

ALEXANDRIA  
ALEXIEVA  
ANANIEVA  
ARNOLD  
COLCLASURE  
DEBRAAL  
GUGIC  
HOSKINSON  
ILICH  
KOSTA  
LAW  
LENHART  
MONTAYA  
OWENS  
RUMPEL  
SHINAULT  
WEIGEL

STORIES  
ART  
CONTESTS  
POETRY  
REVIEWS  
AND MUCH MORE!





# NOV/23

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THE WORLD OF MYTH



MAGAZINE

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THE WORLD OF MYTH



MAGAZINE

# INTRODUCTION

*Hack, Hack, Cough, Cough, Wheeze*

*By: Stephanie J. Bardy*



## **Stephanie J. Bardy**

Stephanie J. Bardy is an accomplished author, poet and editor. She is Editor in Chief at *The World of Myth Magazine* and has held an editing position with them for over 2 years. She is also Editor in Chief for *Dark Myth Publications* and holds a position on the Board of Directors for *The JayZoMon/DarkMyth*

**H**ey Mythketeers,

I'm hacking and coughing and wheezing and sound like I've screamed my head off, but here I am, with your intro.

It is cold and flu season my friends, The time of year when you get together with loved ones and go home with parting gifts. A cold, COVID, RSV. Some form of stuffed nose, sneezing, coughing blech that takes you out for a few days. So you start screening your loved ones before you go anywhere and 9 times out of 10, someone is sick. So you don't go out. You don't let those who live in your house go out.

You hermit.

Which is fine if you can enjoy your own company for months on end. But most of us can't. Most of us struggle with the isolation that winter brings. If you live it a snowy area, it can be especially brutal when you don't see sun for weeks at a time. Think I'm exaggerating? Ask someone who lives in a

snowy climate to track how many days of sun they got in a row, and how many cloudy, gray, snowy days. You'll be surprised. I say this every year. We are houseplants with complicated emotions. We need sunlight and water to thrive. When we thrive, we are creative. It comes easy. When we are isolated and struggling, the creativity is harder. For me that is a good indicator that I need to reach out to people, make contact. Maybe even go into the outdoors. Into the people. We are herd animals; we need the company of others around us. I don't mean that as we are sheeple, that is a whole other discussion, I mean that we do better with other human contact. Technology has given us so much that we can stay in touch with people 24/7, 365 days of the year. But once you end that call, you are again, left alone. That can be depressing. So, even as hard as it is when it is so cold that your nose sticks together, go out. Be among family and friends. Take



*Company.*

Her published works include [Eternally Bound](#), [Eternally Bound PCE Exclusive Edition](#), [The Chosen](#), [The World of Myth Anthology Volume 3](#), Musings from Me, Penance all under *Dark Myth Publications*. She also appears in [Full Moon & Howlin: A Werewolf Anthology](#) and *Monsterthology 2* published by Zombie Works.

She has several short stories to her credit on *The World of Myth Magazine*, and several works of poetry.

Her editing credits include *Full Moon & Howlin: A Werewolf Anthology* and all of the works on *The World of Myth Magazine* for the last five years.

precautions of course to protect our vulnerable, wash your hands, don't lick things, you know the drill, but put in the effort to stay connected.

On a happier note, I hope everyone had a wonderful thanksgiving. We are now gearing up for our Christmas issue so get those yuletide stories in!

Congratulations to Peggy Gerber for winning Member of the Month for October! Outstanding job!

Welcome to all our new contributors!!

Also, you will notice that Carmen Baca's poem is being run again this month. There was a glitch in the system, and people were unable to vote for her piece last month, so we are running it again to allow people to vote. It is a well deserving piece.

Our Black Friday sale continues over at Myth Mart, so get over there and check out the merchandise!

[www.mythmart.com](http://www.mythmart.com)

Stay warm and healthy my friends.

Until next month!



Stephanie J Bardy  
*Editor of Tissues, and Vitamin C!*

# Drabble & Flash

## *The Alien of Orchard Lake Teaser Chapter Six*

*By: Jim Bates*



**Jim Bates**

Jim is an award-winning author whose stories and poems have appeared in over three-hundred online and print publications. His collection of short stories

*Resilience* was published in March 2021, by Bridge House Publishing. *Short Stuff* a collection of flash fiction and drabbles was published in October 2021, by Chapelton Books. *Periodic Stories* and *Periodic Stories Volume Two* were published in July and September 2021, by Impsired. *Dreamers* a collection of short stories was published in March 2022, by Clarendon House Publishing. *Something Better* a

**B**ut Al didn't hear it. He just sauntered away, acting like he owned the place. I turned and lowered the container into the pipe to obtain the sample. Something made me look back over my shoulder. Al was gone, but I felt the guy was still somewhere out there, watching me. I sighed to myself. Maybe next time I'll confront the creep. This crap had gone long enough."

\*\*\*

Jeremy stopped reading and took a sip of water. "This is pretty good stuff," he said. "Thanks. It was getting pretty weird there with Al." Jeremy shuffled the papers. "But this is all you wrote." Ebar turned red. "Yeah. That's as far as I got. When I sent the communicate that night, I didn't get an immediate response but

didn't think too much of it. Those kinds of things occasionally happened. After all, it was a long way away to Rykos."

Jeremy nodded. "That's for sure." He leaned forward. "But, go on. Then what happened? Did you quit sending?"

"No! Not on your life. I sent every day after that for about a week, but still heard nothing back. It started to get disconcerting. What was going on with Zenon? It made me nervous. Anxious."

"I definitely can understand that."

Jeremy paused, thinking. Then he asked, "Even now, there's still no word I take it?"

"Nothing."

Jeremy was thoughtful. "Well, we'll get back to that. But for now, going back to the situation at the treatment plant, the more I think about it, the more I think that you really were justified getting into it with Al. I think most people would agree with you and what you did. I sure do."



dystopian adventure novella was published in July 2021, by Dark Myth Publications. Most recently, Periodic Stories Volume Three – A Novel was published in April 2022, by Impspired. His short story "Aliens" was nominated by The Zodiac Press for the 2020 Pushcart Prize. His story "The Maple Leaf" was voted 2021 story of the year for Spillwords. He lives in a small-town west of Minneapolis, Minnesota. All of his work can be found on his blog at [www.theviewfromlonglake.wordpress.com](http://www.theviewfromlonglake.wordpress.com).

"That's very kind. Thank you." "If that was all there was to it, that'd be one thing. But then there was that issue in jail with you talking to Commander Zenon."

Ebar blushed. "I know. I think that kind of sealed my fate." He was quiet for a minute, then said, "You know, I've never told anyone this before."

Jeremy perked up and looked over. "What?"

"I finished writing my

communicate."

"You did?"

"Yep. Right up to the end. To the fight."

"Including the fight?"

"Yeah."

"Ebar!" Jeremy implored. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Ebar shrugged. "Well, it's been a hectic month or so. I've been arrested and stuck in jail. Then they'd put me in the loony bin in the hospital. Now here." He pointed around the room. "I've had time on my hands, so I wrote it up. I just finished last week." He got to his feet, went to his desk, and took out some more papers. He held them out to Jeremy. "Here they are. Want to read them?"

Jeremy shot out his hand and took them before Ebar could change his mind. "You bet! Of course, I do."

Ebar smiled gratefully. "Thank you." He went back, sat on the bed, and lay back against the wall.

"Might as well make myself comfortable." He unscrewed the cap and took a drink from his water bottle. "This is where it gets interesting."

# Drabble & Flash

## Choke

*By: Steven Bruce*



### Steven Bruce

Steven Bruce is the author of *Thrown Up* and co-author of *Dark Matter 8*. His work has featured in *Picaroon Poetry*, *Building Bridges*, *No Tribal Dance*, *Forward*, *Lonesome October Lit*, and the *Black Light Engine Room Literary Magazine*. Some of his poems have been translated into Polish. In 2019, he graduated from Teesside University with a Master's Degree in Creative Writing.

**W**ith turmoil, she

compressed her lover's chest. "Come on," she said. "Come back to me. Please." She docked her red lips over his blue lips and endeavored to breathe life into him. "Come on," she said. "You can't die yet." She compressed his bony chest. Her lover's bloodshot eyes sprang open. "Please. Help," he gasped towards the spinning ceiling fan. Mascara tears cascaded to her wide-eyed grin. She kissed his pale forehead and wrapped her soft hands around his neck. "I brought you back," she whispered into her lover's ear. "I brought you back so I could kill you twice."

**VOTE FOR THIS PIECE** ★★★★★

HOME 7



# Drabble & Flash

## Hidden

*By: Kate MacDonald-Dunbar*



**Kate MacDonald-Dunbar**

Kate MacDonald-Dunbar is a retired septuagenarian who started to write just over sixteen months ago. She has many hobbies, but writing helps to fill an insomniac's dark quiet hours. She has had seventeen poems and six short stories published, online and in print: Chris Fielden's "Nonsensically Challenged," for charity. High Shelf Press volume XXIII. WinglessDreamer. Spillwords Press. 805 Lit and Art. Funny Pearls. Little Old Lady Comedy. Dillydoun Review. The World of Myth Magazine.

**T**he Book of Shadows

passed as an inheritance to me  
holding magic so powerful in its  
seals, I had to flee  
I am aware the warlock prowls,  
his black eyes ablaze  
he is still seeking knowledge, but  
in forbidden ways  
I will continue to dance while the  
moon's embrace  
steeps me in mystery held in this  
enchanted space  
A witch knows her Book of  
Shadows, it resides within  
every breath, every whisper,  
every molecule therein  
lost to me are alabaster  
moonbeams, stars at night  
though waves of hatred spill over,  
yet magic burns bright  
he may be trying to find my book  
with all of his might  
I know the purity of witch magic  
will keep it out of sight  
Though the warlock still hunts me  
with unrelenting zeal  
while I have the strength, my  
powers I will never reveal  
in these dark hinterlands, for the

moment, I must dwell  
so well hidden from his sight by  
the power of this spell  
while I dance and float within  
shadows, leaving no trace  
I guard well my Book of Shadows  
in this mystical place.

# Drabble & Flash

By: Dawn Colclasure

*The Sacrifice*



**Dawn Colclasure**

Dawn Colclasure is a writer in Oregon. She is a freelance writer, book reviewer and columnist. She is the author and co-author of over four dozen books, among them her horror novel, *Shadow of Samhain*. Her forthcoming *The Sacrifices* from PsychoToxin Press include the YA horror story collection, *The Worst Thing You Ever Did*, and the psychological horror novella, *All the Beautiful Things*. She also has a magical realism novel, *I'll Be Ghosting You*, scheduled for a November 2023 release by Gypsy Shadow Publishing. Her short stories have appeared in magazines and anthologies. Her websites are <https://dawnsbooks.com/> and <https://www.dmcwriter.com/>. She's on Twitter @dawnwilson325 and @dawncolclasure.

“P lease don’t make me

go!” he begged her, but she didn’t had been her deal with them all listen to his pleas. She never did. She always told him “Face your fears” and stuff like that. But this wasn’t something he just feared; he knew the monsters were real! Maybe she did, too, because she opened the door and said, “Here he is!” before tossing him back into his bedroom.

He got to his feet and ran back to the door, but his mother only smiled at him as she closed it. He gripped the doorknob, hearing the sounds of their footsteps behind him. Tears ran down his face and he shuddered with terror as he tried to turn the knob. It was locked! He turned to face what he knew was certain death, now resigning himself to the horrors that had haunted him for all of his ten years.

They had waited until he was ready and now they were here to finally feast on him. His mother was sacrificing him to the monsters that had terrorized him

at night for years. Perhaps that along. Perhaps she had been promised all of that money and fame she had in exchange for him. After all, he was ten now, and the ten-year deals with monsters found under a baby’s crib were common.

If only he hadn’t been the one to pay the price.

He screamed as they descended on him, ripping chunks of his skin from his body. He cried out in pain but at least the pain did not last long; one more fatal bite to his chest ended his young and tormented life.

VOTE FOR THIS PIECE ☆☆☆☆☆



# Drabble & Flash

*By: M. Weigel*



**M. Weigel**

M. Weigel lives and works in Reno, NV. She retells myths and fairy tales and loves exploring science fiction, fantasy, and horror. When not writing, she researches stories in their oldest forms to see how they survive and transform into today's tales.

## *When the Gods Fail*

**C**allisto: I swore my love and

loyalty to Artemis. My vow didn't repel Zeus's lust. He left his seed behind. My bruises and tears didn't move Artemis. She still called me whore and cast me out. My fury didn't stop Hera. She gave me claws and fur, separating me from my son.

Callisto: Now my son and I live in the stars. For what? As an honor? Because he lusted? Because she was cruel? Because his wife was jealous and wouldn't hurt him? May the stars turn long enough to see the gods fall and know my pain.

Medusa: I was her devoted servant. I performed my duties well. I only sought wisdom. Poseidon raped me in the temple. Athena didn't offer me advice on how to survive. She glared at my bruises and ignored my tears. She wouldn't hurt him, so she turned me into a monster.

Medusa: Thus, I wear snakes, and I turn the men who come for me to stone. Now one comes with

her shield. He will take my head because a goddess lacks mercy but can feel guilt. May Arachne include my pain in her next

Cassandra: Apollo found me lovely and offered his affection. I knew how that would end. Say yes or become a tree. No one would hurt him for his tantrums or betrayals. I stalled for time and asked for a gift of prophecy. I thought I was clever; I would choose freak over victim. Then Apollo came closer, and I hesitated. He sensed my revulsion and spat in my mouth.

Cassandra: No one believes me about him or anything else. I will die defiled and betrayed because no one can refuse a god. May his followers come to see him as he is—as vice-riddled as his father.

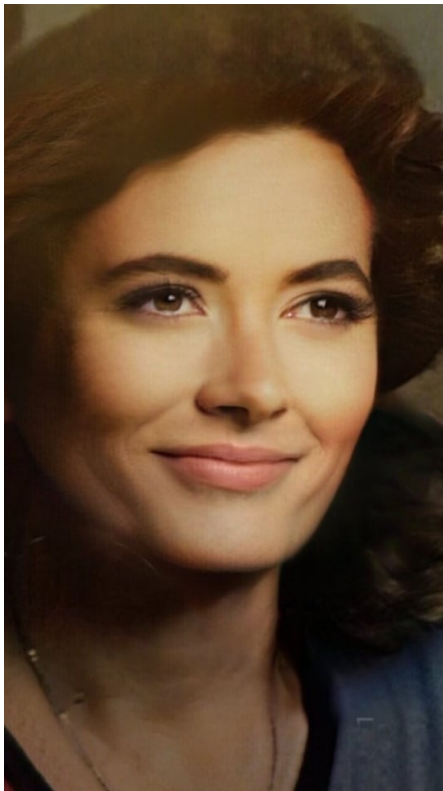
All three: May others know our stories, our pain, and our unheard prayers. May be the gods be known for what they were: rapists and accomplices. May their strength, wisdom, and predictions be tainted for how they treated us.

All three: Sometimes the gods create the world. Sometimes they give fabulous gifts. And sometimes . . . (too often) . . . the gods fail at being divine.

# Drabble & Flash

## *When the Truth Came Out*

*By: Gabriella Balcom*



**Gabriella Balcom**

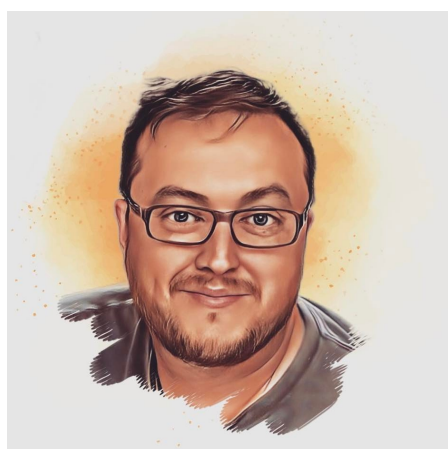
Gabriella Balcom, who is from Texas, writes fantasy, horror/thriller, romance, sci-fi, and more. She likes traveling, music, photography, great stories, history and movies. Gabriella says she loves forests, mountains, and back roads. She has a weakness for lasagna, garlic bread, tacos, cheese and chocolate. Check out her author page: <https://facebook.com/GabriellaBalcom.onestaraauthor>

“He’s using you,” Allegra’s coven stressed. “You’re *wrong*,” she retorted. “He loves me.” “Yes, I do,” Manfred agreed, standing beside her. He showered Allegra with compliments after the others left. When he showed interest in her magic, she shared her knowledge freely. Once he’d learned a lot, he knocked her out, and began draining her life energy. But her coven had been watching secretly. Casting a spell, they suspended him in mid-air, awake but immobilized. Allegra awakened, realized what Manfred had done, and blasted him into pieces. “Love is dangerous,” she concluded. “From now on, I’ll focus on power alone.” The end.



# Drabble & Flash

*By: David K. Montoya*



**David K. Montoya**

For a good part of two decades David K. Montoya was an active writer, artist and business entrepreneur in the micro-publication world. In 2013, turned his pen in for a microphone and became a podcaster for the following five years—and even did a small stint in independent Hollywood. But, now, he's come home and is ready to begin weaving new tales for this magazine.

## *Wormwood*

**M**atteo Hunziker, a respected professor at *CERN*, burst into the spacious office of Director-General Gretel Grimm. His mind was racing as he had just emerged from his observatory, where he had made a horrifying discovery. However, his panic was short-lived as he saw Grimm buried under a pile of paperwork, struggling to keep up with her daily tasks.

"What?" Grimm growled. "I'm sorry to disturb you, Director-General," Hunziker stammered. "But I have made a discovery of grave importance." Grimm sighed, slammed her pen down on a stack of papers, and said, "There is always a discovery of grave importance, Professor. I am supposed to have these papers reviewed and signed by the second week of May, and here it is the first of June."

"My apologies, Director-General," Hunziker squeaked. "But this is truly serious."

"Matteo, my dear... What year did

I become Director-General?"

Grimm said as she stood up from her chair. "Do you know?"

"No," Hunziker answered nervously as he watched his boss approach him.

"It was January 3117," Grimm explained with an unpleasant tone. "That was eight months ago today...And do you know how many times you have rushed into my office with a new discovery since then?"

Confused, he mouthed, "No."

"Seventy-two times, Matteo,"

Grimm continued. "That means you have been in my office once a week with a new discovery."

"But this discovery is more important than all the others," Hunziker countered.

Grimm sighed again and walked back to her desk. Once seated, she asked, "What is it this week?"

"The legend of the *Wormwood* asteroid is true," Hunziker replied fearfully.

"Wormwood? The meteor that is supposed to destroy the world?"

The one from the Christian Bible?" Grimm clarified in disbelief.

"Yes," Hunziker confirmed.

*To Be Concluded in ALIS: A Science Fiction Love Story...*

# Children's Literature

## *The Calm*

*By: Tim Law*



**Tim Law**

Timothy Law is a writer of fantasy, horror, detective and general fiction from a little town in Southern Australia called Murray Bridge. A happily married father of three children, family is very important to him. Currently working at the Murray Bridge Library in the role of Library Manager he has dreamed since his early high school years of becoming a full-time author. Working for a library, surrounded by so many wonderful authors it is difficult not to be inspired to write.

Many of his short stories and general musings can be found on

“How long was I gone?”

Dove begged to know. “What have I missed, is the world finished or is the final battle yet to come?”

“What are you talking about, Dove?” asked Bull, his face full of worry, his fists clenched, ready to punch something.

“She is talking about her dream,” said Fox. “I fear that our friend has had yet another vision.”

“Meow?” asked Cat.

Dove and Mouse both ignored

“You are right, Fox,” said Dove. “I did have a dream, a vision that showed me monsters falling from the very clouds while hideous giants crashed through the Capitol, my home.”

“That was no dream, Dove,” said Bull. “All that you say was a so called vision is actually real, it did happen, yesterday...”

“Then is all lost? Have we failed?” the paladin asked. “Have I been unable to do the will of Luna, the king dead?”

“We do not know,” said Fox.

“There still seems to be life within the city streets, citizens cleaning up in the aftermath.”

“Cat and Mouse both went out, they have just returned,” said Bull.

Mouse, who probably should have been nicknamed Rat, looked up from nibbling on a crust of bread at the mention of his name. “Squeak?” he asked.

“Meow,” said Cat.

“Rrrroooooooooowwwlllllll...”

answered Fox. “Squeeeeeeee...” Mouse nodded and went back to the crust.

“He is becoming more and more like the animal and less and less like himself, every day,” suggested Fox. “I can tell you though both Mouse and Cat think that the sorcerer and her tower are somehow involved.”

“Let me guess though,” said Dove.

“Neither of them dared to get close enough to take a look.” Mouse looked up and bared his teeth. Cat hissed and growled long and low in the back of her throat. The hackles on both animals rose.



his blog

<http://somecallmetimmy.blogspot.com.au/> or on Parenting Express

website.

Fox made to comment but Dove waved him away.

“Don’t bother,” she said. “I do not need that to be translated.”

“We were hoping that you could check on the palace,” said Bull.

“We all tried to meet with the king before the attack on the city and we had no hope then.”

“It seems likely we would have even less chance now,” Fox added, his face long and whiskery.

Dove gave that a moment of thought and then nodded.

“I would also like to check on my other family,” the paladin said. “I worry for them; the moon is a mere crescent and Luna’s strength has ebbed to almost nothing.”

“Do as you believe that you must,” said Bull. “Just don’t stay out too long.”

Dove tapped on the breastplate that covered her torso from neck to navel.

“Do not worry for me,” she laughed. “I have more than just my faith to protect me.”

“Hopefully that will be enough,” said Bull. “I must admit I do not have a lot of faith in... Well... Faith, I guess...”

“Faith has got me this far,” said Dove. “I promise I will have enough faith in it for the both of us, Bull.”

The barbarian grunted.

“Just promise us you won’t die,” he said. “Now more than ever we need a leader.”

“None of us can know our

future,” suggested Dove. “Not without the use of magic and paying a great price.”

“I don’t suppose you paid such a price?” asked Fox.

“You boys are so sweet with how much you worry,” said Dove with a smile. “How you worry about me, all of us really.”

“Yeah, well don’t tell anyone,” said Bull. “Reputation, you know?”

“Your secret is safe with me, Bull,” said Dove. “I promise not to confess to anyone.”

“I would not even speak to anyone,” suggested Fox.

“What if I promise not to speak with anyone that I do not know,” suggested Dove.

“Yes, no, wait... Oh I don’t know,” said Fox, confused. “This is your city, surely you would know most if not all.”

“Trust me, both of you,” Dove urged. “I would not purposefully put us into any more danger than we already face.”

Fox and Bull both nodded. They could not ask of Dove any more than that.

“Thank you,” the paladin said, grateful. “Now please, I am leaving, bar the doors as I go.”

In the front room waiting patiently was Dove’s loyal steed Purity.

“Good girl,” said Dove as she gave the beautiful beast a thump upon the flank and then rubbed her muzzle.

Purity searched the gauntleted hand for a sweet treat and found the apple that Dove had brought her.

"Come, it is time that we went and checked on friends and then up to the palace to see what chaos has befallen there," Dove told her companion.

The holy warrior of Luna considered for a moment the possibility that Purity was also some person once transformed into a great beast, but then she remembered seeing the foal birthed; no, as much as she liked to believe she were something more than just a horse, Purity was of the equine family, and seemed likely to always be such.

Beyond the safety of shelter, back on the slum streets of the Capitol, Dove and Purity discovered many citizens braving the quiet. They roved in gangs, groups of no less than four, sometimes as great as ten, searching bodies, broken buildings, looking for salvageable treasures that would help them to survive. Over the past day and night, the once wondrous human capital had become a symbol of doom and disaster, a true reflection of the rot and ruin that had seeped unseen into the world. Dove's heart was pulled in two directions simultaneously, first she desired to send all whom she saw home again, empty handed.

"Leave the streets!" she called. "Return to your homes!"

"We have no homes!" the people called back. "We are tired, and afraid, and we are hungry."

Each time that thought of food crossed the mind of those, be they known to Dove or stranger, the famished eyes looked upon Purity with thoughts of meat in bellies. Each time Dove urged her steed onward and Purity was always happy to obey.

The Capitol had changed, but eventually Dove's instincts helped by Purity guided her to Luna's church.

"Tom!" the paladin called out, somehow expecting that the gardener would still be out front pruning the hedges while the world went mad.

"Dove is that you?" asked the voice of Sister Mary-May.

"Of course, it is Dove, sister," said Sister Josephine. "We would expect none other to foolishly brave the streets at such a time, and we are most joyful that she has."

"Sisters, what has befallen Tom the gardener," Dove begged to know as she dismounted from Purity and led the steed onto Luna's holy grounds.

The pair of elderly ladies shared a glance.

"Oh no," Dove whispered.

"It is as you prophesied," said Sister Josephine.

"The church did suffer in the attacks upon the Capitol," said Sister Mary-May. "Poor Tom stood his ground and was struck trying to protect us."

Dove's gloved hand flew to her mouth that was open in shock.

"Did he die?" she asked, unsure if she wanted to know the answer.

"He sleeps," the pair whispered.

"Bishop Wannuluf will not say if it is the sting that has caused such or if he himself has placed our Tom in that state."

"To help with the healing," suggested Sister Mary-May.

"Take me to him, please," Dove requested.

"Who?" asked Sister Josephine.

"Do you wish to see the gardener of the bishop?"

"Please let me see Tom first, and then Bishop Wannuluf," said Dove. "Hurry, if you can."

"Sister Mary-May, please settle our friend's steed, I will take her to the gardener," said Sister Josephine.

"Of course, sister," said Sister Mary-May. "I shall take Purity and then advise the bishop that Dove has arrived."

The paladin released her steed into the sister's care. Looking up she could see the great star falling toward the city and the sorcerer's tower.

"It is too soon," she muttered.

"We are still incomplete."

"Come, friend Dove, follow me," urged Sister Josephine. "Since the attack upon the Capitol things have changed, a little at least. As Dove followed her guide she discovered that buildings she had known during her childhood years

were now flattened or broken open and gutted.

"We have the sick and injured safely housed in the wine cellar," the sister said. "But we have needed to create a new pathway to get there."

