

THE WORLD OF MYTH



MAGAZINE

ISSUE 125  
APRIL, 2024

AGOMBAR  
ASHLEY  
BROWN  
CURETON  
DEBRAAL  
DELMAS  
EM  
GERBER  
GOSSE  
KOSTA  
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ONYECHE  
PATRICK  
RUMPEL  
SALETE  
WHITE

STORIES  
ART  
CONTESTS  
REVIEWS  
AND MUCH MORE!





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### Masthead

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The World of Myth is published for anyone interested in quality Fantasy, Horror, Humor, Action/Suspense, or Science Fiction and related genre materials. All issues are posted on the Web.

THE WORLD OF MYTH



MAGAZINE

# INTRODUCTION

*Hey! We're Back!*

*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 5 years. She is also Editor in Chief for *The JayZoMon Dark Myth Company, LLC*.

Her published works include *Eternally Bound*, *Eternally Bound PCE Exclusive Edition*, *The Chosen*, *The World of Myth Anthology Volume 3*, *Full Moon &*

**H**appy Earth Day

*Mythketeers!*

Okay, so maybe I'm a day or two late but it was Earth Day this week. I am back in Canada, and I can't say I am enjoying the Springtime weather. It has pretty much rained since I got here, with one horrid, but brief moment of snow. April is a rainy month anyway, having between 16-18 days of the soggy stuff, but we have definitely had more than that at this point.

So, I am not happy. I want sun. I want tree's covered in that lime green haze that means new leaves. I want flowers and warm sun on my face.

I want to go back to California. LOL!

But here we are, it is what it is and I guess I will just have to stay busy and fill up my time.

This month see's a larger magazine than last month and we are still welcoming all our new contributors. Like I say every month, it warms my heart to see all our regular's send stuff

in and makes me giddy with joy when I see new names.

I would like to congratulate Tim on the final installment of his series *The Teacher*. If you have been following along you are as sad as I am to see it end.

Congratulations to Tatiana Salet for being the cover art for this issue! You can check out the whole picture in our Art Gallery. The Open Contract Challenge is winding down and you only have a few days left to get your pitch in. Remember, this is only the pitch stage.

You still have lots of time to actually finish the work itself, so don't panic. Never panic. Until it's time to panic. I will let you know when it's time to panic. Speaking of panic...our 20th anniversary issue is coming! September is right around the corner. I know, I know, we haven't even had summer yet and I'm already talking about Fall. But we are doing a special anniversary issue to celebrate and I want to showcase the best you have. I want your sci-fi, fantasy, action, drabble, flash



*Howlin: A Werewolf Anthology, Monsterthology 2, Full Moon & Howlin: A Werewolf, The Chosen, Natural Instincts, The World of Myth Anthology Volume 4, Musing From Me, Unwelcomed: Stories of Hauntings and possessions, Penance and The Monster Within: Tales of A Tortured Mind.*

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

She has edited thirty books and all of the works on The World of Myth Magazine for the last five years.

and poetry. I want it all! Humor, horror and the best you have to offer for art! Children's tales and art from children! I want this magazine to outshine our 15th year.

Which was the first year I was editor. I have been at this for 5 years and I want it bigger, better and badder than the last one I was part of.

I know we can do it. So, I am asking, all our regular contributors, our past contributors, and all new contributors, to start working on your piece now.

Polish it up, and make it shine for the world.

I also, again, want to take a moment and thank all those that keep contributing to our GoFundMe page. Every bit is helping a lot and we couldn't keep doing this without you. Within the next month or so, we will be starting a Patreon page offering things at each level that are fun, interesting and possibly useful!

We do still have advertising opportunities available for a very reasonable price, and you can buy ad space in our upcoming comic series American Smash!

I am going to close this intro by saying Happy Belated Earth Day. I hope you all did a little bit to help preserve this big blue ball we all share.

Until next month,



Stephanie J Bardy  
Editor of Earthworms and  
seedlings.

# Drabble & Flash

*Daedalus Designs Ltd.*

*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)

**A**nd this year's Cretan Prize

for Architecture goes to... Daedalus, for his labyrinth in the Court of King Minos at Knossos.

The committee realizes that this award may attract some controversy as the new maze structure is centered upon and incorporates the old prison area and a small menagerie that housed inimical cryptids. Animal charities have been vociferous in their opposition to the labyrinth's construction. We are here only to judge the final execution of the architectural plans.

This work is an intellectual and physical puzzle, a stone codex like no other. Ladies and gentlemen – and other iterations including magical beings and deities – you are invited to select one date from a trio of specially planned guided tours. Daedalus himself will lead and accompany you. The complexities of this construction are such that you are advised not

to attempt solo exploration.

A genius never stands still. So, even as he may take a moment to reflect upon his achievement, we hear that Daedalus is already planning his next venture. Which we can reveal is The Waxed Wing Flying School, in conjunction with his prodigal prodigy son Icarus. Sure to appeal to the Summer tourists who flock here for that Greek island sunshine.

We wish them well with this new project and, excuse the pun, hope it gets off the ground.



# Drabble & Flash

## Ugly As Can Be

By: Gabriella Balcom

“Ugh!” Tamryn grimaced. voices.



**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>

The three-foot-tall spruce leaned to the right, foliage sparse and raggedy. “Surely you’re not serious. It’s ugly as can be.”

Ernie sighed. “Hey, you’re the one who insisted we get plants for our home, so they could help purify the air.”

“Yeah, but I saw *plants*, not a mostly dead twig. I wanted to have a choice. To be able to look at dozens of beautiful varieties, and choose the nicest. I didn’t mean getting stuck with something like *that*. It’s awful.”

“Everywhere else was sold out or closed, so we don’t exactly have a lot of choices. You know that.”

She sulked when they left, tree strapped to their roof, but helped transfer it to a nice ceramic planter at home.

During the night, the spruce’s foliage shook slightly. Two scorpions, a female and a male, dropped to the floor, immediately growing to many times their original size.

Tamryn and Ernie woke after the enormous creatures stung them, and screamed until they lost their

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“Why are you fussing?” the male scorpion demanded.

“You know why,” the female retorted.

“You’re the one who wanted pets.”

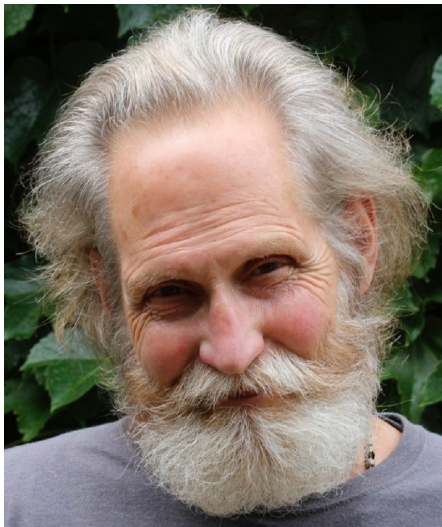
“Yes, but *look* at these two.” The female glared at him. “They’re ugly as can be.”

**The End**

# Drabble & Flash

## Leeches

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 Impspired. *Dreamers* a collection of short stories was published in March 2022, by Clarendon House Publishing. *Something Better* adystopian 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

**W**e were sitting on the

city dock. I was crying, "I don't want you to leave."

He put an arm around my shoulder. "It's okay, little man," his term of endearment for me, his five-year-old kid brother. "I'll write every day." Ron was eighteen and my hero. Early next morning he was leaving to go to war.

Later we walked along the shore. I got covered with leeches and he sat me down and picked them off, one by one. I'll never forget his gentle touch, or how he dried my tears. Or that last day we were ever together.



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

we [www.theviewfromlonglake.wordpress.com](http://www.theviewfromlonglake.wordpress.com)st of Minneapolis, Minnesota. All of his work can be found on his blog at .

# Drabble & Flash

## Hemlock

*By: Nikki Delmas*



### Nikki Delmas

Nikki Delmas is a name that has been steadily rising in the world of literature and art, making a mark as a talented author and artist with a diverse range of interests and accomplishments. Her journey from a fledgling UK author to a multifaceted creative professional is nothing short of inspiring. With a profound love for Classical Art and Architecture, English literature, Fantasy Fiction, and Sci-Fi, Nikki's creative spirit knows no bounds.

**M**r. Perigo was dead. There was no doubt in this matter. It had been established by his mourning widow, the clergyman, and the undertaker. He was as dead as an inanimate object could be. As dead as a cartwheel abandoned in a canal, as a flickering candle in a haunted mansion, as a penniless poet's inkwell. Take your pick, he was defiantly a goner.

It is important to establish this here, alas the rest of the proceedings will lack the fantastical element the author had intended.

The only person to be seen at Mr. Perigo's funeral was his grieving widow Rebecca, who had, after much effort, produced a tear or two. It was a sorrowful sight to behold on that grey and dank January morning as the mist crept around the graveyard's permanent residents. However, if you were of a keen eye, you might well have spotted a dark, cloaked figure leant nonchalantly

against a twisted Yew.

Mary Hemlock was a former employee of the Perrigo's and, as she watched on with interest to the proceedings, chuckled to herself.

Don't be misled, Mary was of sound mind. Her dark, intelligent eyes glinted from under her black cowl hood. Several magpies gathered in the branches above her head and around her feet, a murder of crows. The birds were greedily feasting on earthworms surfacing from the soil. Their blind eyes searching for some darkness more intense than the earth below them.

Dark attracted dark and knew when in the presence of a master. The wintry chill had little effect on Mary. She was the cold that crept under your doorway at night, the foreboding that stirred you from your sleep, the hail scratching at your window. Nothing could take away the warmth from her soul, it had been extinguished long ago. Her heart a pendulum swinging in a dark and empty void.



Children shrunk away when they met her in the street. Newborns would howl in her presence as confused mothers fussed to calm them. She took no heed, had no time for the pleasantries of town folk as they bustled around with their cheery dispositions. When their fairytale turned sour, the lovers tryst bore fruit, the Prince became the Beast, when there was no way out, they knew where to find her. Desperate times called for desperate measures, and she charged handsomely for such services.

# Drabble & Flash

## Drone On - Part One

*By: Kate MacDonald-Dunbar*



### Kate MacDonald-Dunbar

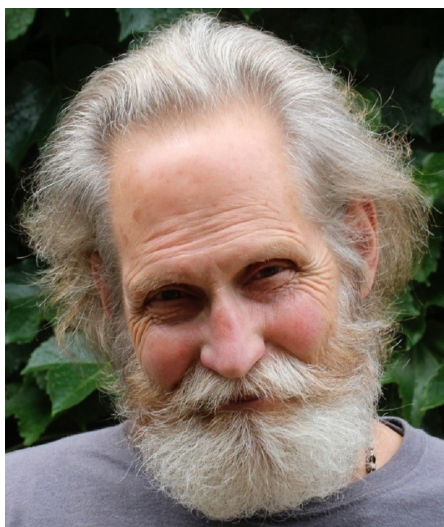
Kate MacDonald-Dunbar is a retired septuagenarian who started to write just over sixteen months ago. She has many hobbies, but writing helps to fill an insomniac's dark quiet hours. She has had seventeen poems and six short stories published, online and in print: Chris Fielden's "Nonsensically Challenged," 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.

I hear the cleaner drones. It must be six am already. Why we are disturbed at such an unreasonable time I cannot fathom. Annoyingly, it has been this way for as long as I can remember. I wake before the sound even reaches me now. I squirm a little and feel the chair realign to my body contours. My console lights up, and I take my first sip of coffee substitute. I have no concept of what real coffee tastes like, so there is nothing for me to compare this with. Before I start the day, I will record my thoughts. It is mandatory, although we are assured that nothing we say will be heard, each night the previous day's comments are erased. The process is to let us vent our feelings, so nothing festers into discontent. That done, there is a bleep, to let me know my Breakfast pill has been warmed. I move my head to the correct tube and swallow it. It is my favourite, eggs, and bacon. Next, time for ablutions. I surrender myself to the bots, and after I am clean and sweet-smelling again, they return to their cubby hole. It is almost time for me to begin my day of data filing. I check for new messages first. Ah, Dave has challenged me to another game of Quarto after our Dinner pill. I send him a tick and a thumbs-down emoji. He knows that I mean he is going down. It is a complex game, and poor Dave's linear brain cannot cope with the elaborate 3D concept. He is improving, but it is a slow process. On reflection, what else is there to do? It is at enervating times like these I find myself longing for a reset.

# Drabble & Flash

By: Jim Bates

## The Alien of Orchard Lake Teaser Chapter Ten



**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 Impspired. *Dreamers* a collection of short stories was published in March 2022, by Clarendon House Publishing. *Something Better* adystopian 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

### The Story so Far:

For fifty years, Ebar, an alien from the planet Rykos, has lived on Earth in the form of a human, Kyle Johnson. When the soft-spoken Ebar (Kyle) gets in a fight (one he didn't start) at his job at a sewage treatment plant, he is put in jail. Unfortunately, Ebar's jailer overhears him trying to contact his home planet. The consensus is that Ebar is crazy. He is put into The System and comes under the care of newly hired social worker Jeremy Slater who befriends Ebar. Jeremy's egotistical boss Richard Andrews thinks Jeremy is nuts to care so much about Ebar and makes life hard for him. Jeremy's friend and fellow social worker Julie is on Jeremy's side. Together they try to figure out how to do what's best for Ebar and eventually come up with a plan. Fortunately, Ebar agrees to the plan that Jeremy presents to Andrews and the team at a meeting.

### Chapter 10 Teaser:

Later that day, Andrews called Phil Jorgenson, who answered right away. "What's up? How'd it go?"  
"Great. I'm taking over the case of Kyle Johnson."  
"What about the case worker? That Jeremy guy?"  
"Gone. I booted him. I've got the case now"  
"Congratulations," he said.  
"Thanks. Give me a week or two with him. I'll get him to believe I'm on his side, and that it's all to the good that I treat him as an alien. I'll tell him that the publicity will do him wonders. He'll make a lot of friends. Stuff like that. I'll bet he's kind of lonely."  
"Brilliant, Rich. Sounds like a good plan to me." Then he paused.  
"You expect any trouble from Slater?"  
Andrews shook his head even though Jorgenson couldn't see it. "Not a bit. The guy's unbelievably passive. Not to mention naïve."



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).

"So... no issues? What about that Julie? Aren't she and Slater friends?"

"If you're implying, 'Are they an item?' the answer is no."

"No? You sure?"

"Absolutely. She a lesbo from the word go. Nothing to worry about from her."

"Good to hear. So, you're all set?"

"Yep. I get the file tomorrow morning, and then he's all mine."

"Congratulations, Rich. This will make you famous."

Andrews chuckled. "I know. You, too."

Jorgenson laughed. "I'm looking forward to it."

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

# Children's Literature

## For the Show

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

**T**he giant's fists were slow, but the more punches Bull took from him the longer his brain took to react to each new attack. Blood streamed from Bull's nose, surely broken, and a cut above his left eye. The crowd was chanting Karloff's and Steve's names over and over, the names give to their champion. It seemed to look to Bull like he was finished before he even started.

*This is not where you are going to die,* the barbarian told himself. It was getting more and more difficult to believe that though. Bull hurt, everywhere, the pain the worst that he had ever suffered. He threw a wild left hook and felt it thud against the giant's bulk. Even that hurt, made worse still as the sound of the giant's laughter cut through the ringing sound that filled Bull's ears. Another blow from Karloff and Bull felt his stomach rise up toward his throat. Simultaneously he felt his feet leave the arena floor, he was flying, backward...

Maybe Dove's goddess Luna was calling him up to the black sky, the blanket of stars. He saw stars then, dizziness threatening to overwhelm him as Bull reached the arc of his rise skyward. The way back down was twice as bad as the way up. Disappointment that he was still in the fight, that the Master refused to end it. Bull realized that the way things were going he was going to die, and that it was going to happen sooner, not later.

"Wat you fink we do to him now, Steve?" the giant rumbled as Bull's body hit the sand. "Break der arm or der legs or der head maybe?"

*Oh, please no...*

Any air the barbarian's lungs did have, left his body in the form of a saddening wheeze.

"Ha, ha, ha, dat good finking, Steve," roared Karloff. "We break dis hero to pieces and see what him got inside."

Again, Bull felt himself rising up, into the air. This time he knew though that he was not being summoned by any goddess, at

his blog

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

least not yet.

“Break... Arms...” Bull then heard a voice whisper.

“Good for der show, hey Steve,” roared Karloff.

The giant changed the grip he had on Bull’s limp form, showing the feverish crowd his victim’s left arm. Bull screamed, a primal, animalistic cry of anguish as the giant began to twist.

“Stop... Playing...” whispered the voice.

In a moment of clarity, Bull discovered, the voice belonged to the tiny headed Steve.

SMACK. Instinctively the barbarian lashed out with an openhanded right cross. There was a crunching sound as Bull’s palm almost knocked Steve free of the tiny neck which kept Karloff and Steve together.

The giant dropped Bull.

“Hey, you hurt Steve,” Karloff grumbled. “No bodies has ever done nuffin like dat to Steve... Him only small and stuff...”

Bull waited, cowering on the sand of the arena floor, waiting for Karloff’s great boot to extract revenge. Nothing came though, no pain, no unconsciousness. Bull carefully opened his left eye as widely as he could manage, his right eye black and blue and sealed.

Karloff was a few feet away, having retreated. His focus was utterly upon the little head that lolled to the side, eyes closed.

“Steve... Steve...” the giant

whispered while his fat fingers poked at the little head. “You does not do da sleeping now; you must tell me what to do...”

The crowd screamed for Karloff to finish the fight, a fight that Bull wished was already over. The voice of the Master boomed orders to his champion. Karloff ignored them all.

“Steve?” he murmured, Bull thought that he could see genuine tears trickling down the giant’s cheeks.

Slowly rising to his feet, Bull searched for a weakness, for some move in his bag of tricks that he had not tried yet.

“Please be wake up, Steve...” begged Karloff. “Please not be dead now.”

Bull tried to concentrate of staying alive, but all he could think of was the poor head that he had just hit with such a forceful blow.

*Please don’t be dead, Steve,* Bull prayed, a silent prayer in his mind.

Then he saw the little face, nostrils flaring, alive, but unconscious.

*Oh, thank you Luna,* Bull thought, the barbarian releasing a sigh of relief.

He did not know if indeed Luna had heeded his and Karloff’s begging, or if faith even held any power wherever it was that he found himself. All Bull knew then was that it was now or never.

Taking a few tentative steps back,



Bull ran and then leapt at the weeping giant. His kick, aimed for Karloff's face, only reached up as high as the giant's throat, but in the end that was high enough. The giant's cry of shock and pain was more of a gargle. In slow motion, like an oak chopped down, Karloff collapsed to the sand and then spammed. There was a moment when the confused crowd did not know how to respond. Then their master, the Master, took back control and the masses followed his lead. "CHAMPION BULL... FINISH THE FALLEN!!" boomed the voice of the Master, an order, not to be refused. Bull limped forward and stood over the fallen figure of his enemy. Karloff still only had eyes for Steve. The odd sensation of falling had woken the tiny head back into consciousness. Bull could see the shock on Steve's face. The little head was obviously the brains of the duo, it had not yet dawned for Karloff that defeat meant death, even though he had been the source of that fate for so many of those who had faced him in the arena. The responsibility of champion of this arena was far too great a one for Bull to bear. A great axe fell from high above them and thudded, causing a cloud of sand to plume where it landed. Was it a gift from the girl dressed in the purple robes, something

preplanned, or thrown down from the pod from which the one known as the Master resided, Bull did not know. "TAKE UP THE AXE OF JUDGEMENT AND CLAIM YOUR VICTORY!!" the Master's voice demanded. The crowd chanted Bull's name, over and over, and the barbarian got a taste of the euphoria that came with being the greatest... The incredible feeling associated with being the Master's champion. The feeling of power that accompanied being the Master's killer. "Do it," commanded the woman dressed in purple. "Take up the blade and finish off the giant." Bull, even with only half an eye that he could open, saw evidence of the bloodlust reflected in the woman's very soul. *We are both fighting for her, Bull thought. Of course she does not care who wins, either way she gains favor with her precious Master...* In that moment, Bull understood there was only one way for him to retain his integrity, only one way that he could win on his terms. The crowd's volume rose to a whole new level as Bull bent down and took up the axe. Striding across the sand the few feet between him and the vulnerable giant, the barbarian then struck Karloff's temple with the butt of the weapon. "I refuse!" cried Bull, flinging the

weapon toward the girl. "Insolence!" hissed the one cloaked in purple. Bull's poor attack with the bulky weapon was struck by a flash of lightning that turned the axe to ash. The bolt of brilliant light then leaped from axe to Bull and struck the arm that made such a pitiful attack. Bull flew again, the jolt causing him to rise up and sail to his right. The world went black before he had the chance to land as what breathe the barbarian had left escaped him.

#

"That was stupid of you," said the voice of the one dressed in purple. She had noticed Bull's eyes fluttering as the barbarian woke up. "Where am I?" Bull wondered. He could tell that time had passed, but it was impossible to tell if it had been minutes, hours, or days. "In der dead bay," rumbled the voice of Karloff, out of Bull's range of vision. "Did you say DEAD bay?" asked Bull. "Yep," the giant confirmed. "It der place where der bodies go after der battle is over and dun." "Do they call this the dead bay because the bodies that normally come here are dead?" asked Bull. "Normally... Yes..." seethed the

lady dressed in purple. "This battle turned out differently though..."

"So we both lost, but we're still alive..?" asked Bull, unsure.

"No, me and Steve still goings to dead, Steve fink," rumbled the giant, his voice full of regret. "Der Master is determined our feet and it not going to be pretty for watching."

"The Master has determined your fate," corrected the woman. "You will be getting the fate that should have come to you already..."

"What, an execution?" asked Bull. "Head in a basket... A gift for the precious Master..?"

Struggling to turn and look at Karloff and Steve, Bull found that he was tightly bound to the mattress where he was lying. It was impossible to move even a little.

"Where is the spectacle in that?" asked the girl. "Of course, it will not be that simple."

"It not?" asked Karloff, surprised to discover this news. "Dat good..."

"No, the Master has his pets that he likes to feed when things don't quite go to plan," said the girl, smiling. "You, my barbarian, are very lucky you will not be punished the same way as my champion brute."

"So, me gets a fighter's chance?" Karloff said, hopeful. "You hears that Steve... Der Master can offers der mercy some time..."

"The Master?" laughed again the one dressed in purple robes. "Merciful?"

"Yeah... Der fighter and der pet faces it off in der pit..." suggested Karloff. "Me and Steve is strong enough to take down der lion, der wolf, even a bigger beast."

"What of a wyvern?" asked the girl

"Me gives us der fighter's chance," suggested the giant.

"Even if der beast is a why-fern... Whatever dat is..."

*My gold coins would be on you as well, giant,* thought Bull, but he did not state the words aloud.

