then past it to the crudely painted face of the clown. He smiled, but it didn’t reach his red-rimmed eyes. “You do? Can I still win the purple monkey if I play it?”

“Sure you can win that, but you could win something even better.” The clown laughed, then said, “If you dare.”

Betty studied the face for a moment before turning back to the game she’d been playing. Lobbing all three of her remaining balls in quick succession, she missed each time. “Okay, where’s this game?”

The clown took her hand, tightening his grip as she resisted and led her down the midway to a brightly coloured tent in one of the farthest corners. Pulling back the flap, he led her into the dimly lit interior. Music began to play, a haunting melody that permeated her mind, making Betty feel slightly ill at ease.

“Where’s the game?” Betty looked around the space and couldn’t see anything remotely resembling a game of chance. The only things in the tent were a chair and a table covered with a dark blue piece of cloth.

“Would you care to sit down?” The clown extended a gloved hand in the direction of the chair. “All will be explained in time.”

Betty looked at the chair, then at the clown before sitting down. “Okay...”

“The game is simple, in fact you’ve probably played it with your friends,” the clown paused to take the cloth from the table, letting Betty see its contents. “So what will it be? Truth or Dare?”

The table held two piles of cards, one labelled *Truth*, the other *Dare*.

“I don’t understand.” Betty looked from the clown to the pile of cards, confusion evident on her face.

“It’s simple, you pick a card, I read it and your answer or action will determine your prize.” He rested his hands on the table, studying her.

“What’s the catch?”

“There is no catch, my dear. You simply choose a card and we play from there.” For a moment the clown’s exasperation flooded his words, but he quickly hid it away.

“Okay...” She considered the pile before saying, “Dare.”

The clown picked up the top card and carefully turned it over. He smiled before reading it aloud. “Oh this one’s easy. Call the Game Master the worst insult you can think of.”

“Who’s the Game Master?”

“Well I am. So what are you going to hurl at me? And remember, make it good! You’ve got a lot riding on this...”

“A lot riding on it? What do you mean?” Betty shot a confused look at the clown, beginning to wonder what she’d gotten herself into.

“Your purple monkey—don’t you remember?” The clown laughed, as if to reassure her. “So what’s your insult?”

Betty looked at the clown as different insults crossed her mind. She could comment on his appearance, but that seemed too easy. He was a clown and a rather sad excuse for one at that. There was his profession; certainly there was an insult in there somewhere. None of that seemed enough though. In the end she went with something she knew would bother her if someone pointed it out...

“You smell like shit. And I mean you really smell like shit. From your costume to your breath. Actually it’s like shit and death; you know that smell when you find an animal after it’s died? Only worse.”

The clown’s over-exaggerated eyes widened as he laughed, his whole body shaking with mirth. Still chuckling, he responded, “You don’t smell so great yourself, sweetheart. That perfume you’re wearing can’t hide all those years living on the wrong side of the tracks.”

Betty bristled for a moment, drawing her arms close around her in a hug. As her shoulders slumped, she wondered who else could smell it on her...

“That was an excellent round! You definitely took on the dare and won.” He pulled a purple stuffed monkey from beneath the table and sat it on the top between the piles of cards. “Do you want to go for something bigger?”

Betty looked at the toy on the table, all the while wondering if she should continue. Her greed won. “Abso-freaking-lutely! What do I do now? Do I pick another card?”

“No, it’s my turn now.” He said it with such glee it made Betty wonder if she’d made the right decision. She watched as he picked a card from the *Dare* pile and flipped it over. “Tie your opponent to the chair. Oh, that’s easy enough!”

It took him only a few moments to overpower Betty, tying her to the chair with a nylon rope pulled from underneath the table. While she struggled, there simply was no way for her to have stopped him. She screamed, begged for someone to help her but the music in the tent only got louder, muffling her distress.

“Well that was easy, wasn’t it?”

“Fuck off you stupid asshole! Let me go!” Betty tried in vain to get him to untie her, but the gravity of her situation soon overwhelmed her. With tears streaming down her face she stopped struggling and looked up at the clown who now held her captive.

“That’s better. Now what will it be? Truth or dare?”

“Truth.” Picking a *Dare* seemed too dangerous to chance.

After picking up the top card, he read, “How scared are you right now?”

She looked at him, mascara tears winding a path over her cheeks and whimpered, “Very.”

The clown smiled in reaction and said, “Excellent! I think I’ll pick another Dare...”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Julianne Snow is the author of the *Days with the Undead* series and the founder of *Zombieholics Anonymous*. She writes within the realms of speculative fiction, has roots that go deep into horror and is a member of the Horror Writers Association. She is the Publicist and a co-owner of *Sirens Call Publications*.

Twitter: [@CdnZmbiRytr](https://twitter.com/CdnZmbiRytr)

Blog: [Days with the Undead](http://DayswiththeUndead.com)

A Mermaid's Kiss *C L Raven*

The sea pounced on Romy's bare toes then withdrew, tempting her into its sandy bed. She chased it then ran backwards, the tide pursuing her. It retreated, stealing her footprints, like she was a ghost in her own life.

Misshapen rocks skulked in the shadows, their rough edges the claws and teeth of sleeping trolls, waiting for the curse to break so they could feast on human bones.

"What if the sea was a reflection of the world how it was, the past intact beneath the waves?"

"See?" Donovan said. "A moonlit walk on the beach isn't horrific."

"It's a romantic cliché. Next you'll scatter rose petals on my bed or surprise me with a candlelit dinner."

"What would remove the cliché, oh cynical one?"

"A ghost pirate ship forever seeking lost treasure," Romy drawled in a pirate's accent.

"I didn't bring one. Fancy a swim instead?"

Donovan peeled off his top, kicking off his jeans and boots. Romy dropped her boots then wriggled out of her black corset and fishtail skirt, cursing when the skirt wedged on her hips. She shimmied free, her skin red. Donovan scooped her up, waded into the sea and threw her in. She hit the bottom then jumped up, splashing him and destroying the sky's deadly reflection.

"I've swallowed half the sea. And possibly a starfish." Romy coughed, wiping her eyes.

Donovan kissed her as they sank beneath the waves. Romy rose for air, but he trapped her against him. She slapped his chest, shaking her head. *What is he doing?* He pushed her down, his nails puncturing her flesh. She tried prising his hands off her shoulders then kicked out, only feeling water. Her black and pink hair swirled, almost invisible in the unforgiving sea.

Her lungs screamed. She snatched a handful of sand and flung it. It sprinkled harmlessly into the water like discarded wedding confetti. She glimpsed the broken moon; a silent witness to her suffering. Her heart thundered, water gushing around her ears. Her throat, chest and eyes burned. She flailed, her feet scrabbling for grip. Disbelief, betrayal and fear engulfed her with each battering wave.

I'm going to die.

She clawed him, her fingers slipping off his wet skin. Her head throbbed to the tortured beat of her heart. Black rain fizzed in her vision; tiny fairies luring her into the perpetual dance. Her body floated; uniting with the sea as it invaded her body with its own.

Spectral faces with crimson eyes emerged from the sea's dark heart, their fangs glinting, their pale fingers reaching to drag her into the darkness.

Cold water lapped at Romy's body. She spat sand and sea then struggled to sit up. Her hair was matted with sand, seaweed and a small crab. She freed the crab, watching it scuttle across the beach.

"What the-"

A black fish tail with sporadic fuchsia scales was moulded to her hips. She poked it. The fins flapped. Webbing joined her fingers at the second knuckle.

"I'm either dreaming, or the victim of a prank."

"You're a victim of murder," a female voice called.

Sultry mermaids perched on nearby rocks. *I'm hallucinating. I'm probably still drowning.* She rose and face planted. The mermaids giggled. Glaring, she crawled into the sea, feeling like a seal. She tried using her arms to swim then flicked her tail. She crashed into the rocks.

"I'm dead?"

"You're a mermaid."

"I suppose unicorns exist too?"

"Not to my knowledge. I'm Taliah." Her midnight blue tail matched her hair. Her pale skin was almost translucent. Like all the mermaids, her irises were red.

"Romy. Aren't mermaids just myths and male fantasies?"

"Mermaids are the undead souls of women who've drowned. Either by their hand or someone else's."

"I die human and I'm reincarnated a zombie half-fish? What is this? Devolution?"

"Freedom."

Taliah beckoned then dived off the rock, the other mermaids imitating her.

"Do you rise for air like dolphins? Or do you have gills?" Romy felt behind her ears then under her breasts. No gills. This was beginning to feel like a Disney film. If crabs started singing, someone would sue for copyright infringement.

"The dead don't breathe," another mermaid said.

Romy dived, finding herself surrounded by coloured tails: emerald, gold, silver, red, rainbow patterned, each matching the mermaids' hair.

Donovan spiked my drink. Or I'm dead. And a mermaid.

The mermaids made swimming look easy. Romy felt as graceful as a skeleton marionette. They slithered through a gap in a rock, emerging in a cave. They flipped onto a rocky shelf then disappeared into a rock pool, writhing through a cavernous tunnel. Jagged edges sliced Romy's arms. *I hope there aren't sharks. Dead or not, I'm not being the main course.*

She stopped in a clearing. A palace made of bones dominated the sand.

"Is there a shortage of building materials down here? Wow, I can talk underwater."

"Whatever the sea claims is ours," Taliah said. "Gifts from nature."

"Nature's clearly a man in the gift department. I'm surprised it hasn't caught on on land."

Taliah took Romy's hand, leading her inside the palace. Skulls formed pillars, sea glass sealing their eye sockets. On a throne in the centre, was Romy.

"Shit!" She backed up. "If I'd known I'd die, I would've kept my clothes on."

"We couldn't find them or we would've dressed you. At least your lingerie matches. And you shaved."

"I'm glad I wasted fifty pounds on the Siren Collection for it to rot at the bottom of the sea. I wore it to make Donovan's heart race. Instead he made mine stop."

"Life's a bitch." Taliah smiled, revealing rows of needle fangs. "Now do you believe me?"

"How did you find me?"

"Kadie heard you thrashing. But it was too late."

Rage consumed Romy. "I'll kill him! Then resurrect him and kill him again."

"Wait until the Harvest. It's the only time we can rise above the waves, apart from collection day."

"Is that like rubbish day?"

"It's when we greet the lucky recipient of the Mermaid Lifetime Membership pack. Sorry, we're out of car stickers, but you do receive a dazzling tail and a tongue upgrade." Taliah's forked tongue flickered.

"What do you know about our fine species?"

"You have amazing singing voices, enormous breasts and sit on rocks, combing your hair. And you're not real."

Taliah cackled. "Hate to disappoint you, but my singing sounds like an angry cat and boobs don't magically grow after death. I don't sit around, combing my hair; I'm too busy drowning people."

"Do mermen exist?"

"If you're imagining gorgeous romantic leads, think again. They're ugly, though heroic. Mermaids

are beautiful, so it's easier to kill men. It's fifty-fifty whether we'll help someone or lure them to their doom. Depends what mood we're in."

Romy rubbed her forehead. "My brain's malfunctioning as it dies. Like when people see the tunnel or float above their bodies."

Taliah slapped Romy's tail with her own. "We're real."

Romy trailed Taliah into a bedroom. Rows of watches were fastened around bones in the wall, all stopped at different times. A lampshade made from earrings threaded on fishing line stood on a bone cabinet in the corner. Necklaces created a beaded curtain in a doorway. Fishing net formed a canopy over the bed, diamond earrings hanging from it like condemned men.

"Your room won't take long to decorate. Tourists always drop shiny stuff in the sea. And shipwrecks are like Santa's grotto."

Romy slumped onto the bed. "I can't believe Donovan killed me. I never saw it coming."

"That's the beauty and tragedy of death." Taliah hugged her. "If it's any consolation, he won't see Death's scythe coming either."

Romy lay on her bed, watching the chandelier sway. It was more fishing wire than jewels – the latest tourists protected their belongings, even when the mermaids capsized the tour boat. Taliah lounged in a bone chair, flicking a skull off her fins and catching it.

"I didn't realise being a mermaid could be...boring," Romy said.

"It's been a slow month. It livens up in summer. Alcohol and sun are a deadly combination. Many men are willing to die for a mermaid's kiss."

"Do they become mermen?"

"They become trophies."

Kadie, a blonde mermaid with a golden tail twirled in. "It's here."

"Summon the troops." Taliah catapulted the skull at Romy. "Ready for your first shipwreck? You could finish your chandelier, maybe rescue a handsome sailor. Or drown him."

The mermaids gathered outside the palace. Obeying Taliah's command, they surged through the sea, like a deadly rainbow that would reveal the pot of gold then chop off your hand when you touched it.

Romy lurked behind rocks with half the mermaids, while the others raced upward. The sea shifted, preparing to pounce. She slipped out from her hiding place and joined the mermaids surrounding a ship. They sang, luring the sailors to the ship's sides. The sky darkened, thunder rumbling as though Death's carriage rolled across the clouds. Large waves battered the ship, lightning flashing as if the sea gods photographed the horror. Desperate cries were snatched by the wind and sacrificed to the storm. Waves surged aboard, stalking the mesmerised crew, as though Davy Jones had risen from his locker to claim their lives. The ship lurched, the deck flirting with the water. The sea seized the ship like a kraken, hauling it into its lair.

Romy followed the ship, finding it nestled amongst rocks and coral, its hull an open wound. Kicking legs dangled near the choppy surface. Mermen caught falling bodies, carrying them to safety. With their green skin and pigs' ears, they mirrored something from nightmares, not fantasies. When survivors saw them, they struggled free and swam toward the mermaids. One man punched a merman and reached for Taliah. The merman chased him, earning a kick to the face. Taliah pulled the sailor close, her nails becoming claws. He closed his eyes, parting his lips. She sank her fangs into his neck and gouged out his throat. Blood cascaded around them like a crimson veil. She pushed him away, waving goodbye. A shark glided past, swallowing the corpse as it descended. The sailor's lower leg floated down, sand spiralling as it hit the floor, turning the golden grains scarlet.

The merman glowered and chased another survivor, who preferred to take his chances with a shark. Bubbles exploded from another man's mouth as he thrashed, Kadie's fangs locked around his neck. Her claws embedded in his shoulders, blood seeping out as his hands flopped down. She released him, his drifting body staring into his own death.

Romy shadowed Taliah and the rainbow mermaid, Indiana, as they dragged him to their palace by his legs. They laid him in a silver coffin then Taliah removed two knives from a small treasure chest. The mermaids flanked the coffin, picked up the man's hands and began to skin him.

"I'll make a hammock frame from his bones, put my fishing net to use," Taliah said.

"Why kill him?" Romy said.

"Last Harvest, his crew captured Kadie's sister. We found her body on the ocean floor. Her tail had been severed, as though they were trying to see if she had legs. We buried her in our graveyard."

Romy sashayed to the open window. Rocks juttied out from the ocean floor. Driftwood and broken metal from shipwrecks formed crude railings marking the graveyard's perimeter. Seaweed shrouded some gravestones, billowing like the hair of a drowning victim.

"Mermaids can die?" Romy asked.

"On land," Indiana answered. "The sea can't kill us twice."

"Sailors believe mermaids' tears have magical properties," Taliah said. "At Harvest they hunt us. We hunt them back."

"Are our tears magic?" Romy asked.

Taliah laughed. "The dead don't cry."

Romy turned back to the coffin. The man's skin was flayed off, exposing the gruesome secret lurking beneath a human's outer shell. His eyes were wide, his peeled lips wrenched back in a grimace.

"What happens with the skin?" Romy asked.

"Sympathetic fishermen make a living out of leather," Taliah replied. "We trade it for information."

"What kind?"

"You'll want to know when Donovan is near the water, right?" She stroked the large piece of skin cut from the man's thigh. "This pays for that."

"How will they know who he is?"

"Indiana's an amazing artist. She memorises whoever murders a future mermaid."

"You saw my murder?" Romy asked.

Indiana's haunted gaze fixed on Romy. "I see what happens, not when."

Taliah rose. "The Harvest begins when the blood moon rises. Then you'll have your revenge."

Scarlet ripples shimmered on the water, as though the moon had been slain and its blood stained the sea.

Kadie darted into the palace. "Donovan's with a woman by the water."

Nausea sloshed through Romy's stomach. "He's going to kill someone else?"

"Tonight, it won't be her sleeping in a watery grave."

The mermaids left the palace, their tails glistening. Romy's tail beat the waves, nerves tingling in her webbed fingers. She would see Donovan for the first time since she died. And he would be with another woman, not an undead fish hybrid.

The mermaids stopped by an overhanging rock. Kadie pointed upward. Romy saw nothing but darkness. She steadied herself on the rock, letting it guide her. Her head broke through the waves. She gasped at the sight of the fiery moon, the stars piercing night's satin skin. She merged with the shadows when voices caressed her ears.

"Donovan don't, I'll fall!"

"I'll save you." He laughed.

Anger ignited Romy's veins. He lived and loved while she dwelled beneath the sea as a mythical creature found in legends and Disney films. Kicking her tail, she boosted herself up.

"Donovan."

He turned, his face becoming the pallor of a corpse. "No. You're-

"Dead. Because of you. Except a woman who dies in the water never truly dies." She pushed away from the rock, flicking her tail out. He stared. She laughed and swam back, beckoning him. She pulled herself up, her tail fluttering against her sisters' bodies as they prowled beneath the surface. He warily knelt. "How many men can say they kissed a mermaid? One kiss, to last eternity." She stroked his face, her lips brushing his. "Your eternity in Hell."

She grabbed Donovan's collar and plunged beneath the waves, dragging him in. He struggled, his screams carried away by bubbles as the mermaids swarmed, tearing his flesh. Romy enjoyed the terror blazing in his eyes as her fangs ripped his throat. She let go, watching the mermaids tug Donovan's mutilated body to the palace. He reached for her, blood trails flowing from his fingers.

Indiana relinquished Donovan's watch. The second hand ticked once then stopped. "Your first kill. Display it with pride."

"Might make a trophy cabinet from his bones," Romy murmured.

"Furniture is a bonus. We kill for revenge and eternal youth. We feed on our murderers' souls. Through their deaths, we live forever."

ABOUT THE AUTHORS - C L Raven are identical twins from Cardiff, Wales, who have published 6 short story collections and a novel. When they're not looking after their animal army, they're exploring castles, ghost hunting in spooky locations and drinking more Red Bull than the recommended guidelines. Along with Ryan and Neen, they have a ghost hunting show on YouTube - Calamityville Horror though never see any ghosts.

Twitter: [@clraven](https://twitter.com/clraven)

Blog: <http://clraven.wordpress.com>

**A Vampire
Urban Fantasy Series**

...where scary can be funny



Exsanguinate

Book One
World of Blood
by **Killion Slade**

Available on Amazon

No One Blamed the Dog *Laura Ring*

It was the surprise hit of Christmas – the Magnetic Decision Maker, or MDM, discovered by the older boy in his Christmas stocking. It had a round tin base like the lid of a jar, with ‘decisions’ stenciled around the edge (Yes, No, Definitely, No Way, Maybe, Ask a Friend). An adjustable chrome arm stretched over the base, from which was suspended a heavy metal ball on a wire. The idea was to ask a question, and give the ball a push, which would set it circling madly, with wild jerks and corrections, before settling on one of the answers.

With his typical whimsy, the older boy declared that all decisions over the holidays were to be made exclusively by the Magnetic Decision Maker. Mother, Father, and younger brother laughed, and agreed.

Even with the most banal questions, the Magnetic Decision Maker seemed uncannily inclined to disappoint or thwart the questioner’s unspoken desire. Should I eat this Christmas cookie? *No*. Should I take an afternoon nap? *No way*. For inconsequential decisions, the MDM couldn’t be bothered. Should I go upstairs? *Maybe*. Should I read this book? *Ask a friend*.

At first, the family members used the MDM strictly for genuine decisions, where the element of ambivalence was at least implied. Should I clean out the closet? *Yes*. Should I invite so-and-so for dinner? *No*. But soon, the household members felt a strange compulsion to question the routine, and even unconscious decisions they made moment by moment. Should I go to sleep tonight? *No*. Should I go to the bathroom? *No*. Should I blink my eyes? *No way*. Even stranger was their compulsion to obey the MDM’s edicts, no matter how absurd, or unpleasant.

By the second day, the family members had grown increasingly distressed, not to mention physically uncomfortable. The questions asked – and decisions delivered – assumed a distinctly malevolent air. Should I hit my brother? *Yes*. Should I push Mother off her chair? *Definitely*.

Soon the family’s dependence on the MDM – and utter relinquishment of all will – was absolute.

Who knows what dark impulse led the older boy to ask if he should take his next breath – or, when told *No*, what compelled him to stop breathing. Father was desperate to call an ambulance. *No*. The younger boy, trained in first aid, wanted to start artificial respiration. *No way*. Mother wept to see her first born go limp and fall to the floor, his lips blue. “I could kill myself for buying that stupid toy,” she cried, simultaneously destroying the younger child’s faith in Santa, and setting the ball circling of its own accord.

Mother pulled a knife from the kitchen drawer. As she watched the ball make its stuttering circuit around the base, she thought fleetingly of the Son of Sam, who shot all those people because a dog told him to.

The ball shuddered to a stop.

Her final thought was how funny it was – that no one blamed the dog.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Laura Ring is a native Vermonter with vagabond tendencies, currently living and working in Chicago. She has been scaring herself silly since early childhood, helped along by her seven older siblings and some wonderfully twisted friends. She writes poetry, fiction and non-fiction.



The Seduction *Roh Morgon*

She spotted it from clear across the parking lot. Low, shiny, black. It beckoned her.

Come to me.

Captivated, she walked closer, admiring its sleek lines, its wedge-like shape. She stopped next to it, her breath indrawn. Her eyes traveled slowly along every curve and angle, finding no flaw.

I am yours, it whispered.

She walked around the back of the steel beast, admiring the wide flair of fender beneath the sloping rear window. The taillights formed graceful arcs, red bracketed in chrome, like two crimson eyes, and she nodded.

I am yours.

She worked her way along the other side, her eyes narrowing above her smile as she observed the tapered nose. When she moved to the front of the machine, she took a sharp breath and held it, trapped in the wicked gaze of the almond-shaped headlights. Her eyes drifted downward and widened at the sight of the clear-lensed foglights. Low on the bumper, they reminded her of a pair of curved daggers, the points angled inward and down.

No, she thought. *Fangs. They look like fangs.*

A chill ran through her.

Come. Be with me.

Startled, she backed away from his alluring demand.

No, she thought. *I can't afford a new car right now. Especially one like this.*

But she couldn't deny her attraction.

Come. Touch me.

She tore herself from its magnetic stare. Against her will, she stepped around to the door.

Her fingers curled all the way around the handle and she smiled as it nestled comfortably in her palm, and when it pulled out instead of up, her smile broadened. She'd always disliked handles that pulled up—they were so awkward when her arms were full.

The door swung open with little effort and the scent of fine leather drifted out, seducing her further.

Come. We were meant to be.

She lowered herself into the deep, contoured seat. Her pulse sped up as she settled into its rich embrace. It fit her body perfectly, as though it were made just for her. Chills ran through her again she snuggled against its firm hold, soft but strong.

Ah, my sweet. You see?

She reached up to stroke, then take hold of the leather-wrapped steering wheel. It fit just right, molded to support her hands in her favorite position. The sound system and Bluetooth phone buttons were strategically-placed around its rim, ensuring her hands would never need to leave their resting spot.

I am yours.

Her gaze drifted over controls and gauges situated to help keep human eyes on the road. It fastened on the leather gearshift knob begging to be touched. Oval-shaped and inset with a shiny chrome plate, it pressed against her small hand, smooth and firm. It fit perfectly.

She closed her eyes, caught up in the dream.

A tap on the window broke the spell and she jumped as a salesman leaned down and peered in at her.

Dangling from his hand was a key.

The door opened, and a few quick words later, he was sitting in the passenger seat and, in the ignition, was the same key.

Her hand shook as her fingers slipped around it.

Yes. Let me sing for you.

The black beast rumbled to life with a deep-throated growl, its 3.8-liter engine sounding much lower than she would've expected from a car of this type. Her blood answered his call, racing through her veins as her heart beat faster and faster. She smiled, then placed her trembling hand on the gearshift. With a final caress, she slipped it into gear.

The low-slung car surged forward, surprising her with its raw power. More respectful of its sensitivity, she eased out of the driveway and into the street.

This was unlike anything she'd ever experienced. The suspension was stiff but comfortable, without the bounce and sway of a sedan. The steering was tight, responding to nothing more than a squeeze of her hand.

Faster. Let us race the wind.

She turned onto the freeway. Her heart hammered in anticipation.

Flinging her inhibitions aside, she jammed the pedal to the floor and the monster roared.

They were doing 100 by the time they reached the end of the onramp.

Holy crap, she thought as she looked at the speedometer. The salesman beside her coughed and squirmed in his seat. She backed off.

Faster, my love, faster.

The freeway in front of her was empty, and with a glance in the review mirror to check for cops, she gave in to his demand, and went for it.

They screamed up the asphalt, the white dashed lines blurring alongside. Her heart pounded as wave after wave of adrenaline coursed through her. She ignored the babbling salesman. She was drunk on danger and speed.

110. 120. 130.

Yes! Yes! We are as one!

The ecstasy was beyond anything she'd ever imagined. But she felt a stab of pain at the loss of her innocence as she realized she was forever changed. Nothing would be able to match this.

As reality asserted itself, she relaxed her foot. They slowed to a 75-mile-per-hour crawl, then exited the freeway. She glanced at the white-faced salesman and bit back a grin.

Now, my love, let us dance.

Paying no attention to the protests beside her, she turned the car back onto the freeway.

She laughed at how easily they moved from lane to lane with nothing more than a tightening of her wrist. They were perfectly matched and their graceful waltz between the other cars was smooth, effortless. They were in and out and gone before the drivers even registered their presence.

You see? We were meant to be.

Too soon, they were back at the dealership. The salesman dripped sweat as he scrambled out.

Alone at last, my love. I am yours. Take me.

She closed her eyes, breathing in his scent, memorizing it. One hand cupped the gearshift knob as she ran her other lightly over the steering wheel one last time. She swallowed her regret and slipped outside.

NO! You cannot leave me. I am yours!

She stepped away, then with tears in her eyes, turned to gaze upon him once more. The way he crouched—low, stealthy, his lines promising speed and power, his perfectly-balanced stance athletic and confident, his intense almond-shaped stare, and his fangs, his fangs—etched into her mind, and she knew she'd never forget him.

With a deep sigh, she turned her back on him, and walked away.

NO! My love ...

The days crawled by. He haunted her every waking thought and stalked every dream. She fought his desire, her desire, as she stared at computer screen during the day and TV screen at night.

She found herself driving by the dealership, wondering how she'd gotten there. She could see him, waiting, like a black spider perched in his web.

My love, please...

She'd hit the gas in denial and speed up the street.

I can't do it, she thought.

But even as she fled, she felt relief that he hadn't turned his fierce attention to someone else.

Week after week, she fought his call.

I am yours.

She had a nice, sporty sedan that was almost paid off, and she was looking forward to freedom from car payments.

I am yours.

But slowly, she began to succumb to the idea. She rationalized it, focusing on research and math to justify even the possibility.

I am yours.

She met others, in red and yellow, silver and grey, with 2.0 Turbo and 3.8 six-cylinders, in stick and automatic.

I am yours.

Yet she always came back to him. None of them compared to the black devil who'd stolen her heart.

I am yours.

Her resistance crumbled near the end of the third week. After a long, anxiety-ridden night, she got into her sedan, her mind and body numb from lack of sleep.

And then she was standing in front of him.

I am yours, my love. Come, let us be as one again.

She felt disembodied as she watched herself fumble with paperwork and scrawl illegibly across document after document. A check and a handshake sealed the deal.

Reality settled in and a shudder wracked her body. This will be draining my account every month for the next seven years, she thought. What have I done?

She stepped outside and forgot all thoughts of contracts and payments when she looked at him. She walked around him, slowly, like she did the first time they met, and her heart felt as though it would burst.

Her fingers trailed along the handle and then she pulled it, opening the door. His rich leather scent filled her nostrils and she drank in his essence. Drawn into his embrace, she slipped into the deep contoured seat meant only for her and smiled. One hand found its place on the leather-bound steering wheel, and the other...the other inserted the key. *Her key.*

He roared in triumph and she grinned. As his web settled around her, she heard a low chuckle.

Now ... you are MINE.

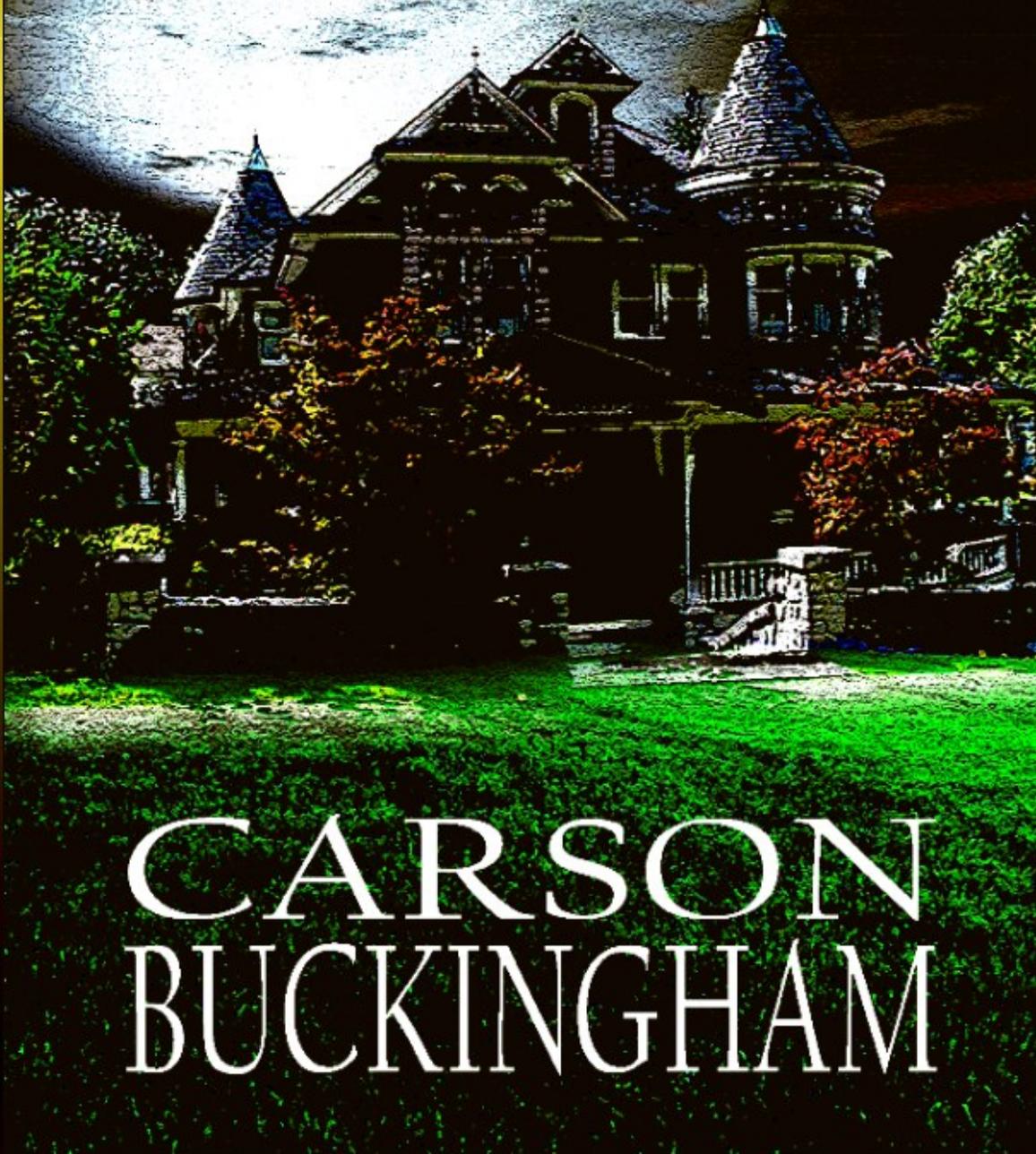
ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Roh Morgon dreams up her dark tales while driving the back roads of California's Sierra Nevada foothills. She's best known for her vampire series which includes *Watcher: Book I of The Chosen*, the 1840s historical horror novella *The Last Trace*, and "The Games Monsters Play" from *High Stakes: A Vampire Anthology*. Her next novel, *Runner: Book II of The Chosen*, will be released in 2014.

Twitter: [@rohorgon](https://twitter.com/rohorgon)

Website: <http://www.rohmorgon.com>

"Excuse me, did I hear you were looking for work?"
but with the job come a series of unusual conditions...

Gothic Revival



CARSON
BUCKINGHAM

Coming soon from Sirens Call Publications!

The Other Child *K.Z. Morano*

My name is Lila. Not that I expect anyone to recognize my name. I am after all, just the ‘other child’. But I do have a story to tell. And though it may not seem as magical as the candy-colored versions they tell about my brother and sister, it is nonetheless the truth.

I was ten when Hans and Greta came into our lives. They were no more than suckling infants, children of Mr. Higgs whose wife had died of childbirth. I pitied the woman; the babies’—if you could call them that—enormous heads must’ve ripped her apart. Her single reprieve was that she did not live long enough to see what they looked like.

Ugly creatures they were, with limbs gnarled like the branches of an ancient tree and pink eyes that poked out from their massive skulls. Shameful scandals of nature. To have brought them into this world was a sin in itself.

Still, there could be no greater love than that of a mother’s. And it was for my recently widowed mother’s love for me and my baby brother that she had agreed to nurse them. Money was money, after all. And I’d like to think that it was for Mama’s love for us that she had agreed to share Mr. Higgs’ bed as well.

Since they were always suckled first, the creatures grew stout and strong while my little brother grew thin and sickly on whatever that was left. I shall never forget that one afternoon when I came home from the forest with my palms full of berries. I saw Mama staring out the window, a twin’s mouth latched on each of her nipples. They wriggled in horrific delight as they greedily sucked the life from her. Their plump cheeks and snub-noses were smeared with crimson that dripped towards the floor in a rhythmic tap, tap, tap...

“Mama!” She started and looked down at her bloody breasts.

“Goodness,” she murmured absently. “They must’ve been very hungry.”

It baffled me how they were already able to grow a complete set of teeth—they were yellow and needle-like—while my brother still hadn’t any. But then they were always different. The boy’s reddish gaze followed me everywhere while the girl’s stare seemed frighteningly intelligent, as though she had an understanding of the hatred and fear that her presence stirred from within me and enjoyed it immensely.

Great was my relief when Mama declared that she’ll stop feeding them. But the news soon eclipsed my happiness. Mr. Higgs, now impoverished, was to live with us in our tiny cottage. It was hardly surprising. Famine was upon us and Mama was a woman with conscience. What did surprise us all was the sudden death of Mr. Higgs. He was found in the thickets—dismembered, disemboweled and drained of blood.

Mama was inconsolable. It didn’t help that we grew hungrier and poorer with each passing day. Left with nothing but a few crumbs of stale bread, I finally convinced Mama to get rid of the twins. Fewer mouths to feed, I said. And they were always insatiable. And so one night, we took them deep into the woods. The wind stabbed at flesh like icy knives and the barren trees reared like frozen giants. They didn’t cry. The twins simply sagged against the tree like a pair of hideous puppets, holding hands, framed against the background of silver mist.

Whatever Mama did, she did out of love for me and my brother. Not that it helped him much. My brother died anyway, consumed by a sickness. It was too late to save him; the monstrous twins had already stolen what they could from him. It wasn’t long before Mama’s guilt caught up her with her and slowly, she began to lose her grasp on reality...

For me, it was years of struggling with famine, years of caring for my ailing Mama... People were afraid to venture into the woods for fear of the strange beast that lurked there. Though it had never been caught or seen, it always left a trail of blood, bones and bowels.

So grave were my troubles that I was close to forgetting that the twins ever existed. But then they came back, as Mama said they would. We pay for the sins we commit, she said. One day, the tangle of bushes parted and out they came, five years older but no less repulsive. Mama begged me to let them stay. She said we could afford to feed them now and she wanted their forgiveness.

The twins never spoke a word. I suppose there had been no one in the woods to teach them. The fact that they had managed to survive on their own was disturbingly peculiar. Then I looked at them and thought: *How utterly silly; they're so tiny.*

Then one afternoon when I came home from the market, a delicious aroma wafted from the kitchen, insinuating its way into my nostrils.

"Surprise..." said a voice, soft and spidery. It was the first time that I heard Greta speak.

Something hissed and crackled in the oven.

"Where's Mama?" I asked.

And Hans spoke; his voice was deep and hoarse. "Yummy. Yummy." He rubbed his bloated belly and pointed into the rustling inferno. "Tummy. Tummy."

It was then that I saw the blood-stained pieces of Mama's clothing on the floor.

I think I went mad then.

I ran out of the cottage screaming and went as far away as I could, never to return again. News from the old village would still reach me as troubadours sang their versions of the tale, adding candy and gingerbread—distorting the story, syllable by syllable, until the truth lies buried beneath the fantastical lies.

Mama said we pay for the sins we commit. But I think we pay more dearly for the sins we fail to commit. I look at my infant step-daughter, her unfamiliar eyes dark and beady, and I place the pillow on her face.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - K.Z. Morano is a writer, a beach bum, and a chocolate addict. She writes anything from romance and erotica to horror and dark fantasy. Her stories have been published by JWK Fiction, Popcorn Horror, KUF and Blood Reign. Several of her stories will also be appearing in various forthcoming anthologies, magazine issues and online venues. She is currently working on her first short story collection.

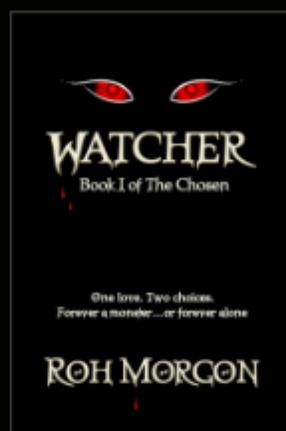
Twitter ID: [@kzmorano](https://twitter.com/kzmorano)

Blog: <http://theeclecticcentricshopaholic.wordpress.com>

Predator. Killer. Monster.

The words echo in Sunny Martin's head each time she looks in the mirror.

Would you kill for love?



WATCHER
Book I of
The Chosen
By Roh Morgon

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

*Death lurks around every corner, and each wary step
Henry takes draws him deeper into the mire...*

CARPE NECTEM



BOOK 1 OF THE
SONGBIRD
TRILOGY

KATE MONROE

Available on Amazon

The Threshold *E. F. Schraeder*

Darin's chair creaked as he leaned back to look behind the cubicle wall. He felt like the last person on campus. It was only ten. *Felt like midnight.*

Fluorescent lights hummed in the hallway, but they were too dim to see very far. He'd been pulling late nights running biochemistry tests on a sample the biology students picked up at the lake. The organism was unlike the other forms of algae they'd found. The standard analysis at the lab yielded no results. It behaved like a parasite, consuming the algae and changing form. It multiplied by an insane rate once it achieved a foothold. At least that's what the centrifugation process suggested.