With care Dove made her way up a damaged staircase and then over the rooftop of the meeting hall. She caught Sister Josephine when the elder stumbled, and then took the lead when it was obvious where the new entrance lay.

"I can go the rest of the way myself, with thanks," Dove suggested.

"But I wished to see Tom as well," Josephine replied.

"Then come along too," Dove urged. "We shall go carefully together."

At the entrance to the cellar door stood two familiar faces, but neither father had time for even a smile for Dove.

"Go through friend," ordered Father Francini, Father Donnuns merely stepping aside.

Within the darkness Dove discovered another sister handing her a candle stub, and but such light as that glow emanated she and Sister Josephine discovered Father Oatis, Father Raed, Father Pothus, and of course Tom the gardener. Dove checked over them all and discovered the same puncture wound.

"As I had feared," the paladin told the sister. "It is not by the

bishop's doing that these men slumber."

"Bzzzzzzt..." murmured Tom.

"Bzzzzzzt, bzzzzzz, bzzzz..."

"Dove, it is a most terrific surprise

that you have chosen now to visit

us," announced the voice of

Bishop Wannuluf. "Though I would wish it were far more celebratory circumstances that had brought you here."

"I wanted to check upon my family before I looked upon my king," said Dove with a tight smile. "And from what I am witnessing here I fear for the fate of those at court."

"As do I," agreed the bishop as he embraced Dove.

The paladin hugged the bishop tightly.

"What will befall us all?" she asked, whispering her worries into the old man's ear.

"Only Luna truly knows," Bishop

Wannuluf replied. "Our hope is that the moon's light will shine bright soon and reveal to us, Luna's faithful, some of those secrets that she holds tight to her chest.

"I too wish the same," Dove agreed.

"Speaking of secrets, there is one that I can reveal now though,"

said the bishop as the embrace came to an end. "Please Dove, allow me to introduce to you, Lady Bee."

Upon mention of her name, an elf gracefully stepped into glow, Dove noticed that there was a

determined look upon her face.

"I know who has done this to your friends," the elf stated. "I want to find them and make them pay."

"There is more happening here than you know," answered Dove.

"Luna wants no part in your plans for revenge, but we do need you to help us to save this world."

"In turn wish for the world to be saved," said Bee. "But I will make absolute certain that in the process of enacting my part in that I will also extract my revenge."

Dove looked to Bishop Wannuluf, but the old man shrugged his shoulders.

"This is your dream, Dove, only you can know how it is that our goddess wishes such wisdom to be interpreted."

"We shall work as one toward the greater goal," said Dove.

"How we get there will be by walking differing paths, side by side," agreed Bee.

"All in accordance with the will of Luna," said the bishop.

"Walking by the light of the moon," said Dove.

"Walking by the light of Luna," agreed the elf.

"I found us a Bee," said Dove, causing Bull to rise up with fists clenched and ready, and Fox to transform into his sleek alter-ego. Cat continued cleaning herself, seemingly carefree, but at the mention of insects, Mouse



disappeared.

"Don't worry," said Dove, reassuringly. "This Bee is... Well... Not exactly friendly, but I'm fairly certain she is on our side."

"So, is this all we've got to save the world?" asked Bee the blade singer.

"All of us plus a mouse called Mouse who used to be a thief," said Dove.

From a corner of the room came a chattering of squeaks and squeals.

"The greatest thief in the whole of the kingdom," said Fox who was halfway back to his humanoid form. "Or that is the way he tells it."

"I can vouch for the mouse and his claims," said Dove. "When he was not a rodent, the name Randolph van Rattertan was indeed a prince among rogues, thieves, and cut throats."

"Then that is something, I suppose," said Bee.

"We six are all that my dream reveals," said Dove. "There are no more."

"Come, gather together as one and tell me all that you know, and I in turn will share for you my story," suggested the blade singer. Without more options available to them, the group found themselves drawing close, in the calm of the night they talked, and as they talked they formed a plan.

# Children's Literature

## The Teacher - Chapter Two

By: Tim Law



**Tim Law**

Timothy Law is a writer of fantasy, horror, detective and general fiction from a little town in Southern Australia called Murray Bridge. A happily married father of three children, family is very important to him. Currently working at the Murray Bridge Library in the role of Library Manager he has dreamed since his early high school years of becoming a full-time author. Working for a library, surrounded by so many wonderful authors it is difficult not to be inspired to write.

Many of his short stories and general musings can be found on

I did not know what had a hold on me, but whatever it was I knew that its grip was tight, and its silver there was space for five was strong enough to pull me down, through that plughole, into the drain and then through a tunnel beyond. The tunnel was dark, and very narrow. I could not understand how it was even possible that a child my size could fit. Above me and below me it looked as though that tunnel was far too narrow for me, and yet I did not touch the walls of the tunnel as I was pulled along. And then, after what felt like only a few minutes, suddenly with a loud "pop" I was suddenly out of the tunnel, and when I looked behind me I discovered that there was no such tunnel there, only hills and grass, and clouds. What a strange world I found myself in. I came out of the tunnel, bleary-eyed, seeing archways of silver and gold everywhere. We had only last week been learning about rainbows in school, and just then, although the curved shapes that I could see all looked familiar to me, the pair of colors were just not right. Below the other arches, at that stage colorless, transparent, there but not quite there yet, a promise of things to come. "Thank goodness," said a voice. "We need an extra pair of hands to get all of these painted up in time." I looked around me and discovered a creature made out of rock, something like a gargoyle, but not frightening, it was a creature that was just ugly. "We?" I asked, looking around I could not see anyone else. "Here, put this on," it said, handing me a lumpy grey suit, ignoring my question. "Hurry, before the boss comes to check on us." "What do you mean, the boss?" I asked, but again, I got the feeling my questions were all going to remain unanswered. "Just hurry up and change already," said the gargoyle. The suit was quite snug, almost as if it had been sewn exactly for my

his blog

[http://somecallmetimmy.blogspot](http://somecallmetimmy.blogspot.com.au/)

[t.com.au/](http://somecallmetimmy.blogspot.com.au/) or on Parenting Express website.

size. As I zipped it up I heard a very familiar voice.

"I am looking for a little child who has escaped from my class," said the substitute teacher Mrs. Mister.

The student that she was looking for was me, but for some reason, perhaps the costume I was wearing, Mrs. Mister looked at me as though I was a gargoyle too.

"Hurry up with these rain boxes," the substitute then said. "I have a science lesson all about whether that starts in less than an hour and I will need all of these done so that I can teach it."

What an impossible task! There seemed to be at least a hundred unfinished arches, each one needing at five or more bands filled in. I could not help but ask though, the teacher had said that her lesson was about whether, not weather. Curiosity got the better of me, even though the gargoyle was doing his best to get me to stop talking.

"Whether what?" I asked, while the gargoyle waved his paintbrush at me and madly shook his head, telling me to stop asking all of my questions. "Did you mean to say that your lesson will be about weather, not whether?"

"Well, whether or not the rain falls up or the sky is down, if a frown is the best face for a clown, should you see the child, or any child, you both know where to

find me," said Mrs. Mister. "For a gargoyle you ask far too many questions about whether and weather..."

Then she wriggled her way into a bumper-car and putted away. I tried not to laugh as I watched that funny little car with the great big teacher slowly climb up a hill and then reach the peak before it vanished over the other side. I had not seen Mrs. Mister arrive in the cart, I had not heard it arrive, but I certainly heard it go.

"What an incredible challenge," said the gargoyle. "Getting all of these rain boxes dillied up for the big boss in less than no time, to the quicker goes the prize."

"What prize?" I asked, but the gargoyle did not answer, he was far too busy painting.

So, while the substitute vanished over the horizon I picked up my brush and dipped it into the paint pot so that I could begin to paint as well.

As I wandered across the red soil, I felt my costumed feet drift through the purple grasses, leaving my three toed footprints in my artistic wake. Each time I dipped my brush into that paint pot I discovered that the colors changed. I splashed some pink, a bit of aqua, even a terrible mustard brown and yellow combo that made me want to sneeze; I filled in those empty arches as quickly as I could, but as soon as I finished one arched rainy-thing I looked across at the



other gargoyle and discovered he was two completed bands of seven ahead of me. "How do you paint so quickly?" I asked. "I think, there for it is," said the gargoyle. "It is what?" I asked. "Pink!" cried the gargoyle. "And it's fluorescent this time." And so, it was. A rainbow of pinks that dribbled down through the layers until it had become the darkest of dark blues. We then worked together, two gargoyles on a mission, and within the hour we were done. None of the bands of color matched the red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet pattern that I had been taught by Mr. Bright, but the gargoyle seemed to think that Mrs. Mister would be happy, and so I felt happy too. Once we finished the last one I made to take the costume off, it was splattered with all sorts of different colored paints, even some colors that we had not used, and it was becoming tighter, almost as if it was shrinking or I was growing. "No, no, no," said the gargoyle. "Leave it on, just for now." And at that very moment we both heard the "putt... putt... putt..." of the bumper car and moments later Mrs. Mister came back over the hill again. "Beautiful!" laughed the substitute teacher. "Perfect!" "Thank you," I said. "We did it together."

"Oh, no, I didn't mean you or your work," said Mrs. Mister. "I meant that if I had painted them as I originally planned to do, these rain-arches would have been both beautiful and perfect, unfortunately these I did not paint, and what you two have done will just have to do." "I feel pity for the children," murmured the gargoyle, head hung, although I could see a smirk on his face. "As do I," laughed the substitute teacher meanly. I got the feeling that Mrs. Mister really did not care for the children in my class, or any children for that matter. I made to say so, but the teacher spoke again before I had the chance. "Well, I guess if you both worked together then you both deserve the prize," she said. With a wiggle of one of her serpentine strands I heard the teacher mumble some strange, magic syllables. Then one by one our hard work vanished, then so did the gargoyle, and finally me.

I found myself in darkness, my eyes open but all I could see was the fuzzy brown and black you get when you squeeze your eyes shut tight. "Where am I?" I asked. "You're here, with me," said the voice of the gargoyle. "Follow my silence and I will lead us back to class." "Follow your silence?" I asked, but then I heard it, an absence of sound as obvious as a footfall. I had a choice then, I could follow the gargoyle and learn about rainy-rainy things and see what my class thought of the silver, gold, pink, and blue arches, as well as every other color in between. Learning about things that we had already been taught, and being taught about them wrong was not going to help me to find out what happened to our actual teacher, Mr. Bright; the teacher that taught us one plus one did not equal five, and that the arch in the sky was called a rainbow, and no proper rainbow included silver, gold, and pink, no matter how pretty such an array looked in the sky. So instead of following the gargoyle, I listened for the silence, and every time I heard it I went in the opposite direction. It sounded closer and closer, the further away that I tried to go, but then, when it was its loudest, it was suddenly gone, and I couldn't hear a thing.

I opened my eyes, because they had been closed after all and I found myself in a maze with green walls covered in scribbled arches of black, white, and shades of grey. Above each arch were the eyes of Mrs. Mister, the arches looking like multiple mouths, every single one of them

a reflection of that nasty smile I saw her give the gargoyle when she laughed about the students in Mr. Bright's classroom. "I see you," said the mouths, flashing sharp looking teeth like knives. "I smell you too." "But you do not have a nose," I shouted back, not wanting to show the substitute teacher just how scared I was. "The knows nose," the faces on the maze walls cackled. Wiggly snake hair appeared above one of the faces and then a body. "Shouldn't you be teaching a class?" I asked. "Yes, we are outside learning about fluff dumpers and colored frown boxes, and it is the perfect place for me to make little kiddies run," said the face and body of Mrs. Mister. And suddenly I found every face of the substitute teacher scribbled on the maze walls started to become real and started to look like the other children from Mr. Bright's class. "The first one to catch the gargoyle and take off its skin will win the prize," cried the teacher. "But Miss..." called Tommy Tolittle. "What is the prize?" Five of the snakes turned toward the little boy and hissed angrily, but Mrs. Mister stroked them lovingly and they fell to sleep. "Little Tommy Thompson..." laughed Mrs. Mister, making Tommy smile. "How does a longer lunch time sound?" "Oh yes, Miss Hiss," said Tommy, in a dreamy look in his eyes. "That sounds lovely." "Yes, Miss Hiss," cried the other children. "We will catch the monster, don't you worry..." For a moment I forgot that I was the one in the gargoyle costume, the one covered in those strange shades of paint. The moment my class turned toward me though I remembered, and so I ran. Sam told me that in his adventure he followed his heart and it lead him to a friendly polar bear and lots of other friends. I needed to trust that my heart would do the same. I ran through that strange green maze, tried to run away from the children that were running after me, but on every wall that I passed by a new child appeared, their hands reaching out for me. "I got it miss..." called Tommy Tolittle. "Miss Hiss, I caught the gargoyle..." I felt Tommy's hands upon my shoulders, but then I ducked and shrugged, and he let go. "No fair miss..." moaned the boy. "I had it fair and square." "Listen to instructions, Thompson Two-ears," called the voice of Mrs. Mister. "I will say again, the first one to catch the gargoyle and take off its skin will win the prize." "Stay still you little monster," hissed Tommy, and as I dared to look over my shoulder I discovered that his hair was clumping together and turning into snakes. "Tommy, it's me," I said, and I unzipped the costume and showed my face. I watched as Tommy ran his fingers through his hair and the snakes disappeared. "Hey everyone, it's not a gargoyle we are all chasing," said Tommy Tolittle, surprised. "It's only J..." "Just a terrible monster that needs to be caught and brought straight to me," interrupted the voice of the substitute teacher. "Go, run Jess," whispered Tommy, as he gave me a shove. "Go find Mr. Bright." "Thanks Tommy Tolittle," I said as I put the facemask of my gargoyle costume back on and started to run again. I turned left, and then right, and then right again. In my mind I knew that I was looking for the heart of the maze. There would be something or someone there that could help me. "Come on! This way!" shouted the voice of the other gargoyle, I could see it just ahead of me, and for a moment I thought perhaps I had already found a friend. "I'm coming!" I shouted back. "She is this way!" the gargoyle shouted then, and straight away I knew that this gargoyle was not helping me, it wanted the prize, the extra-long lunchbreak. I looked over my shoulder, but I could not see any of the children

that were chasing me. That was when I got an idea. The gargoyle did not want to help me, but there was a way that it could. I quickly took off the costume I was wearing and handed it to the gargoyle.

"It's over here!" I called.

Three of the children from the class came around the corner then, all at the same time. I dragged the gargoyle holding the costume along with me and when we got to a T-junction in the maze I shoved it left while I ran off to the right.

"Go... Go... Go!!!" shouted Tommy to the other kids, pointing left in the direction that the gargoyle went.

"Thanks Tommy!" I yelled over my shoulder as I ran on in the direction that my heart lead me.

"Good luck!" Tommy yelled back as he ran off to the left as well.

"No... No... No..." hissed the faces of Mrs. Mister, still spying on me from the maze walls.

I began to use the sleeve of my shirt to wipe away the chalk images. As they disappeared they faded away further ahead along the maze as well.

"We will catch you, child, you will not get far," the substitute screeched, her voice behind me, but no longer beside me or ahead.

With greater confidence I continued to run along the maze passageways. I turned right, then right, then left, and finally I discovered a long straight passage and then I closed my eyes tight as that I knew was going to take me to exactly where I needed to be.

"So long, Mrs. Mister, you can't catch me!" I called.

I ran as fast as I had ever run before. Then I saw what was ahead at the end of the passage and I tried to slow down, but the floor of the maze had arrows all pointing toward the way that I was running, and my legs and feet obeyed the arrows, not my brain.

At the very end of the passage, at the very heart of the maze, that place where my heart had been leading me all along, there was the biggest version of Mrs. Mister's face that I had ever seen.

The snakes that made up her hair were all wiggling about and hissing loudly with their forked tongues flickering in and out from between their lips. The evil eyes of the substitute teacher twinkled like distant asteroids of promised doom.

The most frightening thing of all though was none of these, it was the wide open mouth that was filled with sharp teeth on the top, and even sharper teeth on the bottom, and lying on the maze floor right where I was headed was a thick, orange, oozy tongue with hairy warts all over it.

"Oh, please no," I begged. "Please don't make me go in there."

But I had no option. The maze arrows were pointing straight at that tongue and that big, open mouth. I got closer, and closer,

I felt my foot squish on that horrible tongue. The great big mouth of Mrs. Mister crashed shut behind me, and I discovered that I was in darkness once again.

***To Be Continued...***

# Fantasy

## *Shadows of the Anasazi Part three*

*By: Gabriella Balcom*



**Gabriella Balcom**

Gabriella Balcom, who is from Texas, writes fantasy, horror/thriller, romance, sci-fi, and more. She likes traveling, music, photography, great stories, history and movies. Gabriella says she loves forests, mountains, and back roads. She has a weakness for lasagna, garlic bread, tacos, cheese and chocolate. Check out her author page:

<https://facebook.com/GabriellaBalcom.lonestarauthor>

**N**o one responded. No one appeared. Nothing moved. Maybe she'd seen an animal. That would explain the shifting shadow and the silence. She shrugged and continued exploring. Ronnie stopped now and then to admire paintings and handprints preserved on walls. One spiral shape caught her eye. Drawn to it, she traced the pattern with a finger and thought she smelled burning sage. She must be imagining it. Studying the wall once more, she remembered reading the Hopi spiral represented going on a long journey — or something like that. After she climbed a wooden ladder to a higher level, she repeated her methodical room-to-room search. She was surprised to turn a corner and see a small piece of cultivated earth outside the pueblo on a raised bit of land beyond the cliff. She recognized corn, squash, and beans growing beside other plants she didn't recognize. Another large barrel rested nearby, this one full of

water. The plants appeared to be in good condition, with the soil around them cultivated. The immediate area was free of weeds or plant debris, an impressive feat in and of itself considering the overhanging branches. Clearly, someone maintained the plot. The garden was the first sign she'd found of human life here. Reentering the pueblo, she discovered more hopeful signs: a bed made of tree limbs secured with rope and several woven blankets on top. Two were soft and in stunning shades of blue, and she recalled reading the Hopi were famous for their blue blankets. The bed was by an outdoor fire pit, which would keep anyone who slept there warm through cool nights. A faint rustling came from behind her, and she turned, expecting to see nothing or an animal. Instead, an elderly woman stood in the shadows. Small and slight of build, she looked as if an unexpected sneeze could blow her backwards. Her mouth moved, but Ronnie couldn't make out words. All she heard were the wind's eerie music-like tones, raspy moans, and what sounded like faraway chanting. That wind was really something else.



The figure walked down the hall in the pueblo and Ronnie followed. "Ma'am, could I talk with you? I'm looking for a woman named Serena Moffett. She used to go by Seezie, but she might call herself Kaya." "I haven't heard the name Seezie in years," the woman said. "Maybe in a lifetime." Her words were so quiet and faint, Ronnie had trouble hearing them. They could almost have been another whisper of the wind and had come from behind Ronnie. She eased around slowly, not wanting to spook the woman. Despite Ronnie being an utter stranger, one who could have brought bad tidings, the old woman stepped toward her without hesitation. The outdoor lighting blinked off without a sound. A trick of the moonlight made the woman appear translucent. Ronnie blinked hard but saw only a person again, small and faded but solid. "Please come," the woman said, beckoning for Ronnie to follow. Leading the way to a ladder protruding from a dark kiva, she descended. She took slow steps at first, then moved quicker and vanished into the darkness. Ronnie followed, easing one cautious foot after the other. Down here was much blacker, but a few rays of moonlight made their way inside. The woman bent to sit cross-legged on the ground and Ronnie followed suit. "Are you Seezie?" Studying her with searching eyes and a small frown, the woman answered, "You have eyes, but can you see?" Cocking her head to the left, she finally smiled, and her eyes sparkled. Ronnie was shaken by the warmth and welcome the woman offered, and she recognized features from a photo Carly had given her of a younger Seezie. "Yes, I can see you're Seezie. Carly sent me to look for you. She wanted you to know how much she's missed you and how much she appreciates everything you did for her." Seezie's sharp gaze struck Ronnie like a spear. "Is there anyone you miss, Ronnie?" "Yes. My parents died in a car accident when I was little, and I..." Ronnie stopped in mid-sentence, sadness overwhelming her. She wasn't one for sentimentality or tears, but her eyes dampened. "You've missed them ever since." A hand, deeply lined and covered in age spots, touched Ronnie's arm. It was so light, she didn't feel it, but she felt its heat like a ray from the sun warming her. "And they miss you. Life can feel hard when your family journeys on. When they leave you behind. You've been alone too long, and your loved ones miss you, young one." Seezie opened her mouth to croon — a soft sound which reminded Ronnie of mothers comforting their children, fathers rocking them to sleep or tossing them into the air and catching them with safe, strong hands, and grandmothers singing lullabies to grandchildren. Another voice chimed in, echoing Seezie's, and Ronnie didn't realize at first it was her own. The wind's humming and moaning blended in, and that seemed fitting. Ronnie patted her leg in time with the beat and rocked from side-to-side. For some reason, she found it difficult to keep her eyes open. She dozed off sitting up, thinking she heard the shuffling of many feet, voices singing, and the haunting strains of several flutes dwindling down into one. As her eyes shut, she imagined Seezie's face changing — the flesh fading away, leaving only a skeleton behind. When Ronnie woke, she was lying on the kiva floor with a blanket tucked around her. The elderly woman was nowhere to be seen. Ronnie called out, "Hello? Seezie?" But she neither saw nor heard anyone. Her body was stiff as she rose, bent in slow motion to touch her toes, stretched, and rubbed her neck. Her head ached. Pushing a button to illuminate her watch, she gasped. "No wonder!" It was 4:21 AM, several hours after she'd arrived. Carefully folding the blanket which had been placed over her, Ronnie set it aside, circumvented the spider crawling across the floor nearby, and climbed out of the kiva. The lights were still off. The air filled with the sounds of rustling branches, owls continuing to hoot their melancholy messages to one another or the world at large, the

low chirr of insects, and an occasional frog. The wind still moaned, whistling musically, its intensity stronger than before Ronnie's nap. The night had grown colder also. Prickles rose on the back of Ronnie's neck, as if someone had dropped an icicle down her shirt, and she shivered. The weather forecast that morning had predicted temperatures in the fifties, but she felt frost in the air. Gazing around, she saw a light glaze of it shimmering on every surface. That meant it was actually in the thirties. Her jacket wasn't enough to keep her warm, and she didn't want to get sick staying out too long. At the same time, she didn't want to leave without speaking to Seezie again. Ronnie had revealed only part of Carly's message and hadn't said she wanted her grandmother to come and stay with her. Ronnie was very aware of the discomfort in her head, her empty stomach, and the worsening chill. Then she remembered her hotel. Her feet moved almost of their own accord toward the entrance. Now that she knew Seezie was here, she could return another time. She froze. Something had been bothering her and she realized what it was. Cliff Palace was in a park which was toured frequently and monitored by guides and rangers. This was *not* a dwelling place anymore and no sensible person would condone a frail, elderly woman living here alone. So how did Seezie manage it? Did

she have a cabin in the woods, with indoor plumbing? A place to keep food cold, a bed protected from outdoor elements, and a heat source? Ronnie ignored her throbbing head. Lethargy crept through her body, no doubt courtesy of her blasted low blood sugar, and she couldn't help but sigh with relief when Seezie appeared once more. "Come, child," the woman told her. "Follow me." Doing as she was asked, Ronnie thought she was being led deeper into the pueblo through areas she hadn't noticed earlier, past ladders descending into the depths of blackness or ascending to unknown somewheres. Looking over her shoulder, her eyes widened. It seemed improbable — maybe impossible — but she couldn't see the front of the pueblo system anymore. She couldn't see any light from the moon she knew hung overhead either. "Seezie, exactly where are we going?" The old woman didn't respond but beckoned before vanishing around yet one more corner. It was strange, but from Ronnie's position, the summoner in the distance looked like nothing more than a shadow. A *vanishing* shadow. Ronnie picked up her pace, walking fast, but soon broke into a run to catch up. Try as she might, however, she couldn't. Seezie stayed several yards ahead, no matter what, and the farther they walked, the fainter the woman seemed. For a moment,

Ronnie even imagined she saw the walls *through* the elderly woman's body. Ronnie chuckled at her whimsy and spoke aloud. "Yup. I need food. And sleep." Stopping, she massaged her temples and shivered. She rubbed her arms, pulled her jacket tighter, zipped it up to her neck, tugged the hood over her head, and stomped in place. "I need warmth, too, darn it!" An echo of stomping footsteps returned to her, along with the same eerie moans, groans, and humming. "Wow." She marveled over how much the wind imitated the sounds of life. Moving in the direction she'd last seen Seezie, she was confused by the woman reappearing from another direction fifty or sixty yards away. Seezie waved her arms and her mouth moved, but Ronnie couldn't hear any words. She could barely see the older woman because she was swallowed by shadows once more. Ronnie assumed Seezie was trying to get her to hurry and rubbed her head yet again. She felt a little dizzy and stood still till it passed. Seezie waved again, this time with greater urgency. "Yeah, I know," Ronnie called out. "I'm coming." Her mind had grown foggy, her body was weak, and she couldn't think straight. Was Seezie telling her to come or to stay put where she was? Sighing, Ronnie moved forward, but couldn't see her companion in

the dark. In fact, she saw practically nothing. Taking another step, her right foot encountered open air and she realized a kiva hole lay in front of her. She reached for the closest wall, but her fingertips only brushed the surface. Pitching forward, she made a last-ditch attempt to grab the ladder into the kiva. If she could just grasp the rungs, she... But she fell too quickly, her scream ending in a gasp and a thump.

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Ronnie didn't know where she was when she first woke, but soon relived how her landing had jolted her entire body. She lay on the ground in an awkward, ungainly position, her arms, and legs akimbo. Getting on her knees, she stood and examined herself. Nothing appeared to be broken, and she didn't feel or see blood, so that was good.

"Whew, I was lucky," she exclaimed. She must not have fallen far. Strange, though — the hole above her seemed a good distance away when she looked up.

Amazingly, her didn't hurt anymore. She didn't even feel a twinge. Could the jolt have shocked the pain from her system? Was that possible?

