

THE WORLD OF MYTH



MAGAZINE

ISSUE #118  
SEPTEMBER, 2023

ARNOLD  
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STORIES  
ART  
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REVIEWS  
AND MUCH MORE!

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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 2 years. She is also Editor in Chief for *Dark Myth Publications* and holds a position on the Board of Directors for *The JayZoMon/DarkMyth*

**H**ello *Mythketeers!*

Welcome back to our little magazine! It's been about a minute, hasn't it? I do hope that you all have enjoyed your summer and are ready to get back into helping us produce and publish the best possible magazine we can put out. Now, before I get into my intro, I want to remind you that not only do you have this wonderfully free copy, but you can also pick up a hardcopy for a small fee. That being said that money will go to help support the magazine, the website and anything else associated with The World of Myth.

As you can see, we have been busy over the summer putting together a new and improved issue which we are hoping is easier and cleaner to navigate. One thing that will never change is the quality of the work we put into the magazine itself. That comes from you, the writers, and the artists. This is just the watching the days get longer and

place to showcase your amazing talents.

We do have an amazing magazine for you and will get back to our monthly issues again. Some of you have already sent it work right on through to January, which I will always be forever grateful! For our new contributors, you can submit before the 15th of each month, for that month issue. So, we are accepting for October now, up until the 15th of October. I have had an up and down summer. I spent time with family, visited nieces and nephews, grandchildren and friends that are like family. I had visitors of my own and spent time alone. While it was wonderful and the weather was beyond amazing, I was also missing family far away. Now the cooler weather is creeping in, the leaves are changing, and you can smell the approach of autumn pushing it's way in. The 21st saw the dying of the light, as we turn towards the darker time of the year. Except for our friends down under, who are

*Company.*

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

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

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

the light get brighter.

For me, this is a time to turn inwards and reflect on all that has gone unchecked over the summer. Take stock of my well being. The summer tends to be a time of carefree abandon. You soak up the sun, spend time outside and, if you are like me, in the water as much as possible. You have windows open filling your rooms with fresh air, you smile more, move a little slower, and relax more. But there is a bad side to that. Because of the carefree nature of summer, we tend to put off the serious things in favor of fun, family, and festivities. Yes, bills still get paid, adulting still gets done, but the little serious things get pushed off. Health, mental and physical, is the biggest one for me. I am a sun baby, so I feel good in the sunshine. If I feel good, I must be good, right? Not necessarily. So, the cooler weather, brings a cooler head and a time to tend to those weeds that have been growing unchecked in my garden. It's time for me to look to the light within myself to carry me through the darker months, or at least until I get to the airport! I've said it once, and I will say it again...I don't like the snow!

With all this retrospect happening, it has also got my

creative juices flowing and I am elbow deep into my contribution to *Zombie Works Publications* latest anthology *The Monster Within: Tales of a Tortured Mind*. I am looking forward to reading all the submissions and notifying those who have been accepted. The scariest monster to me, is the human race. What we do to each other is far worse than any character on the big screen or in the pages of a fiction book. You can still get your submission in too, just send them to [zombieworkspublications@yahoo.com](mailto:zombieworkspublications@yahoo.com).

I hope you all enjoy our new format and all the wonderfulness inside.

Until next month,

Yours Respectfully,



Stephanie J Bardy,  
Editor of the New, the Old, and  
The Achy



**Adele Evershed**

**OPEN CONTRACT CHALLENGE**

EST. 2019

**2023 GRAND PRIZE WINNER!**

# Drabble & Flash

## *Beating the Boys at their own Game*

*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

**I**t was my time to shine. Finally, my chance to show them all what I could do.

"You find yourself in an unfamiliar forest," I began.

"Lame," whined Chester, spitting Cheetos crumbs all over my bedspread.

"Dude!" I cried, disgusted.

"You're the lame one."

"Come on guys," my older brother Dan said. "Let's see what Mindy's got."

"Hope it's more than just a dorky old forest," muttered Chester.

"So," said Pete, as he gave me an encouraging smile. "How did we get there?"

"You're the Bard, right?" I asked.

Pete nodded. Chester groaned.

"Well you were performing a song on stage at the inn," I continued.

"What inn?"

"The Fuzzy Quarter Staff?" I suggested.

"One on every corner," laughed the boys.

"You know it!" I agreed, giving a

grin.

"So we're watching Songbird sing," said my brother. "Then what?"

"Then..." I thought for a minute, this would need to be good.

"From the kitchen you heard shouting and the sounds of a scuffle.

"I, Orkus the barbarian unsheathed my great sword," stated my brother.

He almost hit his hand on the fan as he pretended to draw a gigantic sword from behind his back.

"Meanwhile I pull from my bag of components a little piece of wire and an apple," suggested Chester.

"Are you sure it's not Cheetos you pulled from that magic sack?" Pete asked with a smile.

"Nah, definitely an apple..." confirmed Chester. "I'd never waste snacks."

"Wot dat?" Dan said next in his gravelliest voice.

I laughed until it became obvious he thought he was a serious actor.

"We cautiously enter the

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

kitchen," said Pete.  
"All three of you?" I asked.  
"Yep," Pete confirmed.  
I smiled to myself, this was going to be good.  
"As you all enter the kitchen it's obvious the inn has been overrun by goblins."  
"Goblins?" moaned Chester.  
"Everyone always chooses goblins."  
"Yeah, sis," added Dan. "Try something different like lizard men maybe."  
"The GOBLINS are dressed in forest green," I told the boys. "All but one who is dressed in a black gown covered in silver stars."  
"Orkus strides through the sea of green and swings his mighty blade at the one dressed in stars," growled Dan.  
"Orkus finds his movement is slowed and he falls into a dreamless slumber."  
"What? Wait? What?" stammered Dan.  
"In fact, Songbird and Illuminous also feel a bit sleepy," I said.  
"Illuminous lights and launches his apple bomb," Chester announced, quickly.  
"The wick is lit as Illuminous succumbs to the sleep spell," I said.  
"Did the bomb go off?" asked Pete and Chester together.  
"You find yourself in an unfamiliar forest... Sitting on a log..." I began again. "Your

clothing smells of apples.  
"Illuminous stays on the log," announced Chester. "Nothing can harm us while we're sitting."  
"I forgot to say you are all tied to the log, it rises into the air," I informed the boys.  
"Mindy!" grumbled Chester, Dan, and Pete together.  
*"Enjoy dessert," states the goblin dressed in stars to the forest giant.*



# Drabble & Flash

## *His Picture On the Wall*

*By: Puneet Kumar*



### **Puneet Kumar**

Puneet Kumar is a full-time poet, writer and relationship and happiness coach. He writes poems, short stories, novels and self-help books. He has self-published 15 books.

He is published in several anthologies. His story is published in anthology "Six feet From Tomorrow" His poetry is published in anthology "Blood and Sand" and "Scentsibility" "Poetry Leave" in March 2020 and others. He is also published in Spillwords.com. He publishes his articles and poems in Medium

[https://medium.com/@puneetkumar\\_95349](https://medium.com/@puneetkumar_95349) and also get published in <https://www.authorelainemarie.com/post/my-life-as-a-writer-and-coach>

He loves to write on subjects like relationships, healthy living, food and nutrition, wine, lifestyle or anything that adds positive lights into the life.

He was first published in Debonair magazine in India May-June issue 2000 that he considers as a beginner's luck.

Is it weird to fall in love with someone you met online? I don't think so because I know I have.

His name is Alex. He is handsome, funny and extremely sweet. Each morning, I'd receive a sweet message from him. Oh, I just love his attention. Although one thing bothers me, he said he can't leave his house, so if I wanted to meet him, I'd have to come to him. But since I love him, I'd do anything.

One day, he texted me to come visit, and I excitedly rode the taxi to his house. I rang the doorbell, and it wasn't Alex who answered, but an old lady. I smiled and said I'm there for Alex. She frowned but invited me in.

"Alex, someone is here for you." called the old lady.

I looked around and saw pictures neatly hanged on the

wall. I looked closer and found Alex's photo with a boy sitting on his lap. Before I could react, I heard footsteps rushing downstairs.

"Who is it granny?" The voice belonged to the boy in the picture. He must be around 9 years-old, with curly blonde hair and deep blue eyes. Just like Alex's.

"Um, I'm looking for Alex." I said.

"I am Alex." The boy replied.

Anger prickled down my spine as I grabbed the photo of Alex and the boy. "This man," I said while pointing to Alex's face on the picture, "Is also Alex? Is he your father?"

The boy nodded, and what he said turned my anger into horror. "Yes miss, and he died just a year ago in a car accident. I am Alex Jr."

# Drabble & Flash

## *The Elephant Stomp*

*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* a

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

The head animal keeper often tried to get amorous with young Kathy the elephant handler.

Finally, she'd had enough, "Come here. I want to show you something."

He licked his lips and leered, "It's about time."

"Let's lay down."

When he grabbed for her, Kathy said, "Now!"

Instantly, Shirley lumbered around the corner, raised her foot and brought it down, splat, squishing his head like a pumpkin. Brain matter flew all over the place.

Kathy smiled at Shirley. "Good job! We girls have got to stick together."

The big elephant nodded, trumpeted once and smiled. Then she trumpeted again.

# Children's Lit

## *Those Happy Days*

*By: Padmini Krishnan*



### **Padmini Krishnan**

Padmini Krishnan writes free verse poetry, haiku, and short stories. Her recent works have appeared in *Potato Soup Journal*, *Plum Tree Tavern*, *Terror House Magazine*, and *Page & Spine*. Her forthcoming work will appear in *Spillwords* and the *Stonecrop Review*.

“W hen I was a kid,” Siam’s

father said, “We used to have a two-course meal for dinner and a deliciously creamy dessert.”  
 “What is a dessert, daddy?”  
 “It is a sweet dish after a meal. We had puddings made of apples, berries, plums, peaches, and pears.”

Siam watched his dad, open-mouthed, “And the two-course meal?”

“I loved garlic steak, pepper steak and meat roll.”

“Wow, dad. Steak seems to be your favorite.” Siam said with envy in his voice. He had long finished his last drop of soup, made from rice and potato.

“Let us go inside, Siam,” said his dad, Percy, urgently, as the sky trickled tiny drops.

Siam looked inside the kitchen, hungrily. His mother, who looked like bones sewed in the skin was preparing more soup. Percy wondered if she would have any left after he, Siam, and Shira had their ‘breakfast’.

Siam stared at his dad’s hand.

“Dad, would you tell me what happened to your thumb and the index finger in your right hand?”

Percy sighed as he recalled his wife as a plump, pink-cheeked girl from the neighboring village.