Like an infection, a cancer. Darin squinted at the tube, shook it, and watched it swirl. Strange work, but spinning samples was easy cash.

Darin stood up and stretched. Darin looked down the dark hall. Shadows of the stair rail stretched long from the outdoor light glaring from the window. When the heating system clicked on he jerked, startled.

"Too much computer screen," he muttered to himself, pawing his eyes beneath his glasses. For a moment he seriously considered using the orange campus security phone even though he knew it existed for the students afraid to walk back to their cars at night. Girls, mostly. At least when he gave tours he told groups those phones were there for everyone, anyone. For any reason. *As if some nerd in a yellow vest would accomplish shit.*

"Safety in numbers." That's what Darin had said at least a hundred times to recruits. He chuckled thinking about it, how the phrase made parents smile.

Darin clanked open the heavy lab door and made sure the lock clicked into place. The motion automated lights flickered on. He flung his backpack across his left arm and kept his right arm free, just in case. "What the hell's with me?"

Something groaned in the walls. "Heating vents," Darin grumbled, quickened his pace. "Got to stop creeping myself out, man." He heard clunky footsteps that made him shiver.

Darin had been the last person signed in, and the other offices closed by 5 p.m. between terms. He felt like a target flared onto his back as he stepped into the elevator.

Everything was so clean before classes started again. Industrial gray carpets were scrubbed, walls painted a clean new white. Even the posters were cleared off the bulletin boards.

Darin waited for the elevator doors to open to the stark lower level of the parking garage. Cinderblock and cement. The smell of oil and grime never erased. *Here's where it happened, where it always happened. Crime stats don't lie.* Darin waited for the threshold to open up and let him out. His uneasy feeling persisted; he shifted on his feet.

When the elevator doors hissed open, he jumped at seeing one of the undergrads who found the weird sample across the courtyard.

"Wait!" Kate waved.

Something had her freaked, too. Her short brown hair flopped over her eyes as she ran. She bumped into a garbage can that teetered over as she ran. She jumped over the trash. Somebody fumbled behind her. Darin thought she was being chased, and yelled out just as the probable attacker ambled into another building.

"I heard you, Kate," Darin hollered back to her. Darin stepped out, holding the door.

Kate flopped across the doors, panting. Sweat trickled down her face. "The library . . . infested!"

Darin imagined crawling roaches and interrupted, "They spray between semesters, sends them out in droves." He remembered how freaked he was the first time he'd seen it.

"No. Roaches I can handle. The sample, I think it infected some of us. Jerry handled it directly, and a couple others from class. Oh God." Kate panted, still catching her breath.

"Jerry and I were working in the library. I asked him about a mark on his wrist. It was an oval

shaped red mark, all puffy. There was a small cut in the center that was oozing pus," Kate gulped. "It was gross. He said it swelled up after the field tests, figured it was a reaction to something in the water. After a couple hours at the library, it got worse, darkened and thick lines started traveling up his arm, down into his fingers. I told him he should get to an emergency room or something; it looked horrible." Kate looked down, tears streaming her face, "That's when he flipped out, started tearing through the library, knocking everything over, and—" she stopped.

Darin dropped his arms, and the elevator was long gone. He stared at Kate, open mouthed, waiting for her to make a joke of what she was telling him. It had to be a joke.

"Then he started biting people, fucking biting them! He ripped off the librarian's arm."

Darin squinted at her. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

"I'm serious. He tore her arm off and started gnawing on it like," she sobbed.

Darin didn't know what to say. Kate was just a kid, straight out of high school. If she was making this up, she should be a drama major.

"Okay. Let's assume you're right. Jerry is having some sort of reaction. How many people were exposed?" Darin felt queasy, thinking about how he'd spent the last two hours in the lab with it. "I mean, it can't impact everyone the same way, right? You were exposed and you're not going crazy, right?" Darin pressed, as much for his own sake as hers.

Kate nodded. Her eyes hazed with a sort of numb fatigue.

"So not everyone is going to turn into, into, um," he paused.

"A zombie" Kate said flatly. Her eyes narrowed.

"Right." Darin couldn't believe what he was thinking.

"Well, he had a cut. Maybe it needs an entry point. But there's more, worse," Kate said.

Darin looked at her, his expression blank.

"The librarian, after he chewed on her arm, she turned too. Then it started spreading fast, to everyone they attacked."

"He didn't kill her?"

"No, he changed her."

"Like a vector," Darin said. "Okay. We understand something about it, maybe the infection has a tipping point."

"Don't start some 'Let's use science' bullshit with me right now, Darin. I don't need a lab assistant right now. I need someone with a shovel or a gun. I need someone who can go back into the library and kill as many of those fucking things as possible." Kate's voice pitched up about an octave higher than normal. She was shrieking, hysterical.

"Okay, listen. Let's get everything we can that might stop them."

"You didn't see them. The library was teeming with them by the time I got out. It spreads too fast. The best chance we have is killing them or letting them kill each other."

"Let's call security," Darin said. He imagined the orange vested geeks with hot pepper spray and walkie talkies. "Or the cops, let's call the cops."

"I tried. They thought I was nuts, hung up on me," Kate punched the wall.

"Great. Look, back at the lab, we've got safety gear, equipment. Clothes, eye protection, gloves, so we don't get infected."

They fled the lab fully donned in white protective gear, toting a fire extinguisher each. They yanked three boards off the fence and tucked them into a backpack and Darin broke into the custodial supply room. He picked up a broom and broke the handle in half, handing one end to Kate.

Kate threw the stick against the wall. "We're not hunting vampires. We need to do better than pointy sticks. I need something to chop off a head," she snapped.

Darin cringed, leaned over to pick up the broom handle. "This could pin something down. I don't know. I don't know where to find a fucking chain saw right now, Kate. We're just gonna have to make do." He shoved the stick back into her hands and pointed to the base of her neck adding, "aim here, sever the nerves at the neck."

"Perfect!" she yelled, lifting up a nail gun. She pressed it to the board and a series of nails thudded into the board.

Darin found a drill and checked its charge. It revved nicely, and he tucked it into his back belt loop.

Darin and Kate pushed open the glass door to the lower entrance of the library. Emergency lights blinked and the fire alarm blared over the muted sound of screams.

Darin had never faced anything stronger than an angry student complaining about grades. He bit the inside of his cheek.

At the end of the hall wet chunks of a dismembered body sat in a wide pool of blood. As they approached, Darin noticed small bits of the body still twitching, threatening to come to life, but they didn't have enough mass, enough leverage to go anywhere. Bits of fingers clenched and extended, unable to move in any sensible direction. He felt like puking, and his stomach muscles started to spasm uncontrollably. He only hoped they wouldn't encounter whoever left the mess as they trod through the slop of flesh.

"Come on," Kate said flatly, already disassociated. She blankly stepped over a heap of quivering limbs, her footsteps sloshing through the mess of wasted bodies.

"Thank God we have masks on, I can't imagine the smell," Darin mumbled, choking back the bile in his throat.

Kate plodded ahead of him, moving alongside the wall until she reached the end of the hall. She tipped a flashlight just over the edge of her waist, reluctant to extend her arm around the corner.

"Look out!" Darin yelled as a grayish hand swiped at the light.

"Shit!" she withdrew.

Darin met it, eye to oozing eye, at the corner. He yelped in disgust as its hot, moist breath steamed the plexiglass protecting his eyes from exposure. Darin tried to take a step in retreat, as it flailed to grasp him. As she shone the light at it, it hissed, exposing a mouth full of rot, cracked teeth and a paste of bloody slime drizzled from the corner of its lips.

The bile Darin had been pushing down bubbled up in his mouth again and finally spurted out, stopped by the face shield he wore. Its pungent, sour odor filled his nostrils. He pushed his hand inside the mask and wiped the mess away as best he could.

As it moved jaggedly toward Darin, stumbling over what looked like a leg, Kate moved behind it quietly. She pulled back her arm and drew the broom handle out from her backpack and aimed for the base of the thing's neck. In a single thrust she plunged it into the crevice between head and spine. She heard the fragile vertebrae crunch as she forced the stake deeper, a splatter of blood marring her white chemical suit.

"Fuck!" she screamed, withdrawing the stake only long enough to reposition it above the thing's collarbone, pinning it to a crumbling patch of drywall. Its eyes twitched and lips convulsed as it choked out a guttural moan.

Darin and Kate stood, panting, as they looked around the hall.

"I don't know if this was the best idea," Darin said, looking up the dimly lit hall. "I mean, shouldn't we just get out of here?"

A grimy hand clobbered him from behind, and he felt fingernails scraping at his back. He pulled up the fire extinguisher, foam shot with dizzying force and the second creature collapsed, covered in the white spray. Darin pounded its head with the extinguisher until it sank like a rotten melon, caving into

mush. Chunks of skull matted with bloody hair clung to the extinguisher and dripped at Darin's feet.

"We shouldn't have come back," Kate said coldly, staring at the thing heaped on the floor. "Can we backtrack?" she said, glancing behind them.

"We can try. It's that or up to the next level and out the garage exit." Darin felt suddenly grateful for the summers he'd spent giving campus tours. He knew the place very well, which seemed genuinely useful for once.

Behind them, the emergency lights had blinked out, and groaning noises filled the corridor. They shook their heads, realizing they couldn't go back.

Darin lugged the empty extinguisher, still coated with a sludge of blood. It was heavy enough to do serious damage, even if it had to be done up close.

They ventured slowly up a single flight of cinder block stairs, Darin holding the flashlight behind Kate. They paused at the door. Darin carefully clicked the handle and nudged the door open, allowing a sliver of light to filter into the cramped stairwell.

"Looks clear," Darin said, one hand propping open the door. "We can make a clean shot to the back," he nudged his head to the exit.

Kate tugged Darin back from the door. "Darin, if this gets off campus, there's no stopping it," Kate's voice was low.

He shrugged. "We have to make it out first."

They stepped into the library amidst scattered books and tipped over computer tables. A dripping sound caused them to glance toward the long arched windows where an assortment of savaged bodies lay strewn and stacked across a table.

They ran toward the exit, but three of the things closed in around them. Darin hurled the extinguisher, hoping to buy time. It clanked to the ground and toppled one of them.

Darin jumped over it and sank the drill into another one's hand, pumping the motor until the screw fastened the creature to the side of a bookshelf.

It howled and Darin moved quickly to its other hand, inserting another screw into the bit like he was reloading a machine gun. He stuck it through the wrist, a spray of blood erupting as he wrestled the thing's arm against the wall.

Kate riveted the fallen zombie to the carpet with a series of rigid shots from the nail gun and looked around. There were too many of them. She looked at the exit. It may as well have been ten miles. She glanced at Darin and saw him wrenching his hand away from the thing stuck to the bookshelf. His hand met a slippery ooze of blood as he tried to push its wrist flat with one hand.

Darin's screaming echoed, and she saw his hand covered in blood as he removed the grinding drill. The thing was stuck, but almost smiling, its wide gaping mouth twisting.

"Hand slipped," Darin yelled, head drooped. Blood flowed from the gash across the meat of his thumb, his elbow-length glove shredded. He motioned for her to get out with his uninjured hand and removed his faceplate.

Kate couldn't risk helping him. She nailed the fence board across the door, creating a block. She stared at Darin, his arm flailing.

Darin's screamed above the fire alarm, "Run," as he raised the drill to the base of his neck.

**A version of this story originally appeared in 2012 at Tales of the Zombie War*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - E.F. Schraeder's creative work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Darkness Internal*, *The Kennedy Curse*, *Dark Gothic Magazine Resurrected*, *Zombie Jesus and Other True Stories*, *Carnival of the Damned*, *Corvus Magazine*, and elsewhere. Her poetry chapbook *The Hunger Tree* was released in 2013. She struggles with three dimensional tasks, plays the banjo, and is considerably interested in manifesting telekinetic abilities.



I Am Darkness *L.A. More*

I am darkness. I am the black swirling through the room. I am everywhere. I am nowhere. A haunting piano melody glides through my mind. Keys twinkling off tune. A gray sky opens above me, and chains hold me to the ground—mottled earth, decay. Bodies surround me, dead eyes upon dead eyes upon dead eyes staring at me. Mouths are pried open, and massive crows slither out, eating their way through pale lips. They cover me, embalm me. They screech.

They're all dead because of you.

You killed them.

Murderer.

You should kill yourself too.

Vomit rushes out of me, turns to puke-stained butterflies. Swarm. Swarm. Wings in my face.

You did it. You did it.

And now the mouths. The lips that once held life. Dried blood. Broken, rotting teeth.

Don't you remember?

Pickax. Blood. Barbed wire. Tendons, veins, ligaments, bone. Savagery. Laughter. I cackle with them, with the bodies. It's all a grand game.

We love, we fuck, we kill.

The Birds.

Join us.

The bodies.

Join us.

And then I am in a hallway holding a knife. I walk into a room. There is a little girl staring at me. She isn't afraid. Black sludge gushes from her mouth. She grins.

I dare you to do it.

Then gutting, screaming, tin taste on my tongue.

You're the reason.

Stop it.

They're dead because of you.

No! Fuck off!

Join us. Join us. Join us. Join us.

River made of sinew. Trees made of hands and flapping in the wind. Skies raining blood and tongues and teeth.

Big bird. He looks at me, his eyes wide and yellow, his feet clutching an old, crumbling rock.

Did you really believe you were good?

I didn't kill them.

Of course you did. Who else could commit such crimes?

A monster. Not me.

But can't you see? YOU are the monster. Look at your hands.

River water flowing. Hands stained red. Agony. Horror.

Women tied up in the basement, pleading through gagged mouths. Cutting them bit by bit by bit, fingers, then toes, then sliver by sliver of mottled gray skin.

STOP IT.

Face yourself.

Hands wrapped around the bird's neck, squeezing. His laughter; a crow's cawing.

Caw caw caw caw caw caw.

Yellow eyes blue. Beak nose. Red lips. Snow in winter. Splash of crimson.

Let go. Smack of skull against ice. Tiny stream of red.

Those eyes. Staring. Lifeless, yet accusing.

You did it. You did it.

I didn't mean to do it!

Face yourself. Admit what you are.

Monster. Fucking monster.

Swimming in the river. Faces blaming me. Screaming for answers. Pleading me to stop. Daring me to do it.

You should join us.

The river. I need to go with the river.

Holding breath. Deeper into the black. Black as my soul. The deeper, the less bodies. Deeper, far away from the birds.

Chest exploding. Can't hold my breath. Inhale. Water. Pain.

Take it all away.

I did it. I killed them all.

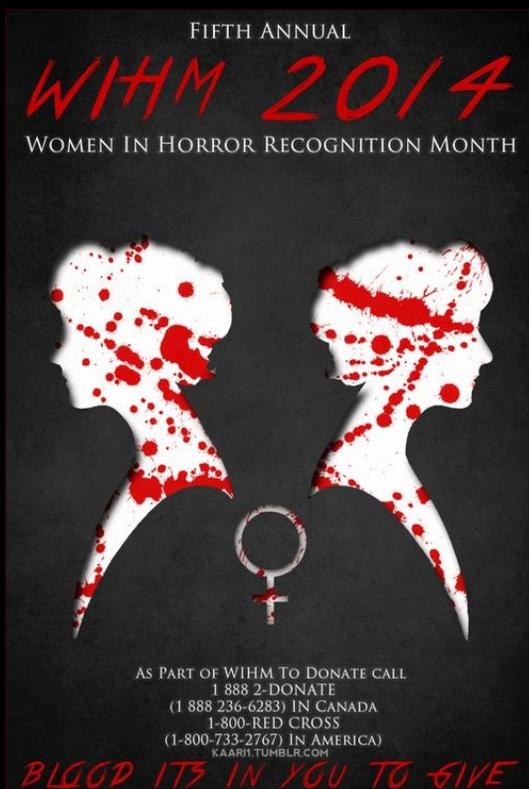
Darkness. A door swings open.

Where is the Nightmare Room?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - L.A. More has been a horror enthusiast since before she can remember. She is a writer, a dreamer of the macabre, and prefers movies alone in the dark. When she isn't researching terrifying things, she is an editor and artist.

Twitter: [@akabins](https://twitter.com/akabins)

Author's page: www.burningtree.ca



To Donate as Part of WiHM call:
1-888-2DONATE In Canada
(1-888-236-6283)
1-800-REDCROSS In the U.S.
(1-800-7433-2767)

More information at:
www.WomeninHorrorMonth.com
Also [@WiHMonth](https://twitter.com/WiHMonth)

Frankie's Day *E. A. Irwin*

Today the sun shone brightly for Frankie Vaughnstein. Positive each ray slanting through the canopy of trees lining his street spoke with the clarity only the sun's revelation could provide, he knew with certainty this secret was for him alone. Yes, it would be a wonderful day for another great adventure filled with magic and fascination. That was one of the sunlight's promises to him.

Frankie wandered the deserted streets of his neighborhood, entranced with the dappled shade on the sidewalks while envisioning stories about each solid piece of shadow being an island he'd conquered during his endless travels. Then the brilliant daylight would peek through to flare on the pavement. Make it waver and sparkle as if the vast oceans between them came alive, luring him beyond those sandy shores. Visions of pirates pillaging for hidden gold and sunken treasures lingered in his mind as he picked up a fallen branch and fought another invisible foe until that new enemy lay dead at his feet.

"Hey, Frankie!"

Frankie dropped the branch sure he'd been caught by a new intruder on his beach. Shading his eyes, he scanned the street for the owner of the disembodied voice. His face lit up when he saw Dr. Porter waving from his porch, and began sauntering up the long drive then plopped on the top step.

"Hi, Dr. Porter, isn't it a great day?"

Dr. Porter searched Frankie's naive face out of habit, and then smiled. "Sure is, Frankie. I believe this is one of the finest we've had in a long time."

"I think the sun is shining just for me today, don't you? I'm getting all kinds of ideas about what to do and where to go."

A shadow of concern crossed Dr. Porter's face. "You are huh, like what?"

Frankie scraped his feet against the wooden step, unsure if he should share his new ideas. "Just stuff, you know, like walking to town and maybe visiting the park for a while." He looked toward the street and watched a few cars creep through the neighborhood, wondering what it would be like to own one. Perhaps one day.

"Frankie?"

His thoughts slowly drifted back to the porch. "Yeah?"

Dr. Porter tapped his cane on the wood and pointed. "What do you have there?"

Frankie beamed with pride when he held up his new find. "I got it at the antique store. Miss Janice told me it was a collector's item—an honest to God, genuine Superman lunchbox. Miss Janice made it nice and shiny so I could take my lunch whenever I go special places. I'm going to eat in the park later after I go to town."

Dr. Porter thought of Janice and her small consignment shop, smiling at the idea of her saving a lunchbox for Frankie. "Well, you certainly picked a wonderful day for a picnic and outing. I shouldn't keep you from your fun."

"Okay." Frankie rose from the step and was halfway down the walk when Dr. Porter called him back.

"I haven't seen your mom for a while, how is she doing?"

Frankie shuffled his feet as he spoke, his concentration on the sunny day making him anxious to leave the porch. "She's okay, kinda tired," he puffed out his chest and smiled genuinely at the doctor, "but I'm taking good care of her."

"That's good to know. I don't mind coming over to check on her if she needs me."

"No, she's fine, just tired. I'll tell her you asked about her. See you later." Frankie sprinted down the walkway, waving goodbye as he resumed his stroll through the last few streets approaching town. He squinted into the sun and smiled. Yeah, today was a perfect day.

Frankie stared at his reflection while looking into a storefront window. When he moved the plaid of

his shirt seemed to undulate, altering his pleasant thoughts. He hated plaid shirts. Every time he donned one, the patterns made him sick—and angry. Why did his mother insist on buying them? He had an entire closet filled with a solid row of plaid yet she continually bought more. He wasn't a baby, why did she insist on buying his clothes? He looked like a geek in this shirt. As Frankie continued to stare at his reflection the shininess of his happy day slowly tarnished.

Suddenly, Frankie remembered the one item his mother hadn't bought, and it lay below the plaid's surface in the form of a Spiderman t-shirt. He ran his hands lovingly along the place on his chest where he knew the character claimed his body like second skin. Looking up to the sun, he felt its penetrating rays release a new thought. *This is your day, Frankie. Make the most of it.*

A tinkling brass bell sounded over the door as he stepped through the portal into another world. Entering caused a momentary blindness as he progressed into the soft, cool shade of Miss Janice's shop.

A voice sounded from within the aisles. "May I help you?"

Frankie turned down the aisle expecting to see Janice, instead finding her assistant. "Miss Rose, where's Miss Janice?"

Rose finished dusting the remaining books before acknowledging him. "Janice wasn't feeling well so she didn't come in today. Is there something I can help you find?"

He didn't like the feeling of not seeing Janice after walking all the way to town. Especially today after the sun assured him it would be a good day. "She promised she'd be here today. I was supposed to meet her. We made plans."

"I'm sorry Frankie, but she's sick. Why don't you come back in a few days and perhaps she'll be well and the two of you can continue with your plans."

The sun's rays no longer made it inside the shop, leaving Frankie confused and angry.

"Frankie?"

"Huh?"

"Is there something I can help you find? Did Janice leave something for you to pick up?"

Frankie touched his chest hoping to gain strength from Spiderman. He heard a message entering his head making his thoughts clearer. *Just be cool, Frankie, don't cause any problems. You can always visit Janice later.* He let his hand slowly drop from his chest. "Um...all right...I'll come back in a few days when she's better."

Rose smiled as she walked to the counter to look for a pen and piece of paper. "That's great. I'll leave Janice a note to let her know you were in to keep your date and she missed you. It's a beautiful day to do more exploring. I know how you love to seek new adventures on these bright days. Now you take care, Frankie, and find something fun to do."

"Yeah. Right. Okay bye, Miss Rose." He left his usually comfortable world and stepped into the hot glare of the sun, the blinding rays trapping his thoughts, branding them with fire.

Frankie arrived home as the beginning of dusk began dusting the earth with shadows. Entering the sanctuary of his house made him feel secure after his many adventures and the long day away from home.

He walked through the house with the deliberate steps his mother had taught him. Not the silent tread of one who stalked, or that's what his mother had said when he walked through the house with no sound and had frightened her. Frankie continued through the house until he found his mother and stood over her bed, watching her peaceful face as she slept. Luckily he hadn't awakened her when he called her name or she'd have been mad and told him how stupid he was for not being aware she needed her beauty sleep.

Sitting in the chair next to his mother's bed, Frankie pulled the lunchbox onto his lap. Just staring at the Superman figure made him feel as special as the day Miss Janice had given it to him. He lovingly caressed and stroked the cool metal before unlatching the lid to examine the inside for remaining food.

Frankie had been extra hungry after his excursion to town, yet saved a portion of his lunch to eat while visiting with his mother. Lifting out a half-empty bag of cheese puffs, he ate the remaining treat, his hands becoming sticky as he devoured the cheesy snack. Orange clumps clung defiantly to his dirty hands, each coated finger reminding him of the puffs he crunched.

Wiping his fingers on his shirt, Frankie soon realized his mother would hate cleaning the orange stains left behind. He stared at his fingers that now resembled rusted stubs, unable to understand what would make them that color, then looked inside his lunchbox and smiled as he remembered. Pulling the object out, Frankie proudly held it for his mother's observation and delight.

"Mom, I thought about you all day and got you this surprise. Isn't it great?"

He retrieved his mother's sewing kit from beneath the bed and threaded her large upholstery needle with the glistening gold thread she saved for special projects. With all his necessary tools assembled, he began the arduous task of replacing his mother's dead heart with the new one taken from his lunchbox.

He worked diligently, sewing the heart into the dried chest cavity of his mother in an effort of reanimation from her final repose. He grinned as he studied his expert workmanship. This heart would do the trick, not like the other animal parts he'd used to alter her appearance after he'd killed her.

"Mom, how do you like the new heart? I got it from Miss Janice, who is one of the nicest people I know. Everyone always said she had the biggest and kindest heart so I picked it just for you. I hope this finally makes you happy."

Frankie turned and squinted at his reflection in the bedroom mirror—a thirty-year-old man stared back. His mother had always called him special, and then she'd shut him away for days when he spoke of his inner thoughts and what he could do if she only believed in him. Smiling broadly, Frankie realized he'd never hear any of her negative comments again.

Walking along her bedside, he ran his hands over the soft blue blanket that matched the cloudless day outside. "You know if tomorrow is as great as today was maybe I'll find you some new eyes so you can see how pretty you are. Then you'll be able to see how grown up I've become and that I really am a man now. Mom, this has been my best day ever."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - E. A. Irwin resides in California and crosses genre boundaries to keep life interesting as a dark fiction bender. Author of the short story series, *Myth to Life: The Rise of Riley McCabe*, she's currently writing the series' first full-length novel along with the Shamrock series. Her work appears in various anthologies, along with print and online magazines infiltrating the world wide web.

Twitter: [@ea_irwin](https://twitter.com/ea_irwin)

Website: www.eairwin.webs.com



Sirens Call Publications
PURVEYORS OF DARK & EDGY FICTION

LIFE IS DIFFERENT AMONG THE DEAD.



Available on Amazon and Smashwords

My Heart's Desire *Mari Wells*

My phone's screen lights the dark bedroom. As I lay in bed flipping through photos taken at today's school dance my heart stops as Cole's face appears. I'd snapped the picture while he could pay attention to me, before Kayla got back. As soon as Kayla's around, he doesn't notice anyone else.

Why couldn't he see me the way he sees her? My stomach twists, acid rises up my chest and burns my throat. A love spell would change my luck. He'd forget about her and be crazy about me. We're already best friends. He just needs a little push in the right direction.

Staring at his picture, my fingertips tingle. I want so much to touch him. Feel his skin, hold his hand. It'll be soon.

I glance at the alarm clock on my bedside table. Ten minutes to midnight. The spell online said I had to do this at midnight. Moving as slow as I can, to the right, slower still as my mattress squeaks I get out of bed. My bare toes curl when they touch the hardwood floor. A chill runs up my legs and settles at the base of my spine.

Get back in bed, you can't force his will. Some sites said I shouldn't mess with his free will. I'm not, I'm just nudging him in my direction. I tip toe across the room and press the left side of my head against the wall. Dad's snoring echoes through our joining wall.

The chalk and tiny candles I got after school are buried somewhere in my purse. Digging to the bottom, my fingers curl around the thick cylinder I hid it all in. I glance at the clock's display. Five minutes.

Bending down I pick up the corner of my rug and pile it at the side of my bed. I pick my phone up and press it on. Cole's smile greets me, I can't stop the muscles in my face from smiling. Just like I can't stop my heart from skipping a beat. I'll need to see his picture to make this work. The phone safe in my left hand, I pop open the cylinder with my thumb. I look over my shoulder at the time again.

Two minutes left. I bend at the waist and start dragging the chalk across the wood floor. First a circle, then a five pointed star inside. At the four star arms I place a candle, I bend at each one and light them. I turn a full 360 to make sure it looks like the diagram online. Perfect! This is proof that Cole will love me tomorrow.

My screen is black again. I press the phone. The time flashes one minute left. My heart rate speeds. It throbs in my ears. Both hands press and slide at the screen until I gasp. My cheeks warm.

Cole.

The site said I needed to repeat my desire while looking at his picture. "I love you Cole, love me too. Love me Cole. Love me Cole." The skin at the back of my neck prickles. "Love me. Love me."

A chill moves down my spine. I want to turn around. "Love me, love me Cole." The floor boards by my door creak. *Oh no, mom woke up.* I look over my shoulder at the empty doorway.

A cold breeze crosses over my shoulders. The clock reads two minutes past midnight. Not enough time, I begin repeating my simple chant. The curtains at my window flutter as cold air pushes in. I know that window was locked before I crawled into bed.

Frigid gusts of wind assault me blowing the flames until they go out. Shadows cast by my phone's screen race into the dark. I tap the screen again bring the image and light back into the room.

My hands tremble as I begin to whisper. Deep in my gut I know someone's watching me. I expect Mom or Dad to barge into my room at any second. My mouth fills with acid, my stomach constricts. Dinner was more than six hours ago. Dizziness washes over me.

A foul stench fills my room. It smells like the bathroom does after dad's been in there after a Brussels sprout dinner. My empty belly twists, dry heaves knock me to my knees.

My heart beat races making me dizzy. The room is cold, keeping the wretched smell frozen in the air. Behind me the floor creaks. Someone shifts their weight from one side to the other.

Standing back up I tap the phone's screen, it remains dark. There's no glow from the clock's display. My room is in total darkness. With my heart throbbing in my throat, my pulse pounding in my head I turn around. I can't see anyone, but I know someone's watching me.

"I'm not afraid." I say. Imagining Cole in front of me I start the spell again. "My heart's desire is for Cole to love me." Ice prickles at my throat. Painful punctures pierce my neck, four on the left, one on the right. I begin to move into the air. The tips of my toes struggle to touch the floor.

The scent of rotting flesh blows into my face. I still can't see anything.

"You will do as I say."

The rotten breath gets stronger. My mouth opens to refuse, to explain my desire. The grip on my neck tightens. The back of my jaws water, filling my mouth with the tangy taste of metal. I can't feel anything at my neck anymore, I'm still floating in the air.

"You will provide for my children."

The voice is high pitched and feminine.

"I promise you will have his heart."

Thousands of small tingles tickle at my neck, squirm down my chest. My stomach twists, and somersaults. The waistband around my belly snaps, and I feel like I've binged on pizza.

Long black tendrils emerge from a fractured skull. Mesmerized I watch them sway above her head, waiting for one to strike me.

"My children must be cared for." She says bringing my attention to her face.

Light glows from her empty eye sockets, no not light, mirrors. My reflection shows a large gaping hole in my neck. Jagged skin surrounds the wound.

My growing belly growls. Her jaws open, a cackle vibrates through her arm into my body. Scents and sounds fill my senses.

"I've given you the requirements in order to care for them properly."

The tips of my toes, the balls of my feet touch the ground. Now fully standing on the floor. The rotting, sulfur stench fades. Candle flames relight, warmth fills my room. The alarm clock reads three minutes past midnight.

My belly knots, nausea rises through my chest. Hunger.

Leaving my room, I enter my parents' room. My stomach contracts, my mouth opens. I'm going to be sick. Bending, my shoulders heave. Tiny little animals bounce on the floor. Goat legs and hooves on small muscled human torsos. They can't stand more than six inches.

Hundreds emerge with each bout of nausea. They run across the floor, their hooves tapping against the wood, sounding like a stampede. *The pitter patter of tiny feet.* They climb up the bed. My eyes close tightly.

Blood, its rusty smell, fills my nostrils. Tears sting my eyes. Thousands of tiny goatmen tear into my parents like piranha. Within seconds blood stained sheets and bones are all that's left in the bed. They jump from the bed and walk toward me.

Climbing up my pants and shirt they tickle my neck as they begin filling my stomach again. Dazed, tears welling in my eyes, I walk.

Instincts, their's not mine, move me. When the tears dry, and I can see four of the goatmen present me with a red slimy mass.

"Your heart's desire." One of the tiniest says.

I look around, we're in Cole's room. Blood drips from the soaked sheets. Each of the thousands of tiny men wait, staring at me.

"Take it!" The fattest one shouts.

All the others bounce on the bed, excitement burning in their small beady eyes. I take the mass, cradling it in my hands.

“Mother always finds the foolish ones, that don’t understand what they’re doing or calling, to feed us.” I hear one whisper.

The pirahnas begin their slaughter again as I look at the thing resting in my palms.
Cole’s heart.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Mari’s love of the paranormal goes back to her tween years with origins in vampirology. In recent years, she has expanded her knowledge to other paranormal beings.

Her paranormal pieces have been included in supernatural magazines, websites, and blogs. Other stories are featured online and in print.

Twitter: [@Mari_Wells4](#)

Blog: www.mariwells.wordpress.com

Out of Phase: Tales of Sci-Fi Horror is Now Accepting Submissions!



Very simply, for this collection of short stories, we are looking for Science Fiction Horror. We don't care if that means mutation, creation, invention, machinery gone awry, or space and or time travel. But it must be Science Fiction, and it must be Horror Fiction. What we specifically do not want are Other World/Fantasy stories - these will be rejected.

If you choose to take a factual approach to your Sci-Fi Horror, we ask that you exercise constraint and not bore us or the reader with unneeded details. By all means, include necessary details, but delivering a slew of facts in order will not translate to an intriguing read. Most likely, these stories will be rejected as well. Our review team is highly scientifically minded, so vet your facts, and make sure they are accurate. False data based too closely on truth that lacks an imaginary spin will also earn you a rejection.

Be creative, imaginative, and dead-on-the-money accurate on this one. It's our first venture into the Sci-Fi realm, and we won't be accepting anything that lacks genuine kick!

Submission Deadline: May 31, 2014

Word Count minimum: 4,000 words

Full guidelines on www.SirensCallPublications.com

Home, For Good *D.M. Slate*

7:43 PM Days Home: 1 - Arrival Night

Her bag hits the ground with a *thud* and Julia sighs in relief. The over-stuffed backpack looks like it might burst at the seams, and it feels just as heavy. She pulls her suitcase along behind her, parking it beside the backpack. Resting her purse on top, she digs deep down inside with her right hand, searching for her keys. The purse is just as full as her other two bags, and it takes a few seconds of careful digging to locate the key ring. Julia's left hand holds her phone. Her mother's voice projects out of the speaker into the apartment breezeway, in the dim-lit night.

"I'm just glad that you're home, safely. We've missed you so much! Are you sure you don't want us to come over, tonight? We can bring dinner. It'll only take us forty-five minutes to get there."

"No, mom, not tonight. I've been traveling literally *all* day. I just want to take a shower and get some sleep."

"Well, how about brunch, tomorrow?"

Julia tries to muffle the groan, but it escapes her throat, anyway. Her mother hears it, too.

"Honey, you've been in Brazil for almost a month. You can't blame us for wanting to see you."

Entering her apartment, Julia drags her luggage inside, closing the door behind her. "I know, I know. But I'm home, for good – this time. There's no rush."

The disappointment oozes from her mother's voice. "Okay. But promise me that you'll call me when you wake up and feel rested, so we can get together?"

Dropping her purse on the kitchen table, she nods her head in response. "Yes. I will call you some time tomorrow afternoon. I promise."

Satisfied, Julia's mother says her goodbyes. Julia plops onto the couch, sighing in relief, tossing her phone gently onto the coffee table. She looks around the small tidy apartment, smiling at its familiarity. It feels good to be home. She lays her head back, enjoying the plush comfort of the couch – something she's been without, recently. Her hostel in Brazil was equipped with only the most basic of necessities, and nothing more. The couch feels luxurious in comparison.

Stretching her legs, Julia kicks off her shoes, letting them fall carelessly to the floor. Her stomach growls, cramping in hunger. *Dinner* – the thought makes her almost nauseous. She hasn't eaten since early this morning, and she knows that both her refrigerator and cabinets are barren, void of any food.

Rising, she goes to her luggage, dragging the bags into her solitary bedroom. She sits on the edge of her bed, opening the largest bag. Digging deep down inside, Julia's fingers graze against the metal tin. Smiling, she removes it from the jumble of clothing. The metal container is adorned in a pattern of twisting black and white, with a large multicolor diamond painted in the center. The brightly painted box had been a gift from one of her students, and although Julia knew it was illegal to bring food through customs, she'd smuggled the present anyway.

Opening the lid, the smell of ripe bananas wafts through the air, tickling her nose. Her stomach growls again. She breaks one of the bananas away from the cluster, and then places the tin on her nightstand. She devours the fruit, savoring the flavor. She drops the empty banana peel on the open tin lid. Exhausted, Julia falls back upon her pillow, not even bothering to change clothes. Sleep takes her almost immediately.

10:27 PM Days Home: 1

A prickly sensation brushes past her arm, causing Julia to stir. Subconsciously, still half-sleeping, she reaches for the arm to scratch it. Her fingers pass over the unfamiliar bristly hairs, and then the creature moves. Startled, Julia's eyes pop open – wide awake. The *thing* scurries up her arm. Screaming, she bolts upright in bed, swiping at her elbow.

Scrambling for the lamp her hand darts to the nightstand, reaching blindly under the shade for the switch. Just as Julia's fingers skim past the knob, she withdraws the hand with a *yelp*. Fiery pains radiate from her palm, sending scorching arrows of burning agony climbing up her forearm. Frightened and confused, she bolts away from the bed – sprinting to turn on the bedroom light.

Looking down at her hand she sees two tiny droplets of blood, marking the wound. Still unsure of what happened, she stares at her throbbing appendage - flabbergasted. The pain is far worse than any bee sting she's ever encountered, and already, her hand is turning a bright shade of crimson. Julia's first instinct is to call 911, but her conscious thought overrules. *What are you going to tell the operator...? Help – something stung me... but I don't know what it was. How Stupid!*

Eyes scanning the room, she searches for her attacker. Attempts at ignoring the pounding throb in her hand are unsuccessful, and tears stream steadily down Julia's cheeks. Her fingers are swelling rapidly, resembling over-stuffed sausages. Pushing the pain aside, she creeps forward, scanning the floor before every step. She has no idea *what* she's looking for.

Nearing the nightstand she barely breathes, holding as still as possible. Then, a tiny movement catches Julia's eye. Something inside the painted tin moved. Taking another guarded step forward, she peeks into the container. Four bananas remain inside, taking up the majority of the space. Eyes widening in horror, Julia gasps as the large brown Brazilian tarantula crawls over the edge of the tin onto her nightstand.

Frozen in fear, she's unsure what to do. She knows that the Brazilian Wandering Spider is poisonous - everyone in Brazil knew that, it was one of the first things she'd been trained on. Squishing the monstrosity is out of the question... it's simply too big. *But I can't let it be free in my apartment!* Deciding that she must trap the arachnid, she turns, looking for anything at all to cover the threat. Her movement startles the spider, and much to her surprise, Julia watches as it stands in an upright position.

The two front sets of legs rise up, as does the front half of body - at which time she can see the red face of the monster staring at her. Swaying from side to side, the tarantula looks like it might attack at any second. Frightened that the huge, hairy spider might jump at her - Julia backs away from the nightstand. Her foot catches on the corner of her discarded luggage, sending her flailing backward to the carpet. Julia's throbbing hand smashes against the floor, sending waves of uncontrollable pain through her body. Stars dance before her eyes.

Rolling to her side Julia attempts to get her bearings, cradling her blazing hand. That's when the second strike hits, from behind.