"Then you have never faced a wyvern, and you certainly do not know the dragon that belongs to the Master," suggested the girl.

"Drag... On..?" muttered Karloff, murmuring something to his other head.

*So, Steve survived then. That's good news.*

"You've got this, Karloff and Steve," said Bull. "You make a great team."

"Dat wot Steve say," replied the giant.

"Blind faith and stupidity won't grant you victory," said the purple clad girl. "The Master will make sure of that."

"Nope," agreed the giant. "Der big muscles will be der fing which grant der victory... Me and Steve don't do faith or luck..."

"Me has had enough... I mean, I have had enough of you and your babbling..." grumbled the girl.

"Get out of my sight, both of you..."

Bull watched the girl vanish, and immediately the sensation that bound him to the bed released him.

"I guess that it is back to the cages then to await our feet," suggested Bull.

"Nah, we got time to stretch arms and legs and fins before they put us back in der," rumbled Karloff.

"Get off der bed and me and Steve here will shows you the rounds."

"Lead the way," said Bull, happy for the first time since his arrival.

The Dead Bay was nothing special, quite cold, a few figures dressed in dark, blood splattered robes milled about quietly dealing with those that had actually died. Karloff pointed out the open archways that took the two warriors back toward the arena. Nobody approached them or gave them a second glance.

"Are they all prisoners too?" Bull asked.

"Dunno," replied Karloff. "Me and Steve not seen dem before."

"Should we ask?" enquired Bull, but Karloff answered that with only a shrug.

*I guess I wouldn't care much either if I was destined to die here,* the barbarian thought.

"Me shows you der best bar in der city," Karloff declared instead.

"Dis where me go after every win."

Beyond the Dead Bay Bull discovered that there was a great sprawling metropolis, not the sandy fighting pit he had assumed. People were everywhere, wandering past like life was normal. Bull caught bits of sentences, a mother and daughter on their way to market, a cleric mumbling a prayer, young boys excited about the fight the night before. It took Bull a moment or two before he realized that the fight the boys discussed had been the one between him and the giant.

*How many hours have I been out for?*

"Come, dis way," rumbled Karloff, his fat finger directing Bull toward an alleyway.

"It is them..." gasped one of the youngsters.

Then Karloff and Bull discovered themselves surrounded.

"Why did you do it?" one voice asked, poking Bull in the chest.

"You lost me a lot of coin," said another voice.

"Let us see the proper end of this battle, right here, right now..." suggested a woman walking past.

"Der rules is der rules..." said Karloff, slow and steady, like this had been drummed into him.

"Yes, but the two of you broke the rules..." the woman argued.

Bull watched as Karloff leaned in and whispered something to the little head, Steve. The barbarian keenly watched Steve whisper something back.

"We not loud to talks about dat," rumbled the giant. "Now watch outta der way..."

The crowd parted as Karloff lumbered in the direction of the alleyway and the tavern. Bull quickly followed after, narrowly avoiding the sea of people closing up again and trapping him with their unanswered questions.

"We famous now," said Karloff.

"Me not fa-mill-yar wiv dis kinda fame..."

"You much prefer being the winner," replied Bull.

"Definitely not der loser," Karloff agreed.

"I tell you what," said Bull. "I will buy the first round."

"I like dat offer..." rumbled the giant. "Dat make me and Steve both feels like der winner again..."

The giant crashed through the door of a non-descript building, no signage, no sign of light. As Bull followed after his eyes needed to adjust, lanterns turned down shed very little ambiance.

"Here he is," roared a voice from the gloom.

"Hey Mac, me and Steve bought a friend," rumbled Karloff.

"Some friend," the voice from the darkness replied. "Thanks to him you've got a date with Old Father Time."

"Yeah, me guess dat true," agreed the giant as he ducked to avoid a low roof beam. "Dat old man be waiting for me for far too long anyways though..."

"You got that right," said another voice, the insectoid for the cages, Bull recognized earlier.

"You're free too," Bull stated, revealing his surprise.

"Yeah, they let me out to stretch my wings, every now and then," the figure replied.

It was then that the tavern was revealed, Lanterns and tiny candles lit up the small space where a burly barkeep continued to pour amber ale. It was sad, but it was the closest thing to comfort and friendship that Bull thought he would find, and he was right.

"Pull up a stool, stranger," the barkeep offered. "The drinks here are off the house."

"Thanks," said Bull.

"He isn't kidding," suggested the insectoid. "Literally, this stuff you're about to drink runs from off of the rooftop and into a barrel."

"You not think too much and den it taste like mamma's milk," laughed Karloff, the sound similar to hillsides colliding.

"OK then, poor me a cup and let's celebrate being alive for another day," suggested Bull.

"Even I'll drink to that," said the barkeep.

#

"So how long have you lived here?" Bull asked the barkeep, Mac.

"At least thirty years," Mac replied. "Long before the Master came and turned our township



into a tourist destination.”

“So, this is new then?” the barbarian asked.

“Yeah, maybe three years,” Mac suggested, after a moment of consideration.

*No wonder nobody has done anything about this place, Bull thought. The Master is obviously just inviting the ones he knows will keep quiet.*

“So now that we are free, why doesn’t anybody leave?” Bull then said, catching the eye of his fellow competitors.

“A few have tried to leave,” said the insectoid.

“Dey der ones who ends up eaten by lions and stuff,” said Karloff.

“Dat why me fort it would be lions dat me and Steve wood be fighting...”

“Not lions?” asked Mac.

“Nah... Der lady says me going do fighting der Y-fern...”

“A wyvern,” Bull corrected.

“Yeah, wun of dem,” Karloff agreed. “Dat wot me says.”

“Tough luck,” lamented Mac.

“That must mean you need another drink.”

“Yes, but why do they get eaten by the lions, the wolves, the wyvern?” Bull asked, not allowing such a simple explanation satisfy his curiosity.

“That girl who brought you in... Do you remember her..?” asked Mac.

“How could I forget,” sighed the barbarian.

“Pretty?” smiled the barkeep.

“Pretty horrible...” said Bull.

“Yeah, she der worst,” agreed Karloff.

Steve whispered something faintly, causing the giant to cock his head.

“Steve fink dat she make der good wurst sausage,” laughed the giant.

“I’ll definitely drink to that,” said Bull. “Roof waters for everyone...”

The barkeep poured four more cups of the brown sludge and handed them out.

“Here is to somehow surviving all of this and returning to far better times,” suggested Mac.

“Here is to not dying,” said Bull.

“Me and Steve likes both those fings,” agreed Karloff.

“As do I,” said the insectoid.

*I wonder if there is some way out of this mess, Bull considered.*

As cup after cup of roof water was poured and shared around, a plan began to form in the barbarian’s mind. He had found a way out of stranger places than this. For Karloff and Steve, he would need to do it soon.

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

# Children's Literature

## *The Teacher - Chapter Seven*

*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

**M**ost people say that they are afraid of falling, when really the fear is not about the journey, instead it is about the destination. Falling is a bit like what flying is, the only real difference is that when you fly you control how quickly you are going when you reach the ground again. With falling you tend to have no control; you just go where it is that gravity takes you and you need to deal with the consequences when the falling is done. I knew that my classmates were going to catch me and that I would need to finally face the substitute teacher Mrs. Mister, if I stayed where I was and did not take a leap of faith. This whole adventure had been one gigantic leap, me trusting in my gut instincts and following my heart. My friend Sam had told me that he had followed his heart, especially when he had been most afraid. I had wanted to go across the corridor, that tiny gap between my classroom and Sam's, but when I had opened the door I should have guessed that I would not be faced with a simple walk. No, instead of seeing the classroom door where Sam was, with all of his wisdom, I discovered a massive void, the door I was hoping to open, the place where help resided, looked to be eons away. But my heart told me to jump, and so I did. Instead of falling down, I fell up. The bottom of the abyss ever so slowly became further and further away. I tried to go back into my classroom and found any steps that I tried making backward ended up sending me in the direction of Sam's. It looked so far, so that was how I knew that it was still near. The darkness was not real, but the pills in my hand were, and the trouble that my teacher Mister Bright was in was also real, very real. I took another two steps backward and found I went four steps forward. I decided to walk so that I would get there quicker.

his blog

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

Each second became a minute and each minute turned into an hour. The bell rang and children cried. The pigeons outside, peering in through the windows made strange sounds, cooing, chortling, pecking at the glass. I could hear Mrs. Mister and her snakes on her head, they were hissing at the other kids, and I knew that the other kids in my class were shrinking. Only Tommy was growing, he was Mrs. Mister's favorite. He was supposed to have caught me, finding the pills and then he was supposed to be bringing both me and the pills to the substitute teacher so that she could tell me off and tell me when and finally tell me how, because I was not allowed to be off, I was not allowed to when, and I certainly did not have permission to be how. All of those things were only allowed to be done by the children that Mrs. Mister liked, and I certainly was not one of those.

"Reach out BOY and bring me back that which is front!" screeched and hissed and spluttered the voice of the substitute, Mrs. Mister sounded very far away, and that made me want to hurry.

"I will get HER and I will bring HER, and I will catch HAIR and I will snatch HARE..." boomed the voice of Tommy as the boy I knew became the giant that I didn't. As he shouted, I could hear

Tommy becoming larger than life. As he changed his words I discovered that his words changed me. A little fluffy tail grew at my behind, my ears wiggled up to the top of my head and then they began to grow longer and furrier. Whiskers sprouted from my cheeks and my feet grew as my arms shrunk. I felt like I wanted to leap everywhere, and I was really hungry for some grass. I wanted to crawl back through that hole in the blackboard and find that meadow again that was full of pretty, tasty flowers.

"Jess," I said to myself as my nose twitched and I sniffed the air. "We have got to find Sam, and quickly..."

I could smell danger, and it was all around me. I bounced as small a hop as I could manage and suddenly I had made it all the way across the darkness.

"COME BAAAAAACK!!" boomed the voice of Tommy.

"To go back you must go forward!" I called in Tommy's direction, my voice meek and mild as it flew from my mouth and over my shoulder.

I wanted to add that I was unwilling to make such a mistake after coming so far, but my voice had gone, I had no voice left to talk with.

I knocked at the classroom door, and the door swung open for me. Sam stood there, as if he had been waiting for my knock.



“Hi Jess,” he whinnied. “I’m a horse.”

I pointed toward his back with my sharp claws and his horse head nodded up and down.

“Don’t I look great as a horse, Jess?” my friend asked.

I rubbed the top of his horse head to show that I agreed. I tried to tell Sam that I thought he looked so strong and fast, but my voice still had not come back.

“You need to say the words to make me go,” Sam neighed. “And I would say them fast because Tommy is almost big enough to eat us both.”

I looked on as Tommy grew some more, and for a moment I wondered how he had ended up in the girls classroom. I also wondered how I was supposed to make a noise when I did not have a voice. Then it suddenly dawned on me that horses can be told to move simply by someone making a clicking noise with their tongue. I tried to make that noise, and I was very thankful when I heard that much needed click.

“Alright then, if you say so,” said Sam the horse.

And we were off and racing. As we galloped through the doorway of Sam’s classroom I wondered why it looked like an open paddock and I also wondered why, when Sam had previously been a magnificent dragon, he was now a horse. Had I made that decision, since this was my adventure, or had Sam been in control of his own transformations, or, the other possibility, was it all random, a mere unpredictable result of this bizarre substitute and the world that I had been thrust into.

“Give up, you cannot outrun us,” called the booming voice of Tommy, still growing.

He ran on his knuckles and knees, Mrs. Mister was sat upon his back, her serpentine locks flying about in the wind, hissing ferociously, obviously annoyed.

“We won’t give up!” I cried, and with joy I discovered that my voice had returned.

Then to my surprise I found my voice growing three arms and four legs. I also discovered that a head had appeared on the tip of one on the multitude of fingers. That very head gave me wink before my voice was gone again.

It bravely leaped from my mouth to the top of Mrs. Mister’s head and began to wrestle with the snakes.

“Well, you don’t see that every day now do you,” neighed Sam, and then with a spurt of speed we began to gallop faster, pulling away from the battle between fingers and snakes.

I wanted to cheer, I wanted to shout, I desperately needed to encourage my voice to overcome the nasty hair upon the substitute’s head, but my voice was doing all of the talking without me. It was all do and no say, and from where I was sitting it seemed to be winning.

“So where are you taking me,” Sam asked.

His horsey voice distracted me from what was happening behind us. I shook the packet of pills to indicate that we needed to find the cave where Mr. Bright was glowing golden, but Sam did not know what that meant, he was only my best friend, and also a horse. It was almost impossible for him to translate the shaking of a packet of pills into the explanation of my cunning plan. Almost impossible, but not quite. Without my voice I chose to explain what I was hoping would happen with a number of hummed notes, tongue clicking and hare paw and claw waving.

“Neigh!!” replied Sam, disagreeing.

I tried to explain again, but this time I added some fluffy tail wiggling and waggling. This time Sam nodded his head up and down.

“Right!” my voice told me and Sam as it flew back into my mouth. “We’ve bought some time, but not a lot... Lots cost too much, and time is far cheaper...”

I looked over my shoulder but made sure not to speak just in case that caused me to lose my voice again. In the distance I could just make out the figure of the substitute trying to untangle her snakes. Tommy looked to be growing smaller, or shrinking taller, either way it was good for

me and better for him. I could not past. blame it. Slowly we drifted closer to the caves.

see my classmates, but I was “Look,” I said to Sam and my to the caves.

guessing that they were also voice, but we were going too fast, “How do we know which cave to explore?” Sam then asked me.

returning to a size that was more and they did not see what it was His voice was no longer a neigh or

normal for them, a shape that that I knew was there. a whinny, or anything horse-like

was more their shape. Normalcy “You look,” whinnied Sam, and hisa whinny, or anything horse-like

was returning, the rubber band of horsey head pointed toward the at all. It also was not the rumble

reality was not so stretched. caves in the mountains that were and grumble of a dragon either. It

“Wait... W... Aaaaaaaa...” called up ahead. was Sam, and Sam was falling. I

the voice of Mrs. Mister, “But how do we get there?” I discovered that I was no longer a

seemingly so far away... asked. little hare, either, that my feet

I considered slowing down Sam as We were on the ground and the had become normal feet, my ears

we galloped across the grassy caves were so high up above us. were back to being normal ears

hills, but the moment we stopped “Have you already forgotten?” again. The only thing that was still

those who chased after us, trying said my voice, it was full of not normal was that I was sitting

to stop us were bound to catch surprise. on Sam’s head.

up. “I must have,” I admitted. “Flap your arms!” I called out, but

“Go Sam, go!!” urged my voice. “Your friend here is a dragon,” my my voice was so faint, sounding

I patted Sam on the top of his voice replied. far away.

horsy head to do the same, to “No, he is a horse,” I said. It had crawled down into my

encourage my friend to go, go, go. Sam had been a dragon, he also stomach, hoping that it did not

Sam was only happy to oblige. was a boy, but at that very get hurt when we reached the

As far as I understood, horses ground, something that was

could not fly. coming toward us very quickly.

“I can be both,” Sam then told Or was it that we were getting

me, and he closed his horse-eyes closer to the ground?

and made a sound that was The ground became really close.

definitely not very horsey at all. When it (or we) arrived, no longer

Great big, leathery wings plopped in the air, Sam discovered that the

out from Sam’s flanks, one wing ground was soft, just like jumping

on the left side and one wing on on a bed. I looked over at my

the right side. The wings fell friend and I could see that Sam

loosely upon the rocky NO and was jumping on a bed, his bed.

then they rose up and started to Our adventure had carried him all

flap. They flapped in time and bit of the way back to his home. Me

by bit we rose up, up, into the air. voice, well we landed hard, and

We were flying again; my friend soft. We landed together in a

and I were soaring through the great big pile of NO that wrapped

clouds. My voice crawled back, us up in a freezing hug. The air in

into my mouth, not wanting to there was so cold that my voice

fall, and I did not for one moment came chattering and rattling out

from my stomach. but then I thought maybe Mister the bottle and take out one or  
 “Quickly Jess,” it said to me. “We Bright had taken a turn for the two, but instead he asked me to  
 need to get warm...” worst. hold out my hands. He upended  
 I remembered the song about I ran into the cave, the golden the pill bottle and all of the pills  
 running on the spot, but my teeth glow growing brighter. When I got spilled out. I caught some, but  
 chattered and clattered together to the end of the cave it looked as many ended up on the floor. The  
 so much that I did not think I though I was the one who was noise of the escaping pills woke  
 could speak. My voice gripped me glowing. up the snakes, and their hissing  
 by the hand, my right hand, and I saw the bed, and in the bed was woke up Mrs. Mister.  
 with a strength that surprised me, a person. That person was so tall “What’sssss thisssssss?” the  
 it pulled me out of the bank of that their feet and half of their substitute hissed.  
 NO. legs hung over the end of the “This is the time when you leave  
 “Come on, Jess, come climb with bed. The covers covered the for lunch and never come back,”  
 me,” my voice urged. person’s body and head, but I Mister Bright said, bravely.  
 Up the mountainside we went, up could see some snakes sticking The snakes that wriggled and  
 and up, where the air was so thin. out from the top of the covers. twisted about Mrs. Mister’s head  
 We could see many caves ahead Those snakes snored quietly as I tried to bite Mister Bright but one  
 of us but only one cave was crept closer to the bed, and the by one he popped one of his pills  
 glowing. I pointed toward it. head on the body snored loudly. into their open mouths. One by  
 “Yes,” said my voice. “I can see it one they swallowed the medicine  
 too.” and one by one they shrunk back  
 into Mrs. Mister’s scalp.  
 When we finally reached the the covers. But, beneath the “What’ssssss happeningsssss to  
 entrance to the cave I was much covers, beneath the bed, that me...?” slithered Mrs. Mister.  
 warmer, my teeth had stopped I watched on as the substitute  
 clacking together and I was ready shrunk and changed until she  
 for my voice to go back into its became the cook from the  
 box. Reluctantly it did. canteen kitchen, Miss Paula.  
 “Just call me whenever you need “No more serpent soup for you,”  
 me and I’ll be there,” it said. ordered Mister Bright.  
 “I know,” I replied. “And no more illuminous shakes  
 for you,” suggested Miss Paula.  
 I took a cautious step into the I looked over at the pair and I  
 cave and called out. discovered that my teacher was  
 “Mister Bright!” not glowing anymore.  
 There was no answer, so I tried “Can we please go home now,  
 again, this time louder. Mister Bright?” I asked.  
 “Mister Bright!” I shouted. “It’s “I will call for Sam and see if he  
 Jess, I’ve brought your pills!” can give us all a lift back,”  
 “Ah, Jess, excellent, excellent,” suggested Miss Paula.  
 called back a voice from deep in “Oh yes, please do Miss Paula,”  
 the cave. replied my teacher. “I still have a  
 It did not sound like my teacher, I expected Mister Bright to open

couple more rain boxes to dilly up  
before my next lesson.”  
As he gave me a smile and I wink,  
I knew that it would all be OK.

***The End***

**VOTE FOR THIS PIECE** ☆☆☆☆☆





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# FANTASY

## *Boon of the Nomad*

*By: J. Agombar*



**J. Agombar**

J. Agombar resides near the treacherous waters of Southend-On-Sea, Essex, UK where visions of the speculative, criminal, and supernatural have taken over his mind (usually alongside a bottle of whisky). He holds a BA Hons in Humanities where the creative writing module inspired his first published work with Luna Press. His work appears with over twenty publishers to date, including two short story collections of his own. His third collection is due late 2024.

**T***reasure – A quantity of wealth or value in any form including that of precious metals, gems, or other valuable objects.*

The warm night drew in slowly with the shrill of cicadas welcoming it from the dense flora. Halesen lagged behind his father, his legs trembling from fatigue. The horses that walked alongside them were given respite because of the increasing heat and sheer distance they had come.

“Are we close?” Halesen asked, trying to cover the desperation in his voice.

Asclepius paused and reached into the pocket of his tattered trousers. He pulled out a small pouch and tipped six runes into his palm. Each small stone was scored with a different symbol that glowed a bright azure as if fueled by moonlight.

“Judging by the runes, we are

closer than ever before, Hale. But this flora is thick, and the darkness will only hinder us. We should set camp here tonight.” Halesen was relieved to hear it. His feet were blistered from the relentless journey and the humidity had been affecting him too as they headed further south. His shoulder felt limp and weak from carrying his satchel. He knew food rations were necessary for their journey, but it was surprising how much it affected his stamina. For Halesen, a boy of twelve, it felt like they had been traveling for a year to the other side of the world, but in reality, it had been nine weeks, and they had only just crossed the lower hemisphere that he had always dreamed of seeing.

They moved further up a ridge in the land which curled around to a precipice. They set their bags down and erected the tent before building a fire. As the pan full of pinto beans was placed over the fire to prepare their meal, Asclepius attended to his son’s feet with bandages and ointment. “Tell me about the treasure again,

father!" Halesen asked as his feet were disinfected with an herbal mixture. His father couldn't help but show a weathered smile. "Again?" "Well, legend has it that many centuries ago, a scepter was forged by a blacksmith of unknown origin, and blessed by an ancient nomadic mage who wandered the lands collecting jewels and gemstones. Forged in two parts, he added the jewels to the casing and the haft which could be removed to serve as a dagger. The scepter, when completely decorated to the nomad's liking, was presented to a king as a gift for many years, but then it fell into the hands of a usurper who claimed the kingdom, and the scepter, for himself. This false prophet was overthrown by his own slave, the Jinn, who had been enslaved over time for mankind and our selfish design. A spell was cast by mages of this era to control the chaos, and the scepter was separated once again into two parts and scattered, thus, trapping the Jinn. Many years later, the dagger was discovered by a boy of the desert sands. He was aided by his tribe to reunite the dagger with the rest of the treasure. But when he combined the dagger and its sheath to restore the scepter, it released the Jinn who once served. The Jinn served him for a short time, but under false pretenses. The Jinn was bitter and intent on enslaving humankind like we had once done to his own people. Much destruction occurred before the Jinn was once again trapped, this time within a cursing stone which was taken by a tribesman and concealed in a cave away from the masses, along with his own fate." "Was the Jinn sealed forever?" Halesen asked, fascinated. "Nothing is sealed forever, son. All remnants of human atrocity are uncovered eventually. More centuries passed, and the stone was found clutched by the tribesman in a mining cave deep in Africa. The man was long dead, but the Jinn was released again. His powers had diminished entirely, but over time he had transformed into something different, a simpler, malevolent creature with a viciousness that could not be reasoned with. Terror resurfaced in villages across the continent, but the fear of the human response was what mostly traveled within the tales of what had happened. The 'Shetani', as it was then referred to, mostly lived inside the human psyche, a generational punishment for evil deeds once committed. "What happened to the scepter?" "Long before that time, the scepter became a symbol of hope once more, for several generations. It was eventually lost over time, but the counterpart dagger reappeared in another continent far from here. A warlock, fearful of its power, knew what he had acquired, and so traded it for maps, coin, and food with a friendly merchant. Beyond that it is said that two young siblings acquired the dagger in a feud where their parents were killed, and they were left orphans. They used its strange power to protect themselves for a while and nothing of it was heard until much later when humans had advanced their technology to such a level that it hindered them. Viruses plagued their gadgets and machinery that they had become so reliant upon. When things did not work for them and supplies ran low, they had no choice but to abandon their way of life. "But a museum which held the ancient dagger was raided in the collapse by a thief who did not understand its power. The thief went mad trying to control it, but he couldn't as the dagger he wielded reflected the turmoil within him outwardly. Many electrical storms raged across the world, assisting the decline of humanity's technological age. The weapons they had built malfunctioned, ships strayed off course and sunk, skyscrapers they had built crumbled, and of course, many people died trying to steal and fight for the basic necessities rather than choose to

re-learn what their ancestors knew about the natural world.”