“Yes, Siam. You are old enough to know. When I was your age, I lived in a wealthy village. My father was a farmer who grew livestock. The Autumn River near our village took us to the fertile fields near the mountains. They were called Lakewood Fields; they were rich with huge trees and delicious fruits. My brothers and I used to go there to eat the plums, for they were the tastiest.”

Siam’s big ears struck out in his thin face. “I had two uncles? Where are they now?”

“Listen to me. I am coming to that,” said Percy. He saw the rainwater trickling down the bamboo tree outside. Worried, he looked at the roof of his hut and hoped there would be no heavy rainfall.

Percy cleared his throat. “My two older brothers, Drake, and

Robin were far more impulsive and adventurous than I was. I was timid (I still am) and stayed away from all the adventurous tasks. One day, my brothers climbed onto a mango tree, plucking ripe yellow mangoes. I stood down catching the mangoes they tossed when something happened." Percy gulped, shuddering at the memory. "We saw something flying high above. It looked like a bird with stripes." Percy scratched his head. "This creature tossed something onto the oak tree below and flew away. We stared at the prettiest creature we had ever seen. It looked like a small girl about 3 feet tall; it had exquisite silvery pink hair and bluish-pink eyebrows." Percy was lost in the wonder of that moment while Siam twisted his mouth in distaste. How can someone with bluish-pink eyebrows be exquisite?

"I later learned that it was a pixie." Siam didn't know of any pixies. He just knew of 'showoff Shirley' in his class with a pixie hairstyle.

Percy shuddered, "Well, she had an angelic face. But her smile was like a poison; she smiled like a snake."

"Dad, I didn't know that snakes smile."

"Yes. They do." Percy began an impersonation of a snake's

toothless 'smile'. Siam felt scared at this and decided not to interrupt the story.

"The leaves of the oak branch in which the pixie perched had turned greenish brown all over. She said in a sweet voice, "Boys, I am now the owner of these fields. You are no longer allowed to trespass."

"At this, my brother, Robin, laughed, "We are not scared of a little creature like you."

"What can you do, after all?" Drake's face looked scornful."

"Instead of getting angry, the pixie laughed in a musical voice and stretched the brown leaves towards the mango tree. The leaves caught my brothers and pulled them inside the oak tree. I screamed at the sight of it. When I opened my eyes, my brothers had vanished. However, I could see two brown acorns.

The pixie spread the leaves towards me, but they just managed to reach my thumb and index finger, which spluttered down as seeds. Fear in my every being, I ran wildly out of the woods. I don't know when I reached my house. My mom found me lying on the porch of my house."

Percy sighed. "After that, everything went downhill. My father, after having lost his two children, took up drinking.

Slowly, we lost all our fortune. We heard more reports of kids

turning into fruits near the mountain fields until people stopped going there. Famine plunged our village and neighboring villages into poverty. So, we moved to town." Siam listened, open-mouthed.

The story was too fantastic to be true. Either his father had seen weird, magical things or he was just a good liar and storyteller. Percy looked behind his son.

"Shira, were you listening to my story?"

"Yes, daddy. I found it fascinating, and it is a shame that your fields were taken away."

Siam saw Shira's thoughtful face and realized she believed every word of their father's story. If Shira trusted this, then the story was true. Siam had acute faith in his elder sister's judgment.

Shira, at 9, was a couple of years older than Siam and always had a hopeful and happy look on her thin face, contrasting with her brother's anxious countenance.

The next morning, Shira asked her mother, "Mom, can we please go to Sara's house? It is her birthday today."

"Sure." Her mom said, surprised that Shira would want to take her brother to her friend's place. Usually, the kids had their own set of friends. Hopefully, they would have something good to eat there, she thought.

Shira hesitated and stood in the

kitchen, biting her nails. Her mother sighed and went to the living room, without looking at her. She took some change from her old dressing coat. Shira knew that her mother had given away the money meant for the breakfast the next day.

"Let us take a bus to dad's old village. It is just an hour away," said Siam as they hurried to the bus terminus. Siam and Shira had decided the previous night that they would go to the fertile fields their father was talking about. After a bumpy ride, they reached their dad's small village. "Look at the mountains!"

exclaimed Siam, as they stared at the tall, layered blue and black rocks beneath darkening clouds. They walked through the deserted streets where they saw a couple of pedestrians.

Siam hailed one, "Mister, can you tell us the way to the Autumn River that would take us to Lakewood Fields?"

The man stared at the kids with a strange look on his face.

"Where are you from? The Autumn River dried up long ago. As for the fields, nobody goes there anymore. Have you not heard of the dangerous gypsy that lives there?"

"It is a Pixie", corrected the other pedestrian.

"But can we go to Lakewood Fields at all?" asked Shira, desperately.

"Yes. It is just the next station; you will need to take the train."

He pointed to the station around the corner. "It will take you to the Lakewood Fields. Nobody goes there though..." but the kids were already running. The siblings were in luck. A train glided into the platform as soon as they got their tickets. Siam and Shira gazed at the shining, glassy mountains as they drew closer to the fields.

"I wish we could buy something to eat," whispered Siam. His eyes looked hungry as he put his hand on his stomach. Shira felt the same, but she took his hand. "We will go to dad's fields, and you can have the plums, peaches, berries...anything you want."

Siam stared open-mouthed at her, her self-assurance bewildered him, "They are not ours. The pixie..."

Shira replied with determination, "It is not hers to take, Siam. She was wrong in doing so. We will defeat her."

Shira did not know how but right always defeated the wrong, she was sure. She did not share her mother's pessimism or her father's fatalistic attitude. Shira always felt hopeful that things would change. She felt that this was the time for a change.

They were not surprised when no one got down in the Lakewood Fields. The vibrant

shades of green thrived with red and yellow flowers, peeking behind the leaves. Dazzled by the natural beauty, the siblings strolled cautiously. Siam goggled at the mouth-watering fruits while Shira gazed at the mesmerizing flowers, many of which she could not name.

There was a sudden movement and Siam looked up in shock as a large coconut had just missed his head. They heard subtle laughter. A tiny, almost girl-like creature sat on an oak tree with brown leaves. The leaves, though brown, were strong and silky. The tree bore no signs of decay. The pixie looked ethereal, as their father had described. Siam drew back at her toothless laughter, "Go away. This place is mine."

Siam stepped forward, scorn and fear battling inside him. "You should be the one to leave. You think this place is yours just because of a stupid bird that dropped you here..." At this, a long branch stretched and wrapped itself around Siam, pulling him away. He was pulled deeper and deeper into the oak tree until he disappeared. Shira saw a new green fruit sprouting in one of the oak branches. If there was negative magic, there was sure to be positive magic too, Shira thought as she looked around. She was surprised that she did not panic

when her brother was abruptly taken away. She felt strangely calm as if her brother had just gone to school and would be back within a few hours.

"What are you waiting for? Take me next." She said confidently.

"Go away", screamed the pixie. She seemed scared. Shira noticed that a small plant had cropped up through the soil next to her.

"I will not go until my uncles and brother come back to life. Also, this field belongs to everyone, and you are the one who is trespassing."

"How dare you to talk to me like this?" the pixie bristled, "Go and get her", she turned on the leaves; but they only shrunk at her words.

Meanwhile, Shira looked in surprise at the new plant next to her. It had striped green leaves. The pixie had now gone quiet; she looked a little fearful and clung to the branch near her. Shira turned to the growing plant near her and felt a sense of confidence, happiness, and peaceful security. The leafy plant grew further, till it sprouted a brown flower, the rich color of freshly prepared chocolate. Shira had never seen anything like that. Shining with vigor, the flower bends forward. Shira realized that the plant had sprouted out of her hope and positivity. These were her

strengths that the pixie feared.

"No. Please", the pixie said piteously, trying to blend in with the oak branches. The plant sprung forward and folded the pixie around its body. "I have just settled here. Let go," she moaned faintly. The plant stood poised in the air for a minute and then took flight. Shira stared until the plant became a small dot, flying far away. The nature was still vibrant, but less threatening and the oak branches had changed colors to a dull, normal green. Shira watched in wonder as five fruits fell with a thud from the branches. Out of them emerged four boys and a girl. Her brother, Siam, ran to her side. But Shira was staring at two boys whose features were very familiar. One was of her age and the other seemed a couple of years older. The two boys walked slowly towards the siblings. "Why, Percy, how thin you look!" exclaimed the oldest one.

"I feel so confused as if it has been ages since we left home," said the other.

"Who is this girl, Percy? She looks a little like Cousin Emma." "You are our uncles, Drake and Robin!" Shira's heart dipped for the first time that day. She knew that they would defeat the pixie but had not expected to find their uncles as children.

"Uncles?" Robin and Drake

stared at each other.

"Percy is our father. Oh God, I expected you to be grown-ups." Siam blurted out.

Robin and Drake stared at them, still not able to comprehend anything.

"I want to go home." Drake said in a small voice, "It seems like years since we left home."

"Yes, indeed. Our mom said she was going to make an apple pie this evening. Let us go home." said the other girl with a small boy by her side.

"I am still very hungry," Siam looked at Shira and glanced at the variety of fruits in the ground, his eyes seeking his sister's assent.

"Yes. I am hungry too," said Robin. All of them looked at Shira as if seeking her approval. She felt as if she was almost an adult and that she had emotionally grown since the morning. She said with forced enthusiasm, "Then what are we waiting for? Let us feast on them."

At this, Robin and Drake ran towards the mangoes while Siam joined the girl and the boy in hunting for the plum tree. Shira felt no hunger as she looked at them, happily devouring the fruits. Drake and Robin were sure to be shocked and disturbed to find their parents long dead. What would their father, Percy, say when he

saw his brothers still as kids?  
They would have to go to school  
with her and Siam. But could her  
parents afford that? And how  
about the other girl and boy?  
Where would they go, as their  
old village was almost bereft of  
human beings? At least, all of  
them could visit the fields  
whenever they wanted. Shira  
picked a plum seed lying on the  
ground and gazed at the other  
children. Right now, all of them  
were happy and contented.

**The End**

# Children's Literature

## *Awakened From Slumber*

*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

**F**ar beyond the peak of the world, eons from the most northern of stars, in a place beyond the known universe, the consciousness that was Kuthuli began to stir. Those that had been able to punish a god, to banish a god, those with the knowledge and gumption required to save themselves from eternal slavery were now gone. A millennium of millennia had passed, and new lifeforms had come into being. The consciousness of Kuthuli was drawn toward a place in the heart of the cosmos, a single planet with an abundance of souls; with purpose and determination, the god renewed its journey. Its sole purpose was to enslave all things, to turn sentients into worship, and nothing would stop it this time.

In the deepest, darkest forest, in an overgrown glade, the oldest of oak trees grew mighty and tall. None came here, no druid, no beast, not light, nor wind.