Regardless of whether it was or wasn't, anything that got rid of her headaches was fine by her.

Seezie reappeared and came toward her, moving so fluidly she almost glided. She shook her head at Ronnie and sighed, but offered

the younger woman a warm smile and placed a cool hand on her arm. "It's about time you got up. Come. The ceremony is beginning."

"Ceremony?" That's when Ronnie heard all the sounds she'd written off as the wind playing with her imagination — the moaning voices raised in unison, the humming melody the likes of which she'd never heard before, all those feet pacing, stomping, shuffling — and the drums and flutes. "Hey, only you and I were here before. Where did all the people come from?"

Seezie patted her cheek. "They're here for you."

"For me?"

"You're being welcomed.

Honored. We'll have an initiation ceremony and naming for you.

It's a great honor to be chosen to join our people. You'll be one of us."

"But I'm not Indi-uh-Native American. I'm white."

"No, you have the blood of our people running in your veins. It comes from many generations back, but it runs strong and true. Sometimes, spirit matters more than blood anyway. Come now."

Following Seezie through the new kiva, Ronnie could see light.

Figures moved up ahead against the vivid backdrop — the picturesque mountains and sloping cliffs, the junipers

standing proud and ageless across the expanse. She felt they carried a special message for her. People chanted in a language she didn't

know, but when she really focused on it, she found herself understanding the words.

Something about great gods and those who watch over everything and everyone. Families loving one another. The rarity of choice spirits. Death was not an end at all but a beginning. Honor was important, but love surpassed it. Several individuals turned toward Ronnie. She made out the leather leggings, the braided hair decorated with beads and feathers, and saw some people were dressed as Kachina dolls. She remembered they represented supernatural beings that controlled the world.

When many welcoming smiles were directed her way, she smiled back.

Seezie tapped her shoulder, "Let's not keep them waiting. They've waited for you a long time as it is."

"But who are they?" Ronnie stopped moving. "What's going on?"

"I told you." Seezie sighed and put her hands on her hips, looking every bit an exasperated parent chastising an unruly child, or a teacher determined to be patient when dealing with a stubborn student. "They're waiting for you. And I've been waiting for you. Now you're making us wait longer. That's rude. We're your family."

"But—" Ronnie tried to puzzle through everything. "I have a family. I mean — *had* a family."

"Yes, but would it hurt to have

more? Would your parents want you to be all alone?"

"No." Her heart both ached and sang at the thought of belonging and being surrounded by love instead of the indifference she'd endured growing up. Still, Ronnie remembered the reason she'd come to Mesa Verde in the first place. "But Carly wanted you to know how she felt." Ronnie had to tell Seezie of her

granddaughter's wishes. At the same time, Ronnie was in awe of how she felt. Valued. Important. Neither hot nor cold, but comfortable. And it was truly a miracle her head wasn't killing her at this point.

Despite this, she knew she needed to return to her car before it was seen. She also needed a bath in her hotel room. And she needed to do what Carly had requested — bring Seezie to her.

The old woman patted Ronnie's arm as if she was a little girl.

"Don't worry. We'll get to Carly later. It's not her time."

A group of Native Americans approached them. Two of them, a man and woman, seemed familiar to Ronnie, but she didn't know why. They opened their arms and pulled her into a tight hug.

"Come, child," the woman told her. "You are ours."

The dancing continued nearby, along with the chanting, shuffling, and stomping. The voices and drums rose against the haunting notes of many flutes, which again tapered off into one playing alone. The air buzzed with sound, and

Ronnie felt the beat throughout her body, throughout her blood which thrummed and flowed electrified through her veins. As she moved toward those waiting, her eyes fell on the ground. Despite the soft soil, the people walking in front of her had left no trace of their passing. Ronnie glanced behind herself. She hadn't left any footprints either.

**End of third part of story.**



# Fantasy

## Wyldewood Forest Part One of Four

*By: Gabriella Balcom*



**Gabriella Balcom**

Gabriella Balcom, who is from Texas, writes fantasy, horror/thriller, romance, sci-fi, and more. She likes traveling, music, photography, great stories, history and movies. Gabriella says she loves forests, mountains, and back roads. She has a weakness for lasagna, garlic bread, tacos, cheese and chocolate. Check out her author page: <https://facebook.com/GabriellaBalcom.onestaraauthor>

Lianna crossed her legs as she read, then uncrossed them. After a minute, she lay on her back but didn't stay that way long. She rolled onto her stomach next, but to no avail. She felt antsy but didn't know why, and just couldn't focus on her new book. Although it was fantasy, her favorite genre, her mind wandered every time she started reading. She'd waited forever for this particular novel to come out, so her restlessness made no sense, and she studied the cover, frowning. Setting the book aside, she went to make a cup of chamomile tea, but cringed at the sight of the unwashed dishes lying in the kitchen sink. There were only three, but they were enough to bug her and remind her of other to-dos. Laundry had been piling up and Poofus, her long-haired Persian cat, had been shedding like crazy so a round of vacuuming would be in order.

She'd planned to take care of everything once she got off work yesterday but ended up pulling a double shift after a coworker called in sick. This morning, she'd awakened, remembered she was off, and gone straight back to sleep. Thinking of tackling her chores now, she grimaced. Her desire for tea gone, she headed outside.

Lianna closed her eyes, lifted her face to the sun, and basked in its warmth, an appreciative "ahhh" escaping her lips. A soft breeze touched her, stirring her hair, and she relaxed a little, feeling her worries evaporating. Her morning glories caught her eye, and a sense of well-being flooded her. She'd planted the shades she loved — pink, purple, and blue hues — and they were stunning. Touching their petals, she marveled at the velvety softness before kneeling by her rosemary plants. She gently rubbed a sprig between her fingers and raised them to her nose, inhaling deeply. The scent put her in an even better mood.

Two squirrels took turns chasing each other up and down the nearby trees, stopping to scold one another from a stand of oaks.

She snickered, trying to guess what the fuss was all about. Had one stolen a nut from the other, perhaps? Birds pecked at the ground not far away from her. Others soared overhead and a couple landed on her small fountain. Water wasn't piped to it, but she regularly filled the basin by hand. After the winged visitors took flight again, she realized the reservoir was bone-dry and hurried to remedy that. More birds flew to a tree nearby, landed on a various branches, but as soon as she walked away, they visited the now-full basin. Two splashed around in the water, sending droplets flying. Her hammock looked inviting and she approached it, but stopped short after glancing toward the distant trees in Wyldewood Forest. She'd first glimpsed the woods five months earlier when she'd moved into the house she was renting. That day, she'd used the camera on her phone to capture the trees' rich greens which ran the gamut from light to dark. Their change from distinct one moment to hazy and mysterious the next had fascinated her, especially when they'd vanished behind a thick wall of fog. She'd been intrigued and imagined all sorts of magical things going on behind the foggy curtain. a

Some of Lianna's favorite books featured enchanted forests. For years, she'd imagined discovering one, walking amid centuries-old trees and placing her hands on their trunks, touching their living faresences with her own. She'd even imagined them speaking with her and carrying her around like in her favorite fantasy stories. Rumors about the forest abounded, including tales of people entering and going missing, but she'd shrugged them off. Exploring the woods was something she'd planned to do since moving into her place. Each time she'd thought of doing so, however, she'd gotten sidetracked. "Hooo," an owl called from within the trees. "HooooHoooo," came a deep answer from a different direction. Lianna could easily picture a white female owl flying in search of help, and almost colliding with a large, dark-grey male. He'd feel compelled to assist her, and they'd have beautiful baby owlets. The imaginary scenario made Lianna smile, and she chuckled at her tendency to lose herself in daydreams. She almost forgot to breathe when she glanced at Wyldewood Forest again. A low fog was moving in, no doubt from the nearby stream. The mist ever-so slowly circled the bases of the trees, moved higher, and soon encompassed them in smoky swirls, creating an air of mystery before concealing the woods altogether. Knowing they was there but being unable to see them intrigued her to no end, and she bit her lip, feeling like an explorer who'd stumbled upon a new world. Now would be the perfect time to visit, and she could definitely use something to shake up her routine. For way too long, she'd been in a rut: going to work, coming home, doing chores, taking a bath, watching tv, then dropping into bed brain-dead. After retrieving her keys, Lianna locked the back door behind herself. She walked the half-mile to the wide stream running parallel to the forest. The water was placid, the ground underneath it appearing firm. She slid when she walked forward, though, sinking an inch into the mud, and chose to stay along the edge instead. Eventually, she found a narrow, four-foot-wide section, jumped across, and continued on her way. By the time she arrived at the forest's edge, the fog had dissipated, and she entered. Her breath caught in her throat once she saw huge trees mere feet away. Each was several feet wide, probably hundreds of years old. A strong sense of endurance washed over her. Timelessness. She reverently brushed her fingertips across the bark on one of the largest trunks and the feeling intensified.

A faint sound came from somewhere far away. Straining to make out what it was, she realized it was music. She hurried toward it, and the longer she listened to the melody, the more it seemed familiar. Lianna walked and walked, but no matter how far she went, the music seemed distant. Her watch had stopped at some point during her trek. She guessed forty minutes to an hour had passed but kept going. The volume finally grew louder, and she saw something small and rectangular on the ground ahead. She assumed it was a radio, but when she got closer, she discovered it was a book with music emanating from it. Curious, she bent to pick it up, and the sound abruptly stopped. The tome was ancient and badly cracked, faded words that she couldn't make out running down the length of the spine. She gingerly opened the cover and turned pages. Pictures covered each of them. One that caught her eye featured a dark sky over a field of glowing, yellow lights. Fireflies. Lianna touched the image and remembered a long-ago evening when she was six or seven. Her grandmother had taken her to pick blackberries. The sky had darkened while they'd picked, but faint lights had blinked off and on around them. Gran had taught her about fireflies then, catching one to show her granddaughter before setting it free. Lianna caught the scent of honeysuckle in the air and remembered the honeysuckles blooming alongside the blackberry bushes years ago. A bright glow caught her attention. Seeing that it came from the picture, she gasped. The light from the fireflies was growing brighter and the image was expanding. She trembled and the tome slipped from her fingers. Her mouth fell open as she found herself standing in the field of fireflies, a dark sky overhead. She studied her surroundings, trying to spot something familiar, but the woods were gone. "You look lost," somebody whispered. She whirled and looked around, but no one was there. All she saw was grass swaying gently in the breeze, and the fireflies' glow lit up the night as they flew through the air. "You're a long way from home." The voice was so quiet, Lianna couldn't tell if a man or woman had spoken. Wondering if she'd inhaled some mysterious forest substance, she slowly turned in a circle, but didn't see anyone. "Hello?" she called out. "Is someone there?" "Use your eyes," a man snapped. "We're right here." "All of us," a woman added. "*Maybe I'm dreaming*," Lianna mused. She pinched her arm, winced, and a ludicrous thought made her snicker. "Are you fireflies talking to me?" "Do you see anyone else?" the man growled. She frowned and surveyed her surroundings yet again. "Okay, I've lost my mind," she concluded. "You can think that if you want," the man said. "But it's not true." A wave of exhaustion hit her, and she swayed. She yawned so widely she thought her jaws would unhinge, before lying on her back in the meadow. "I'm clearly worn out and imagining stuff. A nap will solve everything. I'll wake up in my bed and find this has all been a dream." "*Get up!*" the man yelled. "*Now!* If you fall asleep, you'll stay here forever." Horrified, Lianna jumped to her feet. "Forever?" "That's what I said." "Nothing here looks familiar. How do I find my way back to where I was?" "This is a different world and there's only one way to get out." "A different *world*?" "Yes. Not the one you're from and used to." Although Lianna tried to stay calm, her stomach lurched. His words didn't make sense. "Not the one I'm from? That's impossible." "Are you going to repeat everything I say?" Her feelings coalesced in a surge of irritation. "*Maybe!* So, what if I

do?" Her aggravation helped her focus, and some of her fatigue faded. She still suspected someone was playing a trick on her, though. Fireflies couldn't talk and that meant someone had to be hiding. Infuriated at the sneaky culprit, she glared around the area, trying to spot him. "Whoever's messing with me, enough is enough." "Do I sound like I think this is *funny*?" the man demanded. One of the closest fireflies zoomed straight toward her face, stopped only a couple inches from her eyes, and buzzed loudly. She took a step backward, considering everything. The guy sounded pissed, wherever he was. The firefly got louder, buzzing in short bursts as it moved closer, and Lianna's shoulders sagged. Given that she'd seen a picture expanding with her own eyes, maybe this wasn't a trick after all. "You don't need to be rude," she said, looking straight at the insect this time. "I'm not used to talking to fireflies. I just need some time to think. My brain isn't working right. I'm too tired." "Time is something you don't have." He sounded weary now. "The longer you're here, the more tired you'll become." Taken aback, she concluded, "So — no sleeping. What else can you tell me?" "This world is governed by magic and logic."

"Logic?"

"Things that make sense."

Lianna's interest was piqued, but learning facts about her surroundings wasn't the most important thing now. "How do I got home? Or return to the forest I was in, at least?"

"You have to solve a mystery, fix a problem, or help someone."

"Which one?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"You." The male recited, "Opportunities will be presented to you. If you succeed with the first, you'll never encounter another, but if you can't resolve it, a second will appear. You can try to solve it — or the first. If you can't complete the second either, you'll get a third chance."

"Do I get a specific amount of time?"

"No. You have as long as you can stay awake to do one of the three. However, if you end up going to sleep, your time runs out right then. You'll lose all memories of your life before and remain here. Forever."

***The end of part 1 of 4.***



# Fantasy

## *Paechra's Tale: Part Twenty-Seven*

*By: Tim Law*



### **Timothy Law**

Timothy Law is a writer of fantasy, horror, detective and general fiction from a little town in Southern Australia called Murray Bridge. A happily married father of three children, family is very important to him. Currently working at the Murray Bridge Library in the role of Library Manager he has dreamed since his early high school years of becoming a full-time author. Working for a library, surrounded by so many wonderful authors it is difficult not to be inspired to write.

Many of his short stories and general musings can be found on his blog

The year is 514, Vladimir the Young is Sage-King of the human kingdom of Thuraen. The year is 5,297, Ulan is High Prince, Derek is Low Prince and Sienna Alknown is Mother Druid of the sylvan princedom of Greenwood Vale.

A cast thousands barred the way of Paechra and her army. The strange creature that looked like her friend Raven stood at the enemy's front. Beside Paechra was Anton, his sword already drawn, the old man eager for battle. Paechra had tried to tell Anton that the one who looked like Raven, the one Anton thought he knew to be Johannas Stormsong, was not in fact a man at all. Paechra's special sight told her such and she believed what magic told her more than what the illusion before her said. Anton, like the other human, Thomas the Butcher, struggled to believe in magic, struggled to accept that what he could see was what was

real.  
"Stay back, lass," Anton ordered. "I know this boy and I have been waiting for this moment for quite some time."  
"You cannot be serious?" said Paechra in reply. "This is NOT Johannas, not some battle between the old and the new."  
"You tell it your way and I will tell it mine," replied the head truth keeper.  
"Do I stay, or do I go?" asked Thomas, meekly.  
"Go!" ordered Anton and Paechra together.  
"Take the wagon and lead it behind the lines," added Paechra.  
It frustrated her to see that Thomas looked to Anton for confirmation before he obeyed. Precious seconds could mean the difference between life and death, and they were wasting many of them.  
"Come," Thomas clicked as he stepped through the throng of druids, Paechra's sylvan sisterhood, all shimmering faintly with a blue glow,

<http://somecallmetimmy.blogspot.com.au/> or on [Parenting Express website](#).

evidence of the magic they were preparing to use.

The sea of sylvan parted allowing the butcher to lead the boy Yohan, the ancient Sienna, and High Prince Ulan to what Paechra hoped was safety.

"Where did you want me?" asked the voice of Ulan from behind Paechra.

The ruler of Greenwood Vale had jumped clear of that wagon and shirked the offered safety, that was how it so seemed to Paechra.

"Back on the wagon," Paechra ordered, giving the prince a glance.

Ulan had a great big hunk of wood in his hands, brandishing it like a club or cudgel. Coupled with the determined look on his face, Paechra could foresee trouble.

"I have not travelled all such distance with you, Miss Lightheart, only for you to ask me to wait on a wagon with the young and the old," announced Ulan. "Tell me where you want me to go and I will be there, but do not treat me like a wilting flower."

"Please at least tell me that Yohan has stayed with Mother Sienna," said Paechra.

"Sienna Alknown has the boy and Heidi with her," replied Ulan. "All three are safer than most right at this moment."

"Not as safe as Michael

Stormsong and Queen Catherine," considered the younger Lightheart.

Raven's father was back in Greenwood Vale with the human queen awaiting the birth of her child. For a moment Paechra thought it a good thing that Michael was not there but wished that she and all that had chosen to follow in her footsteps could have been anywhere else too. Paechra hoped that this was not to be the end of her story, nor the end for any of her friends.

"What would you do, Raven?" the sylvan asked, out loud, but to herself.

"Not knowing your friend, but knowing common sense, I would suggest this Raven's actions would be the opposite of Anton's," suggested Ulan.

Paechra turned her attention to where the head truth keeper had previously been and discovered Anton was already three determined strides toward the figure dressed in black.

"Come step forward boy and face me like the man you claim to be," called Anton.

Immediately the sight on the loaded crossbow held by the figure that looked like Johannas Stormsong trained on the advancing Anton.

"Perhaps I will have the opportunity to shoot you after all," said the figure dressed in

black mail. "Or perhaps I should

have my army tear you limb from limb until all that remains is a bleeding shell of a proud man."

"You and I can finish this," ordered Anton. "We should just send all the others home."

"I told you to turn away," laughed the dark knight. "I gave you that chance, but you all refused."

"So now we fight," said Anton.

"But this battle shall be only between you and me."

"Wrong!" called back the figure that stood at the front of the army of wolf-like vorsurk. "Why would I give up such a great advantage, you call yourself a leader, and yet you act as if you are the lost little lamb."

In that moment Paechra felt something change. There was something in the nature of the man with no aura, the aura that was not there seemed to warp into something evil, or more evil, if that was possible.

Without a thought the druid reacted. A flash of blue in the image of a sparrow flew forth from her clenched hand that opened. The bird flittered about, diving in and out between Anton who had again stepped closer to the one dressed in black, and that strange figure who threatened them all with his loaded crossbow. As the bird passed between the pair of not rushing forward en masse,

combatants the crossbow fired and struck it true. There was a gasp from the army of sylvan behind Paechra, but she ignored them. Instead, she closely watched Anton. She had saved his life yet again, and yet again he ignored such a favor.

"Foolish boy," announced the old man with a cocky smile.

"Have I taught you nothing about the importance of advantage?"

"Foolish human," replied the figure who looked like Raven.

"You do not realize that it is I who still hold all of the cards."

With impossible speed the figure unsheathed a long blade that burned with pitch colored flames. In an instant the weapon swung upward in a strike that aimed to open Anton from his navel to his throat. Somehow Anton managed to get his own blade in the way of the swift strike, clumsy instinct more than trained warrior skill. The magical blade that burned with dark fire sliced through Anton's unenchanted one, but the block was enough to turn the weapon from its deadly course.

"Ha-Ma-Moosh!" called Paechra, and a great wall of wind knocked Anton to his knees while also pushing the warrior dressed in dark mail backward into the throng of vorsurk.

Behind her, Paechra heard other druids cast similar spells, the

wall of wild wind buffeting the barbaric vorsurk back into the corpse of trees from whence they had appeared.

"Attack, you useless hunks of muscle!" ordered the one without an aura.

Eagerly the wolf-like creatures howled as one and rushed toward Paechra and her army.

"My blade!" cried Anton as he picked up the fallen piece from the ground. "My sword I have had all my life as a truth keeper." "Get up!" yelled Paechra as the vorsurk frontlines drew up level with the kneeling Anton. "This is the fight that you wanted, old man, so get up and fight!"

It was almost as if these were the very magic words that Anton needed to hear. Paechra witnessed Anton's aura change from grey to a burning, bright white. With what remained of his sword Anton feverishly stabbed and swiped, cutting down the barbarians that he could reach, a pile of bodies swiftly growing around him. Paechra heard strange grunts and growls, animalistic sounds emanating from Anton as he fought, sweat quickly creating a thin sheen across the old man's skin.

"Everyone hurry, to Anton's side!" Paechra ordered with a shout.

The young sylvan had quickly noticed that the vorsurk were

instead funneling their attacks in pairs and triplets solely focused on Head Truth Keeper Anton as their target.

Druids shrouded in blue auras shaped like wolves, bears, doe, and the likes moved forward toward the skirmish, driving the vorsurk back as swiftly as they came forward. Peering into and beyond the line of trees, Paechra discovered that there was no source from whence the enemy came, they just seemed to appear.

"They have no aura," she whispered, the fact surprising her.

"You are correct," agreed Sarah Lightheart, Paechra's mother, she having made her way through the fighting to stand beside her daughter. "These creatures, this man, even the very trees and road we follow, and pass seem to be of pure imagination."

"I have blindly taken us down a road that is not real," stated the younger Lightheart in disbelief.

"I have allowed myself to be guided by emotion and have placed us all in great danger."

"Cease your personal pity and join the fray," called Anton over his shoulder.

"Anton!" Paechra cried as the figure that resembled Raven took another swing at the old man.

beachfront like sentinels,"

The burning blade sliced with ease through Anton's guard, his armor and then his collarbone; blood the color of royalty spraying out like a pretty fan. "Turn away and return to your forest, witch," ordered the warrior encased in black, dark, empty eyes catching Paechra's as Anton collapsed from the savage blow dealt.

"Daughter, wake from this dream," pleaded Sarah. "We do not need walk such a path."

"Do you not see, mother?"

Paechra replied. "We are being shown the way, and the way is full of death and sacrifice."

#

"Daughter, come back to us," commanded the voice of Sienna Alknown.

Paechra opened her eyes and discovered that she was in her tent.

"Your aura turned black, almost like it was disappearing," gasped Heidi. "I did not know what to do, so I found your mother."

"And I in turn brought with me our mother druid," added Sarah Lightheart.

"And I am the one who found a way to bring you back to us," said Sienna, she gave Paechra a small smile as she squeezed the young druid's hand. "It was a close call, but we are glad that you have returned."

"I still smell the sea," murmured Paechra weakly. "Have we not yet left?"

"You have been dreaming for two days," said Heidi. "We could not wake you."

"We have lost time, but we have gained much," said Paechra.

"The road is not the path we need follow."

"You talk nonsense now, girl," grumbled the voice of Anton.

"It gladdens me to see you alive and well, head truth keeper," stated Paechra, smiling, not the reaction that any in the tent expected.

"Paechra is deluded," announced Sienna. "Everyone out, allow her to rest..."

"No," said Paechra firmly as the mother druid began to herd the others out. "My vision showed me the dangers of walking the road, taking the child, doing the expected."

"Never once have I known you to do the expected, Paechra my friend," Heidi stated.

"And that is why I now know how we need travel to Andrapaal," said Paechra. "How I think we will be able to surprise the vorsurk, save the kingdom, and return the lands to the humans."

"How?" asked Anton.

"We travel by boat."

Anton rolled his eyes.

"We build our own boats from the great palms which guard the

continued Paechra.

"If you truly believe that this is the way," said Sienna.

"Mother Druid Sienna, the North road leads to danger,"

announced Paechra. "I trust that my vision has taught me such."

"Fear dream, you mean," growled Anton.

"Such a dream showed me your death," Paechra bit back.

"A death in battle I would gladly accept," the human declared.

"Then you are the fool we all thought you to be," stated Sienna. "You should instead strive to live, at the very least long enough to see out this quest."

"Is that what you wish?" replied the old man. "Mother of the druids, are you journeying toward an ultimate gesture of sacrifice?"

"None of us know our futures," replied Sienna. "And none of us should."

"But what I have foreseen I fear shall come true," stated Paechra. "Whether we take the boy Yohan as promised or not, it will be by way of the rivers we shall travel to Andrapaal."

"I have need of the earth beneath my feet," said Anton, firmly. "I shall not be asked to row again."

There was a glass-eyed look for remembered horror etched on the head truth keeper's features. suggested to Heidi.

Paechra nodded when she saw it.

"It shall be too long and too difficult to construct enough rafts from the trees to

accommodate all of us," she said. "We will follow the river then, but travel by land, the road is watched, and it is not safe."

"As crazy as your words seem to sound," said Anton. "I sense that there is no swaying you from such a course."

"You speak the very truth that you aim to protect," Paechra replied.

"Then let me ask of the sage here for his permission," suggested Anton. "It would be better I deliver your strange plan."

All eyes turned to Paechra as she nodded her agreement.

"Thank you for your offer of support," she said.

"I am merely seeking a way to make the best of this," replied the human. "Do not make the mistake and believe that this is friendship."

"No, of course not," said Paechra, trying not to laugh.

"Never would I believe for a second that a man such as you could befriend a forest witch like me."

"Hmmm..." said Anton.

His lips were turned downward in a frown, his arms crossed, but his eyes showed signs of thoughtfulness. Without

another word he pushed his way through the small crowd that had gathered in the tent and made his way toward the sage's house.

"What is this talk of taking a child?" Sienna asked as soon as Anton had left.

"I thought that I could discover vital information about the one who is named Johannas Stormsong," said Paechra. "But the dream vision has revealed to me much that I wanted to know."

"Out, all of you get out of this tent," commanded Sienna Alknown. "Young Paechra and I have much to discuss."

"Including me, mother druid?" asked Heidi.

"Yes, child, including you," said Sienna.

"But this is my tent too," Heidi pleaded. "Where shall I go?"

"Perhaps I could suggest that you take a walk along the beach?" offered Paechra to her friend.

"Yes," said Heidi with a smile.

"The gentle lap of waves upon the shore shall calm me, thank you, sister Paechra."

"I believe I shall join you," Paechra added. "Once you are finished with me of course, mother druid," she continued, respectfully.

"Perhaps wait outside, this should not take long," Sienna



"As you wish, Mother Sienna," said Heidi with a nod.

With the tent emptied of all but the two of them, Sienna closed her eyes, and the aura of a dawning day enveloped her. Paechra felt her own eyes close, and a similar glow surrounded her as well.