“Some say the thief could not bear to part with the dagger despite the turmoil it brought him and the rest of the world.

Eventually, he used it to end his own life. Then, a few years ago, the thief was found dead by a new nomad of our time.

Fortunately, the dagger was still in the thief’s possession, and so the nomad took it. This nomad, luckily, held a strong relationship with Mana, the true force of nature that was bestowed upon the ancient ones. He knew that this artifact had a power that could cause great harm in the wrong hands, but if held by a righteous and clear mind, could also be used for great spectacle in the restoration of mankind,” Asclepius explained as he finished dressing his son’s feet.

“Thank you, father. I feel good as new!” the boy said leaning back and pushing his feet to the air with a newfound energy.

He raised himself back to his feet to glance over the edge of the precipice. His father stood next to him for a moment, using his staff to steady himself. The twilight was enough to illuminate the damaged city that sprawled into the horizon. Crumbling skyscrapers interspersed between

rows and rows of abandoned houses were now mostly engulfed by trees and flora. Vines hung from bent streetlights and

crumpled cars stood rooted by mold and vegetation to the cracked asphalt.

“Is there much of that technology stuff in all these places?” Halesen asked.

“So much. They had technology cooking their food, holding their money, transporting them, and even entertaining them.”

“Life must have been so easy for them!”

Asclepius nodded. “Indeed. But powerful people made it hard, greed got to them, and they just... lost control of their own aspirations.”

Asclepius hobbled to the edge of the grove where they camped to stand before a small dying tree.

He checked its few remaining leaves by rubbing them with his fingers. The underside felt woolly, and he confirmed to himself with a nod. He placed his palm upon the main root and wrapped his other hand around a branch a little higher. He closed his eyes and concentrated. The tree seemed to change, more leaves sprouted at an alarming pace, its roots twisted and migrated just enough for him to witness a distinct difference in its vitality.

“By the grace of Mana, I bless this apple tree. May it provide for us to assist in our journey,” he whispered.

“Do you remember these times when you were my age?” Halesen interrupted, still staring into the ruins of the valley.

Asclepius moved nearer to him.

“It was a time my great grandfather knew well. I was born in the aftermath of the electric skies, as they called it, but I was fortunate, really,” he said as he placed a hand upon his son’s shoulder.

He turned to remove some gathered wood from his satchel to add to the fire. Halesen pondered more on what it was like for people across the vast history he had missed.

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The next morning, Asclepius rose early and cooked breakfast upon a fresh fire. He let his son sleep longer while staring out over the precipice. The day was drab, a blanket of cloud brought light rain upon the desolate wasteland before him. Yet he was pleased with this, as it would prove a more balanced test for his theory. The six rune stones in his hand, upon each scored with an ancient symbol, glowed their bright azure once more. They felt warm in his palm and reassured him that the nomad’s boon was close.

Two carved wooden bowls were placed down to catch rain while it lasted, one was to quench the thirst of the horses, the other their own.

“Do you think we’ll find the treasure today?” Halesen asked, startling Asclepius from behind. Asclepius glanced at the glowing



runes once more. "I am certain, son," he said with confidence. Asclepius moved toward the small tree he had graced with Mana the previous evening. The tree had flourished with leaves and had grown apples that had already ripened. He picked two from it and tossed one to Halesen.

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They continued with their horses down the cliff and into the valley of the ruins. Halesen asked many questions about the vehicles and shops and the lines in the road that once dictated the manner of motion for this civilization, but his father could only answer so much. They glanced back to where they had camped and saw a thin spread of waterfalls the other side of the precipice shrouded in greenery. Ivy lined the whole length of the cliff as well as pretty red flowers that protruded from it in small bunches. Several of the waterfalls cascaded down into a large sinkhole that had filled with rain beside an abandoned, metal plagued bus station. Halesen thought that even ruins could not limit nature's beauty. The runes in his father's hand glowed, and each time Asclepius looked at them, they seemed to speak to him somehow, guiding him silently. His father trudged ahead through broken paths and

long grass between overgrown vegetation, and eventually brought them to a large, dark clearing underneath a massive structure.

"What is this, father?" Halesen asked.

"This, son, is a bridge," he replied, looking above. "It was used to cross over water and large gaps in the land before flying machines were invented."

Halesen raised his eyebrows at the prospect of such ingenuity.

"And this is a subway," Asclepius lowered his gaze to the dark cavernlike entrance before them.

"They used machines to travel great distance underground from here."

"Wow! They travelled so much! But why? Not everyone was a nomad."

"There were many more of us than there are now, and they had many reasons, but, once again, the desire to be somewhere they were not, was mental, rather than physical."

They left the horses outside.

Heavier rain set in, and they followed a set of mossy steps down to a dark platform where the stones lit their way. Dirty white tiles lined the walls that seemed to swell and leak fluid from deterioration. Halesen hesitantly followed his father off the edge of a platform and into a long tunnel. A metal rail ran the entire length of it and occasionally, rats shuffled

between the fallen bricks and rubble on the way. A few minutes found them in front of a skeleton slumped against the edge of the tunnel. Halesen recoiled at the sight but calmed as the clothes upon it still covered the brunt of the decay. Still intact was a satchel of bright blue material. Strange items were attached to it that Halesen didn't recognize, but his father recalled them being a dreamcatcher, a flask, and metal clips known as carabines. The bag was covered with stitching and patches that bore old forgotten symbols of peace, and a tree of life that Halesen did recall in some way.

When Asclepius opened the bag, he pulled out bundles of warm clothes that were once needed for the winters in this region. He unfolded a well-preserved knitted garment to catch sight of the treasure they sought. He paused for a moment and glanced toward his son who stared on in awe amongst the blueish glow of the runes. He then handed the garment to him, and the boy took it.

"Why me? You found the treasure!" he said.

"Because your heart is purer, and more worthy. This treasure is no ordinary artefact. It reacts to the one who handles it. I am old and tainted by troubles gone by. Many people who lived here did not want to give their younger generations a chance, they

shunned their beliefs out of pure hubris. Some even wanted them to suffer all the same hardships they had. If I were to bring bad Mana upon the world once more, I couldn't forgive myself. I'd rather let you lead." Asclepius explained. The boy understood him and took a pensive moment before taking the clothing. He unfolded it to reveal the ornate dagger, he instantly noticed its blade had been gilded in a curious way. It had sections missing from it, a shaft, and a series of scattered holes, but not entirely randomly. Despite its age, the blade shone in the azure glow of the runes. the elaborate hilt was indeed decorated gold and encrusted with colorful gemstones complete with a guard that twisted around the hand purposely for effect. The base of the hilt contained a gleaming gold pommel with an embossed circular pattern on it while the main grip was pasted with arcs and curves with a precision of genius for its time of forgery. He could not help but ball his fists with excitement as he stared at the treasure, unblinking. Then, as he reached for the hilt, a moment of hesitation set in. "How do I know if I'm worthy to wield it?" he asked his father. Asclepius shrugged and smiled. "There's nothing so pure as a young, happy heart that seeks treasure. And there is only one way to find out."

With that, he picked up the blade, awestruck to clutch such a weapon of legend. The runes stopped glowing just as they exited the abandoned tunnel of the subway. As they stepped out into the open once more, and small vines flourished under his feet with every step he took in his worn boots. The skies above had also cleared to reveal a bright blue penetrated by dazzling sunlight that caused the remaining dew to glisten everywhere. The duo remounted their horses and looked around with a smile before turning to each other. "I can feel it's power," Halesen said, holding the blade up to the light. "Yes. The Mana is strong," Asclepius replied. "I'm gonna use it to heal our world and restore faith in future generations." Asclepius broadened his smile. "Good call, son. It's about time. I'm proud of you."

# Fantasy

## Contentedly Ever After

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's one of the biggest cover-ups in history, that the Grimm brothers were not fairy tale writers at all, but rather part of a marketing team hired by the ruling class of Europe. Their job was to take the marriage stories of the reigning monarchs and spin them into fairy tales with a happy ending. I am here to shed light on one of those stories. My name is Flora, better known as the miller's daughter, and this is the story of Rumpelstiltskin, minus all the lies and deceit. Let's begin with the facts. It is true my father bragged to the king that I could spin straw into gold. He did it to elevate his own status with absolutely no concern for my well being. I hate that jackass. It is also true, that the king locked me in a bed chamber for three straight nights and told me that if I didn't spin the room- full of straw into gold, he would murder me. And finally, it is true that Rumpelstiltskin saved my life and that in desperation, I agreed

That's where the similarity ends. Rumpelstiltskin didn't spin straw into gold. We don't live in a world of magical things like the Grim Brothers would have us believe. Rumpelstiltskin was a very rich man who brought bags of his own personal gold to give to the king in order to save my life. At the time, I didn't understand why this small, hunchbacked man would do that for me, but there was a good reason.

On the fourth day, as promised, the king married me. Not because he loved me, but purely out of greed. He and my father both didn't give a flying fig in space that I was against this marriage. So here I was, stuck with this greedy, obnoxious man whose face and personality made me gag. His halitosis was unparalleled. The king and I never shared a bedroom, though those first few weeks were a horror. He would visit me in the night, and afterwards demand more gold. When I explained my powers were used up, he never came to my bed chamber again.

He rotated through a string of mistresses, and that was okay with me.

Ten months into our marriage, I gave birth to a baby boy, and he became my reason for existing. When the king tried to take the boy away from me, and have him raised by the royal nannies, I knew I had to escape that toxic environment. I couldn't take the chance that Prince George would grow up to be like his father. I tried to sneak him out of the palace, but there were guards watching my every move. The King considered both the Prince and I to be his possessions and I was treated like a prisoner.

Just when I was at the end of my worn and tattered rope, Rumpelstiltskin appeared and saved me for the fourth time. He returned to the palace allegedly, to claim my child, his prize for saving my life. He brought with him a gold bullion, a gift for the king to assure his entrance into the palace. When he approached me, I began to wail, begging him not to take my son. But he calmed me down, explained he wanted to help, and I felt like I had no choice but to trust him. His plan was to announce that I had three days to guess his name, and if I failed, he would claim the child as his own. In reality, he arranged for our escape. He told me to pack a

to give him my first-born child as payment for his deed.

bag of necessities for George and get myself expelled from the palace.

Rumpel smuggled George out of the castle hidden in a laundry bag and the two of them vanished as if they never existed. The king couldn't track them down. He became so enraged he stomped his left foot so hard it crashed through the wooden floor. He then banished me from the kingdom with the decree that if I should ever try to step foot in the palace again, I would be murdered on the spot.

I was saved. With the money Rumpel gave me stashed in my petticoat, I made my escape. I bought a horse and rode to the secret location where he waited for me with George. Together, we boarded a boat to the Americas, and changed our identities.

I once asked Rumpel why he helped me. After all, I was just a poor girl, a miller's daughter with nothing to my name and a very bleak future. He risked everything for me. His gold, his business, and his whole future. This is what he said. He had spotted me in the marketplace and was drawn in by my beauty.

When he approached me to purchase some bread, I didn't look down upon him for his ugliness, but instead treated him with kindness. He fell in love.

After an arduous, months long

journey, we made it to the Americas. Rumpel had enough money left over to purchase a large plot of land which we turned into a farm. We share our home with two dogs, fifty pigs and two hundred cows. Sadly, Rumpel and I could never marry, because technically I am still married to the king, but we do masquerade as husband and wife. I sometimes hear murmurings that the townsfolk call us Beauty and the Beast, and they gossip that I married Rumpel for his money. I don't care. All I care about is that George, now known as Henry, is thriving and growing up well. Unlike the fairytale, this story does not end in a happily ever after. I am still quite scarred from all I've been through, and I live in constant fear that one day the king will find us. I rarely leave the farm. Rumpel takes care of all the business in town and brings Henry to school. Meanwhile, I'm kept very busy taking care of the animals, cooking meals, and raising my son. I have become quite fond of Rumpel and enjoy his company. He is a good father to Henry. I am content.

**THE END**



# Fantasy

## *Paechra's Tale: Part Thirty-two*

*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

**T**he 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 principedom of Greenwood Vale.

Paechra stood upon the bank of the river, the sound of the waves gently lapping upon the shore gave her courage as she addressed the crowd before her. It was a crowd of her peers, it was a crowd who were keen to hear what she had to say, as their leader. Regardless of this, Paechra was nervous. The dreaming of the night had revealed that the dark one had captured those who had followed Anton off the rafts and into the forest. Such dreaming had also revealed the strange nature of the one who looked like Paechra's friend Raven Stormsong, his ability to see dreams and dreamers, something that not even

Paechra and her sister druids could do.

Paechra, with help from Sienna, Sarah her mother, and other druids, had tried to explain such discoveries to High Prince Ulan, but this only left him confused, concerned to the point where Paechra Lightheart now stood before so many and tried to think of what to say. The words refused to form. Silence dragged on, and on.

"Paechra, they must know," called Sienna Alknown.

"Please tell us," cried a voice from the crowd. "What do you know?"

"Yes, please!" called out another.

"What have you discovered?"

"Our friends and family are in trouble," Paechra began, not knowing any other way to tell such a sorrowful tale.

"We have followed you; we have left our homes..." the crowd replied.

"I know, and I am sorry," said Paechra. "I should never have let them go."

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

"It was not your choice," called Sienna.

The mother druid's voice was indeed ancient, yet it was still strong and loud enough to be heard over the murmuring discontent that rippled through the gather sylvan.

"It was your choice to allow those who left to have their choice," continued Sarah Lightheart who stood beside Sienna.

Paechra took heart from hearing such voices.

"We are the ones who remained, you are they who placed their trust in me and my leadership," Paechra stated.

"And I ask that once more you put that trust in me."

"I will follow wherever and whenever you lead, Paechra Lightheart," boomed the voice of High Prince Ulan.

"I will follow, Paechra," cried another voice.

One by one, more called out their faith in Paechra. The swell of support grew larger and louder until more than three quarters of the group that had gathered in the night admitted their belief.

"We will save our family, save those who have become lost along the way," Paechra promised.

"And how do you propose that we do such?" cried the distinctive voice of Thomas the

Butcher.

"We abandon the raft," Paechra replied. "We break them apart, we turn the pieces into weapons, and we take the fight to the enemy."

The gathered sylvan, especially those who had been training with Anton and Thomas, responded with hollering and hoots, strong sounds of support.

"Our enemy is waiting for us, they know that we are coming," warned Paechra.

"But we shall overcome them with numbers," promised Sarah, giving her daughter a look of encouragement.

"Yes, we shall all be with our loved ones again soon," added Sienna.

"Come, let us bring the raft to shore," one sylvan said.

Others took up the same cry. Knives and dagger blades busily worked through tightly tied cord, fraying it, causing it to snap and give way. Then, just like that, the crude boats that had been their form of travel over the water became nothing but splinters, sharpened poles, pokers, clubs, and walking aids.

"Lead us into battle, Paechra," demanded the crowd. "The night will not end until two becomes one again."

"Come, the phoenix shall be our guide," announced Paechra.

And looking skyward all could see the stars in the sky had taken

up the pattern of the spirit guide. The moon's light beamed down and a spectral trail lead through the tall timbers.

"To victory and to saving those who need it," said Thomas, even the butcher becoming caught up in the thrill of taking the fight to the enemy.

"May the gods of the forest watch over us tonight," prayed Paechra, quietly, to herself and nobody else.

"Keep your light within your heart," ordered Paechra as she and her sisters followed the moon and the phoenix. "Wait until I give the word."

Those without the powers of the druid followed loyally after the sisters of the forest, the vorsurk could be detected in the scent on the wind. All from the sylvan grove and their kin knew when the enemy could be detected it was high likely that you could be detected too.

"Slowly, sisters," urged Paechra. The vorsurk numbers were small, maybe thirty compared with the two hundred that followed Paechra, yet in the dark, with friends in such peril, it was difficult to say who had the upper hand. In small groups Paechra sent her forces onward to engage with the sentries who guarded the wagons. The figure who pretended to be Raven must have thought he was so

clever, thought that Paechra would use her superior numbers and rush forward as one. Pits and traps lay hidden near the trees, above them and below them, but Paechra and her sisters asked the trees, spoke with the animals of the night that hunted or fled. The forest knew what was right and what was wrong, and it was most happy to tell those who were able and willing to listen.

"I see," whispered each sylvan sister in turn. "Thank you..." Nature speaks in image and riddle, what is a moment seems a lifetime and what is an eon takes the form of a blink. And so, the slow and steady approach resulted in none of Paechra's forces caught in the snare traps Raven had prepared for them. Thomas narrowly managed to avoid falling foul, in his rush to tackle a scarecrow soldier, he stumbled into one of the hidden pits, only for Ulan to catch him by the arm and yank him back.

"Many thanks, to you your kingness," called the butcher as he stabbed the man of straw. Ulan could not help but laugh. "Hush," hissed Sarah, close by. That was enough to cause the whole forest to erupt that night. "Now!" called the commanding voice of Paechra, accompanied by the same boomed order from the man in black.

Vorsurk ignited sword blades

that burned bright in the darkness. Sylvan sisters wrapped themselves in the color of right. Amongst such brilliance the soldiery of Paechra's force brought their bits of raft to bear and the night was filled with the sounds of the skirmish.

"Where is he?" Paechra begged to know. "Where is the one who calls himself Raven?"

In the heat of the fight none knew of where the great adversary had hidden, they had only knowledge of what was in front. With no aura, Paechra found him impossible to locate. And then he was before her, sword raised.

"Do you seek death regularly?" the figure of evil asked, grinning. "Your blade cannot harm me," declared Paechra. "But my magic can send you back to where you came from."

"Do not be so certain that what you so say is true, daughter of the wind playing in the leaves," said the voice.

The blade fell impossibly fast, slicing through the moonlight, and then Paechra's magical field, treating both as if they were the waters of a stream.

"Sisters, I beg for your aid,"

Paechra pleaded, relinquishing her shield, and embracing her own form of the dark.

She allowed herself a single smirk of pleasure as Raven's face contorted into confusion. He

made some uncertain stabbing motions, testing the emptiness before him, but found only tree trunks. Paechra then stepped through the space between Raven and the wagons and ended up with Heidi again. "Paechra?" gasped Heidi. "Silence," ordered the younger Lightheart. "We can speak as friends again once the night ends and day shines bright." "I shall be quiet," promised Heidi. "But just tell me this... Are you here now or am I dreaming again?" "I am here, friend," assured Paechra. "I have come to fulfill a promise." "Then I shall not keep you," said Heidi with a sigh of relief. "You are freed," Paechra said next. "Go if you can and join the others." "My injuries are minor compared with Anton's, but he is now much healed," said Heidi. "I will help you here if it pleases." "To work with my best would give me the greatest of joys," said Paechra. "Go spread the word that we will light up the night and then follow the north road south." Heidi nodded. "It shall be as you so request, friend Paechra," she said. The two sylvan embraced, briefly, and then Heidi escaped from the wagon's covers. "Now what shall we do with

you?" Paechra said, turning her attention to the pale form of Anton. The head truth keeper looked much older, almost comparable with Sienna Alknown. "I cannot give up all my future years," continued Paechra. "But it seems our enemy was stealing yours." With care and precision Paechra placed one hand upon Anton's heart and then leached five years from her own future and pumped them straight into the failing human. Anton gasped and convulsed violently. "What did you just do to me, witch?" he groaned. "For whatever it was I am truly grateful." "It gives me great hope to hear you speak, Anton," stated Paechra with a sigh. "For it means I do not need to carry you home." "Carry me? Me?" spluttered the old man. "I'd much rather limp." "Your voice encourages me, but I'd love to hear it less," suggested the sylvan. "Then pass me my blade and I shall let such do the talking for me," commanded Anton. "This will must do, for now," suggested Paechra handing the head truth keeper the wooden club she had with her. Anton gingerly sat up and then took the offered weapon.

"I guess that beggars cannot be choosers," he mused. "You are indeed correct," Paechra said in reply. "Well, I'm off," said Anton next, and then, like Heidi, he slipped from the wagon's covers and vanished into the night. "Stick with what you know," prayed Paechra. "We none of us are ready yet to take on alone what we cannot comprehend." Whether Anton heard her, Paechra could not tell. Yet, she spend a moment pondering, if he had heard, would he choose to listen. Of that she was certain that she knew the answer. So, without further ado, she herself escaped the wagon's confines and ventured up the line to the next one.

Just over an hour passed by, and within that time Heidi and Paechra managed to clear each and every wagon of its captives. Paechra gave a shrill whistle, the signal for her forces to move through the forest in search of the road. They chose not to use the wagons, an easy to track and easy to find target, but they did spend some of their precious time freeing the horses from their tack and sending them galloping back the way that they had come from. Paechra noticed the steed of Raven and considered freeing it also, but the risk was too great. The



sylvan did not know if the beast would still recognize her, still see her as a friend, someone who could be trusted. It had been a while since Paechra had left her friend, the actual Johannas Stormsong, in the captivity of the sage Vladimir, the city of Andrapaal under threat, the vorsurk in the very heart of Thuraen. Who truly knew whether Raven's aura had been extracted, or whether that figure was an imposter. Who could truly say what affect such strangeness had had upon that poor horse? No, Paechra made the decision to wait for now and to leave the poor beast be.

"Come, we must away," ordered Paechra, guiding her kith and kin into the cover of the forest over the way.

"We must not stop until the deed is done," demanded Anton. But Thomas was beside the head truth keeper, hurrying the older man along.

"There will be more days, more fights, and more victories, Anton," the butcher promised.

"I want no more victories, man," grumbled Anton. "I want my deserved revenge."

"Night is turning to day," announced Sienna, she being helped along by the strength of High Prince Ulan. "We must not be caught by the dawn's light."

"Did you see how the vorsurk did fall?" asked one of the sylvan

males to another.

"All of that training has shown its worth," agreed another.

"Quickly, do not delay," ordered one of the sisters of the sacred grove.

She sensed what it was that the mother druid knew. Paechra and her mother also felt the need for haste.