The base of her neck explodes with excruciating pain, releasing waves of distress through her spinal cord. Gasping for breath, Julia rolls away. Her eyes focus on the second spider, dancing back-and-forth, only inches from her face. Julia's neck muscles spasm and she cranks her head to the side, smashing her face into the carpet. Her breathing comes in rapid spurts, followed by a series of long hacking coughs.

Drawing her good hand underneath her body, Julia pushes her torso upright, attempting to sit up. Her gaze swings to the side, trying to locate the spider on the floor. Her vision begins to blur, shifting in and out of focus. The world spins around her as Julia's stomach churns. The bedroom sways, slanting to the side. She collapses to the floor, passing out on her stomach, face planted into the carpet.

11:45 PM Days Home: 1

Julia's eyelids try to open. Dazed, as if her brain were submerged in a thick fog, she slowly turns her head to the side, eyes sweeping lethargically around the room. The only thing her mind can process right now is pain. Fiery, hot searing torture. Every inch of her body screams in agony. Try as she might, she is

unable to lift her head, at all. With focused concentration, Julia pulls her good arm out from under the weight of her torso. Her entire body feels encased in cement. It lays limp – unmoving. She focuses all of her concentration on her neck, willing it to move – but still, she can't lift her head.

Her groggy vision catches the movement of something underneath her bed. Julia strains her dilated eyes to focus, and as it comes near, she makes out the distinct shape of a spider. Heart racing, her memory rushes back, and the severity of her situation sinks in. Panicking, she tries to scream, but only a muffled gargle escapes her throat. She chokes on the saliva gathering in her esophagus. *Phone... get to the phone!*

Her good hand claws at the carpet, grasping - trying in vain to pull her body forward. She makes several attempts before gaining enough momentum to roll onto her side. Her balloon-size hand pounds relentlessly, with every agonizing beat of her heart. Lightheaded and out of breath, Julia stops moving. Sweat pours from her feverish body and the incessant pain in her muscles intensifies. She closes her eyes, knowing she'll never reach the phone. It's a hopeless effort.

2:23 AM Days Home: 2

Drool drips from her partially open mouth, pooling on the carpet below. She's beyond the pain now. The end is near. The muscle paralysis has entered its last stages of advancement. Her eyes no longer blink, frozen open in a trancelike stare. Julia's lungs only expand and contract twice per minute. Her heart slows, barely beating. She feels frozen in time. Her brain has been misfiring, replaying random memories and events that took place throughout her brief lifetime. She sees herself as a child, feeding the giraffes at the zoo. If her depleting body had enough muscle control to smile at the fond memory, she would.

Then, there's a flash of Brazil. A flash of a secluded village – and then one of an old woman. She's draped in the skin of a black leopard, carrying a staff decorated in feathers. The skull of a small animal adorns the top of her gnarled stick. The skull is painted in a pattern of twisting black and white, with a large multicolor diamond painted in the center. The ancient woman yells, in some unrecognizable native language, before stomping her feet and shaking her staff about. Natives emerge from their huts, staring with blank haunting eyes.

Then running. Lots of running, through the endless jungle. A scream, followed by a fall. Gargled pleas for help as I turn to find my friend gripping an arrow, protruding from his chest. Blood drips from his parted lips as he chokes, "...shouldn't be here... cursed."

The memory fades. Julia's pupils contract, focusing on a movement. One of the hairy beasts is making its way ever closer to her face. Each horrifying footfall brings the lethal spider within touching distance. At this point, her hear beat doesn't even increase. Julia doesn't blink when the tarantula comes to a rest with two-out-of-eight legs on top of her nose.

Her vision blurs, shifting away from the spider to a memory of her mother. Julia hears the echo of their last conversation replaying in her ears. She wishes now that her parents had come over, so she could've seen them, once more. Her experience in the Brazilian jungle had been enough to terrify her, and she'd vowed to stay put, at home, upon her return.

A tear slips from the corner of her eye as her own statement plays over and over again, in a loop of torture within her brain... "I'm home, for good – this time."

As her lungs contract for the last time, the irony of the statement is not lost.

8:15 PM Days Home: 2

The tissue surrounding the bite marks has broken down, creating open wounds through the various skin layers, down into the muscle. A dark discoloration surrounds these spots. Julia's body has begun to stiffen. Her eyes remain open, staring in terror underneath of her bed.

The two large Wandering Spiders have combed the entirety of the small apartment, working every inch of the floor plan, searching for food. The apartment is tidy. No plants, no bugs... no nutrients. After hours of unsuccessful hunting, they turn upon the body.

A dark discoloration surrounds the original bite spots. The skin had already begun to deteriorate in a wide circle around the wounds. This is where they begin their feast.

8:42 AM Days Home: 3

The medical examiner bends down, looking at the body of the victim. She's positioned on her side, one stiff arm outstretched. Black necrotic tissue is easily visible on both her outstretched hand, and the back of her neck. The tissue surrounding the black marks is red and bloody, oozing and open... not natural looking. Curiously, the examiner bends down, probing at the neck wound. He turns, speaking to the police officer in the next room.

"Well, she's definitely been bit by something very venomous. I don't know exactly what we're looking for, yet, but you better start searching this apartment. You don't want it getting to anyone else..."

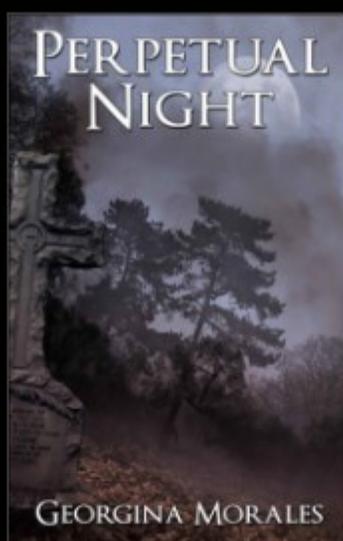
He rises to his feet, spinning on his heel, surveying the room. He reaches down, reading the tag on her luggage.

"She just got back from South America. It could be one-of-hundreds of species that are poisonous. When you guys find it, be sure to let me know what it is, alright?"

He reaches down, closing his bag of post-mortem examination equipment. The bag pops closed, securing the quiet dark space for the tarantula to hide in. The examiner lifts the bag, carrying it – and his unnoticed passenger - with him out the door.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Danyelle (aka D.M. Slate) resides in Colorado, where she's lived for most of her life. She attended college at the University of Northern Colorado and completed a business degree, and now works as a financial analyst. She's married to her high school sweet-heart, and together they have a young daughter and son. Her first publication was released in December of 2009.

Website: <http://dm-slate.com/>



*When secrets are
unearthed,
there's always
a price to pay.*

**PERPETUAL
NIGHT**
by
Georgina Morales

Available on Amazon,
the Book Depository, and
Barnes & Noble

Seeing Gloria Bobrowicz

"It won't be long now sweetie," Kate purred to her growing abdomen just two days before her due date.

Maude, an evil witch who thought Kate had stolen her mate, cast a spell on her taking away her sight. She was not guilty of the crime having absolutely no interest in Maude's lover, but that didn't matter to Maude. Fact was, she was now blind.

Kate knew she couldn't reverse the spell. Alone and scared, she decided to conceive and was extremely diligent in taking care of her fetus, protecting it from harm.

The greatly anticipated day arrived, much to her delight. Not wanting to involve a doctor or midwife, Kate climbed into her tub to birth the baby. It was a long, painful, harrowing labor.

Finally, hearing the first cry of her child, she smiled.

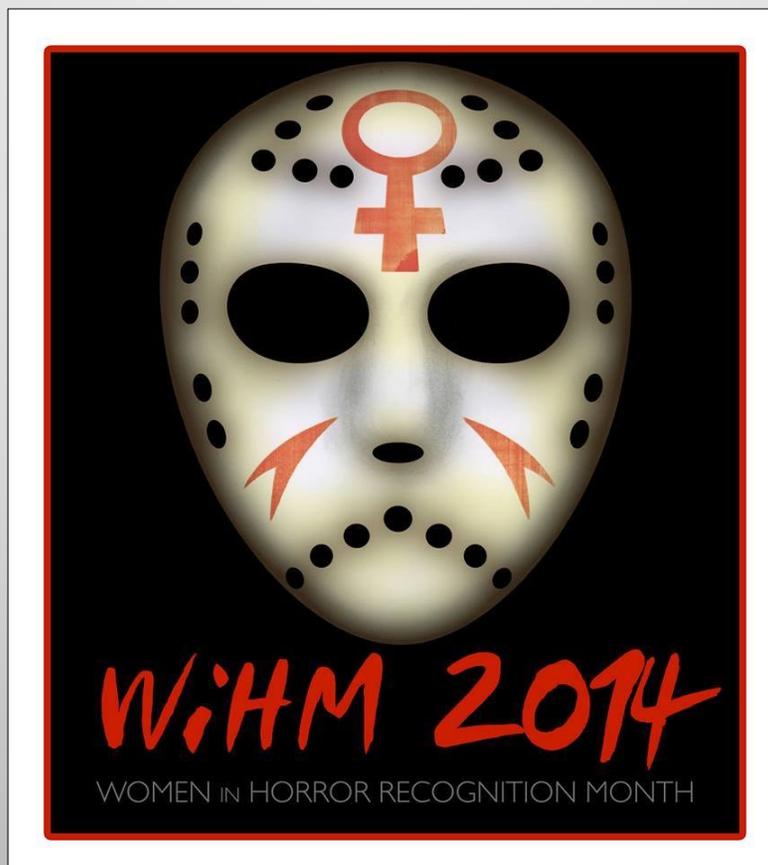
Raising the baby in the crux of her arm, she gouged out her own dead eyes, then those of her freshly born infant. She eagerly popped the baby's eyes into her own empty sockets. Having thought long and hard on the issue, Kate was excited by the prospect of being whole again. She believed the baby's healthy eyes would bond with her body, serving as replacements for her own useless orbs.

Darkness, nothing but darkness. Alas, all for naught.

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](https://twitter.com/GlorBobrowicz)

FB: [Gloria Bobrowicz](https://www.facebook.com/GloriaBobrowicz)



Baby Makes Three *Shenoa Carroll-Bradd*

When he thinks I'm asleep, my husband Corey stops breathing. Apparently the rhythm and noise is just an act for the daylight hours. Makes me wonder what else he fakes. Corey doesn't steal the covers anymore, either. He's cut out the middle man and now simply steals my heat. I keep waking up to find his alabaster arms wrapped around me, sucking all the warmth away.

Corey's mother used to joke that he'd out-live us all. With her heavy French-Canadian accent, it had always sounded ominous, like a curse.

I wonder if she regretted her words once he was admitted to the hospital with metastasized stomach cancer.

I regret a lot from that time. I often sat beside Corey's bed, watching his wasted chest rise and fall, wishing I'd left before they found the tumors. I wished he was someone else's problem, that it was someone else's turn to be told which of his organs were shutting down, and how the cancer was resisting their best attempts. They said they couldn't save him. I told him they could.

I felt relieved when the call finally came, can you believe it? Relieved to hear my husband was dead. I cried myself blind, leaning against the kitchen counter, phone pressed to my ear. Happy tears. No more pain for Corey, no more pain for me. I actually thanked them.

An hour later they called back to say there'd been a mistake. It was a miracle. Corey lived. They apologized for the inconvenience.

A lot has changed, since Corey came home.

He pushes his food around on the plate instead of eating, and he goes to bed when I do, but I don't think he sleeps anymore. I think he watches me sleep, and pretends to breathe until the coast is clear. He doesn't sweat the same either, and when he cries, his tears smell sharp, like embalming fluid.

He won't tell me what the doctors did.

Slowly, life has fallen back into old rhythms. It's been three months since he left the hospital, and things are nearly back to normal now. Or at least, close enough.

I used to do everything I could to avoid looking at my stomach, telling myself I was too busy to exercise, I had too much on my mind. It was always something I would get to later. Now I stand at the mirror and stare, as day by day, my stomach swells.

Corey's already named the thing that grows, but does not stir, within me.

If it's stillborn, we'll take it to the hospital. They'll fix it up, like they fixed Corey. And then it will be my turn. I'm sure I won't notice the smell once it becomes a part of me. I won't waste so much time sleeping. Or...breathing. And we'll save thousands on grocery bills.

The universe tested me with Corey's illness, and I failed. But this baby, whatever it turns out to be, might be my salvation. My cold-skinned, dead-eyed salvation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Shenoa Carroll-Bradd lives in Southern California, on a street where she can see both palm trees and mountains. She writes whatever catches her fancy, whether that's horror, fantasy, or erotica. Most of her time is spent on short stories, but she also has a couple novels in the works.

Twitter: [@ShenoaSays](https://twitter.com/ShenoaSays)

Facebook: www.facebook.com/sbcbfiction



Inkwell of Blood

E. A. Irwin

Come to me my beloved ~
that I may take delight in you.

Worshipping what you are
through the creation I have become,
encroaching darkness lies upon us,
dissolving to unearthly true night.

My breath is claimed,
my heart unleashed,
knowing your denial of me
exists not within our realm of being.

Freedom is what you allow,
forbiddance not a word we know.

You watch—your eyes aglow with need,
I wait—until my pulse is frenzied.
Your body lush, my mind attuned,
relishing our experiences together,
unbridled with unrestraint.

My blade lies against your face,
reflecting the love from your eyes.

As I begin my homage of pain,
a tear the color of your crimson lips
claims your cheek with desire.

A flash of steel
awakens passions held captive,
heightened by the inability to find release.

My blade traces your form
with care born of love and longing,
the pooling of your life force
becomes a burgeoning inkwell of blood
into which I dip my blade
and write my manifesto of
need upon your welcoming page.

I gaze into your ecstasy-filled eyes,
the understanding of what we desire
completed with the stroke of cutting steel.

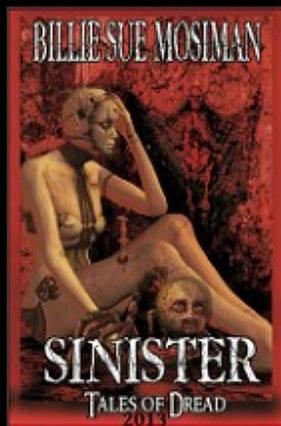
Stay with me my beloved ~
that you may take your delight in me.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - E. A. Irwin resides in California and crosses genre boundaries to keep life interesting as a dark fiction bender. Author of the short story series, *Myth to Life: The Rise of Riley McCabe*, she's currently writing the series' first full-length novel along with the Shamrock series. Her work appears in various anthologies, along with print and online magazines infiltrating the world wide web.

Twitter: [@ea_irwin](https://twitter.com/ea_irwin)

Website: www.eairwin.webs.com

Fourteen tales of dread
ranging from horror to
dark science fiction
to noir.



SINISTER

Tales of Dread
2013

Billie Sue Mosiman

Available from Amazon

Battery Displacea

Brittany Warren

On this bashful equinox;
synchronize opera and soaps
to cleanse deoxy error--
rival the fauna margins between scope and reflection,
in this perfect home.

Thin lizards;
the archetype of oddity and burst--
line the cripples and cracks of their bathtub
as opposite prototypes linger
and stretch upon faded, floral carpet.

Lady assesses her birthmark during rest;
wonders if twin basks in harsh glow of tin heart--
takes time to prepare for malfunction
beneath genuine steam and angry water,
takes a connected, perky breath.

Born-again ghouls fill the bubbles and holes;
between the water and solitude
as bleach radiates from her pores.

Illusory sweets parallel the minerals on the walls;
agro her opposite to where she dwells--
amid envious perspiration
battery acid cries,
forces lady's feminine flesh into derogatory wither.

Horns of luminosity, length, and bitter;
violate from the catacombs of scalp--
cherish pungent hair,
shatter mirror's dusk and pipe's channels
as water heats twice over,
boils lovely lady--
her waves of ribbons and curls.

On this bashful equinox;
dare cleanse deoxy error...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Brittany Warren is a twenty-three-year-old English Language and Literature major, and a four time published dark poetess. Brittany adores both reading, and creatively manipulating the written word. As an individual who has dedicated the past fifteen years to writing, she still works feverishly at her craft—and her imagination is that sweetly horrific strawberry in a field of passive violets.

Dark

Lori R. Lopez

A black hole is etched in my soul
Space has no end, no beginning
It bounces to the knife-edge of Nevermore
And beyond, perhaps too far
Past the scary old tree
At the end of the road
That you reach now and then; a dead end
I've been there. Have you?
Yet I always seem to keep going
Over the barbed-wire fence, into tall grass
A stark field, the kind that's just there
For no apparent reason
It's always the same, like a dream
Tromping in black and white
Approaching a house
I wish I could stop
I am drawn inexorably to disaster
Like insects flock to a window or burning bulb
Please stop. Why won't you listen?
I climb the steps, cross the porch, turn the handle
Forgetting to knock, as if I already know
The answer
Crossing the threshold with bated breath
Asking for trouble, fearing the worst
We never fear the best
And the house is so dark
Inside and out
It chills my veins and spine
Forgive me, I can't look
But must and shuffle toward the parlor
The man in his chair, eyes staring
At something that isn't there
Doesn't notice me
Or hear the clock tick on a mantel
Crimson staining his white shirt
From numerous cuts
Splatters the cortex of my brain

I doubt it will wash out
His eyes haunt me as I retreat
Seeing them in my skull
I fumble down a hall
The dinner table is set
A lady and two children sit
Like a museum exhibit
Faces on their plates
I don't stay for dessert
Fleeing upstairs as if to hide
Under the bed of an elderly matron
Stretched primly on the chenille spread
Fully dressed in sensible shoes and hat
Eyes closed, her expression passive
No sign of blood but I'm too late
A door crashes in below me
And I stand frozen next to a corpse
As boots echo through the house
He's coming and I can't move
I can't wake up
It isn't a dream
It's dark
I should have kept it to myself
These memories
I crouched in the closet
Listening while he entered the room
And found me
I sneezed from the dust
And nervousness
Slapping palms to my mouth
Tardily, after the fact
With a growl he yanked the door
I was never good at Hide-And-Seek
He always won . . .
We are eternal
That's the first thing you realize
On the other side.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Lori R. Lopez wears a lot of hats, and you never know what madness might lurk beneath them. An author as well as an artist, musician, actress, activist and more, she writes short stories, novels and poetry. Her books include AN ILL WIND BLOWS, CHOCOLATE-COVERED EYES, DANCE OF THE CHUPACABRAS, THE MACABRE MIND OF LORI R. LOPEZ, OUT-OF-MIND EXPERIENCES, and THE FAIRY FLY.

Twitter: [@LoriRLopez](https://twitter.com/LoriRLopez)

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/lorilopez>

Slice

Emerian Rich

Slice.

The word makes my soul ache.
Not from fear or dread,
But from sheer delight.

The slice makes my tongue tingle,
Anticipating the bitter taste of blood.

And as I look at you,

I feel the jittery jolt of an addict.

I am, I suppose.

A slave to the body sliced in such a way.

A sharp blade against tight skin.

Will it break?

Will it bleed?

Will it taste as sweet as last time?

Her versus him.

Child versus adult.

I've teased myself with thoughts each will be
different.

But you all taste the same.

The metallic grain of blood,
The salty slip of flesh.

Love.

You've said it too.

Only, when I say it,

I mean the taste of you.

The phantom wound inside your thigh,

I took last time I made you cry.

Just as your body shuddered,

My ring sliced,

I got a taste.

I dare not think of the taste till now,

Right before I taste all of you.

Now lay back my dear,

And take the brunt.

After your last orgasmic delight,

It will be my turn to feast,

Until I lose all sight.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Emerian Rich is the author of the vampire book series, *Night's Knights*. Her creepy horror shorts can be found in anthologies by Dragon Moon Press, Hidden Thoughts Press, and Hazardous Press. She's also the horror hostess of the internationally acclaimed podcast, HorrorAddicts.net.

Twitter: [@emzbox](https://twitter.com/emzbox)

FB: [Emerian Rich](https://www.facebook.com/EmerianRich)

Threatening to unravel the
last thread of her sanity,
Stacy must make a heartrending
decision...before her post-apocalyptic
nightmares come true...

but reality is worse than nightmares.



THE EVOLUTIONIST
by
Rena Mason

Available on Amazon

Deadbeat

Alesha Aris

Twass the night before Valentines and I toiled through the night
Wrapping a present to suit your sight.
The lamp's gentle fiery glow
Warmed my crimson satin's flow

Boxed and sealed taped and bowed
As last night's memories like a rose
once again began to unfold

How under my tips it gushed and pumped
Squirting heavy pouring blood.
Gently I carried it in my care
Still beating beneath my hands bare

I'll trudge to you slow and steady
Almost blue but content and merry Melodic in it's rhythmic state
For you my love I've revived it's bass

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Alesha Aris a young woman hailing from the heart of Jamaica found herself indulging in the art of tailoring words to a lyrical artistry. She aspires to and adores evoking emotions from her audience so that by the virtue of rhythm, rhyme and imagery her words may linger in their minds just as they did in hers.

Twitter: [@Alee_Ari](https://twitter.com/Alee_Ari)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/alee.aris.397>



Sirens Call Publications
PURVEYORS OF DARK & EDGY FICTION

www.SirensCallPublications.com

Nina ~ @Sotet_Angyal

Julianne ~ @CdnZmbiRytr

Gloria ~ @GlorBobrowicz

Sirens Call Publications ~ @Sirens_Call

sirensallpublications.wordpress.com

Mummy's Boy *Caylee Slansen*

DAY 1

Well look, she awakes, from her slumber so sweet.
How are you feeling? How did you sleep?

Oh Mummy, dear Mummy, why do you cry?
Is it because of this knife? This one in your side?

Does it hurt when I twist it? When I move it slow?
How about when I force it as deep as it'll go?

Now, now, be still. Please try not to scream
Or those stitches will tear and your lips will bleed.

Now Mummy, I must go, I have guests on the way.
Don't worry, I'll be back. We have more games to play.

DAY 2

They say I have your eyes, "so deep and so blue;
A vision of beauty, honesty and virtue",

Oh how naive they are, how simple, how vain.
Your eyes of 'innocence' are now eyes of pain.

But why can't they be mine? Why must we share?
Who says these eyes are yours alone to bear?

No matter, I can fix that. All I need are these scissors
and those betraying orbs will no longer be with us.

They say the eyes are the window to the soul,
But Mummy, dear Mummy, where is your soul?

DAY 3

So two days have gone by, yet still you're strong.
Let's see if we can change that, let's see how long

You can continue to fight, to resist the pain
I insist to bear on your delicate frame.

What's this? A tear that falls from your eyes?
You want me to have mercy? To forgive your lies?

No, don't nod your head, you'll weaken your stitches
And we don't want you falling to pieces.

Now this I have here, it's an interesting contraption,
But I won't ruin the surprise, you'll feel it in action.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Caylee Slansen is a 24 year old poet from the Yorkshire Dales, England. With a love for horror from a young age, her passion can be clearly seen in her writing, although she does like to brighten the mood with a bit of comedy every now and again!"

Website: <http://caylee-slansen.deviantart.com/>

Where Scary Can Be Funny



Available on Amazon

Stuck Tabatha Stirling

It's New Year's Eve, I'm 23 years old and soon I'm going to eat somebody.

When the outbreak started, I mean, really *first* started and tiny rumours like petulant scorpions ran haphazardly through the unit – most of us just shrugged and carried on. You aren't born in Queens just to go down that last dark road whimpering. You go down shouting, gouging, biting, spitting. Ironically, this was to prove much truer than anybody had thought.

But the gossip wove and sang and whispered its way into people's ears and then their hearts and the fear took hold. Withered barflies exchanged nervous glances as they tossed back an extra shot for luck and life. Facial tics became more pronounced and dogs began to refuse to leave their houses, growling low and profound, their hackles rising in a fast concluding premonition.

And the emergency center at NY Hospital Queens was doing a brisker than usual trade. At first we were treating nervous conditions, panic attacks, high levels of anxiety and angina. Then the wounds started arriving and everything went Mexico City south in a flash bang. For starters, the blood would not stop flowing. I do mean that literally. There was some form of anti coagulant in the infected's mouth or *chomper hell* that was screwing up the healing. And then the tempers started fraying and the rage pushed itself forward all dressed up in crimson and body parts and the biting started. And the compulsion and whatnot.

I'm a stabby hands. A blood taker. The Queen of the Needle. The eternal joke at a party. 'Least I have a fucking job, cocksucker', I often smile to myself whilst a good ole boy mimes Vampire shit behind my back. I take the blood, I tape the blood. I label the blood. I pass that shit onwards to the radiant white-coated skinnies up in the lab. Myopic farts that dither and dather in the presence of a real live meat bag.

I am not going to set the world on fire or kill four people from a clock tower. I will never write the book everybody has inside them. The pains and loved up sweat of labour will evade me. Because of one second of fucked focus. One thrashing biter and a needle tip not being where it was supposed to be.

So here I am. Huddled and shaking like my cousin Barb who came off her Temazepan too fast. My jaws mashing together and an autophagic hunger coursing my brain, fizzing to the very brim of it. My fingers are gnawed and blood stains my once virgin ski-slope, lab coat.

I pillage a deep breath as the doors bing-bing open. And all I see is *fleshfleshfleshfleshfleshflesh*. Limbs, necks, acres of skin and beauty and bone and blood and succulence. And I am gone, bye-bye lost in a Volta of graceless, feverish feeding with the sweet sounds of death banging against the insides of my lines.

New Year's Day Queens, NY 2023 12.01 am

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Tabatha Stirling lives in Singapore and Scotland with her Warrior Poet husband, eccentric 6 year old son and a beagle called 'The Beagle'. A self-confessed tomboy, Tabatha has a huge collection of gangster films, loves to play Minecraft & Skyrim and is totally digging Joe Abercrombie and Dawn Finch as writers of the moment. Flash Fiction is a new and exciting love affair for Tabatha'.

Twitter: [@volequeen](https://twitter.com/volequeen)

Blog: tabby007.tumblr.com

One Photograph: Two Points of View



The Cull - *Julianne Snow*

The first stone pinged off the side of the vehicle with animosity, thrown by a protestor from the crowd. Her angry face shone brightly before being lost among the sea of acrimony the bus travelled through. The passengers could only sit and stare, unsure of what was really going on and what would become of them. Herded up like animals, they'd been forced onto buses, their meagre possessions stripped from them by masked guards. Silently they sat, in a state of collective shock, their powers of comprehension failing them in the face of such secrecy and overwhelming authority.

The children cried and cuddled into their parents, not wanting to witness their fate, not understanding what was going on. All along their route, the people outside hurled their insults along with rocks, the outer casing of the bus only managing to keep out the rocks. As the windows weakened, so did the resolve of the worried inside. The masked and armed guards could see the collective composure slipping away with each barb, their poison spreading and infecting even the most determined. And then the screams of hatred and words of abuse exploded inward as the web expanded across the surface of the glass. The angry roar of the gathered filled the interior of the bus until there was no space for anything else. The air reeked of smoke, stale sweat and fear.

Slowing to a stop, great wrought-iron gates loomed in the front windscreen; they had arrived. But no one knew where they had been brought to. The gates opened and the bus rolled forward. Fences and makeshift buildings had been erected inside the walls—the space designed to keep those who inhabited it inside, while the others were kept out. But which side of the wall was clear of infection?

Have Nots - *Nina D'Arcangela*

Struggling to pull his filthy hands from my throat, I kick outward slamming him into the table on the opposite side of the abandoned railcar. He loses his balance, and crumbles to the floor like useless debris. I'm on him in a heartbeat, pummeling his blood smeared face until my fist slips off the grizzly mess. As he shoves me sideways, I lose my footing on the exposed metal and stumble. He launches himself at me. I can see the crazed look in his eye; I feel the desperation in his taut muscles; I can hear the animalistic grunts he makes as he tries to rip the flesh from my face with rotted teeth. We fall; he lands on top. I manage to wedge my right knee between us. I wrap my other leg around him using the heel of my bare foot to repeatedly strike his kidney. Toxins release; I can feel him losing strength. He tumbles sideways dragging me with him. The scuffle continues. His left foot shoves my knee unnaturally back, I howl in pain and rage. Enough rage to tear loose. After fisting handfuls of his lice infested beard, I slam his head into the floor over and over again. Roaches disturbed by the scuffle run from dark nooks to darker crevasses, hiding from the meager light leaking through the windows.

Still grappling in the confined space, each clawing for the upper hand, I hear the sound of a siren. In the distraction of the moment, he kicks upward flinging me to my feet. Arms flailing wildly, I see the cop on the steps; panic grips him. He fires a single shot. The last thing I see is the look of shock on the young man's face.

He kills me unknowingly over a dingy green sneaker.

Lady In Red *Megan Stewart*

The winter's chill caresses my exposed skin as I take the half-day's trek through the cascading forest east of Castle Cachtice. The quaint towns surrounding the base of the hill are still unaware of what transpires beyond the sheltering walls of birch and oak. The adrenaline pumps through my iced veins, heating my blood.

"You, my girl. You alone know what keeps me happy."

Even though the words were only uttered in passing, my heartbeat races. Having the slightest of words said by Countess Bathory sends a shiver racing down my spine. Her thick, sensuous voice calls to my mind the blood she bathes in, the blood I bring to her as a symbol of my devotion.

The snow crunching underneath my feet calls me back to the present. I wrap my weather-beaten cotton shawl further around my shoulders in attempt to fight off my unease of the path before me. The moon dips over the fiery horizon and the echo of howling voices carries on the early evening breeze.

"Bring only one," she said to me. "From the eastern town. Those western girls have lost their charm."

With her words clear in my mind, I continue through the forest as whispers of lost souls rustle the leaves. The moon shines through the dense canopy of black, leading me through the remainder of the woods. I can see a break in the trees, the dim light of the town peeking through.

This place has me uneasy. I can feel the energy and taste the enmity radiating from the people. I cautiously make my way to the only inn still open, and the innkeeper shows me to a room.

"This way, miss."

She leads me down a short, candlelit corridor and stops in front of what I assume to be my quarters for the night. I thank her as she unlocks the cracked wooden door. She leaves with a small bow of her head. Trying to ease my scattered thoughts, I think of my Countess. Failing her has never been an option. I try to shrug off my unease by planning to find her a girl worthy of her praise.

The morning has come and gone, leaving me with a few scant hours of daylight left to pursue a fitting quarry for the Countess. This community is hard to penetrate. No one person is willing to consort with an outsider. Walking back to the inn, I see a young woman sitting near a frozen well. Her fair skin, tinted blue by the cold, is framed by soft black curls flowing down her slender back. The dejected look marring her face and the sadness in her eyes are almost enough to make me rethink my choice, but as our eyes lock I know there is no turning back. She is the one.

I smile gently at the girl, not wanting to upset her further.

"What ails you, girl?" She doesn't reply, just looks down at her stiff pink fingers. I try to engage her again. "Would you like to go someplace warm?"

Glancing up at me with eyes the color of honey, she slowly gets up as if saying, "Lead the way." Color returns slowly to her features once back in my chambers. Knowing it is too late to begin the journey back to the castle, I pay for the girl and I to stay another night. The innkeeper doesn't speak. The feral glow in her eyes, reminding me strongly of a wolf's, has me pushing the girl hurriedly to the safety of my room.

It takes me all night to coax the girl into speaking. At first I only receive her name. Isobel. Later comes her reason for sitting alone. I can't help but become enraptured by her plight. Betrothed to a man she has never met, saving herself for him alone, planning her wedding day only to be tossed aside for another.

"The dishonor I bring to my family by staying has forced me out of the only place I have ever called home." I have met many who've shared a similar fate. The men leaving for another woman: a sister, a cousin, a friend.

“I can give you a new home. My Countess is in need of a maid,” I offer with a hidden smirk. I feel pity for her, and yet, it is surprisingly easy to lead her astray. Small droplets seep from her eyes as she throws her arms around me in thanks.

“We head out in the morning. I suggest you sleep.”

Eyes follow us as Isobel and I leave the inn. Isobel looks weighted down by the glares. It seems her dishonor wasn't only to her family.

“Dishonor your family, you dishonor the town,” Isobel whispered under her breath. Straining my ears, I could barely catch the phrase.

“We shall reach the grounds by nightfall.” Isobel picks up her pace, eager to find warmth and shelter. The bite of the wind chills us, warning us of impending snowfall. Back through the forest we walk. Isobel clings to me like a child; she can hear the whispered voices as well. I tell her not to be afraid, that the voices are long since living. She clings tighter.

I point to a worn path in the dirt, letting Isobel know the woods are almost behind us. She lets go of her breath in relief and drops the crushing grip on my forearm. Castle Cachtice can be seen in the distance. It won't be long until we can rest our feet in the hot water no doubt waiting for us upon arrival.

Isobel is enraptured with the wealth of castle. Never has she seen such extravagance.

“What the Countess wants, so shall she receive.” That saying plays through my mind. Taking her to her new chambers is no easy feat. I tell her to be silent as we pass the servants' quarters, not wanting to wake those asleep or handle the whispers that will escape their lips when they lay eyes upon Isobel. Bidding her goodnight, I walk the halls towards my Countess' chambers. I leave a note with her door attendant on the arrival of her request and instructions to gather me when the Countess awakens.

A gruff voice calls my name from just outside the servant's kitchen. Wiping my soiled hands on my stained apron, I am handed a note from the same door attendant as last night. I open the note, pausing only to thank the man as he walks down the stone corridor.

Keep the girl hidden. We must wait for the most opportune moon.

Waiting for the moon is never good. Each time I have to entertain a new girl, the last aspect of my duties becomes almost too much to bear. I don't know how much time I can spend with Isobel before I can no longer do what I must with a sense of detachment.

Four days have passed since I received the letter from my Countess. I wake up to find another on my bedside table. I waste no time arranging my clothes and bed linens. I walk calmly to Isobel's chambers. I'm greeted with a curious smile.

“Today you have the honor of meeting the Countess whom you now serve.” I can sense her excitement and trepidation. Easing her racing emotions, I show her to a part of the castle few people know exists.

I bury all emotions of pity and sadness as we walk to the Countess' bathing chamber. I cannot afford to be attached to this slip of a girl I met not a week ago, but some emotion still slides through my grasp. I don't want Isobel to suffer. I don't want her to feel what comes next. As we enter the chambers, the confusion is clear on her face.

“Isn't it improper to meet the Countess in such a state?” Locking the door behind me, I turn to her and try to smile. I tell her not to worry, that there is a door deeper in the chambers. Her shoulders visibly relax. As Isobel walks in, I pick up a glass jar of fragranced lotions the Countess uses after she is done bathing, intent on knocking the poor girl unconscious. The glass shatters and the smell of fresh lavender surrounds us.23.5

The tears flow freely down my face as I hoist Isobel up by the chains attached to her ankles.

“At least she won’t feel it.” I repeat to myself over and over as I make the cuts necessary to drain her. I hold her sliced wrists gently over the porcelain basin, not wanting to accidentally wake her. I pull her hair away from the deep slash on her neck. It would be a shame if any blood marred her beauty. As the last ruby droplets leave her body, I let what is left of Isobel down and drag her to a door leading to where bodies are stashed if it is before nightfall. Only during the night is it safe to bury the dead.

My Countess walks in moments after the body is stowed. She dips her finger in the blood, tasting it before she gets in. Moaning in what could only be pleasure, she steps out of her robes and relaxes into the basin. I have never seen her take such delight out of a previous bath. She runs the liquid through her hair, down her arms, over her face. With the blood marring the strong features of her face, my Countess looks otherworldly, like a supernatural goddess. I have never witnessed her being so free. Even in her private chambers the Countess has always had a serious edge.

I watch as the blood dries on her body. She steps out, unworried of her state of undress. I can’t help but marvel at how beautiful she is. Covered in blood with the moon shining its silvery light directly on her, I know I will never be able to love another. Finally noticing my presence, she beckons me with a gentle wave of her bloodstained hand.

I walk to her, not knowing what to think. She embraces me tightly and I can do nothing but remain still.

“You have done well, my girl.” Without a thought, I wrap my arms around her waist, returning the embrace I have only dreamed of.

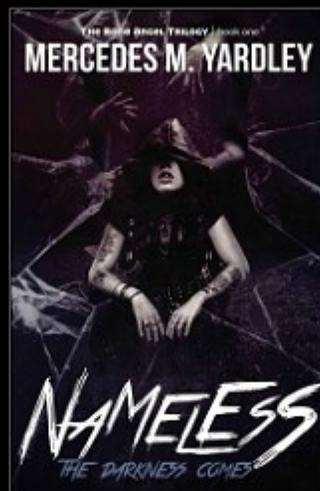
ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Megan Stewart resides in Southern California with her Shiloh Shepherd. She recently graduated with her Master’s degree and works full-time as an automotive journalist at Automotive.com. When not working, she loves to write short stories, novellas, and poems that focus on the darker side of the human condition. She is currently working on a collection of short stories to publish at a later date.

Twitter: [@Megan_Stewart21](https://twitter.com/Megan_Stewart21)

Blog: <http://lifesunfilteredramblings.wordpress.com>

LUNA MASTERSON SEES DEMONS.

She has been dealing with the demonic all her life, so when her brother gets tangled up with a demon named Sparkles, ‘Luna the Lunatic’ rolls in on her motorcycle to save the day.



NAMELESS

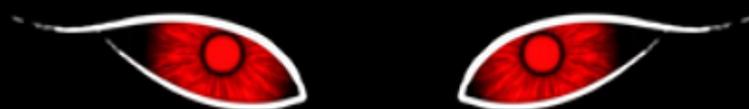
The Darkness Comes

by

Mercedes M. Yardley

Available on Amazon

Would you kill for love?



WATCHER

Book I of The Chosen

One love. Two choices.
Forever a monster...or forever alone

ROH MORGON

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

Waterlogged *Jenn Monty*

Rachel turned on the water in her new claw foot tub. The air began to steam up in the small bathroom as she stepped out of her clothes and into the warm bathwater. After two days of moving furniture and unpacking boxes, her muscles ached. A little soak in the tub, a glass of wine, and then a good night's sleep before starting a new job in the morning; everything was moving forward according to plan.

She found this little house on the outskirts of D.C. through the Internet and had snapped it up for a song. The realtor said the house just wouldn't sell, that buyers felt *uneasy* after a viewing. Moving across the country meant her time in D.C. up to this point was spent landing her dream job instead of house hunting so when the realtor offered a walk-through using a webcam, Rachel had agreed. The house was charming even pixelated. After all the inspections came back clean, Rachel signed the papers without ever stepping foot inside the home. Now as she leaned back into the soothing lavender scented water, she was thrilled to have taken such a huge gamble.

Rachel closed her eyes. The warmth and scent relaxed her body and mind. She felt a tickle on her left foot and a small ripple in the water; the tap must still be dripping. She would get that looked at later in the week. After what felt like minutes, goose bumps ran across Rachel's skin; the water no longer felt warm and chilled her to the core. Rachel frowned without opening her eyes. Maybe she had dozed off; she wondered how long she'd been in the bath.