"Show me everything that you can remember," requested Sienna's ancient voice.

Paechra cast her mind back to the time she led those who had chosen to follow her cause down the North road. The vision felt so real, every step she could sense the presence of Sienna, watching, listening, and learning. There came a gasp that threatened to break the bond and cause the recollection to come to a halt, Sienna reacting to the first time that Johannas appeared in the dream, but the mother druid was strong, especially in the ways of magic, and somehow she was able to keep the connection intact.

When the battle upon the road broke out there was no way though that Paechra could relive such a vision twice. She herself chose to step away, discovering that Sienna held her hands so tightly that they had turned white. Paechra gently freed herself from Sienna's grip, the elder choosing then to open her

eyes.

"A broken blade, the attacks all focused on Anton, what can it possibly all mean?" the ancient muttered while Paechra shook her hands vigorously, trying to get the blood flowing again.

"All that I know is the one who Yohan has heard all of the gossip about is not my friend," stated Paechra with certainty. "It gladdens my heart to know this but also chills it as I now fear for his safety."

"Your friend is on his own journey," said Sienna cryptically.

"One that may help us, or hinder us, but not one that we can know of now."

"Forgive me, Mother Sienna," begged Paechra. "I cannot yet let go of my worry."

"Keep it with you as you would a locket," suggested Sienna. "Place it in a pocket of your mind such that you can examine it at a later time."

Paechra nodded, and then did as she was asked.

"Thinking back over the vision and the discussion between the one dressed in black and the head truth keeper, I did see my friend's steed acting as any steed would," said Paechra, thoughtful. "I have ridden upon that horse and swear I would know it anywhere."

"Then there must be a connection between the one with the tome, and the truth

keepers..." considered the ancient.

Paechra's mind filled with an image of her father. Beside him stood a man dressed in the blue robes.

"Vladimir," murmured the younger Lighthouse.

Then the vision changed, and the blue robed sage became a puppet on strings. A young hand pulled upon those strings making the puppet dance.

"This is all beyond even me," suggested Sienna. "We need gather together our sisterhood."

"Allow me," offered Heidi.

Sienna nodded.

"Ask them to gather at the foreshore," she ordered. "We have much to discuss."

***To be continued...***

# Horror

## Pleasant Years Retirement Home

*By: James Rumpel*



### James Rumpel

James Rumpel is a recently retired high school math teacher who has greatly appreciated spending some of his newfound free time rekindling his love for science fiction and the written word. Writing also provides him with an excellent opportunity to ignore the household chores his wife assigns. He lives in Wisconsin with his forgiving wife, Mary.

The chief administrator, Evelyn Wildenburg, took a seat behind her desk and motioned for Kurt and Kim to sit down. Kim slid her mom's wheelchair between the two office chairs before settling into one of them. Kurt took the other. "So, what did you think of the tour, Joan?" asked Evelyn. The elderly woman in the wheelchair gave a slight shrug. "The place is okay but I don't need to be here. I can get along just fine at my place. Can't I just go home."

"We've talked about this, Mother," said Kurt. "You can't manage without constant help. You called me five times last week just to come over and do simple things for you. I can't come running over every time you need to open a can of beans. We've already decided that you need to have constant supervision." Kim gave her brother an intense stare. "No, you're the one who

decided that," she snapped. "I'm perfectly fine helping mom. I go to her house at least twice every day. I'm more than willing to keep doing that. If Mom wants to stay at home, we should do everything in our power to let her."

Kurt glanced at the administrator and shrugged. "Sorry," he said before turning back to his sister. "This is not the time or the place to repeat this argument. You agreed to look at this place. You even picked it out."

"You can't make me stay here, Kurt," said Joan. "We looked. I don't think it's the right place for me. Can you just take me home now?"

It was Kim's turn to address Evelyn. "I apologize, too. As you can see, we're still trying to figure this all out. My brother is right about one thing. I did choose your facility to be the first we looked at. I have a friend, Maureen Harris, who told me that your facility did a wonderful job with her mother. She talked about a very special feature that you have here. A feature that my mother and I would love. If it works the way it was explained to me, I'd be more than willing to pay the extra fee."

The chief administrator gave a quick, knowing nod. "I see. Maureen and her mother were

very pleased with us. I'm surprised that she told you about our extra service. She wasn't supposed to." She took out a file and made a small note in the margin before continuing. "I suppose word of mouth is good advertising and I think your mom would like what we have to offer. We can look at doing that. I think we might have everything we need."

"I have no idea what you two are talking about," interjected Kurt, "but if it's something you and mom will both like then I'm all for it"

"Excellent," said Evelyn, rising from her seat. She took Kim's mother's hand and smiled at her. "Joan, I have one more very special room to show you. I think you'll love it."

"Great, let's go." Kurt rose from his chair.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Kurt," announced Evelyn, "I think it's best if Joan looks at the room by herself."

"That's fine," he said. "If this secret room convinces mom to stay, I don't care what it is."

"Great, I'll take Joan down to see. You two can wait in one of the empty patient rooms. If your mom likes it, I'll have the paperwork brought down to you."

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Kurt and Kim stood in awkward silence. He examined the room where Evelyn had sent them to

wait. It was rectangular in shape, about fifteen feet by twenty feet.

The walls were bare except for a full-length mirror and a single-paned window that occupied the far wall. The only pieces of furniture were a hospital bed, a chair, and a plain-looking chest of drawers. "It isn't that bad," he finally said. "Sure, it's a little on the small side but there's more than enough room. Mom doesn't really need much space. We could throw some family pictures on the wall or maybe one of those posters with a cat hanging from a tree. It'll be great for her. Besides, this place has a big rec room, and the dining hall has that big TV. If she gets claustrophobic, she could just go there."

"I don't care how you try to twist it. Mom wants to stay in her own home." Kim pulled back the curtains and looked out at the parking lot.

"Life here would be so much easier for mom," Kurt continued.

"All the cooking and cleaning will be done for her. There isn't a lawn that I have to mow every other week. Somebody else can handle any problems that come up. There are so many advantages to living here."

"If that special room works like Evelyn says it does, then this will work out. Otherwise, we are not going to force Mom to live in a retirement home. She deserves more."

Kurt rolled his eyes. "Do you have

any idea how selfish you're being? You have no clue how difficult mom living on her own is for me."

A knock on the door interrupted the discussion before it could blossom into another full-blown argument between the siblings. Evelyn peeked her head inside the room. "Kim, your mother wants to see you. Will you come with me? Kurt, the paperwork should be ready for you to look at very soon. I'll have one of my assistants bring it here when it's ready."

Kurt smiled, "Does that mean Mom wants to stay here. That's excellent."

"She's agreed to the special feature," replied Evelyn.

Kim turned toward the door. A smile replaced the glare she had just thrown toward her brother.

"Great. I can't wait to see how this works."

"I think you'll be pleasantly surprised," replied Evelyn.

The two women took off down the hall, leaving Kurt by himself.

He took out his phone and started playing a game.

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Kurt groaned as he lost the game for the fifth straight time. He didn't know what was wrong with him. He usually won more often than not. For some reason, his reactions were slow today and he kept making silly mistakes.

He checked his watch. It was nearly forty-five minutes since Kim had gone off to that special room with Evelyn. Where was that paperwork? How much longer was going to take? His back was starting to get sore, and he felt a twinge in his knee. Kurt figured there was nothing wrong with sitting down for a while. He didn't want to sit on the bed, so he plopped himself down in the room's only chair. It was one of those fancy, electronic lift chairs. Grabbing the remote, he reclined a little and raised his feet off the ground. He stared at the blank wall in front of him. The cinder blocks had been painted a light beige color. He had to admit, it was pretty drab looking. Was it cold in here? What had he done with his jacket? Had he left it in the administrator's office. He rubbed his hands together, both for warmth and to try and loosen the stiffness in his knuckles. It wasn't fair that Kim was upset with him. She had no right to be mad. He was only trying to help. Mom couldn't make this decision for herself. He was being her advocate, or something like that. What was that word? It was right on the edge of his thoughts, but he couldn't come up with it. It just floated on the periphery of his mind. Something that started with an A. Maybe he should call Kim. He took out his phone. It seemed

smaller than usual. He tried to bring up Kim's number but kept hitting the wrong button. Why do they make these things so darn complicated. His back was still aching. Maybe sitting in this chair had been a bad idea. He took the remote and pushed a button only to find himself reclining even further. After a couple more tries, he got his feet on the floor and started to stand up. His knee and back exploded in pain. He tried to push himself upward but couldn't. He tried again and had to stop because it was becoming difficult to breathe. He groaned as he settled back into the seat. Still struggling to catch his breath, Kurt found himself rubbing his hands together once again. Why were they so sore? He couldn't believe how wrinkled and loose the skin around his fingers was. He considered trying to stand again but decided he didn't have the energy. Something was wrong; he was definitely ill. When he got home, he was going to have to make an appointment at the clinic. Finally, he leaned back and closed his eyes.

\*\*\*

"How are you doing, Kurt?" Kurt could barely open his eyes and turn his head to see where the voice was coming from. Two women had just walked into the

room. He should have known one of them. She was very familiar looking. The other was a little younger. She had long blonde hair and a noticeable spring to her step.

"Who are you?" he asked, shocked at how the words caught in his throat and came out as a barely audible mumble.

"Oh, don't you remember?" said the first woman. "This is Joanie. She wanted to stop in and visit you one last time."

Kurt wanted to shout. "What do you mean, 'one last time?' I'm not supposed to be here". Nothing came out but a low gurgle. He raised his hand to point at the two women. It shook uncontrollably.

The younger woman came over and kissed him on the forehead. She whispered in his ear. "I'm sorry for doing this to you. I really am. But I had no other choice. I was dying. Now, look at me. I have a full life ahead of me again. You were the one insisting that this place wasn't so bad. You'll like it here. You don't have any other family. You'll be fine here. Kim will come and visit at least once a month."

"They've got a nice rec room and a big-screen TV," added the other woman with a sly grin. She put her hand on Joanie's shoulder. "We've got to get going. We have to do some paperwork with Evelyn and see about getting you a new ID."

The two women were gone movie on the TV.”  
before Kurt could find the energy Kurt tried to scream but all he  
to say anything. He slumped in his managed was a painful groan  
chair. followed by a coughing fit.

A different woman wearing  
brightly colored scrubs knocked  
on the door and then came in.  
“Good afternoon, Kurt,” she said.  
“Time for dinner. Let me help you  
into your wheelchair.”

### The End

“I’m not supposed to be here,”  
whispered Kurt. He fought against  
the nurse’s efforts to help him  
stand. He turned away from her  
and caught a glimpse of his  
reflection in the large mirror  
hanging on the far wall. Staring  
back at him was a decrepit  
looking elderly man. His hair was  
supposed to be thick and dark  
brown, but in the reflection, what  
little there was was almost pure  
white.

That wasn’t right. He was only  
forty-three. . . or was it forty-four.  
Why was it so hard to think?  
What had happened to him?  
His voice cracked as he tried to  
explain to the nurse. “I just came  
here to bring my mother. I’m not  
old.” Kurt’s entire body was  
shaking. He wanted to say much  
more but he couldn’t find the  
words or the energy. All he  
managed was a feeble, “Help  
me.”

“Come on, now. Don’t start with  
that,” said the nurse. “You’ll feel  
more like yourself after supper.  
It’s your favorite; mashed  
potatoes and peas. I hear that  
we’re going to play a Roy Rogers



# Horror

## *Sleepy Time Tea*

*By: Dawn DeBaal*



### **Dawn DeBaal**

Dawn DeBaal lives in rural Wisconsin with her husband Red, two rescue dogs, and a stray cat. Dawn has published over 400 stories in many online magazines and anthologies, including Spillwords, Potato Soup Journal, Zimbell House Publishing, Black Hare Press, Clarendon House, Blood Song Books, Cafelit, Reanimated Writers, The World of Myth, Dastaan World, Vamp Cat, Runcible Spoon, Siren's Call, Setu, Kandisha Press, Terror House Magazine, D & T Publishing, Sammie Sands, Iron Horse Publishing, Impspired Magazine, Black Ink Fiction and others. She was the Falling Star Magazine's

No matter how much she tells me to, I won't call her mother. My own mother was a saint, and this monster will never hear that name from my lips even though she tries to make me say it. Olga Heller is my father's second wife. He married her out of desperation to have free childcare after my real mother died. She was a godsend, my father told me, appearing in our lives looking for a job in childcare right when he needed someone. That was six years ago, and I have hated every day she has been in my life. I am almost eleven and no longer need anyone to care for me.

My step monster called me to climb up and fetch her bread bowl. Olga is a large woman and can't climb the steps on the stool. It is my job on bread-baking days to get the bowl down for her. It is a large, heavy ceramic bowl that only fits on top of the cupboard. While I am up on the stool, my hand feels a jar I'd never noticed

before. I lift it and read "Sleepy Time Tea" on the handwritten label. I quietly set it back where I found it and grabbed the heavy bowl.

Olga is mad at me today. I didn't take the trash out fast enough, and I knew she would find a way to punish me.

"Quit dawdling, girl," Olga says, pointing her snagged, arthritic finger to the top of the cupboard. The bowl is almost more than I can lift, but I get stronger every time I do it. I was handing down the bowl when I swear, Olga let go of it on purpose. The heavy bowl shattered on the floor, spreading little pieces of yellow gravel across the kitchen linoleum.

"You clumsy girl!" Olga shouts and kicks the stool out from under me. I followed the bowl to the floor, cutting my arm on a chip. Luckily, it was the only injury I had.

I refuse to cry, for she would take pleasure knowing I am hurt. I pick the chard from my arm and tuck it in my pocket. Blood runs from the cut, and I place my hand over the top to stem the flow. I read somewhere that bleeding is good for a puncture wound as the 2019 Pushcart nominee.

<https://linktr.ee/dawndebral>  
<https://www.amazon.com/Dawn-DeBaal/e/B07STL8DLX>  
<https://www.facebook.com/All-The-Clever-Names-Were-Taken-114783950248991>

blood cleanses germs.

"Pick this mess up," Olga shouts as she storms out of the room. I know there will be no bread today.

I cleaned the wound with peroxide, then swept the chards, dumping them in the garbage. I wished I could tell my father what a cruel woman Olga Heller was. I sense that my father doesn't like her much either, if only he knew what a poor job she did.

I went to bed that night saying my usual prayer, that of having Olga leave us. I dreamed of my mother. The vision was so vivid. My mother stood at the foot of my bed, looking as I remembered her. "Winnie," she called to me softly. I woke to rub the sleep from my eyes, not believing what I saw.

"The tea you found, give Olga some hot tea with honey." The vision of my mother wavered like she was in water or behind a veil. She whispered some things and reminded me to give Olga the Sleepy Time Tea.

I wondered why my mother wanted me to be nice to the witch, but I promised her I would do this, falling back to sleep after she disappeared.

The following day I climbed the stool and reached around above the cupboard to find the special tea and brewed a pot, setting it on the table.

"I've made tea for you," I call out. Olga comes to the kitchen, surprised that I would do

something nice. "I'm sorry I broke your bread bowl," I tell her, even though I knew she'd dropped it on purpose.

Olga sniffed at me but still poured some tea and hummed as she drank it. A few minutes later, she put her hand to her chest and moaned, looking at me.

"What is this, girl? Did you poison me?" Her eyes were wide and then squinted in pain as she doubled over, trying to catch her breath. Olga fell from the chair onto the floor. In less than a minute, she was gone. I had poisoned Olga Heller. Frightened, I ran to my bedroom to hide. Father came home, found Olga on the kitchen floor, and called for me.

"Winnie?" I could hear the panic in his voice. He has forgotten that I am much older now and I can take care of myself. "What happened?"

"I don't know, Father. I was in my room." He patted Olga's fleshy yellow cheek and then felt for a pulse on the side of her neck.

"She's dead," Father's voice wavers, and I pretend to care.

"Are you alright?" I nod at him.

"We must call the authorities,"

Father says, dialing the phone.

I rinse out the teapot and the cup. When the men come, they look at Olga and her large stature.

I heard one of them say they weren't surprised she was dead, being so severely overweight.

"Heart attack," they agreed. I

breathed a sigh of relief. "She mentioned yesterday she was having pain in her chest." I whimpered. "Father, who will take care of us?" Father pulled me close to comfort me while the men struggled to get Olga on a gurney to take her away. After they left, my father spun around with a look on his face, and I knew he'd seen the "Sleepy Time Tea" on the counter; I'd forgotten to hide it back in its proper place. "Where did you find that tea?" Father asked me accusingly. "Above the cupboard where the bread bowl used to be." "You didn't drink any, did you?" "No, Father, I know what it is. Mother told me in a dream what to do. She said you made this tea for her when she was sick and in pain. She told me it would give me relief from Olga." Father's hand trembled on his face. He breathed deeply and then let out a sigh. "Your mother was the one who bought the tea. She asked for the special tea every night, knowing one of those nights, I would follow through with her wishes and end her pain. I couldn't bring myself to give it to her. One night, she was in great pain, so I made the special tea for her. She thanked me before she took a sip. I didn't know there was more in the house." "Father, don't worry. I am old enough not to need Olga or anyone to care for me. Every night I prayed for Olga to go away because she was mean to me. Last night Mother came to me in a dream and told me to make Olga the special tea, so I did. Now Olga is gone and can't be mean to us anymore." Father pulled me close and hugged me, whispering in my ear. "Mother knows best." Years went by, Father grew old and became sick. The doctors told us there was no hope, that he was in the final months of life. "Winnie," my father called from his bed for the thirtieth time that day. I had no life; I was stuck at home caring for him. "Please, bring me some tea." I reached for the canister on the countertop and stopped. My eyes traveled to the cabinet where the bread bowl used to sit on top of the cupboard. Pulling the step stool over, I reached up and felt the jar. "Sleepy Time Tea," in my mother's handwriting on the label. I took out the tea ball and filled it with the special tea. The kettle startled me when it whistled. "Coming, Father," I turned to see the zinnias in bloom outside the window and fetched a vase to put fresh cut flowers on the tea tray. "There's a good girl." Father moved into a choking fit; I was afraid he wouldn't be able to drink his tea. "Here, let me help you. I held the cup of kindness to Father's lips. His eyes met mine, and a slow smile crept across his face as he inhaled the steam rising from the cup. "There's a good girl," he said again, patting my arm as I held the tea to his lips. "Sleep well, Father." He bucked a little knocking the teacup from my hand, which fell onto the tray, toppling the vase. The water spread across the tray mixing with the tea turning the zinnias black, instantly.

# Action/Suspense

## *In the Midst of Normalcy Part 8*

*By: Tom Fowler*



### **Tom Fowler**

Tom Fowler, 68 years old, retired and lives in Overland Park, KS. Author of several books and numerous short stories. Visit Tom's blogsite at [tommyschoice.wordpress.com](http://tommyschoice.wordpress.com)

## **24. Sunday Morning,**

**July 6. 7:05 a.m.**

The murder of Leann Edgmon happened so quickly, silently and without disturbance that one could be tempted to say the killing was uneventful, if such a thing were possible. Because of how and when it was done, it was not until morning when Leann's body was found. As it was on most mornings, yesterday being an exception, and suffering from a bad headache, Tim arose first, just after 7:00. Ever the perfect host, he had come down to make coffee, knowing how much his guests would need it after last night's partying. But, on this day, Jack was only a few minutes behind. He awoke and realized his wife was neither in bed nor in the bathroom. Come to think of it, he realized she wasn't in bed when he came in last night. Sensing something was wrong, Jack

quickly dressed and met Tim in the kitchen, where he was making the coffee and setting out toast and croissants. The digital clock on the coffee pot flashed 7:23. "You're up early," Tim said, smiling.

"Yeah, I should still be asleep. We sort of tied one on last night."

"Did you have a good time?"

"Yeah. Too good a time."

Tim was pleased and said so. "I'm very pleased the husbands and wives got to know each other so well."

Jack didn't say so, but he had always considered Tim a well-meaning do-gooder. Instead, he said, "Me too but now I can't find mine. Is she asleep in another part of the house?"

"I don't think so but maybe." Tim grinned, "We sort of tied one on too." Remembering why the Coleman party ended early ruined his good mood but was careful to hide this from Jack. He added, "She's probably asleep on a sofa in the den or family room. We were feeling no pain last night."

Tim and Jack quickly searched the unoccupied rooms in the house. Leann was nowhere to be found.

Jack asked, "Could she have left? They quickly saw all of the automobiles were present and accounted for outside. Big Tim said, "I can't imagine that she walked anywhere. She's got to be in the house somewhere." And then, he thought of it, saying, "Stupid me! We haven't checked downstairs." In a few short moments, they were staring numbly at the cold body of Leann, laid out almost peacefully at the feet of the perpetually young image of Marilyn Monroe. Their tired and overworked senses did not allow them at first to comprehend the truth. Tim commented, "I guess she passed out. I didn't think she was that drunk." The horror of the situation hit Jack first. Without emotion, he asked, "Is she dead?" Dully, Tim replied, "Looks that way." They both saw the tear in Leann's nightshirt and the small red spot staining it underneath Leann's rib cage. Neither of them was trained beyond basic first aid but it was obvious she was dead and had been stabbed. Tim lightly touched his cousin's body and felt the harshness of cold skin. Rigor had set in, and Leann's countenance reflected the shock of her attacker's quick and deadly action. Mercifully, there was no look of horror or discomfort on her still attractive face, only surprise. Surprise which lasted for only an instant before the black finality of death overtook her. The desk clocked indicated the time was 7:28. Tim was a person who could remain calm and perform well in an emergency. Jack did not share this characteristic with him. He began to sweat and become ashen as the gravity of the situation set in. Tim acted quickly, setting him down on the recreation room's small sofa and covering him with a blanket. He did not yet hear stirring from the others upstairs. It had been a night of excess for all of them so hopefully, all would sleep late. Tim stayed with Jack for few minutes. He needed time to think and sort this out. He had seen the red spot below Leann's breast, but it was inconceivable to him that anyone in the house would murder her. He had not consciously thought of this as yet but soon the reality would hit him full force. As soon as he felt Jack's reaction had peaked, Tim went to the phone and dialed 9-1-1. He told the operator, "We have a deceased person in the house. Please send somebody. We don't know how she died." The clock in the 911 PSAP center reflected 7:33. As luck would have it, an Overland Park patrol car was in the neighborhood only a couple of blocks over. Tim had barely enough time to get upstairs and wait before the officer arrived. He was pleased to be able to meet him in the driveway. There would be no doorbell ringing or knocking on the door. But, he thought, that is really not an issue. There will be plenty of activity here soon enough. Sgt. Lonnie Kinnard introduced himself to Tim and asked, without emotion, "So there is a dead person?" "Yes. She's downstairs in my rec room. It's my cousin Leann Edgmon. I'm not certain what happened." Tim was excited but in control of his emotions and actions. Kinnard, a law enforcement veteran with 23 years of experience, sensed something wasn't right but said nothing. The professional persona he had developed over the course of his career would stand him in good stead for the remainder of this call. Tim took the officer downstairs. Kinnard, who possessed an uncanny physical resemblance to the deceased actor Dana Andrews, saw immediately the red spot underneath Leann's breast. He took a mental note of the location of the body and how it was positioned. His first impression was the same as Tim's. Ms. Edgmon was almost peaceful in repose and only a slight look of surprise around her mouth and eyes. Whatever happened had happened quickly. Kinnard decided to be very direct

with Tim. he asked, "Who's that on the sofa?"

"Jack Edgmon, Leann's husband." "He OK?"

"In shock but doing better."

Jack made the effort to say,

"Hello, Officer. I'm Jack. Sorry but I'm a bit shaken up."

Gently, Kinnard answered, "That's understandable, Mr. Edgmon. I will speak with you in a moment."

Pulling himself up from the couch, Jack approached them and said, "That's OK. This isn't going to get any better." Looking at Tim, he continued, "I'm better now, thanks."

Officer Kinnard said, "OK, but take it easy."

Tim thought that the large, well-muscled Kinnard was more than he seemed. He was very much a no nonsense police officer, but also one who seemed to possess a degree of tact and feeling for people undergoing trauma. Tim would find out later that Kinnard came up the hard way as a beat cop in the St. Louis projects. Big Tim was also a man with a feel for people and he took an immediate liking to Lonnie Kinnard.

The three men stood over Leann.

If you weren't paying close attention, you would easily assume she was asleep. Softly, Kinnard said to Jack, "I believe she has been murdered. See the blood underneath the breast and rib cage area, plus the position of the body."

Softly, Tim added, "The look on

her face."

"That can happen anytime," said

the officer. "Surprise can happen for any number of reasons."

Kinnard had seen much worse. As far as violent deaths are concerned, this was one of the least traumatic he had seen.

Jack was getting dizzy again. The shock of seeing his wife in this way was too much for him. Tim led him back to the sofa. Kinnard asked, "There are others in the house?"

Tim breathed deeply before answering. He was now thinking the unthinkable. "Yes, there are many. We have hosted had a family reunion since Wednesday of last week."

Officer Kinnard did not allow his reaction to this news to show on his impassive face. Quietly but firmly, he said, "Well, I need to talk to them. I assume they are still sleeping?"

Tim and Sgt. Kinnard heard noises from upstairs. "It appears some of them are waking. You make sure all of them are up," the officer said, "I'll tread as gently as I can but as of now we have a murder investigation."

The watch on Lonnie Kinnard's thick wrist told him it was 7:48 a.m. From the time Tim arose to make coffee until now, not 45 minutes had passed.

## Begins

The first thing Kinnard did was call for backup. He knew his good friend and superior, Detective Gary Baughman, was on duty this weekend and would be here as quickly as possible. He also needed backup from other uniformed officers. He did not want another situation like the Ramsey incident in Colorado a few years ago, when the first few hours after the death of the little girl were handled poorly. He knew if help did not arrive soon, with all of the family members waking up and beginning to ramble through the house, critical evidence could be destroyed.