Paechra's final glimpse as the sun began to rise was that of the figure dressed in black bringing back from the edge of death's abyss one of the fallen vorsurk. The spell used by Raven's twin was not that of healing but of a forced animation.

"Undead," she muttered, shivering.

The game just got that much harder.

#

"We must stop, Paechra, please," Heidi begged of her friend. "Some are still showing the worst of the skirmish, battered and bruised."

"Of course," Paechra replied with a sigh.

The force, still at least two thousand strong was not as strong as it once had been. The mission to rescue had come off as a success with no human or sylvan still imprisoned, and yet everyone seemed to be suffering some sort of melancholy, causing travel to slow.

"Halt for a half hour break,"

suggested Heidi.

Anton was quick to find Paechra. "Break! You have called for us to finally cease this running away, I hope," the head truth keeper demanded to know.

"Anton look where we are headed," suggested the sylvan. "I see where we are going, witch," Anton replied.

"Andrapaal is that way, but the enemy is the other way."

"I cannot allow you to go on some foolhardy solo vendetta that is just going to get you killed," stated Paechra, plainly and with as much clarity as she could muster.

"It is you who is the fool, Paechra," Anton stated. "The man in black is the threat."

"And you believe by getting rid of him you win the war," said Paechra, trying to stay calm. "At least you did not refer to him as Raven this time."

"I know what I'm seeing, lass," Anton argued. "If it looks like a horse and it sounds like a horse..."

"Knowing what it is that I know of vorsurk magic, that horse could be a dragon," Paechra argued back.

"You and your kind only know of what the stories tell you," said Anton.

Paechra made to argue back, but it was true what Anton said. Her people had left the humans to battle with the vorsurk for over

five hundred years. If any race knew what the vorsurk were familiar with it would be Anton, Thomas, and their people. It was foolish to ignore the past though, and Paechra had had her own recent experiences with the enemy, barbaric soldiers as well as cunning sorcerers.

"You know what you know, Anton, and I have my own experiences," said Paechra.

"And I guess you're going to suggest something along the lines of a good leader listens to all before deciding what is right," grumbled Anton.

"I would prefer it put as wisdom can only come from listening, learning, and remembering all," suggested Paechra. "There is merit in what you say also."

"True wisdom comes with age," suggested Sienna as she hobbled up to confront the pair.

"I need no more lessons taught by you, or any of your daughters," grumbled Anton.

"Then you are indeed the fool that Paechra has suggested," scoffed the ancient sylvan.

"All that I am asking is that you people leave me alone," said Anton.

"We are bringing you home," suggested Paechra. "It surprises me that you do not wish to show some gratitude for that."

"A threatened home, with the enemy in reach," Anton argued.

"And have you found that sword

of yours yet, mighty worrier?" asked Sienna.

Paechra noticed the purposeful difference between warrior and worrier, but she noted sadly Anton missed such subtle hints. "I am certain that one of your men has hidden it," Anton grumbled.

"Or the enemy has taken it as a trophy," Paechra suggested.

"All the more reason to go back and get it," demanded Anton.

"Or if not that blade, I would love to swing that blade of his against him."

"One word, Anton..." said Paechra. "Undead, and lots of them."

"That's five words," argued Anton.

"Five words that mean your certain death," stated Sienna.

"And then, you rise up and join their ranks," added Paechra.

"Nonsense," scoffed the human. "I'd cut them down before they got anywhere near me."

"With what?" asked both Paechra and Sienna, a chorus of disbelief. "Would you choose to use the air, the leaves, or perhaps a twig?"

"I cannot win..." grumbled Anton, he then storming off in search of Thomas and some human company.

"Don't wander off too far," called Sienna.

"We have our eye on you," Paechra added.

That was true. Having less than a day's grace between them and a strange enemy, Paechra had requested that all the sylvan kept a close eye on Anton so he did not sneak away. Even Thomas had taken it upon himself to make sure that the head truth keeper continued upon the path to Thuraen's heart. Paechra was determined that all of her forces would at least arrive safe.

*To be continued...*

# Horror

## *The Bassers*

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

**Y**ou hear them before you see them. Loud bass speakers booming from their vehicles. Ba dada boom boom da doom. Ba dada boom boom da doom. It rattles the windows in your house and fear in your soul. Playing the guessing game, are they two miles away or one? I hide behind the curtains peeking out to watch them drive by. I'm wound tighter than a banjo string relaxing only when they keep going past my place. I breathe a sigh of relief that it's not my turn today. Our little subdivision lives in fear of a bunch of punk kids. We called them "Bassers" on account of the loudspeakers in their vehicles. Once they moved in, they started taking over our lives. We were just a bunch of retirees looking for summer in the winter. What did we know? At first, the subdivision tried to put a curfew on the loud music after nine p.m. But the Bassers laughed at us. When the private constable wrote out tickets, they just tore them up in front of them, laughing while flakes of the paper floated to the ground. The hired cop to afraid to pursue it any further. The Bassers picked their mark, first stealing things out of the yard then moved on to the garage. I know they were getting ready to make a move on my house. It was only a matter of time. I felt I needed to do something to scare them off. Down at the Flying Hawk Hardware and Lumber Yard, I purchased a pickup truck full of stuff. When they asked me what I was doing, I told them I was helping the grandson with a science fair project. "Come to the school." I invited them, knowing Daryl and the boys would never set foot in a school again. I spent time in the Army, Special Forces. If there were any one thing in my life that I had perfected, it was how to fortify my position. Instead of waiting for the inevitable attack, I was going to be proactive. I would lure them to me and take care of

them once and for all. I shuttered the windows, cutting a small hole in each one to put my rifle through. Then installed small electric wires on the door front and back. If anyone touched the knobs, a good amount of voltage not enough to kill, but enough to garner respect, would be sent through the would-be intruder. I laid a few spike sticks across the driveway, something I could move with the jerk of a rope if I needed to leave quickly. I always had my rifles and handguns. I was a well-formed, well-armed militia, with plenty of ammunition. Oh, and a few short sticks of dynamite from when I had a stump removal business. All this, along with a few more tricks I learned in Vietnam back in the day. I was set. All I had to do was wait my turn. I'd give those Basser's a run for their money! I might be an old guy, but I was still a formidable foe with surprise on my side. As the sun went down, the Bassers woke up. They took their hog jacked trucks and SUVs, cranked up the tunes, and started their nightly rounds of terror and theft. I had buttoned down for the night when I heard the boom boom dada boom da boom. I quickly made it to the house. I had already laid the spike sticks in the driveway for the evening. I almost hoped the bastards would hit my house. The music grew deafeningly loud. I could feel it while the windows rattled, and so did my teeth. I was ready to do battle when they went around the corner. Part of me was relieved. The adrenaline rush was for nothing, perhaps tomorrow would be my day. The next morning, I decided to escalate things, not wanting to wait any longer. I was an old guy who didn't have much time to waste. I had my usual breakfast of half an order of biscuits and gravy at the Country Café like I did most mornings, barely getting a good morning from Dorothy who forgot to bring my two creams again. It was like I didn't exist. Local gossip from the coffee klatch seated at the lunch counter was broadcasted when I overheard them talking. "They got Zeke's house last night." The man in the Busch hat reported. "No, not Zeke! Is he ok?" John Deere tractor hat asked. "They beat him pretty good, took him to the hospital by ambulance, cleaned out the house." John Deere hat shook his head. "I heard the cops finally came to check out our situation." He put the word situation in air quotes. "We have got to do something about those Bassers," said the Busch guy. Just then, the boom boom da boom pulled into the parking lot. A big Dodge Ram with I had been "tagged." It was my turn next. I didn't feel like such a

of the window of the diner. Everyone shut up. Big talkers they were when no one was around. The Basser got out of the truck and walked in, ordering a coffee to go. Everyone in the diner stared at the punk. He didn't seem to care. He knew the effect he had on us old people. Some tried to pretend they were still able to carry on a conversation but mostly failed. All eyes glued on the Basser. Yep, someone needed to do something about those punks, but dang, they were young and big. "What are you looking at?" the punk said to me. Mentally I stared down the Coffee Guy, sizing him up while thinking to myself, "Come to my house." I glared into Basser's eyes. He knew I meant him. He huffed as if I was no big deal, and then he pretended to make a pistol out of his thumb and forefinger, blowing the imaginary smoke from his finger, putting his pretend gun back into his pocket after he shot me. It was my turn to laugh. "Go ahead, punk," I thought to myself as I sipped my coffee nonchalantly thinking. "*I am ready for you.*" I watched out the window as he walked the parking lot. I saw him finding my car with the Vietnam Vet bumper sticker that matched my hat. The Basser took some chalk and marked my tires.

tough guy anymore, but I wanted this reign of terror over with. After I finished my breakfast, I saw a few Bassers parked around the café, intimidation is their strong suit. They are like vultures. I knew they were watching me to see where I lived. The chalk marks on my tires would be the giveaway. After realizing that waiting them out wasn't an option, I drove home.

One followed when the other guy turned off. Then another one picked up. They were so obvious, especially with the loud music. I turned into my drive, opening the gate, driving through, and locking it behind me. The truck roared. I saw he had marked the road in front of the house with an x, drawn in chalk.

I was wired, anticipating their arrival. I drew the stop sticks across the driveway, battened down the shutters, cleaned my guns, made sure I had a butane torch to light the dynamite sticks. I was ready. I sat in my chair while the television droned. So tired, that unbelievably, I fell asleep. Ba dada boom boom da doom. I woke up with a start. It's happening. Looking through the peephole in the door, I started recording on cameras placed around the property. A guy cut the chain on the gate. I grabbed my shotgun, standing it up against one window and took my .22. There were four vehicles. Two came in and hit the stop sticks, their tires deflated. They got out, and all I had accomplished with that move was to succeed in pissing them off. Two vehicles stayed behind, not daring to come up the drive any further. They had learned, and now they were more cautious. One of the motion lights came on. I saw one of them jump. They came together, and I could hear their laughter. They thought I was an easy mark. After the flat tires and the motion light, they got a little taste of what was in store for them. But they banded together with false bravado. "Old man, we're coming for you." It was Coffee Guy from the café this morning. Yep, I had ticked them off. They weren't going to walk away. Now it was a matter of revenge. I kept watching through several cameras. Two of the guys were out in front taunting me, and the other two snuck to the back of the house. One was grabbing the doorknob and got a good shock. The first guy hopped around shaking his hand. The idiot. The second guy, didn't believe him, so he grabbed the handle and got the same shock. I am sure they had some burned fingers. They took off to the front of the house to warn the other two.

My heart pounded in my chest. I hadn't felt this alive since being overseas. I was back there walking through the jungle in the rain. Nothing like being close to death; it makes you feel more alive. I was going to enjoy this. I opened the small opening in the shutter poking out the .22 because I didn't want to kill anyone, just scare them off. I aimed for Coffee's hand and pulled the trigger narrowly missing him. I knew that would get them running.

"He shot at me! I'm gonna kill that guy." Coffee Guy ran up onto my deck, grabbing the door handle before he received his shock. He let go and danced around like he was being forced to dance by a shooting pistol. I'd seen that in a western. I love it when that happens. But my joy was cut short when he shouted. "Old Man, come out and take your medicine." I stuck my rifle out and shot out the small portal. This time they scattered behind their cars. I knew if I didn't end this fight tonight, it was only a matter of time before they put me in the hospital like Zeke, or worse, kill me.

I didn't hear it until it passed by me. The bullet came through the side of my house! Holy shit! They were shooting at me. When did they get so bold that they felt they could put bullet holes in my house? Now I was angry. I had enough evidence to know I was defending myself and not committing murder. I lit an eighth of a stick of dynamite and threw it under the cars, ran back into the house before they knew I'd



walked out the back door. "What was that?" Coffee Guy asked. "I saw sparks!" "Duck, I think he threw something at the car!"

Now, if you've ever experienced dynamite, even an eighth of a stick produces a sound that is incredible, and there is rushing air that fills the vacuum created by the explosion. One of their cars was destroyed. Pieces of it were raining down on them.

"Oh my God. He blew up my f'n car!" The one that shouted tried to tear off the shutters on my windows, but I had them reinforced. He jerked and pulled at the shutter. I shot out the window, taking the property loss. It slammed through the glass and the wood. The guy shrieked and started running.

"I'm leaving. Who's coming?" Four of them left, scrambling into one of the cars that were still running. Now it was just Coffee Guy and me. His truck was in the driveway, parked behind the car that exploded and the other two with flat tires. He was ranting and raving. I could see he was fighting with himself.

He'd made a decision. Back on the deck, he stepped in a bear trap I'd set. I had him now. His friends were long gone, and he was about to lose his foot. He wailed and screamed. I waited until he calmed down and watched him looking at the trap to see how he could spring it. I couldn't give him that chance. I opened the door. He looked up at me as I pulled on the chain dragging him toward the house. He wailed even louder. "You're going to pull my foot off, stop," he screamed. "I'm calling the cops. You are in trouble, old airman."

"Go ahead, call them," I answered calmly. "Just what are you doing on my property? What are you going to tell them? A man's home is his castle. I have a right to defend my castle." I could see him weighing his options. His friends couldn't intimidate me anymore, and he was trapped, looking at the possibility of losing his foot.

"So, do I call an ambulance, or do I finish you off?" The Basser started crying. It made me feel more powerful than ever. I tugged on the chain again. He was like a wild animal. He stood up, hopping on one leg. I ran back through the front door keeping it wide open. Coffee Guy needed to be in the house so that no judge or jury would convict me—an old man defending himself against several punks.

He came through the door with his knife drawn, swinging wildly. I shot and hit him in the gut. I heard the oof and saw him fall to the floor. He was rolling around bleeding like a stuck pig. My first instinct was to slit his throat, put him out of misery. But the clarity of the moment was there. He wasn't dead yet. I called the cops and asked for an ambulance.

"Home invasion. I shot the guy that came into my house." Finally, the Sheriff's department sent a couple of squads. The whole time we complained about the Bassers in our sub-division, they never sent anyone from the county. We had hired our own private cop, and the county was mad that we hired extra protection. Sure, now that I shot a man, they come. The deputy walked onto the deck, checking out Coffee Guy, and then came up to me and grabbed the gun from my hands. "You are crazy!" Just as he was putting down the rifle, Coffee Guy drew a pistol and shot the deputy. I grabbed my rifle and drilled Coffee Guy. The ambulance arrived, and they took on the deputy, barely noticing Coffee Guy, who had been declared dead.

Mr. Cromwell, you're bleeding," another officer said. "What?" I looked down. Coffee Guy must have caught me with the knife. My hand was dripping all over the place. I fainted. When I woke, I was in the hospital. The hand was all stitched up with a big bandage. "You may go as soon as you feel stable," The nurse told me. When they released me, the first thing I did was to go down and see Zeke. He was going to make a full recovery but had one Hell of a shiner and bruises all over. "Hank," he was glad to see me

and glad to find out the Bassers' were on their way out.

That was my lucky day. The police were able to get the other attackers using the cars they'd left behind and my video. They confiscated my dynamite. I no longer had the license to have possession of that.

I walked into Country Café, my arm in a sling, everyone looked at me. And then one guy in the coffee klatch stood up and started clapping. Soon the whole restaurant followed suit. I was embarrassed but proud.

"Morning Hank, the usual?"

Dorothy came by, she noticed me. She poured my coffee and put two creamers on the table just the way I like it.

"Yes, thanks," Dorothy called back to the kitchen.

"One half-order of biscuits and gravy for Hank Cromwell put it on my tab." And then, she winked at me. I felt warm all over. Sure, I had a court date coming up, but everything on video showed them attacking me. None of it would have happened if they'd stayed off my property. This is a stand your ground state. I'll come out alright. The best part of the whole ordeal? After seven years of living in this subdivision, I was finally accepted into the neighborhood.

**THE END**

# Action/Suspense

## Calming Chaos – Part One

By: Darnell Cureton



**Darnell Cureton**

Darnell Cureton was born and raised in New Jersey, the Garden State. He is currently working in IT support connecting users to devices in a corporate environment. In his spare time he enjoys writing flash fiction and provides writing encouragement to authors on his blog Fictionista. His writing diary and latest work can be found at [DarnellCureton.Com](http://DarnellCureton.Com)

### 'Land Lord Louie'

At 2 am Louis Raleigh Foster watched from his second floor window as Bernice staggered on her feet heading toward her building foyer. Her fun date with Lance Martin, a Porsche salesman came to an end when Lance stopped on Interstate 285 with an ultimatum.

"Get out or put out," he demanded. She reacted to his aggressive behavior by spitting in his face. In seconds Lance abruptly changed his demeanor and drove Bernice home. He offered to help her safely inside, but Bernice refused the offer. Her head was still cloudy when superintendent Louie came out of nowhere, standing by the complex entrance.

"I was heading to the laundry room to fix a broken washer when I saw you having trouble getting out of a car," he lied while taking the opportunity to grab her by the shoulders. He assisted

her to the entrance door without asking if she wanted help. Louie looked around at neighboring windows then pressed a button on a mobile app that controlled the entrance security cameras, turning them off.

"My date put something in my drink," she mumbled still having trouble steadying herself. Louie kissed her neck as he casually asked, "by any chance is your roommate home?" smiling smugly. Louie knew her roommate Francis was away for the weekend so all he had to do was get her to apartment 1G. In privacy he could assault her whether she passed out or not. Her defenses were down, and he planned to take advantage of the situation. If she called the police it would be a case of he said she said. However, when he stood in front of her apartment he felt protective.

"Just hold on Bernice. I'll get you safely inside then lock the door on the way out. Your date must have given you a roofie. You'll be

fine in the morning," he reassured. On his way back to his apartment Louie wondered what came over him. He had the chance to have her after weeks of refused advances, and then he decides to be a father figure? "What the hell," he muttered to himself as he took the stairs back to his apartment. In the hallway coming from the third floor, he heard a man yelling and loud banging. "What now, after 2 am in the morning?" Louie ran up the stairs to see what the commotion was all about.

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### 'Dennis the Menace'

Dennis Baker had the TV volume at maximum as he watched a VHS recorded tape of Wheel of Fortune. Vanna White the game show hostess, was 25 years of age during the broadcast Dennis found of the show on an obsolete home video media player. It was connected to an analog 27 inch TV that pulled in local channels with a digital antenna. His eyes followed the stunning young blonde woman standing by tall letters, turning them for each contestant in a form fitting red sequin dress. His face turned the color of Vanna's dress just before he slammed his fist into the kitchen wall. Dennis wrote letters to Vanna each week, pledging his love for the 67 year old woman. His mind stuck on the youthful

version of the hostess, wanted a response to his overtures. When he checked his mailbox earlier it was empty. His aspirations grew as he watched Vanna turn more letters on the old video. "That skank!" he mocked. "She could at least write me back," he reiterated while punching the walls again, leaving blood marks where his fists struck. "All I want is a date," he convinced himself. "Just a date."

The doorbell Dennis installed without management permission began blaring a 1920 auto horn sound "Ahooga, Ahooga," known as the Klaxon. The ringer sounded a high 85 decibels, much too loud for an apartment. Louie standing by the door fell back after pushing the ringer once. He got his feet and began knocking hard on the apartment door.

"Dennis you idiot, stop making so much noise! Do you know what time it is?" he shouted. "Open this door, damn it!" Louie demanded. He was making just as much a commotion as Dennis. A tenant in apartment 3B opened their door slightly using one eye to surmise the situation. "Mind your damn business!" Louie yelled behind him as the female tenant slowly closed her door. Dennis recognizing Louie's loud voice yanked his door open. "What?" he screamed, eyes flaring. His rent was three days late but that was no reason to be pounding on his door. Dennis

glared at the superintendent with both hands balled into fists. He waited for an explanation of the house call. Louie perceived the look on Dennis face and noticed the balled up fists. He decided to de-escalate the confrontation.

"Dee, I started off wrong. Let me rewind a bit," Louie said humbly. Its 3:10 in the morning. I can hear your TV on the first and second floor. If I step inside will I see holes in the walls? Is that what that loud banging noise was everybody heard? And what about that doorbell? That ring is much too loud for an apartment door. It disturbs everyone. If you're having a mental health crisis I can get you some help," Louie reassured. "But man, I hate to say it but if you can't keep the noise down, you gonna have to move out."

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### 'Jolly Jogger'

Ramona Gonzalez prepared for her midnight jog in Roselle State Park. She wore her favorite black active sportswear with a mesh long sleeve crop top paired with high waistband leggings. With her shoulder long hair in a ponytail, she looked like an extra from the Matrix movie franchise. "I also have my reflective vest and clip on heel lights for extra visibility," she assured her mother Julie. Julie was visiting for the weekend and was at first

surprised about the midnight run then terrified for her daughter's safety on second thought.

"Mom, I know the clothes are hard to see but I have the reflective vest and sneaker lights that will keep me visible," she asserted.

"And it keeps you visible to muggers and rapist's too," her mom shot back. Why don't you go with a girl friend or better yet a man? Nothing good happens at night, especially to vulnerable

young women," Julie emphasized. Ramona let out a sigh. She was tired of getting the same lecture each visit. Her job as an anesthesiologist paid well but had a high pressure environment. Patient safety limited social interaction with coworkers, on and off the job. She had no close friend to jog with.

"Mom I'll be fine. I have my phone connected to an app that dials 911 emergencies with my location using one tap if needed. Also, I'm testing out a new product called Harmony Without Hostility or H-w-H. It's a synthetic pheromone that causes males to become nonviolent. There are no side effects on women, and it comes in various packaging.

"I never heard of it," Julie quipped. "Is it like pepper spray?" "No, it's a pheromone fragrance which I spray liberally on my body. It mixes with perspiration and provides protection as long as I sweat," Ramona explained. It

also comes in an edible strawberry candy as well," she added.

"That sounds unbelievable! Don't put your trust is something that you don't know. How you know it works? Some puto could have made up the whole thing to get your money." She cautioned.

"I'll be careful ma. Besides, I still carry my keys and pepper spray."

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### 'The Midnight Menace'

Dennis crouched behind a lime glow juniper bush. Its bright green and black color blended in with his dark clothes. He watched and listened for someone to prey on. The only thing nearby were crickets and occasional light from bio luminous insects. As he swiped away lighting bugs his fantasy thoughts of Vanna White returned to his head. "All she had to do was go on a date with me. If she did, I wouldn't be out here now," he rationalized while rubbing his sore knuckles. This... what I'm doing... is her fault. Her fault. Her fault, he chanted as he heard footsteps approaching.

A woman wearing a dark outfit was running at a fast pace. Her hair bobbed back and forth to the rhythm of blinking footwear.

Dennis crouched to a runner's position, ready to sprint at the women as she drew closer. The plan was to hit her midsection, dropping her to the ground. Then

after a few well-placed punches to the face he would drag her back behind the juniper tree.

"Ready, set," he psyched himself up as the woman approached.