None had dared to penetrate the darkness. That was why no one witnessed the strange way that the oak's bark changed, it cracked and curled as something beneath it seeped into its roots and then up through the ancient until it became possessed. The oak passed on the news to its saplings that the egg within its roots was a great seed that needed to be protected at all costs. The saplings in turn informed their own children, and soon the green eggs began to appear amongst the roots of other trees. The dark ochre seeped in to corrupt the sap; trees began to die as they fed their new parasite. Soon after the blackness flowed within mountain stone and the chalk of the hills. Blades of grass turned yellow, drying up as they happily gave what they could. The eggs grew, the creatures within becoming stronger, the strange fluid that sustained them beginning to glow and pulse. People came, penetrating the darkness where none had been for a thousand years, drawn by



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

dreams and promises of power. These people chanted the language that they were taught, their voices growing louder as more flocked to this strange cult. A new era was on the cusp of becoming a reality. The world would soon change, it was time.

The old Queen was dead, abandoned by the hive, and slaughtered by the blind workers who for so many years followed her instructions without question. The soldiers had been plotting a change for quite some time, and for those who were against the old ways there was shared a ripple of joy. The massacre that followed was bloody and swift as all those still loyal to the old ways were found, herded to the heart of the hive, and then mercilessly fed to the new queen. She ate, gorging herself upon foe after foe until there were no more bodies available for her to devour. After this, she squealed her frustration. Those loyal to her, those who had been accepted to the new hive began to undertake their duties, some sacrificed themselves to appease their queen's hunger, some undertook the role of helping her to expand the hive, and some took on the responsibility of finding food and followers to help the hive to grow strong and prosperous. A war was coming.

All within the hive could sense that the time to prepare was now.

Kuthuli's consciousness echoed to its loyal followers, and soon the news spread that the god had shaken free of what seemed like an endless imprisonment of slumber. Beasts like birds with mouths full of dagger-sharp teeth and leathery wings flocked to the calling, traveling through space and time to reach the planet that their Master sought to conquer. The flock thought as one, paused as one, destroyed as one, on their way to a battle that they thought they would easily win. Kuthuli was with them, their time of victory was nigh.

Rumors began to spread, tales of the strange mountain cult that was causing all the chaos and devastation. A storm that blew in unexpectedly was blamed upon the strange ones, a herd of pigs that all lost their piglets to a growth in the intestinal tract had to be due to the relentless chanting, a whole orchard of apple trees that refused to blossom and fruit, fields of wheat refusing to yield, all of this and more was blamed upon the strange cult. Families turned upon families, neighbors came to blows, and friends turned into thieves and murderers. As the

blight spread toward the Capitol the king's soldiers were sent to disperse the trouble and help things to return to normal, but those who left the comfort of the palace and urban life did not wish to explore, learn, and truly deal with what was happening beneath the surface. They wished only to punish what they could see, to report back to the lords and ladies that all was well. None could foresee what was coming. No one wished to spend the time, for it was unknown to them that time was running out.

From town to town the hive spread, slowly growing in number. Those who refused to join their cause were merely sacks within which the queen's eggs were incubated until they were ripped apart and born anew, part of the bigger picture. The queen became strong, and yet the larger her presence the greater her hunger and her need to expand the hive. It was almost impossible to keep up with the demand, but, while there seemed to be none able to resist the spread, somehow the workers and soldiers found a way to carry on. For it was almost time to reveal that which had come to destroy the world. It was almost time for the hive to resurface and take back what had belonged to them for so long.

The Prophet Jacob looked out upon the world and wept. He had watched in silent disbelief as signs of the three Elder Gods began to appear.

"Why in my lifetime?" he shouted, pleading with the gods of the now.

Their silence gave Jacob reason to fear what it was that would come next.

But then followed the visions, a strange group of animals, a dove, a bull, a rat, a bee, and some sort of feline. Encircling all of these was the distinct image of a fox's bushy tail.

"What are you trying to tell me?" the prophet begged to know.

The silence of the gods continued.

So, Prophet Jacob left the mountainside that he called home and ventured bravely out into the unknown. His only hope was to find the creatures from his dream, in fact, it was the only hope for the entire world, and time was quickly running out.

# Fantasy

## *A Moment to Remember Part 2*

*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)

## **9. Ruth and Jake**

Jake arrived home a little bit after 9:00. He had not been drinking and seemed relaxed, so Ruth, even though she was fatigued and emotionally drained, thought now was as good a time as any to speak with her son.

She asked Jake for a few minutes to visit. To Jake, she seemed worried, so he said OK, even though he just wanted to go to his room and be alone. At the kitchen table, in her customary way, she got right to the point. Looking her son in eye, she said, "Bab Rhodes was here for a visit, and she had something interesting to tell me."

Jake could not think of anything Bab would want to say to his mother and said so. "I didn't know Bab and you knew each other. What did she want?"

Bluntly, she replied, "We didn't know each other until today, but

we know each other now. She said you broke up with Danny."

*It didn't take long for that to get around, he thought. Sighing, he replied, "Yeah. You know why. I don't want Danny's life ruined by my illness."*

Don't you think that decision should be hers? You know that girl loves you very much."

"Maybe, but I love her too, and I think this is better for her in the long run."

"Again, don't you think she should have a say in this?"

"Probably she should, but I think this is better."

"You're going to let her live the rest of her life thinking you just dumped her for no reason?"

"She'll figure it out after I'm gone."

"You don't know yet when you will, in your words 'be gone.' "

“Even if I live, this will always be hanging over our marriage. She will always have a husband in poor health.”

“You are assuming a lot. Do you really want her to live the rest of her life feeling rejected, that you gave her no chance to be with you when it counts most? How will you feel, years down the road, if you are healthy and vigorous, but know you let the best thing to ever happen to you just . . . go? I think you better go to bed and reconsider this.” Ruth, doing her best to keep herself together, quickly rose and left the room, leaving Jake to sit and think about his mother’s words.

Jake sat there for several minutes, seeing this in a new light. *It is interesting, he thought, how the words of another can change a viewpoint, especially when it is your mother.* After completing that thought, he rose and went to bed and, following Ruth’s directions, thought long and hard about Danny and what he had done, eventually falling into a fitful sleep, for he knew the lives of two people were at a crossroads.

### **10. Jake and Danny**

The following morning, Jake

called Danny and asked if they could meet. Fortunately, it was the weekend, so getting together soon was not a problem. But, for Danny, setting the time certainly was not a problem, the reason for his request was. She asked him, in the calmest voice she could muster, “You made it very clear you want nothing more to do with me. What do you want?”

Jake had returned to his senses and was pretty much back to his old self, as well as you can be back to normal when you have recently been diagnosed with cancer. He realized he made a mistake, a very big mistake, in treating the woman he loved as he did. It took a stern talk from his mother to get him to see this, but see it he did, and he was grateful. However, he now had something to do: win Danny back. It worried him that she may not forgive, or ever wish to see him again. But, he had to answer the question before Danny hung up on him, for if that happened, he was certain there was no undoing what he had done. So, he began to speak and answer her question, “I want to talk to you in person. There are some things in my life going on which you need to know. I am aware I acted badly the other night. Please allow me a hearing. May we speak in

person?”

Danny was tempted to throw her phone against the wall, mad as she was now. But something inside of her warned her not to do that. Slowly, and with some hesitation, she answered, “OK. You may come over. How about tomorrow evening? Sunday evenings is usually pretty quiet.”

Jake wanted to come as soon as possible, right then would have been good for him, but realized Danny was holding the upper hand. Making an effort not to sound disappointed, he said, “That will be fine.”

“OK, see you around 8:00pm. Is that a good time for you?”

“Yeah, 8:00pm is good.”

“Eat something before you come. I haven’t been cooking. For some reason, my appetite has been off.”

He wanted to say, *that is a sucker punch I deserved.* Instead, he said, “OK, see you tomorrow evening.” He wanted to say, *Love you*, like he always did, but for now, maybe forever, he no longer had that right. As they hung up from the call at the same time, Jake considered that, while he got the meeting with

her he wanted, he very much feared what the outcome of the meeting would be. *The next day and a half is going to be the longest day and a half I will ever spend. Guess I deserve it.*

### 11. Danny

Danny felt sick to her stomach. She just allowed the man who had mistreated her very badly permission to come to her home tomorrow. She did not owe him that, but she had agreed anyway. *No doubt he thinks I have no sense of self-worth, she thought, miserably. But, nevertheless she had agreed, I guess to see what he wants to say that he didn't bother with the other night.* She was getting mad all over again, but she determined to keep it under control until she heard what he had to say. As she poured herself a large glass of wine, she said to herself, *the next day and a half is going to be the longest day and a half I will ever spend.*

### 12. Jake and Danny

Jake felt sick to his stomach as he rang the bell to Danny's apartment. Choking back panic, he feared, *this may not go so well, but I've got to try.* Fortunately, he did not have to wait at the door long in a state of panic. As soon as the door

opened, Danny greeted him with a stiff, "Hello."

"Hello to you too," was his nervous response. *A bit too light-hearted for the occasion,* he thought. She invited him in and offered him a seat in the small living room. Jake was visibly nervous, as he was painfully aware that his words and actions for the remainder of the evening would determine his future and, hopefully, Danny's as well. "Thank you," was his awkward reply.

"Well, here you are. What do you wish to discuss?" Danny hoped her nervousness was not as noticeable as Jake's.

Jake inhaled deeply and answered, "I'm here to apologize. I am very sorry, sorrier than you know about my behavior towards you last week. I don't know how to explain it, except you might say it was a form of . . . temporary insanity. That is the best I can do to explain it."

Danny was more interested in what he was saying than she cared to admit, saying, "Go on."

"I will just come right out with it. I have cancer. It may be terminal, and it is inoperable. I felt like asking you to marry me would

be terribly unfair. You may marry me just in time to nurse me until an early death, and I did not want that for either of us, especially you."

Danny was trying to hold her emotions together – something she was getting a lot of practice with lately. Carefully, she said, "You never asked me to marry you."

"No, but I was about to, before I knew about the cancer. In fact, I had already purchased a ring to surprise you with."

"So, you love me enough to want to marry me, but not enough to trust me to love you unconditionally? I think the marriage vow includes, in sickness and in health."

"It's not that," he replied hastily, "a year or two married to me would affect your life from now on." Jake then went on to explain in detail his experience with Dr. Wentworth and what he could expect going forward. When finished, he added, "I did not want to burden you with having to make a marriage decision."

Danny did not expect this and did not expect her reaction to it. She should have known something was up with Jake, but

an abrupt dismissal from somebody's life causes you to not think clearly. Still, his lack of faith in her ability to love him unconditionally disturbed her very much. He loved her, she was sure of that, but had showed no faith in her ability to love him in the same way. Her reply was, "You are not showing much faith in me."