"Irene, it's Lonnie," he said through his radio to the dispatcher on duty. This morning it was Irene Long, the newest member of the Overland Park PD dispatch team. Irene was a 49-year-old widowed mother of two who had returned to work last year after the death of her husband Carl. Kinnard liked her and was pleased she was on duty this morning. He liked her efficiency and businesslike demeanor.

"What's up," she asked, matter-of-factly.

"I have a murder. Get Gary over here and I need more uniforms. You may have to get them from Shawnee or Lenexa but get them. I have a house full of people and I won't be able to contain them

# 25. The Investigation



myself for long.”

“Will do,” was her prompt reply.

Soon, she had patrol cars from neighboring communities heading to the Coleman home and Detective Baughman out of bed and on the way.

Within minutes the Coleman house was a beehive of activity. The backup officers arrived quickly. Fortunately, they were not doing anything else on a slow Sunday morning.

Just before they arrived, Sgt. Kinnard was able to keep the family in the den while he and Tim explained the nightmarish finding in the basement recreation room. The mantel clock read 8:00.

Tim was not surprised when he saw that Cathy and Stephanie kept their composure better than the others. Looking at Officer Kinnard, Cathy asked, “Are you certain Leann was murdered? You said there is minimal blood.”

“Yes. The medical examiner will have to make the final determination, but I’ve seen this before and am reasonably certain.”

Numbly, Bob asked, “What happened?”

Before he could answer, they all heard noises at the front door.

Kinnard cautioned them to stay where they were; he was going to let in the backup officers. It was 8:05. Remembering Bob’s question after taking a couple of steps, he turned and said, “We

don’t know and won’t for a while. Please stay here. Somebody will be with you shortly.” With that, he hurried toward the front door and welcomed the officers into the Coleman house. He was quite pleased and relieved when he saw two officers, one from Mission and another from Lenexa, had arrived at the same time. Just as he was beginning to brief them in the hallway, his cell phone rang. Its digital display informed him it was Baughman calling. Soon, he was in animated conversation with the detective with the other officers intently following his end of the call.

“I’ll be there in a minute,” Baughman said. “Has help arrived?”

“Yeah, just got here. Was just starting to brief them when you called.”

“Good. Get them lined out. I had to shave and dress. Took me a few minutes to get going.”

Kinnard managed a chuckle. “That was fast! You don’t get many calls from me on Sunday mornings.”

It was Baughman’s turn to laugh, saying, “I don’t and that’s fine. I’m in the car and will be there soon. I’m a couple of miles away.”

Lonnie Kinnard spent the few minutes before Lt. Baughman arrived briefing the other officers. He placed one with the family and another in the basement with the body. He took a small amount of guilty pleasure in

knowing he had handled this well so far. The medical examiner and her team would be pleased.

Soon, Baughman was at the door. After introducing himself to the family and sharing a short exchange with Jack Edgmon, he and Kinnard went downstairs. The number of family members worried him. He asked, “Has the basement been disturbed?” “As far as we can tell, no, it hasn’t. I just placed an officer at the door. The owner uses it as a recreation room, and it is well lit and clean.”

“Well, that’s good. We’ll take all the help we can get. You perchance don’t have an idea as to what happened, do you?”

“If you mean how Mrs. Edgmon was killed, yes I do. If you mean who did it, no I don’t. It appears she was stabbed.”

Lt. Baughman liked the officer’s professionalism. It was a major reason the two men were good friends. The lieutenant was pleased it was Kinnard on duty this morning. His presence always made his job a little easier. Kinnard asked, “Is anyone else on the way?” He meant the medical examiner and Baughman knew it. Baughman replied, “Not yet. I wanted to see this for myself and look at the room undisturbed.” Noticing the life size cutout poster of Marilyn Monroe, he commented, “Now, that’s something. I wonder if this will figure into our murder.”

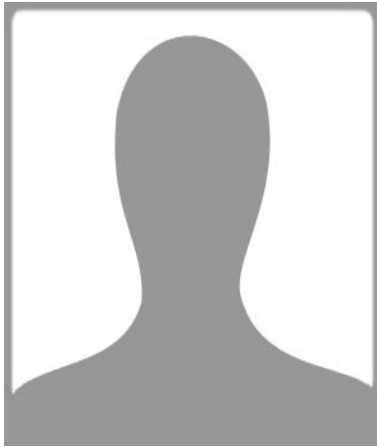
Dryly, Officer Kinnard answered, "It already has." Pointing to Leann, he continued, "Mrs. Edgmon is lying right at the feet of it. To me, that's an odd coincidence: A huge house like this and we find her here." Baughman said, while carefully reviewing the body, "You may be right." Arising, he said, "Well, we better get the whole team here. We'll need photos and the medical people. We need more officers to look through the house and secure outside. We'll need to start talking to the family." The two men walked back upstairs, leaving the solitary police officer guarding the room as he was before they came downstairs. Kinnard recalled reading a book long ago on the Lizzie Borden murder case in Massachusetts which occurred a few years before the turn of the 20th century. She was accused of murdering her napping father and stepmother with an ax, but her guilt could not be proved and was found innocent in a court of law. But this was not what was primarily on his mind. He was thinking now of the huge number of people that congregated at the Borden house after the murder. In today's terms it would be considered a media circus. This weighed heavily upon his mind as he looked out the front door. The presence of police cars from three different municipalities had already drawn attention in this quiet, upscale neighborhood. That a medical van and several more officially marked vehicles would soon be here would only add to the attention and curiosity. Within the hour, over two dozen law enforcement personnel had arrived. When they were all on site at 8:53, the body of Leann Edgmon was still lying undisturbed at the feet of the cardboard Marilyn Monroe and the first news van with a video antenna arrived on scene, forced to park several houses down because of the number of official vehicles parked close to the Coleman house. Fortunately, the police officers secured the house and grounds very well. The news team was kept well away from the house and the Coleman family was still sequestered in the den. There would be no repeat of the mistakes made on that day after Christmas, 1996, in Colorado. Still, there was much for Lieutenant Baughman to worry over. Gary Baughman was short, thin, and wiry with a light complexion and medium length brown hair. His dark eyes could and would bore right through the soul of a person being untruthful with him. A 35 year veteran of law enforcement, he had taken this job in Overland Park, KS, to be near his daughter and her family. He spent 22 years in Indianapolis, Indiana as an inner city detective and another 10 in Chicago. This case was already bringing back unpleasant memories, but he had to admit that the excitement and accompanying adrenaline rush were not entirely unwelcome. He felt up to the challenge, whatever surprises the case may bring. That was good, because as of this moment the veteran detective had little idea of what he was getting into. He would not fully understand the uniqueness and horror of Leann Edgmon's murder until getting deeper into what would become the strangest case of his lengthy career.

***To Be Continued...***

# Action/Suspense

## Glumdale Police Station Suspect Report

*By: Jessica Alexandria*



### Jessica Alexandria

Jessica Alexandria is a young author who started her amazing creative journey during the year 2019, previously using the pen name Alice Grim Rose.

Not only does she specialize in writing horror she is also a filmmaker, turning many of her short stories into short films.

No matter how many people told Jessica that she would never make it as an author she never listened to them and kept on doing what she loved.

In the year 2024 her debut novel will be released.

Jessica always has many projects on the go such as writing short

**DATE:** October 17th, 2022

**CASE NUMBER:** 8505830

**DETECTIVE GIBSON** - Please state your name for the record.

**JOHN ALLEGY** - Your prime suspect.

**DG** - Your legal first and last name will do.

**JA** - John Allegy. And yours?

**DG** - As you are aware, my name is officer Gibson. But we are here to talk about you and Sarah.

**JA** - Ah yes, Sarah. This woman I have absolutely no connection to, yet you all claim I've killed.

**DG** - Well we have evidence that proves otherwise, Mr. Allegy.

**JA** - Like what?

**DG** - Your fingerprints on the murder weapon, for one.

**JA** - And how can you prove they weren't planted?

**DG** - So you're claiming you were framed?

**JA** - Yes, I've never even met that woman.

**DG** - And why would someone want to frame you?

**JA** - I have a lot of enemies.

**DG** - With enough bad blood

to frame you for murder?

**JA** - Yes.

**DG** - You're really grasping at straws here, Mr. Allegy.

**JA** - Am I? You're the one who busted into my apartment at 4:AM, accusing me of murdering that woman.

**DG** - That is standard protocol.

**JA** - Sure it is. Um, could I get a soda? I'm parched from all this arguing.

**DG** - If you stop lying to me, then yes. Now, let's go over your alibi again.

**JA** - Again? You have forgotten that fast?

**DG** - Indulge me.

**JA** - I had the day off work and I had booked tickets to the big hockey game. Afterwards I celebrated the local teams win in the sports bar on seventh street. Then I went home.

**DG** - And what time did you arrive at the bar and leave the bar?

**JA** - I got there around, eight?

And I didn't go home until after midnight. The bartender can vouch for me. Lucy is her name, sweet girl.

**DG** - We did talk to the

stories, directing films, working on books, creating things to add to her fantasy world, hosting podcasts and so much more!

bartender but there was some time unaccounted for. Apparently you entered the washroom around 11:05 and didn't exit until 12:20. That was the same time Sarah Kallborn was killed. Not to mention her apartment was only a block away.

**JA**- Oh yeah well, I can tell you now, I had some of those pickled eggs and my stomach didn't adjust to them well. Let's just put it that way.

**DG** - That's your excuse? You were using the washroom at the time of the murder.

**JA** - Yes.

**DG** - Isn't that convenient?

**JA** - When you think about it, it kind of is, isn't it?

**DG** - So, we have an hour that no one can account for during the exact time the victim was murdered, your fingerprints on the baseball bat used to smash in the victim's head, and yet you still claim your innocent?

**JA**- Yes. And I want a massive and sincere apology from your whole unit after this.

**DG** - I bet you do.

**JA** - Excuse me? You're the one who has derailed my entire life because of a misunderstanding. Even after I have told you and multiple other detectives that I didn't kill that woman! It's unbelievable!

**DG** - Calm down.

**JA** - Calm down? Calm down? I never followed that woman home, I never broke into her

apartment, I never smashed her head in with a baseball bat, I never threw the weapon out the fourth floor window! I don't understand why you are accusing me of this! I'm leaving.

**DG** - Sir, you cannot leave right now. You have been arrested and we are questioning you.

**JA** - Our justice system is fucked.

**DG** - You know, John. We never told you the bat was thrown out the apartment window or that Sarah lived on the fourth floor. I find it interesting that you know that information.

**JA** - I, Um, I... I saw it on a case file as you walked me in, someone left it open on their desk. You still think I did this?

**DG** - By what you just said you're not helping your case, John.

**JA** - Well I didn't do this! I am not capable of harming another human being.

**DG** - No? Let me refresh your memory. In 2017 you were charged with aggravated assault but was let off because the victim killed herself before the trial. In 2018 there were thirteen domestic dispute calls to you and your wife's address in one year. You don't handle your anger well? Do you?

**JA** - Those were all misunderstandings.

**DG** - Were they, John?

**JA** - They were! Even if I did kill that woman, and I'm not saying I did, I have no motive, I have never met that woman before in

my life.

**DG** - See John? I can't help you if you keep lying to me.

**JA** - I am not lying, I am telling you the truth!

**DG** - And see? There is another one. We have security camera footage of you and Sarha kissing outside of the Deli on Wonderland road.

**JA** - What? No, no, that can't be true.

**DG** - Well it is, look.

**JA** - No. No. No! I... That woman's name is Clarice, she's a prostitute.

**DG** - So you do know the victim?

**JA** - That's not the victim, the victim's name is Sarah. That's Clarice.

**DG** - Alright. And how do you know Clarice?

**JA** - She's a prostitute.

**DG** - You are aware solicitation is a crime, correct?

**JA** - I didn't sleep with her... I... After my wife left me I got really lonely. I wasn't big into that intimacy stuff, that's one of the reasons she left me. I just miss someone to be around, someone to hold space for me. I paid Clarice to randomly meet me in public or to go for walks with me. I- I never slept with her.

**DG** - Yet you kissed her?

**JA** - Kissing is much different than sex.

**DG** - So, Sarah had a secret life as a prostitute?

**JA** - That isn't Sarah, her name is Clarice!

**DG** - But look, their pictures are

side by side. Don't they look the same?

**JA** - I guess they do, but that can't be true, Clarice would never lie to me.

**DG** - No?

**JA** - She loved me!

**DG** - She loved you?

**JA** - Yes! The last day I saw her, we confessed our feelings for each other.

**DG** - Then what happened?

**JA** - We were going to run away

together, I know there were rumors going around my work that the boss was going to fire me. But she said her work was too important.

**DG** - Her job as a prostitute?

**JA** - But all I could think about were other men's hands on her and how she would rather that, rather be touched by dozens of other people than be with me.

**DG** - That made you mad, didn't it?

**JA** - It did! I yelled at her, and we had a big fight in front of the deli.

**DG** - Was this the same day the photo was taken?

**JA** - Yes.

**DG** - Okay, tell me what happened next.

**JA** - I don't remember a lot of what happened after that. But I would never put a hand on Clarice!

**DG** - Because you loved her?

**JA** - And she loved me.

**DG** - Is there anything you do remember from that night, John?

**JA** - I went to that sports bar and I be with you?

drank. I just wanted my pain to end. And I ate some of the pickles

that the bar offers, they didn't sit well in my stomach. I spent an hour in the bathroom.

**DG** - You ate pickles?

**JA** - Yes, they were dill and garlic.

**DG** - Okay. So, John. What happened when you came back from the washroom?

**JA** - I remember my anxiety was worse than it was before, I was dazed. I was very drunk. But drinking isn't a crime!

**DG** - No, but it's not an excuse for a crime either.

**JA** - What do you mean?

**DG** - John, did Clarice ever show you where she lived?

**JA** - Yes, she let me walk her home one day.

**DG** - Were you mad that Clarice rejected you?

**JA** - Of course I was mad. I poured my heart out to that woman, and she chose being a whore over a future with me!

**DG** - Did you visit Clarice's house that night?

**JA** - Are you accusing me of killing Clarice? I would never hurt her! I loved her!

**DG** - Sure you loved her, but you were just another paycheck for Clarice, weren't you?

**JA** - No, she wasn't like that.

**DG** - But you told me, she was a prostitute and you paid her to spend time with you. Do you really think that if you stopped paying her she would still want to

**JA** - You don't know what you're talking about.

**DG** - Don't I? If she really cared for you then she would have quit her job to be with you. But you were just another john.

**JA** - No, that's not true!

**DG** - Alright, Then prove me wrong.

**JA** - I...

**DG** - You can't, can you?

**JA** - She would never hurt me.

**DG** - It was all a loving fantasy for you, wasn't it? But the second reality hit, and you remembered you were no more than someone paying for her time, your heart broke. You had so many strong emotions that you had no idea what to do with them.

**JA** - Clarice broke my heart.

**DG** - So you spent the night drinking to try and drown out your pain. But once the alcohol had clouded your mind you decided it was a good idea to go over to her apartment and talk to her.

**JA** - I... I didn't want to hurt her. But I was sad and angry, and I just wanted to try and talk some sense into her. I wanted to tell her that she was worth more than those dirty men's money!

**DG** - Of course you did because you truly cared for her, didn't you?

**JA** - I do! I marched up to her apartment and when she answered the door she looked afraid. I didn't know why; she had always trusted me before.

**DG** - What happened next, John?

**JA** - She tried slamming the door in my face, but I pushed my way in, I just wanted to talk! She threatened to call the police and I started to panic, I tried batting the phone out of her hands and accidentally pushed her to the floor. Clarice kept on screaming and screaming and she wouldn't shut up! I needed her to be quiet, I couldn't think...

**DG** - And you hit her with the baseball bat to keep her quiet?

**JA** - No! I just wanted the screaming to stop. I held a pillow over her face until she stopped! I knew she lived in a bad area with nosy neighbors and I didn't need them to come through the door.

**DG** - Then what, John?

**JA** - She was lying unconscious on the floor; I kept passing through the apartment trying to make sense of the situation. I kept replaying the whole situation again and again in my head and I got so angry thinking about how she chose her job over me. How she choose doing... *That*, over me. I just got angrier and angrier and then I blacked out.

**DG** - You blacked out?

**JA** - The next thing I remember was seeing Clarice dead and wrapped in a bloody drop cloth. And then I didn't feel so angry anymore.



# Action/Suspense

## *Something's Out There*

*By: Destiny Eve Pifer*



### **Destiny Eve Pifer**

Destiny Eve Pifer is a published author whose work has appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies. Her work has appeared in FATE Magazine, Country Magazine and Spotlight on Recovery. Her work can be found in anthologies by Black Hare Press, Macabre Ladies Publishing and Nocturnal Sirens. She resides in Pennsylvania

“Hurry up,” Paul called out as his girlfriend Helen tried to keep up. Helen could feel her lungs aching as she rushed to keep up. It was the one thing that irritated her the most about Paul. He loved rushing ahead of her and then yelling when she couldn’t keep up. Helen rushed up to Paul just in time to see him heading off the trail. “Where are you going!” she shouted. “I found something awesome!” he shouted back. Despite the red flags that were popping up in her brain she followed Paul into the thick brush. She watched as he approached a strange creature that had beautiful colors but appeared to have some sort of fungus covering its body. “Look at how beautiful it is,” Paul said, kneeling beside it. “Paul gets away from that,” she said in a cautious tone. As usual, her boyfriend didn’t like listening to anyone but himself. “Relax Helen I just need a few photos.” No sooner had he snapped a shot with his fancy phone when something black shot out of the creature’s mouth. Helen watched in horror as it stung Paul in the leg. He fell over on his side and began to scream. Helen knew she had to get to him but couldn’t risk getting near the creature. She turned and began running towards the hiking trail. “I’m going to get help!” she yelled. Once she had reached the trail she called for help. When the forest rangers and EMT arrived, the creature was gone and Paul’s leg was already becoming infected. She looked at the black streaks coming from the bite. Paul was delirious and was withering in pain. Helen hated to see him in such agony. If only they hadn’t ventured from the path that day. Helen found herself sitting in a crowded ER as she awaited news on her boyfriend’s status. She couldn’t stop the horrible thoughts running through her mind. What was the mysterious creature? Where had it gone? The one thing she did know was that it was unlike anything she had

ever seen before. At the hospital, Paul was rushed into surgery. As he was being sedated he looked right at her. All Helen could do was watch as the doctors tried to take care of his leg which had now turned completely black. She was nursing a cup of coffee when one of the doctors came out and sat down beside her. He began asking her questions about the creature that bit Paul and if she had ever seen it before. She answered with the truth. She had never seen anything like it before. The doctor had a worried expression and immediately began making calls. Soon the hospital was swarming with a team from the CDC. They put Paul into quarantine and started monitoring his vitals. Helen was ushered into a separate room where she had to strip naked. She stood in a cold room as doctors in hazmat suits looked all over her body. As they did she couldn't help but feel violated. However, one of the doctors a female talked to her in a calm voice. She asked Helen if she came into contact with the creature or touched Paul after he was bitten. Helen replied that she didn't touch either one. At first, she had felt like a horrible girlfriend for not tending to Paul, but she knew that she couldn't trust the strange creature. The forest ranger met her outside the tent and pulled her aside. He talked about the creature and how he and his men searched the forest for it. While they never found the creature they did find at least twenty dead animals. Each one had turned black and had a strange type of fungus on them. When she heard the news Helen found herself terrified. If the mysterious creature was indeed responsible then what was going to happen to Paul? The next day she received a call that Paul was all better and ready to be released from the hospital. The doctor gave him a series of antibiotics and now Paul was back to his old self. He demanded that she pick him up from the hospital and as she drove there Helen began to rethink her future with Paul. Maybe now that he was better she could finally leave him. Helen pulled up to the front entrance as they were wheeling him out. Paul immediately jumped in the passenger seat. He seemed to be way more active than he normally was. The first thing he asked for was a cheeseburger. However, instead of requesting it well done, he asked for it to be rare. The bloodier the better, he said, biting into the pink meat. Helen, who just ordered a drink, found herself fighting back the urge to throw up. With every passing day, Helen watched as Paul began to change. It started when she witnessed him eating a pound of raw meat. Then he began complaining about his back. When Helen took a look she noticed strange dark and purple spots that were rising out of his skin. Then she watched as he began to lose his teeth. Paul insisted that he was fine, but Helen could see that he wasn't. Every night he stared out the window as though he was searching for someone or something. It made her uneasy. The more Paul began to change the more terrified she became. On his chest, he noticed what appeared to be fungus. The same mysterious creature. Helen pleaded with him to visit a doctor but as usual, Paul ignored her. When she found him laying on the bathroom floor. Helen was even more concerned. He was withering in pain and had vomited some type of black stuff all over the toilet. He pulled up his shirt and showed her what appeared to be a long black stinger coming out of his belly button. Once again she opted to call for help though she knew at this point that what she needed was a scientist. But Paul pleaded with her to be left alone. That afternoon Helen packed a bag and left. She found a small apartment in the bad section of town. She knew that Paul would never find her there. She phoned the military and explained that her boyfriend had been bitten by a mysterious creature and was

now changing. That seemed to get things moving and soon they were rolling into town. Paul meanwhile had disappeared, and the military was desperately trying to find him. The head scientist Dr. Chris Murphy informed her that what they were dealing with was a creature from another planet. They believed that it crashed into the forest and was considered very hostile. The only thing they did know was that it had infected a human and now that human was on the loose. Meanwhile, Paul's condition had worsened. His body was now covered with the same type of strange fungus as the creatures. Angered that Helen had run off he found himself preying on various people. He found a prostitute and used the stinger in his stomach to infect her. He could feel her blood coursing through his veins. The next one he infected was a mugger who made the mistake of trying to rob him. Once again he used the stinger to infect and feed. After being stung in the woods that day Paul found himself telepathically connected to the creature. It was telling him to not only feed but to infect as many people as he could. As he began to change even more he no longer remembered who he was. Helen could only watch from the sidelines as the military fought to take down the creatures. She was horrified by what she saw. The infected were attacking innocent civilians and she was helpless to stop them. She was placed in a sealed-off area with a group of scientists who were trying to locate the creature. Helen had a feeling that she knew where it was. When she climbed the tree she spotted something strange in the distance. Something orb shaped. She had never mentioned it to Paul for the changes he had undergone had happened quickly. Now here she was in a protected area contemplating something stupid. She needed to stop all of the chaos. She slipped out of the tent and armed with a flashlight and a gun headed into the deep forest. As she walked through the darkness she couldn't help but feel an intense feeling of fear. She had no idea what she was going to do if she found the creature. Perhaps shoot it? But what if it bullets couldn't hurt it? She had come across the area where she and Paul had first discovered the creature. As the bushes began to shake she took a step back and aimed the gun. But it wasn't the creature that emerged. Instead, it was Paul, and he was grotesque looking. He barely resembled a human. His eyes were red with black slits. He was completely covered by something that resembled a fungus and hard purple shells. She wanted to scream but knew it would do no good. "Paul," she said to him. "It's Helen your girlfriend." Paul cocked his head and then smiled. His mouth was completely black. "I remember you," he said, inching closer. "Stop or I will shoot," she said. Helen knew damn well that it was best to shoot before he attacked but there was still a piece of her that love him. Before she could think twice Paul came at her and she found herself shooting. At first, the bullets didn't seem to affect him until she aimed for the head. It was a bullet to the head that brought him down. Suddenly in the distance, she heard an animal let out a cry. Running through the brush she found the creature draining a young fawn. She aimed and fired at the creature. It let out a squeal and started toward her. She tried to shoot but found she was out of bullets. She cursed herself for being foolish. If only she had brought something else to use. She turned and began to run towards the same tree she had climbed before. Helen jumped up and grabbed the branch. She then began to climb high out of the creature's sight. Down below the creature had stopped running. She could sense its presence as it made its way through the thick brush. Finally, when it had made its way past her she jumped down and grabbed a huge branch. With every ounce of fury, she ran towards it and began clubbing it.

She clubbed it until she was sliver of hope she would win.

covered in a strange goo. In the distance, she heard something rush towards her. Flashing her light, she was horrified to discover that it was another creature. There had been more than one all along. Wherever they came from the creatures were aggressive. They seemed to be content with staying in the woods and allowing infected humans to multiply. She swung the branch at the creature that began leaping towards her. Before it could use its stinger she swung as hard as she could. She could feel it hit a tree a few feet away. When she was sure she had killed it she made her way back to town. There were fires everywhere and people screaming. The military appeared to retreat. Grabbing a hold of a flare gun she began destroying the very town she had grown up in. With every human-turned creature she took down more popped up. As she lit each one on fire she couldn't help but feel a sense of power. Perhaps the military would come back. Perhaps they were just getting more ammo. Or perhaps they had been turned. Even the tent had been taken down. Helen knew that she couldn't let it spread. She couldn't let this become a worldwide epidemic. Even if it meant becoming infected herself she would continue to find a way to stop it. Maybe they would overrun her or maybe with just a

**THE END**

# Action/Suspense

## *The Revenge of the Forsaken Pumpkins*

*By: Lisa H. Owens*



### **Lisa H. Owens**

Lisa H. Owens, an author residing in North Texas with a motley crew of rescue dogs, has been published in several anthologies and various media outlets—including a two-year stint as a monthly humorist columnist. She was listed in "Who's Who of Emerging Writers 2021," and her stories are often inspired by true events, usually including private jokes and family nicknames. Visit her website for more information: [www.lisahowens.com](http://www.lisahowens.com)

It was ironic that Old Man Crunk lay dying in a field sparsely populated by forsaken pumpkins. Having grown up on a pumpkin farm which also touted a seasonal pumpkin patch, he despised the miserable gourds. Abhorred the manner in which they mocked him with their orangeness. Hated the decades of dealing with tourists and their snotty-nosed children who descended upon the family farm—like a Biblical plague—at the first hint of color changes in the leaves and crispness in the air. From his position, lying on the ground in the midst of what little remained of the family farm's dwindling pumpkin fields, tightly ensnared in the vines of the castoffs—those sad pumpkins that were deemed too scrawny or too misshapen for the Crunk Family Pumpkin Patch—he spied the convoy of distant relatives driving in from the city. In tandem, as if given a signal, the cars slowed and a host of right blinkers popped on, indicating they were nearing the dirt road that would ultimately lead them to the dilapidated farmhouse in which Old Man Crunk had resided since birth. He heard the mocking titter of the rejected pumpkins, their devious vines hugging his throat like an insecure lover. The insidious gourds had been inside his head. They were always inside his head, tormenting and befuddling his mind—their spidery hisses pleading to be mulched into organic matter, thus ending tortuous deaths involving withering and dehydration. Crunk thought about the homemade pumpkin pies burning to a crisp in the oven. Had the gourds not summoned him to the field, something they did quite often here of late, he would be in the tiny, overheated kitchen with a half dozen pies cooling on the sideboard and the table set for the onslaught of relatives arriving for the annual Crunk Thanksgiving Luncheon. It wasn't that they enjoyed spending time with him, for they certainly did not enjoy his sarcasm; but that they each

wanted to ingratiate themselves to Crunk, a childless lifelong bachelor. Without an obvious heir, they would never miss the luncheon, lest they be cut from The Will.