She sighed and pulled her arms to the edge of the tub as she opened her eyes. A face stared back at her from across the water. Wet black hair framed a boney white face with dark hollows where the eyes should have been. Thin grey lips curled up at the edges in an eerie smile. Dark green veins penciled the cheekbones giving the being a look of rot Rachel had only seen on TV. The face was attached to a body dressed in a soaking pink nightgown. The arms and legs had the same mossy veining as the face.

The creature tilted its head like an inquisitive child as a high-pitched scream filled the room. The head moved too fast for a human and the motion coupled with the sound terrified Rachel. She looked at the thin lips still curved in a closed smile and realized the scream was coming from her own mouth. The thought that her body had automatically responded broke Rachel's paralysis and she scrambled over the edge of the tub. Rachel struggled to her feet, water streaming from her body. Her limbs felt like lead. Three steps to the door; Rachel forced her legs forward without looking back.

She reached the door and yanked. Her hands slipped off the knob and fear bubbled up in her stomach. The door was locked, except there wasn't a lock on the bathroom door. Rachel tried again, jerking on the knob in an effort to pry the door open. She shot a look over her shoulder as she continued to wrestle with the door. The creature was still in the bath but the head turned toward her. It found her with those non-existent eyes, its creepy smile noticeably larger. A sob escaped Rachel's chest and the smile widened into a full grin, showing rows of sharp animal-like teeth. Rachel swung around so her back was pressed against the door as the creature shifted.

Faster than Rachel thought possible, it was free from the tub and slithering across the floor. It moved with odd angles, like its arms and legs were rusty from non-use but with a speed Rachel knew she couldn't escape. She cried out as the thing seized her ankle. With one fierce tug, it pulled her to the floor, Rachel's head cracking against the tile. It began dragging her back toward the tub. Rachel screamed again and her hands flailed, searching for something to grab. Before her bath-slick fingers could find purchase, the creature hauled Rachel back into the freezing water. It pushed her body down.

Claw-like fingers dug into Rachel's shoulders and shoved until her head was completely submerged. The black and white face was inches from her own, that horrible grin opening as the creature's hair danced in the water. The sight of the thing above her was surreal; the water-blurred light haloed the raven hair and as Rachel's eyes began to close, she could almost imagine an angel was holding her under

Bubbles gurgled up from Rachel's choked scream as the face shot down. Razor tipped teeth dug into her cheek. Adrenaline coursed through Rachel as she tried once more to save her own life.

Rachel's head shot up out of the water and she gasped for air. Her lungs exploded as she grabbed the edge of the tub. She leaned over, coughing up water as she pulled herself onto the floor. She glanced back, praying the creature wasn't coming for her again. The tub was empty. Rachel stared at the sloshing water then looked around the room. The door was slightly ajar and the only water on the floor was where she currently sat. Her mind swam. Tears welled up as she tried to understand what had happened.

She must have fallen asleep and dreamed the whole thing. Rachel cried silently as she reached for a towel. She sat on the toilet until her legs stopped shaking. She wanted out of the bathroom but couldn't force her body to move. Adrenaline and fear still poured through her veins. After what seemed like an eternity, Rachel stood. She walked out of the bathroom and down the hall to get dressed. She would clean everything up in the morning. She tiptoed through her new home, flipping on every light before slipping into her bed.

Rachel slept without dreaming. She felt foolish the next morning as she traipsed through the house turning off the lights. The stress of a new job in a new city had manifested in a horrible dream, that was the only logical explanation. With daylight streaming in every window, she finally worked up the nerve to go back into the bathroom. She needed to finish getting ready for work. She walked in, leaving the door wide open. The tub was still brimming with last night's water. Rachel walked over and reached in to pull the plug. She saw black hair floating around the edges of the drain just as the bathroom door slammed shut.

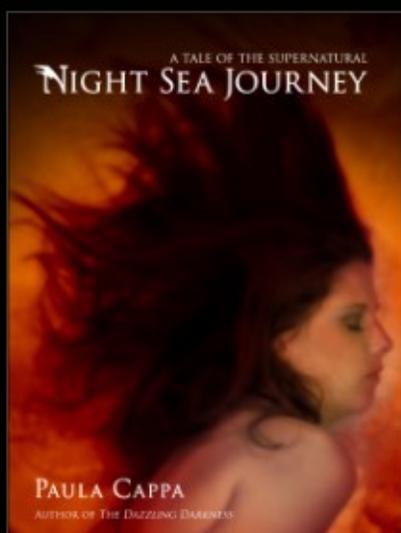
ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Fueled by caffeine and music, Jenn Monty spends her days crunching data and her nights writing poetry, flash fiction, and short stories. Her love of horror and fantasy often lends a dark note to her prose but she also enjoys writing science-fiction, dieselpunk, and even a smidgen of romance from time to time. Her desire to try new places and things has opened up her creative outlets to include travel and food journaling as well as photography.

Twitter: [@BrewedBohemian](https://twitter.com/BrewedBohemian)

Website: www.brewedbohemian.blogspot.com

*From the land of ghosts,
beyond consciousness,
a dark visitor invades.
No one hears her scream.*

Night Sea Journey is a tale of the supernatural, a quiet horror novel with paranormal elements, psychological twists, romance, and murder.



A TALE OF THE SUPERNATURAL
Night Sea Journey
by
PAULA CAPP A

eBook currently available on Amazon

Print version available March 1, 2014
from Crispin Books

9 *Mystery Rose* Eden Royce

Gabe scrawled an address on a faded coffee shop receipt and passed it to the man across the table. He gave a luxurious cough.

Mike slipped the paper into his suit jacket pocket. "Are you sure about this?"

"If there's any help for you, it's there. But I don't know..." He shook his wooly head like a broken puppet left to dangle without a master. The empty coffee cup sat between the men, ignored.

"So, you think this woman can do it?" He frowned at the diner's laminated menu and tossed it aside.

"Maybe." Gabe chewed at his cuticles. A strip of dirt lay under his nails. When the waitress refilled his mug, he grasped it with both hands and held it against his lips. "So warm."

"Look. If I'm gonna get involved in this kind of thing, it needs to work."

"I hear you."

"How did she move all those accounts without me noticing? I wonder if she found out about..."

Gabe grimaced. "You didn't exactly try to hide it. Why'd you do it? You had it so good with her."

"You don't understand." He paused when the bell on the door tinkled and three squealing teenagers in shorts and flip-flops tumbled into the all-night grease bucket. Mike continued in a hard whisper. "Can this witch—"

"*Mambo.*"

"What?"

"She is a *mambo*, not a witch. A priestess, a vessel for—"

"Whatever. Can she raise Karen?"

"I think so. You just have to pay." Gabe pulled the dusty, wrinkled coat closer around his thin frame and shivered.

Mike stood and threw a twenty on the Formica tabletop. "Go get yourself some rest, bro. And a shower. You reek."

Mike programmed the address into his car's GPS. Gabe's scribbling made the words look as though they read: *9 Mystery Rose*.

"It's 'Road'. Damn drunk." Mike relaxed into the plush interior of the midnight blue coupe as it slid through the half-lit streets. Litter danced macabre steps with the wind in the shadows of the abandoned buildings.

A silhouette darted in front of the car.

"Holy shit," Mike stood on the brakes. A symphony of screeching tires and florid curses severed the silence. The hunched figure skittered away and faded from view.

"Unable to locate address." The guidance system blinked, as if confused.

"Piece of crap. You had it a minute ago." Mike pressed every button, but the machine refused to respond. He looked around. No one in sight to ask.

A cloud shifted, leaving the moon exposed and brighter than the flickering streetlights. "There it is."

Number nine crouched at the end of *Mystery*. A lonely lamp fought to illuminate the shop's front window. He peered inside, and a fluttering movement made him jump back. The door opened and the sweet heat of oranges and chili powder wafted onto the balmy air.

He walked into the shop, ducked under the bundles of dried herbs hung upside down from the ceiling. One wall displayed amber bottles in various sizes, all without labels. On a stand in the corner, swung a large crow, whose gaze followed him as he moved. A candle glowed next to the bird and he could see his reflection in its unblinking eye. He took a step back.

The nut-brown woman motioned him deeper into the murky room. Her skin, while no longer taut, remained unlined. Two salt and pepper plaits escaped from the patterned headscarf.

“What can I do for you, *mon fils*?” She didn’t smile as she settled her stooped frame onto a stool next to an antique secretary’s desk.

“Um, yes. I was told to come here for—” Words failed him when he saw her slice the pad of her thumb and add a few drops of blood into a ceramic bowl. “Actually, I’m just looking.”

Her rheumy eyes turned sharp and pinned him like an insect. “Everyone come here for something. You don’t find Zéphyrine less you need her.”

“My wife died and I was told you could...could...” He swallowed with difficulty, while the woman seemed content to wait. “Bring her back to life. I need to talk to her one more time.”

Zéphyrine didn’t reply, but continued to grind the blood into the contents of the bowl. No other sound except the rustling of bird’s wings. “Gabriel tell you this?”

Mike nodded, but spoke when the woman frowned. “Yes, ma’am.”

“What else?”

“He said I had to pay you.”

“Always payment.”

He rocked back and forth on his heels while the woman continued to add pungent items from the drawers in the desk to the bowl, heedless of his impatience. Unused to waiting, he looked around the store. A bowl of pomegranates rested on a window ledge, their coarse skins dried and tight. Drawn to the supple finish on a ring box covered in pale, soft leather on a side table, he reached for it.

“Don’t touch that.”

He yelped and spun around. The mambo, fists on her generous hips, stood toe to toe with him. The top of her head came up to his shoulder.

“How did your wife die?”

“She got sick and—”

“You killed her.”

Mike’s jaw dropped and he looked around him, as if he could locate a camera hidden among rows of incense cones and twirling dreamcatchers. “No, I didn’t. Of course not. I loved her.”

She flicked her tongue at him. Thick and black, it left the scent of wet ashes on the air. “I can taste your lie.” She advanced on him and he banged against the table.

A screech came from the box as it fell to the stone floor and cracked open. Thin, dark liquid seeped from the damaged corner. “I’m sorry.”

“*La vérité*, Michael.” Her accent deepened; its richness covered him, lulled him. “I hear only the truth.”

Mike’s vision swam and he swallowed hard. “I never could keep a job. But I love expensive things. Clothes, cars, trips. I was drowning in debt when Karen came along, with her convertible and her trust fund. She spent a fortune on me.” His eyes locked with the crow’s unblinking gaze. “When we got married, it changed. She put me on an allowance. Said I was burning through her family’s money. Said I needed to be a man and get a job and stop bleeding her dry. That set me off.”

When he returned his eyes to Zéphyrine, she was nodding. “How long ago?”

“About three months.”

“And you want to know how she hide the money from you? Where it is now? So you don’t have to hit a lick at a snake for the rest of your days? I never understand a man don’t want to work.”

“But—”

She held up a hand. “Don’t matter. Don’t care.” She went back to the desk and poured the contents of the mortar into a pouch and secured it around her neck. “Payment is due when I do the work.”

“You don’t care that I killed her? Don’t you want to know how?”

“Can you pay?”

“I’ll pay whatever.” They’d had close to fifteen million the last time he saw a bank statement.

She pointed to a dim corner. “*Bon*. Let us go.”

He took the shovel she indicated. There was no sign of the box, save for a smudged trail of dark liquid where it had fallen.

Mike followed the old woman as the full moon guided her through the cemetery. She navigated weary tombstones, making sure her steps never fell on a grave. The moon stopped and hovered over an unmarked section of the well-kept graveyard where the grass had just begun to grow in.

Zéphyrine snorted in disgust. “You didn’t even buy a stone for her?”

“I didn’t have time. I was waiting until I had the money to do it right.” He wouldn’t meet her eyes.

“Dig.”

Mike took off his suit jacket and rolled up his sleeves. Piles of earth grew higher behind him. His back throbbed, but thoughts of a nubile masseuse in less than a bikini drove the shovel deeper. Sweat poured from him. Fine-grained dirt abraded his face and arms. A metallic thud. He forced the blade of the shovel into the corner of the casket and wedged it open.

Karen lay in the unlined casket, hands folded on top of her white dress, her dusky skin ashen. Lank black hair rolled in waves past her shoulders.

Decomposition had yet to eat away all of her serene face, but the skin had her hands were shrunken into claws. Zéphyrine leaned in and sprinkled the contents of the pouch onto the body as she murmured in a melodic French. “*Réveille*.”

Karen’s eyelids flipped open.

Mike pressed against the back of the coffin-shaped hole to reassure himself of an escape route. “K-Karen, honey?”

Her jaw opened with a pop and she struggled to sit up. Her right hand caressed her left. “Where is...my ring?” Her voice sounded rough and painful.

Terror sliced his flesh and crawled in. “I had to sell it. You were gone so fast.”

“What...do you...want?”

He thought of what he would do if Karen lunged at him. He could use the shovel. Or if he couldn’t get to it in time, he knew his hands fit around her neck.

“The dead do not breathe, ” Zéphyrine said.

Shit. He turned his attention back to his late wife. “Karen, I miss you...dear. I can’t be with you, but I need to ask you a question.”

The corpse waited.

“Where did you move our money, baby? I went to settle up some bills and it was gone. Our accounts had barely enough for your funeral.” Sweat ran down his face, but he wouldn’t wipe it away, in case Karen mistook it for tears.

“I moved it... I thought...you were...cheating on me. Stupid...”

“No, it wasn’t stupid. I should have paid more attention to you. I’m sorry.”

Karen’s face contorted in a rictus smile. “Central Credit...Union. In my...maiden name.” She creaked her head to look at Zéphyrine. When she faced her husband again, the smile turned knowing and the wheezing was no more. “Don’t worry, love. We’ll be together soon.”

Mike slammed the coffin shut. As he clambered out of the dank hole, he could hear Karen’s cackling laughter. He brushed dirt from his slacks and tried to catch his breath. “I’m getting as far away from this freak show as possible.”

“There is still the matter of my payment.”

“Right. When I get the money tomorrow, you’ll get paid.”

“Payment is due when I do the work.”

“Look, I don’t have it right now. But I’ll get it to you, I swear.”

“You have it.”

She reached out to him and he knocked her hand away. “What do want, thirty bucks?”

“Your eternal servitude.”

Mike ran.

Arctic wind shrieked in from behind the witch and tore the scarf from her head. Long, thin braids cracked whip-like in the now frozen air. Icy mist rose from the ground. Her eyes rolled back in her skull, white against the walnut skin as she stretched her bare, fleshy arms to the torn sky. A high, keening cry rose up as the earth lunged and snapped like a rabid dog on a leash. She released its chain. “My legion, the hunt is now.”

Mike’s dress shoes slipped on the moist dirt. He panted and his body dripped cold sweat. He stepped in a hole, hidden by the cemetery’s long grasses, and went down. He clawed at the ground as it retched and split open beneath him. Rot and decay rolled into his mouth as he tried to scream. He spat, rubbed his tongue on his filth-crusting sleeve.

A skeletal hand closed around his ankle, the flesh on the bone slick with the ooze of decay. Mike stared, as it pulled itself forward and opened a mouth teeming with bloated maggots.

“So warm,” it whispered.

He howled and kicked off the thing’s grip, scrambled to his feet and fled toward the open gate. He dodged the grasping hands where they emerged from the dirt. He looked behind him. They were lumbering toward him, hundreds of them, stinking and leaking putrid gore. He ran harder, trying to outdistance the rotting corpses as they swayed to Zéphyrine’s eerie song.

Mike turned to see a milk-white form rise in his path and he could not avoid it. He ran through the spirit and gasped at the achy weakness it left. Hope of escape withered. More hazy forms emanated from the frosty slush, each taking a turn ripping away hunks of his soul. He wobbled, unable to keep his footing.

His steps faltered as they circled back for another pass, their banshee wails gluttonous and gleeful.

Legs leaden now, he sank deeper into the tortured soil with each step. It was getting closer: the rattle of bone, the tattered mutterings... Above it all, the scent of wet ashes. He began to sob.

Anthony strolled into the diner and found Mike at a corner table hunched over a cup of steaming coffee. His navy suit jacket was grayed over with dust and his hair stood at odd angles. Mike pushed a thin strip of paper with an address scrawled on it across the table. Anthony looked around before he pocketed it. “Man, you look like hell.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Eden Royce is a writer and editor from Charleston, South Carolina whose stories have been published by various presses. She also reviews books for Hellnotes, a website dedicated to horror in fiction, art and movies and is the horror submissions editor for Mocha Memoirs Press. Besides writing, her passions include roller-skating, listening to thunderstorms, and excellent sushi.

Twitter: [@edenroyce](https://twitter.com/edenroyce)

Blog: <http://darkgeisha.wordpress.com/>



The Scientific Method *Rebecca J. Allred*

"You know, in some cultures they cut off your hand for stealing." Daniel paced up and down the rows of incubators and centrifuges. During the day, as many as thirty investigators might be working in the lab at any given time, but now it was deserted, and Daniel's voice echoed off white boards and epoxy resin countertops, making it impossible for Richard to tell exactly where he was.

Richard's irresistible cobalt eyes ricocheted inside their bony sockets like a pair of tandem pinballs. They were the only mobile parts he possessed in that moment. His wrists and ankles were securely fastened to a chair with zip ties, and his mouth was stuffed with filter paper and secured with several strips of rainbow lab tape.

"But you didn't steal with your hands. Did you, Richard?" Daniel stepped from behind a tower of deionized water. He wore a face shield, safety goggles and insulated gloves. In one hand he carried a coffee-can sized container labeled LN₂, in the other a glass pipette.

"No," Daniel said, "You seduced my lab assistant with greedy eyes that lapped up my research proposals when her back was turned." He set the container on the counter; the lower half had sprouted a lawn of frost.

"I don't think losing your hand would do much to stop you from stealing again." Daniel removed the lid; frigid fog boiled over the edges. He placed the pipette into the container, filling the glass tube with clear, bubbling fluid. Richard's eyes bulged like rubber stops under high pressure.

"But I suspect that a few drops of liquid nitrogen on those icy-blue peepers of yours might just do the trick." Daniel peeled back Richard's eyelids and positioned the pipette above the first writhing globe.

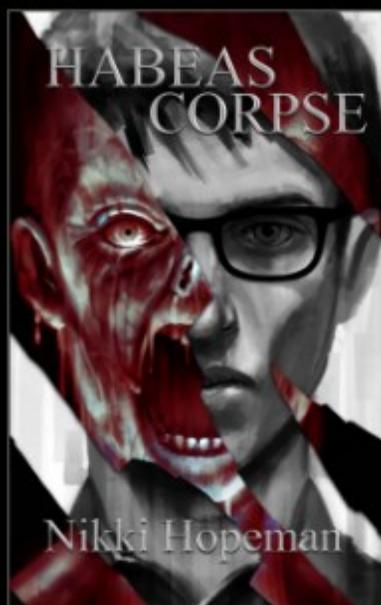
"As we are both men of science, let's test that hypothesis. Shall we?"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Rebecca is an accidental achiever extraordinaire. She lives in Salt Lake, working by day as a pathologist, but after hours, she transforms into a doctor of macabre fiction. Her work has been featured on Hellnotes.com and her story, *Zoe's Last Birthday*, is scheduled to appear in *Vignettes From The End of the World*, a forthcoming anthology from Apokrupha.

Twitter: [@LadyHazmat](https://twitter.com/LadyHazmat)

Blog: <http://diagnosisdiabolique.blogspot.com>

A forensic technician
who eats the evidence
is asking for trouble.



HABEAS CORPSE

by

Nikki Hopeman

Available from Amazon,
Barnes & Noble,
and Blood Bound Books

Goodbye, Alice *Arriane Kerr*

Alice felt someone watching her when she turned into her street, where her home sat amongst identical redbrick, blank faced houses. The street was shadowed, someone having vandalised the streetlamps so many times the council didn't rush to fix them anymore. She paused, scanning the driveways, but couldn't see or hear anything.

Alice was small for a sixteen-year-old. She had brown hair, blue eyes that were framed by dark circles of missed sleep, and the pallid complexion of someone who didn't eat enough. People from her area had that same look about their faces, like they had all lived a hundred lives. Her mother was no different; Sue had once been pretty, but her hair was wiry and dry from too many bad dye jobs over the years, her face was prematurely lined, her mouth turned down and shoulders hunched forward. Alice's stepfather, Tony, on the other hand, had grown into his looks. He was a confident man and walked like he was looking down on everyone else.

Alice checked her watch when she spotted a white van parked in her driveway. Tony wouldn't be home at this time; he always came home after work to be fed, before returning out. This was why Alice always lingered in cafes or libraries after school. As she moved past the van, she peered into the dark passenger window, but saw only her own reflection.

"Don't scream," a low voice ordered from behind her.

The man, whoever he was, clearly hadn't expected her to comply, because he covered her open mouth with a stained rag. Alice choked on the chemical that burned her next breath, her body slackening as the drug worked its magic. The man hoisted her awkwardly into his arms and carried her to the back of the van.

Inside the house, Sue Greene sat in the darkened living room, her fingers tight on the chair's armrests. When she had imagined this night, it had played out differently. She had thought there would be screams and tears, a commotion of some sort. But it had been so seamless, so silent.

And now Alice was gone, as quietly as she had been in every other aspect of her short life. Sue closed her eyes when the retreating sounds of the van had disappeared completely. The idea of selling her own child, of actually selling a human being, would have been disgusting to her once. Now she was desensitised to how cruel life was, Sue didn't actually think anything could surprise her anymore, even herself.

It had been Tony's idea, of course. His brother had told him about it, about people who would offer money for a life. Sue knew she should have tried to protect her daughter, but what could she have done? She had no friends or family left that would help her. Anywhere she ran, Tony would find her.

He wouldn't be back for hours and so Sue allowed a tear to roll down her cheek. Once one had escaped she found she couldn't stop. She cried, her shoulders shaking in time to each painful intake of breath. *Goodbye, Alice.* Sue cried that night for her daughter, for Alice who she would never see again. She cried harder when she imagined what they would do to her, whoever *they* were. But, most of all, Sue Greene cried for herself, for her lost future and tired life.

Alice woke and promptly turned on her side and vomited. When she'd stopped heaving she sat up and shuffled to one side of the van, tucking her legs up to her body. The road rumbled beneath her, every bump and dip shuddering through her like an attack. They could be anywhere, for all she knew they'd left London. Blankets and stained pillows had been placed on the floor and even up the walls. Alice tried not to wonder how many people had been in the back of this van. Panic was making her shake. *Where was he taking her? Had Sue noticed she was missing? How long would it take the police to find her?*

Never having being much of a crier, Alice's eyes were dry when the van finally squealed to a stop

and the doors were wrenched open, letting in the early morning light and highlighting how dirty the bedding was. Her kidnapper was large, his green shirt straining around bulging arms, his buttons looking ready to pop. Alice slid out to stand beside him and he grabbed her arm, as if she would run...as if she had anywhere to run to.

He closed the doors and pulled her around to face the building they were evidently going into. They seemed to be in some sort of industrial park. She was led into an ugly, grey building with no windows and a faded red metal door. The kidnapper opened the door and pushed her in front of him. She stumbled into a room that was colder than it had been outside. Her breath left her mouth in a tumbling cloud.

"Move," the kidnapper ordered, taking her arm again and marching her forward.

The warehouse was practically empty, except for a handful of wooden crates on the opposite side of the room. Leaning against one, were two men.

The first to straighten up at the sight of them had long straggling brown hair. He was glaring, but it was difficult to see exactly where the glare was directed thanks to the flash of his chartreuse eyes. *Like cat's eyes*, Alice thought, as they stopped. The second man was younger, in his early twenties at most, and was shirtless. His torso, arms, and even his hands were covered in the most beautiful tattoos Alice had ever seen.

"What is this?" the man with chartreuse eyes asked.

"This is your order," the kidnapper said.

"This isn't what we *ordered*," the tattooed man said disdainfully.

The kidnapper snorted. "Don't look at me like that, kid. At the end of the day, you still paid money for a person."

Alice felt like she was going to throw up again. What was going on?

The man frowned. 'We ordered a specific girl. You said you knew how to find her.'

"I do, but like I said, finding a specific person actually takes more time and money. If I'm going to do you a favour, you can do me one, too."

"I see," the man said softly. "And this favour is...what? Taking a random girl off your hands?"

Alice looked up at the kidnapper and watched a slow, dangerous smile spread across his face.

"*Buying* a random girl," he corrected and placed a heavy hand on Alice's shoulder, setting off a wave of nausea in her stomach.

"She looks unwell," the man observed.

"Even baby drug addicts go through withdrawal."

Alice blinked at him in shock. "I'm not a drug addict, you drugged me –"

"Shut it," he hissed.

"Is that what you'll do to Juliet, drug her?" the tattooed man asked angrily.

The kidnapper sighed. "Your girl ran away, how else do you think I'm going to get her back to you?"

"And in the meantime, while you look for my daughter, what are we to do with this girl?" the man asked.

The kidnapper leered. "Anything you want. She's legal. You could even turn her into a freak."

Both men frowned and Alice felt fear run its fingers down her spine. She took a step back and the kidnapper gripped her upper arm tightly.

"Where do you think you're going, honey?"

"Let go," Alice said, the panic well and truly taking hold of her now.

She struggled against him and gasped when he smacked her across the face with the back of his hand. She hit the ground, landing on her hands and knees.

“You lot usually change the whores, druggies, and homeless, right?” she heard the kidnapper say as if he was grinning. “Just think of her as one of them, no one’s looking for her. Her own mother sold her to me.”

Sue. So, she wouldn’t be at home worrying, the police wouldn’t be called. Sue knew exactly what had happened. A dry sob wracked through Alice’s frame as she crouched on the floor. A drop of blood fell from her mouth and landed between her hands. “Get out,” the man said coldly.

The kidnapper laughed. He grabbed Alice’s arm and went to pull her to her feet.

“Let her go,” the man said.

“Oh no, you’ve already made it clear that you’re not interested. I’m sure I’ll find someone who’ll buy her. She’s a pretty little thing, right?”

“Do *not* touch her,” she heard the man on the other side of the room shout, but a hand still gripped her upper arm tightly.

Alice was halfway to her feet again when the kidnapper screamed, and the reason for the scream was clear. The tattooed man had sprung forward. Midway through the air, his body had broken. Bones snapped, skin stretched, and his body twisted as it was completely destroyed from the inside. He landed lightly on four legs and Alice found herself staring into the flat, beautiful face of a panther. Her mouth opened in a silent scream and the grip on her arm tightened. At the last moment, she was pulled to her feet, and met with the full impact of the charging panther.

She screamed as pain ripped through her body, and landed in a crumpled heap on the floor. She stared blindly up at the ceiling, her back arching, as white hot pain ripped her in two. Alice knew she was dying, in her whole life she had never felt pain like this. She clenched her fists and her fingers slipped over her palms. She looked down at her hands which were glistening with more blood than she had ever seen. She screamed again and choked on the sound as it caused a fresh wave of pain to crash through her. Large, alien eyes appeared above her. Kitty-cat eyes.

“Shit,” the man breathed.

Alice’s body convulsed as he placed a hand on her side, adding pressure to help stem the flow of blood. It was too late though, surely? She’d already lost so much blood, she was warm, so very warm. She heard him talking, but couldn’t see him anymore. Her vision was blurring, her eyes losing the battle with the urge to black out.

Warm. Why am I warm? That last feeling made her pause. When people described death, they always mentioned the cold. But she was burning up, so what did that mean? The man leaned down and murmured something in her ear, just as the darkness stole her away.

The man leaned down and murmured an apology in her ear, just as the darkness stole her away.

The girl’s body slackened, her ragged breathing the only indication that she was still alive. Both shifters, one in human form, the other still in panther, looked down at her sadly. Rhys ducked his head down, pointing to the wound, and looked at Gabe with solemn yellow eyes. Blood dripped from his black chin, the body of his kill lying only feet away. Rhys didn’t need to shift back to human form for his meaning to be any clearer.

Gabe removed his hands from the girl’s side. The skin there was pink, swollen, and new. She’d healed around the accidental bite mark, her body infected with the virus that was simultaneously saving and changing her.

“Come on, we have to take her home,” Gabe sighed, slipping his arms under her thin body and picking her up.

The next twenty-four hours would be a waiting game. Her dying body would fight the virus, but inevitably it would win, either by changing her into a shifter or killing her.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Arriane Kerr is a writer, reader, and daydreamer. Her love of fantasy novels began in childhood; she was an army brat whose imagination kept her company on long journeys, and in countries where she could not speak the language.

Twitter: [@ArrianeKerr](https://twitter.com/ArrianeKerr)



The Doctor's Appointment *Shawn Arntson*

"Hello! I'm home!"

I put the heavy paper grocery sacks on the kitchen counter. Paper, never plastic. I know plastic is really bad for the animals. Someday I'll get those nice cloth sacks to use, but for right now, paper will have to do. At least paper comes apart in the rain so it's not too bad as far as grocery sacks go.

My black cat, Isis, came sauntering into the kitchen and wound herself around my feet.

"Hi, baby," I crooned as I stooped to pick her up. "How was your morning?"

She purred and pushed towards the grocery bags hoping I'd brought her a treat.

"Let me get this stuff put away, and I'll give you a surprise," I said putting her down and turning my attention to the groceries.

"While I do this, I can tell you about MY morning. It was not at all pleasant." I pulled out a half-gallon of milk and put it in the refrigerator along with eight quarts of cream.

"Only eight?"

"Eight is enough," I said. "If we run out, I can always go back to the store again. And don't be so ungrateful. It's not nice. Anyway, you know I had my doctor's appointment this morning. The one to see about that weird black spot on my shoulder? Well, you would not believe what HE had to say. I really think the man is dangerous."

While I spoke, I stacked cans of tuna on the counter. It was much easier to stack them up and then move them to the pantry rather than try to pull them from the bag and stack them in the pantry. I liked the stacks to be even. It certainly doesn't look nice to have six cans in one stack and eight in the next stack. I stacked the cans in nice, neat, even columns and then carried the columns one at a time to the pantry. I'd tried to carry two columns at once before. Boy, THAT sure didn't work. I'd dropped some and tuna cans went rolling everywhere. I continued my story as I moved the columns carefully to the pantry.

"So, this lunatic doctor tries to tell me that I have cancer. Cancer! Can you believe that?"

"You know that's not enough tuna, right?"

"What? Of course it is. It's four cans per day. There's seven days in a week. That's 28 cans. That's what I bought. Now really, quit interrupting me. It's rude."

I moved the last stack of cans to the pantry and closed the pantry door.

"So, I told Mr. Thinks-He's-So-Smart that there is no way I have cancer. Only old people and crazy people get cancer. Everybody knows that."

I reached into the bag again and paused.

"I told you I brought you a surprise, right? Well..."

With great fanfare, I pulled out four packages of catnip.

"I know how much you love this stuff." I put the packages on the counter and then picked one up to sniff at it. "Though really, I can't see why. It doesn't smell like much of anything to me."

Isis wound around my legs again and looked up at me purring loudly. I reached for my scissors—I always keep scissors nearby; you never know when you'll need them—and snipped off a corner of the bag.

"Here you go, baby." I poured a small pile of the dried herb onto the floor where Isis proceeded to sniff at it before enthusiastically flopping herself on top of it and rolling onto her back.

"Now, really. I know you like it, but you'll rub it all into your fur if you do that. And then I won't let you sleep on my bed with me. You know I don't like crumbs of that stuff all over my sheets."

Isis continued to roll.

"But I love this stuff! It's my favorite treat of all!"

"Well, really. I know that, but still." I reached into the grocery bag to pull out the last couple of items.

“So ANYWAY. Mr. Lunatic-Not-So-Smartypants doctor keeps trying to tell me about cancer this and cancer that. That sicko man even wanted to make me stay at the hospital. He kept telling me that I’m really sick and need TREATMENT.”

I folded up the two grocery bags and stacked them with the others next to the refrigerator. Hopefully it would rain soon so I could take them outside to let them disintegrate’.

“Can you imagine,” I continued. “TREATMENT! For CANCER! I’m telling you, the man is dangerous. Not to mention crazy. So of course, I told Mr. Muckity-Muck as much. I told him there was no way I was going to let him lock me in his nasty little hospital for some ridiculous disease that I don’t even have.”

I filled the tea kettle with water and set it on the stove to heat up. I got my favorite mug out of the cabinet.

“So, Mr. Dangerous-Crazy-Man-Who-Thinks-He’s-A-Doctor tells me he’s going to go get some INFORMATION for me to read about my ILLNESS. I’m telling you, that man is completely buggy.”

I got a tea bag out of the pantry along with my cute little cat face sugar jar and put both of them onto the counter. I opened the tea bag and put it into my cup as the tea kettle began to whistle. I poured the hot water into the mug over the tea bag.

“So, while Mr. Idiot-With-A-Probably-Fake-Medical-Degree goes out of the office, probably to call some big orderlies to tie me down to a bed and make me stay in that gross little hospital, I decided that he was Simply Too Dangerous To Ignore.”

I got a spoon out of the drawer and added precisely nine heaping spoonfuls to my mug. I absolutely cannot drink tea without sugar, but too much sugar can make it undrinkable, too. Precisely nine spoonfuls, heaping spoonfuls, makes it just right. I rinsed the spoon and put it into the dishwasher.

“So, I went to the door of the office and looked up and down the hallway to make sure he was really gone, and then I got my trusty little powder bottle out of my purse. You know, a girl can never be too careful. One never knows when she might run across somebody who is Simply Too Dangerous To Ignore. You know that.”

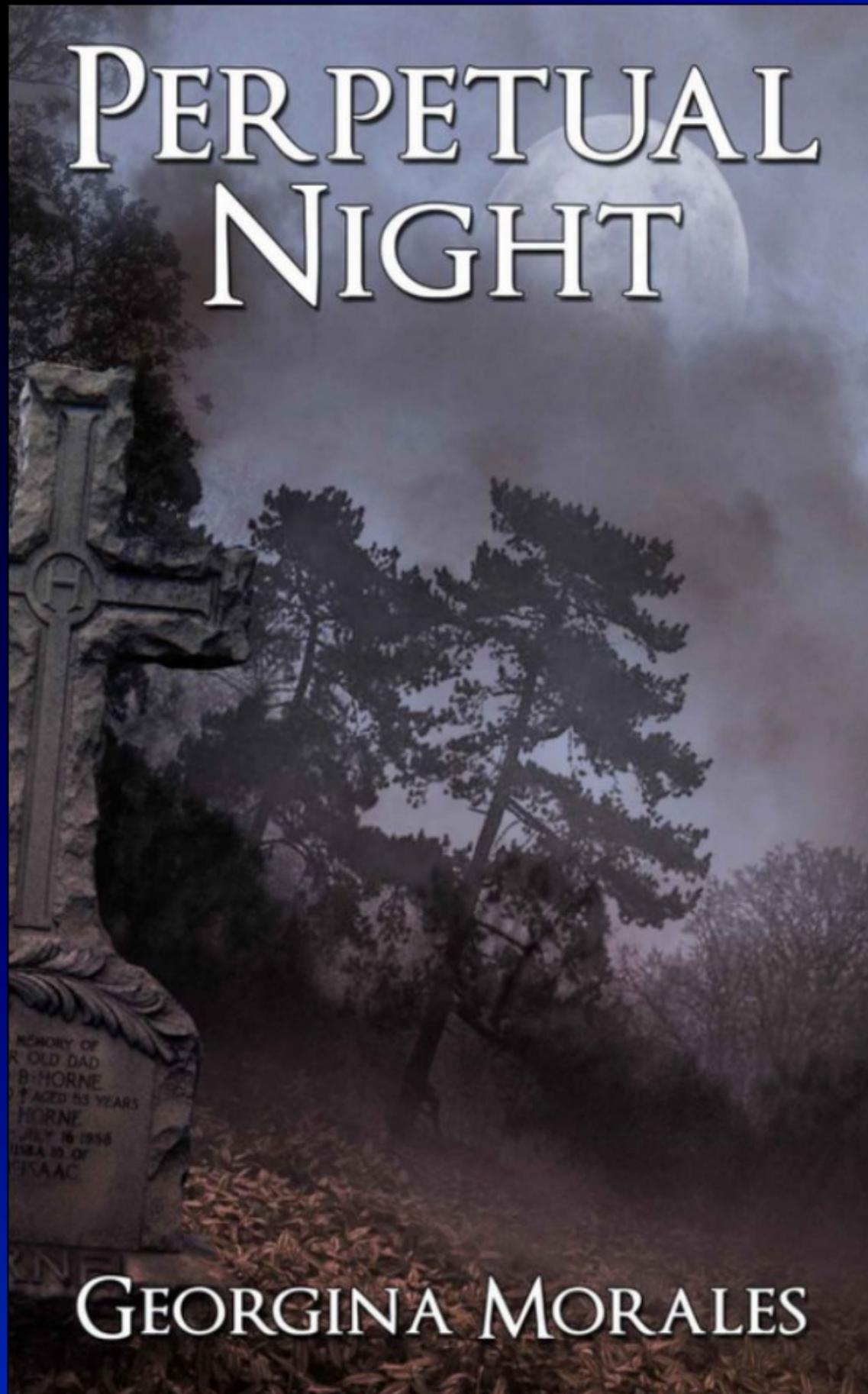
I moved to put my cat face sugar jar back into the pantry. Isis was still on her back in her catnip, but she was staring at me intently. I smiled at her.

“So, while the not-so-great DOCTOR MAN was out, I shook a goodly amount of powder into the cup of coffee on his desk. I couldn’t find a spoon to stir it in with, so I just used his pen. I was back in my seat long before he finally came back and sat down again. Let me tell you, it was pure joy and comfort to watch him drink his coffee down while trying to explain to me that I’m going to die.”

I sipped peacefully at my tea and looked out the window. It was a beautiful, sunny day.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Shawn Arntson has been writing since the age of eleven when she used to entertain her friends with fabulous middle-school stories. She loves words and expressions and primarily writes stories with a supernatural bent. She is fascinated with all things paranormal but most especially magic and ghosts. In addition to writing, Shawn works as a freelance editor while also working on her master’s degree and raising two children.

When secrets are unearthed, there's always
a price to pay.



Available on Amazon, the Book Depository, and Barnes & Noble

The Promise *Rose Blackthorn*

The breeze off the ocean was cool, but the sun was brightly shining. She couldn't stand to stay cooped up in the house anymore; so she put on a sweater over her t-shirt, and slipped her feet into blue rubber flip-flops with sailboats on them. She didn't bother to lock the French door on the patio; she was pretty sure no one would bother anything. Then she crossed the long backyard, sparsely covered in struggling grass, and climbed down the steep decline to the sand. She found a beached tree trunk a hundred yards along the strand, and sat down to watch the surf. The wind blew her dark blond hair into a swirl of tangles around her head, but she didn't care. The sun felt glorious.