"I have all the faith in the world in you! I just did not wish for you to have to make a very hard decision, and then be scarred by it for the rest of your life. You know, you may live half a century or more after I am gone."

Jake sensed he was losing her. *Put up or shut up time now*, he knew. Later, he would think back to this moment and realize how odd it is; to think we know something, believe in it, make a hard decision concerning it, and still be wrong, even if our motives are for all of the best. But for now, all he had put himself and Danny through the past few days was coming to a head – right now. He asked himself, *what are you going to do, Jake, what are you going to do? Are you going to walk out of this apartment again, this time never to return, or will you choose to do something else? What is it going to be?*

Danny sensed she needed to give him the time he needed. She suspected this matter would be settled in the next few moments. She was not wrong.

Jake began to speak, very softly while looking squarely in her beautiful, sad eyes. "You know, I've been a fool. I have not trusted you to make your own mind up concerning this. Well, I am doing so now." Taking the ring out of his pocket, gently he asked, "Will you marry me? I cannot promise much except an uncertain future. But I want you by my side. Perhaps, together we can beat this thing which has frightened me more than I can express. Perhaps you can be my courage for me. I cannot imagine you thinking I am much of a catch after living through the last few days, but please say yes. I do not know how to say how terribly sorry I am to have broken your heart, but please, please give me whatever lifetime I have to make up for it. Please, marry me." And then, he began to cry.

For the next few moments, which would later seem to both of them like a lifetime, Danny let her thoughts and instincts take over. *Jake had handled this all wrong, but he was under a lot of pressure. I don't think it will do*

*either of us any good if I do not understand that. He loves me, and I love him. I will never feel good about myself if I cannot forgive him, especially if he dies with a broken heart.*

The room was silent and still.

And then, Danny began to cry. "Yes, she said, and again, "Yes." She hoped her answer was clear to Jake as she was speaking through tears and intense emotion. It was a few minutes before they regained their composure. Both of them at this moment felt a depth of emotion they would never experience again. Love, gratitude, relief, these things and so much more in a moment of emotion most of us will only ever dream about.

It was truly a moment to remember.

### ***Epilogue***

Ten Years Later

"The restaurant is not too busy right now, hope it stays that way. I always like for our anniversary to have the dignity it deserves."

"I agree." Danny chuckled, and then added, "Our marriage almost did not get off of the launching pad."

“I know, and you must know, I have spent the last ten years being grateful to you for agreeing to marry me. An abrupt breakup and a battle with cancer was a rocky way to begin a marriage. You could have refused to take me back, and nobody could have blamed your decision. I will never be able to say it often enough. Thank You.”

made it without you; my state of mind would not have allowed it.” He reached across the table and kissed her hand, saying, “Here’s to many more years together.”

**END**

Danny was deeply moved. Her husband was being thoughtful and she delighted in that. Smiling, she said, “We got a miracle when you beat the cancer. We got two more miracles with the kids. Not only did you beat the odds with cancer, but the sterility you were supposed to have never happened.”

“Yes, we are richly blessed, and it would not have happened without your saying yes. I will be truthful, had the positions been reversed, I’m not sure what my answer would have been.”

“But, the positions were not reversed, and you did not have to say anything. Showing up at my apartment said more to me than your words.”

“But you showed me love and trust in a frightening future – and forgiveness. Powerful things, those. I would not have

# Fantasy

## *The Invitation*

*By: Karen Bayly*



### **Karen Bayly**

Karen Bayly is a writer, software tester, and author of *Tesato's Code*, published in 2022. Her passion for writing began as a child when she wrote soap operas for her dolls to perform. These days, her PhD in biology, research background, and fear for the future informs her writing, a fusion of science fiction, horror, and fantasy. Her short stories and poems have appeared in *Yellow Mama Webzine*, *Black Petals Magazine*, *Every Day Fiction*, and

Amy Willow nestled in the pillows, a shadow of her former self, and clutched her granddaughter's hand, her blue eyes pleading.

"The shed," she said, her breathing coming in sharp rasps. "Go to the shed."

Ceri squeezed the older woman's papery hand a little tighter. "Why, Gran?"

"A snapshot of the past. Find me."

"I don't understand."

"Willow women..."

Amy beckoned Ceri closer, and the younger woman leaned in, straining to hear any last words.

"We are... special," she said, expelling a long, satisfied sigh, her final farewell to life.

bathing in sorrow until the nurse shooed her away.

#

Ceri Willow sipped her tea, still dressed in black, and stared out the kitchen window. Gran's funeral marked a new chapter in her life. As Amy's only relative, Ceri inherited the house. She'd grown up here, first with her mother and Gran, then with Gran alone after her mother died, but now she lived and worked in the city, two hundred kilometers away. She didn't want to sell up but could think of no other option, yet the idea of other people living in these quaint, old-fashioned walls rankled.

Then there was the shed. Gran had wanted her to go there, but visiting the rundown old lean-to at the bottom of the garden hadn't been a priority. Gran had banned her curious younger self from the shed, stating it was too dangerous for children. When



anthologies from Black Beacon Books, Black Hare Press, and Crystal Lake Publishing. She is a member of the SFWA and HWA. She lives in Sydney, Australia, with two cats, a guitar, and a ukulele.

Her granddaughter said nothing, she hit her teens, she no longer cared about places she found fascinating as a child. However, She spun around to see the smiling face of a middle-aged today, her curiosity returned, so man with a huge mustache, placing her cup in the sink, she mutton chops, a white shirt, a followed the old stone path to bow tie, gray trousers, and braces. The shed had to the shed door. disappeared, and she now

inhabited an old-fashioned grocery store reminiscent of the one in a historic village on the edge of town. Outside she could hear the gentle clip-clop of horses' hooves and cartwheels squeaking.

The shed was as dilapidated as she remembered, but no more so, twenty-five years of rain and sun ineffectual in ageing it further. She peeked inside. Nothing unusual, only dusty boxes stacked on one side counterbalanced by neglected furniture on the other.

"Thank you. Um, I was wondering if you could tell me today's date?"

Leaving the door open for light, she began opening boxes. She searched through the first box and dug through the second box. "Twenty-fifth of April." No photos. The third box, still "And the year?" nothing. The fourth and last box? Zilch. No snapshot of the past in this shed.

He cocked his head, regarding her with undisguised amusement. "Thought you might want to know that. Don't get many folks dressed like you around here. It's 1895."

Her eye fell upon a silver jewelry box on a shelf above the casing. It was too high to reach, so she closed the shed door, grabbed a chair, and pushed it up against the ancient wood. She placed one foot on the seat, ready to test its stability.

Holy moly. She'd gone back in time.

"Now, what is it you were looking for?"

"Let me help you, miss," said a voice behind her. "Don't like my customers 'dangerring themselves standing on old chairs."

Ceri couldn't think of anything to say other than the truth, but the notion that photos may not yet exist left her tongue-tied.

"You look a touch peaky," said the shopkeeper. "I have some smelling salts if that is what you need."

She shook her head and took a deep breath.

"I'm looking for a photograph of someone."

The man pursed his lips. "Hmm. Can't say I stock photographs. Whom might these photos be of?"

"Amy Willow."

"Oh, Amy! A regular customer of mine. Used to come visiting her daughter, Marion, and just moved back here for good." A flicker of recognition lit up the man's face. "Why, you must be Ceri!"

She nodded.

"Hello, there! I'm Jeremiah Jackson. Been wondering when you might drop by. Amy will be thrilled to see you."

Ceri leaned against the door, willing the world to stop spinning, fighting the urge to faint. A strong smell of ammonia pummeled her nostrils, and her head cleared instantly.

Jeremiah grinned. "Smelling salts. Nothing better for an attack of the disbeliefs." He glanced out the window. "And what you're looking for is about to arrive."

She followed his gaze. Two women hurried down the main street, and her eyes grew wide with wonder. One was her grandmother; a younger version Ceri had only seen in photographs. But the other woman took her breath away. There strode her mother, glowing with health and vigor, exactly as Ceri remembered her before cancer robbed them both.

Her feet echoed what her heart desired, and she ran to meet them.

"At last, you're here," said Gran.

Marion Willow held her daughter at arm's length, eyes brimming with tears.

"Look how beautiful you are. I am so proud."

"Oh, mum. I've missed you so much."

"Well, you could have visited," her mother said.

much time warding her away from the shed, afraid she would want to join you before her time. Then I worried it would bind her to the cottage too soon if she understood Willow women's magic. I knew she had more to do with her life first."

Ceri's brow wrinkled. "Willow women's magic?"

"We don't die, dear. We relocate to Willowvale. Willow women have held this space for over eight hundred years." Gran winked. "We redecorate occasionally, but the late 1800s suits us all the best. Some of the older ones find modern life challenging."

"But why am I here now?"

Her mother took her hand. "Take this as your invitation. Will you visit? And then, will you join us here when your time comes?"

"Now, before you answer," said Gran, "you must commit to protecting the shed. The shed is your portal. Without it, you cannot enter."

Ceri didn't need to think. "I'll move into the cottage and work from home. I don't need the city when this is waiting for me."

“My fault,” said Gran. “I spent so

Gran beamed. “That’s my girl. Now you should go. I sense a real estate agent is snooping around the backyard.”

Ceri turned to see Jeremiah at the door of the shop, beckoning. The doorway shimmered, fluctuating between the shop and shed doors, yet somehow both simultaneously.

A frisson of excitement ran through her body, and she kissed Gran and hugged her mum. “See you both soon.”

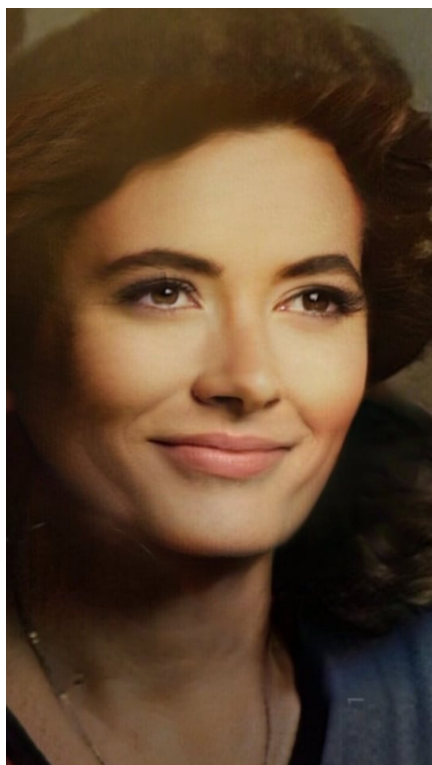
Eager for whatever came next, she opened the door to a new life.