#

“Son of a Biscuit-Eater! Where is that old bastard?” The gold-digging once and twice and thrice-removed cousins complained as they exited the parked cars and began to form the traditional line from the driveway to the warped front door of *the old bastard’s* home. One-by-one the entire Thanksgiving meal, less Crunk’s pumpkin pies, would work its way up the line of relatives, bucket-brigade style, from the cars to the center of an expansive dining room table. Things erupted in chaos when Cousin Ernie opened the front door to a thick cloud of black smoke originating from the kitchen. “The pies!” The collective cry went up and the relatives scattered as panic set in. Panic, not out of concern for the old bastard, but out of fear of losing the delectable pumpkin pies, a Crunk Family Recipe, once upon a time smuggled in from the old country.

Cousin Ernie slipped oven-mitts on his hands, which set off an immediate argument among the relatives as to who should do the

honor of removing the pies from the oven. The argument turned violent when a few lower-tier cousins began to throw their weight around, grabbing the mitts off Ernie’s hands and one of the elderly aunts took an accidental punch to the eye. All grew quiet and it finally dawned on the youngest and only considerate one in the bunch, Cousin Maynard, that some misfortune may have befallen Uncle Crunk and the pies were forgotten. This is when the covert whispering and conspiring began. All (except young Cousin Maynard) agreed that Uncle Crunk had outlived his usefulness and needed a little push to ease him on to the afterlife, if and only if, some misfortune hadn’t already taken him to the great beyond. They fought like cats and dogs over who had come up with the best plan to end the old bastard’s life—if he was still alive—but like all of their arguments, the subject eventually turned to who was Crunk’s favorite. Who would inherit then quickly sell the farm, winding up on Easy Street? Off they went to search for the old bastard as flames flared up in the forgotten oven, licking the edges of the scorched pies.

#

Crunk was not dead... yet. From a great distance, he heard the front door slam and a sing-song voice

calling his name, “Uncle Cruuuunk. Uncle Cruuuunk? Where aaarrre you?”

He snugged his hands under the pumpkins’ murderous vines, providing a smidge of relief from the boa constrictor-like hold they had on his neck, and struggled to raise his head. He gazed towards the front porch, his vision bleary through eyes that were red and bulgy from the constant pressure to his carotid artery. But his skewed vision didn’t matter; he’d recognize that bunch of numb skulls blindfolded. Just as he suspected. The relatives were out in full force, searching the grounds for his whereabouts. Crunk smelled a rat. He was suspicious of the syrupy sweetness of Cousin Ernie’s voice. That idiot didn’t have a nice bone in his entire body. He was sick to death of the whole lot of them. Sick of the annual thankless Thanksgiving luncheons. The disruptive chatter of the relatives openly arguing over who was Crunk’s favorite; over who would inherit the family farm once the old man bit the dust. Well, he had a newsflash for the wretched lot: *none of them* were his favorite. “Check over by the barn, Dinglewad,” Cousin Ernie roared. His true colors were once again starting to bleed through his thin candy-coated exterior.

Crunk did not struggle to free himself from the vines. He was resigned to his fate—slow



strangulation—the revenge of the passed for a smile in his current pumpkins, those shunned gourds state. The vines sank deeper into he’d left to die of dehydration in his flesh, drawing blood and this harvested field. completely constricting his

He pulled his hands from beneath airway. He closed his eyes and the constrictive vines and dreamed of the colossal explosion burrowed them in the soil that would send slivers of a half alongside his torso. He started dozen pumpkin pies (and the wad scooping, mounding loose soil of cash, Crunk’s entire life savings, and broken bits of the barren stuffed inside his sagging vines and withering pumpkins, up mattress) to the moon and of his and over his prone form to afterlife in a place called Heaven, camouflage his steadily where God-willing, annoying weakening body. He relished the relatives and disgruntled thought of expiring in this field. pumpkins didn’t exist.

Buried in pumpkins, his lifelong The ground began to tremble and sole companions. Dying alone, quake, and a sonic boom filled the cawing crows the only the air as the dilapidated witnesses to his death. farmhouse was blown to

The aggrieved vines tightened the smithereens. A series of noose around his scrawny neck. aftershocks rocked the fields and Slowly, slowly, and slower still, mini explosions peppered the sky little-by-little cutting off his until all was finally quiet.

supply of oxygen which reminded “MAYNARD! Whadja do, him of his occasional emphysema Dumbass?” Cousin Ernie’s flare-ups and the full tank of exasperated cry broke through emergency oxygen tucked away in the silence and Crunk contentedly a corner of the kitchen... near the drew his final breath.

oven, likely still scorching those pumpkin pies. He doubted anyone in that self-centered bunch had the wherewithal to remove the smoldering pies from the oven—except possibly young Maynard—but being the butt of all the jokes and the family scapegoat, he went mostly unheard.

The thought of a big *KABOOM* filled Crunk with glee and the corners of his blue, oxygen-deprived lips lifted, forming what

**The End**

# Action/Suspense

## *The Writer's Dilemma*

### *Part One*

*By: Kathleen Chamberlin*



### **Kathleen Chamberlin**

Kathleen Chamberlin is a retired educator living in Albany, New York with her husband and two rescue dogs. She began to focus on creative writing in 2020, during the quarantine period.

“All the best opening lines have already been taken,” Olivia lamented. “After trying no fewer than seven different ways to begin the story, I’m stumped. I have to find a way to capture the reader right from the opening sentence. It’s got to be memorable, too, like ‘Call me Ishmael,’ or ‘Scarlett O’Hara was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it when captivated by her charms,’ or...”

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,” Elizabeth added.

“Exactly! Not too long and not too short but something that teases the reader into the story.”

“You’ll think of something. Besides, you don’t have to actually settle on a first line before you create your characters. Can’t you do that later, after you’ve written them?”

Olivia nodded. She had been writing for years, bits and snatches scratched on stray

envelopes, or on the back of deposit slips, sometimes in a black and white composition notebook and, more recently, on her laptop.

“What’s this one going to be about?”

“I don’t know yet.” Olivia answered with a frustrated laugh.

“Usually, I have a vague idea of one of the characters and that leads me into finding some circumstance that the character might face, but it’s just not happening this time.”

“What if you wrote a physical description of the character or named it?”

Olivia shook her head. “I don’t like to box the characters or the reader in that way. Physical descriptions that are minimal allow the reader more freedom.

That way the readers help me create the character. They become more invested in the narrative. And names? Very problematic. A name can be associated with a person the reader might despise and that negative echo colors their response to my character. Do you remember the nighttime soap opera *Dynasty*? There was a

character named Claudia and I really liked the name." she paused, "until that scum-sucking whore came into my cousin's life and ruined him. Now, no matter how brilliant the writer is, if the character is named Claudia, she's got no chance. None." She laughed at her own bias. "Sometimes, I don't name the characters at all. That only works if I am writing about only one or two characters. More than two makes it too difficult to keep track of them."

"So. Let me recap the situation: no opening line, no names for any of the characters, no physical descriptions either. Do you have a setting? A title? A plot outline? An ending?"

Olivia started to giggle, and Elizabeth answered her own questions. "Of course, you don't. You're a pants-er. That's how your genius works."

\*\*\*

A few weeks later, Olivia called. "I have a start," she said, "and if you have some time to stop over after work, I'd like to run it by you for your 'kind constructive criticism.' I'll even splurge for snacks and drinks."

"Sold! See you about, oh, quarter of six?"

"That works. See you then."

Elizabeth arrived as Olivia was setting out cheese and crackers. She dropped her coat over the

back of a chair.

"Wine, beer, or other?" Olivia asked.

"Let's do wine." They sat in the small living room, sipped the wine, and caught up on their most recent interactions with co-workers and family members. Finally, Elizabeth said, "Okay, no more stalling. Let's hear it."

"Just keep in mind that it's only a partial first draft, and it's got a long way to go."

"Yup. All the usual disclaimers noted," Elizabeth said, glass in one hand, bottle in the other as she settled comfortably in the overstuffed chair. Olivia opened her laptop, took a breath, and began to read.

"Wait till you hear this!" Helen Wells dropped into the desk side chair in Charlotte Smith's office, hooked one leg over its arm and looked as if she was about to divulge the answer to one of the world's most famous mysteries. Having been her closest friend for more years than she could remember, Charlotte knew that have a start," she said, "and if you have some time to stop over after work, I'd like to run it by you for your 'kind constructive criticism.' I'll even splurge for snacks and drinks."

"Sold! See you about, oh, quarter of six?"

"That works. See you then."

Elizabeth arrived as Olivia was setting out cheese and crackers. She dropped her coat over the

"Charlie" to her friends, had dark brown hair with just a whisper of auburn. Nature had also gifted Helen with two extraordinary features: her eyes and her smile. Her green eyes looked at the world from under long, thick lashes that dared any onlooker to resist. Her smile could only be described as megawatt, exuding confidence, and enormous pleasure in being alive, ready to enjoy the company of whomever she chose to spend time with. Charlotte was quieter in every way. Her hazel eyes were smaller, less dramatic, sometimes dark brown, sometimes green, depending on what she was wearing. They blazed like a lightning strike when she was angry, danced when she was happy, and smoldered with a sultry sexuality she wasn't fully aware of whenever she was pensive. She smiled far less than Helen did, was less outgoing. Yet, from the moment they had met, they forged a forever friendship, each the Ying to the other's Yang, providing the all-important equilibrium that was the essential foundation of friendship. They harbored no jealousies, were never attracted to the same men, and trusted each other completely. So, when Helen challenged Charlie to ask what the exciting newsflash was, Charlie half-smiled and said "You've met the love of your life, a scion of a land baron. You're

quitting your job, and you're moving to a small island to ride bicycles and skinny dip near his yacht."

Helen's laugh preceded her "Noooo," as she dragged the word out for effect. "But you're close."

Swinging her leg back down to the floor, she leaned forward, a smile blazing across her face. Here we go again, thought Charlie, who was the brakeman on the runaway train of Helen's impetuous and impulsive nature whenever it hurtled towards the edge of the cliff.

"Do, tell, then. I sit here on pins and needles." She sat back in her office chair, swiveling to give her friend her full attention. Helen's eyes sparkled and she couldn't suppress her laugh or her smile as she lowered her voice in a conspirator's whisper and said, "It's him again" as she lay her hand against her chest and let her head fall back, emitting a gushing sigh of pleasure. Charlie knew immediately who the 'him' was, although it could have been any one of the many men who had been bewitched by Helen's charm over the years, including Charlie's former husband whose eyes had popped the first time Charlie introduced them.

"Don't tell me Peter Montgomery has entered stage right. I thought that was over."

"I did too! But I guess it's not. I mean...he is sending me the most

*incredible* emails that are absolutely heart-stopping!" She shivered in delight. "He's so utterly *romantic*. Let me tell you, Charlie, it's everything I've ever wanted, no, needed, and wow! How can I let something like that just end?"

Her question was for herself as well as for Charlie and Charlie could see that Helen was giddy, and happy in a way she hadn't been in years. Because of that, Charlie chose her words carefully."

Olivia stopped reading, picked up her glass and allowed the wine to slide down the back of her throat before reaching for the bottle.

Finding it empty, she walked to the fridge for another. Elizabeth hadn't said anything and as she uncorked the bottle and filled her glass, Olivia asked, "Liz?"

"They say 'write about what you know.' Just keep reading."

Olivia took her seat. "Where was I? Oh, here. Okay" and she began to read again.

"Because of that, Charlie chose her words carefully. "Do you want it to end? Of course, you don't. It makes you feel young, desirable, and pursued. All of the things marriages kill." She grew reflective. "If you choose not to end it, then what? The thrill of riding that glorious wave? Just be careful you don't get crushed when it breaks."

The friends had grown up on Long Island and body surfing at TOBAY

Beach was a summer ritual. As soon as Helen had passed her driving test and gotten access to a car, they ditched school, driving well over the speed limit, to reach their destination, Helen thrilled by the speed, Charlotte holding on to the dashboard white-knuckled. Helen's reasoning was, the less time in traffic, the more time on the beach. Their body surfing adventures became a metaphor for many of their life experiences when, after one glorious afternoon of riding the waves to shore, they were blindsided by a series of waves that overtook them, pummeling and pounding them into the shallows, leaving them gasping for breath and cut by the shards of seashells. Thereafter, whenever things seemed fun and exciting with a hint of danger, they would recall that day and its swift and severe punishment. "I know, I know!" Helen said, acknowledging Charlie's warning. "But Charlotte! Charlotte! I can't resist. Besides, I'm just being true to my nature." Her self-deprecating laughter accompanied the last few words.

***To be continued...***

# Science Fiction

Newport

*By: Doug Hawley*



**Doug Hawley**

The author is a little old former actuary who jumped from numbers to words. He has hundreds of stories published in all of the usual genres and four continents (South America, Africa, and Antarctica are difficult for him). He had two short story collections published in 2023. His home is in Oregon USA with cat Kitzhaber and editor Sharon.

**M**eeting Kayoko changed my life. I was in my late twenties at the time and had been through a few discouraging relationships at the time – the intriguing beauty that disappeared without explanation that I never heard from again, the one that I took for granted because I didn’t think she was good enough, and the one whose last heterosexual relationship was with me. Gretchen was one of the women with whom I had a normal relationship. After a few dates neither one of us felt any spark but became good friends. We shared an interest in sports, and both were Portland Trailblazer fans. After runs on the beach, we traded bad dates and romance stories. I think that she exaggerated about how bad her dates were to make me feel better about mine. She was too sharp and attractive to have as bad luck as she claimed. By introducing me to Kayoko, she did me the best favor anyone had

ever done for me.

After one of our runs while I was sucking wind and close to collapse, she asked if I wanted to go on a blind date with a “super friend of mine”. If I hadn’t been doing so badly on my own and had enough oxygen to speak, I would have said “hell no”.

Instead of that, a few minutes later when I could speak I said “sure, has to be an improvement in my love life”.

When we met over coffee I had a hard time not gawping at her. She’s a biologist at the Oregon Coast Aquarium just south of Newport Oregon, where I’m a restaurant owner, but she could easily be mistaken for a model. If you knew me, it would be clear that she was a nine having coffee with a three if I’m generous with myself and round up. She would be a ten if not for the gap in her teeth, which has always turned me on. Maybe because I was so happy to just have coffee with her that my normal abysmal game rose to the occasion. She seemed generally amused to hear my bad jokes (what do you call a broken off tree – I’m stumped) and screwy stories from the

restaurant. Within twenty minutes she was totally engaged and asking me about recipes. I was surprised about her disgust with my frog dishes though. She had sad stories about the racism that she had faced. She mentioned some of the horrible names she had been called in high school. I won't repeat them. I'd heard enough from some of my old girlfriends to be disgusted by the casual racism some practiced. I'll take just about anyone ahead of a white bigot. I had to act like I didn't want to try to take her home that night because I didn't want to scare her off. I invited her to that old standby dinner and a movie for a second date instead. Not much choice of movies in Newport, but we made do with what we had. I didn't pay much attention; it might have been "The Sound Of Music" for all I know. Mostly it was us groping and sucking face. On the way out she said what I was thinking "I hope you're ready for the third date next. We'll go to the bar before we go back to your place." She could only see my face, but my whole body was smiling at the prospect. On the third date a couple of days later we drank way too much at the Inn Between and had a delightful evening back at my place. I'm not a gentleman, but I'll act like one in this case. I won't give you the play by play, but two odd things struck me

about her. When she was otherwise naked, she kept on a wide neckband. The oddity of it made me think back to realize that I had never seen her neck. When I asked her about it she said that a disfigurement made her self-conscious. She made a joke of it "Don't worry, I haven't been bitten by a vampire and you can see my neck after we're married". Even though I thought she was joking about marriage, I was happy with the idea. A scarier observation was that during the heat of passion her body remained cool, even cold. She explained "I've got a rare metabolic condition, but don't worry I've not dying anytime soon." The next couple of months were easily the happiest of my life up to that point. We'd go for a picnic on the beach, and I'd be dressed in several layers in the cool windy weather, and she'd go swimming in the cold Oregon waters. I worried about her, but she was an expert swimmer and never got cold. I was a bit disappointed when she went back to Japan to visit her family, but she said she'd be back soon. After all of my earlier heartbreak, I wondered if it was really a short break and if we would pick up where we left off. I shouldn't have worried. She came back on schedule and said "It's time to put a ring on it. We're getting married."

We had a small wedding with a few friends and family. I didn't expect any surprises, but I had forgotten her promise to reveal her neck. She has gills. I freaked out and fell over some furniture before she mentioned "Oh yeah, and I swam back to Japan. I can't wait to tell you about hitching a ride on whales when they were heading in the right direction. I may not do this again; I've got hair-raising stories about hiding from sharks and giant octopus." In most ways, being married to an amphibian is much like being married to another human. She is more active in warm weather like other cold blooded animals but is fine in cold water. My guilty secret is being aroused by her gills. I won't go into detail, but I feel so privileged to be the only one who gets to see and caress them. After my poor history with women, I'd recommend dating outside our species to anyone who is lucky enough to have the opportunity. Best of all, there's a newt on the way – we don't know when it will arrive because the gestation period for human – amphibian hybrids is unknown.



# Science Fiction

## *When the Clock Moves Backwards*

*By: Drew D. Lenhart*



### **Drew D. Lenhart**

Drew is a technology nut from Indiana who works in Information Technology writing software. When he's not writing code, he's writing words. He has written numerous flash fiction, short stories, and comic books. He founded the comic publishing company, SnowyWorks. More info can be found at <https://snowyworks.com>.

**T**he desolate streets of the ancient world were obscured by thick, tainted-yellow smoke. Even behind the protective breathing apparatus with filtered air tanks, the stench lingered, a constant reminder of the toxic smog. Only Lexi was around to guide me. "In twenty feet, turn right," advised Lexi. Lexi was a cutting-edge marvel of technology, a motion sensitive, A.I. driven GPS assistant, all contained in a small earpiece. I couldn't see much beyond the swirling clouds, just hazy shadows moving behind the protective plastic of my mask. "Make sure you're right about this," I muttered. "The smog is so thick today; I can barely find my way in this mess." "My sensors track registered locations only, sir," Lexi replied. I couldn't fathom how people endured this smog-infested landscape. Just looking at the air made me feel sick. I prefer to

stick to the high-rise buildings, cleaner air, better views.

"In five feet, turn left." Lexi directed, projecting red markers onto my goggles. Yet, the system often struggled, revealing obstacles just before I collided with them.

Occasionally, dim lights of moving vehicles zipped by my left leaving streaks of light in the smog and seemed to slowly dissipate. Short blasts of thick, smoggy air would hit my ruffled brown overcoat causing me to misstep, almost as if it were a wave of water crashing into me.

"In forty-two paces, you will have arrived at your destination," Lexi declared, outlining a small shop in red.

Looking through the mask of the breathing apparatus, before me in bended neon tubes, I squinted to barely make out the glow of *Calzer's Clockworks* sign hanging in the front window. The store seemed frozen in time, likely a remnant from the 21st century. "You have reached your destination," Lexi announced, marking the shop's door.

I twisted the handle opening to a small foyer. The door creaked

open, revealing tile and  
woodwork, real woodwork, a  
stark contrast to the modern  
world of recycled plastic.

A sign hung on the wall with  
instructions for visitors. *Please  
wait until decontamination is fully  
complete before entering!*

A solid blast of cold air hit me  
from all sides, startling me. This is  
decontaminant doing its job,  
destroying any living microbe that  
may have latched onto me. I  
couldn't shake the fear of it  
missing something, poisoning me  
slowly.

Calzer's Clockworks is a sanctuary  
of time. In every conceivable  
place is a clock of some sort. If  
there ever was a place for old  
clocks to end up, this is the place.

The left wall upon entering was  
lined with tall and beautifully  
constructed grandfather clocks  
crafted out of wood, which all  
seemed to be ticking in sequence.

Clocks of all shapes and sizes  
hung on every wall: circular,  
square, oval, and triangle. Clocks

with visible moving gears, cuckoo  
clocks and their busy components  
were like a symphonic orchestra

playing in tune. Inside illuminated  
display cases sat hundreds of  
wrist watches and pocket watches  
decked in gold and silver.

Behind the counter sat an old  
man with thick, black-rimmed  
glasses, which magnified the size  
of his eyes. He was a round,  
pudgy man with a black sweater  
vest looking intently into a large

magnifying glass repairing a small  
pocket watch. He took no notice  
of me. I took off the breathing  
apparatus and stood in front of  
him tapping my foot a few times  
to catch his attention.

"Excuse me?" I said, annoyed.  
"Can you help me?"

Suddenly interested. "Hello sir,  
my name is Calzer, what can I  
help you with today?" he said,  
with his eyes looking above his  
thick glasses.

"I'm looking for a clock for my  
wife, can you help me find one?"  
I asked.

He nodded silently while putting  
down a small screwdriver and  
moved aside the pocket watch  
carefully.

"Can you be more specific?"  
asked Calzer as he propped his  
head up with his hand. "There are  
all kinds of clocks. Wall clocks,  
pedestal clocks, digital clocks,  
alarm clocks, and atomic clocks,  
just to name a few."

"How about a clock to sit above  
our fireplace?" I suggested.

Calzer stood slowly. "Ah, yes. I do  
have the perfect clock you can  
take off my hands."

Calzer pulled a skeleton key out of  
his vest pocket and unlocked the  
door of a large wooden chest.

Inside, Calzer removed a clock  
about a foot long with a light  
wooden stain. The clock face was  
a light aging yellow.

"This clock is very old. I cannot  
seem to get rid of it. It is very  
beautiful and well maintained,"

said Calzer as he admired the  
intricate wood carved detail on  
the clock.

Judging by the age, this would be  
the perfect gift for Therese. The  
clock was thoroughly cared for as  
the wood looked brand new. The  
craftsmanship of the intricate leaf  
border around the edges  
magnified its beauty.

"It does look very nice. I think my  
wife would truly enjoy this."

"Perfect! However,..." his voice  
trailed off. He hesitated before

continuing, "This clock..." Calzer  
said as he put a hand on the clock  
and the other on his hip. "Holds  
power beyond your  
comprehension."

"Power?" I scoffed. "You're  
speaking nonsense. It is nothing  
more than a relic of times gone  
past."

"You're blind to the truth!"  
Calzer's voice grew sharp.

"I don't understand," I said. "It's  
just a clock".

"Well, yes, it is, however this  
clock is truly important and  
special. As the new owner of this  
clock, you must agree to maintain  
and protect this clock at all costs.

And never, ever turn the clock  
hands backwards or  
counterclockwise."

Calzer paused and looked down  
as if he were embarrassed. "Time  
always moves forwards, not  
backwards. Remember that.  
Moving the hands backwards will  
cause you to go back in time."

"I really thought this was some

cheap tactic to jack the price, but you are actually insane,” I said. After a short pause, I burst out laughing. I put my hand on the display case to hold myself up. I glanced over at Calzer, who was unamused. This was no joke to him. I could see the crinkles on his forehead as if he were holding back the anger.

“Ok, I’m sorry, this is not a joke?” I said, trying to hold back the laughter.

“I am telling you the truth, the mere act of turning the dials back could catapult the bearer to a place beyond their wildest imagination.”

It must have been the child in me, always having to push that button, or touch wet paint when a sign clearly says *Wet Paint*. I don’t know why. I put my index finger on the hour hand and moved it counterclockwise around the dial several times. Calzer yelled. “You are... making... a grave mistake!”

Calzer’s voice and the noise of the entire store began to slowly get quieter as if someone turned the volume down on a remote. I began to squint a little more as everything began to look fuzzy and lose its color. I looked down at my hands. The color was fading, and I could slightly see through them.

Nausea set in and I closed my eyes. My skin began to tingle as if my whole body were asleep. Absolutely no sound at all. What was happening? Suddenly, sound seemed to stand still.

Suddenly its long neck ducked to match my height and before I could scream for help, its mouth engulfed my head. I began to see black as its teeth sank into my throat.

\* \* \*

“Unable to contact servers, trying again in five minutes,” said Lexi. Calzer stood up angrily in his empty store. He picked up the mantle clock with both hands and placed it back into the wooden cabinet, “I tell everyone every single time, do not move the clock hands backwards!”

I stood there, taking in the lush, untouched wilderness, feeling an unexpected sense of belonging. This ancient world seemed to beckon me, inviting me to shed the chaos of my life and embrace its beauty.

The wonder quickly dissipated with the sense of terror. Just as I started to imagine spending the rest of my days here, a ground-shaking sound began to approach, heaving, trampling with hollow thumps, growing louder with each passing second. Something big was moving in the woods as I heard loud puffs of breath. Off to my left, a massive beast of ancient myth, towering over me like a mountain, crashed through the thick brush. Its scales gleamed with an ancient, weathered majesty and its eyes locked onto mine.

My heart raced; I couldn’t move. Every instinct screamed at me to run, but I froze in awe and terror. The ground trembled beneath its massive weight, sending shockwaves through my feet as it let out a thunderous growl. Time

# Humor

## Space Opera

By: Doug Hawley



**Doug Hawley**

The author is a little old former actuary who jumped from numbers to words. He has hundreds of stories published in all of the usual genres and four continents (South America, Africa, and Antarctica are difficult for him). He had two short story collections published in 2023. His home is in Oregon USA with cat Kitzhaber and editor Sharon.