"Go!" he murmured while sprinting towards the woman. Dennis ran into Ramona colliding with her center mass but failed to knock her to the ground. She side stepped him and screamed, which startled Dennis for a few seconds. Using those seconds, she kicked Dennis between the legs, but the blow failed to make direct contact. He grabbed the raised leg forcing Ramona to the ground. Jumping on top of her Dennis used his weight to keep her down as he grabbed her arms. Ramona screamed and kicked the air as Dennis drew back a balled fist ready to land the first blow. Before striking the restrained woman, calmness took over his body. When his breathing relaxed he wondered why he was sitting on top of a woman on the ground.

"Oh my God! What am I doing? I'm so sorry. I don't know what came over me." He apologized a third time as he helped her to her feet. "Are you hurt? I'll drive you to the hospital if you need medical attention. My car is near here," he pointed out.

"I'm OK." Ramona said quickly as adrenaline implored her to flee. "I'll just be on my way," she added, running at a fast pace past Dennis heading out of the park



without looking back.

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### **'Last Call For Alcohol'**

"I'll have a Killian's Irish Red and double shot of Jack Daniels neat," Dennis told the bartender. He grabbed a few bills from his pocket and laid them on the table. The money was for his rent which was now four days overdue. 'What's it gonna hurt if I'm a few more days late? Louie the jack off landlord has it out for me anyway,' he surmised. The bartender named Grayson poured cold beer into a frosty glass and set a shot glass filled with warm whiskey next to it. Dennis downed the whiskey in one gulp followed by a sip of the cold beer to slow the burn in his stomach. As his senses dulled from the booze, Dennis thought about what happened in the park with the woman. One minute he was ready to beat, rob, and rape. The next he was apologizing and offering her a ride to the hospital. 'It's a good thing she left on her own. I would have been arrested for sure at the hospital if I walked in,' he figured. "Last call," Grayson announced to the patrons as he rang a bell behind the counter. "Before you close my tab, I'll take another double shot of JD if you don't mind." Grayson looked at Dennis with indifference. If the bar was

staying open he'd probably cut off first, and then follow. As she this customer that appeared to be drove away he would turn on his getting sick, but it was the last call, so he poured another double shot of whiskey. "Thanks buddy," Dennis acknowledged while paying his tab and giving Grayson twenty dollars more. Grayson looked at the tip, and then nodded a thank you as he moved on to settle up another customer. Dennis clutched his stomach after drinking the second shot. There was more than a burn going on. This was a stabbing pain, something he never experienced. 'What the hell is wrong with me?' he thought. 'Maybe I should go home, figure out why I have this pain. It's not a mental health crisis like loser Louie said,' he decided. Just then he spotted a black woman coming out of the ladies room alone. She walked a slow sexy sway over to a side table near the bars entrance. She grabbed a light jacket and a key set. Speaking with authority the woman told someone on her mobile she would be home in twenty minutes if traffic was light. Imani stood five foot four with long colorful braids, huge bust, and weighing no more than a buck ten turned male heads throughout the bar. 'I may have another chance' he grinned, deciding to ignore the increasing body pain. Dennis planned for her to leave the bar

fake police lights. When she stopped he would ask her to get out of the car to perform sobriety tests before attacking. If he played his cards right, he would have her soon.

***To Be Continued***

# Action/Suspense

*The Red, Grey, Black,  
and White- Part Two*

*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>

**A**ugust 1862, Charleston,

### South Carolina

"You speak of this *technology* as if it is all-important or a god to be worshipped, but we do not agree," Geronimo told Governor Henry Clark and the officials with whom he and his grey brethren were meeting.

Other Native American chieftains had joined their alliance after hearing about their plans. Cochise, who led another band of Apaches, Crazy Horse of the Sioux, and Sitting Bull of the Lakota had chosen to attend the meeting, too. They'd been reluctant to travel though the air in the strange thing called a *spaceship*, much less set foot in it, but once they'd agreed, they were amazed by how fast they'd traveled from one place to another.

"Progress is bad if we destroy Mother Earth," Cochise stated firmly.

Crazy Horse asked the whites, "Where will you live if the land is

dead?"

"You will die without food and water," Sitting Bull added.

"Our beliefs are different than yours," Governor Clark said, clearing his throat. "But we'll do what we think is best with the land. We own it."

"No, you do not," Crazy Horse retorted. "You talk of ownership but our people have been here for generations. We have respected and preserved the land to the best of our ability. You are killing it."

General Burnside snorted. "The land is fine," he declared before murmuring to the governor, "I'm glad I insisted on being here."

He'd brought at least forty armed soldiers with him, and they were positioned around the room.

"Governor Clark," he added, "I know you're trying to be patient with these...uh... But this is ridiculous. We're fighting a war and *that* is the most important thing right now. We can't afford to waste time on nonsense like this."

"We came to you because this is important," Geronimo stated calmly.

"In the past, we could not stop your destruction," Cochise rasped, his voice cold and threatening. "But this is a new day. And your thoughts are not hidden from us. We know them." Geronimo had shared his special gift with Cochise and the other chieftains.

Crazy Horse nodded. "You will not be allowed to harm the land anymore."

"No, you will not," Sitting Bull said, frowning at the governor and general.

Burnside glared at him. "You are a murderer who's killed innocent men and women." He looked around at each of the Native Americans. "All of you are murderers who've killed innocent people." As he spoke, the governor glanced away.

No one responded to the accusations, although there were some cold stares.

"Some of my bronze brothers lost their wives," Ooloon said, his voice devoid of inflection. "Many lost their children, brothers, sisters, and parents." After getting no response, he added, "You haven't asked *how* they lost their loved ones, but I am going to tell you. They were killed."

Clark paused before saying, "Many Americans were killed, too."

Burnside abruptly changed the subject. "We heard your threats to destroy our factories. But you need to know we won't sit and do nothing while you try."

"To *try* is one thing," Geronimo said. "But we didn't say we would try. We said we would *do*."

"We mean what we say," Cochise said.

"How do you not comprehend our concerns and the consequences of your actions?" Ootoon asked, his English fluent and ringing with conviction. "You have petroleum refineries, sawmills, textile mills, steel plants, and many other factories. Poison runs from some of them straight into the rivers and seas. It also seeps into the ground. Already plants and trees in the affected areas have stopped growing and withered. People are getting sick and dead fish float on the water. You have done this with your technology. Rather, with how you have chosen to use it. I know all about technology and the harm it can cause because the unrestricted use of it destroyed my planet."

"*Planet?*" Burnside exchanged a glance with Governor Clark. "I admit your height and body shape are unusual, but I've seen traveling circuses that feature all kinds of abnormal people. And I could easily use paint to change my skin color, as well. Saying you're from a different planet than here is preposterous."

"He speaks the truth, even if you don't believe it," Geronimo stated. "You and your men have the right to think as you wish. But on the matter of this Earth, we bronze men are in agreement with our brethren the grey men. We will not let you do further damage to it."

"Pah!" Burnside stood and walked away. He turned before going out the door and uttered a warning. "We do not tolerate threats and will take immediate action if anyone tries to damage our industries." Turning to the soldiers under his command, he commanded, "Arrest them."

Geronimo, Ooloon, Crazy Horse, Cochise, and Sitting Bull spoke quietly amongst themselves before facing the white men once more.

"We asked you to shut down your factories until you find a safe way to dispose of the waste and byproducts, but you refused," Ooloon stated. "We asked you to consider how you've damaged the Earth in the past — how you *are* damaging it now — but you refused. We asked you to work with us to preserve the land and achieve peace between all of its peoples, but you refused. You have made your choice clear."

"Choices have consequences," Sitting Bull stated.

Crazy Horse's lips curved but his gaze remained icy.

"Now see the result of your choice," Geronimo said. Beside him, Cochise merely nodded.

The Native Americans and grey men stood and prepared to leave. As they did, the soldiers reached for their revolvers and rifles, but froze with their arms at awkward angles. Their voices rose in consternation. From their panicked expressions, twitches, and jerks, they'd obviously found themselves unable to move.

Once the visitors went out the door, Ooloon tapped the device on his wrist, and his ship appeared in the sky. The government officials and military men, now released from their immobility, rushed outside, instantly bursting into startled chatter. Even as they took aim at the spaceship, green beams emanated from it, struck a factory with tall smokestacks across town, and it exploded. The army rallied, firing on the ship, but nothing they did made a difference. In rapid succession, the spaceship blew other factories to smithereens.

**October 1862, Atlanta, Georgia**  
Geronimo, Ootoon, and the Sioux and Lakota leaders approached Atlanta, accompanied by a number of Pawnee, Iroquois, and Cherokee. Thousands more had joined them, and their numbers continued to increase every day. Soldiers had constructed barriers to block the roads and fired as soon as the group was within shooting range. They used rifles. They used revolvers. They used

cannons and howitzers. In fact, they used every weapon in their arsenal, but none of their projectiles hit their targets. Rather, an invisible barrier stopped the bullets and missiles, and they fell to the ground. Then Ootoon blew up an Atlanta factory.

**April, 1863 Dakota Territory**

"It is important to treat captives fairly," Sitting Bull stressed, addressing two braves who had been caught torturing white prisoners. "What you have done is not honorable."

"White men are the ones with no honor," the torturers argued.

"They murder our people and do not deserve to be treated well. Remember the Dakota and what happened to them?" They referred to the mass execution of Dakota warriors the previous year.

Cochise said nothing, but his eyes glittered.

Listening from where he sat, Geronimo frowned. He glanced at Ootoon, whose eyes were troubled. Unspoken communication passed between them.

Ootoon looked at his men, who took away the two torturers.

"We cannot blame those men for their hatred of the whites," Crazy Horse commented. "I hate the white man, but the braves should have obeyed orders."

"I agree with you," Sitting Bull

said. "And I hate whites, too." Geronimo nodded. "I also have reason to hate them. But the disobedience of two of our people — even one — could lead others to act the same way, and our word must mean more than the whites' word."

"Not all of them are bad," Ooloon said. "Many have joined us and some of them are quite kind and good."

"Some of our own kind are not good," Sitting Bull offered. Ooloon sighed. "Every race has good people and bad people, but everyone is equal and should be treated fairly. And our goal is peace."

He and the Native Americans had formed the United League of Nations, with their own government. Despite the United States deciding not to join the alliance — probably due to their energies being focused on their civil war — many white men and women had joined the League on their own, appearing to have good intentions. But the same couldn't be said for everyone.

Some whites were in an uproar because the U.S. government had decided not to retaliate for the destruction of the factories, and they'd made their hatred of the bronze and grey men clear, continuing to fight. As a result, the allies had set aside a prison camp for the most violent individuals — the camp they came to inspect that day.

In addition, they'd moved several groups of non-allied whites off of Native American lands and into reservations for their own good. There, volunteers were teaching them how to respect living creatures and the earth. Reservation officials had outlawed and confiscated guns and weapons. They'd banned firewater and strong spirits, too, because white men tended to overimbibe and act irrationally after using it.

**July 2, 1863, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania**

Thousands of bodies lay on the ground, the hot sun beating down on them. Some of the dead men wore blue uniforms. Others wore gray. Slain horses lay here and there and the stench of death filled the air. Even so, the battle raged on.

But the Union and Confederate forces stopped fighting when the silver spaceship appeared in the sky, and watched it slowly descend, landing on the battlefield. No one spoke when Ooloon stepped out, followed by the United League of Nation's governing council, and several other grey and bronze men.

"Your war is over," Ooloon announced, his voice ringing clearly. "Tens of thousands have died, and for what?" He surveyed the combatants to his left, then the ones to his right.

A shot rang out as someone fired

at him, but he ignored it as the bullet struck an invisible barrier instead of him.

"Is life of so little value to you?" he demanded.

"We know you don't value the bronze man," Geronimo yelled.

"But do you not value each other? Are you and your sons and brothers not worth more than this?"

"Our fight isn't your business," a man called out.

"It is everyone's business," Ooloon said.

"What are you?" another man asked.

"A living being like you," Ooloon replied loudly. "Just like my bronze brothers. Our skin may be different colors, but we're the same in the ways that matter. The black men some of you use as slaves are just like us, too. They are *people*, not property. And as I already said, this war is over."

**August 12, 1863, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania**

"Four score and seven years ago," President Lincoln said from the podium, "our fathers brought forth..."

Journalists had said this gathering would be the largest, most memorable one in United States' history. And they'd been right.

Not only were American citizens in attendance, including men who'd fought on both sides of the Civil War, but also many Native Americans, Negros, and the

visitors from another planet.

While Geronimo and Ooloon listened to the speech, they looked at one another and the other chiefs with them. Lincoln had joined their alliance the day the Civil War ended. So had Frederick Douglas, who'd done so on behalf of the Free Negro Men and Women of America. He'd been chosen as the first president of the newly-formed organization. Afterward, the United League of Nations had added "and Free Peoples" to their name.

"I don't know whether to smile or cry," Douglas commented, his eyes shining. "I dreamed of my people being free for so long, but at the same time I worried it might never happen."

"When we were fighting the whites and they were forcing us into the reservation, I had the same fears," Geronimo admitted.

"And the same dreams."

"I did, too," Cochise said. "My anger at the white man gave me strength to keep fighting but ate away at me."

"We were always meant to be free but I grew tired of fighting," Sitting Bull said. "I longed to live the remainder of my life in peace and quiet."

Crazy Horse stated, "My life was nothing but war. I thought my children and grandchildren would never know anything but that and the same hatred I felt."

"You saved our lives and changed our future," Geronimo told



Ooloon. "If you and your people hadn't come when you did..."  
 "But we did," Ooloon replied.  
 "And we've helped you, but the dreams were mainly yours.  
 Together, we've already achieved important things, but there's much more to do." He told Douglas, "You told us you believe education is vital for the Negro people — for all people — and we better agree with you."

"I believe all Negroes need to learn how to read and write," Douglas said. "They need the same opportunities as white people have had all along. And women are just as intelligent as men; they need better treatment also."

"We want you to write that and make it a law," Geronimo told him.

Ooloon nodded. "You could call it Equal Education for All or whatever you want." He lowered his eyes for a moment. "And I want to say something to all of you that I should have said long ago. I apologize for not coming earlier. We knew your world had problems but our focus was on our own planet. We were trying to save it from the mistakes of earlier generations, but couldn't. Now we know that wasn't meant to be. But you endured horrors in the meantime, and I am sorry for that. If only we'd come..."

"You have nothing to be sorry for," Geronimo replied. "You saved me. You saved my people."

"And mine," Cochise said. "If you

hadn't come, we'd still be fighting."  
 Sitting Bull nodded gravely. "I could have died by now."  
 "Death rode after me and I believe I may have sought it," Crazy Horse admitted.  
 "We cannot change the past." Frederick Douglas spoke softly.  
 "All we can do is work toward a better tomorrow."

***End of second part of three***

**VOTE FOR THIS PIECE** ★★★★★

# Action/Suspense

19 20 21 - Part two

By: Timothy 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

**S**ydney had turned into a dazzling, sunny day. Mike had taken the girls on one of the many iconic ferries across from Sydney Harbor to Manly Beach. The harbor waters were calm thankfully, a direct contrast to the hustle and bustle of people milling like ants throughout this busy part of the city. The ride on the Manly Ferry had been a joy with ample opportunities for the girls to take selfies, some with dad and some without, all with the famous Australian bridge in the background. Now Mike was hoping for a casual stroll across the golden grains of sand that made up Manly beach. Fine to warm weather had brought out all the locals as well as an army of tourists making a stroll more a game of tiptoe as Mike and his daughters tried hard to not tread on the tapestry of towels covering the extremely busy beach. “Not what I had in mind girls,” apologized Mike to his two daughters who had put their phones away. “I’m so sorry.” “Don’t worry dad... Nothing that

can’t be fixed with a gigantic milkshake...” suggested Georgie with a cheeky grin. Sasha nodded her agreement eagerly. With a laugh Mike took his girls by the hand and turned away from the ocean and its sea of swimmers and amateur surfers. “Come on then, let’s go find you each a shake and me a beer,” he stated. “Peppermint for me, please,” requested Sasha. “And you know how much I love mango, dad,” added Georgie. “One peppermint, one mango and one Belgium bitter...” agreed Mike. “That sounds like the perfect way to spend our daddy and daughters time together.” The two girls smiled in agreement as they each took one of their dad’s offered hands.

#

Sonya looked out across the wildness of the grey ocean as a strong offshore wind played with the waves causing the seascape to churn and dance. “Do you miss it?” Ray asked,

is difficult not to be inspired to write.

Many of his short stories and general musings can be found on his blog <http://somecallmetimmy.blogspot.com.au/> or on [Parenting Express website](#).

standing beside her, seeing the joy in the sparkle of his friend's eyes.

"May be a little..." Sonya suggested, lying to her friend's simple question as much as to herself.

"I don't believe you," teased Ray with a boyish smile. "I think you may not have missed it straight away... Maybe didn't miss it yesterday... Now that you see it, though I bet right now you sudden have realized just how much the powerful ocean is part of your past and should definitely be part of your future..." stated Ray.

"Maybe you're Senior Sargent... Maybe you're just a lonely heart clutching at what could have been..." teased Sonya, tearing her eyes away from the pure, natural ferocity of Goolwa Beach that day. "Now how about you show me where that bag was found?"

As she removed her shoes and turned to follow Ray the sand felt good between Sonya's toes. The sensation brought back a multitude of pleasurable childhood memories. Years on the streets of Melbourne chasing scum and worse, and many mornings and evenings in her local gym had prepared Sonya for a casual stroll amongst the dunes. The salty sea air only invigorated her more, giving her a natural energy while sapping her simultaneously. After the flight and the drive from Adelaide

Sonya knew that this afternoon by the seaside would be enough to help her sleep very well once she crawled under the covers.

There was still so much to do though before the peace of slumber.

"This is the place!" Ray called as the two of them strode over the crest of another great dune. Sonya could see the area that had been staked with star droppers and orange police tape. She frowned as she noticed all the footprints both outside and inside the taped off area.

"Why is there not an officer watching the crime scene?"

Standard protocol right Senior Sergeant?" Sonya asked with a single eyebrow raised high.

"Three staff for the entire district, one of them on part time hours..." stated Ray as an excuse, letting his words trail off and hang in the air.

Sonya shrugged and the eyebrow dropped. "Do you mind if I take a look around?" she asked.

"Go ahead," replied Ray, strolling down the dune, and raising the tape so Sonya could duck underneath. "We've been over this area, every inch and none of us could find any evidence but the tracks from the digger."

"What's that then?" the detective asked, uncertainty obvious in her query.

"Just a bit of rubbish from another bloody shopping bag," cursed Ray as he looked across

where Sonya was pointing. "Humor me..." Sonya mused as she left her friend holding on to the string and turned away from the official scene of evidence discovery. Sand fell like tiny waterfalls as the detective hiked her way carefully up the side of the next dune. Halfway up where the slight corner of plastic flapped feebly in the sea breeze Sonya pulled a pair of thin rubber gloves from her jeans back pocket, putting them on before she began digging with her hands. "Come help me, Ray, please... There is something here!!" she yelled over her shoulder. With a sigh Ray let the string go and headed over to join her. "I told you Sonya that we've been over this area..." stated Ray with a sigh. His tune changed though as he eventually saw what Sonya had spotted early on. "Oh... Damn... Not another one..." Ray muttered as he too donned some gloves. At first there was an element of frustration in his tone. Quickly though the pair's digging revealed a backpack strap sealed within what seemed like three or more supermarket shopping bags. Ray's tune had very quickly become one of admiration for Detective Sonya. After two minutes of frantically flicking away sand more of the backpack became evident. Both Sonya and Ray could see the dark patches of color on the

outside of the midsized bag, this one snow white with REEBOK stitched into the front pocket in bright purple thread. "Do you have any tools in your car?" asked Sonya. "I'll go grab them..." replied Ray. "And the droppers..." he added. "And the police tape..." continued Sonya... "Lots of police tape... We've just found another clue and the little patch you and your team cordoned off is not nearly big enough." "Hells... For all we know," replied Ray as he turned to leave. "This could cover the whole blasted beach..."

#

"Joe! I'm looking at the Holden right now," a young lady, perhaps in her mid-twenties murmured over the phone. "It has been parked at the bottom of Dent Street for most of the afternoon... You may as well say that they have left it in the middle of my front yard..." The person on the other end replied in a voice that was a combination of calm and patronization, as if the young lady were a child many years younger. "You can't say that Joe... You're not here to see... Just know I'm not happy about it OK... I'm more than a little bit worried..." replied the girl, obviously frustrated. "I was just hoping you would acknowledge that..."

There came a barrage of angry shouting from the other end of the line, orders of sorts, nothing that helped to ease the lady's mounting levels of concern. She gave a sigh and slammed down the old style phone back onto its receiver. "Was that Joe!" an older voice, male, called from the direction of the bedroom. "Yeah, that was Joe," replied the girl. "He says not to worry, Jack!" "So don't worry!" advised Jack with a laugh followed by a hacking cough. "Come in and sit with me, Lisa... Yelling is no way to have a conversation, now is it?" "No, I guess not, especially for you in your condition," the one called Lisa replied. "Forget my condition, don't worry about me," called the one known as Jack. "Instead, why don't you go fix us both up and drink and we can come up with a way to pass the time that doesn't involve worrying..." Lisa considered telling Jack that it was not even midday, but words like that would have probably made the man angry. "Sure, Jack," she said instead before wandering off in the direction of the kitchen. "Good girl, Lisa," Jack replied before a coughing fit overcame him.

#

“So where should we go next girls?” Mike asked his daughters. “Surely you would need a rest after our ferry trip and such a massive treat.”

“To the aquarium!” called the girls, together. “Please dad?”

Mike sighed. He still felt guilty about the zoo trip, but he had not given up entirely. With luck the zoo staff would understand his mishap in the rush to get to the airport, and new tickets could be allocated. He needed time to sort it all out though, time that his daughters were not interested in giving him, or so it seemed.

“OK girls, I guess you are still too full of beans for me to take a break,” Mike sighed, but smiled. “Let’s catch a bus though, dad’s exhausted.”

“Yay!!!” chorused the two youngsters.

“We’re going to visit Nemo!” cried Georgie. “And all of his family and friends!”

“I want to see the sharks!” added Sarah, even louder.

“And I’ll see if I can call the zoo,” said Mike.

As the bus came up over the horizon, Mike fished out his phone and looked up the zoo’s number. He was still listening to the sound of ringing as he handed over cash to the driver.

“Four for the aquarium, please,” Mike mumbled.

“Only three, dad,” said Georgie.

“Remember, mum’s not here,” her sister added.

“Oh yeah, only three, thanks mate,” Mike said, apologetically.

“No worries,” said the driver as he handed back a few coins.

“There is standing room at the rear of the bus, so it would be great if you could all head there...”

The trio migrated to where the driver suggested as two more figures climbed aboard. One was an elderly lady, for which a young man in a business suit vacated his seat.

“Thank you,” the old woman said as she gratefully sat.

The bus jerked forward then, and the poor businessman almost fell.