***THE END***

# Fantasy

## *Shadows of the Anasazi Part One of Three*

*By: Gabriella Balcom*



### **Gabriella Balcom**

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

**S**tudying her surroundings, Ronnie saw nothing but dirt — and more dirt. She noticed smudges on her beige slacks, frowned, and spoke aloud. "Blast it! How'd I get dirty?" She'd climbed out of her car mere moments ago, and hadn't touched or brushed up against anything. Thank God she hadn't worn white. Of the other two pairs of pants she'd brought with her — both jeans — she'd accidentally dripped mustard on one the day before, and had just one clean pair left. "Darn, Ronnie," she chided herself. "Needing a washateria wasn't part of the plan." After spending so much time alone, this habit of talking to herself had become her constant companion. Mancos, Colorado, a relatively small city with 1,260 residents, was only a few miles away from her, but she didn't know her way around. Neither a local nor a Colorado resident, she'd driven from East Texas the evening before, speeding most of the

way. On a normal day she would've ooh-ed and aah-ed over the mountains, valleys, rolling meadows, and elk herds in the distance and taken non-stop photos. Yesterday, however, hadn't been normal, and she'd ignored the scenery.

Ronnie had made a reservation at a local hotel, and her main concern had been locating it and checking in before her room was given away. Thank goodness, the place hadn't been hard to find. Once that was squared away, she'd turned her attention to the reason for her trip, Mesa Verde National Park. She printed out directions prior to leaving home, but confirmed them at a gas station, and hurried to the park. Of all the sites, only one held her interest, and she'd paid in advance to join the last tour group of the evening. She'd joined the other visitors and dutifully tromped around with them, brainstorming while listening to the guide. Her pounding headache, although unpleasant, hadn't kept her from noticing the park's high traffic

chocolate. Check out her author page:

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

and security presence. She doubted anyone lived on the grounds beyond the staff. Her tour group had stood in front of pueblos built into the side of the mountain with a cliff hanging over them. These dwellings were constructed of sandstone, wood, and mortar with some plaster over the exterior. Although they varied in size, most had two to four levels which were reachable by ladder. The people who'd lived there were better known as the Anasazi, although that label had fallen out of favor. They'd flourished between 450 and 1300 A.D. in the Four Corners area of the United States — portions of Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado — and left behind over six hundred dwellings built into cliff faces. The natives had vanished over time, with all kinds of theories existing as to why. One maintained drought had forced them to move. Regardless of what had occurred or where they'd gone, their descendants lived on, including the Pueblo and Hopi peoples. The guide the night before had stressed that the indigenous people hadn't called themselves "Anasazi." This was a Navajo term carrying negative connotations. Portions of the word inferred they were alien, an enemy, and something once

whole which had since scattered, like a body decaying to nothing but bones and strewn about by scavengers. The current preferred name was "ancient pueblo-dwellers." Now, Ronnie stood alone in Mesa Verde National Park. She'd researched beforehand and knew "mesa" meant table — in this case, the flat-topped mountains — and "verde" meant green. She was near the entrance to Cliff Palace, a large dwelling with over one hundred fifty interconnected rooms and twenty-three *kivas*, a word meaning ceremonial meeting places. One hundred to one hundred fifty people had lived here. Ronnie had snapped photos the night before in an attempt to blend in and look like any other tourist, but she hadn't felt the "magic" described by other visitors. To hear them talk, it seemed they felt they'd "gone back in time," and could imagine long-gone people moving through their daily routines. "What's magical about this?" she muttered. People once lived here, but they didn't anymore. At some point in between, they'd moved on. People often did. How was that unusual? Realizing she felt grumpy, Ronnie sighed. She loved history and visiting historical sites, so her negativity made no sense. This was essentially a vacation, since

she was off work. She had been offered money for her time and efforts, but she'd turned it down.

"Hah!" The reason for her attitude dawned on her. She hadn't eaten since the morning before. Not eating wasn't wise — she had low blood sugar — but the omission hadn't been deliberate. She'd been focused on reaching Colorado, checking into the hotel, and joining the tour in time. The latter had lasted longer than she'd expected, involving a surprising amount of trekking round and about and climbing up and down ladders. Afterward, she'd been exhausted, desiring only to collapse onto her bed and sleep. Ronnie had awakened this afternoon feeling rested. Food wasn't on her mind. Instead, she'd wanted to learn about the area, and she'd spent hours online doing research. But her blood sugar must have plummeted since then. A dip explained her general fussiness and negative attitude, lack of energy, as well as the headache she'd had for the past couple hours.

Rummaging through the chaos in her purse, she found a battered two-pack of granola bars, and inhaled them. Digging more, she discovered a Tootsie roll and half a bag of M&Ms, which vanished instantly. Soon,

Ronnie felt more alive, more positive. More herself. Her headache subsided, and the tightness in her neck and shoulders eased. She used a hair band to secure her long black hair, took a deep breath, and relished the fresh air. She'd had occasional days off work, but never a vacation, and she wasn't due back until Monday — four days from now. So she could relax.

She recalled the winding road she'd traversed to Mesa Verde's entrance. She'd passed sweeping panoramas of flat-topped mountains, some towering over her and others rising only slightly. In a few places, she'd glanced out her window and looked down upon plummeting valleys and sprawling grasslands and brushlands. Once, she'd glimpsed a horse and another animal which she thought was a coyote.

Ronnie was surprised to see another horse now in the distance. It stood motionless for a moment before galloping away, mane and tail billowing behind it. She'd read something about wild herds living here. Then she saw a solitary tree on a hill before her. Highlighted by the setting sun, it wasn't very tall but stood proud and solid, with the golden light flaring around it in rays. Ronnie got a

sense of eternal permanence, and wondered if it was a juniper. She'd read about the tree's significance to the Hopi, how it was used in numerous ceremonies, and held spiritual importance for their people.

A piercing wail sounded above her, and she looked up to see an eagle soaring just before it plummeted toward the earth. It snatched some small animal from the ground, but she couldn't make out what.

The air around her carried odors reminiscent of the spruce-, pine-, and sage-scented candles she loved to burn at home. As she tried to differentiate one smell from another, they only grew more potent. If she hadn't known better, she would've thought something was burning nearby. A fruity odor hit her nostrils, too, but she had no clue where it came from.

She studied the vegetation around her and recognized pinyon pines from pictures she'd seen online. Her research had revealed this area boasted numerous varieties of pine, juniper, fir, oak, cottonwood, and chokeberry, whatever that was. Poison ivy grew here, too — she couldn't seem to escape that one, regardless of where she went — as well as sagebrush, rabbitbrush, and bitterbrush. Mosses, ferns and orchids grew near seep springs;

she loved the name *seep*. And wildflowers of varying species and colors were common: pink, yellow, white, red, purple, blue... Although Ronnie had a memory like a steel trap for names and miscellaneous facts, she doubted she could identify more than three or four actual plants. Directing her attention back to the pueblos, she tried to picture the *Anasazi* of long ago and was surprised by the speed with which new, vivid images rushed into her mind's eye. Slipping into a daydream, she saw Native Americans moving around her. When they turned to smile at her, she was struck to the core by the warmth and recognition in their eyes, and heard them saying, "You're home, dear one." She imagined herself working alongside them, mixing dirt and water, moving sandstones, and helping build a home by hand. And, she could feel the peace and calm of belonging, of being accepted by people who cherished her. Leaving the fantasy with reluctance, her shoulders drooped and she sighed, comparing the love she'd just experienced — although it was a daydream and not real — with her life. Her biological parents had died when she was young, and even though she believed they'd loved her, she had few memories of them. After going

into foster care, she'd been placed in a home with elderly sisters, who'd attended to her physical needs but hadn't offered much in the way of true caring. They'd made it clear through their actions she'd represented one thing to them: wages. She'd been expected to be "seen and not heard," to do her homework and chores without complaint, and to pretty much take care of herself and not bother them at all. The sisters had shown affection toward each other but hadn't seemed to comprehend she had a need for the same. Or, maybe they just hadn't cared. Consequently, she'd grown up feeling estranged from those around her, lonely, and had longed for a sense of belonging. After her daydream, Ronnie acknowledged Cliff Palace was more than abandoned pueblos. It had been a home to people who'd lived out their days and nights here. And it was impressive, especially having been built into a cliff. The setting was almost romantic, with mountains stretching into the distance, a mournful wind blowing through the valley, the glowing circle of the rising moon standing out against the darkness, and the village, all snug and tucked-away with the stone overhang stretched protectively over it.

Ronnie had always dreamed of a little private spot for herself, hidden from the rest of the world. She jumped when a bird called out overhead, realized time had escaped from her while she mooned about, and knew she couldn't let herself waste any more of it. Glancing at her watch, she was surprised to learn it was 8:52 PM. Although the full moon cast enough light by which to see, she couldn't know if or when the clouds would shift and block the light. Reaching into her purse, Ronnie pulled out a large index-card holder. She'd copied Carly's postcards, and decided to keep them in the hard plastic container. Opening it, she withdrew the copy of the postcard that had drawn her here. She wouldn't have come to Colorado or this spot if it hadn't been for the postcard. And, she wouldn't have seen the postcard or even known it existed if not for Carly. Ronnie had encountered Carline Thomason, who went by Carly, online five months before. The other woman had sought help in finding the parents of an ancestor born in 1929. Ronnie had gotten interested in genealogy as a teenager. She'd become adept at tracking people, meeting some of her emotional needs through

volunteering to help others. Her lifelong sadness over losing her family had tied right in to the satisfaction she'd felt every time she was able to link children with their parents and relatives. In addition, she'd dreamed of finding her own biological relatives. She'd searched census records and found Carly's ancestors. At her request, Ronnie had also followed the other woman's line back over fifty years, locating burial sites, some death records, and obituaries. The people in question had been quite easy to find on the 1930, 1920, and 1910 censuses, but harder to locate for 1900 and 1880. Ronnie had found them but doing so took hours, and she hadn't pursued pre-1880 yet. In the course of her research efforts, she and Carly had chatted back and forth about families, history, recipes, pets, and whatever else came up. When Carly had asked her three weeks ago to locate someone, Ronnie had assumed this was another ancestor search. They'd spoken by phone soon after. Carly shared a story revolving around Kaya Pentewa, who was born on a Hopi reservation. Her mother struggled to support herself, her husband, and their six children including Kaya. The woman earned money selling milk from two cows and cooking