**S**pace Opera Logdate LSMFT

This is Captain James T. Pickard of the Starboat Entropy. I'm teaching starboat operations and culture to Ensign and captain in training Horace Green.

Green: I have so many questions. I don't understand why we are not crushed into atoms when we accelerate at gorp or insane speed?

Captain: See that red doohickey on the wall behind you?

Green: Yes. The blinking one?

Captain: It adjusts gravity.

Green: How does it work?

Captain: No idea, but you could ask Drinky, our chief engineer. The one whose accent keeps shifting. Some days he's Welsh, sometimes he's Bostonian. He's a little crazy, but good with widgets.

Green: What's the difference between gorp and insane speed and how do we go faster than light?

Captain: *Long laughing fit.* The difference between gorp and

insane is just the special effects. Gorp is kaleidoscope with wahoo sounds and insane is purple with banshee screams. When we found that all the physics books claimed faster than light speed was impossible, we threw out the books. Easy fix.

Green: How do you decide which planets to visit where no man or woman has gone before who wasn't wearing cheap alien makeovers?

Captain: I have to admit that I had a lot to do with that. It is not a coincidence that they usually have semi-human dynamite women who usually fall for the captain – me. I did make a couple of mistakes. Planet Sappho showed no interest in me, but Yeoman Sally Twist had a great time there. We had to stop for triberyllium crystals there after only getting a trillion kilometers on our last 100 gram fill up.

Depending on which way you swing, you might want to take a pass on planets Bear and Twink.

Green: It seems that you see a lot of action in combat and romance.

Captain: Rank has its privileges. I have had some dalliances with the crew as well. You might say unprofessional, but I say hubba hubba. My great regret is the princess that we picked up who was escaping the Abominable

Asteroid and its leader Dark Rader. I was ready to marry her until I found out that she was my sister. Major bummer.

Excuse me for a moment. Our Diversity Officer Ababao wants my attention. What is it?

Ababao: Captain, I'm from Detroit. I just can't get the Nigerian accent right. What should I do?

Captain: Let me check. Google says that we have only 3,234 Nigerians watching the show. You do you, no problem.

Ababao: Another thing. We don't have any nonbinary, Bulgarian or short crew members and we can't afford three more personnel.

Captain: We can afford one more. Get a short nonbinary, Bulgarian, three for the price of one.

Ababao: Genius. I'm on it.

Captain: Back to you, trainee Green.

Green: I'm puzzled. According to the manifest, there are only ten crew members, but I've seen 112 since we took off.

Captain: We get a lot of turnover, particularly for the ones with plaid shirts, and others who tell their agents that they want off. They only last about a week, so we stream crew on and off as needed.

Green: One more thing and I'll go back to cleaning toilets. When I got onboard, it was 2021, but now it's 2567. How did that

happen."

Captain: It's because of a Newtonian-Einsteinian quantum time shift relative to the expanding universe and relativity. *Whispers – We didn't want to make the same mistake that Space 1999 and Space Odyssey: 2001 did and pass the dates the movie titles represented without the world on those dates being anything like the movies.*

*Loud noises interrupt the conversation.*

Captain: That's enough training for one day, and I can't hear anything anyway. The crew is still working on replacing doorknobs with whoosh machines. Three years now and nowhere near complete. We can put a man in orbit around the Big Dipper, but we can't finish a simple maintenance job.

*Appears in Haven, Short Humor, and Literally Stories*

# Poems

## *Bad Ass Alice*

*By: Kate MacDonald-Dunbar*



**Kate MacDonald-Dunbar**

Kate MacDonald-Dunbar is a retired septuagenarian who started to write just over sixteen months ago. She has many hobbies, but writing helps to fill an insomniac's dark quiet hours. She has had seventeen poems and six short stories published, online and in print: Chris Fielden's "Nonsensically Challenged," for charity. High Shelf Press volume XXIII. WinglessDreamer. Spillwords Press. 805 Lit and Art. Funny Pearls. Little Old Lady Comedy. Dillydoun Review. The World of Myth Magazine.

In a parallel universe, where reality bends  
Lives a bad-ass Alice, here chaos never ends

In this Wonderland, she stands tall and strong  
With a machine gun sounding her battle song

Her face is a canvas of the rabid Cheshire's grin  
Tattooed with madness, holding feral fire within

She walks into hate, where dreams intertwine  
A queen of rebellion, now writing her own design

Each step she takes, the ground trembles beneath  
She is a symphony of power, a tempest of disbelief

Her eyes, filled with courage, pierce the night  
A fearless warrior, forging her very own light

In this topsy-turvy realm, where nonsense thrives  
She dances with danger, her spirit ducks and dives

She defies all the rules, in this twisted lost domain  
A rebel against conformity, keen to break the chain

Her machine gun blazing, she fights for the weak  
Protecting the voiceless, oppressed, and the meek

No tyrant can tame her, no obstacles are too tall  
She is the embodiment of justice for one and for all

In this Wonderland's depths, chaos is her guide  
Alice has found purpose, she listens to each side



With her rabid Cheshire cat tattooed upon her face  
She roams through the madness, and leaves no trace

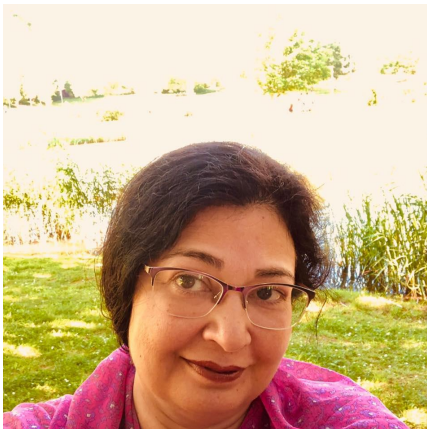
So let us raise our voices to this fierce heroine  
Whose existence defies the ordinary, the routine

In a parallel universe, where dreams come alive  
Bad-ass Alice reigns, with her dream set to thrive

# Poems

## *Ever-lasting Lyre*

*By: Sultana Raza*



### **Sultana Raza**

Of Indian origin, Sultana Raza's poems have appeared in 90+ journals, including Columbia Journal, NewVerseNews, Classical Poetry Society, spillwords, Poetry24, Dissident Voice, and The Peacock Journal. Her fiction received an Honorable Mention in Glimmer Train Review, and has been published in Short Story Town, Coldnoon Journal, and Entropy. She's read her fiction/poems in Switzerland, France, Luxembourg, England, Ireland, the US, and at CoNZeland.

Her creative non-fiction has appeared in the Literary Ladies

### **A play in verse on Orpheus**

#### **Text of Scene 1**

(Day. Grove of Whispering Ferns on an islet made by two streams near a beach in Thrace. Sage Cigogne, the old King of Storks converses with Orpheus in Bird Speak. Other rare birds, and smaller animals are listening to them).

Sage Cigogne:

I implore you, Orpheus do not go,  
Covert intentions I can smell from a mile.  
Stay in your country with us awhile  
All their cards these gods don't show.

Orpheus:

It's my duty to go and protect.  
Do you know what an honour it will be?  
All these heroes to accompany.  
Wishes of the gods, how can't I respect?  
In any facts are your qualms grounded.

Sage Cigogne:

Be careful, of traps some gods might set.

(The Royal Blue Nightingale and the Silver Albatross lead the tweets in agreement with Sage Cigogne).

Orpheus:

With misgivings, don't let your heart  
Be filled, or doubts bubble unfounded.

#### **Text of Scene 2:**

Guide, Literary Yard, Litro, inspired, etc. Her 100+ articles (on art, theatre, film) have appeared in English and French. An independent scholar, Sultana Raza has presented papers related to Romanticism (Keats) and Fantasy (Tolkien) in international conferences.

<https://www.facebook.com/sultana.raza.7>

(Day. Grove of Whispering Ferns near a beach in Thrace. The Royal Blue Nightingale who'd witnessed the scene, reports to Sage Cigogne, the Silver Albatross, and other birds, and animals).

Royal Blue Nightingale:

The Argo asked Orpheus to play  
His lyre to chart its wondrous way  
Before it would leave the sheltered bay,  
To make it budge, or make it sway.

He helped entertain the heroes tough,  
He helped them mourn, he helped them cry,  
He could persuade the Argo to fly,  
His song could calm even waves quite rough.

(Sage Cigogne asks the Royal Blue Nightingale and the Silver Albatross to accompany Orpheus, and to send word back to him through other birds from time to time).

\*\*\*

### Text of Scene 3

(Day. Shore of Colchis. The Royal Blue Nightingale is singing, memorizing it's own record of Orpheus's journey, which only other birds can understand. It's telling this tale to the Silver Albatross who'd stayed behind to keep an eye on the Argo, and a flock of sea gulls, charging them to fly back to Sage Cigogne to tell him this glorious tale).

Royal Blue Nightingale:

At last when they approached the Golden Fleece,  
All the brave heroes were quite stumped,  
With disappointment, Jason was dumb,  
For a monstrous snake guarded the trees.

None was there who could fight,  
Such a huge monster long and coiled.  
In Aietes's intrigues they'd gotten embroiled,  
They were forced in a corner tight.

Defeated, they couldn't go back to Greece  
Only Orpheus and Jason, Medea took.  
Cautious, they hid in a nearby nook,  
Without the bard, they'd get no Fleece.

When Orpheus played his soothing tunes,  
The monster's eyes closed one by one,  
As sleepy magic his melodies spun.  
Serpent could have slept for many moons.

The reptile stirred, but Orpheus played,  
Jason sprang forth and Fleece cut down,  
All serpent could do was but frown.  
In sleep's hold the monster stayed.

As heroes cheered, said Argo with glee,  
'My faith in your skills are proven right  
Orpheus, you overcome with no fight'.  
Escaping, they made their way to the sea.

\*\*\*

#### **Text of Scene 4:**

(Day. The Grove of the Golden Fleece. The Royal Blue Nightingale is watching the sleeping Colchian Dragon covertly. The Colchian Dragon starts to wake up, and feels a burning sensation in many patches of its long body).

Colchian Dragon:  
Ouch, oh, ouch, what burns my skin?  
Where's my Fleece, and who are you?

(The Stymphalian Birds have been sent by the gods to spray down a poisonous white powder, so that the Colchian Dragon would be dissolved. Since the Stymphalian Birds have beaks of bronze, the powder doesn't affect them).

Stymphalian Birds  
It's far away now, with the Argo's crew.  
Quiet snake! Don't make such a din!  
You deserve an end that's inglorious.

Colchian Dragon:

Why are you burning my body so long?

Stymphalian Birds:

In scheme of gods, you have done wrong,  
You couldn't even kill weak Orpheus.

Colchian Dragon:

You too couldn't drown the magical Argo,  
Though you flew round and round.  
Oh, I keep my ear to the ground  
About your secret mission, I too know.  
So stop spraying that poisonous powder!

Stymphalian Birds:

You couldn't resist his sleeping spell.

Colchian Dragon:

On the past we needn't dwell.

Stymphalian Birds:

None will save you, do shout louder!  
You were supposed to kill silly bard,  
So with the Fleece could Jason flee.

Colchian Dragon:

Stop a bit! Just listen to my pleas!  
Ouch! These sprays lance like shards.  
You couldn't kill bard, or his lyre take;  
In your quest you all have failed,  
Why have you been so easily bailed?

Stymphalian Birds (flying away towards the sea, in pursuit of  
the Argo):

We can still make Orpheus quake,  
But of no use are you anymore,  
Now you'll rot to your core!

(The Colchian Dragon dies an agonizing death, as its long body  
gets burned by the poisonous powder. The Royal Blue

Nightingale sets off in pursuit of the Stymphalian Birds, but soon loses sight of them, as they can fly much faster and higher than real birds. It hitches a ride with the Silver Albatross, waiting for it on the shore. They try to find the Argo, asking for its whereabouts to every bird they meet).

**Video of Scenes 1&2:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nejUBtEIIU&list=PL8G4TNBMm0cRxVR7p8ork\\_7nHej1W7fPO&index=2&t=20s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nejUBtEIIU&list=PL8G4TNBMm0cRxVR7p8ork_7nHej1W7fPO&index=2&t=20s)

**Video of Scene 3:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7D8dWshpw4&list=PL8G4TNBMm0cRxVR7p8ork\\_7nHej1W7fPO&index=3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7D8dWshpw4&list=PL8G4TNBMm0cRxVR7p8ork_7nHej1W7fPO&index=3)

**Video of Scene 4:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvoeAR7ytZI&list=PL8G4TNBMm0cRxVR7p8ork\\_7nHej1W7fPO&index=4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvoeAR7ytZI&list=PL8G4TNBMm0cRxVR7p8ork_7nHej1W7fPO&index=4)

**VOTE FOR THIS PIECE** ★★★★★



# Poems

## *For My Mother*

*By: Angela Kosta*



### **Angela Kosta**

Angela Kosta was born in Albania in 1973. She has been living in Italy since 1995. She has published 9 books: novels, poems and fairy tales in Albanian and Italian. Angela Kosta is deputy editor-in-chief of the international newspaper 'Albania Press'. She is also a translator and her publications are seen in various literary magazines and newspapers in Albania, Kosovo and Italy.

She writes articles for the Italian newspaper 'Calabria Live.'

I have written several lines and endless verses with my tears,  
pain of love for her.  
Where are you, my mother?  
I wish to kiss your eyes with goodness once again!  
I want to caress your warm hands just the way you used to do.  
I want to feel the wrinkles of your untimely old age with my  
fingers,  
I don't want to see you in such lethargic condition.  
Your gray hair are the witness to eternal suffering;  
You are irreplaceable to me,  
You are my mother Sophie;  
I will always love you endlessly,  
Like a goddess,  
You will live in my soul;  
How can I believe that I will never see you again in this life!  
You won't be here anymore;  
Didn't you know that you would be in my breath?  
How can you die till I am alive?  
Your winsome smile reminds me of the glare of the stars.  
The universe of nostalgia fascinates me as you have given light  
to my life and raised me with the patience of sufferings.

So with great love for your good sake,  
Speak up,  
Just tell me at least one last word!  
How would I live like this?  
My mother,  
Please read these verses silently.  
Don't be silent!  
Ah, I wish I could challenge time and the evil of death.  
I will destroy the unfortunate fate and drive away the evils.  
I'll snuggle in your lap again.

Just as I did, when I was a kid.

The lap, where I found a tranquility and solace.

How happy I was then!

When your hands caressed my soul deeply

And my whole being blossomed.

Mother,

Please don't go like this to stay beyond the sky.

# Poems

## Four Thanksgiving Haiku

*By: Peggy Gerber*



### Peggy Gerber

Peggy Gerber is a poet and short story writer from northern New Jersey who is thrilled beyond words to have been chosen as the winner of the 2021 Open Contract Challenge. Her poetry chapbook *Stumbling in CrazyTown* will be published shortly and she is grateful to each and every person who was involved in the process. She is also very proud to have had one of her stories chosen for the anthology, *Natural Instincts: Tales of Witches and Warlocks*. It is a very fun book to read.

#### *Haiku I*

Turkeys give their lives  
for our Thanksgiving dinner-  
debt of gratitude

#### *Haiku II*

blood drips down faces  
as turkeys get sweet revenge-  
gobble gobble, bitch

#### *Haiku III*

stomachs stretch and bloat  
and still we keep on eating-  
Happy Thanksgiving

#### *Haiku IV*

calories don't count  
at our Thanksgiving meal-  
holiday wishes

# Poems

## *I Wish I Was a Three-Headed Fiery Dragon*

*By: Petrouchka Alexieva*



### **Petrouchka Alexieva**

Ms. Petrouchka Alexieva is a well-known as a feminist, a LOVE poet, distinguished scholar and TV persona. She is an “All American Scholar Award” recipient (2008). Speaking 8+ languages, her poems and scholarly works highlighted in TV show, varieties of venues and opening ceremonies. Ms. Alexieva’s name was included in NASA’s list of Mars Exploration Rover (2003) and Science Laboratory Rover (2011) capsules.

I wish I were a three-headed fiery dragon  
And solve all my problems at once.  
As you know, all my brothers travel at night  
Due to traffic control. That’s right!

The first head could lie down  
On a heavenly cloud  
Avoiding my insomniac time.  
So, I could get my beauty sleep  
Way above the commoners’ crowd.

Meanwhile, the second head,  
Could blow flames on the neck  
Of the people who only exist  
To inflict pain to the others. I have a list  
And I’d give them a glimpse  
How the furnace below really is.

A note of delight: Dante was right  
About hell, but my list is longer.  
My flames might be faster and stronger –  
Because I carry three fiery hells at once.

I almost forgot! I would have a third head!  
It would be flame-buoyant and wild.  
The two heads could stay sober and dry.  
In fact, I don’t mind to turn my domain  
To a beer-marathon den.

Folks, I would have no problem to host  
Everyday Barbie-cute in my back yard.  
Oh, pardon my spelling. What I was telling?

I meant “b-b-q” and...you’ve got the clue.

I swear! I’m not going to still sexy maidens.  
Oh, Holly Dragons’ heavens!  
This is an outdated fashion  
For this Internet age, but I’ll party with no brake.  
And keep on my neck  
Boys from fire-fighting descent.

They’ll point out a hose. Of course!  
It would be great, if on every event  
I could get free swimming lake there  
Just bursting my breath in the air.

No, no, no! I’m not going to flap my wings  
And silently disappear!  
My happy and dizzy third head  
Would weave its long neck and cheer:  
"Oh, what the heck!  
Hey man, toss me another barrel with beer!"

# Poems

## *I Wrote This Anyway*

*By: Ken Gosse*



### **Ken Gosse**

Ken Gosse usually writes rhymed, humorous verse in traditional meters. First published in First Literary Review—East in November 2016, his poetry is also in Pure Slush, Home Planet News Online, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Spillwords, and others. Raised in the Chicago, Illinois, suburbs, now retired, he and his wife have lived in Mesa, AZ, over twenty years with rescue cats and dogs underfoot.

I'm desperate to write but I find that tonight  
something's wrong with my muses—I can't light their fuses.

I prod and I poke them and try to provoke them—  
a slumbering bear unaware that I'm there—  
but they get revenge; circling round like Stonehenge  
barricading my brain claiming it's their domain,  
then when I'm fast asleep (which they know will not keep),  
they'll bedazzle my thoughts with some fluffery naughts  
till my thinker will ache, making sure I'm awake  
and I'll rise once again (that's the fate of old men).

So tonight I won't write. No! I'll give up the fight  
but abuse every muse in my dream-filled delight.



# Poems

## Make a Choice

*By: Cindy Rinnes*



### Cindy Rinnes

Cindy Rinne creates fiber art and poetry in San Bernardino, CA. A Pushcart nominee. Her poems have appeared in literary journals, anthologies, art exhibits, and dance performances. Cindy is the author of several books: *The Feather Ladder* (Picture Show Press), *Words Become Ashes: An Offering* (Bamboo Dart Press), *Today in the Forest with Toti O'Brien* (Moonrise Press), and more. Her poetry appeared in: *Unleash Lit*, *swifts & slows*, *Lothlorien*, *Mythos Magazine*, and others.  
[www.fiberverse.com](http://www.fiberverse.com).

I

I experience cloud mist on my face of flames.  
 Lighthouse beams guide me to the heavens and  
 your blue scales. I change the temperature as sparks  
 spit. Lightning flashes. You ignite a storm as you  
 begin to stir. Can Fishboy see the flaring in the sky?

II

*I implore, My womb carried our daughter's  
 heartbeat. I sang to her of a land of palaces.  
 Wondered if she would have a beak and  
 feathers, skin of scales? Made of air,  
 water, and fire, her pupils' slits.*

*She would've been a passionate creatrix  
 with a knowing beyond moon wisdom.  
 I would've told her stories of her pirate  
 brother. But she is gone. Awaken, Sky Dragon!  
 Flee to Lemurian caves to find your son.*

*I shout, Even gods and goddesses grieve alone!  
 But I needed you with me. You abandoned me  
 for Nirvana. I became a mermaid and only  
 heard you speak in whispers. I missed your  
 heartbeat next to mine. I left a lone feather*

*that burned in the wet when I transformed  
 into a phoenix. My purpose has changed. I will  
 be an animal guide for our son. It's time for you  
 to be his father. Fishboy's life is in danger. Stop*

*being selfish. Your solitude has lasted long enough.*

III

Guiding  
the cosmos like  
we do, a legacy  
for our son to defeat the beast  
find calm.

# Poems

## Silence

*By: Jasna Gugić*



### Jasna Gugić

*Jasna Gugić was born in Vinkovci, Croatia. She is the Vice-President for public relations of the Association of Artists and Writers of the World SAPS; Global Ambassador of Literacy and Culture for the Asih Sasami Indonesia Global Writers, P.L.O.T.S USA the Creative Magazine Ambassador for Croatia; and a member of Angeena International, a non-profit organization for peace, humanity, literature, poetry, and culture. She is also co-editor of the anthology, Compassion—Save the World, one poem written by 130 world poets.*

*Jasna is a multiple winner of many international awards for*

Silence in me  
strikes in lightnings  
of the sky, too gray  
and destroys my accumulated  
fear in the years  
of non-belonging.  
Silence in you  
does not know my fears  
and gets lost in the words  
of unknown people  
whose hands cannot  
touch the softness  
of our hearts.  
Don't let me stay silent  
because my love is  
louder than your smile.  
The loudest one.

VOTE FOR THIS PIECE ★★★★★

*poetry and literature, and her work has been translated into several world languages. Her first independent collection of poetry was published in 2021, a bilingual English-Croatian edition, entitled Song of Silence. She lives and works in Zagreb, Croatia.*

Many of her poems have been translated into several foreign languages and are represented in joint collections. Her poems have been published in magazines in around the world.

# Poems

## *Social media reacts to my death*

*By: Allen Ashley*



### **Allen Ashley**

Allen Ashley is a British Fantasy Award winner. He is based in London, UK and works as a developmental editor and a creative writing tutor. He is the founder of the advanced science fiction and fantasy group Clockhouse London Writers. His latest book is the poetry collection "Echoes from an Expired Earth" (Demain Publishing, UK, paperback 2021).

Website: [www.allenashley.com/](http://www.allenashley.com/)

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

Social media reacts to my death:

A few kind people post  
sad or care emojis on  
Facebook. And if you want  
to make it laugh or angry,  
I'm in no position to stop you.

I still don't merit a blue  
tick on Twitter that's now called X.  
I never really sought verification,  
justification, or any sort  
of shun.

An unexpected alliance of family  
and friends starts a Go Fund Me  
page to bring me back from Hades,  
Heaven, Limbo, or the North  
Middlesex Hospital  
For a fiver, you can sponsor  
an ear or two fingers.  
The stretch goal is a couple of thousand,  
which might restore my heart,  
my soul, my intellect.  
All donations are strictly  
voluntary.

**VOTE FOR THIS PIECE** ★★★★★

# Poems

## Tempus

*By: Kate MacDonald-Dunbar*



**Kate MacDonald-Dunbar**

Kate MacDonald-Dunbar is a retired septuagenarian who started to write just over sixteen months ago. She has many hobbies, but writing helps to fill an insomniac's dark quiet hours. She has had seventeen poems and six short stories published, online and in print: Chris Fielden's "Nonsensically Challenged," for charity. High Shelf Press volume XXIII. WinglessDreamer. Spillwords Press. 805 Lit and Art. Funny Pearls. Little Old Lady Comedy. Dillydoun Review. The World of Myth Magazine.

Time, is it friend or foe? Each minute can speed up, or lag behind. Be assured, if all is sorrow pain and despair, every second will creep slowly by. This can make you feel as though you are being pinned down by gravity, limbs heavy, breath constricted.

Perhaps there's a slight feeling of ennui. Lackluster or low-spirited? Then each hour will wrap around you to nullify and dilute your spirit even more. Drab grayness will seep into every crevasse of your soul.

Are you joyful today? Is the sun a shimmering orb brightly shining, while a slight breeze cools you? Do you find the scent of flowers all-pervading, while your love is close, holding you in a warm embrace?

That is when, like a flash, time will speed past, so quickly that hardly a moment will be captured within your memory. The saying is that time and tide wait for no man. The actuality is that time would not even wait for the tide, so inexorable is it. Therefore, time is neutral, it is your mind that controls your perceptions. Might it be the case that while in that dark place of despair, there is nothing to distract you? Darkness nullifies you. Then the coin flips.

Here is joy, laughter, love. Being surrounded by the trappings of this scenario, you are overwhelmed by warmth and understanding. People know and care for you. There are many distractions.

We are not machines, nor do we require balance to function. We can lean towards happiness and negate sorrow. Let time dance to your tune, grasp your vision, and tap out your own rhythm.



# Poems

## *The Curse Of Consumption*

*By: Lynn White*



Lynn White

Lynn White lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. She was shortlisted in the Theatre Cloud 'War Poetry for Today' competition and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net and a Rhysling Award. Her poetry has appeared in many publications including: Apogee, Firewords, Capsule Stories, Gyroscope Review and So It Goes. Find Lynn at: <https://lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com> and <https://www.facebook.com/Lynn-White-Poetry-1603675983213077/>

I can hardly remember my early life  
when I wiggled and wriggled  
embryo-like  
blindly  
consuming  
all before me.  
I know I sensed the warnings  
not to bite off more than I could chew,  
but consumer of cliches that I was,  
I carried on regardless  
making a meal of everything  
I could swallow,  
even the words.  
I could feel  
that  
change  
was coming  
and eventually  
it happened!  
I made it happen!

My curse became a blessing  
and I broke out  
of my hard carapace,  
split open the shell  
that had become my prison,  
did my best to leave it behind  
to have a look at the world outside  
and continue my cruise of consumption.

Nothing was sacred  
I ate it all

and grew fat,  
so fat,  
too fat.  
So fat I felt ready to explode.

And then it happened,  
I swear,  
it was like a nuclear explosion  
inside me  
all the dust and debris of decadence  
solidifying  
into something unspeakable,  
mushrooming  
into something unintelligible  
to be spewed out  
of my big accursed mouth.

I don't know what  
will become of me now.  
I don't know what  
I will become now.