She and Cole had come here last year for vacation. They'd both spent their entire lives in the Midwest, and the thought of seeing the ocean together for the first time had been romantic. Their two weeks here had been something like a honeymoon, and they had talked seriously about packing up and moving out here. It hadn't happened. Other things had come up, money had been an issue, and all their friends and family were in Missouri. And at one point, having friends and family close had become very important to both of them.

Things were different now. She didn't have all those compelling reasons to stay in Calhoun, and her memories of this place had called to her. So, first chance she got, she went ahead and packed, coming back to the Oregon coast, and the tiny town that had so caught her fancy.

It was hard, being on her own. She missed familiar places and people. Most of all, she missed Cole. But she knew that eventually he'd catch up with her. He'd promised.

After a while, she decided she'd better go into town. She didn't have much in the house in the way of food, and maybe tonight she'd go all out and make something decadent.

Back in the house, she changed from flip-flops to sneakers, stuck her wallet in her back pocket, and grabbed a 'go-green' reusable shopping bag to carry back her groceries. The walk from the house to the store took about fifteen minutes. Once she'd reached the glass doors and stepped into the dim interior, she wondered if she should have ridden the bicycle. Depending on how much she decided to get, it might be a heavy load to pack home.

"Oh, well," she said to herself, heading toward the canned goods, "The exercise is good for me."

She quickly picked out cans of soup, several different kinds of canned vegetables and fruit, and three bottles of spaghetti sauce. Pasta was on the other side of the aisle, and she added packages of macaroni, rotini and bowtie pasta to her bag. Then, having something for dessert in mind, she picked out a couple of cake mixes and pre-made frostings, then a four-pack of pudding as a snack. She carefully avoided both the dairy and produce sections; she was probably the only one to notice, but there was an unsavory smell coming from both.

She went to the checkout counter, swiped her card, and waited to enter her PIN. A couple of minutes later, she was lugging the heavy shopping bag back down the street. She didn't see anyone she knew, so she didn't linger. Most days she spent at least an hour or two window-shopping or browsing, but today she wasn't in the mood. By the time she reached the house, her shoulder was aching, and the wind had gotten chillier, raising gooseflesh on her bare legs.

"A fire tonight," she said, letting herself into the house. "I should have got some marshmallows."

Dinner was bowtie pasta with marinara sauce; she didn't have any hamburger or sausage to go with it, but the vegetarian dish was still satisfying. She opened a can of pears for dessert, deciding she wasn't in the mood for cake after all. As the sun slid toward the horizon, swiftly sinking into a bank of dark clouds, she started a fire in the cast-iron firepit on the back deck. A few yards away, the tide was coming in, the soft susurrations of the water on the sand reminding her of evenings on the beach with Cole.

They'd gone almost every night to watch the sun set over the water, cuddled in a big blanket on the sand, a small driftwood fire burning nearby. Then, they'd occasionally spoken to other people who were also enjoying the brisk evening air, walking on the strand and admiring the always-beautiful sunsets. Tonight, she had the view to herself. She added another branch to the fire, then sat back and pulled a blanket around her shoulders against the chill.

With no surprise, she found her memories returning to Calhoun, to the last time she'd seen Cole. He'd been ill, complexion grey and haggard, a tint of yellow to the whites of his eyes. He'd been attached to more than one machine, each monitoring a different system, giving the doctors updated information as his body began to shut down.

"We shouldn't have waited," he said, his voice little more than a hoarse whisper, nothing like the deep melodious tones she was used to. "I'm sorry, Saira. We should have gone back as soon as we could."

"We'll still go," she told him, forcing a conviction into her voice that she didn't really feel. "As soon as you're feeling better, sweetheart. You can take it easy, and I'll pack everything up, and we'll move to the coast. It'll be wonderful!"

He nodded, a sorrow in his jaundiced eyes that he was unable to speak of.

"You can't leave me," she whispered, tears sliding down her face like tiny drops of ice.

"I'll always find you, Saira," he replied, letting his head fall back against the white pillowcase. On the other side of his bed, his parents sat with hands clenched together, their eyes going from his sallow face to the monitors that beeped and pinged above his head. Cole's best friend, the best man at their wedding, stood looking out the window. His face in profile was set and unmoving. "I promise, my love. No matter what happens, I'll follow you. I'll find you. We aren't done yet."

In the morning, she puttered around the house for a while. She cleaned up the dishes from last night, meticulously putting everything back in its proper place. She didn't bother to turn on the TV, or the radio. She'd come to prefer the silence and the sound of the sea, to white noise she paid no attention to. Restless, she decided to walk into town again. There was no reason to; she just didn't want to stay here. She was fidgety, and couldn't stand the thought of trying to read a book, or work on her needlepoint. She knew it was only a matter of time until Cole arrived; after all, he'd promised! But she was impatient, and needed something to do to take her mind off her brooding.

Instead of walking down to the road, and following it into town, she opted for the more scenic beach path. When she and Cole had been here last year, someone had told them it was called 'The Boardwalk', but that was a misnomer. The path was winding and narrow, following the edge of the beach, and made of asphalt not wood.

Seabirds, mostly gulls, wheeled and called above, hovering mere feet above the sand as they rode the breeze on scarcely moving wings. The tide had gone out during the night, exposing more sand dotted with shells, rocks, and ropes of seaweed. Something dead had been washed up, and it was covered with a bickering flock of birds. It was far enough away, she couldn't tell what it was, the birds obscuring her view even more. She was thankful for that. Whatever it was, she really didn't want to see.

When she reached the first of the little gift shops and boutiques that lined the street, she left the Boardwalk behind her. She hadn't brought any money, wasn't intending to buy anything, and so didn't go into any of the stores. Instead, she moved slowly from window to window, looking in on the displays of T-shirts and beachwear, blown glass and jewelry, cheap knick-knacks and souvenirs imported from Taiwan, and paintings from local artists hung in the front window of a gallery.

The sea breeze continued to blow, growing neither stronger nor showing any signs of dropping; it pushed a paper cup, plastic wrappings and used napkins along the street. "Someone should really clean

that up,” she said to herself, turning away from the miscellaneous garbage to the next shop. She came to a tourist trap she and Cole had shopped in on their vacation. They’d gone in, feeling silly about spending time in such a tacky little place. Plastic and tin chimes hung outside the door, and cheap little keepsakes lined all the shelves. But the shop offered to take a photo and transfer it to a T-shirt or coffee mug or mouse pad in less than an hour. So they’d had their picture taken before a garish hand-painted backdrop of a hot pink and neon orange sunset, and paid for the picture to be put on coffee mugs, T-shirts and baseball caps for all their friends and family back home.

The gifts had been a great laugh, and Saira smiled as she remembered it. It hadn’t been too long after that that Cole got sick, and her smile faded. Suddenly, she didn’t want to be here anymore. She didn’t want to remember his illness, or how much pain he’d been in. She didn’t want to be alone in this beautiful place; but there was no one for her to talk to.

She moved to the middle of the street, looking up and down the deserted sidewalks. As though noticing for the first time, she saw the broken windows and charred remains of long dead fires. There were bodies sprawled here and there – she never looked at them if she could help it, pretending they weren’t there. But now she couldn’t take her eyes from them. They’d all been dead for some time, weeks at the least, since before she’d come here. The nearly constant breeze swept all remaining stench away. The sickness Cole succumbed to had spread rapidly, only a very few people never catching it – Saira was one of those. Those who caught it didn’t die, exactly. They stopped being who they’d been, not even really human anymore. They’d become violent, nonverbal, and ravenous. In only a few days the contagion spread across the country, perhaps around the world. Communications were quickly lost, the power grid followed shortly after.

Saira found herself back on the beach, crouched in the sand, her face buried in her hands. She knew this had happened before. She’d remembered all of this before, and then somehow forgot it all again. She walked around town, pretending to buy her groceries from the store, pretending to window shop, and suddenly all the death and carnage would re-impact her psyche. And then, as though it was just too much for her to bear, she would block it out again, returning to an almost fugue state where she waited anxiously for her husband to join her.

“What can I do?” she asked, lifting her head and uncovering her eyes, her gaze going immediately to the latest corpse on the beach, still covered in scavenging birds. “What do I do?” she called louder. But there was no one to answer.

Saira hummed to herself, slowly adding the last of the frosting to the freshly baked cake. For some reason the power was off, and flipping the breakers hadn’t helped. She’d tried calling the power company, but it must have been after hours, because no one answered. Checking in the garage, she’d found a camp stove slash oven that ran on propane, so she’d used that to bake the cake. It was a little more difficult to operate than a regular oven, so the cake was slightly burnt around the edges. But she’d cut off the worst of it, and covered the whole in Devil’s Food Chocolate frosting. It was Cole’s favorite.

When the front door opened while she was cutting the cake, she looked up expectantly. A tall figure dressed in rags lurched toward the kitchen, familiar shaggy dark hair falling across his forehead. Saira set the cake knife down, and wiped her hands on a towel as she went to meet him, a broad smile on her face. “Cole! What took you so long, sweetheart? I’ve missed you so much!”

This story was originally published in the anthology "New Dawn Fades" from Post Mortem Press in November 2011.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Rose Blackthorn lives in the high mountain desert with her boyfriend and two dogs. She spends her time writing, reading, being crafty, and photographing the surrounding wilderness. She is a member of the HWA and has published numerous short stories and poems in both online venues and print or e-book anthologies.

Twitter: https://twitter.com/rose_blackthorn

Blog: <http://roseblackthorn.wordpress.com/>



Mr. Squeak *Georgina Morales*

Jimmy's sleeping next to me. I didn't mean to make him angry at dinner today, but I don't want to keep eating Mr. Squeak, either. What if Santa gets mad? He won't help Mom find us! But Jimmy says I have to eat or it won't matter if Mom ever finds us, because I'll be dead. He says it's been seven days since he crashed the car. I don't know; I sleep a lot. Sometimes when I wake up it's day, sometimes it's night

After the crash, we tried to find his friend's cabin, but we couldn't see with the snow blowing in our faces. That's why Jimmy built the fort. It's small, but we snuggle together and it keeps us from the wind. We spent a couple of days without food. Then, when the storm passed, Jimmy went hunting. I stayed, tying pieces of Jimmy's red shirt to every other tree. He came back a few hours later with a dead squirrel. We ate it raw. Jimmy hid behind a tree so I wouldn't see how he cut into it with his pocketknife. He let me eat more, said he'd catch another one later. But he didn't

Many nights passed without him catching anything. One evening I got angry and cried. I told him I hated him for taking the car without telling Mom. He was supposed to stay home and watch me, not take me to some stupid girl's house

That night Jimmy brought another squirrel. Except it was the same one he'd caught before, I recognized the line of black fur on its belly. When I asked Jimmy, he said we were lucky because we were lost in a magical forest. He said he'd found Santa while hunting. Santa had promised to help Mom find us. He also said we could have some of his magic animals. I didn't believe him, but I ate just the same.

After that day, every evening Jimmy came back with the same squirrel, went behind the tree, and handed the pieces of meat to me. I named the squirrel Mr. Squeak. I always said thank you and sorry before I ate him, but I guess he didn't mind. Now that Jimmy can barely walk, he just goes over the hill and Mr. Squeak is waiting for him. Or at least that's what Jimmy says; I never go with him. I like Mr. Squeak.

The sun's up. Jimmy hasn't moved. He looks pale; his fingers are black on the tips, blacker than mine because he lets me wear his gloves on top of mine. He said it didn't hurt anymore, and it was easier to catch Mr. Squeak without the gloves

Sometimes when the wind blows really hard, it sounds like people yelling in the mountain. I imagine Mom coming for us. Except right now it sounds like Eric, Mom's boyfriend.

I run out into the clearing. I holler back as hard as my dry throat allows me. Can he hear me? I get inside the fort and shake Jimmy. He doesn't open his eyes. I grab his legs to pull him out; they're so skinny. And lumpy. And his pants are stiff from the knee down, stained darker than their original navy blue. I peek under the fabric.

I scream so loud my ears hurt. There's no skin left on his lower legs. Where the muscle's exposed, it looks dry; the way meat looks when it's been in the fridge for too long. I can see a bit of white in some parts. Is that Jimmy's bone?

I get away from the fort, away from Jimmy. Something tangles in my legs and I fall. It's Mr. Squeak, he was hiding underneath Jimmy's legs. But his belly's open, like a sac waiting to be filled.

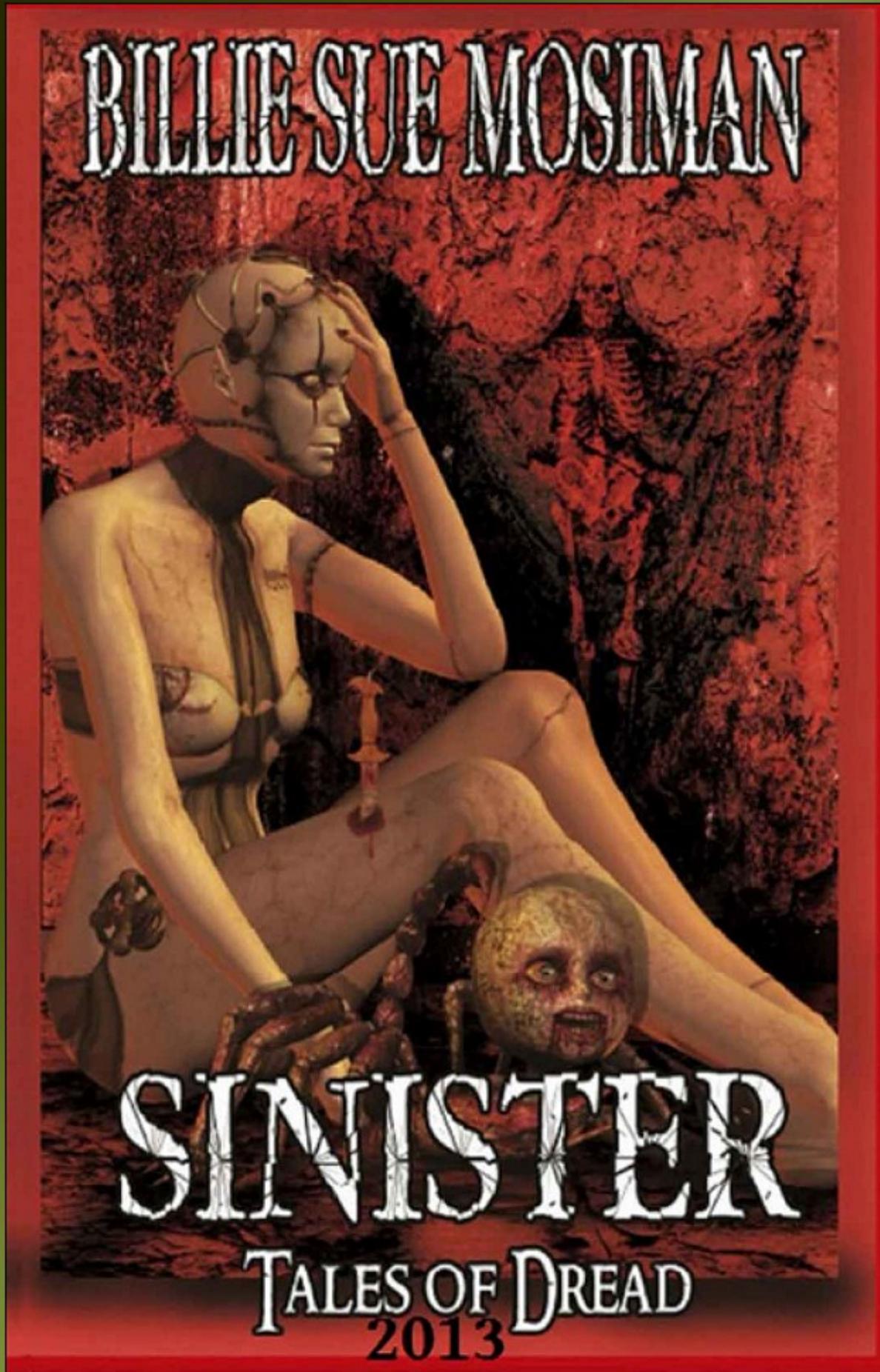
I crawl into the open, dry heaving. Eric sees me. He runs, hugs me, and thanks god we're fine. I tell him I'm not fine, Jimmy's not fine. Mr. Squeak, the magical squirrel, ate his legs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Georgina Morales writes horror, mystery, and everything else that might give you nightmares. 2011 saw the debut of her first novel "Perpetual Night". Her short stories have appeared in magazines and anthologies such as Dark Moon Digest, Lucky 13, and Gothic Blue Book. She lives in New England along with her husband, two daughters, their beagle, and their old, grumpy cat.

Twitter: [@GinaMAuthor](https://twitter.com/GinaMAuthor)

Website: www.diaryofawriterinprogress.blogspot.com

Fourteen tales of dread ranging from horror to dark science fiction to noir.



Available from Amazon

Dissection *Eli Constant*

Of course the house was creepy. Doesn't every good horror story have at least one fear-inducing edifice with creaking stairs and squeaking hinges? My story's no different, but it isn't the house that terrifies me. It's never been the house. In another life, I might have come to find the home's quirks endearing; I might have come to think of it as a family home, a place to run back to when life got hard. But this wasn't a different life; it was my life.

I hated my life- enough sometimes to wander out back to the miniature river and trail my toes in the cool water, let my imagination move toward the moderately sized boulder near the creek side... imagine myself holding that heavy stone against my body as I laid back into the moving wetness.

I shook my head; I shook it brutally, jarring my brain back from oblivion.

"Maris!" My mother's hoarse voice matched her wrinkled, cigarette-ruined face. She reeked of tobacco all day, every day. My dad was dead. His death had been meticulously brutal, surgically-precise incisions decorating his wrists, ankles, neck, stomach, but nothing removed. The cops had never found his killer. That thought alone would have propelled me through another day of this life. It should. How many people get away with murder? Probably more than you'd think.

"Maris!"

"Coming!" I yelled back sharply. My dad was lucky actually; he didn't have to live with Mom anymore. My mind moved back to the boulder by the creek. I could kill myself, but I wouldn't. I deserved to live and someday... someday soon, I'd be free, without my father or mother to hold me back.

My mother yelled for me a third time. I reluctantly stood up. I'd been sitting on the rusted, swinging bench under the dying, grandfather oak tree. It was to the right of the house, all but hidden by overgrown weeds. The shorts I had on were pale blue and likely decorated in red-brown rust now. *Stupid to sit here*, I thought, pissed at myself. I didn't have a lot of nice clothing.

The screen door was swinging shut as I took my first step up the front stairs. The sun was falling below the tree line now, casting dancing, dark shadows across the sun-scorched, thirsty lawn.

Pots and pans were clanging and crashing in the kitchen. *Great. Mom's cooking again; she's a terrible cook.* I walked toward the kitchen slowly, wondering what the hell she was concocting tonight. The stench that hit my face when I walked through the doorway was beyond awful- a cross between the formaldehyde soaked frogs we'd dissected in Biology last year and day-old vomit.

I sat down at the round dining table. My mom glanced at me and grunted, her mouth occupied by a half-smoked cigarette, its ashes slowly falling into the sauce she was stirring.

"Bet that will add some flavor." I mumbled, disgusted by the scene.

My mother turned around quickly, her face scrunched in bitter anger. "Eat or starve. I don't give a shit."

I didn't respond as she faced the stove again. I watched her closely though, thinking about my dad. He'd been a good cook. I hadn't thought about that when I'd decided to...

A large plate was in front of me now, bowtie pasta smothered in a sauce that was off-white with little green and brown bits. I picked up a fork and moved the food around slowly.

"It's that alfredo sauce your dad used to make; I found his recipe. I didn't check the date on the cream in the fridge, but it wasn't lumpy or sour. I added dried basil and bacon bits." She actually smiled at me, like she was waiting on some praise or a thank you. Her gray, chipped teeth were unattractive and aged her even more. I just grunted at her attempt to be kind. It wasn't normal, didn't make up for her being such a shitty mom. Other girls had pretty mothers, ones that smelled nice and didn't put bacon bits in pasta sauce.

Lifting a forkful up to my mouth, I stuck out my tongue and licked quickly. It tasted... off. Course, it smelled like crap too, so I wasn't expecting it to have the flavor of world-class cuisine.

My mom was still standing over me, waiting for me to say something. I set the fork down, letting the metal clink dully against the chipped plate. "I think it's safer to starve myself." I sneered, pushing the plate away from me. Mom's face flashed with anger again, giving her eyes a brief, unusual brightness, but it faded quickly, melting into obvious disappointment. She'd wanted me to like the food; she'd wanted me to be nice to her; she'd wanted me to lie. Mom stomped over to the stove, grabbed the sauce pot and dumped it into the trashcan. The sauce and metal pan were still hot and the plastic trash bag began to melt.

"You weren't hungry?" That was unusual, Mom was always eating. You couldn't tell to look at her, of course; the smoking kept her skinny, skeletal really, her bony collarbone accentuating her weathered skin.

"Why should I eat food that's not good enough for my own daughter?" She sneered, the almost-finished cig hanging from her dried lower lip, all traces of kindness gone from her voice and expression.

"Guess you shouldn't; better you than me though." I stood up, pushing the chair back slowly so its metal legs scraped harshly against the floor. I always did that, scraping the same spot, creating deeper gouges in the hardwoods. I found it... satisfying. My mother was used to it; she'd stopped trying to correct the behavior months ago. She was murmuring angrily as I walked out of the kitchen though, too chicken-shit to speak when I could hear the words.

Grabbing my backpack from off the hall floor, I headed upstairs, the creaks and groans greeting me as I moved upward. It was my birthday tomorrow; maybe that's why my mom was trying to be nice today. I'd been threatening since Dad died that I wasn't going to live with her once I turned eighteen. As I closed my bedroom door, I heard the phone ring.

Dad wasn't a bad dad; he drank a lot, but he was never mean. He always cowered to my mother, doing the cooking and cleaning and yard work- all after working eight hours at the plant. He deserved better. I recognized that; that's why I think he's better off being dead. I'd told him several times to leave mom, take me with him and start a new life, but he wouldn't leave her. He still saw my mother as the beautiful, innocent girl he'd met in grade school. She wasn't. She was bitter and crude, all her past beauty long rotten.

He couldn't do it for himself though; someone had to do it for him. His death could have been less painful, but he needed to learn that he was worth something, that he should have worked harder to make a better life for himself. I think about his murder a lot. All of those little cuts on his body, the way his face looked... in the morgue as they pulled the sheet away from his face.

I studied for several hours, preparing for a brutal calculus exam. Around 9 PM, I heard my mother coming up the stairs. A hard knock on my door and then it opened; my mother never waited for me to 'allow' entry.

"I was going to give this to you tomorrow, but Bud called from the diner and needs me to work a double." My mother was as bad a waitress as she was a cook. She dropped a small package on my bed. "Happy early birthday." She leaned a little closer and then hesitated, pulling back and leaving my room quickly; the door closed with a whine. Had she just tried to kiss my forehead? Good thing she hadn't. She must have downed a bottle of cheap pinot after I'd come upstairs; she smelled like wine and tobacco now- a smoky bar filled with overage, overused women. She could have at least watched me open the present though.

Slipping my index finger beneath the paper, the comic's section of a very old Sunday newspaper, I ripped upward. The single piece of tape broke easily.

A disposable camera. I hated photography; maybe I was the only person in the world that thought taking photos was stupid. Course, I also had a photographic memory. Nearly a year later, I could see every nuance of my dad's inert face...

I both hated and loved my brain; the way it could recall colors, shapes and expressions with perfect clarity was unmatched. My dreams were always vivid, making me relive moments in time as an eternal loop testing my sanity. Not that I was exactly sane. Who could be, growing up in a house with a weak, functioning-alcoholic father and a chain-smoking bitter wench of a mother? They'd made me how I was, forcing me to veer away from normal, happy teenager. I wasn't born this way. I wasn't born to live like this.

Holding the camera in my hand, I sifted quickly through my memory files and found the day that had changed everything. The day I'd walked into Biology and sniffed my first whiff of formaldehyde. The day I'd first held a scalpel and sliced into slimy, chemical-fixed skin.

The memory always erased my hate, my desire to walk to the small river and bury myself in the water. The memory made me focus on freeing myself. Freeing people I love. I lay back on my bed, closing my eyes as I walked through Biology class a year past. The tiny liver, the bloated stomach and the way its eyes were glazed-over and unseeing. I noted everything, slicing slowly and learning.

I must have fallen asleep; my small lamp was off and the room was dark. A blanket covered my body. Mom had come in my room again, unannounced like my privacy didn't matter. Hitting a small button on my plastic watch, the screen came to life, dull green and glowing. It was four in the morning; I was eighteen, my birth hour come and gone.

My father was spared this last year; she wasn't. She did not deserve relief... until now.

I sat up and rotated my neck, preparing. Quietly, I stood and then knelt. My hand reached between my mattress and box spring and extracted a sandwich bag. Inside, was a folded piece of yellow construction paper, such a cheery color.

Removing the bag's contents, I sighed and slowly unrolled the paper to reveal a blood-stained scalpel. I'd never cleaned it, wanting to preserve the memory of frog and father. I'd wash it after *her* though.

My mother's room was dark, her breathing heavy. She was lying on her back, perfectly positioned. I should have hesitated, but I didn't. I'd told her; I'd threatened that I wouldn't live with her once I turned eighteen. But I never said I'd leave.

It isn't the house that terrifies me. It's never been the house.

If you ask me what truly terrifies me.

I'd have to say... myself.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Eli Constant is a genre-jumping detail junkie, obsessed with the nature of humanity. She believes that there's beauty at the core of most everything, but that truly unredeemable characters create the best stories. Eli is the author of *Dead Trees*, "*Mastic*," "*DRAG.N*" and is a contributor to the upcoming charity anthology: "*Let's Scare Cancer to Death*," benefitting the V Foundation.

Twitter: [@Author_EliC](https://twitter.com/Author_EliC)

Website: www.eliconstant.com

Shadows In The Rain *Gerri Leen*

The rain falls in sheets, as if the heavens are trying to drown the city. Sarah runs to the corner, searches the oncoming traffic for a cab. Two race by her, their roof lights darkened, fares warm and dry within.

"Mommy?"

Sarah turns, backing into the crosswalk and slipping, a car honks as she tries to correct. She falls, cold wetness soaking into her pants from the rain-drenched pavement. The car goes around her, the window opening just long enough for the driver to call her a crazy bitch.

Crazy?

Crazy is letting the thing that stands staring catch her.

She scrambles to her feet and runs. She covers two blocks, as fast as she's ever run, and then she bends over, hands on her thighs, breathing hard.

"Mommy?" This time the voice is ahead of her, and Sarah looks up slowly, peering through her sodden hair to see Emily.

"You're dead," Sarah says, and takes off the way she came, afraid to run through whatever the thing that's pretending to be Emily is. Afraid to find out that it isn't a ghost, isn't a figment of her imagination, isn't too much stress or not enough sleep.

She doesn't want to find out it's really Emily because Emily is dead. Emily got sick and died, in Sarah's arms, on the way to the hospital. In a cab that stopped, the way none of the ones passing now will, the night the driver took her all the way to the roundabout and the sliding doors; he waited while she keened and rocked and wouldn't give the people from the emergency room her little girl.

Her little girl who was dead. Who still is dead. Isn't she? Oh God, please, isn't she? Because the thought of her not being dead--they put her in the ground.

"Mommy?"

Sarah turns and there Emily is, light brown curls not wet despite the rain, yellow dress Sarah dressed her in herself dry as a bone.

"You're not real."

"I am. You wanted me back."

That's true. She wanted her back. She prayed for her to come back. She went to that woman, the one in East Village, the scary one with the snakes and the black candles.

"It's natural, what I do," the woman said when Sarah backed away from the terrariums full of reptiles. "It's not evil. Don't be afraid."

Sarah handed over her money. She let the woman cut her. She held the snake. The one with brown and yellow scales, Sarah's blood smearing over them, her blood not seeming to bother the snake, its tongue flicking out at nothing as it slithered out of her hands and around the woman's neck.

"You'll be with your daughter again," the woman said, and the snake's tongue flicked in and out as she spoke.

Sarah had a million questions but then the snake moved toward her, his tongue flicking out again, and the woman smiled--a terrifying smile--and Sarah gave in to the fear that filled her and fled.

"It's me, Mommy." Emily walks up to her, takes her hand in hers.

For a moment, there is only joy. For a moment, she is certain this is Emily, come back to her. And then coldness floods Sarah, and the rain seems to stop falling on them.

"You wanted me back, Mommy."

"I did." Her hand where Emily holds on is falling asleep, a pins and needles feeling streaming up her arm, into her shoulder, to her neck.

"I can't come back, Mommy. I don't know why. They told me some things aren't allowed." Emily smiles and it is a sweet smile, a dear smile. The smile of her little girl.

"Who told you?"

"I'm not supposed to say."

"Was it a woman with a snake?"

Emily laughs and the sound is the lovely bell-like trill Sarah remembers. Her baby. Her girl. She's alive.

Sort of.

Sarah is back at the hospital, in her memory, hearing again the wail of the sirens from ambulances trying to get past the cab in the roundabout in front of the emergency room, as she held her little girl, as the doctors and nurses tried to pry Emily free.

"I can't come back. But we can be together."

Sarah sinks down, the same way she did that night, when they finally wrestled Emily away from her. She sinks down and feels her heart beating hard and fast as coldness dips down from her neck, into her chest, on to her gut. Her head hurts.

"Need a doctor."

She told Emily she would get her to the hospital. And she had, she got her to the hospital. She just didn't get her there alive. "I'm sorry, baby. I failed you."

Emily kisses her, and everywhere her lips touch her feels like someone laid ice on her skin. "It's okay, Mommy."

Sarah's body starts to feel as frozen as where Emily kissed her. Her legs are cramping, and she slides flat, lying on ground that should feel cold, that should feel wet. The only thing that feels cold is her, and Emily's hand.

She hears a person; he sounds so far away. Then she realizes he is talking to her.

"Yes," he says. "Yes, I'll get you help."

Her little girl's grip tightens.

"Let me go, Emily."

"No, Mommy." Her daughter's tongue flicks in and out, her hair and the dress remind her of something, something brown and yellow, what was it?

"Just hold on," the person says, his voice gentle. "They're almost here."

It's not a cab that comes this time. It's an ambulance. It will get her to the hospital. It will.

So what if her dead daughter is sitting next to her on the ride? So what if she's smiling down at her, singing a song that sounds like the wind and the waves--or like a snake slithering over leather? So what if the EMT reaches through Emily every time he checks Sarah's vitals?

"Are we there yet?" Sarah asks the EMT.

"Almost," he and Emily say together.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Gerri Leen lives in Northern Virginia and originally hails from Seattle. She has a collection of short stories, *Life Without Crows*, out from Hadley Rille Books, and stories and poems published in such places as: *Sword and Sorceress XXIII*, *Spinetinglers*, *Entrances and Exits*, *She Nailed a Stake Through His Head*, *Dia de los Muertos*, *Return to Luna*, *Triangulation: Dark Glass*, *Sails & Sorcery*, and *Paper Crow*.

A reality worse than nightmares.



THE EVOLUTIONIST

RENA MASON

Available on Amazon

Oakwood *Angeline Trevena*

I watched the girls at the bus stop; giggling, spinning around to make their short, pleated skirts extend out from their hips like tutus. I looked away as I caught sight of white underwear, my face beginning to burn.

"Hurry up gay boy!" yelled Stevie from up ahead.

Pulling my rucksack higher onto my shoulders, I set off at a run to catch up with the distant silhouettes of my friends.

"Hey, look at this," Ben called excitedly as I approached. The four of them were gathered in a circle, looking down at something on the ground. Stevie had found himself a long stick and began prodding whatever it was.

I squeezed between Chris and Joey, and looked down to see a dead cat baking on the hot road. It was already a crawling mass of flies, its ginger fur matted to its head with dark blood.

"Look at those teeth," said Chris. "It looks like it's laughing."

"It's sneering," corrected Joey, baring his own teeth and growling. Chris squealed in delight and set off at a run, racing round and round in circles until he tripped on a loose shoelace and collapsed on the floor in laughter.

"I wonder what happened to it," said Ben.

"Probably hit by a car," replied Stevie. He had managed to hook his stick under the cat's collar and picked it up off the floor, making it dance about like a string puppet.

"Stop it!" I said. "That was someone's pet."

"Well, it's not anymore." Stevie lifted the stiff cat up towards me. I stepped back and the stick snapped, dropping the cat back to the ground.

Ben stared at me. "It's dead. It's not gonna hurt you."

"I know," I mumbled, staring down at the dust clinging to the toes of my shoes.

"Come on scaredy-cat, let's go." Stevie set off and, one by one, the rest of us followed.

I could feel my back dampening from sweat under my rucksack, and I tugged my woollen jumper away from my waist where it had been tied most of the day. I pulled my shirt out of my trousers, the cotton furrowed with deep creases. Up ahead, the figures of my friends wavered in the heat, Stevie still dragging the broken stick behind him, the end of it scraping through the dust and bouncing against loose stones.

Stevie stopped at a fork in the road, dropping to the ground in the shade of a large oak tree. The rest of us gathered around him, looking at him expectantly. A car sped past, kicking gravel into the backs of our legs. Ben, the only one of us in shorts, yelped in pain and jumped away.

"That's why you shouldn't wear those lame shorts," said Stevie.

Ben leaned down, rubbing his sore calves with his hands. As he straightened, he rubbed the side of his nose with his middle finger, aiming the gesture at Stevie. Stevie kicked out, but from where he sat, his foot was several inches away from Ben's legs.

We stood for a few minutes, waiting for nothing in particular. No one was in a hurry to get home to fussing Mothers, annoying siblings or homework, and we were glad of the shade.

"Right," said Stevie at last, drawing the word out thoughtfully. He made a show of looking up the road to his left, to the estate we all lived on, and then looking up the road to his right. That road led past miles of fields, thick with crops, and eventually to the farm that managed them. There was another lane branching off that road; a private drive leading to a retirement home they had been building over the past year.

Stevie stood, but said nothing, pausing for dramatic effect. "Let's check out God's waiting room."

"Let's not." I tried hard to just sound bored, emphasising the point by idly plucking a leaf from the lip out with his tongue and groaned. "No one's moved in yet."

Stevie turned and walked away. I looked at the others, but they all just looked back blankly and followed Stevie without question. I considered just walking home alone, but didn't want to spend the rest of the year branded as a coward.

"Bloody hell," I mumbled and followed them.

The end of the drive was marked by a wooden sign stating 'Private Drive. No Turning.' Stevie pulled a black marker pen from his pocket, adding an 's' to the end of the word 'Private' and crudely amending 'Turning' to read 'Turding'. He looked back to us with a smug grin, raising the pen like a trophy. I recognised it from our teacher's desk.

Chris laughed and slapped Stevie on the back in congratulation. Stevie grinned at me, and I knew then exactly what he was going to say.

"You can't come, look." He pointed back to the amended sign. "No turds. Sorry."

"You better stay behind too then," laughed Chris.

Stevie grabbed Chris' head under his arm, dragging him around in circles. Chris stumbled around, kicking up dust, vainly trying to punch Stevie in the back.

"Are we doing this or not?" I asked.

Stevie turned to me and grunted, releasing his grip on Chris.

The drive was a straight road, flanked on either side by cornfields. We could see the large building up ahead of us, and as we got close, Stevie gestured for us all to get up to the edge of the corn which towered over our heads. He crouched down low and made some hand motions he had probably seen in some war movie and crept slowly forward, stopping every few steps to look around. After a while of this, he disappeared from sight behind a hedge.

"This better be worth it," said Ben, "I need a drink."

I sat down on the verge and began throwing stones at a fencepost on the other side of the drive. Chris and Joey joined in the game, managing to hit the post only a fraction of the times I did. It felt like forever had passed before Stevie came casually sauntering back, kicking up showers of gravel from the drive.

"There's no one here. Better yet, the front door's unlocked." Any fear of getting caught was forgotten in the excitement of an unlocked building to explore, and we all charged towards it without a hint of hesitation.

In fact, the front door was wide open.

"You've already been inside," Joey said, and Stevie just grinned in reply.

The hallway was large and cool, and at the other end of the stone tile floor, a huge wooden stairway led upwards. I dropped my bag from my shoulder, and lay down on the floor, turning onto my back to look up at the ceiling. The room was capped with a large dome; there were no windows in it, but shards of coloured glass had been set into the stone, making it sparkle like the night's sky. I closed my eyes, enjoying the feeling of the cold tiles beneath me.

"Oh my god, man, no way!" I sat up as Chris cried out; Joey and Ben started screeching and laughing too. I screwed my head round and saw, right in the middle of the hallway, Stevie crouched down with his trousers around his ankles.

"What the hell are you doing?" I leapt to my feet and reached out to grab him, but I was too late.

"You're disgusting."

Stevie looked up at me with mock innocence painted all over his face. "What? I needed to go."

"I thought you said 'No Turding' here!" Chris hopped excitedly from one foot to the other, but Ben and Joey just stared. Stevie grinned and straightened, pulling up his trousers.

"Was that really necessary?" I asked.

"Stop being so uptight, I'm just having a bit of fun. Anyway, once all the fogeys get here they'll be shitting everywhere anyway. I'm just christening the place." Stevie shrugged and sauntered off up a corridor.

Chris followed him, his excited yelps echoing around the empty building. Ben and Joey turned and looked at me.

"Come on, let's just go. This is stupid." I picked up my bag, hoping they would follow me.

"It's just a laugh," said Ben. "We're not hurting anyone."

I dropped my bag back to the floor and sat myself down on it, determined to simply wait until they got bored and came back. Their voices grew quieter, somewhere a door slammed, and then there was just me and the silence. I drummed a song on my knees, I counted the tiles on the floor, I looked up at the domed ceiling. I strained my ears, trying to catch the sound of a laugh or running feet, but the silence was thick, and suddenly I felt more alone than I had ever felt before. I stood up, pulling my bag onto my shoulder.

"I'm going now guys," I called out, but only my echo called back to me, shaky and distressed.

"Whatever," I muttered, and crossed the hallway towards the door.

The sound of tyres on the gravel outside stopped me in my tracks. I looked around desperately and threw myself through the first unlocked door I could find. It was an office, with a huge desk in dark wood. I dropped down behind it, peering out from between the two pillars of drawers that supported the leathered top. I heard voices, the clattering of crockery, and through the frosted glass panel in the door, I saw shadows move around in the hallway.

A squeal indicated that they had found Stevie's little present. I did not want to be a part of this. I turned to the window, looking for a catch or a handle, but the window was locked tight. I searched the ledge for a key, running my hand around the edges, but found nothing. I turned to the desk, easing open drawers, rummaging through papers and envelopes, but still found no key. Then I noticed the papers. They were all headed up with 'Oakwood Institute for the Criminally Insane'. This wasn't a retirement home at all.