a restaurant. Kaya's father drank, seldom worked and, when he did, couldn't keep a job for long. He developed cirrhosis and died when Kaya was eight. When her mother got sick two years later, Kaya dropped out of school to help at home. She was twelve when her mother died, after which her siblings were farmed out to kin. The relatives wanted Kaya to stay with them also, but an official questioned the large number of kids and adults already in their home. Perhaps this could have been resolved, but a lack of money, understanding of the system, and legal help resulted in Kaya going into foster care. Adopted at thirteen by a New Mexico family, she was renamed Serena Moffett, and went to live in Santa Fe. She later married and had two children, a boy and a girl. The boy died in a car accident at twenty-one, but the daughter, Maria, married and had one girl and three boys. Maria's husband left her, and the now-single mother held things together by a shoestring. She eventually turned to prostitution and drugs. One day, she left her children in a park and didn't return. Ronnie had recorded her conversation with Carly, including her retelling of the story, and pulled out her phone to replay a portion of the audio

file there at Mesa Verde. "That was my mother who abandoned her children," Carly said from the recording. "I remember clear as day. The sun was shining. Everything looked vibrant because it had rained. Our mother didn't kiss us or hug us or say 'boo.' She just handed me a plastic bag with two packages of raw hot dogs inside and a half loaf of bread. A couple cold Shasta Grapes, too. She said, 'Share this with your brothers.' I was the oldest, and often watched them after she started using. I watched her walk away and thought nothing of it. It was totally normal — then. It blows me away any time I think about it now. She didn't look nervous or unsure of herself. No tears. She just strolled away with some dooper. I didn't know I'd never see her again or that life as I'd known it had ended. I had no clue my real life was *about* to begin..." "That's how we met Seezie — my grandma, Serena Moffett. She hadn't liked my father, but my mother had married him anyway, and they'd taken off. Seezie didn't know where they'd gone or if they were alive. She had no idea my brothers and I even existed until the state contacted her about our mother's disappearance. But, she showed up and accepted responsibility for four angry,



distrustful kids she'd never met.  
She didn't have to, you know.  
Her life wasn't easy, but she was  
making it. She could've moved  
right on but put us first."

**End of First Third of Story.**

# Fantasy

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

*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.

“How much farther?” moaned the young voice of Yohan the student sage.

“You tell us, boy,” growled the distinct voice of Head Truth Keeper Anton.

The pair of humans had been traveling as a part of Paechra’s army for two days, moving southward along North Road. Yohan had tried as often as he could to escape from under the wing of Mother Druid Sienna Alknown, although it was not often that the oldest sylvan rested, even though the wagon that she, Yohan, and High Prince Ulan rode upon rocked the trio like a cradle. Sienna was getting far too much enjoyment from ordering the young boy about.

“Fetch me some red berries,” Sienna demanded, and ten reprimanded Yohan when he returned with poisonous fruits colored a rich, bright shade of pink.

“Trim my nails!” commanded the old one.

Again, Yohan was scolded when he broke Sienna’s parchment-like skin. A dark blue oozed from the slice and mother druid gasped in pain.

Paechra watched on from afar, just within eyesight and earshot, trying not to laugh.

“You fool of a boy!” cried Ulan as the high prince attempted to help with the wound.

“Keep away!” Sienna cried. “I can fix it!”

“Go find some kindling to start a fire, Yohan,” suggested High Prince Ulan.

Paechra almost chortled as she witnessed just how quickly Yohan made to obey.

The youngest Lightheart had hoped to speak with Yohan and discover more about the rumors he had overheard which

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

mentioned Paechra's friend Raven, and anything that the boy had heard about Andrapaal; the vorsurk, the citizens, whether it was a peaceful or hostile occupation of the capital, but Sienna had had other plans. Thus far, two whole days in and at noon on the third, there had been no time that Paechra and Yohan could have privately talked. Paechra had begun to wonder if Sienna Alknown was living up to her name and had her reasons for keeping the two apart.

"Do you not agree that this could be possible?" Paechra had asked of her friend Heidi.

"Yes?" was Heidi's uncertain reply.

"Yes you do not agree?" asked Paechra. "Or yes, you agree that our mother druid does not want me to speak with the boy?"

"Yes?" said Heidi again, this time even less sure of her response.

"My thoughts also," Paechra had said with a nod of understanding and satisfaction. "I shall find a time to discover if what we think is true is..."

"And what is it that we think is true?" Heidi had asked, but Paechra was by then deep in thought, plotting and planning.

With Yohan finally away from Sienna and the keenly eyed Ulan, Paechra thought it an opportune time to take the boy

aside.

"Yohan!" she called, as the young sage stepped away from the column of sylvan and went searching for sticks.

Paechra made to call again, but before she could she saw Anton place an arm around Yohan's shoulders like a caring father would.

"This I need to hear..." Paechra said to herself, and she hurried to catch up with the pair.

"... and then he raised the prices at the market, but none of the merchants saw any of the additional profits..." Yohan said, causing Anton to cry out in surprise.

"I just want to turn around and march back up to that Sage Williamsons and give him a large piece of my mind," growled the head of the truth keepers.

"I do hope that you don't," murmured the young sage in reply.

"Nonsense," said Anton, trying to reassure. "Everything you have told me will be kept in strict confidence."

"That may be the case," Yohan replied. "But Sage Williamsons will know that it is me..."

"Impossible," huffed Anton.

"Impossible for it to be anyone else other than Yohan..." suggested Paechra.

"Lightheart, when did you sneak up upon us?" asked Anton.

"Only just now, truth keeper,"

the sylvan replied.

Anton's aura changed from one of guilt to that of relief, making Paechra wonder what it was that she had missed.

The aura of the young sage was a constant pinkish haze, telling Paechra that he felt very much out of place.

"My feet hurt," Yohan complained.

"You spend most of your time on the cart, with the elderly and royalty," Anton snapped. "Try walking all day and then tell me such things."

"I would happily walk all the way back to the beach," said Yohan.

"I would not care how much that my legs ached after such a hike."

"You say that now," growled Anton. "But I doubt very much if you would still sing the same tune should we let you make such a journey."

"Hush, both of you," ordered the druid. "Such speaking has done naught but cause you both angst."

"So what is it that you would like to discuss?" asked the head truth keeper, though the question sounded very much like the accusation that it was.

"Raven?" said Paechra in surprise.

For out of the forest that ran alongside the road there came a figure upon the back of a charger, he was encased in dark metal armor, a great sword was

held aloft, and his free mailed hand was wrapped around a helm shaped to resemble the messenger bird.

"Who are you and for what purpose do you come with such forces into these lands?" came the booming voice of the figure astride the great warhorse.

"Raven, it is me, Paechra... Paechra Lighthouse..." said the sylvan.

"Johannas, cease this ridiculous charade and get down off your high horse," shouted Anton, angrily.

"I do not know you or your kind," the figure announced, addressing Paechra directly. "All I see is a foreign force on Thuraen soil."

"Look at me boy, I am your master," ordered Anton.

Paechra looked again at the one who she thought was her friend, discovering his aura was missing.

"Go back and warn the others..." she whispered to Yohan. "Go... Go now..."

Without needing to be asked twice, Yohan ran as quickly as he could.

"You there, boy!" called the figure upon horseback. "Stop now or I will stop you."

"No friend of mine would harm a child!" Paechra stated coolly.

"We are not friends," the warrior replied.

"He has a crossbow!" Anton suddenly cried

Paechra saw in the same instant that this fact was true. The one whom she first thought was Raven did have a loaded crossbow. He drew it forth as he sheathed his sword. Ignoring both Anton and Paechra he aimed the weapon at the fleeing Yohan.

"One more step," boomed the mounted figure. "And you will step no more."

"Fire upon the child and you will regret it," warned Anton.

"Then perhaps I will fire upon you," the warrior replied.

Paechra watched as the crossbow swung so the bolt was inches from Anton's face. That was when the warrior pulled the trigger.

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

# Horror

## Gold Springs Spa

*By: Dawn DeBraal*



### Dawn DeBraal

Dawn DeBraal 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* 2019 Pushcart

Three hundred sixty-five days of the year, Dottie Lee Spaeth thanked the good Lord for the invention of hot water. Once in the morning with her coffee to watch the sunrise and again in the evening with her glass of Merlot watching the sun going down. Dottie was the proud owner of a one hundred and twenty-eight jet Gold Springs Hot Tub Spa. She used the tub to help alleviate arthritis in her back and hands after a long day at the bank.

Dottie eased her three hundred and seventy-four-pound body into the tub, turning on the jets to low feeling her body floating, displaced by the water and the air in the tub. She didn't feel the weight any longer as the water lifted her girth from her bones.

"Thank you, God, for hot water!" she said in her daily prayers twice a day as the tension eased in her neck and shoulders moving down to her feet.

"Ahhhh," she said out loud. She was in the middle of doing her stretches when she felt a sledgehammer hit her in the side of the head. *What the hell?* She puzzled. The headache that proceeded the stroke was so intense, memories of her doctor who had warned her about being so over-weight. He'd told her she was a good candidate for a stroke or a heart attack. She was only forty-six years old. The words came back to Dottie in an instant flashback.

She saw the phone on the bench next to the hot tub. It was on her left side. Intent on picking up the phone and dialing 9 1 1 to get an ambulance to her home. Her left arm wouldn't move; it floated helplessly in the water. She could feel drool coming from her mouth.

"Stroke?" she slurred.

"Oh my God, no." Her right arm tried to reach across her body to get the phone and call for help.

nominee.

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

*When had her arms become tyrannosaurus Rex arms?* She wondered. She was able to get the one hundred and twenty-eight jets to stop bubbling, and she started to punch the control panel to get the temperature down below the one hundred and two degrees, which was making her sweat. It was so hot she had been in for nearly forty-five minutes.

Brutus, the pit bull next door came out barking at her as he did nightly. He threw himself at the fence before his owner called him back. "Brutus! Come!"

"Haaaaap," Dottie called, but there was little sound, and only a slur of a word. She tried again, but it was useless. Brutus gave up and trotted back to the house. She heard the screen door slam. Dottie's arm and leg were getting tired. Her body wanted to fall to the left. She couldn't support herself that way. Her right knee pushed hard against the wall of the Gold Springs hot tub, trying to keep her afloat while her right arm hugged the side of the tub. She questioned now why she needed five acres in the woods. She was going to drown in this hot tub, and it would be days before they found her. Maybe the bank would send someone, perhaps not.

She tried to pull herself around the tub to get her right arm to take the phone, but every attempt dumped her into the water gagging. It was all she could do to stay afloat. Being stuck in the Gold Springs was a living nightmare. She'd heard about the miracle drug if administered within a few hours of the stroke, Dottie would have a better chance at a full recovery.

In her heart of hearts, she knew that wasn't going to happen, not now that she couldn't reach the phone, and her good knee was giving out from trying to keep her three hundred and seventy-four pounds from tipping sideways in the water. Dottie tried to float her body, breathing in her nose and out of her mouth and trying to relax, trying to stay alive.