Mike caught him by the arm and helped him to remain standing.

“Thanks mate,” the young man said. “I didn’t expect that.”

Sarah and Georgie noticed as the young man’s shirt untucked that he had a unicorn tattoo on his abdomen, the body of the beast most likely inked upon his thigh, remaining hidden by his dark trousers. Georgie loved unicorns more than anything in the whole wide world. She was just about to say as much to the man when her sister stopped her.

“We shouldn’t talk to strangers,” Sarah warned. “Mum and dad both taught us that, remember?”

“Yeah, I guess,” Georgie agreed.

“But dad is right here.”

“Strangers are still strangers,” said Sarah, firmly.

“What are you two going on about down there?” Mike asked

the girls.

“We shouldn’t talk to strangers should we, dad?” Sarah asked.

“Hold on... Sorry...” Mike said to the person from Taronga he had been speaking with on the phone.

“Dad?” the girls said, each hoping to hear a response that backed their argument.

“Yes, I mean no...” the girls’ dad mumbled. “I mean... I wish your mother was here, she normally deals with this sort of stuff...”

“We do too,” said Sarah.

“Yeah,” moaned Georgie. “This was supposed to be a family trip.”

“I know, girls,” replied their dad.

“I know...”

The bus jolted again as it pulled in from the road.

“Sydney Aquarium,” the driver called over his shoulder.

“Come on girls, this is our stop,” Mike said.

The elderly lady smiled at the trio as they shuffled by her.

#

Sonya had called in a favor to the station in Adelaide, Holden Hill. It had taken a lot of convincing, but eventually she had managed to get a dozen more officers down south to comb the beach. Five more backpacks had been uncovered. So far hands, feet, an upper arm, and parts of the torso had been discovered. Sonya estimated at least eight victims, but she and Ray would not be certain of the number until



everything went up to the labs in the city.

"I don't know how you can stomach this, Sonya," Ray asked, and then realized what he'd just said.

Sonya ignored the look of shocked embarrassment on Ray's face.

"It is all just so organized," she murmured. "Did you notice that too, Ray?"

"Yeah, I guess," he replied.

"Each bag has a separate part, and you know what that means..." Sonya continued.

"Tell me, detective..." Ray begged.

"Put me out of my misery..."

"Our killer, or killers, collected the

parts of their victims..." Sonya

explained. "Nobody could come

and dig up each bag to add a foot,

a quarter of a ribcage, the

occasional hand..."

"Maybe they killed a whole bunch

of people all at once, cut them up

and then dumped all the bags in

one knight..." Ray suggested.

"Nah, I don't buy that theory, and

neither do you..." Sonya retorted.

"Even without the lab report you

can tell the different body parts

have been in the bags for varying

periods of time..."

"Well, please forgive a country

cop his suggestions," grumbled

Ray. "I am more than happy for

you to do this one on your own."

"I'm sorry, Ray," Sonya said. "I

forget, I'm the visitor here, not

the local anymore."

"No, don't apologize for good

police work, Sonya," Ray said. "I should learn to grow my ego a thicker skin."

"Let's wait and see what results come back from Adelaide,"

suggested Sonya, giving Ray a friendly smile.

"Whether it is theory A, theory B, or another whole different set of

truth," added Ray. "We can both agree we're dealing with a

psycho."

Sonya shivered when Ray suggested such a thing.

"Thanks for bring me in on this one, Ray," she murmured. "I'm

pretty sure this stems back to that case I was on before they shipped

me interstate."

"It is good to have you back, Sonya," said Ray. "Together we're

going to close this one, I just know it."

"Me too, Ray," said Sonya. "I'm not leaving until it's done."

#

"Jack..." cried Lisa. "There are more of them now..."

The phone crackled with that same calm and patronization.

"Calm...? You want me to stay calm...?" Lisa growled. "This is as

calm as you're going to get from me Jacky boy until the red and

blue flashing lights are far, far away from my front yard..."

Jack replied... Cool... Sharp... A voice like a knife...

"You're not here... It's not your head that will get the chop..." Lisa said. "They are bottom feeders."

said, just as coldly.

Jack's next words caused Lisa to smile.

"When will you arrive?" she asked. "Will it be as early as tomorrow?"

The voice on the other end of the call oozed promises and support.

"I'll tell Joe, straight away," Lisa promised. "He'll want to know so we can come to the airport and pick you up."

She listened, and Jack's next request caused Lisa's smile to turn into a frown.

"Sure, Jack, he's sleeping now..."

the girl. "We will leave your visit as a surprise, our little secret..."

#

"How do they get the shark not to eat the smaller fish?" Georgie asked her dad.

They were staring at the giant fish tank in the café area, jostling for

viewing space with the other families and tourists gathered there.

"Um... Maybe the diver tells the shark to play nice?" suggested Mike.

"Really dad, you are so silly sometimes," laughed Sarah.

"Well then, miss know-it-all, you tell us how come there is a shark in with all the little fish and other sea creatures," said the girls' dad. Sarah puffed up with pride.

"The species of shark that we can see is called a Whale Shark," she

“They eat bottoms?” asked Mike, over by the turtles, does he look feigning surprise. familiar to you?”

“No, dad,” Georgie giggled. “It means that they eat stuff from the bottom of the sea.” “Don’t be ridiculous,” said Sarah.

“Like feathers, and foam, and bed bugs... Ewwww...” said Mike with a smile. “You cannot possibly make out anyone that far away and through that much water.”

“Yes dad,” said Sarah, her arms crossed. “There are bed bugs in the sea...” “No, I’m serious,” suggested Georgie. “I’m going to check it out.”

“Good to know...” the girls’ dad replied. “I guess I’m never going swimming ever again.” “Dad told us to stay right here,” stated Sarah, firmly.

Sarah and Georgie both knew just how much their dad loved to be in the ocean. The number of times they had joined him at the breakfast table, and he had smelled just like the beach, the evidence pointing squarely to the fact he had woken early and already gone for a refreshing swim. “Yeah, you stay here and tell dad where I’ve gone,” said Georgie, moving away from her sister’s side.

“Dad...” the two girls chorused. “Are you being serious now, Georgie?” Sarah asked.

“Yeah, I guess you got me,” Mike admitted. “I might ask if there’s a way, we can all maybe join that diver and feed some fishes.” Georgie nodded.

The girls’ eyes twinkled. “Well, if you’re going then I’m going too,” said Sarah. “Come on, lead the way.”

“No way...,” said Georgie. The girls gave their dad a quick glance and saw that his back was turned.

“Yes please,” begged Sarah. “I’m sure I’m right,” said Georgie.

“Stay here, girls, and I’ll see what I can do...” Mike promised. “He just looks so familiar...”

As their dad headed off toward the ticket office, Sarah and Georgie continued to examine the gigantic tank.

Georgie stared through the water, to something on the other side of the display that caught her eye.

“Hey, Sarah?” she said. “That guy,

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

# Action/Suspense

## *In the Midst of Normalcy Part 13*

*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)

## 39. **Something to**

### **Work With**

Pete Quarles had long ago quit denying to himself that he was handsome, and women responded to him because of it. He did not use this knowledge in any kind of selfish or negative way. Indeed, he loved his wife very much and had resisted various temptations throughout the years of their happy marriage. Rather, he used his good looks much in the way as a fashion model uses hers; to professional advantage. It was no coincidence that Lt. Coleman thought of Pete when he realized there was a house full of attractive women in the Coleman home. Even at her age, Janelle Burdick was still a handsome woman, no question about it. This, Pete knew, could be good or bad. Often, attractive women are used to the attentions of men and his mere presence did not have the

same immediate effect it did on women of lesser physical charms. Still, he was effective. He knew it and most of the time it worked in his favor.

So, it was with this in mind he began the interview with Ms. Burdick. He hoped that, because on the night of the murder Ms. Burdick and Tim were up a little later than the others in the house cleaning up, she saw or heard something important.

Pete would find out soon as he began the "discussion."

The kitchen was always safe and comfortable territory for a woman, and it was hoped the setting, along with Pete's demeanor, would relax Ms. Burdick. Relaxed people let their guard down and things of importance often came of it. (The detectives realized in hindsight the kitchen should have been the location of Stephanie Coleman's interview). But the lieutenant did not expect miracles as he offered his first question. Speaking of Saturday night, he asked, "You

and Tim stayed up after the others to clean up?"

"Yes, we were up 20-30 minutes later than the others. I don't remember exactly how long."

"Did you see or hear anything?"

"Well, as I was preparing for bed, I thought I heard footsteps on the stairs."

This interested Quarles but he tried not to indicate excitement to his interviewee. He replied, "Where on the stairs?" This was an important question because, as previously noted, in the spacious Coleman home there were multiple levels. There was a recreation room basement where the murder occurred, a ground (main) floor where the garage, kitchen, formal dining room, formal living room, den and study were located and an upstairs area with the bedrooms. A fourth level, the "split" level sat between the basement and ground floors and consisted of the utility room and a small, scarcely used TV and reading room. (The detectives decided not to use this room for questioning as it contained only one chair, an end table with a reading lamp and a small television. The bookcases were mostly empty. It was not, Baughman felt, a place where a person may relax and speak freely).

Janelle replied, "I'm not sure, but the footsteps were clear."

Pete thought for a moment. The stairs in the Coleman house were uncarpeted oak. Distinct footsteps would have to be made by a shoe with a firm sole and heel of some kind. Soft soled sport or house shoes would not have caused Janelle to hear them. He asked, "But, they were loud enough that you heard them in your bedroom?"

"Yes."

Pete believed her when she stated they were loud enough to hear through a closed bedroom door but was unable to determine exactly where on the stairs they came from. The split level houses in this area often carried sounds from one level to the next remarkably well. He thought of his own home in Olathe. Unless you closed the door, the television located in one of the upstairs bedrooms could be heard as clearly downstairs in the den as was by the person watching a program only a few feet away from it. Continuing this important line of questioning, he next asked, "Could you tell what kind of shoe the person was wearing?"

"No, it wasn't real loud, just loud enough to where I knew somebody was on the stairs." Janelle's voice cracked as she added, "I had no idea this would become so important, or I would have paid more attention."

"Did you hear these sounds again?"

Janelle shuddered. She knew the lieutenant meant did she hear the murderer return from the downstairs recreation room. Wringing her hands nervously, softly she answered, "No. Now, you need to know, I wasn't as drunk as some of the others, but I did have a few. My senses weren't as keen as we wish they were now."

Gently, Quarles replied, "I understand. So, may I assume after hearing the footsteps you went to bed?"

"That's correct."

"Did you hear noises in the night? Did anything awaken you?"

"I got up around 5:00 a.m. to use the bathroom." Shaking, she added, "I had no idea Leann was dead downstairs."

"How about noises?"

"I heard nothing. That's not very helpful but it's the truth."

Pete knew Ms. Burdick had had enough for now. "Anything you wish to add?"

"Well, I suppose you should know" she offered, miserably, "Tim was attracted to Leann."

For the second time, a Coleman woman had dropped an important statement in his lap. "What makes you say that?"

"Tim and I are close. Several years ago, I cannot remember exactly when, he confided this to me. It bothered him, being attracted to a cousin and he wanted to talk about it. I would be shocked if he ever acted on his feelings, but it's something you need to know."

Being a woman, I could see during this reunion his feelings for her and efforts to suppress them."

There was an uncomfortable pause. Quarles felt the right thing to do was to let Ms. Burdick offer whatever she wished and wait until she was ready to continue. He was not disappointed. "I know the guys don't know anything of this. I'm not sure about Cathy, Stephanie, or Peggy. I do know that Cathy and Tim have a wonderful marriage. I doubt it would be as good as it is if Tim and Leann had ever done anything. I've sensed Leann had -- maybe still has -- the same feelings for Tim. She gave him a lover's kiss when she arrived last week, and Cathy saw it too. But I really don't know. I think Tim would have told me."

Getting this off of her chest seemed to strengthen Janelle. She looked the lieutenant in the eye and asked, "Anything else?" Pete retained his low key posture. Gently, he answered, "No, Ms. Burdick. All of this has been very helpful, and I thank you for your candor. Rest assured what you have said, or what any of you have to say, is confidential to the investigation."

He arose from the kitchen table and motioned for her to do the same, saying, "Let's rejoin the others."

## 40. Baughman and Mike Coleman

At the same time Bearce and Quarles were conducting their interviews, Baughman met with Mike Coleman on the patio. It was another nice day, perhaps the only pleasant thing in the lives of the Colemans and detectives during this very grim time.

The detective was anxious to speak with Mike Coleman because Mike was the only family member with a history of violence although, in this instance, he was the one being chased by an outraged spouse. Even so, Baughman thought his lifestyle and stormy marriage may reveal something pertinent to the Edgmon murder.

The lieutenant did not waste time and got right to the point. He and his fellow detectives agreed that the gentle approach would probably not work with this man. He would not bully Michael Coleman, but neither would he make a special effort to be low key, as was being done with several of the other family members.

He started by stating, "Your sister was brutally murdered. I am very sorry for your loss, but I need for you to tell me as we begin what your first impressions were."

This statement obviously annoyed

Mike somewhat but, in fairness, Lt. Baughman knew it would upset most people. Mike replied, "What do you think my first impressions were?"

"I don't know. That's why I'm asking."

"You know about the domestic violence my ex-wife and I had. You probably have not found anything similar with my sister or cousins. So, you are very interested in me."

"We're interested in everybody, Mr. Coleman. Please answer the question."

"Well, I was sickened and outraged, as were all of the others. This is a terrible thing. I'm a man who has more than the usual number of character flaws, Lieutenant, but I'm no killer, especially not my own sister. We were not overly close, but I loved her very much."

This satisfied the lieutenant for the time being. He asked, "What did you see or hear?"

"Not much. I knew Stephanie embarrassed herself. I didn't know her sexual preference until the other night but it's no surprise, really. I sort of suspected it but never thought too much about it. We weren't close."

"I'm learning the Colemans are not a close knit family." He did not add, *and one which had a member eager to host a family reunion.*

"No, we're not. We used to be.

The reunion was Tim's way of



getting us back together. Leann from upstairs.”

getting murdered is terrible, but I “What were the sounds?”

feel sorry for Jack. Tim and Cathy, “Sounded like a door opening and 2:54 when I woke up, I was still

too. Until yesterday morning it then maybe a faint clunk or click. I drunk. The mind can play tricks

had been a great time. They really can’t say for sure.” on you in the middle of the night

put themselves out for the rest of Baughman was pleased with this after drinking too much.”

us.” information. He didn’t share his Baughman thought it was quite a

“All right, then. In your words, tell suspicion with Mike that perhaps coincidence that Mike woke up

me what happened after the the murderer picked that time to just as the murderer moved to

party broke up.” go to the main floor bathroom dispose of the murder weapon.

“We went to bed; all of us except and throw away the steak knife. He considered that noises from

Tim and Janelle who stayed up Instead, he asked, “Could the downstairs could have been the

late to clean up. We were pretty sounds have come from the reason he woke up. Still, was it

wasted and the deal with basement?” coincidence or a misleading

Stephanie just made us want to Mike ran a hand through statement from Ms. Edgmon’s

break up.” thinning, sandy hair and thought killer?”

“Did you see or hear anything?” for a moment before answering, Once again the street wise

“No. In this respect, I’m probably “I doubt it. Sound travels very Michael read the lieutenant’s

your poorest witness. I was barely well between the first and second mind. He said, “If I wanted to lie

able to slip out of my clothes floors but sounds in the to you, I would come up with

before passing out on the bed.” basement are muffled unless the something better than that.”

“What about during the night?” door at the head of the basement Maybe, but nevertheless,

“There’s one thing, but I can’t say stairs is open and you are close to Baughman believed him. He had

for sure how accurate my it.” not shared with the family the

impressions are.” Mike Coleman “Was the basement door shut finding of the murder weapon.

grimaced as he said this. when you and the others came Baughman smiled thinly, asking,

Baughman’s regard for this man upstairs just before the party “Anything else?”

had risen since the interview ended?” “I got up around 6:00 to relieve

began. There seemed to be more “Yeah, Jim was last out and he myself. I was quiet. I don’t think

to him than he had been led to shut it.” anyone heard me.”

believe. After a short pause, Mike Baughman felt he was telling the “Is that it?”

continued, “About 3:00 a.m., 2:54 truth about the source of the “That’s it.”

to be exact according to my travel noise and the basement door. “OK, Mr. Coleman, Thank you.”

clock, I awoke. My head and Both Tim Coleman and Jack As they rose from the patio table,

stomach hurt but experience has Edgmon stated the door was shut Michael asked, “When can we

taught me to just lie still and go before they entered the have our cell phones and laptops

back to sleep after partying too basement and found Leann. Even back?”

hard. After maybe five minutes I if the murderer had found the Baughman was surprised he had

heard sounds, sounded like they door open, which was unlikely, he not been asked that question

came from downstairs. Sounds had shut it when leaving the before. Using his best conciliatory

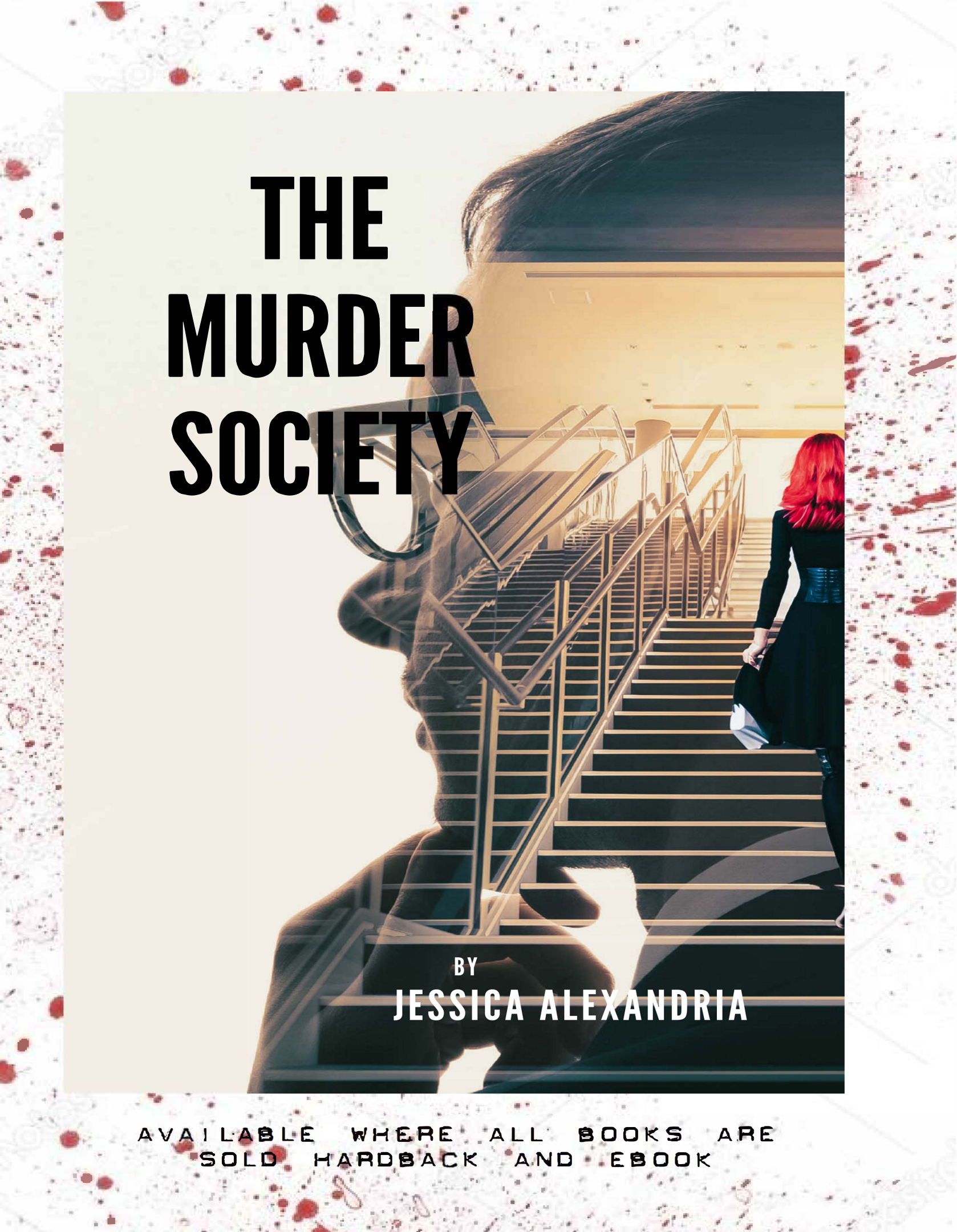
are funny in this house but I’m basement long before 2:54. “So, demeanor, he said, “Soon. I know

reasonably certain they weren’t you’re pretty sure it wasn’t from I cannot keep you sequestered

and shut off from the world indefinitely. Everyone has voluntarily cooperated and that is deeply appreciated. I know the family is as anxious to find Ms. Edgmon's murderer as we are. But I hope you understand that it's very important to isolate the murderer for as long as we can. For whatever it is worth to you, all of your employers and relatives have been notified." Gary attempted to smile, "If you have a dog, rest assured he's being cared for." Michael smiled back, displaying for the first time his formidable charm, and said, "He's a she."

**VOTE FOR THIS PIECE** ★★★★★

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



# THE MURDER SOCIETY

BY  
JESSICA ALEXANDRIA

AVAILABLE WHERE ALL BOOKS ARE  
SOLD HARDBACK AND EBOOK

# Science Fiction

## *Sleepie and TNT*

*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>

**L**ying side by side on the couch in the living room, the two calico cats looked identical except for their eyes. Sleepie's were partly closed as if she were exhausted and on the verge of falling asleep at any second. TNT's, on the other hand, were the complete opposite. Hers sparkled with life and alertness. "Uh-huh." Margie, their human, studied them and snorted. "You look all sweet and peaceful, but that's misleading as can be, isn't it? That's not who you truly are. And the minute I drop off to sleep, you'll probably race around and around the apartment, sounding like a herd of stampeding horses or elephants. And do you care that you wake me up every single time? Of course not." She shook her head but smiled at them. Walking over, she sat down beside them and smoothed their furry heads. "You mischievous furballs better be glad I adore cats."

Sleepie yawned widely and stretched. TNT widened her eyes, blinked, and exuded sheer innocence. They rubbed against their person and purred loudly as she continued to pet them.

Margie eventually walked away, though. Sleepie glanced at TNT and communicated telepathically with her. "You heard what she said. She knows we aren't real cats."

"Relax," TNT replied, answering the same way. "That's not what she meant. You worry too much." Within moments, they zoomed down hallways and ricocheted off walls, making a horrendous racket. They bounded down shelves, knocked books and mementos off right and left, and speed-climbed drapes and curtains, leaving claw marks everywhere.