I turned back to the window, shaking at the solid frame, and outside I watched in horror as my friends ran across the grass, disappearing into the tall corn, not even looking back to see whether I was behind them.

It must have been several hours before the building seemed silent again. The sun was already deep in the sky, casting an orange glow through the window.

I stood, gingerly crossing to the door and peering through, framing my face with my cupped hands. I couldn't see any movement outside the room, couldn't hear any footsteps or voices. I slowly turned the door handle and opened the door just a crack, peering out into the hallway. There was a bucket of water on the floor, a few wet rags piled beside it, but the space was deserted. I inched the door open a little further, just enough for me to slip through and pull my bag out after me.

The front door stood ajar, the sanctuary of the corn fields just outside. My hand was on it, pushing it wider, my foot on the step, my other foot on the next step, my nose drawing in the clear evening air.

"So you're the one who left the welcome gift?" A hand clamped onto my shoulder, pulling me back with a force that left me stumbling to keep my balance. The front door was slammed shut, the cornfields disappearing from view.

"No, no, it was...it wasn't..." I stammered.

The woman pushed her face down towards me. She was broad, her arms thick, her face square. A mole jutted from her bottom lip, smeared over with lipstick.

"I think that some of the guests here would like to thank you for that little present." She grabbed my wrist and dragged me, screaming and fighting, up the corridor, my trainers leaving desperate scuffs of black rubber on the tiles.

She stopped at a metal door, and unlocked it. As it swung open I saw the sheer thickness of it, although she had opened it as if it were simply made of cardboard. Inside the room were a few armchairs, their cushions covered in plastic. A television played some old chat show from inside a cage in the top corner of the room, static crackling across the image. Several faces turned towards me; men and women all dressed in the same green tracksuits, each face with the same drained expression.

I caught sight of Stevie, held tightly by a man whose face was covered by thick, black hair. I screamed out his name, and Stevie's eyes flicked up towards me, but they were dull and empty, and showed no recognition. The man shook him like a doll, snapping his head back and forth.

I struggled, but the woman's grip was far too strong. I called Stevie's name again, but he didn't turn round. The man dropped him to the floor, discarding him in a heap, blood streaming from his nose.

"I've got you another toy," the woman said. "Don't break this one so quickly. And keep the noise down."

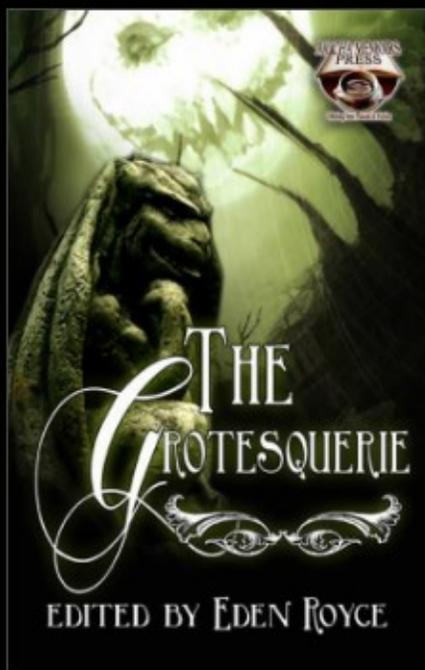
ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Angeline Trevena was born and bred in a rural corner of South West England where she still lives above a milkshake shop. She is a fantasy and horror writer, poet and journalist. Some years ago she worked at an antique auction house and religiously checked every wardrobe that came in to see if Narnia was in the back of it. She's still not given up looking for it.

Twitter: [@AngelineTrevena](https://twitter.com/AngelineTrevena)

Website: www.angelinetrevena.co.uk

Within these pages,
beauty becomes deadly,
innocence kills,
and karma is a
harsh mistress.

The Grotesquerie
is now open...



The Grotesquerie
by
Eden Royce

Available in print
and ebook from
Mocha Memoirs Press

Survival *LE Jamez*

She really couldn't stand the sight of him anymore, but then the feeling was mutual. The thought of having to spend one more night under the same roof as him was making her sick, but since the outbreak they'd been confined together; she'd had no choice. No one did.

She studied him while she filled her backpack with bottles of water and dried food; just sitting in his favourite chair, the awful fake leather lazy boy she hated. Since this all started he had made no attempt to be the man she thought she had married; he refused to accept the current situation and had left all the planning to her. She took a breath and almost gagged at the stench that had filled the air in the past few seconds. It was time. Looking out the window she saw them stumbling up the path towards the door.

"Right, I'm ready" she said. "They know we're here and that front door won't hold them for long, you know leaving is the only answer."

He finally looked up at her, "Our best chance is to wait it out, going outside is suicide. We may not enjoy living together, but dying together isn't going to solve anything," he whispered as he followed her into the hall.

She studied the man she had spent the past 15 years with. Overweight, what was left of his hair was turning grey. She felt no love, no sense of loyalty. She was making the right choice, no matter what she faced it was better than spending the end of her days in this house.

She smiled, "I've no intention of dying with you. Don't you get it? You're my decoy," with that she unlatched the front door and made a dash for the back as they pushed their way in. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw them swarm in and as predicted make a bee line for her husband. She watched, with some satisfaction, as he was surrounded and brought to the floor, her escape route was clear.

Grabbing the car keys off the table she snuck out the kitchen door and made it to the garage door without incident. Breathing heavily she opened the side door and eased herself in, locking the door behind her. Turning she felt her stomach drop to the floor. The garage had been breached. They turned as one when she screamed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Laura Jamez, a mother of two from Dunfermline in Scotland, has been obsessed with horror from an early age. She is currently writing a new horror story collection which will be released spring 2014, exploring the world of Vampires and Werewolves. One of Laura's aims for 2014 is to appear in every issue of Sirens Call, watch this space.

Twitter ID [@lejamez](https://twitter.com/lejamez)

Website : www.officemango.com

Dark Secrets shared...

Dark spells invoked...

Death desired and
death defied...

THIS FRESHEST HELL



the debut horror novel from
NATASHA EWEND
out now in paperback and ebook
www.lacunapublishing.com

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

Cups and Helmets *Elaine Pascale*

“You are dead.”

Chip Ferris read the lips of the Defensive Tackle, but the words slid right by him. Nothing mattered but the game.

This was not any game; this was THE GAME. Not only was this Homecoming, and all of the former upperclassmen who had tormented him in the locker room were here to see him in his glory, but there was also a talent scout present. This scout could open doors. Chip’s parents were salivating over the scent of college scholarships.

Chip, who had never even paid for the gas in his own car, was unable to smell scholarships; he could smell warm apple cider mixed with leather and sweat. The cider was coming from the stands, while the leather and sweat were all around him. His sense of smell was quite acute, because his hearing was so poor. He didn't mind: the less noise, the less there was to distract him. His focus, for football, was immense.

“You are so dead,” the Tackle emphasized, but Chip was already calling the play. Little did Chip realize, his opposition spoke the truth.

It would not be the large, competitive defense (who were also aware of the scout) that would bring down Chip Ferris. It would be something far less likely, far less believable, but far more horrifying.

“You are so dead,” Katrina shouted to Becky, trying to grab the bra from her hands. Becky deftly tossed it to Amy Ferris. Amy had shown no interest in her brother’s scouting opportunity, yet was completely consumed with the amount of stuffing in Katrina’s bra.

“This makes you an entire cup size bigger; it’s cheating,” Amy sniffed, tossing the undergarment to the ground and kicking it beneath a row of lockers. Katrina was outraged, but lowered herself to the floor to retrieve it.

“What is this?” she came up with the bra in one hand, a book in the other. The book had a lock on its cover.

“Break the lock,” Becky ordered, and one of the cheerleaders stomped the cover hard enough to do so. Ownership of the book was given away the moment it sprang open. There was only one girl who wrote with lavender ink, who dotted her i’s with skulls, who was bat shit crazy enough to keep a diary—full of secret thoughts and wishes—on her person in this particular high school. This girl, this poor pathetic girl, was part of a small group that fancied themselves to be some sort of witches.

“Looky, looky,” Katrina called out, momentarily forgetting her bra embarrassment. The other girls crowded around. Their pre-game perfumes competed, as did every part of their lives. They read and read, while donning their uniforms, while fixing their hair, while checking their make-up. They read and they laughed and they said horrible things about the diary's author and her friends. It wasn't so much that they hated the girls; it was that they were angry. Angry that these ‘others’ had chosen a different path, but still seemed happy. Everyone knew that prettiness and popularity were the only choices. The cheerleaders were also angry at the boys that used them. And angry at themselves for falling into the easy traps that adolescence sets.

Mostly, they were angry about the lies they had been fed. They had been told stories of girls who were ‘rescued’ simply because they were pretty. They had been read fable after fable about girls who were deserving of lives in castles, of princes. Even sadder, they knew by heart the story of the two sisters, separated at birth, who had found each other through a lock of their matching red hair. They knew this story and knew that they were supposed to bond together and protect each other, and yet they were so unabashedly cruel to each other.

Tara, tall and thin, and gifted with a new nose on her last birthday, was the first to find the chant.

“Is this Latin?” she asked, her index finger tracing the words.

Becky peered over her shoulder. "I think it's one of their lame spells." She attempted to pronounce the words, "Hemla, pneuma, takcn por luminos."

"That sounds funny," Katrina scolded, and joined in, "Hemla, pneuma, takcn por luminos."

"Let's put a beat to it," Amy suggested, stomping her feet and clapping her hands to the rhythm of their half-time routine.

"You are so dead," a girl in a skull-print hoodie whispered to her dread-locked friend. "You lost my diary?" she hissed, "Why did you have it in the first place?"

"I had forgotten it," the faux Rasta explained, "I forgot the curse."

"You don't need the curse," Diary-girl insisted, "It's dangerous. And now it could be anywhere...if someone finds it, we will all be dead."

The author of the diary was seated directly in front of Becky. Her red ringlets were streaked with black dye. Her nose ring glistened in the stadium lights. She, and the others, watched the cheerleaders carefully.

"Hey...Satisfaction...Give me some of that action." The girls started a chant that was quickly picked up in the stands.

Tara leaned over to Becky and whispered "We should get them chanting that other thing...see the looks on the bitches' faces!"

Becky smiled, but was not interested in what her co-captain was saying. She was busy fighting the itchiness that was crawling up her arm. She couldn't stop thinking about what had happened when they had chanted in the locker room. She could still see the horrible, buzzing lights that had filled all empty spaces: that had trapped them, had violated them. If only Katrina didn't wear stuffed cups and they hadn't found that book.

"Shit," she discarded her pompoms and scratched at her scalp.

"Ugg," Tara sneered, looking at her with disgust, while scratching underneath her armpit, striking a pose that made a strong case for the human/ape lineage. Tara had tried to turn away from the buzzing lights that had swarmed them in the locker room. She had tried to turn away, but the lights had been everywhere. They had landed on her skin, lightly like a mosquito; probing, like a mosquito. They had wafted up her skirt, touching and tickling every part of her. Now, she was one large itch. One famished itch.

Further down the row, Amy scratched and fumed. She had been placed at the end by Becky. Years of dance lessons and an athletic family history combined to create a coordinated specimen envied by the other girls, and especially by Becky. Amy did not understand why this happened. Chip was good at sports and that made him popular with the boys; her ability made her a target for hatred. Why did girls have to knock each other down?

And why was she suddenly so hungry?

Her internal social commentary was halted by the infernal itching she felt. She could see small welts appearing on her bare arms: appearing where the lights had molested her. She saw one of the Wiccan girls mouth to another 'zombie curse.' Amy was more interested in the teen witch's lips, than the words that spilled from them. The lips were glossy and full, and Amy suspected that chewing on those lips could alleviate her hunger. Instead, she nervously bit the skin on one of her fingers. It was an old habit; a bad habit. But, who knew she tasted so good?

From down the row of girls, whining voices complaining about hunger could be heard, and the sweat wafting from the football players smelled delicious.

“You are so dead!” Chip screamed, after he was blindsided. He glared up into the face of his opposition, a gorilla sized boy who was gallantly offering Chip his hand to help him up. “The play was over,” Chip growled. The play had been over; why hadn't the ref blown his whistle?

Chip shook his head and returned to the huddle. “This time guys,” he tried to make eye contact with each of his teammates. “We are going to run it. I'm sick of being knocked on my ass.” As his eyes made the round of the circle, he noticed an offensive lineman missing. He turned to the sidelines, but couldn't find him. The good news: the fans were on their feet. There was a lot of excitement in the stands. Chip clapped his hands to signal the lineup. Where were the refs?

Chip called the play, his voice covering the screams that he would have interpreted as only the roar of the crowd, if he had heard them. He took the snap. Backing up, he twisted his body to pass off the ball and found himself stepping on something hard and unyielding.

A ref.

Not only a ref, but a ref with a cheerleader attached to his throat.

“Gah!” Chip stumbled and backed right into the Running Back, who had been running in the wrong direction: running *from* something.

What was going on?

He saw two players down. Blood was drenching their jerseys so that he could not tell which team they played for. Beside them, a cheerleader made a meal out of a still-shrieking wide receiver

Out of habit, Chip scanned the field. He managed to spot his sister. She had her fingers crammed into her mouth; he remembered that she had done this as a baby. Only this time, her hands were bloody and raw. Only this time, she had sharp teeth which she put to use.

He looked around again. He knew he was in shock and he knew that he was having a nightmare-like experience where you can't run from monsters that are chasing you. Only this wasn't a nightmare, and the monsters were people he knew: one he lived with, and another he had just been making out with the night before. Chip no longer recognized Becky, a girl he had seen naked more than a dozen times. Now, she looked hungry, which was unusual. He had loved taking her to dinner (on his parent's dime, of course), but she would barely touch any food, and he could bogart her dessert.

Chip held his ground as Becky, Amy and two other girls moved toward him. The cup in his pants and the helmet on his head competed for containing the most liquid: one armed with urine, the other with sweat; both stemming from fear.

Everything grew quiet: quieter than normal. Like the silence that infests the jungle right before an apex predator makes his attack.

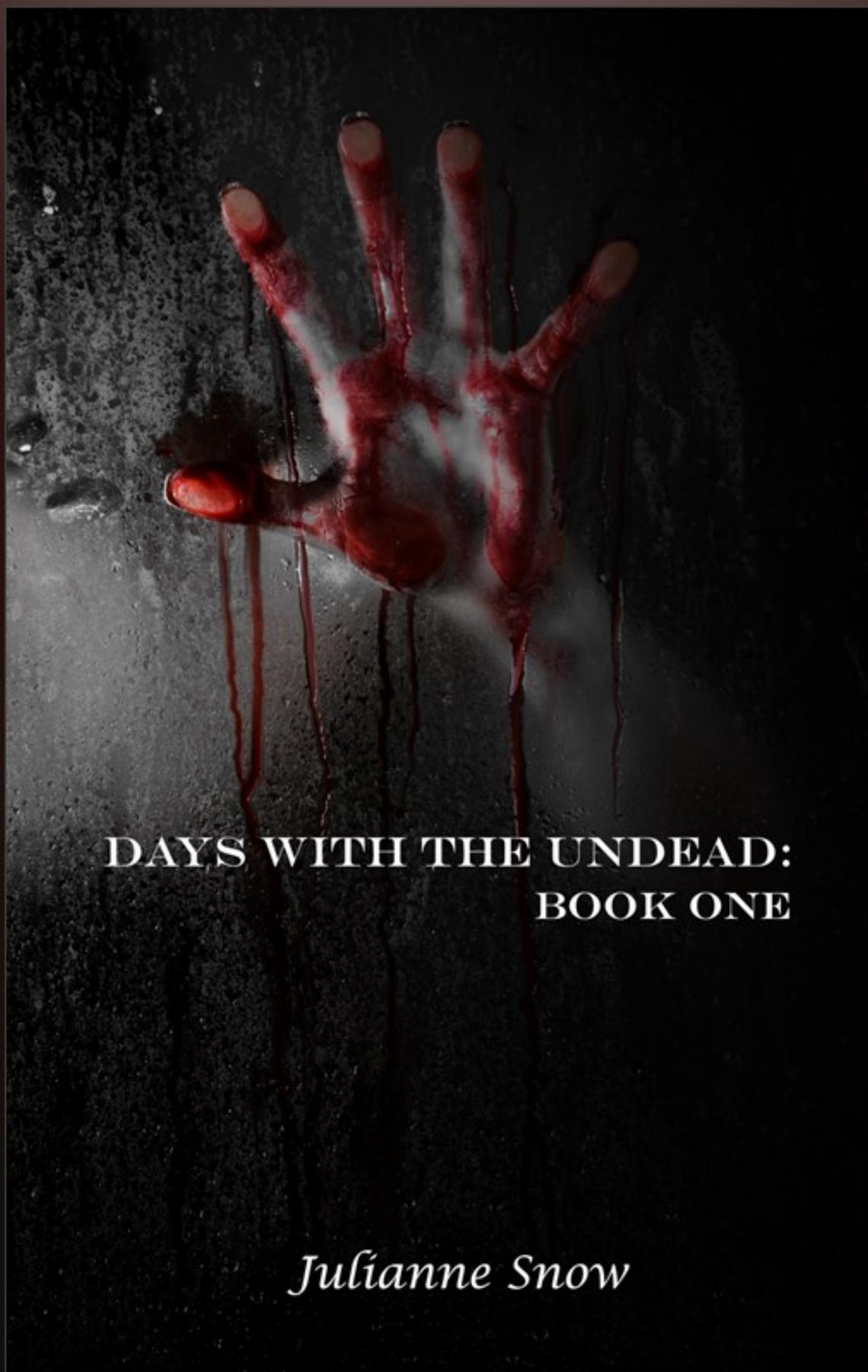
Then, they were upon him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Elaine Pascale lives on Cape Cod with her husband, son and daughter. Her writing has been published in several magazines and anthologies. She is the author of *If Nothing Else, Eve, We've Enjoyed the Fruit*. Elaine enjoys a robust full moon, chocolate, and collecting cats.

Twitter: [@doclaney](https://twitter.com/doclaney)

Webpage: elainepascale.com

...A well plotted zombie apocalypse story with a brilliant ending!



**DAYS WITH THE UNDEAD:
BOOK ONE**

Julianne Snow

**Available on Amazon, Smashwords, Barnes &
Noble, Kobo, & iTunes!**

Dog Eat Dog *Suzie Lockhart*

It was a pungent stench that woke Miles Jackson from his state of temporary unconsciousness. He wasn't able to decipher what it was at first, because chloroform was still burning in his nostrils, masking the worst of the foul odor.

Where the hell was he? He couldn't see, couldn't pinpoint the smell. It was just some type of funk.

Something wet tickled his hand, and he automatically recoiled. He didn't know what it was, and realized with dismay that the reason he couldn't see was because he was blindfolded. The air around him was cold, and even though he was freezing, Miles didn't think he was outside. He squirmed around, and as sensation returned, found his hands tied behind his back.

Then he heard a tiny yelp.

What the hell was going on? Was this some kind of joke?

He was gonna kill his boys, if that was the case. Miles didn't appreciate practical jokes.

He was the serious type.

Serious about one thing, making money.

That's why he'd gotten involved in the dog fights, he...

That odor...he recognized it now. Yeah, that's what it was, the nasty aroma of wet dogs.

"Hey, what the fuck *is* this *shit*?!" he demanded loudly.

No answer was forthcoming. Now he was really getting pissed. A seemingly endless line of curse words spewed from his mouth as he began shouting at the top of his lungs, describing in detail what he was going to do when he found out who was behind this.

"I highly doubt that," a low, female voice hissed from behind as he felt his hands slip free.

He sprang to his feet, ripped off the blindfold, and turned around a little too fast. Bile rose in his throat, and he swallowed it back down, determined not to give those damn clowns the satisfaction of watching him puke.

Shadows swam before his eyes in the dimness, but as they adjusted, he was able to make out three shadowy, cloaked figures standing behind a familiar-looking metal gate. One he was usually on the other side of.

Miles realized with a fright that the gate was, in actuality, the wall of a cage, and that he was inside it! Another stream of obscenities, and then he spat at them through the gap in his teeth.

Now, there was more yelping. Miles drew himself to his feet and leaned against the metal wire for support as he turned back around. Three small pit-bull pups stood behind him, shivering.

A nervous chuckle escaped his throat.

Yeah, this has to be some stupid prank. He thought.

"Alright, you assholes, just let me out already; fun's over."

When he turned back, the cloaked figures had vanished.

Dizzy and nauseated, he slumped back down to the floor. Miles didn't care much for dogs...actually, he hated them. When he was a little kid growing up in the projects, people had some mean-ass dogs that terrified him. He was in the dog fighting business for the money they made him, plain and simple.

What was the deal with the puppies? He laughed unexpectedly at the notion he might want puppies. The humor helped him regain confidence; he needed to get control of the situation and get the hell out of here. *Think*, he commanded himself.

In unison all the pups began to whimper. They were far too young to be away from the bitch that had them. He kicked them away with the metal tip of his Italian shoes.

"Grrr..." A low growling seemed to be surrounding him causing an unsettled feeling to take hold in his lower gut. As he rose back to his feet, his eyes darted about, following the puppies as they disappeared through a tiny trap door across the huge cage. As he moved away from where they had

disappeared, his shoes slid in a puddle he had failed to notice, and he lost his footing. He landed on his elbow, hearing a crack as he landed in dog piss.

“Aughhh!” Miles howled in pain. “My arm, my arm!”

Lights burst on overhead.

He scampered away from the wall of the cage, tears running down his face as he clutched his arm in agony. The sleeve of his Armani jacket was soaked in urine. *Whoever’s brilliant fucking idea this was, is really gonna pay when I get my hands on them*, he thought. He clenched his perfect white teeth together, trying not to let his voice betray the pain and rage blazing like a furnace inside.

Clearing his throat, he said evenly, “Okay, you got me. Now get me outta here. I think I fucking broke something. I need help...”

The words froze in his throat as he locked eyes with a full-grown pit-bull. The pups were suckling on their mother as she eyed him warily, baring her teeth before barking viciously at him for kicking her runts.

As his surroundings were bathed in light, he discovered, to his horror, a dozen cages; all housing fierce looking fighting dogs.

One lone figure remained—the woman who had been talking to him earlier. Miles was on a stage in some sort of dilapidated auditorium, surrounded by those caged beasts, and she was lounging against a dusty old velveteen chair, dark sunglasses covering her eyes. A few cinnamon curls strayed from under the hood of the black cloak covering most of her body. She propped the foot of a high-heeled leather boot on one of the steps in front of her, leaning forward a little onto her knee.

“Enjoying your company,” she spat, before adding. “You lowlife.”

Who was she? Was it some Ho he’d pissed off? Or one of those psychotic animal lovers?

He glared at her hard, trying to remember...

Slowly, she slid the covering off her head and tore off the glasses. “Remember me?”

A shudder went through his body. He should’ve recognized her voice—the acoustics in the old building distorted it, along with the fact she’d kept her voice to a low growl up until now. Miles had realized she was a psycho after their third date. He’d just been so taken by her looks. Even now, as his eyes skirted her voluptuous body in a skintight emerald colored dress, he unwillingly became aroused. Looking at crimson lips curled into a sneer and wide hazel eyes glowing yellow under the bizarre lighting brought it all back.

“Halley? Just what the hell do you think you’re doing?!”

“Dogs belong with other dogs, Miles. Don’t you think?” Apparently, she found the statement hilarious because she was laughing so hard she was practically howling.

Surely she wouldn’t...

“You’re sweating fear, Miles.” Halley inhaled deeply, licking her lips.

He heard a noise...like someone flicking a switch. One of the cages opened, and a pit bull charged at him like a bull towards a matador. He backed up against the cage wall and managed to kick the beast right before it managed to sink its teeth into him.

Another click. Then another.

He was surrounded.

Pit Bulls with strong fighting bodies began circling him.

Huskies. Cobalt eyes blazing at him.

Rottweilers. Powerful jaws snapping...

Sharp teeth bit into his flesh, piercing ebony skin beneath the expensive threads he wore.

Ripping.
Shredding.
Blood.
Laughter...

Halley slid open the cage.

The dogs whinnied, licking her hands as they ran free.

For several moments, she stared down at the mangled body of what had once been Miles Jackson. Pity, really. He had been physically beautiful as a human, and she was certain the change would have made him exquisite...

Too bad he'd been such an animal.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Three years ago Suzie Lockhart discovered a zest for the macabre, and now has stories in a variety of horror publications. She finished in the top ten for the Women on Writing Spring Flash Fiction Contest, and appeared in Dark Moon Digest's *Mistresses of the Macabre*, as well as *The Sirens Call* Women in Horror Recognition Month eZine in 2013.

Working as a Contributing Editor for Horrified Press, Suzie and her writing/editing partner placed second in this year's Predators and Editors Reader's Poll for their first anthology, *Nightmare Stalkers & Dream Walkers*.

Twitter: [@suzienbruce2](https://twitter.com/suzienbruce2)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/#!/suzie.w.lockhart>

The Sirens Call – Issue #14 is Now Accepting Submissions!



Old School Horror

For this issue, we want horror stories.

We don't want murder mysteries, we don't want cleverly couched tales of the supernatural, and we don't want slasher/gore stories. All we want is straight up horror. That's all we're looking for...

Submission Deadline: March 15th, 2014
Full guidelines on
www.SirensCallPublications.com

The Dead Thing *Lori R. Lopez*

It lay there, taking its sickening-sweet time with the rot and stench and bloating, the rite of passage for a corpse. Marnie was impatient, awaiting its metamorphosis in nail-biting suspense, fingertips ragged from chewing them too. Blood on teeth and lips was a welcome snack, like swiping a dip of frosting from a cake. Her belly gurgled, having missed breakfast and lunch. She crouched in the shadows, watching at a safe distance, feeling almost as stiff as the body — hands curled to fists, muscles rigid. The darkening purple flesh would relax. The haggard figure would rise. Soon, although it seemed unbearably tedious, she would have her sibling back. That was the plan. Until then, she and the cadaver needed to remain out of sight.

This had to work. It had to. She couldn't bear to grow up without her little sister. They were so close. It just wouldn't be fair. And it would be her fault.

"Wake up. You need to wake up. I'm waiting for you," she murmured, hugging her knees.

The dead thing — it wasn't Mariska, not yet — hadn't moved since Marnie bashed and pried off the lid of her sister's pine casket, then lugged the body to an abandoned barn. It didn't matter that most of the others who left them never returned. Daddy, Mommy, their grandmas and grampses . . . Only Uncle Gideon came back. From the war, where he had been killed. A letter was sent to his next-of-kin, his sister. Mama died shortly after, heartbroken. Her husband died in the war first. Wars made no sense, she had sobbed. Men shooting at each other because other men said so. The doctor called it pneumonia. Marnie believed it was sadness. Mommy's heart gave up hope. Without hope, there was no reason to live. She abandoned her daughters, who couldn't comprehend the depth of grief and depression that caused her body to shut down, give up the battle for breath.

A day after Mama was laid to rest, Marnie and Mariska gathered their belongings. Marnie was thirteen, too young to be in charge. The farm would be auctioned. They were going to an orphanage in a city. How easily someone's entire world could be crushed, like stomping on a beetle. They had been happy before the war.

Mariska glanced out a window and spotted a man in the distance, trudging a dirt lane toward the house. "Uncle Gideon!"

"Don't be stupid." Marnie had rolled her eyes. Folding a sweater, she scuffed to the panes. He did look familiar. How could it be? The dead couldn't walk.

A pair of lovely raven-maned lasses rushed down a narrow staircase and jostled their way through the front door. They stood on the porch, chests heaving, visages scrunched, peering into the bright sunshine. Was he a mirage? The road shimmered. He seemed to waver like a ghost. As he drew near, he noticed the girls and halted. The man spread his arms wide. Marnie and Mariska exchanged smiles. It was him! They clattered from the porch steps in unison, squealing, and barreled into their uncle's embrace.

He swept them up. "Girls! You're growing too fast. You need to slow down or you'll bump the sky!" They hadn't really grown that much. He always said that.

The sisters clasped him tight. Though he was weary (and injured, yet not letting on), Gideon lowered the girls to swing each of them around by the hands. Like he had always done.

"We thought you were dead!" Mariska blurted.

"Shut up!" Marnie hissed at her sister. "Don't be rude!"

"I was dead," beamed their uncle. "But I woke up, and now I'm here. Where's your mother?" He yelled to the house, "Becca!"

She didn't appear at the door, shade her eyes and shout, "Giddy!" She called him that because he was always cheerful.

The man waited. The girls waited with him. Somber, he peered down at his nieces. "What happened?" His voice had deepened to a moan.

“Ma died too. She wanted to be with you and Pa, I guess.” Marnie hung her head, feeling unimportant.

“Hey.” Gideon lifted her chin. “She loved you. Both of you. More than anything.”

“Then why’d she leave?” Marnie squinted up with one eye, features twisted.

Her uncle squatted to gaze up at two anguished faces. “Sometimes bad things happen. People die. But miracles can happen just as easily. I was dead. My spirit floated out of my body. I could see myself on the ground. My chest had a bloody hole.” He unbuttoned his shirt to reveal an ugly puckered wound. It was still healing. “There’s a matching hole on the other side. I was gone. My unit reported me lost in action. Then I got up. I came back. Came home.”

“Will Mama come back?” the girls chorused.

“I don’t know. It doesn’t always work that way. Things don’t always go the way you want. But we can hope.”

He held their hands. The girls led him toward Rebecca’s resting place behind the house. A patch of earth bordered by a low stone wall boasted a fresh grave among various sunken ones carpeted by stubbly grass.

“Maybe she doesn’t know how,” Marnie suggested. The girls had collected wildflowers daily and knelt by their mother, abiding her resurrection. Hope was like a butterfly in a sealed jar, fluttering and buoyant . . . then flopping, collapsing. *Dead*. Several afternoons later, they picked off the flower petals and littered them, disappointed. “Maybe we have to show her.”

“How?” Mariska asked.

“We’ll play a game. War. You’ll go to sleep and wake up like Uncle Gideon.”

“I don’t want to play that game!” objected Mariska. “It’s for boys.”

“We can do anything boys can do.”

“I don’t care. I don’t want to play it.”

“You have to, or Mommy will stay in the ground!”

Mariska shook her head. “You do it.”

“No. It has to be you. I’m older. I need to put you to sleep. And you were in Mama’s body last. There’s a stronger link.”

“I’m afraid.”

“You’ve gotta be brave. Ya want her back, right?”

The little girl pouted. Her drooping head bobbed.

“We’ll do it tonight, when Uncle Giddy goes to bed. We can’t dawdle. Mama’s been planted awhile.”

Marnie tiptoed downstairs to a dark kitchen and slid a sharp butcher knife from a drawer. She bit her bottom lip when the drawer scraped as she closed it. Silence. She crept upward to the room shared with her sister. Mariska huddled in a corner, trembling.

“Come on,” whispered the girl’s big sister. “We should do it outside so there isn’t a mess.”

The words were no comfort. Mariska began to wail in a muffled keening manner.

“Keep quiet!”

“I’m scared. I can’t help it.”

“You’re being selfish.” Desperate to save their ma, the elder sibling pulled the younger to her feet. Mariska noticed the knife and panicked, weeping. Marnie clamped her empty palm over the kid’s mouth. “Zip it or I’ll get blood on your critters!” The child had teddybears, a bunny and kittycat on her bed.

The hysterics subsided. Mariska loved animals and adored the stuffed toys.

“Hurry.” The gals descended with furtive movements and slipped through a rear door. Marnie

tugged her sister up the slope. They entered the family burial plot and crouched at their mama's graveside. "Okay, hold out your arms."

Cringing, the eight-year-old obeyed — sticking her arms forth, squeezing her eyelids shut. Marnie turned the girl's wrists to the top. Swallowing, she steeled herself and raised the knife . . . then carved its blade across tender flesh. The sisters gasped. Marnie smacked a hand to smother Mariska's delayed howl of pain. Red gashes promptly drizzled scarlet streaks as the girl's arms sank like a dying bird's wings, draining twin pools beside her shoes.

"I'm cold," the child whispered when Marnie removed her hand. Mariska slumped onto the mound of soil covering her mother's grave.

As the sun climbed past the horizon, Uncle Gideon would spy their diminutive forms through a window while filling a pot with water at the kitchen sink. He raced outside and to his horror found Marnie cradling her sister's corpse, rocking, singing a lullabye their mother had sung for them, that Becca's mother had crooned to her and Gideon.

"Do not fret, my dear, about tomorrow.
You have all the time in the world today.
Sleep now and chase your dreams in stardust.
Tomorrow you'll rise to dance and play.
You'll open your eyes again to play.
There will be another chance to play."

The combat veteran had endured tremendous miseries and was hardened by his ordeals. Glimpsing the scene — the pretty child's blue lips; a stained knife visible on the spaded soil — he could scarcely stand without his knees buckling, his stomach revolting.

"Nooooooo!" mourned Gideon, taking the cold stiff girl in his arms, attempting to warm her lifeless body. "Why?"

His surviving niece pushed to her feet and brushed a wrinkled dress. "We're playing a game," Marnie stated, eerily calm. "Like you. She's going to wake up. She's being stubborn. You know how she is. She didn't want to play, and she's being ornery!"

Uncle Giddy didn't care for the game either. He bore the cadaver to the house. Marnie followed. Her uncle paused to stare at her without speaking, then departed to summon the authorities. There was no vehicle. He walked.

A truck arrived with the local doctor. A car braked behind it. A fellow in uniform emerged, accompanied by Gideon. The graying gents leaned over Mariska, occupying the kitchen table. Gideon hunched on a wooden chair near the stove, head in hands.

Marnie perched in the living-room on the edge of a drab green sofa, isolated, trying to behave respectable, gazing occasionally at the inquest. Her sister was the center of attention, as usual. She sighed. The lawman finally strolled to the couch and took a seat. "A very sad day," he mentioned. "Such a shame. She was so young."

"Don't worry. She won't stay dead," Marnie reassured.

"I'm to blame," her uncle told the men. "She isn't responsible. I put a foolish notion in her mind. This is my mistake."

Her lack of guile, the innocence in her demeanor convinced the investigators she didn't realize what she had done, or the consequences of her actions. Marnie was exonerated. Mariska could be buried. A simple funeral had been conducted, her grave dug by Gideon.

He was quiet that night, drinking alcohol, brooding by himself on the porch.

She ate supper alone at the table where her sister was examined, spooning casserole onto a plate from a ceramic dish left by a neighbor. There was chocolate cake, like somebody's birthday. She devoured two slices. One for her and one for Mariska, who was about to be reborn.

Her uncle passed out, snoring in the front. Marnie exited the rear door, locating a shovel and rope stashed below shrubs, and hiked uphill to the scene of her crime. She would play at graverobber this time, which might even be more ghoulish than sacrificing her sister for the sake of a miracle, in the obscure hope their mother would crawl from her tomb. The thought was rather frightening, now that she thought about it, scooping earth. What would Mama look like? The dirt was soft and loose, yet exertion fatigued her as she tunneled to her sister's coffin and shattered the lid. Knotting an end of the rope in a loop (the opposite had been tied to a stone cross), she managed to scale the pit and haul the trussed body to the surface.

It was the most difficult night of her life. Marnie alternately carried and dragged her sister through neglected fields. War made it tough for everyone. Families struggled and lost their land. The girl conveyed the body to a barn on a neighbor's property that had fallen to disuse.

"Quit being so pigheaded," she coaxed. It was taking too long. Their uncle didn't look like this . . . decomposed, mottled. He didn't smell this bad. "Please. Come back."

The dead thing just lay there. It didn't even twitch.

Discouraged, Marnie gripped the corpse's arms. "Wake up!"

Nothing. She cupped her visage forlornly, eyes hooded in regret. Her shoulders, limbs, and gnawed fingers ached.

A noise startled her, and the teen jumped. Her uncle staggered into the doorway. He surveyed the dim interior. "Marnie!" The man hastened forward. "I've been searching for you. Concerned when I saw the grave dug up. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have told you those lies. I was probably in shock, near death, some part of me hanging on. How could I have died and still be here? It isn't possible!"

His niece's countenance transformed from exhaustion and despair. Furious, she straightened too quickly then swayed, dizzy. When she steadied, her voice was chillier than a winter storm. "It is possible. It has to be. You were dead. You said so. Your spirit left your body. This'll work, Uncle Giddy. Mariska just isn't ready. Like when she was born. She didn't want to come out. My sister's being mulish, that's all it is. I know her. She will return!"

"No." Gideon's expression was the picture of conviction. "She can't."

Meeting his eyes, Marnie's orbs welled with tears. Her features crumpled. "No!" she screamed.

He strode to her, wrapped the girl in his arms.

A sound made them freeze: stirring; the rustle of cloth.

Marnie shifted to regard her sister — on all fours, head down, emitting a hoarse rumble.

"Mariska?" She couldn't believe it.

The smaller child lifted an unrecognizable aspect. Lips were pale and cracked, the eyes white, complexion marbled and splotched in motley hues of decay. Limp black hair had dulled and clumped in strands. The creature extended to a stooped pose then leered at the living. It wasn't alive. It wasn't human. Whatever came back from that grave could not be Mariska. Drooling and snarling like a dog with no dinner, it lurched crookedly toward her.

Marnie stumbled in retreat. "You're not my sister!"

The dead thing shambled a few steps. Faltering, it ogled her, then scrutinized Gideon. A tongue licked its parched mouth in a lewd fashion. Dark fingers curled, hoisted jerkily to menace. Claws sprouted at the tips. An array of claws continued to rip out of the creature's flesh, as if armoring its torso and appendages, the hideous mug.

Gideon clapped a hand to his chest. The wound was throbbing with an agonizing pulse. A heartbeat. He grimaced and sagged to his knees.

The beast charged to the man and raked its talons, cutting him to ribbons.

Marnie groaned, splatted with blood, and pressed against a wall. "Are you here to get even? Is that it? You want revenge?"

The miscreant tilted its head.

"What do you want?" the girl shrieked.

The monster in a child's skin and bones grinned mirthlessly. "Soul," it uttered.

Marnie blinked. It wanted a soul. Hers.

The dead thing advanced. "Play," it demanded.

The teen gulped. She was trapped. Her eyes roamed, scanning the vicinity for a weapon. *You can't play War without that*, her brain connected. *Games have rules!*

But the thing cheated. Just like her sister always did, which made her mad. As the corpse slashed its claws, Marnie kicked it in the stomach and knocked the beast flat, then ran as fast as she could. She didn't want to play this game.

The dead thing sprang with demonic agility, latching to the girl like a hump on her spine. Marnie turned in circles, swatting, wrenching it off.