She awakened when the phone started ringing. She was amazed that she'd made it through the night. Somehow, she'd slept while she floated! Dottie tried to raise herself out of the tub, but it was useless. She wasn't cold, but the water made her hands look like sausages so swollen, yet so wrinkled at the same time. The phone rang and rang.

Would they send someone to find her? How long before her

co-workers got concerned about her? Ten minutes later, the phone rang again. She knew it was the bank searching for her. She had a presentation this morning to a new depositor, and they were starting to panic that she was not there. An hour later, a car pulled into her driveway, a horn beeped repeatedly.

"Haaaaaap" Dottie called feebly. She couldn't get her voice to work right. She pounded on the side of the tub to get their attention. Finally, Minerva came around to the back yard.

"Dottie! My God!" she shouted running to the hot tub. Minerva tried to hold her above water but was unable to. She grabbed Dottie's phone and punching the emergency number in. Dottie felt her will to live seeping out of her as Minerva gave the details to what she had discovered in Dottie's yard. Within a few minutes, the ambulance came. The paramedics were unable to raise her body out of the hot tub and called for backup. Several more men came.

Dottie felt deep embarrassment rise up when they all tried at the same time to get her flaccid body out of the tub and onto a gurney. After several attempts, they succeeded. They put a warming blanket on her body,

now shivering.

"Thuuu" was all she could say instead of, thank you.

It took five men to get her gurney in the ambulance. Off they went to the hospital. She was grateful but humiliated.

Eating wasn't easy after the stroke. Lots of choking involved. Dottie didn't get the benefit of the clot-buster because she had been in the tub over fifteen hours, far beyond the time to administer the miracle drug. The damage done had been considerable. Dottie needed to stay in a nursing home for several months after leaving the hospital. As her difficulty to eat played out, Dottie lost many pounds. Physical therapy retaught her the necessary actions to walk, talk, eat and to become independent. The stroke had done for Dottie what her Overeaters Anonymous group hadn't done, making her lose the weight her doctor warned her about shedding.

"Your job is waiting for you when you get better," said Mr. Trenton from the bank. She struggled with the depression that came with the stroke. Minerva came faithfully to see her at the nursing home. Slowly she regained some of her strength.

And was amazed at how quickly the weight came off. Dottie found herself needing new clothes, not being able to keep her pants up. Minerva brought her several outfits. She chose one that wasn't black for the first time in many years.

When Dottie was able to fend for herself, the nursing home staff escorted her out to Minerva's car. She was able to get into the car with little trouble from the wheelchair, something that amazed Dottie.

Minerva helped her up the steps of her home, staying with her during the night to make sure Dottie wasn't alone. County offered transportation, picked Dottie up faithfully Monday through Friday for physical and speech therapy. Her favorite exercise was swimming at the Y.M.C.A. She truly felt buoyant in the pool.

Dottie finally released Minerva to go back to her home nights. It was time, she said to Minerva to start fending for herself, and she was getting ready to go back to work in a couple of weeks, so she needed to do things to regain her strength.

The day came, Dottie got a clean bill of health, she'd lost two hundred and fifty-four pounds

and was given her drivers' license privileges back. Dottie's crowning moment, to walk into the applause of her co-workers finding a beautiful bouquet of flowers at her station. Dottie sighed as she read the card, realizing she had much more to be thankful for from God, than hot water.

At the end of her first day back, Dottie was tired but happy. She couldn't believe how much better her feet felt, not having to pull around two hundred and fifty extra pounds each day. She was cashing out her drawer when a man walked in minutes before closing time. Dottie slid her drawer back in.

The man pulled his gun lifting a bandanna to his face. "Give me the money." Dottie pulled out all the bills from her cash drawer and put them in the bag he'd tossed at her.

"Please take it and leave," and then she recognized the robber. He was the man that sat next to her at Overeater's meetings she used to attend before she had her stroke.

"Donald, you don't have to do this," she said sincerely. The man's mouth dropped. He didn't recognize Dottie with her new look. Not wanting to be

identified, he panicked and shot his gun twice, striking Dottie in the heart, as she bent forward, the other went into her head. Donald ran out of the bank with the sack of money. Dottie fell to the floor, not believing she had gone through all that she'd gone through the last year to be killed in an armed robbery by the man who used to sit next to her in Overeaters Anonymous meetings. Blood pooled along the linoleum floor and ran down the teller's area in a river of death.

"Dottie! Oh my God. Dottie, what happened?" Minerva came out of the break room having heard the shots. Dottie opened her mouth to say Donald but collapsed before she could name her killer. The bank was closed for a few days to clean the building. Minerva was still reeling from Dottie's funeral.

A few days later, Donald walked into the bank.

"How can I help you?" Minerva asked. Donald fumbled a few bills over to her, the very money he stole a week earlier.

"I'd like to start a savings account."

"Oh, by all means, Mr."

"Prescott, Donald Prescott. I'm saving up for one of those spas. Gold Springs Hot Tub Spa, it has one hundred and twenty-eight water jets." Donald was profusely sweating as he was close to four hundred and fifty pounds, his feet hurt terribly, and he was second-guessing his decision coming into the very bank he robbed a week ago.

"You don't say. I have a friend who died recently. She had just that tub in her yard. It hasn't been used in a year, but it is in wonderful shape. The bank is settling her estate. I am sure they will sell it to you at a great price, and you can still keep your savings account." Donald smiled widely at Minerva.

"I'm interested. This place is such a nice bank!" Donald was able to purchase the Gold Springs Hot Tub Spa. He saved so much money buying it through the bank. He saved even more by installing it himself. Donald reached in and felt the water was the perfect temperature. The water sparkled under the lights. He kept thinking what a great deal he got on the tub. Sure, he felt terrible when he realized it was Dottie's tub, but he was going to enjoy those one hundred and twenty-eight jets caressing his body.



He sat down in the steaming hot water turning the water jets to low. He felt his body float up. The bulk of his weight was nonexistent.

"Ahhhh. Thank God for hot water." Donald signed, putting down his glass of wine. His hand felt around to push the jets to a higher speed. When his finger came into contact with the control panel, Donald's body bucked and jerked wildly. The neighbor said he never saw anything like it. Donald kept jumping up out of the water, until he realized Donald was being electrocuted in front of his very eyes.

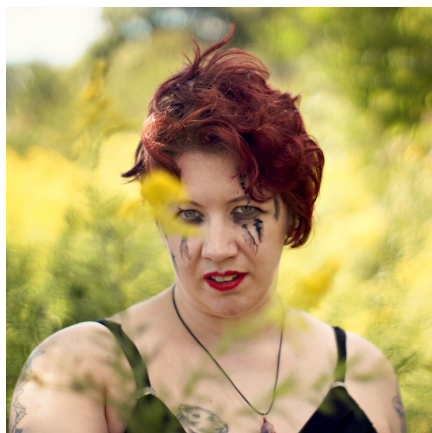
"Donald saved a lot of money on that Gold Springs Hot Spa. He should have spent a little more money on the installation. The tub wasn't grounded properly. It was a sight, I tell you. Never liked the guy, he was a prick. But I wouldn't wish this kind of death on my worst enemy," said his neighbor.

***THE END***

# Horror

## *The Basement*

*By: Destiny Eve Pifer*



### **Destiny Eve Pifer**

Destiny Eve Pifer is a published horror author whose work has appeared in numerous anthologies, magazines, and websites. Her stories have appeared in anthologies by Black Hare Press, Black Ink Fiction, Nordic Press, Fun Dead Publications, Macabre Ladies Publishing, Raven, and Drake Publications. Her stories have also appeared in FATE Magazine, The World of Myth Magazine, Sirens Call Magazine, Spotlight on Recovery, Country Magazine, Reader's Digest, and True Confessions. Her stories have also appeared on podcasts by The Morbid Forest. A lover of

**D**eep in the shadows of the darkness something watched and waited. It watched as the young woman crossed the broken boards and fallen ceiling tiles. It watched as she tried to put on a brave face. But deep beneath that air of bravery, the thing in the basement could smell fear. After all these years she still feared it and with good reason. As she crossed the threshold into the old study the smell of sulfur and mildew made her gag. It had been years since she had been in that basement. The study her mother had worked so hard to fix up and make into a library was now torn apart. As was the old bar room that her mother had paid someone to build so they could have a family room. It was obvious to Lydia that her father didn't take the divorce very well. He had trashed the entire basement and now she was left in the darkness trying to move things around. But as she worked the hairs on the back of

her neck began to rise. Somewhere in the darkness, it was watching her, and she could feel it. She tried to be strong and tried to ignore it but in reality, she had learned that there was no ignoring it. The demonic being lived in the shadows and even as she fumbled with the lights she could feel its breath upon her neck. She found herself heading out the basement door and into the bright sunlight. It feared the sunlight. Standing among the old grape vines she was reminded of the past. She was reminded of the days when her mother and her mother's friends would gather in the study. Lydia could remember peering in through the dusty windows and watching as her mother did tarot readings. She then watched as they pulled out the Ouija board and began using it. In the beginning, Lydia wasn't allowed inside when they contacted the spirits. But soon her mother discovered that she had a gift of knowing what the spirits would say. Some called her a medium but to

everything dealing with horror Pifer currently resides in a small rural Pennsylvania town with her teenage son.