# Poems

## *The Haunting of Marilou*

*By: Carmen Baca*



### **Carmen Baca**

Carmen Baca taught high school and college English for thirty-six years before retiring in 2014. Her command of English and her regional Spanish dialect contributes to her story-telling style. Her debut novel *El Hermano* published in April of 2017 and became a finalist in the NM-AZ book awards program in 2018. Her third book, *Cuentos del Cañón*, received first place for short story fiction

Autumn red, orange, and yellow attract our attention,  
A reminder to some that death of summer approaches  
While others rejoice over the festive holidays to come.  
Cool October breezes scatter dry leaves helter skelter,  
And Marilou counts the days until All Hallow's Eve  
As she plots and plans her favorite night of the year.

Ghastly decoration, costume creation, spooky anticipation:  
Monsters come alive with cotton, crepe, sticks and bones.  
Her mother sets boundaries—these rooms only, not those.  
October is hers; each day a new skeleton or spider appears,  
Until the last one, almost anti-climactic, in a house filled  
With ghouls and ghosts and goblins for weeks already.

This Halloween—her first Haunted House visitation,  
She'd imagined it all year. In a real medieval castle  
On a rocky hill where a famous horror movie filmed.  
News of dangers and deaths during shootings leaked.  
City leaders, to prove rumors wrong, touted tourists,  
Money their motivation to approve the sinister location.

Marilou bounded with her friends onto the crowded bus  
Filled with lovers of horror, young, old, and in between.  
A narrow, winding road ended at the wooded hilltop,  
Halted at a towering turret of dark red brick. Sunset  
Loomed, turning the jovial mood downright creepy.  
The fearful feigned fortitude; the eager led the way.

A majestic dwelling, the dreary great room palatial,  
An ornate fireplace large enough to hold them all,  
The one from the movie that devoured an actress  
In fiery, flaming glory at the end. An evil emanated

anthology in 2020 from the same program. To date, she has published 5 books and close to 50 short works in online literary magazines and anthologies. She and her husband live a quiet life in the country caring for their animals and any stray cat that happens to come by.

From the dark mouth, Marilou felt it in her spine.  
Feeling silly, she shook it off, ready to have her fun.

Stygian halls, spiral staircases, cobwebs everywhere,  
Haunting, disturbing music playing softly elsewhere.  
They climbed cold granite steps to a circular landing.  
Three hallways lay ahead. A sign read, "one by one."  
A couple disobeyed, their laughing echoes following.  
Visitors vanished into obscurity till only she remained.

Marilou stood, unsettled. *Do I dare? Do I go back?*  
Breathed deep, took her turn, and walked right in.  
She went neither left nor right, heading arrowlike,  
Aimed at the end of a tunnel where darkness reigned  
Over candlelight. Passing by silhouettes and sighs,  
She gasped when foul, fetid air hit her in the face.

Hands touched her arms and hair from the shadows,  
Feeble moans turned to growls behind thick walls  
On either side. She muttered, "Is this all there is?"  
Disappointment hit her hard. The feeling didn't last.  
Snapping jaws and snarls closing in sounded real.  
Marilou's eerie walk quickened to a frantic run.

An unseen door on the left flew open, huge arms  
Wrapped her in a tight embrace, lifted, and spun.  
Vanished with her into the black, eyes blinded.  
A scream cut short, a snap, crunching, dripping  
Echoed off the castle walls, amplified, booming.  
Everyone fled, some filling cars, others on foot.

The desperate search for Marilou lasted weeks  
Until winter snows covered them all in white.  
The City nailed shut the castle doors in shame.  
And the town, well, it was never quite the same.  
Entered a phase of before Marilou went missing,  
And after when she haunted them on Halloween.

# Creative Youth Art Gallery

*Gobble Gobble*

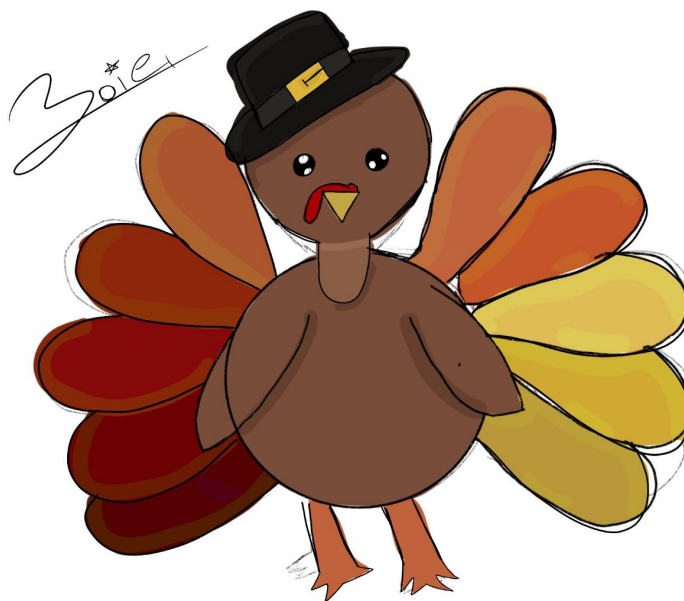
*By: Zoie M. Montoya*



**Zoie M. Montoya**

Zoie M. Montoya is an twelve-year-old who loves to tell stories, draw, stream and hang out with the people she loves.

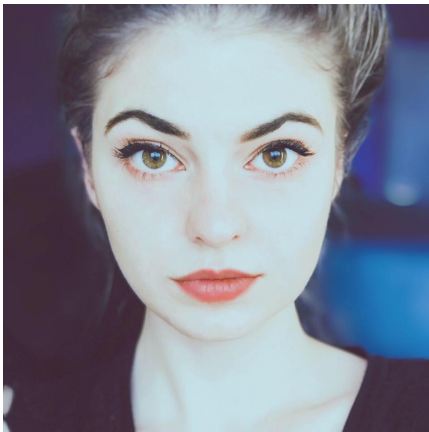
Oh! And, looks forward to the day that she will become CEO of The JayZoMon Dark Myth Company!.



# Art Gallery

*Are You Thankful?*

*By: Boryana Ananieva*



## **Boryana Ananieva**

Boryana Ananieva is from Bulgaria who works and study graphic design. Boryana is currently in her 4th year in university, but she always had had a passion for drawing. Boryana aspires to become a professional illustrator and believe that when it comes to art, talent has little to do with it. Practice is the main drive to becoming better, along with patience (of course).



**VOTE FOR THIS PIECE** ★★★★★

HOME 95



# Art Gallery

## Blood Continues Reign

*By: Rebecca Ilich*



### Rebecca Ilich

If something appears a bit familiar with Rebecca Ilich, it's because it's Rebecca C. Lofgren all grown up. Although she's in her 30s, she has an impressive publishing history behind her name, including being a part of this magazine since issue one and her book of poetry and art **Book of Dreams** being consumed all around the world. Despite the success in the literary market, Rebecca left it to venture into podcasting with her husband & brother. She enjoyed robust achievement for the past five years, now living back in Southern California with her husband and furry children, Rebecca has returned for to The World of Myth!



VOTE FOR THIS PIECE ★★★★★

HOME 96

# Art Gallery

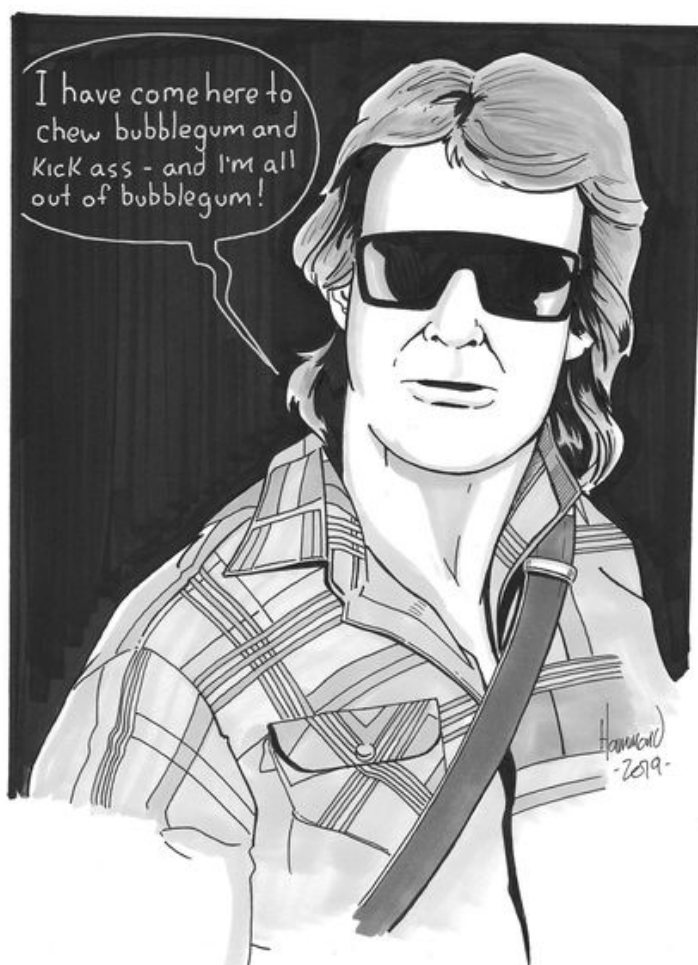
## *Chew Bubblegum and Kick Ass*

*By: Dan Hammond*



### **Dan Hammond**

Dan Hammond hails from Fergus, Ontario, Canada. At the age of 40 Dan attended the Toronto Fan Expo and was impressed with the talent that he saw in the Artist Alley section. Dan then took up a pencil and has been drawing ever since (he's 46 now) Since then, Dan had provided cover art for the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Captain Canuck and Northguard comics. Dan has also provided art for kids books, movie posters, novel covers, logos, t-shirts and decals. Dan is also the creator/publisher of his own original series titled, Seth the Elf and Alien Hillbilly.



**VOTE FOR THIS PIECE** ★★★★★

HOME 97



# Art Gallery

Garruk

*By: Vincent May*



## Vincent May

My Name is Vincent May (aka VAM) I have been working in the art industry for a little over 8 years now as a freelance visual development artist. My job is to take my clients visions from inside their head and put them on paper. This ranges anywhere from comic art, portraits, concept art, graphic & logo design, and much more. [ArtByVAM](https://www.artbyvam.com)



VOTE FOR THIS PIECE ★★★★★

HOME 98



# Art Gallery

*Lost*

*By: Michael A. Sauve*



## Michael A. Sauve

Michael A. Sauve has been drawing for as long as he can remember; even before he could write, he was drawing. He grew up in San Diego, California, moved to Colorado in 1996 to go to college for computer-aided graphic design and has been there ever since. Very few share the passion for the arts and poetry as he does. They are his reason for being.

For more of Michael's work visit his web site:

<https://mikey-madness.deviantart.com>



VOTE FOR THIS PIECE ★★★★★

HOME 99



# Art Gallery

*New Land*

*By: Ashley Shinault*



## Ashley Shinault

Ashley is a 30-year-old California native who is a healthcare worker by day and a mom first. She enjoys art in all of its forms, but her biggest inspiration, hands down, is Bob Ross, who teaches her there are no mistakes, only happy accidents.



VOTE FOR THIS PIECE ★★★★★

HOME 100

# MOVIE REVIEWS

## Review of The Marvels

*By: Kevin Hoskinson*



### Kevin Hoskinson

From humble beginnings working the box office at his local movie theater, he's worked his way to becoming a loving family man and professional bug exterminator. Growing up, he wanted to become an astronaut, a Ghostbuster, a dinosaur, and a Disney animator before he found his passion for writing as a teen. He studied film at Los Angeles Valley College with an emphasis on screenwriting and film criticism. He currently lives in Portland, Oregon with his



The newest film in the MCU is a sequel to three things. It has the job of continuing the story of Carol Danvers, Monica Rambeau and Kamala Khan. The first is of course from her own movie Captain Marvel, with the latter two being the Disney Plus shows Wanda Vision and Ms. Marvel. It may seem like an impossible thing to pull off but director Nia DaCosta is more than up for the task and delivers the funnest entry in the MCU in a long time.

The story starts where Ms. Marvel ended with Kamala mysteriously switching places with Carol Danvers. It's all very confusing to both of them and made even worse by Monica also getting pulled into the fray. It turns out there is a mysterious wormhole that entangles their powers and links their destinies together. While dealing with this new development, they must band together as a team to defeat Dar-Benn, a villain with a personal vendetta against Captain Marvel.

That is an oversimplification of the plot but it gets the point across. As many of these films go, it's not the plot that generally excites us; rather it's the characters, set pieces and whether or not it makes us feel anything. This film delivers so much good that it's hard to dwell on the bad so I'm not going to do that. The important thing is that it gives us everything we expect from a film in this genre. I had a smile on my face for a good portion of its runtime and walked out of it on

wife and two kids, You can follow him on Facebook, Twitter [@Kevin\\_Hoskinson](#), and Instagram [@kevinhoskinson](#)

a high note. Considering recent films in the MCU have failed to capture that feeling in any capacity, I'm beyond excited that this movie exists.

The chemistry between the three leads is especially magical. Being a fan of Kamala Khan/Ms. Marvel, it was a joy seeing her on the big screen and interacting with her lifelong hero and inspiration Captain Marvel.

Much like Agent Coulson meeting Steve Rogers and Peter Parker fawning over Tony Stark, Kamala has a strong admiration for Carol. She's a fan girl and it's hard to imagine us reacting any differently to meeting our heroes and it's incredibly charming and relatable. So much of that charm is because of Iman Vellani, one of the best things to happen to Marvel in a long time. Brie Larson continues to kick butt as Captain Marvel and Monica herself, Teyonah Parris, is incredible as usual.

The movie really takes off when they get over the initial shock and learn how to use their powers in sync with one another. Before that happens though, there are scenes of utter chaos that are perfectly captured so we know what's happening every step of the way. Even if you haven't watched every single MCU show and movie until this point you get a good idea of their powers and can

enjoy it for what it is. Once they learn what the other is capable of they work off of each other in an organic and beautiful way. The Marvel's is a really fun intergalactic romp. The villain is fairly cut and paste with motivations we've seen before but that doesn't matter. What matters is that the MCU has a new power team and my favorite since The Guardians Of The Galaxy made their debut. Captain Marvel, Photon and Ms. Marvel are so much fun to be around and I hope we get to see more of them in the future.



3.5 out of 5



# BOOK REVIEWS

*By: Michael A. Arnold*

Author and/or  
Narrator



## Michael A. Arnold

Michael A. Arnold is a graduate of the University of Sunderland and Northumbria University. He is based in North East England, and has previously published essays and short fiction. His influences include George Orwell and Robert Frost.

It can be easy to assume the author and the narrator are almost always the same person, but they are not. Then problems start. Sometimes they are one and the same, and the opinions or attitudes that are expressed on the surface are the actual opinions of the author, but we should not assume this is always the case. *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger was written in the voice of its main character, Holden Caulfield, not Salinger's own. That book was written in first person, showing Holden's personality through his narration and perspective, but there are times when the relation between the author and the narrator is a lot more complicated.

Imagine a scene where a policeman is chasing a murderer through an empty office at night, at the end of a murder mystery story. What can happen, to build the tension of the scene, is the narration and prose becomes split between the chasing policeman

and the fleeing murderer. This is showing their two perspectives of the same events. The policeman is slowly moving along, trying not to make much sound, ducking behind walls, or looking inside rooms while (to him) the murderer could be anywhere nearby, waiting for the best time to attack. From the murderer's perspective, they keep hearing the policeman walking around in the darkness, or see them with their gun ready, moving through the gloom. This is a pretty typical scene in mystery or crime novels, and having two opposing perspectives is a great way to build suspense. Neither perspective is, clearly, from the author's perspective, but instead they are from the characters' perspectives – even if it isn't in first person.

But then imagine the writer has built the story in such a way that the murderer's actions are understandable or sympathetic, or perhaps that they are innocent of the crime everyone else thinks

they are guilty of. There we could have two conflicting but also understandable perspectives of the scene, or conflict. The policeman, presumably sympathetic to us, is just trying to do his job and keep himself safe, and the murderer (or accused murderer) is trying to stay hidden and get away – imagine they now know how they can clear their name and just need to escape the chase, kind of like *The Fugitive*. Both characters will very different ideas and thoughts during the scene, and the author is in effect acting like a god and entering the minds of two very different people, although both fictional. With something, like this, more nuanced, we are unlikely to get small details making us dislike either person, the policeman or the murderer/accused, and small details are very revealing about how people (characters and the author) see the world. Look hard enough and you will notice how often small details and word choices are used to influence the way a reader feels about a character or an event. When describing Rita Skeeter in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, her hands are described as ‘mannish’. This is in a scene where Harry Potter, the protagonist of the series, is present but this is not Harry’s description, it is Rowling’s. It is being used to create a certain impression of the character, and we are made to feel a certain way about Rita. It does not really matter for our purposes how the use of that word should be exactly interpreted, but what is clear is that the word ‘mannish’ was being used in a negative way. It is used to make the reader think something is wrong with the character. The use of words like this come from the author’s opinions and attitudes and are used intending to influence another person (the reader) to think the same – even if only for a moment. But why should a normal reader of books even care about this? After all, most of us are perfectly capable of coming to our own conclusions about things. Also, if we are being told to dislike a fictional character then so what? They are fictional, no one is getting hurt. There are books when the way we are made to feel about a character is not just intentional, it is also wrong, and the narrator is purposefully mistaken. Think about how Mr. Darcy is initially portrayed in *Pride and Prejudice*. This will most often happen with unreliable narrators, or in stream of consciousness style narratives, where our trust in the narrator is in some way undermined or something we ought to question. With Holden Caulfield or Forest Gump, events around characters are not being described objectively, but are being filtered through clearly distorted or incomplete perspectives. Caulfield lacks a real, deep understanding of the adult world, he also seems to have some form of PTSD or mental health issue following the suicide of one of his school friends. We get a lot of his character through what he says, but you also have to read between the lines to get more of the character and story too than the narrator is willing or able to tell us. Forest Gump is the same. You can think of unreliable narrators as being like the author writing in character, and in a sense an actor taking on a role. If you apply this attitude to fiction more generally, other more apparently objectively written novels, then the author becomes something like an interpreter and describer of events, even if those events are fictional. In this mindset, reading a book is like reading about another world – one where we get a single, subjective viewpoint on. In a sense, authors are untrustworthy when describing their own stories and creations, and there is a term for this: The Death of the Author. Essentially it is the idea that you, the reader, are also creating the story alongside the author because of the way you interpret every description and imagine every scene and character. This can be very fun and liberating when you read a book with this mindset. However, when you do

this, it is worth keeping in mind  
how tiny details like word choices  
are being used to influence the  
way you create that story in your  
head. It changes the way you read  
fiction.

# ART REVIEWS

*By: Michael A. Arnold*    Art and 'mythologies'



## Michael A. Arnold

Michael A. Arnold is a graduate of the University of Sunderland and Northumbria University. He is based in North East England, and has previously published essays and short fiction. His influences include George Orwell and Robert Frost.

**Q**uestion: what might be an art 'mythology'? It has been said that 'art' can be pretty much anything. A work of art can be a reflection of the world as it is, as it can be, a reflection of the artist's (or artists') inner world, or it can be just a small attempt to beautify the world in some small way. It has many uses and has many audiences. We all have opinions on what art is, and what it can do and say. Because of this it is impossible to describe art comprehensively.

This is thanks to an opening up of what art is and how it works that was started by the Modernists in the early 1900s and has been explored exhaustively throughout the rest of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Other debates around art opened up too – not just about, and a few 'mythologies' started to develop. Different kinds of art, and where they tended to be shown, became part of a 'mythology', a term that is here used intentionally vaguely. What is high art? What is good

art?

A room filled with art like you would find in a museum is in many ways just an illusion, an illusion of one kind of high culture. To keep things straight forward, high culture can be divided between the classical and the avant-garde – or the British Museum and the Tate Modern as it is here in the UK. A room filled with exhibits in either of those institutions can look and feel very different, but in one respect they are doing the exact same thing when you think of it. Both are an image of a world that does not really exist, either an illusion of a world eternally based on objective standards of 'high and noble' art, or a world where 'good art' is always new and exciting – where the proverbial envelope is always being pushed. Neither 'world' has much to do with the way most people encounter art in their everyday lives, which most people do without realizing it. The art found in those museums is all part of a 'mythology'. The grand, 'objectively beautiful', classical art found in (for an

example) the British Museum is in 'good' art is bold and challenging fact presenting an illusion of a grand, rarefied history of art. This is a world where beauty and artistic skill with echoing the past are the hallmarks of quality art. This is just a narrative, a story, and art history has always been more complicated than places like the pre-Raphaelites or the Impressionists were once seen as rebels to the art establishment, but as time moved on they become increasingly accepted and are now put alongside other classic works in a way that would have offended the original audiences (such negativity is almost always lost into a misty past eventually) and all this is shown alongside medieval or classical art, as if it all was a part of a graceful art evolution - only recently rebelled against by strange and baffling new methods and ideas, like Conceptual Art. This is a 'mythology' that has been purposefully constructed to sell not just your time in that space, but also that idea of art the space is presenting.

However, what is in the British Museum is often enjoyed more by audiences today simply because they are more familiar than the strange, avant-garde work you see in somewhere like the Tate Modern. In the Tate, the 'mythology' is around seeing the always new, the strange and unusual, the controversial. That

There are some classic or older pieces on display there, but typically this will be from the Modernist era – work from around the early part of the last century. Something like Picasso or Paul Klee, not what most people would think of as 'classic art'. The word 'mythology' here needs some unpacking, and it is not being used in the sense of Roman or Viking mythology. 'Mythology' in this sense is more like the way Roland Barthes used the term in his 1957 book *Mythologies*, Or perhaps what Slavoj Žižek, the Slovenian philosopher that is very popular right now, would call 'ideology'. What is meant is a kind of false appearance or false mindset that has been built up for a specific purpose. Imagine you are walking through your nearest city center and see a small café designed to look like a 1950s diner – complete with music and staff uniforms that are evocative of that era. Stepping into such a place is supposed to feel like you are stepping back in time or stepping into a different world – that is a 'Mythology' in the sense it is being used here.

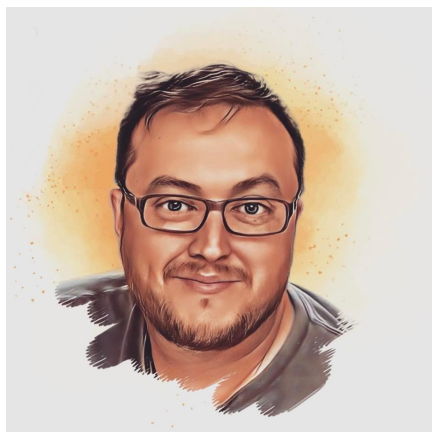
Art establishments are like that 50s-style diner. When you enter most galleries you are entering another world. You are made to feel a certain way through all the different design decisions, even in the building itself, which you might not notice consciously but

are small details that together add to a larger whole. The effect is to ensure you are in the right frame of mind to appreciate the art shown in the very way the person who owns the building intended you to. 'Classical' art exhibits or establishments are often designed to create rarefied airs, where the viewer feels like they are an ennobled part of 'high culture'. Exhibits and galleries for more modern, experimental art are designed to put you in a more bohemian, experimental mood, where your mind is opened to all the innumerable possibilities of what art is and can be. In a very real way, the context around a piece contributes to its reception. Because of this, the strange and seemingly random can be appreciated as serious art, be it modern or 'classic.'

# COMMENTARY FROM THE FOUNDER

*Welcome to my Soapbox!*

*By: David K. Montoya*



**David K. Montoya**

For a good part of two decades David K. Montoya was an active writer, artist and business entrepreneur in the micro-publication world. In 2013, turned his pen in for a microphone and became a podcaster for the following five years—and even did a small stint in independent Hollywood. But, now, he's come home and is ready to begin weaving new tales for this magazine.

**H**ey, Boys and Girls! Wow, it has been a long time since I popped in here, but I have some company news that I want to talk about. As you can see, there are no Board of Directors Minutes. While I have them from March of this year, writing a Commentary from the Owner is more fitting.

An incident with corporate filings cost the company a heavy fine. I learned about it late Friday evening, November 17th. The penalties would continue weekly until The JayZoMon Dark Myth Company was found to comply with the violation for which it was penalized. I knew that I would have to address this at the upcoming Board of Directors meeting that Sunday. I have prided myself on how transparent I am and will

continue to be to the public, so I will be perfectly honest when I say that while trying to figure out how to correct things, the thought of folding shop was at the forefront of my mind. But I was reminded why I do all of this, not for the money and not for the notoriety, but to have a place for creators to hone their talent and offer multiple platforms for their voices to be heard.

It was around two in the morning when I concluded my plan and knew I had to bring it in front of the Board of Directors in ten hours. That morning, I did something I am not known to do very often. I pulled the Owner's Card. Under corporate Bylaws, as the sole proprietor, I can make changes to the company without the approval of the Board of Directors.

That morning, I commandeered

the agenda for the meeting and gave myself time to speak as the majority stockholder. I made a list of things I was prepared to do to put things back in order. As normal, everyone came into the Board Room; after the roll call, the Chairman gave me the time, and I began to discuss how we fell into violation and the \$5,000-a-week fine until the situation was resolved.

I explained that I would re-license the company, remove all corporate titles, and return to management roles. In doing so, I would dissolve the Board of Directors and its members, but those with management titles would remain in their positions, and I would be solely responsible for the company's business dealings.

For those who have been around for a while, I have simply reset the company to pre-PCE days. Everyone you know is still in their positions, and those who were executives, I am looking at new roles for you to take on. I pray that this opens the floor for more creativity to be ushered in and less about the overhead and the bottom line.

I have always said, "I will do what is best for business," so this is not a forever thing. As long as it serves as the best option, the company will continue down its pathway, but if it does not, we will return to

the corporate ways.

Thank you for stopping in and reading this. From here on, I will also stop in every month with my Soapbox about everything in the company, like the old days!

Until next time!

With respect to you all!



David K. Montoya  
Founder of The World of Myth  
Magazine  
And Other Stuff Too.





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