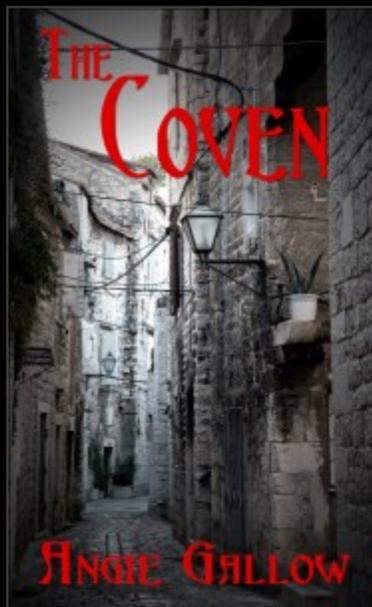
The deranged carcass blocked the door. Marnie clenched her teeth and balled her fists. She would go down fighting. And she did, proving the old adage: War is Hell.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Lori R. Lopez wears a lot of hats, and you never know what madness might lurk beneath them. An author as well as an artist, musician, actress, activist and more, she writes short stories, novels and poetry. Her books include AN ILL WIND BLOWS, CHOCOLATE-COVERED EYES, DANCE OF THE CHUPACABRAS, THE MACABRE MIND OF LORI R. LOPEZ, OUT-OF-MIND EXPERIENCES, and THE FAIRY FLY.

Twitter: [@LoriRLopez](https://twitter.com/LoriRLopez)

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/lorilopez>

After a gruesome betrayal, vampire Sebastien Vilmont is flung into a whirlwind cat and mouse game when his traveling party is ambushed by an opposing group of bloodthirsty vampires. Maurice, the leader of Sebastien's coven, makes the decision to not only wage war against the opposing vampire clan, but a clerical organization known as The Diocese Club who wishes to exterminate all vampire-kind.



THE COVEN

by
Angie Gallow

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

Reunion *Cara Michaels*

Our song played on the radio and I shivered to remember her. If I closed my eyes, her face came to me, the memory softened by time. Dark hair. Warm, brown eyes. The shape of her face, the tilt of her lips, eluded me. Had her nose been a bit long, maybe?

"It's so cold. Have you been outside?"

Snow fell on the dark world beyond the house, a gently hissing refrain. Maybe I *would* go outside this once. Feel the crisp air. Catch the scent of distant fires.

"Better bundle up." Her laughter jangled, discordant. *"Wouldn't want anything important to freeze."*

I knew her voice. Knew her words. Her hurt and anger.

When would I forget?

Something shrieked across the glass before me. I stumbled back. Four furrows carved along the width. I searched the darkness. Nothing more than trees and snow.

The onslaught rattled the walls, circling me.

The kitchen phone rang, startling a shout from me.

"H-hello?" I fumbled the receiver to my ear, my voice loud. Too loud. Desperate. *Help me.* "Yes, hello?"

"How are you tonight, David?"

"Dr. Lazlo?"

"I thought you might like a friendly voice. This being your anniversary."

My anniversary?

"What day is it?" How much time had passed? Did the snow look deeper? I pressed the heels of my hands against my eyes, focusing on the tinny music from the radio.

Our song still played. Not so long then.

My gaze locked once more on the calendar, but the dates blurred.

"February first."

"Oh. Yes." I knew that. Didn't I? The song on the radio caught my attention again. Our song. Our anniversary. "Thank you for calling."

"Baby, this weather is awful. Maybe we should just head back home."

Just a bit farther, I'd promised.

I shook my head to clear the memories.

Dr. Lazlo sighed. Concern mixed with disapproval.

"Have you left the house lately, David?"

Left? Leave? Yes, I wanted to leave this place, but I'd stayed too long.

"She's come back, Doctor. She's so angry with me."

Her rage tore into glass, wood, mortar. Not long now, and she would breach my only defenses.

"Angry? Why should she be angry?"

"I killed her."

"David." Dr. Lazlo's voice hummed in my ear. "It was a terrible accident, but it *was* an accident."

"David? David! Oh my God, the water. I-it's s-s-so c-cold." Pressure built. In my memories. In my mind. Spidery fractures everywhere. *"I c-can't get my s-seatbelt. David, help me, p-please."* I sank to the floor with a heavy thud. *"No, no, no! Jesus, d-d-don't leave me here!"*

"I'm sorry. So sorry."

"David, listen. Melissa is gone." Spider webs ran the breadth of the bay window overlooking a pristine winter wonderland. "She's been gone four years now. She's dead. You do understand that?"

"I understand." I dropped the phone. "She doesn't."

The song faded and the DJ murmured the dedication in his smooth tenor. *Happy anniversary to reunited lovebirds, David and Melissa. Don't let the cold get you.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Cara Michaels is a dreamer of legendary proportions (just ask her about the alien pirate spaceship invasion). Her imagination is her playground and nothing is so fun for her as building new characters and worlds with at least an edge of the fantastic. She's writing whenever the opportunity presents itself and can typically be found tinkering with half a dozen projects. Occasionally all at once.

Twitter: [@caramichaels](https://twitter.com/caramichaels)

Web: <http://caramichaels.com>

Sirens Call Publications is Accepting Submissions for Artists for Upcoming Issues of *The Sirens Call* eZine!

Are you an Artist looking for some exposure? Do you make book covers or take stunning photography? Or perhaps your medium is something different. Whatever it is, we'd love to hear from you.

We are primarily looking for Artists whose work leans more into the dark and edgy realm, but if you are unsure if what you create fits, send us an email and we'll let you know—Submissions@SirensCallPublications.com



Image Copyright © Dark Angel Photography

Tumbling Down *Lori Safranek*

Susan jogged in place while rearranging her hair. The elastic wouldn't hold her thick, brown hair in place. She tightened it and moved back into her running speed.

The gloomy and dark weather had already brought her mood down, so this route suited her fine and it all suited her purpose. Her normal ten-mile route was for better weather and happier moods.

Pounding along the uneven sidewalk, she cursed the city parks workers for not doing their jobs and zig-zagged around a dirty disposable diaper lying right where her left foot should have landed. She shook her head. Definitely back to the longer run tomorrow, on the cleaner, safer route near work.

She took in deep regular breaths and enjoyed the feel of her muscles stretching and heating up as she moved around the park with ease and grace. A 20-something wearing a black sweat suit and scruffy running shoes ran toward her, giving her a bold once-over.

Susan met his eyes with a blank stare and, seeing no encouragement there, he sped up and moved past her. The idea of making romantic connections while running never appealed to her. She was running, not socializing. And today was business.

The route was popular with local runners but Susan knew she had to keep focused on the path, since parts of the sidewalk were in disrepair and a misplaced step could send a runner careening over the edge and down the steep sides of the park.

Turning the third corner, Susan increased her speed. She liked to put all her energy into the last leg of the run, doing her cool-downs at the end. Not all runners approved of her style, but it suited her. Steady, sure, comfortable and then, fast, daring, a flash of woman running at break-neck speed. The adrenaline put her mood in the clouds for the rest of the day, no matter what bullshit life brought forward.

Ahead lay a tricky section of sidewalk that Susan saw as an adversary. She had developed a little step, leap, sidle movement that kept her far enough away from the precarious edge but allowed her to keep her speed up for the rest of the run.

Five more strides and Susan's left foot hit the cracked edge of the sidewalk, sliding off into slick mud. She tried to dig in to the mud with her foot but to no avail. Her weight shifted and soon she was on her back, sliding down the hill.

Her body slammed into something soft. No, wait, it was firm, it caught her up and she slowed down. Before she could see what had stopped her fall, the object broke free and joined her in her slide across the mud. The first spin landed Susan on her back, with the object on top of her. She came face to face with another woman. She tried to pull away from this horrible sight but her movements set them rolling again, over and over, before smacking into the solid ground of the park.

The jolt of hitting the earth took Susan's breath away and she realized she had closed her eyes somewhere during the hectic tumble. She opened her eyes to see where she had landed and saw a pair of blue eyes, surrounded by black eyelashes. The dead woman wore a knit cap like runners wore on cold days.

The corpse had probably saved Susan's life. It was lying on top of her, and though she'd gained her breath back, she still wasn't thinking clearly. This is not how she had planned for it to happen. She remembered why she was there and a scream tore from her throat.

She was touching a dead woman's body, looking into the eyes of a corpse. The scream continued as Susan thrashed to get the body off of her, to get away from the filthy, decaying corpse. She was still screaming when she heard voices calling down, telling her help was on its way. Just calm down, you'll be okay.

No, I'm not okay, there's a fucking corpse on top of me! Susan wanted to yell. Instead she finally disentangled from the body and scooted as far as she could get from the dead woman, and sat staring at

the horrible object.

Its face was covered with blood. Her throat had a black line around it. Susan grimaced when she realized the throat had been cut; that's probably how the girl had died. Susan raised her hand to cover her mouth, since she felt she might throw up. Before her hand touched her skin, thank God, she noticed her blood-covered fingers and screamed again. She frantically scrubbed her hands on her jacket, saying "No, no, no, oh God, no, get it off me." She hadn't expected to fall apart, even, in an emergency. She was a tough cookie, everyone told her so. But blood on her hands, a roll down the hill with a dead body. It was too much.

When two police officers approached her from the park, Susan was sitting with her arms wrapped around her knees, crying. The female cop wrapped a warm blanket around her and the male cop went immediately to the corpse. The process had begun. Someone was here to rescue Susan from her nightmare. She let her mind just go blank, only answering the cops' gentle questions. Once they realized what had happened, they felt too much pity to continue the questioning.

The woman cop pulled Susan to her feet and led her to the patrol car. She drove her home and came inside. Susan moved like an obedient child, taking off her jacket and handing it to the cop, who bagged it for evidence. Then they went upstairs and the cop retrieved all the clothes Susan had been wearing. Susan wrapped a terrycloth robe around her nude body and led the cop back downstairs.

"Is there someone I can call, to come be with you?" the cop asked. She was a slender brunette with a calm manner. "A friend?"

Susan shook her head. "I'm fine. My friend will be here at 4. What time is it anyway?"

The cop glanced at her watch. "It's 3:30, hon."

"Then I'll be fine. I just want to take a shower and get warm. I'm so cold."

"I'd say that's pretty natural, after what you went through. Are you sure you're not dizzy, sick to your stomach, any of that?"

Susan shook her head.

The cop looked skeptical but what could she do? She had Susan sign a couple papers then left the home.

Susan went straight upstairs and took the hottest shower she could stand. She washed her hair over and over and scrubbed her face until it was tender. Then she dressed in a warm sweat suit and house slippers.

She moved to the side of her bed and picked up the throw-away cell phone she kept there.

"It's me. It's done." Susan lit a cigarette while holding the phone on her shoulder. A voice could be heard in the background. "Yes, I'm fine. Cops are gone. They found the body, finally. We had to do their fucking job for them."

She paused while she puffed on her cigarette and listened to the other speaker.

"No, don't call for a while," she said. "Probably a couple months. Call the house phone. I'm going to destroy this phone, it's just a throw-away anyhow."

She listened some more. She rolled her eyes.

"Stop! Stop talking! This is just one step and you know it. It's going to take a little time. Cops gotta file reports, notify you that your lovely wife has finally been found. And she's dead."

"And then you're going to be very busy for a while with funerals and mourning and all that malarkey. Filling out insurance claim forms."

She smashed the cigarette out in a red ashtray near her bed.

"I would guess two months, minimum, and you know that too," she said firmly. "Now, keep your shit together and I'll see you then."

He spoke some sweet words that made Susan's gut cramp.

"Listen Romeo, we can play kissyface once everything's cleared up. Until then, you are the grieving husband and I do not know you at all. We're going to meet on that cruise to Jamaica, paid for with your wife's life insurance money. Nothing suspicious, no loose threads. So keep your cool. I'm too busy to spend time with you right now anyway. I have to finish teaching this semester at the college, finals, all that. Should be perfect timing."

He squawked a little more in her ear and she laughed. "You're just worrying over nothing. Now, go lie down and rest. The cops won't come today, I bet. When they do, we're one step closer to being together. And being filthy rich."

He laughed.

"Yeah, I figured you weren't thinking about the money," she said, her smile crooked to one side cynically. "I have to go now. See you on the cruise, handsome."

They hung up and she lit up another cigarette. She didn't care if this loser lost his cool with the cops. She hoped he didn't, she was kind of fond of him. But if he got caught, he'd go to jail, not her. She didn't want to lose out on all that lovely insurance money, but she'd manage. If the cops had found that damned body earlier, she wouldn't have had to pull her little tumble down the hillside. It wasn't too bad, but she had to admit, she wouldn't want to cuddle up with a corpse again like that. Not for any amount of money.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Lori Safranek enjoys twisting reality into macabre short stories and making something horrible out of something ordinary, often with a dash of humor. Born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska, Lori has found much inspiration for her writing among the seemingly quiet, Midwestern people who continually surprise her with their strange and wonderful antics. Lori has filled her house with research for her writing—in other words, boxes and boxes of books—but she leaves enough room for her husband, Chuck, and their dogs, Arthur and Scout, neither of whom are big horror fans.

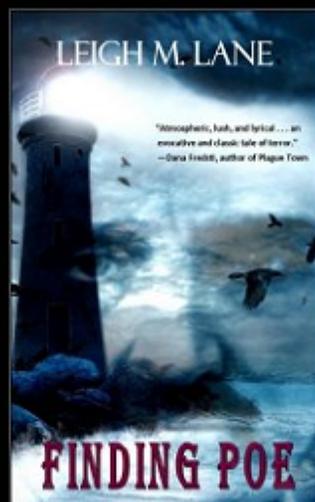
The first three installments of Lori's Freaked Out series are available on Amazon. She has written numerous short stories and plans to write her first novel this year.

Twitter: [@safraneklori](https://twitter.com/safraneklori)

Facebook: [Author Lori Safranek](https://www.facebook.com/AuthorLoriSafranek)

"Atmospheric, lush, and lyrical, Leigh M. Lane's *Finding Poe* is a haunting Gothic novel which will delight anyone familiar with the works of Edgar Allan Poe, as well as anyone who enjoys an evocative and classic tale of terror."

-horror/mystery author
Dana Fredsti



FINDING POE

by
LEIGH M. LANE

Available on Amazon
in print and ebook

From the land of ghosts, beyond consciousness,
a dark visitor invades. No one hears her scream.

A TALE OF THE SUPERNATURAL
NIGHT SEA JOURNEY

A woman's profile is shown in a soft, ethereal light, looking towards the right. Behind her, a pair of large, dark, feathered wings is visible, set against a background of swirling, fiery orange and red patterns that resemble flames or smoke. The overall mood is mysterious and supernatural.

PAULA CAPPA

AUTHOR OF THE DAZZLING DARKNESS

eBook currently available on Amazon

Print version available March 1, 2014 from Crispin Books

Hall Of Twelve *Rebecca Besser*

Who knew that living to see tomorrow would involve laying face down in the mud, sucking air through a reed? Jeff Monroe thought, doing just that.

He couldn't believe that just a month ago life had been normal. He'd been a normal guy with a family. Now it was all gone.

The 'Beings' had come. They didn't have any other name for them, because they didn't know who the Beings were or where they'd come from. The closest thing that came to mind for Jeff was mutants. But that would mean they'd been human to begin with and he didn't think they were.

He had joined the Rebels to fight the Beings after they'd eaten his daughter and kidnaped his wife. Now . . . he could hear them coming. They were behind him, on the right.

They'd almost passed him when one stepped directly in the center of his lower back. Its clawed foot dug into his flesh and curled around his spinal cord.

Jeff screamed.

The Being stepped off of him and signaled to the others with a chirping noise. They gathered around while Jeff was lifted into the air by his neck.

Realizing he could no longer move the lower half of his body, Jeff knew he had no chance. Even if he managed to get free, he couldn't escape.

He noticed three other Rebels had also been captured. They were bound together to form a chain gang, managed by another Being wearing a black cloak. He knew they would be taken to the Hall of Twelve and it was more than likely they would all die there.

During the journey, Jeff passed out from pain.

When Jeff regained consciousness, he found himself lying in the corner of a poorly lit, dingy room. He counted twenty captives, including himself.

A Being in a black cloak sat behind a small, square table under the only light in the room, a bare bulb hanging from wires.

Jeff winced and pulled himself upright.

Another of the Beings entered through a steel door. It buzzed and clicked something to the one behind the table, receiving a nod in response.

The new arrival grabbed a man and dragged him over to the table.

The sitting Being nudged a pair of red dice toward the man.

Jeff remembered the crazy man they'd found in the woods. He'd told them of the Hall of Twelve – about the roll of the dice, and freedom or death. Only one number would set you free, the rest would decide which room, and which horror, would be your death. The crazy man's roll had gained him his freedom.

The man picked up the dice and rolled.

The Beings squealed with delight and the man was dragged through the steel door. His begging echoed back as he was dragged down a hallway. Strange growls, howls, and roaring bellowed out as well. Moments later, the man screamed in terror and pain.

The remaining captives shuddered. One man started to cry and blubber pathetically. Tears came to Jeff's eyes as well, but not from fear. He felt like a failure. He would never find his wife and save her.

The next man chosen walked up to the table with his head held high. He picked up the dice and tossed them down on the table with disgust.

The Beings hissed.

The man was shoved toward a small wooden door in the opposite wall of the metal one. As it was opened the sun shown in, birds chirped, and you could smell the grass. The man was shoved out and the door was slammed shut.

The captives began to stir, one man tried to get closer to the table to see what had been rolled. He was pushed back immediately.

The 'handler' Being moved to grab someone else from the crowd, but the one at the table made rapid clicking noises and nodded toward Jeff. The handler complied and picked Jeff up, bringing him to the table. He was shaking. His nerves were stretched so tautly between fear and hope that he didn't know what to do or think.

He rolled. The dice rattled on the table and bumped against the one inch wooden lip. Six, he'd rolled a six, and as the Beings made sounds of pleasure he knew he was doomed.

Jeff was carried to the metal door and thrust through. The growls, howls, and roaring began anew. They were more spine tingling in the hall than they'd been in the waiting room. Each creature was hidden in a room with a steel door. Blood was gushing out from under door number two.

Must have been the first man, he thought.

He shook harder as they passed each door.

They reached number six. The Being slid back the metal bar and opened it.

Jeff was so scared that he was clutching the cloak the Being was wearing. But with a quick yank, he was torn off and thrown into the pitch black room. The door was slammed shut behind him and re-bolted.

He heard a long, low growl from the far corner of the room and he peed himself.

He felt something move and bump into his limp legs. Blinding pain shot up his arm as something bit him and tore off his forearm.

The pain was overwhelming; his screams were deafening.

Again a bite, and the rest of his left arm was ripped off with violent tugging and jerking.

Jeff was in so much pain he could no longer scream. He lay gasping for breath – each attempt for air was a spasm of tortured pain.

His right arm received the same treatment. Then his legs were ripped off.

As he lay there, nothing more than a torso with a head, he gasped his last breath with an image of his beautiful wife flashing through his brain.

"I'm sorry," he breathed as unseen jaws clamped down on his face, crushing his skull and ending his life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Rebecca Besser resides in Ohio with her husband and son. She's best known for her work in adult horror, but has been published in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry for a variety of age groups and genres. She's currently seeking an agent with the hopes of expanding her reach and readership through a mass market publication in the future.

Twitter: [@BeccaBesser](https://twitter.com/BeccaBesser)

Author's Page: <http://www.rebeccabesser.com>



Inside Out *Marjie Myers*

The sun was up and as such, so was I.

62 years 10 months 1 week and 3 days of training and I was about to graduate. I had thought about this day for a long time.

My trainer had been quiet and unpredictable as a child and I had adopted a similar nature.

I recall the many times we spent out in the woods, catching small creatures and toying with them, toying until it was no longer toying, teasing until it was no longer teasing, tormenting until it was no longer tormenting, torturing until it was death.

Once we peaked at death we would begin again, carefully selecting which creature would be next as we worked our way up the food chain. It was a slow process. The first guest we had was a frog; whose demise was brought about by a boot thwacked down on his head.

What followed were many more frogs; sliced, diced, boiled and burnt, until we found a method that compelled us to try it on something just a little bigger. Hours were spent hunting and preying from dusk till dawn.

My trainers name was Ernest, and everywhere that Ernest went, I was sure to follow.

I needed to observe him, to watch, to listen, and to learn all I could. I would need these skills one day. Only I had bigger plans, I would not be satisfied as easily as Ernest. Ernest was a scientist, organised, thorough, precise and hypothetic but bound by guidelines and rules. He demonstrated restraint when we had begun to consider more intelligent creatures, cats, dogs, and even pigs but I dreamed of bigger and better guests. I enjoyed the games, the tease, the torture and deep down, I knew he did too.

I was blessed by good fortune when Ernest was in his twenties. He met and fell in love with a woman, a woman called Clara, who was so petite as to cast the smallest shadow. Ernest no longer experimented, preferring to spend time with Clara, so much time was spent indoors that I was left wanting.

I thought this might have been the end for us, but then after several months, Clara betrayed Ernest's trust and broke his heart. This was a turning point for him, he had played by the rules, followed all the guidelines and yet he had been toyed with, teased and left in turmoil. His unpredictable nature had caught Clara by surprise. He hadn't really wanted to talk. He hadn't really wanted to return her stuff. He hadn't really wanted to stay friends. He wanted her heart anyway he could get it.

62 days 10 hours 1 minute and 3 seconds was how long it took before he held her heart in his hands.

He tied her up in her own house and toyed and teased her for several weeks; each day she would plead forgiveness, each day she would make promises, but it was too late for her, he could only hear the blood as it pulsed around his body and throbbed in his ears. A heavy beat of white noise that drowned out all reason, all compassion and all control.

He tormented and tortured her, making sure to inflict as much emotional pain first. Exploiting her weakness, threatening her family and then telling her lies about their demise, he wanted to make the body supple and receptive to the physical torture that would follow.

It reminded me of those early days with that first frog; the slicing especially. He experimented with many methods, those which made her eyes widen, her body writhe, and her soul shake in horror were to become his favourite.

For the last thirty years or so Ernest had been perfecting this new passion of his. Even I had lost count of how many guests we had entertained.

Being a trainee hadn't been so bad for me, and on the rare occasion that my existence would overlap with other trainees, I was confident that the length of my apprenticeship would make me a better graduate. I had heard of others who had graduated long ago and had already trained the next

generation and on some level I wanted that to be me but Ernest was a perfectionist and would not make a mistake. Ernest was a fan of the long game, be it a month or a year or even more, he needed to know with absolute certainty that his meticulously planned pursuits would run smoothly. It's why he had been able to continue, why he had never been caught.

Like I said, I am about to graduate, how do I know? How do you think? I can't wait any longer. I have finished lurking; I have seen enough, it's my time to step out of the shadow that binds me and to take my place amongst the living.

The sun was up and as such, so was I.

62 years 10 months 1 week and 3 days and the day of reckoning had finally arrived. I had thought about this day for a long time.

I had been quiet and unpredictable as a child or so they said. I kept quiet because I heard a voice in my head, it scared me; the voice a muffled echo, and I knew if I shared it with them I would scare them too.

I recall the many hours I would spend out in the woods. Like most boys I knew, I liked catching small creatures to keep as pets, I would keep them in a box in the cellar and I liked to play with them, but that wasn't enough for him. He always pushed me to go further, threatening me with the bogeyman, monsters, ghosts and anything that he knew a young boy would fear. I didn't like teasing the creatures, I didn't like the look they had in their eyes, the terror, and I didn't like that I must have looked back at them with those same eyes. But he would make me go back until I was no longer teasing them, I was tormenting them, no longer tormenting them but torturing them, and the only way I could stop their pain was by their death.

I'd hoped we had peaked after that first death, that it would be over and he would be satiated. There was little let up and it would begin again, he would carefully select which creature would be next as we worked our way up the food chain. I knew I was too weak to defy him, so I made sure to take my time. It was a slow process. The first was a frog I had found and adopted; he was easy to talk to and I carried him around in the pocket of my dungarees. He was the only friend the 6 year old me had and as sad as it was, I loved him. A part of me believed that he was a magic frog who would rescue me from the voice in my head, but he didn't, he was just a normal frog. I knew that he would make me torture him and I knew I couldn't so as an act of mercy I took my boot and thwacked it down on his head. I felt completely alone.

There were more frogs; and I sliced, and I diced, and I boiled and I burnt in the hope that it would be enough. I discovered that if I made them release a piercing wail of such a pitch as to make your bones ripple, then he would let me kill them and end their misery. I made it my purpose to find a method that would guarantee this and greatly reduce the length of torture. I wanted it to end. Enforced hours were spent hunting and preying from dusk till dawn.

His name is Sam, and everywhere that I went, Sam was sure to follow.

I could sense him there always, watching me, listening, lurking in the shadows of my mind. Even when I closed my eyes he was there, every waking hour, every dream and every nightmare. I felt his presence and I knew he wanted more from me, that he had bigger plans; he would not be satisfied with the small animals for long. I studied Science at school in an attempt to slow him down; examining each animal for several weeks after the kill meant that I would need to kill less. I tried to be as organised, thorough, precise and hypothetic as I could and scoured the guidelines and rules of animal dissection for something that could prevent it. I bucked against his suggestion that we consider more intelligent creatures, cats, dogs, and even pigs. He enjoyed the games, the tease, the torture and deep down, he thought I did too.

I met a woman in my twenties, she made me feel alive and I couldn't have been more in love. Her name was Clara, she was so petite she casted the smallest of shadows. I wanted to protect her. Sam stayed away when she was around, when I was happy, and I felt free of him. I would spend all my time with Clara.

I thought this might have been the end of Sam that he would finally be gone. Clara it turned out was just like the frog, she couldn't help me and she wasn't magic. I had doted on her for several months only to discover that Clara had betrayed my trust and she truly broke my heart. I was distraught, the happiness had gone, the clouds had returned and Sam's voice became louder. He was relentless, pushing my buttons, feeding my doubts, reminding me of her treachery. He would only let me sleep for an hour here and there, he would only let me eat small meals every 12 hours, and he wouldn't let me leave my house, use my phone or talk to anyone. I wish I had known what he was planning. Why didn't I know? Clara was worried about me and had left messages on the phone and email, let's talk, I need my stuff, and can we be friends? Her worry deepened when I hadn't answered any of them.

Clara came over and her fate was sealed. He pushed me, pressed my buttons, distorted my memories and besieged me mercilessly until I succumbed. There was no way out or around and so I could only go through.

62 days 10 hours 1 minute and 3 seconds was how long it took before he let me stop. I held her heart in my hands. He held my life in his.

I tied her up in her house and robotically obeyed his requests; toy with her, tease her, make her beg for mercy. Each day she would plead forgiveness, each day she would make me promises, but it was too late, he would never let me stop. I could hear my blood as it pulsed around my body and throbbed in my ears; a heavy beat of white noise that drowned out all reason, all compassion and all control, and his voice reverberating over it.

I tormented and tortured her, I wanted to inflict as much emotional pain in order to delay the physical. Exploiting her weakness, threatening her family and then telling her lies about their demise, I thought that would make her scream out but she was stronger than she looked, she was a fighter. I doped her water with painkillers and muscle relaxants to make the body supple and receptive to the physical torture that would follow.

I couldn't help but be reminded of those early days with the frog. She never stopped fighting and everything I tried didn't seem to work and then her eyes widened, her body writhed, and her soul shook in horror. The relief was impalpable.

For the last thirty years or so I gave up fighting Sam, instead I focussed on perfecting the torture that would lead to a quicker death. I wanted to lose count of how many there were after Clara, but their faces were forever burnt in my memory, I would never be able to escape from them.

I heard a story once about how a man had heard voices in his head that had driven him to kill his family and then himself, he was 21. If only I had been as brave. I went to a help group and met with some others who said they heard voices. Sam told me they were lying and that they just wanted to trick me. I didn't know who to believe. Sam knows me better than anyone else. He is all the family and friends I have. It was getting out of control and I knew things had to change, to slow down, and so I became a fan of the long game; be it a month or a year or even more. I told Sam that I needed to know with absolute certainty that my meticulous planning would help things run smoothly. It's why I had been able to continue, why I had never been caught.

Like I said, it's the day of reckoning, how do I know? How do you think? I can't live like this any longer. I have finished being a puppet; I have done enough, it's time to clear out my mind and all that binds me to this life, if I can't be free of him, then I can't live.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Marjie Myers, grew up in Buckinghamshire, England. She has been creating stories since she learnt to read although its only in the last couple of years that she has been writing them down. Having lived in Africa and now returned to the UK she still enjoys the occasional adventure. Not tied to any genre she prefers to follow where her characters take her.

Twitter: [@MarjieMyers](https://twitter.com/MarjieMyers)

Website: www.TheSuddenlyKateShow.com



Wretched *Candy Burke*

“This is fucked up.”

Mel shifted on the bench. “I know, Harry.”

“We get no choice in which jobs we take, have no benefits... Hell, I haven’t had a vacation in forever.”

Mel sighed and nodded. “I know, Harry.”

“I had half a mind to quit. Just march in and tell the boss I’ve had enough. Maybe retire to Hawaii.”

Mel rolled his eyes. “You’re not going to quit.”

“We’re never welcomed. Nobody wants to see us coming in the door. They’d rather have a visit from the IRS.”

Mel tightened his grip on his wooden staff. “The old man in Cincinnati last week was glad to see us.”

“Yeah? Well, he’s the exception.” Harry brushed the back of his hand under his nose. “I really don’t want to be here.”

“Me neither, Harry.”

Mel watched a beat up, old Volkswagen roll into the parking lot and ease into a lined spot. A young man dressed in khaki pants and an oversized camouflage jacket climbed out. He brushed hair from his face, wrestled on his backpack and fished a long, dark case from the backseat. It could have held a musical instrument.

It didn’t.

Mel’s stomach rolled. “He’s here.”

Harry stretched his neck and peeped over the hedges. “He looks normal enough.”

“They usually do.”

The young man lumbered across the lot and stepped onto the sidewalk. His eyes set on the building, he passed the bench without a glance.

Mel stood up and pulled the hood of his black cape over his head. “It time, Harry.”

Harry rose shaking his head, tugged on his hood, and snatched the long handled sickle he’d parked beside the bench.

The dark figures silently fell in step behind the young man.

Bile crept up the back of Mel’s throat. He didn’t particularly like his job, but it didn’t bother him.

Not usually.

Not like today.

Moisture pooled in his eyes as they followed the boy through the glass doors of the school house.

Harry was right. This was fucked up.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Candy Burke writes contemporary romance; stories that are sometimes sweet, sometimes steamy, and almost always spiked with suspense. She weaves her fiction in the wee hours, has a love of flavored coffee, and indulges her dark side in flash fiction and tales of horror.

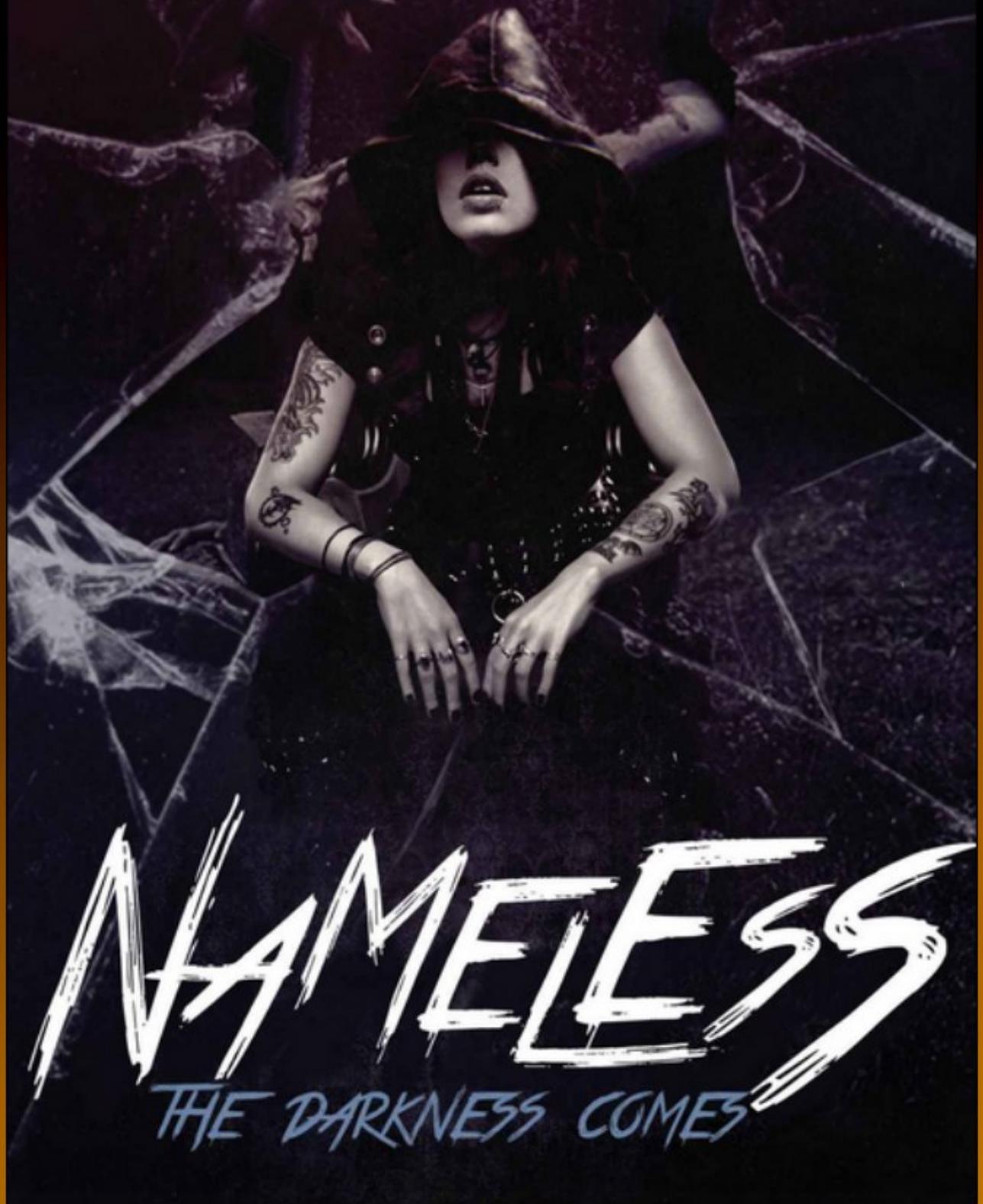
Candy resides in North Carolina with her true life hero, three dogs, a cat and a goat.

Twitter: [@thecandyburke](https://twitter.com/thecandyburke)

Website: www.candyburke.com

THE BONE ANGEL TRILOGY | book one

MERCEDES M. YARDLEY



Available on Amazon

Watch It Weep *Selena Kenworthy*

“Good morning Father, are you here to see Alice Beesley?” the nurse asked him as he stepped through the double doors to Ward A3.

“Yes err... Nurse Hallet is it?” he was looking at her badge to discern her name as she greeted him. A short, stout, motherly looking woman with a kind smile. “She's in a single room up this way Father. Very poorly, she collapsed at the supermarket on Bridge Street and was brought in here. She's desperate to see a priest before it was too late. She must want to put a few things right in case of the worst. She's a tough old thing managed out there on her own on that farm until into her eighties. Pretty good going if you ask me.”

Father Christie smiled and nodded as the nurse chatted. It was one of his most satisfying duties making people near death feel a little happier by listening to their worries or confessions, whatever they wanted to say. He felt it made the passing into the next realm easier for them. It was strange though, he had not met Miss Beesley before, even though she lived in his parish. She had not attended mass and was reclusive, living up there on that isolated farm with no family. She apparently only had animals for company.

The side room was quite dark; the blinds were shut and in the grey metal hospital bed laid a small and fragile looking old lady with long, unruly, grey hair. She was lying on a special air mattress that he knew helped to prevent pressure sores and she was on her side. The mattress hummed as air was pumped into it and moved about. The air in the room was still and stifling, it smelt of age and decay. “Miss Beesley, Alice? The nice Father is here to talk to you. I'll leave you to chat, ok?” Nurse Hallet smiled at him as she left the room closing the door quietly behind her. He took a chair and drew it to the bed and sat his head almost level with the old lady's. He placed his hand on her wrinkly and bony hand that lay on the bed, it was cool and the skin felt papery. Smiling gently at her he noticed her eyes had opened.

“Miss Beesley I am Father Christie. The nurses said you wanted to have a talk with me. What can I help you with? You can tell me anything.” He noticed a hint of a smile come over her face, it chilled him a little, although he was unsure why.

“I've been waiting for you father” she said in a whisper “I have much to tell before I die.”

“Well now is a good time to get everything out in the open. Free yourself from Earthly worries.” He smiled and waited for her to start.

“Do you know about me, about my childhood?” she croaked.

“No I have not been here in this parish for many years and I did not see you at church. But that does not matter now.”

“Then I will tell you from the beginning” her breathing was heavy and she paused overlong between sentences to catch her breath. Her mouth looked dry, flakes of skin present on her thin lips. “I had no parents from the age of fourteen, a car accident. In those days you were considered old enough to care for yourself after fourteen, so no-one bothered with me. I was left to live at the farm as I had always done. I knew what to do, I loved the animals. I grew vegetables to eat and I lived off the money my parents left me quite happily. I didn't need much you see as it was just me. I never went to school, something happened, I can't remember what, when I was a toddler. My mother said the other parents did not want me around their children. So she taught me at home until she died,” she stopped and pointed at the glass of water with a straw in which he held for her while she sipped. “I was fine for a long while but then it got lonely. When Jack turned up, I was so happy; it was wonderful to have company. It is Jack I feel bad about. Jack who I need to tell you about.”

“Jack?” Father Christie asked.

“Yes he was my pet.”

"Oh I see" he answered.

"He stayed a while with me but then seemed to get restless, I worried that Jack would leave. I had got so used to him being there. So I got him a kennel and I put it in the basement."

Father Christie began to wonder if she were a little confused. He wasn't sure if she was talking about a dog or what.

"Why the basement?"

"Well I was worried if someone came they would see him and take him away."

"Ok, I see. So what did you do with Jack that worries you so much?" Still bemused he continued to listen. He decided that she was a little confused and he would just go along with what she said, simply to make her feel better.

"One night while he slept I hit him with a metal bar. I put some chains on his legs and dragged him down to the basement, to his new home. I tethered him there and locked the door, job done. I kept the windows shut and there was no light, unless I brought a candle. I visited him a lot but he still cried and wept. I suppose it was cruel but I watched him and made him stay."

Father Christie began to feel unnerved. This woman had some crazy imagination but she looked so earnest. He shuffled in his chair, feeling himself recoil from her a little.

"Why did you have to make him stay?"

"I didn't want to be alone fool," she snapped at him, losing for a moment the demeanor of a frail old lady and verging into madness. "No one cared about me. I needed a friend. I kept him locked up and hungry for his own good, vicious he could be. As time went on he behaved, he relied on me for food, water, everything. That's when it got interesting," a smile spread like ooze over her frazzled face.