"*Stop that!*" Margie fussed, hands on her hips. "Do you know how many times I've had to replace stuff y'all have destroyed? I should put you to work so I won't have to pay for things anymore." Her furry friends rushed to her, wrapped themselves around her



ankles, and *yowwed* and *owwed* for all their were worth. Her anger soon dissipated.

In the middle of the night, when she was sound asleep, the two “felines” shed their disguises, and resumed their true, Martian forms. Their grey heads spun around and around, and they used their six three-fingered hands to gently lay lamps on their sides on the floor. They scattered cushions and books all over the place, along with numerous other things. Everything looked as if it had been knocked over willy-nilly, and the entire place looked like a disaster zone.

“I suggest we climb the curtains again and rip them more,” Sleepie suggested. “That’s normal for felines.”

TNT agreed. “So is shredding toilet paper and knocking excrement out of the litter box.” “Or leaving new piles here and there.”

“Once we’re done, we’ll don the furry shapes again and sneak outside. You take the houses on the left side of the street, and I’ll take the right.”

“Agreed. The humans will never know.”

They went to work, chuckling mentally. After all, they had to maintain their disguise. It was the only way to keep studying humans and learning about them without being discovered.

**VOTE FOR THIS PIECE** ☆☆☆☆☆

***The End***



# Humor

## Just Your Typical Evening

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.

“D r. Cypher, your ten

o'clock is here. Shall I send him in?”

“Yes,” replied the therapist, straightening out the papers on his desk.

A man, somewhere in his thirties, entered and approached Dr. Cypher's desk. He held out his hand, timidly. Dr. Cypher immediately noticed the man's bloodshot eyes and pale complexion.

“Hi, I'm Rex Stephens,” said the man in a surprisingly chipper tone.

“Welcome, Mr. Stephens,” replied the doctor. “Please have a seat.”

“Do you want me on the couch or is the chair okay?”

“The chair is fine. This is just a get to know each other session.”

The man settled into the chair across from Dr. Cypher. “So, I don't think I need to be here. I think I'm fine, but my mom is concerned about me. For some reason, every time I tell her about

my day or something that's happening in my life, she gets all worked up. She accuses me of lying or seeing things. I finally agreed to come here just to show her that I'm not crazy.”

Dr. Cypher smiled and put his hands together, aligning up the fingertips. “That's very interesting. Do you think the stories you tell your mother are exaggerated or unusual?”

“Not at all. I'm just telling her what happened. I don't embellish it at all.”

“Perhaps our best course of action is for you to tell me the same kind of thing you would relate to your mother. I want to hear what she is hearing. All I need you to do is run through the last day for me. Start with yesterday evening and tell me everything that happened between then and now.”

“Are you sure?” asked Rex. “It's just boring, everyday stuff.”

“That's fine. Just tell me about a typical day in your life.”

\*\*\*

Last night, I went to visit my sister. I went over to her house to have dinner. She made some sort of pea soup. The stuff smelled terrible and tasted worse. I couldn't bring myself to eat more than one spoonful.”

Anyway, after an hour or so she started to act all weird. Her eyes were bloodshot, and she said

some pretty nasty things about our mom. I thought maybe she was drunk or that the soup had given her food poisoning. I helped her into her bed and left. I could have sworn that as I closed the bedroom door, she started levitating, but that's just crazy. I figured the soup affected me the same way it did her. After that, I headed straight home.

I was riding my moped. I call it Chrissy. For some reason, I had a difficult time steering it. It was as if Chrissy had a mind of her own. It was all I could do to maintain control. Every time I came anywhere near to a pedestrian the bike started to veer toward them. I almost hit two old ladies and a toddler. There must have been a loose bolt on the handlebar or something. I somehow managed to get to my house without hitting anyone. Oddly enough, when I tried to turn off Chrissy, she just kept running, even after I removed the key. Before I could get the garage door shut, she burned rubber and took off down the street. The last I saw of my moped, she was popping a wheely, and her headlamp was giving off an eerie red light. I'm going to have to take Chrissy into the shop. There must be something wrong with her wiring.

It was almost dark, so I didn't chase after Chrissy. I noticed there was a full moon, so I quickly headed inside. I knew it was going to be a long night. Things are always bad when there's a full moon.

I had barely locked the door when the howling started. You see, my neighbor, Wilhelm always acts strange when there's a full moon. He spends the first couple of hours sitting out on his deck baying toward the sky. Then he disappears for the rest of the night. Usually, I see him lying on his lawn, naked, the next morning. A lot of the other neighbors complain about him, and nobody lets their pets outside when there's a full moon. My cat and dog were going to be stuck in the house with me all night.

I tried to watch some TV but, as usual, the picture was nothing but fuzz. I don't know why, but I get terrible reception. The only person I know who has ever seen anything on TV at my house was my niece, Angela. She watched a Backstreet Boys concert or something. At least, I remember her saying, "They're back."

I thought about putting a tape into my VCR, but the machine has eaten every single video I have except for one. The only remaining tape is some unmarked video that my cousin brought from Japan. I wasn't in the mood to check it out, so I set it aside for a different night.

Around nine o'clock someone rang my doorbell. I peeked through the window and saw another neighbor, Vlad, dressed in a pizza delivery outfit. When he saw me, he shouted, "I have a medium chicken parmesan pizza, with no garlic."

"I didn't order any pizza," I shouted back.

"Well, if you let me in, you can have it for free."

"I know it's you, Vlad. I'm not going to let you in." You see, we play this little game where he keeps trying to get me to invite him into my house. It's funny, I can even leave the door open, and he won't come in.

"Oh, come on," he said. "Just ask me in. The pizza's still warm."

"Nope," I said. "If you're going to try and fool me with a pizza delivery outfit, you should try getting one that fits. That one's way too small for you and it's got all sorts of spaghetti sauce stains by the neck. You should have cleaned yourself up first. Why don't you try looking in the mirror sometime?"

After I finally got Vlad to leave, I turned around to see my dog, Juco growling at me. He's a little Pekinese with glowing red eyes. Usually, he's okay but sometimes he gets downright hostile. This was one of those times.

Juco jumped at me and started trying to gnaw on my shin. I grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and carried him to the basement door. I toss him down there whenever he gets into one of his moods. I made sure to lock

the door after I threw him in. My basement is a little scary. It's unnaturally cold down there. My mom thinks it's because my house was built on a Native American burial ground. I think there's a problem with the AC ducts.

After that, I wiped off my pants leg. It's unbelievable how much that little dog drools. I went upstairs to my bedroom to try and get some sleep. I knew it was going to be a long night. Wilfred was still howling like a madman. Just as I climbed into bed, I heard a tapping on my window. Sure enough, Vlad was motioning for me to let him in. That guy is stubborn. He must have rigged some sort of pulley system to lift himself to where he could reach my second-story window. I wasn't in the mood to play our little game, so I just pulled the shade and ignored him.

Somehow, I managed to doze off but a heavy weight on my chest jolted me awake. I opened my eyes to find Tabatha, my black cat, sitting on me. It turned out she was in one of her moods just like Juco. Tabatha tried clawing my face, but I was able to grab her before she could do more damage than just a tiny scratch on my nose.

In a way, I can't blame Tabatha for being crabby. A couple of months ago, I thought she was dead. She hadn't moved in two days and was starting to get stiff, so I

buried her in the backyard. Imagine my surprise when she came back a few days later. She must not have been dead and dug some rest. I thought it was going to be impossible, what with all the howling, tapping on the window, stomping in the attic, and growling coming from the basement, but somehow, I must have drifted off. The last thing I remember is a pattern of yellow and white lights dancing outside my other bedroom window. I must have started dreaming. I felt like I was floating upward, surrounded by a blue beam of light.

I couldn't put Tabatha into the basement; Jocu was already there. My only option was to lock Tabatha in the attic. I don't like going in my attic, it's creepy and I always hear footsteps coming from up there. I'm fairly certain it's just the rafters creaking but it sounds as if someone is pacing.

The other thing I don't like about the attic is that I have to look at that creepy Charlie doll I won at a carnival a few years ago. It would be a great toy if it wasn't so scary looking. I am impressed with its design. I've had it for years and the batteries still haven't run out. I don't know how made it so that its head turns, its eyes glow, and it laughs maniacally but somehow it still works after all this time.

Anyway, I took Tabatha up to the attic. She scratched my arm and tore my pajama sleeve, but I was able to get her up there. I tossed her into the corner and beat a hasty retreat. I'm lucky I moved as quickly as I did because a stack

of boxes tipped over and almost fell on me. I raced back down the steps and slammed the door shut. I could hear the Charlie doll laughing as I locked the door. I

have to figure out what kind of batteries are in that thing.

I got back in bed and tried to get some rest. I thought it was going to be impossible, what with all the howling, tapping on the window, stomping in the attic, and growling coming from the basement, but somehow, I must have drifted off. The last thing I remember is a pattern of yellow and white lights dancing outside my other bedroom window. I must have started dreaming. I felt like I was floating upward, surrounded by a blue beam of light.

The next thing I knew, I was lying in my bed, and it was three hours later. A few different parts of my body were sore for some unknown reason. I must have slept at an awkward angle.

Anyway, morning came. I got up and had breakfast. I let Tabatha and Jocu out and sent them outside. I found Chrissy on my front lawn. I noticed a large dent in her front fender. Wilhelm was laying by his sidewalk. I woke him up and helped him find his clothes. They were scattered all around his yard. His shirt and pants were both ripped. I told him he needed to quit partying so hard and then I came here.

\*\*\*

Once Rex finished his story the doctor asked him, "So, you don't find anything unusual about what

happened to you last night?"

Rex shrugged. "No, that was typical. I don't know why my mom thinks I'm hallucinating. You don't think I'm crazy, do you Doc?"

"Not at all. I've heard of cases like this before. Some people are just magnets to the supernatural."

"Supernatural? What do you mean?"

"You know, werewolves, aliens, vampires, possessed object . . . stuff like that."

"I didn't say anything about any of those. What are you implying?"

Dr. Cypher stared at Rex in disbelief. "You mean you don't realize how strange all those things happening to you are? It's like you're living in every horror movie ever made."

"You think so?" said Rex. "I never thought about it that way."

"Luckily, there's something I can do to help you. There is a treatment."

"Really. Is it expensive?"

"Not at all," said the doctor while he opened his desk drawer and pulled out a piece of paper. "As a matter of fact, it doesn't cost a thing at this time. It's more of a buy now, pay later, sort of thing. All you have to do is sign this contract and everything will be taken care of."

"Okay," replied Rex, "if you think it'll help me. Do you have a pen?"

Dr. Cypher grabbed a needle that was lying on his desk. "I don't

have a pen but if you prick your finger, you could just sign your name with a little blood."

"I suppose that would work," said Rex. He took the needle and pierced the skin on his index finger. "Thank you for being so helpful, Dr. Cypher."

"Oh, you can call me Lou, Lou Cypher."

### The End

**VOTE FOR THIS PIECE** ☆☆☆☆☆

# Poems

## *The Apotheosis of Beelzebub*

*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

Silently the devil rules the world  
 From hell the tentacles extends.  
 Like a vampire  
 thirsty blood sucks continuously  
 He becomes livid with those who are helpless.  
 In the storms of life he howls with anger  
 With furious burning fire he destroys  
 Humans still in the womb  
 And on the throne of glorious power he sits.  
 Other Orders Invent Poison by Tasting  
 From the chalice full of tears of humanity  
 The bastion with a thud towards the sky rises  
 He is now the only God.  
 In the valleys, the flowers dry up  
 Pollen and honey turn into gall  
 The mountains are moving,  
 Every stone no longer finds peace.  
 To the blood rivers only the mud remains  
 It turns the whole earth and planets upside down  
 But the demon is still thirsty  
 With lust the weather postulates  
 And it never dies.  
 Tentacles everywhere in space expands  
 The misfortune of fate sprouts in them  
 Over mutilated skulls he tramples  
 And it is reborn every time Innocence dies.



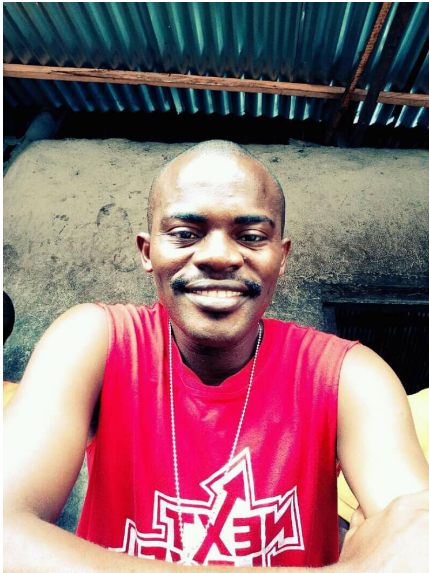
Albania, Kosovo and Italy.

She writes articles for the Italian newspaper 'Calabria Live'.

# Poems

## *Lost at sea*

*By: John Chinaka Onyeche*



### **John Chinaka Onyeche**

John Chinaka Onyeche is a husband, father and a poet from Nigeria, he writes from the city of Port Harcourt Rivers State, Nigeria. He is currently a student of History and Diplomatic Studies at Ignatius Ajuru University Of Education Port Harcourt Rivers State.

John Chinaka can be reached through the following means:

<https://linktr.ee/Rememberajc>

The only thing  
I could remember is:  
I lost the ship's oars  
Before our sail.

The things we became:  
Failed dreams & wishes.  
The boat sailed northward.

Unhealthy &  
Every passenger is fearful,  
For their lives were  
In danger & engendered.

At this point,  
No return for there is a catch of  
Two plus one - three &  
Half of the intended ending.

We barged behind the sea,  
Recounting our voyage.

# Poems

## *No One in Particular Walked Into a Bar for a Poetry Reading*

*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.

A poet and some friends stopped in a bar (which meant he was alone) and so he sat beside a skipper and a movie star, Godot, three kings, and smiling Cheshire cat.

The barkeep said, “Your podium awaits; our stand-up drunk has finished for the day. It’s closing time; I’m locking up the gates. The rest? Passed out—won’t hear a word you say.”

And so the poet stayed throughout the night—the drinks were free-of-charge but free-of-booze. He read alone until the dawn’s first light, yet wasn’t whom the audience would choose.

As each awoke, their stuporous glare would stare around the room, bewildered as they are, and once they found the floor still waiting there they crawled away—the exit wasn’t far.

# Poems

## Quicksilver

*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/>

Always on the move,  
 darting here, dipping there,  
 blowing hot, blowing cold,  
 mercurial as quicksilver  
 dispensing woe or joy  
 in clouds of dust,  
 fairy dust,  
 falling like starlight  
 and landing  
 somewhere.  
 I'm just the messenger,  
 she said,  
 I don't get to choose,  
 gold or silver,  
 coal or shale,  
 it's just dust  
 blowing in the wind  
 and landing  
 somewhere,  
 I don't get to choose,  
 she said.  
 But I wonder.

# Poems

## Redemption

*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.

I am the watcher in the night, hidden behind  
dark clouds in an obsidian sky

Skimming the surface of time and space, my  
often lonely journey never ceases

I am Ariel, a Lioness of God, an angel of nature's  
elements, and a guide to lost souls

Should there be a ripple in the afterlife or a loud  
lament from limbo's denizens, I am aware

Tonight there is a difference, even the minor demons  
appear perturbed, milling around and muttering

Then I see her, a child no more than fourteen, trying to  
force herself into a crevice, holding back screams

Confusion is writ large on her sweet face, what heinous  
crime could she have committed to lead to this?

I gather her up in my arms, and though shaking still  
I feel her relax a little as she gazes into my eyes

Voice quivering she murmurs, "This is Hell is it not?"  
She doesn't seem surprised, more resigned in fact

"Yes child," I reply "but what has befallen you that  
you are here?" It is then that a sob escapes

"My stepfather ma'am, an evil wicked boar of a man  
he hurt my mother, and then he came after me



The night he beat me was his last, I used my Father's  
knife to slit his throat, then mine. Now they are safe"  
I know that I will have a struggle ahead, Satan will  
not let souls slip away, but this poor child needs me

The very reason I flit hither and thither thru the vile  
underbelly of the cosmos is for gentle wraiths like her  
I will see her ascend to take her true place in Heaven.

**VOTE FOR THIS PIECE** ★★★★★

# Poems

## *Legend of the Firefly*

*By: G. Lynn Brown*



G. Lynn Brown

G. Lynn Brown is a published poet and prize-winning writer of flash fiction and short stories. Her work has been published in over fifteen different literary journals, including Spillwords Press, Alien Buddha Press, Prosetrics, Paragraph Planet and Fictionette. She is a contributing author at Friday Flash Fiction, where her Pushcart Prize nominated story, "Her Best Bud," was published (June '23). Along with writing, she is also a digital illustrator and editor of poetry and drabble.

Stars tumble as they fall  
and streak across the midnight sky  
with blazing tails that trail behind  
their striking glitter dusts the ground

Then each glowing little speck  
when by a fairy's fate is found  
sparks back to life  
in luminous flight

The twinkling orbs flit through the fields  
dots of green, yellow and even teal  
reflect the shining stars above...

When the heavens meet earth  
in one little bug

# Poems

## *To Say I Love You, Son*

*By: Fhen Em.*



Gifted him a book by Hans Andersen,  
taught him arithmetic, reeling, writhing,  
guided him before I let go of the bike.  
When he slid and bumped on a rock  
washed his wounds, betadine, and all  
and a pat on the back.  
I know not why I can't say *I love you, son*  
but I know that I love him  
to the depth and breadth and height.

VOTE FOR THIS PIECE ★★★★★

### **Fhen Em.**

Fhen M. was on staff of the publication office in high school and college. He studied the subject *The Literature of the World* at Eastern Visayas State University. Fhen M. was a fellow in a creative writing workshop. His poem "Uyasan" or "Toy" was published in the book *Pinili:15 Years of Lamiraw*. His English verses "Lighthouse" and other poems appeared in *Poetica* anthology series published by Clarendon House.



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# Creative Youth Art Gallery

## *Cry Baby*

*By: Lily M. Montoya*



**Lily M. Montoya**

Lily M. Montoya is an eight-year-old, who loves to tell stories, draw and hangout with people she loves.





# Creative Youth Art Gallery

*Nerd*

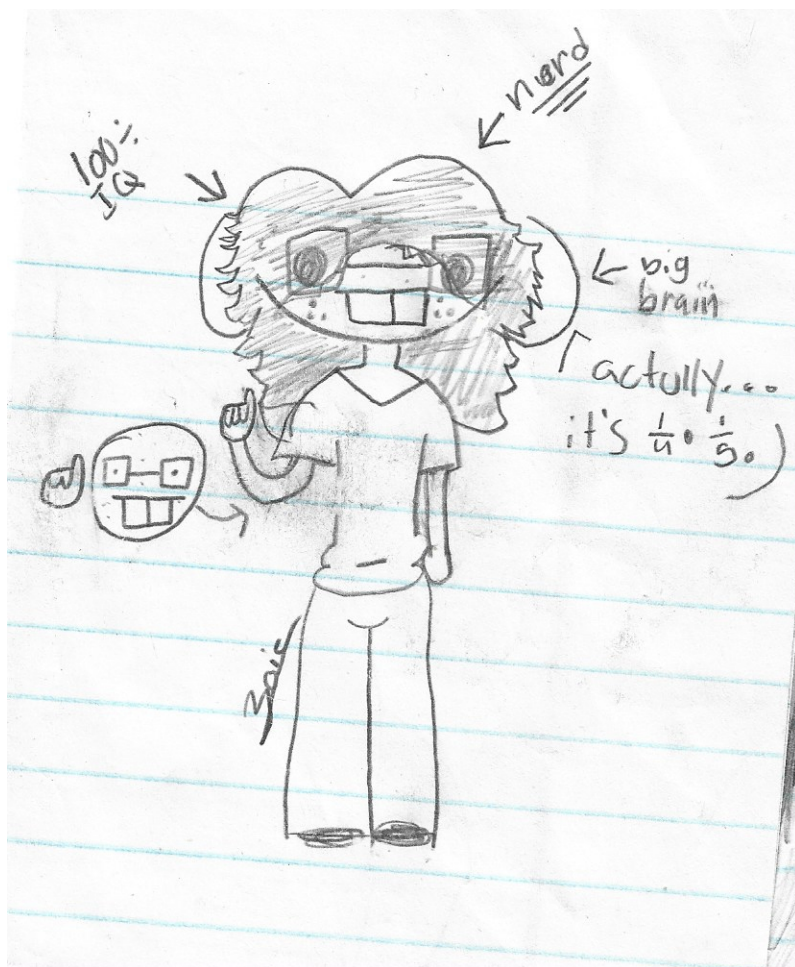
*By: Zoie M. Montoya*



**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.

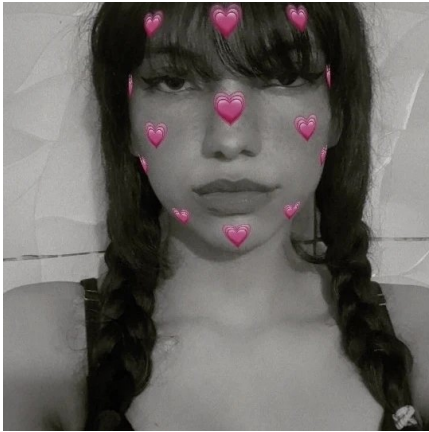
Oh! And, looks forward to the day that she will become CEO of The JayZoMon Dark Myth Company!.