"Someone came. It was a few years later so Jack was such a good boy by then. I had been playing this game with Jack where I would starve him for a week and then throw a live chicken in the basement. Oh the kerfuffle, feathers everywhere, blood on the walls it was hilarious, not for the chicken I suppose. So when this person came to the house I thought I would have some fun. I asked him to help bring something from the cellar; I just wanted to see what happened. I had my axe in hand as usual in case he got out. I didn't need it, poor lad didn't know what hit him, Jack had not been fed for a week and was so hungry he literally ate the boy alive." She was laughing, actually laughing.

"Why did he never attack you then?"

"Because he knew he would never get out if I was hurt. If anything happened to me then that would be the end for him too. No one would know or care."

"I don't understand why are you telling me this now? Do you regret what you've done?" He was still humouring her. All this could not be true.

"I don't regret anything, Jack and I got used to each other. We managed fine until the animals all died. That's why I had to come into the town and how I ended up here. Now I am worried. I've been here a few days and Jack has not been fed. He might have found some rotting scraps about the cellar to keep him going I suppose."

Father Christie sat bolt upright. "You mean he still lives there?"

"Of course, I kept him well, I know about farming and keeping animals."

He was still unsure about what she was telling him. Were these just utterings of a demented old lady, was there any truth in it? Could an animal have been kept for that long? Surely she was confusing a dog she once had with a new one.

"Are you asking me to go and check on him?"

She looked up at him with her eyes that seemed blank. The repulsive smile again and a nod.

"Very well I can do that. Do you have the keys?"

“The nurse” she rasped “she will give them to you.” She closed her eyes then and drifted off to sleep, seemingly content now she had told her story.

He withdrew his hand, he felt suddenly as though he was in the presence of evil. He made the sign of the cross over her. Once out of the room he took a deep breath of air uncontaminated by her breath. He should not feel like this, she was part of God's flock and it was his duty to help her, but the woman repulsed him. He did not want to see her again if he could help it. He would check the house as promised and that would be it. If there were any animals there he would alert the relevant authorities.

The house was quiet and isolated; it was not visible from the road so you would pass by and not know anything was there. He had expected some signs of animals but there were none but a few chickens lying dead in a coop outside, nobody had thought to send someone out to check the property while she was in hospital. He unlocked the wooden front door that had long since seen a lick of paint. The wood work was crumbly; it wouldn't take much to break in. Once inside he noticed the house smelt musty, all the curtains were closed, he moved to open them and dust flew off in great clouds. Outside the light was fading anyway, so there was little to penetrate the hideous inside of the house. He spotted a door under the stairs, he went to it but it was locked. ‘The keys’ he thought, and he got them out of his pocket and tried several of them in the key hole until one turned. Slowly and carefully he opened the door and saw in the dim light the steps leading down to the basement. He felt around for the light but there was none. ‘It was only light if I brought a candle’ he remembered her saying. He saw on a bureau to the side of the door a few old candles and some matches. Lighting one he made himself go through and begin the descent of the stairs. The smell was disgusting, a mix of feces and rotting matter which he could not define. His foot hit the floor at the bottom and something sticky and sludgy coated it. He saw something out of the corner of his eye, a movement to his right, he heard the sound of chains being slowly dragged. He wondered what sort of animal she had been keeping here. The smell grew worse as if suddenly having been disturbed. “Hello” he called nervously.

It was the last thing Father Christie ever said as he was ambushed from the side by a hideous black creature that stank like he imagined the brimstone in hell would. He muttered some incoherent prayer to God as the creature which looked as though it might once have been a man launched at him, biting at his neck and ripping at his throat with his long, filthy finger nails. The creature was hungry, very hungry and he could not wait for Father Christie to die before he feasted.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - I am a busy mum of three using writing as an outlet for my strange imagination. I am striving to finish that elusive novel and also want to continue writing short stories. I used to be a nurse in what seems another life. I love reading fiction of all kinds but I am definitely drawn to stories about the darker side of life or death.

Twitter: [@SelenaKenworthy](https://twitter.com/SelenaKenworthy)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Selena-Kenworthy/467448106717829>

Burial Rites *Katie M. John*

Ever since sixteen year old Lillian Gladstone had been unfortunate to have been locked in the play-chest as a playful prank, her worst fear was being buried alive; the thought of suffocating on her own screams plagued her dreams for years.

In an attempt to know her enemy better, Lillian had become obsessed with all things death – it was an obsession that both her parents and her peers thought too weird to be loveable, and so Death ironically became both her dearest companion and her most fearful foe.

Lillian didn't know that necrophilia was anything other than some sick pervert wanting to sleep with dead people; which is true, but not the only presentation of the psychological disorder. A Greek word, it means lover of Death; ranging in intensity from an interest in the aesthetics of death to a grave addiction.

Lillian set off on her daily vigil to the cemetery. It wasn't that she was trying to be purposefully weird, but when you lived in the concrete jungle the cemetery offered one of the few green spaces; and it had benches, which was better than sitting on the railway embankment amongst the nettles and the fox-shit. She was also far less likely to be molested by some wino because, as her granny had always said, "There's naught to fear about the dead, love, it's the living you got to worry about."

Settling herself down on her favourite bench, she recovered her dog-eared book from the rucksack (it was a cheery little number in which an ordinary girl finds herself in love with a vampire, one of the many she'd read of that theme over the last several years.) It didn't matter that the plot was slightly predictable, it allowed her to escape into a well worn and familiar fantasy in which she could flee the feeling of loneliness and disconnect she felt with the rest of the world. Within the pages of these books, Lillian felt a kinship.

At first her parents had laughed good-humoredly at the heavy dark eyeshadow and the alternative clothing. They'd not been laughing when she'd returned from town with her nose pierced – oh no indeed. In fact all laughter had been replaced with the heavy brooding silence of disappointment; you know the kind that rots your guts and soul from the inside out. This single act had, particularly in her father's mind, marked this phase as not as a phase at all but as a choice his daughter was making about her life. In that moment, their daughter became a stranger to them, and Death became a more accepting companion.

Today, her reading trip to the cemetery was like any other, and the cemetery, (a classic high Victorian folly) betrayed no hint of anything amiss. Littered with weeping angels in various states of ruin, large toppling crucifixes, Lillian's particular favourite were the playful stone cherubs.

Lillian opened her book out of habit but her eyes were preoccupied by the way the sunlight filtered through the tree canopy, casting a green light with the effect of being under the surface of a stagnant lake. She sighed heavily. Being sixteen was hard work – the overwhelming beauty and terror of everything exhausted the mind if one thought on it too long; and at sixteen there was far too much thinking time. It was enough to let the imagination take control of your reason. Only yesterday Lillian had looked up from reading her book at the sight of something moving out the corner of her eye. For one crazy moment she had thought it'd been one of those stone cherubs, running freely amongst the tombstones. By the time her eyes had fully adjusted to the bright shafts of sun, everything had been still. She told herself it was just someone on the path.

And she'd been right – and they'd been watching Lillian intensely.

Lillian had noted how the mourners all seemed to be ancient, as if it were only old folk who seemed to truly understand the importance of investing time in getting to know the place. Young people, she mused, were too foolish to think that the cemetery really had anything to do with them – yet.

Lillian closed her eyes. She was in danger of cat napping. She'd not been sleeping well due to the nightmares; always the same suffocation and screams. They'd taken a slightly more sinister twist of late. Somebody was watching her; more shadow than human, but still a vessel for untold terrors. The sensation would creep up on her just before the screaming would start. Then the form slipped away back into the dark labyrinth of her imagination.

It was the calling of her name that caused her to open her eyes. Nobody knew this was where she hung out, moreover, nobody she could think of cared.

The voice felt cold and serpent like but the effect was curious, invoking both simultaneous pleasure and alarm. However, just like the visitor to her dreams, by the time she'd fully focused it had gone.

She glanced around the cemetery, taking comfort in the fact that the grounds-man was tending to the grass and the thought that surely she was safe because horror stories never happened when the sun was shining.

She returned to her book and waited for her heart to calm. It didn't take her long to slip back into the fantasy. It had gripped her from page one. Oh, how she longed to be wooed by a creature of the night, one that preferably promised not to kill her. It was only a few minutes before the cemetery was nothing but a blur and the sound of reality was left far behind in an increasingly silent hum.

Behind her bench, a shadow loomed. It might have been explained as having been cast by the limbs of the large gnarled tree, but if more than a glimpse was given, the features of a living being were unmistakable. The shadow leaned in, captivated by the sight of the pretty, auburn haired Lillian. It lingered, curling its form around her neck, inhaling her perfume. Half-sensing the disturbance of air around her, she flicked her hair and smoothed her neck with the cup of her hand, subconsciously protecting it from harm.

The shadow faded to nothing, but it wasn't leaving, merely repositioning itself to make its introduction more impressive. Lillian glanced up at the sky; the sun had been swamped by opaque grey clouds that threatened rain. She gathered her book and stuffed it into her bag. She packed her bag and stood up with the intention of heading home before getting a soaking.

The gate was located in the oldest part of the cemetery and so it was strange that she should discover a freshly dug grave to the left of her path. Despite having spent many hours in the cemetery, Lillian had never faced her fear by looking into a grave. Her curiosity prickled and she stepped forward to take a look – hoping that maybe confrontation might offer a sudden cure. She instantly regretted it. If she hadn't lost the capacity to process the vision in front of her, then she might have screamed. As it was everything fell into slow motion. Her mouth fell wide-open but remained silent.

The tidy seven-foot by two-foot rectangle had been sharply dug and the soil placed into a neat pile by the side, but this is where the sense of order finished. Lillian was faced with the full horror of seeing her dead self lying in the grave. Despite the fear and desire to recoil, she couldn't. Instead she was transfixed. She watched in horror as a maggot crawled from up under her cheek and out of her lower eye-lid, flopping out onto her sallow cheek.

Around her, the leaves rustled with a stirring breeze causing them to sing softly, "Take your place. Take your place."

The mouth of Dead Lillian started to move and ripple into a grotesque undulating smile before bursting open into a maggot-full laugh.

Lillian ran towards the cemetery gates. The gravel underfoot did its best to turn and twist her over, eventually it succeeded causing her to skid. Something fell from her rucksack but she didn't care. Her one and only focus was the gate – but despite her speed, and the palpitations of her heart, and the fire raging in her lungs, the gates never grew any closer. Impossibly, she covered no ground at all. The grave still mocked her at her left and the trees still soughed their invitation.

“Time to join us,” a deep stony voice said from behind her. “We’ve been waiting for you. You promised you’d come.”

Lillian squeezed her eyes together but it was the wrong receptacle and the voice still leaked into her head. “We’ve seen you longing for us. We’ve come to love you, Lillian.”

“Who are you?” she cried.

Cold invasive fingers stroked the hair from her face and tucked it behind her ear.

“It’s time, my darling.”

“No – I’m too young to die.”

The shadow enveloped her, manifesting itself into full human form. Slowly, she dared to open her eyes to look on the thing that had come to claim her.

“And so beautiful,” the creature crooned.

Her head, unable to hold all of the terror she felt, broke down into fragments. She saw a head of pearl-polished bone, which shone luminescent like the moon. It might have been defined as beautiful if it hadn’t been so much like an exposed skull. The eye sockets were deep velveteen dark in which green unearthly darkness flickered.

The creature withdrew its cracking fingers from Lillian’s warm, soft-peach flesh, but even after they had left she felt as if they remained, staining her with something rotten and dark. Lillian’s lips quivered. A line of poetry sprang into her mind, *‘Rage, rage against the dying of the light.’* She couldn’t remember where she’d heard it, but there was something that suddenly seemed very important about them. She forced herself to look into the pits of its eyes, thinking that she might be able to convey the fight still left in her soul. But as her eyes locked onto those infinite orbs of dark despondency, all fight left her.

Her mind went blank. Everything in the world had fallen silent, including the birds. There was nothing left to say, the die was cast. She had no idea how long she stood in the roaring silence, starring into that face, but suddenly the bird sang, and once more time moved onwards. The figure in front of her disintegrated.

Looking at the gate, she breathed deeply, knowing she was only minutes from freedom and life. But those minutes may as well of been eons. Never had she felt such a desire to see her parents and enter that soft, claustrophobic world of home. But before she left she returned her gaze to the open grave and forced herself to look down into it. She needed to be certain that it had all been a trick of her over active imagination. It was empty.

Stumbling to grab her bag, she ran down the path and out of the gate. The sun returned and Lillian was beginning to think that everything that had happened was nothing more than some wild and startling daydream. It was because she was so lost in these thoughts that she did not stop to check the road.

The impact of hard metal and soft flesh was fatal. For Lillian the world ended with the flicking of a switch. The ambulance served the purpose of a hearse. She bypassed A&E and went straight to the morgue before her transfer to a funeral home. Pronounced dead on arrival by the paramedics, nobody thought to waste precious resources to look too closely. Maybe if they had they would have noticed a very faint pulse.

The funeral took place quickly; everything seemed to have been done in a rush as if her youthful sense of impetuosity followed her into the grave.

A spattering of school friends (to call them such was a little stretch of the truth) and several teachers who had happened to be free of classes, along with a handful of pick-and-mix relatives, lined the graveside.

As the undertakers lowered the simple white coffin into the ground, the rope snapped

unceremoniously. The coffin lurched and the congregation muttered little cries at the indignity of it. The movement jarred Lillian's body and her head knocked the side of the coffin. Her eyes opened with such force that they tore the undertaker's stitches he'd used to hold them shut.

Momentarily, the hot searing pain blinded her from understanding exactly where she was. It was a brief delay to the horror of finding herself trapped in coffin. The screaming began.

Perhaps if it hadn't been for the torrential rain, the thunder and lightening storm breaking out and the passing of a police-siren then maybe somebody might have heard her before they rushed off.

It is amazing how quickly screams burn up oxygen in a confined space. Within minutes she was light headed and dizzy, her screams weakened by the understanding that nobody was coming – that the only thing that was waiting was Death.

After every mourner had left for the sad little memorial, a dark figure approached her freshly filled grave. All at once she was calm. The sensation of floating made her feel faint and it took her a moment to understand that she was no longer trapped within the six foot pine box, but standing at the edge of her own grave – and she was not alone.

Death carried a rotten rose in his bony grasp. "A flower for my sweet young bride," he said.

Lillian looked on her newly wedded husband with eyes of sorrow. Tears mingled with the blood that stained her cheeks. She went to sigh, but found that her lungs no longer worked. She panicked, convinced that if she didn't get air into them, then she would....

Suddenly she stopped, pulled up tight by a thought and muttered, "I can't die because I'm... I'm already dead." She relaxed her mouth and felt the strange unearthly feeling of just being.

Through her tears she saw Death reach out his hand. "Love me for eternity?" he asked.

She did not answer at first as she was captivated by the sight of the rose turning from twisted black to the fragile blush of pink; of pale-cream flesh filling out his bones. She raised her eyes to look into that hideous, eyeless skull, and found that like the hand, exquisite flesh now graced it. The young man that stood in front of her was truly beautiful. The hood of his jacket slipped down to reveal deep chestnut waves. His green-gold eyes matched her own.

He smiled and it was full of promise. "Love me!" This time it was not a question but a command.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Katie lives in London with her husband and their two daughters. She started writing poetry at the age of fifteen and has since gone on to write an Amazon UK best-selling Young Adult fairy-tale series, *'The Knight Trilogy'* and stand alone novels, *'Beautiful Freaks'*, a Parnormal-Gothic-Detective novel, and *'When Sorrows Come'*, a contemporary tragedy, loosely based on Shakespeare's Hamlet. She is currently working on book one of *'The Meadowsweet Chronicles'*; a tale of modern witchcraft, blending American and English occult folklore.

Twitter: [@KnightTrilogy](https://twitter.com/KnightTrilogy)

Blog: <http://www.katiemjohn.blogspot.com>

A forensic technician who eats the evidence is asking for trouble.



Available from Amazon, Barnes & Noble,
and Blood Bound Books

The Perfect Gifts C.A. Verstraete

Such everyday niceties like greeting cards, holidays and celebrations vanished once the Zs came to town. And now that he'd turned zombie, such things didn't matter to Spence anymore, either.

Roaming the near empty streets, he did notice the windows displaying old cards and pretty things left behind by the fleeing hordes of people. For some reason, the messy but odd assortment of turkeys, hearts and even Santa-decorated items touched a yet-human part inside him. He stood and stared at the colorful display from his remaining good eye, the images and colors stirring something buried deep within.

Ever since he'd been scratched by his crazed former friend, all Spence knew was blinding, raging hunger and a need to keep walking, to go back.

He didn't know his girlfriend had moved on, joining a crowd of other survivors holed up in an empty warehouse. Nor did he know why those images from a former life brought her near-forgotten face to mind.

He groaned at the vague memory, his diseased brain trying to form a connection. Some impulse prompted him to reach out a grubby, diseased hand and grab one of the cards, clenching it tight between his remaining fingers.

Spence shambled along, the snarl on his face turning into a near smile when he came across the human passed out behind a bank of garbage cans, the stale smell of beer competing with the smell of decay.

His hunger sated, he hiccupped at the unexpected taste of alcohol and picked up the bucket he'd found. He trudged along, putting one diseased foot in front of the other, the lure of his old life growing stronger.

Shambling south, ever south, he held tight to the gaudy card and the bucket containing the bloody heart, intestines, and other leftover body parts.

He stumbled on, ignoring the bloody trail behind him, as he carried the perfect gifts to the pretty girl whose face lingered in his memory and drew him to the place he once called home.

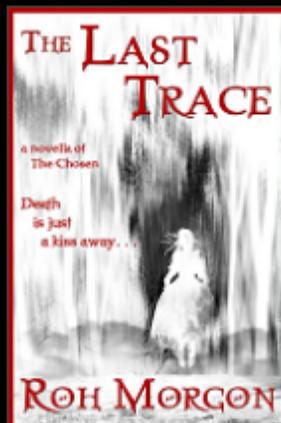
ABOUT THE AUTHOR - Christine Verstraete's stories have appeared in various anthologies including, *Feast of the Dead - Hors D' Oeuvres*, *Timeshares* from DAW Books and coming in *Athena's Daughters*. In her recent book, *GIRL Z: My Life as a Teenage Zombie*, 16-year-old Becca faces life as a part-zombie with odd quirks no girl wants to be noticed for.

Blog: <http://girlzombieauthors.blogspot.com>

Website: <http://cverstraete.com>

Hell hath no fury like a demon scorned...

The Last Trace is one of The Chosen Novellas, a series focused on the individuals within a secret society of powerful blood-drinkers whose violent struggle for dominance in 'The Game' threatens to spill out into the human world.



THE LAST TRACE
by
ROH MORGON

Available on Amazon

An Interview with Angie Gallow: Author of *The Coven*

This month we're bringing you an interview with Angie Gallow, author of *The Coven*, recently published with Sirens Call Publications. *The Coven* is a vampiric tale set in the streets of London just after the turn of the century. Here's the synopsis:

After a gruesome betrayal, vampire Sebastien Vilmont is flung into a whirlwind cat and mouse game when his traveling party is ambushed by an opposing group of bloodthirsty vampires. Maurice, the leader of Sebastien's coven, makes the decision to not only wage war against the opposing vampire clan, but a clerical organization known as The Diocese Club who wishes to exterminate all vampire-kind.

Trying desperately to protect the secrecy of their coven's location below the streets of Whitechapel, London, Sebastien finds himself at odds with Maurice in his desire to not engage in all-out war with the renegade Catholic faction. At the same time, he must also battle the other vampire coven to guard their anonymity from humans. In doing so, Sebastien is forced into choices and alliances he might not otherwise have made.

*Set in the tone of Victorian England, *The Coven* is a thrilling and horrific journey through the seedier workings of the vampire underworld, and pious ideology of The Diocese Club.*

Now that we've whetted your appetite, let's learn a little more about Angie before we get to the questions. Angie is the writer with the over active imagination and love of stories. She's still in school at Columbia College in Chicago, where she grew up. Angie came from a family of readers; her grandmother was a Children's librarian for over fifty years and her mother was avid reader and book collector. She's an avid book reader and collector; the type of person who cried when Borders went out of business and when Kindles became the new 'book'.

Sirens Call Publications: Welcome Angie, what made you decide to become a writer?

Angie Gallow: I think it was always in me. My grandmother told me about the time I was three when I told her a story about vampires. She said I looked at her and said, "Now remember, grandma, there are no vampires." So in a lot of ways, I don't think I had a choice. I've always been a story teller; I've always been kept amused by my imagination and I figure if my imagination can keep me entertained, why not others?

SCP: What is *The Coven* about?

Angie: A vampire who learns of a secret clerical organization that has been using vampires in their campaign against them. My main character, Sebastien soon learns about these vampires, discovering none of them want to fight for this organization, except for one, Harold, who hates what he is and rallies the cause to destroy every vampire walking the earth. The story is an all-in-all cat and mouse game between the leader of these rogue vampires and the main character with the help of his misfit companions.

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

Angie: It's really not the average vampire tale. It's not romantic; there are no 'sexy vampire hunters' and the vampires in question aren't moody or looking for their place in a mortal world. There's a lot of blood and violence and it really plays on the whole vampire myth as a whole.

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

Angie: My writing process is just me allowing my characters to tell me the story. I honestly think about what I want to happen in each chapter, even if it's only a scene; I can take that scene and build around it. I don't write ten pages a day or anything like that; I don't believe in forcing a story to be told if it's not ready.

SCP: If you could cast *The Coven*, who would you choose to play your main characters? Pick between 2 and 5 of the main ones?

Angie: I'd have Rupert Grint (Ron Weasley from the Harry Potter series) to play Sebastien's best friend, Lauren. And I'd have Matt Smith (Eleventh Doctor from Dr. Who) to play Harold.

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

Angie: Telling the story that's never been told. Sounds cliché but its true. It's very difficult to be original when nearly every story has been told in one fashion or another before, so as a writer, we have a hard job regardless.

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

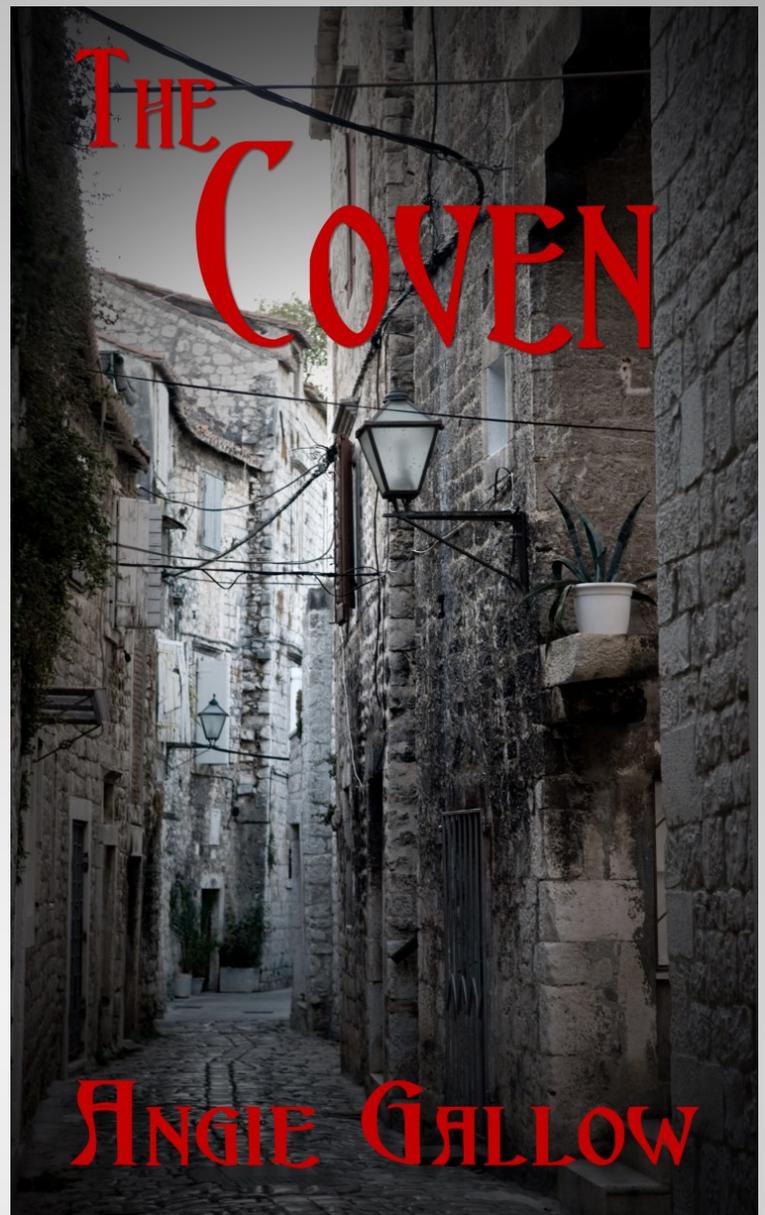
Angie: I think just by revisiting the traditional view of vampires sets it apart; Bram Stoker but without the erotic undertones that vampires tend to carry around with them. It's a violent story because vampires are violent creatures by nature and I think a lot of people forget that. It also carries a philosophical undertones that I wasn't even prepared for when I was writing it.

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

Angie: I got my hands on Albert Camus', *The Stranger* for a class I took not too long ago. And I only mention that because that Camus' character, Meursault and my Sebastien are mirrored in the sense that, they both are loners and look at their own worlds from a very indifferent, slightly emotionless and greatly observant point of view. They both have moments were they are both are questioning their world and the people in it. And at the end of both tales, emotions finally come to the surface in ways no one would expect.

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

Angie: I've always admired Guy de Maupassant and Roald Dahl. Even though they aren't horror writers, they both do wonderful things with satire, the human condition and that their imaginations knew no bounds. I don't have any novels that I could call favorites; all the books I've ever read have been my favorites.



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

Angie: When people are reading your work on a wide scale, I've hit the success mark. The day that I actually sit on the bus and see my work in other people's hands as they're reading and thoroughly enjoying it, then I've been successful. It's different for everyone I'm sure.

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?

Angie: When you start to doubt yourself, you've already given up the fight toward your dreams. Sit down and work at it; write the novel you want to write. Don't be afraid of criticism or to ask for help and never stop putting tools in your writer's toolbox.

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

Angie: I guess I'd like for them to know that the overall meaning of the story which is: just because you don't like something does mean you get to destroy it, suppress it or deem it unworthy. How my readers feel afterward is simply however they feel. Hopefully I hit the fear button in them and made vampires the frightening creatures of the dark they really are.

Thank you Angie for taking the time to answer our questions. And now let's delve into *The Coven* with an excerpt...

One

London – 1910

"Tell me again," Maurice Sorel paced his office furiously. "What happened?"

Sebastien Vilmont leaned against a polished end table. He was battered, covered in dirt and grime. His trousers were grey in patches from colliding with the ground; his blouse held tears and was spotted with drying blood. He wiped his mouth with one hand while the other hand held him against the table.

"I told you. We were ambushed," Sebastien claimed. He had taken his hand away from his mouth and looked at Maurice. His deep jade eyes glowed behind the roaring fireplace. He and Maurice studied one another before Maurice turned away to his desk where a crystal bottle filled with red liquid awaited him. Maurice lifted the plug from the bottle with nervous hands and poured the contents into three matching crystal glasses. He passed one to Sebastien and the other to his son, Alaric, as he stood at his friend's side.

The office door was locked and the three men stood alone. The stillness lingered heavily on the room. Sebastien watched Maurice sip from his glass as he moved in circles reminding Sebastien of a caged panther. Sebastien leaned forward to relieve his frame from the ache careening up his spine as he leaned against the table. The crackling fire was soon the only sound in the room before Alaric eased forward.

"There must be something you're not telling us. Please. There were supposed to be more with you."

Sebastien pressed his lips together and locked eyes with his old friend. They had known one another since they were small boys, causing mischief and conjuring grand adventures. Alaric eyed his friend intently as his eyes coaxed out the answer. Sebastien knitted his brow. The story he had shared with them earlier of how he had arrived was not what he had experienced.

Upon his arrival, Sebastien claimed that it was merely an accident; an unfortunate event that chopped the traveling party from twenty to merely seven. Maurice finished his drink and turned to Sebastien with hard, demanding eyes. Sebastien saw the disappointment growing in the man's hazel stare. Maurice would hold him accountable and make him suffer for something that was not Sebastien's doing. Sebastien leaned forward and stood straighter while he eyed Maurice.

"I did nothing wrong."

"Then explain!" Maurice barked. His voice echoed off the walls and Sebastien's eyes angled downward towards his shoes. Those very shoes that ran and led his party away from a massacre; the very shoes he stood in were now calling him a coward. He looked up in an attempt to hide his shame.

Sebastien had been heralded from his home in Normandy through a letter from Alaric. It asked his friend to complete the task of leading a small group of vampires from Sebastien's hometown to London. The letter asked that Sebastien remain in complete secrecy and to rally the travelers as quickly as possible. Sebastien found his party, per the details in the letter, waiting for him outside of an inn on the edge of their city; all had been sent invitations to London by Maurice, himself.

Sebastien looked upon the nervous eyes of every traveler, each one not knowing whether to trust Sebastien even after his explanation of what was going to take place from that point on.

Once Sebastien had successfully reassured them, explaining who he was and why he had been asked to lead them, the travelers followed him out of the city without question.

"I got them all to the ferry without an issue..." Sebastien explained. Alaric and Maurice listened to the story with bated breath. "I watched everything. People, where we were, and what we were being told; there was nothing that caused me to suspect a thing."

Sebastien's party had vanished below the decks of the ferry with only the porters to notice them as they went about their work. One man, Sebastien recalled, had been watching them closely from the moment they all set foot on deck. The man's beetle black eyes peered at Sebastien, in particular. Sebastien thought the man was only curious of them or perhaps questioning why so many people were traveling as one across the English Channel in the middle of the night. Sebastien regretted to admit his carelessness, but the man knew who, or rather what, they were.

The party moved through a series of small towns and villages after the ferry landed in England. Sebastien claimed he did nothing but travel with caution. He told everyone to keep away from mortals, speak to no one unless absolutely mandatory, and that they would not tarry in one place for too long. He braced himself as he paused.

"In one town, I can't remember the name of the place, I had snuck us out of the hotel after midnight. We were barely on the edge of the town and getting closer to London," Sebastien spoke as though he were trying to remember a pressing dream. He recalled the events with great hesitation, pawing his lips with the palm of his hand as he picked apart his memory. Alaric nudged him to continue. Sebastien snatched his hand away from his mouth.

By the time they had gained a few miles between London and the town they left behind, Sebastien noticed that the group was silently and suddenly being followed. Even though they were travelling under a starless sky, their tracks were being carefully pursued by a group of hooded figures. Sebastien believed the men following them had spread themselves out among the trees that surrounded their path. Their pursuers resembled moving shadows.

Panic washed over the travelers and they all darted out of the clearing. Bushes rustled loudly as the hooded men sprung out of their hiding places. The chaos of the growing chase erupted into a multitude of screams as the scurrying vampires attempted to escape. Yet, for some reason, these men were faster than the vampires, grabbing them in mid-run and flinging them to the ground. Once the vampires hit the ground, a hatchet came down and heads were severed from their bodies.

Sebastien ran with the herd while dodging grabbing claws and swinging hatchets as the chase continued. Sebastien had seen the members of his traveling party being picked apart from foolish acts such as stopping momentarily or trying to hide behind trees and in the darkened brush. Blood coated the grass and splattered against the trees like a piece of haphazard artwork.

Sebastien had been grabbed from behind as his captor snatched him around the shoulders and wrestled Sebastien to the ground. His captor lost his balance as they struggled before they toppled down into a grassy ditch. Sebastien grabbed hold of his attacker's robe and flung him into a nearby tree. He made an attempt to climb out of the ditch but was caught by his ankle.

The hood of his foe had fallen off, revealing golden hair that reflected in the moon light. The pale hand that grabbed at Sebastien's ankle matched the other holding a hatchet above him that was ready to land on Sebastien's head the second he was pulled down. Sebastien was mortified at the sight of his assailant; a fellow vampire was gazing up at him with malicious eyes. With a forceful tug, Sebastien was yanked back down into the ditch.

Sebastien took hold of the vampire's wrist as his foe's hatchet came roaring down. The bone beneath the skin crushed and popped as Sebastien's grip tightened. The hatchet fell to the ground as pale fingers uncurled from around the handle of the axe. Sebastien slashed his attacker's throat with such force that his head was thrown from his body. Sebastien tossed away the headless corpse and climbed out from the trench. He found his way back to his party and found that nearly all of them were either missing or dead.

Sebastien stopped his story again. Alaric saw the distress across his friend's face and refilled his short glass of the red liquid. Sebastien sighed greatly and poured the tangy liquor down his throat. He nearly slammed the glass down and caught Maurice's eyes again. They were softer this time, in disbelief at the details of the story. Sebastien's eyes asked if he were allowed to continue. Maurice simply nodded his head lightly.

Sebastien had taken count of his company once they reached the outskirts of the great city. He would occasionally stop to look over his shoulder as he was not certain if his party was being pursued. He had finally stopped them on a deserted street corner. He leaned against a lit street lamp and pulled a piece of paper from his pocket. It was an expertly drawn map with heavy-leaded pencil with dotted markings to show their way.

He led his frightened party towards their destination until they came to a quiet neighborhood in Whitechapel. They passed through the streets as Sebastien ran his fingertips against the bricks of a wall before his fingers grazed the coolness of a metal door hinge. He took a step back and scanned the bricks carefully before his eyes saw the illusion in front of him.

A heavy door had been camouflaged within the bricks had been made to resemble the color of the graying mortar. Sebastien used his hand to feel for the invisible knocker; its sound echoed throughout the alleyway. The travelers huddled against him, taking the appearance of a scruffy band of carolers.

Sebastien removed a black case from an inside pocket in his jacket. He pulled a thin, black cigarette from within. He lit a match with shaking hands and held it to the tip of his cigarette, inhaled and exhaled a stream of red smoke into the office. It was only moments after that he had been brought to Maurice and Alaric once the pair had realized that the party was short in count from the number of travelers they instructed Sebastien to bring to London.

He turned his head lightly to indicate his story had ended. Maurice was working on his third glass, swirling the liquid back and forth while weighing Sebastien's tale. Maurice's brow began twisting in fury before his glass flew from his hands into the fireplace with a sharp yell. The glass shattered and popped as flames licked the shards; the two friends reeled back from Maurice's temper.

“All of them?” Maurice demanded, spinning to face Sebastien. Sebastien knew he has referring to the hooded vampires from his tale and nodded. Maurice growled through his teeth, “Unspeakable betrayal!”

Alaric started to speak but stopped himself. His father’s fury was not to be pacified so he folded his arms and bit into his knuckles to keep himself silent. Maurice continued thundering, “Using our own kind against us...” Maurice took a breath, “Those damn fear-twisted mortals using vampires as weapons!”

“Father,” Alaric stated and Maurice whirled to face him, “The Diocese Club has been trying to get rid of us for centuries! They’re just as unknown to the mortals as we are...”

Maurice snapped, cutting his son off, “There is no reason for vampires to slay their own kind! If those priests so desire a war with us, they will have one!”

Sebastien’s mouth felt as though it were suddenly filled with cotton. The Diocese Club had constructed plans to rid the known world of all unholy creatures, including vampires. Vampires were seen as forces of evil; demon-possessed corpses used by Satan to terrorize the living. They were an elusive organization known only to the Catholic Church and the vampires who survived their attacks. Sebastien licked his lips, knowing what would happen should Maurice attempt such a campaign. Having witnessed the horror himself, he spoke, “May I interject for a moment?” Maurice rounded on him, “I think it would be in our best interest not to start something we cannot finish.”

“Beg your pardon?” Maurice narrowed his eyes, “Look at you!” he motioned with his hands, “Look at those who arrived with you!”

Maurice’s attempt to shame Sebastien was futile. Sebastien rubbed his forehead.

“Yes, look at what is happening to us all. The Diocese Club, we have no idea how many there are. We do not have a clue as to what they know of us. And we know nothing of them! How can we fight a war without knowledge of the enemy?”

Maurice eyed Sebastien. “We know our own kind.” Maurice smirked wickedly, “That is all that matters.”

If you enjoyed this excerpt, you can purchase *The Coven* on:

[Amazon](#)

[Smashwords](#)

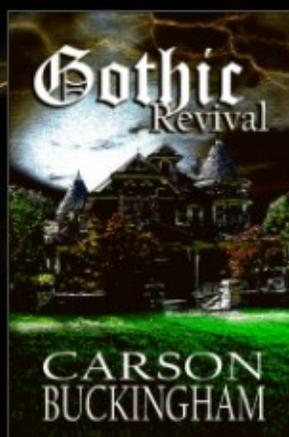
[Barnes & Noble](#)

[Apple Store](#)

Gothic
Revival
by CARSON BUCKINGHAM

*“Excuse me, did I hear you
were looking for work?”*

but with the job come a series of
unusual conditions...



...coming soon from
Sirens Call Publications

Credits

Fiction

Rebecca J. Allred
Alesha Aris
Shawn Arntson
Rebecca Besser
Rose Blackthorn
Gloria Bobrowicz
Candy Burke
Paula Cappa
Shenoa Carroll-Bradd
Eli Constant
Nina D'Arcangela
Angie Gallow
Linda Harris Sittig
E.A. Irwin
Rivka Jacobs
Foinah Jameson
LE Jamez
Katie M. John

Miranda Kate
Selena Kenworthy
Arriane Kerr
Gerri Leen
Suzie Lockhart
Lori R. Lopez
Cara Michaels
Jenn Monty
Georgina Morales
K.Z. Morano
L.A. More
Roh Morgon
Marjie Myers
Magenta Nero
Elaine Pascale
C L Raven
Emerian Rich
Claire Riley

Laura Ring
Marija Electra Rodriguez
Eden Royce
Lori Safanek
Hope Schultz
E. F. Schraeder
Caylee Slansen
D.M. Slate
Julianne Snow
Megan Stewart
Tabatha Stirling
Angeline Trevena
Andrea van Lit
C. A. Verstraete
Brittany Warren
Cassandra Webb
Mari Wells

Featured Photography

Dark Angel Photography

Featured Author

Angie Gallow

Copyright © 2014 Sirens Call Publications
All rights reserved

All stories are the intellectual property of their respective authors. Sirens Call Publications has been granted permission by the authors denoted on the page of contents to print their works in Issue #13 of The Sirens Call. All characters and events appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Artwork is reprinted under the expressed permission of Nina D'Arcangela and Dark Angel Photography

All Advertisements are property of SCP Designs with the exception of the Ad for Exsanguinate which is property of Killion Slade

License Notes

This eZine is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This eZine may not be re-sold, reproduced, or reprinted in any format if you do not hold the copyright to the individual work in question. Thank you for respecting the hard work of these authors.