# Art Gallery

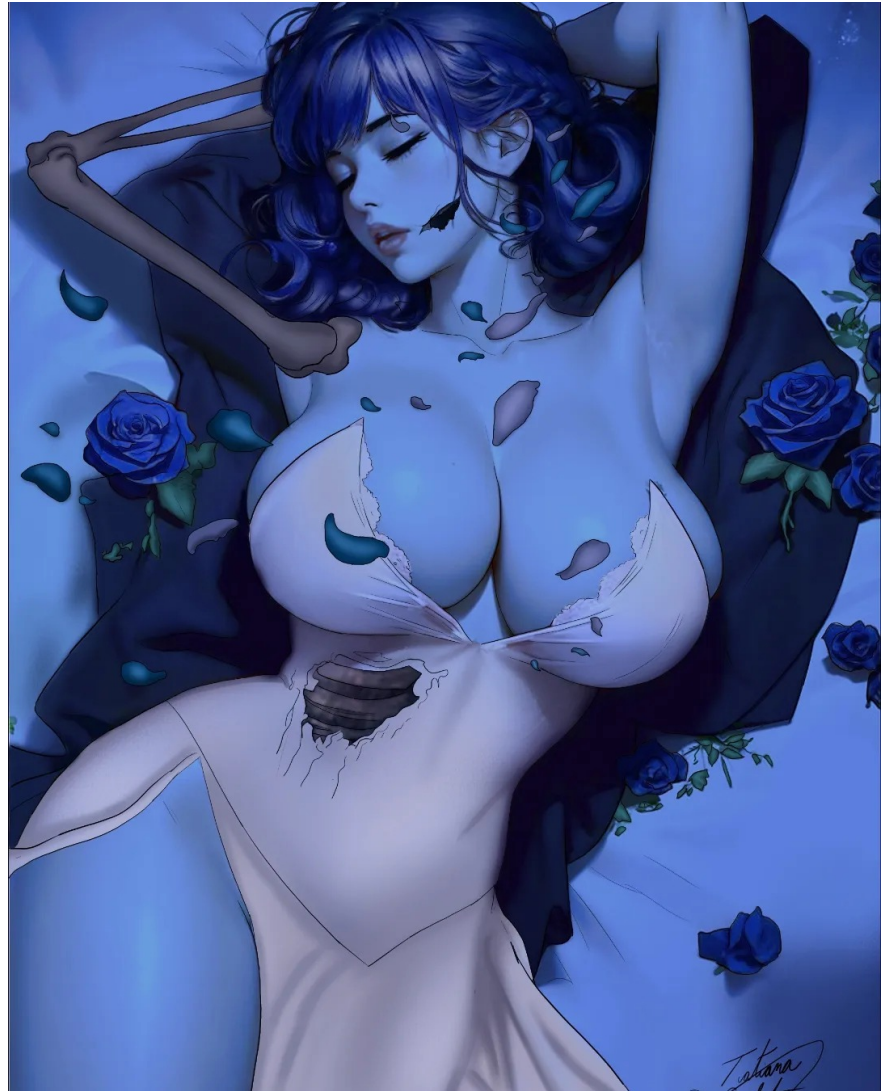
## Corpse Bride

By: *Tatiana Salete*



**Tatiana Salete**

No information provided.



# Art Gallery

## *The Flaming Redhead that Caught my Eye*

*By: Timothy 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 <http://somecallmetimmy.blogspot.com.au/> or on Parenting Express website.





# Art Gallery

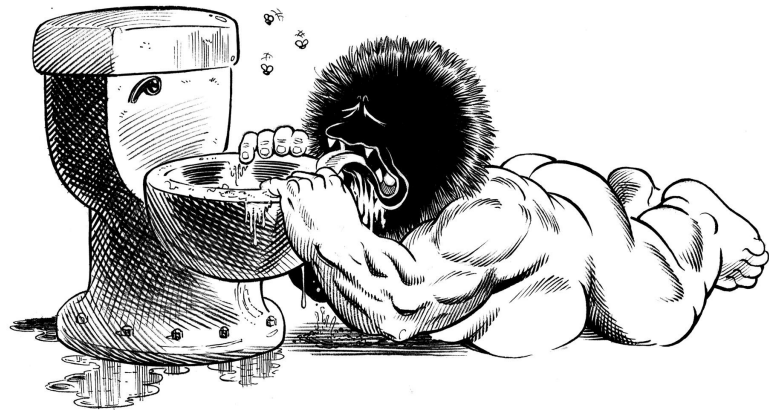
*The Morning after*

*By: Eric Rivera*



## Eric Rivera

My name is Eric Rivera. I'm a young illustrator with a passion for drawing horror/fantasy themes. I have done work for both independent and professional publications, mainly in comics. My goal is to someday work for mainstream comic books and animated media. I've been taking drawing seriously since my days in high school, and continue strive for improvement in the work. I don't know what the future has in store for me, but whatever it is, it'll be worth it. [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).



# Art Gallery

Stress

By: MOK JR.



## MOK JR.

The man known as MoK Junior is a retired artist from Carthage, Missouri. While there is no bloodline between him and the original MoK, he carries the name in honor of the man who once owned a used bookstore in Tulare, California. If you know, you know.



VOTE FOR THIS PIECE ★★★★★

HOME 87



# Art Gallery

Friend

By: *Godspower D. Patrick*



## Godspower D. Patrick

Godspower D. Patrick is an artist/inker/ animator who lives in Nigeria. He has been working in this field for seven years, and his specialty is inking. Currently, he is working for *Dark Myth Comics* on their upcoming release of *American Smash*.



VOTE FOR THIS PIECE ★★★★★

# MOVIE REVIEWS

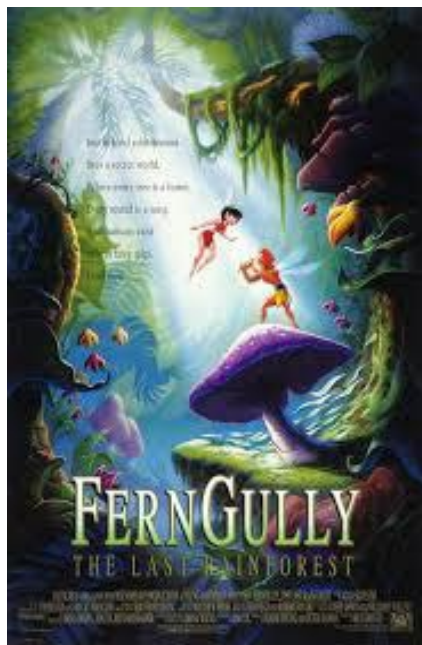
## Review of Next of Kin

*By: Sarcastically Cynical Sally*



### Sarcastically Cynical Sally

Sarcastically Cynical Sally spends time watching endless movies with her boyfriend Moviegoer Grim. She enjoys keeping a running commentary on how she would do it so much better but doesn't actually want to put in the effort. She has a mouth that could get her into trouble, a heart just as cynical, but every now and then you will see her shed a tear over a movie. Whether it's because it touched a place inside her, deep, deep, deep inside her,



**B**efore you all get up in arms and start gunning for me, I am not ripping this movie apart. I happen to enjoy it. I mean who wouldn't? It has a star studded cast including, Robin Williams, Tim Curry, Christian Slater and Tone Loc. It has good vs. evil, tree's, fairies, and nasty humans. A bat who just flew in from a bio-technical lab and a greasy, smokey, bad guy. This movie has stood the test of time. I watched it with a relative

and some short people that have the misfortune of being related to me, and they loved it as much as I did. The littlest of us didn't like Tim Curry's character, but even though he had that sexy singing voice, he was, to a 3 year old, rather unlikable. He kept eating the tree's and that was just not sitting well with her.

We watched this moving to help celebrate and educate on Earth Day. Yes, believe it or not, I do want our environment to get better. I need a lot of oxygen when I get on my rants about the movies Moviegoer Grim forces me to watch. Which I will be reviewing one of his suggestions next month. I just didn't have the time to watch it this month. So be warned. It will be bad.

Ferngully is a fun little movie with a really big lesson. Don't eff around with the tree's. We need them. They create this thing called air and until they come up with a way to breath and not need air, we need them to stick around. Although there are

or it really is that bad, no one will ever know.

some people who could use a little less air...

A poor misshapen human gets shrunk down to fairy size and learns all about the tree's. Crysta teaches Zak about the tree's and how they feel pain and how he can feel their pain. During the course of all this wonderful loveliness, a terrible smog monster that feeds on pollution is released from a very old tree. Hexxus, played by Tim Curry. He is creepy and evil and sings one of the best songs in the whole movie.

The actual best song and best supporting actor, goes to Robin Williams and his portrayal of Batty Koda. A bat that was in a lab as a test animal. He is endearing, hilarious, and sings THE BEST SONG in the whole movie. I'm sure you've seen it or heard it on TikTok.

The whole movie sticks to a very Shakespearan format, with the good fighting evil broken up by comedic relief.

But it imparts a very important lesson. As humans, we are destroying the earth, and we are the only ones that will stop it.

That and nature always finds a way. Wait, that's another movie.

But it is true, nature will reclaim what was hers if you give her enough time. She's a cranky biotch when she wants to be. For a brief one hour and sixteen minutes, this sarcastically cynical woman, was taken back when she wasn't so sarcastic or cynical and was a young woman of 20, enjoying a movie that instilled hope and encouragement for the future.

As the credit's rolled, I remembered that I live in a cesspool of bad movies, and soggy popcorn.

So, even though I didn't dismember this classic film, don't think my little black heart is any lighter. Next month I will shred the movie to bits.

# BOOK REVIEWS

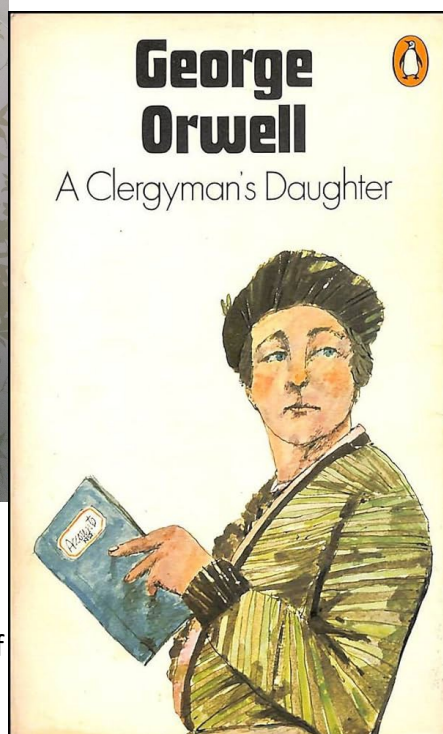
*By: Michael A. Arnold*



## 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.

## The Clergyman's Daughter By George Orwell



**H**ave you ever been disappointed by a writer you respect? Most recently for me it was with *A Clergyman's Daughter* by George Orwell. He seemed unhappy with the work himself, saying that it was only an 'exercise' – published because he needed some money. I had put

this off for years, hoping it would be an underappreciated gem I would get to at some point, and Orwell was being too harsh on himself. But frankly I agree with him.

George Orwell should not need much introduction at this point. Born Eric Arthur Blair, he was born into an upper class family and went to school at Eton – perhaps the most prestigious and well-known private schools in the United Kingdom, if not the world. He was the rebellious sort however, and after a stint as a policeman in Berma (then a colony of the British Empire) Orwell returned to the UK, without ever giving a reason why, and began to work on what he felt was his calling: being a writer. He was always using his lived experiences and he had seen both great wealth and privilege, but he had also seen the effects of colonialism on those colonized and also himself, all of which he would soon write about. His essays like 'Shooting and Elephant' go into more detail on that last one, but he understood,



if he knew it consciously or not, the insidious intoxication that power is, in its many forms. Moving on from his experiences of colonialism, Orwell started looking for new writing materials, and to get another angle on how power can be abused. He began to try to experience the realities of working class life firsthand. He slept rough on the streets, purposely got arrested for vagrancy, and worked difficult jobs to make a meagre living in both France and the UK. His first non-fiction book *Down and Out in Paris and London* is a viscerally grim account of life among beggars and the chronically unemployed.

All this is important background for *A Clergyman's Daughter*, written following the publication of *Down and Out*. By this time Orwell was making something of a name for himself, especially among left-wing readers, but all this was long before the books he really made his name for: *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Even his conversion to Democratic Socialism is still a few years in the future. At this early point in his writing career, Orwell was seemingly trying to write like Dickens, or maybe George Elliot. He seemed to still be hanging onto the idea of writing 'naturalistic novels with big, unhappy endings'. But by the 1930s the Realism of those earlier writers must have seemed stale,

and quant compared to the experimental Modernists like T.S. Eliot (who is mentioned during the novel), D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce.

James Joyce, and especially his book *Ulysses*, must have been on Orwell's mind when he wrote this. In one part this novel is quite experimental, even if the rest is quite conservative. It can be divided into roughly five parts, which might help show the experimentalism better while also hoping to show the flaw in this story:

The first part being a depiction of Dorothy, the main character, in her austere and stressful home life. She is the 'Clergyman's Daughter' of the title. This first section is an extended depiction of a rural, small village life, still somewhat based around the church. 'Extended' is the right word here too, it is 80 pages long – and not interesting enough to justify this length. The constant references to a debt owed to the local butchers, and the village politics becomes too repetitive to keep interest, even if they could potentially be good ingredients for a novel by themselves.

The second part starts following a traumatic incident that causes Dorothy to lose her memory and find herself in a hotel in London. Wondering the streets, she comes across a gang of tramps who are going to Kent to pick hops for money, and Dorothy joins them.

This is the most pleasurable part of the novel, because although the group are living literally hand to mouth and occasionally stealing food, it creates pleasant images of walking through the English countryside and camping in woods around a fire – using old tin cans to make coffee. When they get to the hop farms the hard work begins, and still the charming, bucolic feel does not quite leave even if it is not pleasant work for the characters themselves.

Eventually this group disperses, and Dorothy returns to London on her own starting the third part of the novel. This bit is easily the most experimental, and it is also the shortest. She lives on her hop-picking money for a while, but when that runs out and she starts sleeping on the streets and the novel shifts styles for a single very interesting chapter: is written almost like a play. This whole chapter is strongly reminiscent (basically a copy) of episode 15 of *Ulysses*, which is also written as a play about life at night in a city. Either like or unlike the Joyce novel, this has the feel of a fever dream of drunkenness, and it fantastically captures the sort strange people you meet when out in the center of a city after dark. This chapter is easily the best part of the whole novel. With Orwell's typical layer of grit and hard living, this section is like a nightmare.



Eventually the fog clears, and Dorothy gets a job teaching at a small and not very good private school. This forth section is more like near the end of *Jane Eyre* than anything else, just before Jane reunites with Mr. Rochester. This forth part seems to stand out, being a parody of Orwell's then job as a teacher. Anyone who has been a teacher might recognize something in this section, especially those who have had earnest but lazy students. Dorothy, being the kind-spirited sort, does try to motivate and educate her class, but her plans are always stopped by the school's obnoxious headmaster. There is little original here, but for what it is it is not badly done. Finally, Dorothy returns to her former life, but despite her experiences she has not really changed, and she more or less picks up her life uninterrupted as if nothing had happened. This last part is easily the worst, and it is infuriating. Frankly there is so much missed potential here (which can be said for the whole book) that if written even slightly differently the novel would have been much better. Instead, she accepts the familiar drudgery in the most unsatisfyingly bland way. That is the biggest problem with this novel, it is unsatisfying – especially because there actually were some good ideas here. At least two of the parts I have

pointed at above could have been the basis of a really interesting novel if focused on, and one bit was, although rather experimental, really well done. These are pearls of quality, but it is everything around them that lets this novel down. The protagonist is so flat there is little to say about her. She does not grow, and it is almost like she forgets what happened as soon as the earlier part ends. Most of the time Dorothy's experiences feel more like a series of political points or arguments found in one of Orwell's early essays. That could be a common criticism of all his early novels, but it is especially true here. That might have been fine if it was written like a parable, but this is a novel. That said, the writing is not bad: it is often competent and sometimes good sentence to sentence but combine those sentences and they feel like paragraphs in a lecture. The bland ending leaves you wondering what the 'point' of this even novel is. The protagonist does not learn anything from a series of experiences outside of her usually sedate life. Again, there is something to that idea, someone being so shocked by the wider world they would rather be miserable than angry, but here it does not work. I am left wondering what went wrong here. I have been a big

Orwell fan for a long time, and this was always that one novel of his I had. for one reason or another, put off reading. I had hoped when starting it I would find an unappreciated gem, and it was not as bad as its author's comments made it out to be. Writers can so often be their own worst critics. However, here, I agree with the author: this is his worst novel.

# ART REVIEWS

*By: Michael A. Arnold*

## Art and the Soup Protests



### 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.



This is déjà vu. On Saturday 10th of February, the Claude Monet painting *Le Printemps* was attacked with soup. This is essentially a repeat of another soup attack on the *Mona Lisa*, on the 28th of January. Both have generated a lot of anger online,

and in a sense, these are attacks on the collective cultural heritage of mankind, or at least western culture - yet they keep happening. What is going on? These protests are inspired by earlier soup-based attacks on great works of art by groups more directly concerned with climate

change in the United Kingdom such as Just Stop Oil. On the 14th of October 2022, Just Stop Oil activists threw tomato soup on Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* in the National Gallery Museum in London, saying 'what is worth more, art or life?' which was echoed by those protesters who attacked *Le Printemps*. Very quickly the group Riposte Alimentaire claimed responsibility over X (formerly Twitter). Riposte Alimentaire are not as familiar in the English-speaking world, and all detailed descriptions of them are in French, but from their website and statements they are very concerned with promoting sustainability in agriculture, farming in an ecologically conscious way. It is also very mindful of climate commitments, which it says the French government (and presumably all other governments) are failing to keep to our shared peril. This is certainly timely; France is seeing a huge series of farmers' protests (started on the 16th of January) which have at times brought Paris to an economic standstill. Thankfully none of these attacked works have seen any damage. Maybe there is some damage to the frame here and there, but the works themselves have not been harmed. A small miracle when you think about it, considering their age. Anyone who has seen a really old work of art up close, especially from the renaissance,

will know how fragile they actually are. The paint is so old it has cracked like a spiderweb running across the entire canvas, something you cannot see when standing at a distance or looking at it on a computer screen. With the Mona Lisa, there would never have been any damage anyway. Because of its fame and troubled history since, it has been placed in its own indent in the wall and covered with bullet proof glass. The theft of the Mona Lisa in 1911 and its recovery (and identification) is a whole story all by itself, and we are lucky to have such care and expertise on hand to protect great works of art. Great art is notable and so attacking them sends a powerful message, whatever that message might be. While the goals of these groups may in reality be noble, their method of protesting is unfortunate, to be polite. Now there is more chance that these priceless and historic works of art will be attacked by more violent groups, with more insidious ideologies and goals in the future. These soup attacks have drawn so much attention to themselves, and there will always be people who will want that attention. Those who own and organize museums know this. If there are more attacks on works of art there will need to be more security installed to protect them. The price of installing security and then keeping them secure is

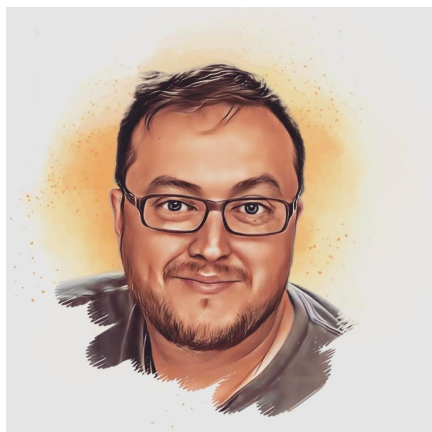
going to cost a lot of money. As a result, the price of exhibits would then increase or the museums might even lock off certain areas – available only to those who either can afford it or are experts in the field, instead of there just a donation box or a flat and often quite low entrance fee, as happens now. Even though public art is (at least in the United Kingdom) subsidized by the government. it is not difficult to imagine the museums needing to find ways to raise a lot of extra funds to cover new, possibly quite high costs. So far, a free exhibit has helped keep art democratized, in some way. Sure, it can feel like appreciating art and high culture is still quite select and closed off, but entrance to art museums is free if there isn't a usually small entrance fee. Increasing the costs of presenting or exhibiting art will make it more expensive and so more of a privilege. We will all lose something if that happens. It might be true that art exhibits, at least the traditional ones, are out of fashion these days, but art is not just the pleasure of the educated and nor should it be. Art is for everyone, and exactly because because of that these attacks have had their notoriety and their power. If we did not care, the protesters would have to make their point another way and we would not have heard about these groups or their goals.

Aside from if you agree with them or not, these attacks have proved that art has an important part in all our lives, even if we do not know it.

# 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! Welcome to the **ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FIFTH** issue of *The World of Myth Magazine* the April edition and let me tell you that it has been busy behind the scenes! The biggest for me is that Steph has traveled back up to the True North for the Summer and Fall seasons, leaving it a little too quiet for my liking here in the Sunshine State of California. Typically, while the kids are off to school, she and I would tackle that day's task, with music going, and conversation never-ending. So, now it is just me in the office and an empty desk to my right, waiting for her to return and bring the fun! One of the big things on the list is the *2024 Open Contract Challenge!* By the time this comes out there will still be two

days left, so if you have a pitch in mind and haven't sent it yet—in the immortal words of Arnold Schwarzenegger, “Do it! Do it, now!”

I have a surprise for everyone this time around, but I am waiting until after the top ten and the wildcard are announced before I let everyone in on the surprise I have in store for one individual in this year's contest! So, click [HERE](#) to enter and a chance to win!

Also, we have been working feverishly on *Dark Myth Comics' American Smash #½ for Free Comic Book Day* arriving on May 4, 2024! If you want to see if the comic book shop near you will be carrying this FREE issue, click [HERE](#) to see and if not, let the store near you know you want it and we will send them a copy. Did I mention it was completely **FREE?**



Another thing that the crew at *Dark Myth Comics* has started is a **FREE** Weekly Comic Strip that works as a bridge between the original one-shot and the one-half issue coming out in May. So, if you want to go check those out click [HERE](#)! There is more to be said about issue #1 coming in July, but I will chat about that in June's issue of the magazine.

Over at *Dark Myth Publications*, we are knee-deep in gearing up for our very own Walter G. Esselman's first book of 2024 called, *Bad Blood: A Wasp Encounter!* This bad boy, pun intended, is set to release May 14, 2024, and there *is* a reason it has a classic *Aliens* feel to it. Wink. Wink. Nudge. Nudge.

Also, while this is more of a *Dark Myth Publications* combined with *Myth Mart*. I am very happy to announce that we are no longer in an exclusive deal with Amazon Inc., in concerns to our eBook properties, and beginning in May all of the *Dark Myth Publications* and all of its imprints will now offer their eBooks on *Myth Mart*!

Over at the *JayZoModcast Podcast Network*, we are gearing up for a brand new **PODCAST SEARCH!** After the last search in 2018, we are back again with the plan to find five fresh and new podcasts to bring to the network as our Midday Line! Once the lineup is complete will begin

releasing podcasts every twelve hours first at midnight and then a new show at noon! So, keep your eyes peeled for a start date and click [HERE](#) for the page to be updated!

Before I jump on to the next subject of business, I want to take a moment to mention *The World of Myth Bits Podcast* and its host, Tim Law. He has been reviewing previous issues of the magazine under the episode title *A Blast From The Past*. Right now, it is up to part five and I absolutely love this series if you are someone from the old days and want to head down memory lane of a simpler time of life, with Tim, click [HERE](#) and thank you for all your dedication and hard work, Tim!

Okay, before I head out for the month, I have a couple more things to cover. First is that we still have openings for our advertising, whether it be audio, digital, and/or print. Everyone who has a contract with us now will be grandfathered in under that agreement and only be charged that price before the launch of our comics, digital comics, five new podcasts per week, and all our websites which continue to grow with traffic! For the current rates click [HERE](#), and lock in a deal before they go up as our daily content continues to grow!

Finally, I want to apologize to

those who are reading my monthly murder mystery, *Six Degrees Celsius*. As you are probably aware, the next installment is missing this issue and I can only blame myself as I have been working on all the previously mentioned things and did not find the time to write the next part, so I am going to try and offer a two-parter next month to make up for it! Again, My apologies!

Okay, that is it for me this month. Come back next time and find out what I have to ramble about and try to connect it all to make sense!

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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