Lydia, it was a terrifying experience. Sometimes the voices that came through weren't always pleasant especially when her mother's friend Willa was in attendance. Willa had a dark past and was suspected of murdering four husbands along with anyone who stood in her path. Yes, it was through Willa's touch on the planchette that Lydia often felt the most anger. Anger from her many victims. Lydia often wondered how Willa could live with herself. However, after each session, Willa often mentioned being afraid to go home. Especially after one particular session when something nasty and horrible came from the board. It wanted Willa and whatever it was, haunted her until she eventually overdosed on pills. But despite Lydia's mother locking the Ouija board away something had been released. Even though they had said goodbye the entity chose to stay. Her mother remained oblivious to whatever demonic spirit haunted the basement. She carried on secret affairs and continued to read fortunes. Finally, her father, who was also oblivious to the strange sounds and occurrences divorced her mother. For the next twenty years, she would remain a stranger to her father. Lydia was

would go on with her life as though nothing happened but deep in the back of her mind something haunted her. When she was injured at work Lydia found her life suddenly crumbled when she lost her apartment. Unable to stand her mother's toxic nature Lydia was forced to make a tough decision for the sake of her son. She decided to move in with her father. The moment they moved in her son refused to go into the basement. He claimed that late at night he heard something through the vent. Something calling out his name. Lydia herself felt the presence but tried to ignore it. However, the demon refused to be ignored. Lydia was carrying a basket of laundry when suddenly she saw something so hideous and terrifying that she lost her balance and tumbled down the stairs. She opened her eyes and saw two red eyes looking back at her. As an unseen force pinned her to the pavement all she could do was scream. She screamed for her son who was too frightened to come down. He too saw the demon looking up at him. The last thing she remembered was her father calling for an ambulance. When Lydia awoke she was on a helicopter heading to a trauma center. As she lay in the darkened hospital room she

couldn't help but feel haunted by the demon. Even miles away it still haunted her dreams. Just like it haunted her when she was a young child. Her mother and her friends had opened a portal and now Lydia was paying for it. What worried her the most was leaving her child in that very house. Diagnosed with a concussion she was forced to stay another night with a phone that was quickly draining. She needed to get rid of the demon and if that meant going back into that basement then so be it. When she returned home she had a long talk with her mother in which her mother's toxic nature was revealed. She simply didn't care and as Lydia looked at her vacant eyes she realized that her mother had released the demon on purpose. It was done as an act of revenge against her father. Returning home, she pulled out her sage and grabbed every book on witchcraft that she had. Though there were many spells she knew that the only true way to get rid of the demon was with sage and prayer. Later that day she sent her father and son off to the store and then came in through the back door of the basement. She was sure to leave it open for she had heard that the demon needed a way to leave. Lighting the sage, she began entering each room. But it

in the heart of the basement that she felt the most presence. Suddenly the cans on the shelves beside her began crashing to the floor. Startled she stumbled backward and over a box of her old stuff. Lydia found herself back on the pavement in the very place where she had landed after the fall. In fact, the blood stains were still there. As she held up the sage she began to recite the lord's prayer in hopes that it would help. As she spoke the light bulbs began to explode and she was forced to hide her face from the flying glass. She could sense how angry the demon was. She got on her belly and started to crawl toward a box of her old things. She could see the crucifix sticking halfway out of it. Grabbing a hold of it she pulled herself up and held the crucifix against her. She once again began chanting the lord's prayer. Just then she saw the demon standing in front of her. However, she didn't flinch or run. Instead, she kept on chanting until the demon disappeared and a strong wind went past her and out the back door. Outside she could hear Father pulling up. Though still shaken by what she had witnessed Lydia knew she had to be strong. She walked out of the back door and around the corner of the house.

Her father and son were both surprised to see her facing her fear of the basement. Little did they know that she faced much more that day.

# Horror

## *The Ravine - Part Two*

*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.

I was trying to relax, but even knowing I was safe didn't take away the memory of that disgusting darkness or the sheer terror I had experienced. Mum's memories of Grandma were fascinating because she didn't talk about her much. I was suddenly hit by a wave of tiredness, and I was so thirsty. Mum noticed and said "Dad and I will go now, darling girl. We will be back later with some of your things. You'll only be here for tonight. The doctors want to make sure you're rehydrated enough before they discharge you. Do you want me to get you some water? Your jug is empty." "That's okay Mum, I'll ring the bell in a moment and get it filled. You get off home and give Mustard a hug and a few doggie treats from me. That is one hot dog. Get it. Mustard, hot dog?" Mum laughed, poor Dad just had his usual perplexed expression on his face. "Come on Robert, I'll explain

later," Mum said as she blew me a kiss and hustled Dad out the door.

I snuggled down in the hospital bed and felt all the aches and bruises I had. Even though the mattress was as thin as could be, it still beat lying on a huge rock. Aware again of how thirsty I was, I pushed the buzzer and, surprisingly quickly, the door opened. I glanced at the person coming into the room and froze. Dressed as a nurse, what undulated towards me was a black gaseous shape, the very thing that had terrorized me in the desert. I managed not to scream. I was alone in the room with it and had no idea what might happen if I did. I clenched my teeth when it said, in a cloying, pseudo-caring voice, "Is there anything I can do for you?" Trying to sound normal, I said, "I'm so thirsty. Could you fill my water jug please?" In the same sickeningly sweet voice, it said, "Certainly I can, I'll be right back." It seemed as though I had fooled

Dillydoun Review. The World of Myth Magazine.

it into thinking I didn't see the real shape and form of it. I hoped that had bought me some time. I put my jacket and trainers on, grabbed my backpack and I was out of the window in seconds. My breath was caught in my throat. The muscles had tightened to stop me from sobbing with fear. I halted for just a moment to get my breath back. At least I had an advantage now. I could see them. Of course, I had no idea how many there were. I couldn't go home because they would be watching my house. The same with my parents' place. I realized I had to warn Mum and Dad before they got back to the hospital. How could I do that? Even if I could utilize astral travel again, it would be foolhardy. There would be the danger of my body being hijacked. Also, I couldn't get my message over to anyone while I was on the astral plane. I took a minute to reflect on how much the human brain can accept. Even when what was being assimilated was totally outside the norm. While running through the back streets of the town, I was wracking my brain to think of an ally. There was one possibility. I remembered my old schoolmate, John. He had started up a college to study the paranormal. If anyone could come close to believing me, it

was him. Mum and Dad didn't know him, but he could call them for me and let them know they were in danger. He could use Mustard's new nickname to convince my parents he was trustworthy. He also might know of somewhere it would be safe for me to astral travel. Next, I had to find a way to destroy these awful nightmare things. What about the way the first entity reacted to the mental scream I had unleashed on it? What part of that sound hurt it? Would John have the kind of equipment I could use to record that? The thing about living in a small town was that nothing was ever very far away. I was outside the college very quickly. The next hurdle would be to get past the gates to see John. I didn't know if he was still there at this time of night. Checking, I saw that it was just after nine, not so very late. Luckily there was an intercom. The night guard answered quickly. I explained who I was and asked him to get a message to Professor Roberts. He said the professor was still in the college as he lived there and buzzed me in. By the time I walked up the drive, John was waiting for me. He looked as if the past ten years had not happened. He was tall, athletic, and still rocking that Beachboy hairdo. I almost

stumbled into his arms. I was so weak with relief at seeing him. He caught me and helped me through the front door and took me into a large room filled with books and comfy chairs. It helped that he'd heard what had happened on our local radio station. I filled in the gaps and when I got to the part of my story that even I was having trouble with, I asked him to remember that he knew me well. I was the least likely person to give credence to ghosts and ghoulies moving among us. I finished my tale and looked at John. To my relief, he was not looking at me as if I might need to be locked away for my own safety.

"Do you have any idea how many of these things there might be walking around?" was his first question.

I was almost in tears. To know he was willing to believe me was more than I had expected. His next remark explained a lot, however.

"For months now, I have noticed changes in people who I thought I knew well. We have to be careful. Three of them work here. We don't want to alert them if I'm correct. I'll get you hidden away in my quarters right away. Then I'll have to invent a crisis of some sort. One that means I have to close down the college for a while."

John took me up to the top floor, where he had a lovely flat. There were two bedrooms and the guest one looked so comfortable. Before I could relax, I asked him to call my Mum. He was to ask to speak to her if my Dad answered first. Nothing against my darling Dad, but he would be very confused by John's message, and time was not on our side. I asked him to give no names, simply to say he had a message for "The Hot Dog." No one was to leave the house, open the door or let anyone (emphasis anyone) into the house, no matter how well they thought they knew them. All was being handled, there was nothing to worry about. More later.

John delivered the message almost verbatim. He put the phone on speaker, and I was so proud of my little Mum. She understood right away, asked no questions, and at the end of the conversation, all she said was, "Mustard sends love and all best wishes." I could hear the love and worry in her voice, and that she was close to tears, as I was. I had no idea whether I could defeat these awful apparitions or not, but for my family, friends, and town, I was going to do my best.

I did not think I could force myself to swallow anything, but when John heated a pizza and

opened a bottle of wine, I managed a few mouthfuls of both. His plan of action was that the next morning I was to be locked in the security office, watching the closed-circuit TV screens. I would be able to see if any dark creatures inhabited the bodies of the staff members. That done, John would inform everyone there was an asbestos scare and the college would be closed for a while. It was an old building, so that was feasible. He would then phone those technicians he needed and ask them to come back, without telling anyone else.

By eight am, I was in front of the screens. By nine, all the staff members had arrived. To my horror, three were indeed infected. I phoned John on his mobile to let him know the bad news. He was devastated. All these people were friends as well as staff. We had no idea what would happen to the hosts when we got rid of their passengers. We could only pray that they were still in there somewhere.

He then told them the story we'd concocted and sent them home. When it was safe, I went to the labs. I explained to John about the sound I had projected at the creature as it tried to enter my body. He then called back those guys he thought would be suited to the task

ahead. I explained as clearly as I could what was happening, but not until I showed them the tapes from that morning of the three poor souls who had been taken could they believe me. I did not blame them. It was almost impossible to think it could be happening. The next step was going to be the hardest for me. I had to take myself back to that terrifying night. Then I tried to reconstruct the high-pitched scream inside my head. The difficult job for the technicians was to capture that sound wave. I was wired up and connected to various pieces of equipment. This was very hit-and-miss, to begin with. Luckily, the work they had been doing, testing for various paranormal abilities like mind reading and telekinesis, meant they had been doing similar experiments. John was versed in hypnosis, which helped me so much. He got me to a place where I could be in that ravine again but feel safe. Gradually, I built up the tension and fear I had experienced, then let it go. The first couple of times it wasn't contained or directed. Then I saw that horror, drifting in front of me once more, and felt the hate emanate from it. I built the sound in my head to a fiery point and threw it. The machinery was oscillating and buzzing with energy. There was a

hushed silence for a few seconds, then cheers erupted around me. They had captured the intent to hurt that I had conjured from my terror. I left them to get it to a manageable state. Once more I was super impressed by the dedication and singlemindedness displayed by these technicians. It had to be tested, of course.

I found was not averse to staying another night in John's flat. We reminisced over the old days, and laughed at the styles we wore then, thinking we were ultra cool. I felt very relaxed, or I thought I was. At two am I awoke to find John's arms around me and the vibrations of a despairing scream echoing in my ears. I consoled myself with the thought that I had the weapon that may well disperse the Nightcreepers for good. As we knew where at least three of the monsters could be found, we started bright and early with a visit to them. I took two people, armed with mobile phones, with me to the first house. John almost had a fit when I said I was going with the team. I had to remind him that no one else could see the blackness. Therefore, only I could verify if the host was free of it or not. He had to agree that was true. We decided to walk so as not to draw attention to ourselves. It was a warm day.

The softest of breezes wafted the smell of flowers our way, making it hard to believe in devil creatures. When we arrived, the unsuspecting entity, who had been Roger Black, opened the door. It was blasted with the sound waves from both phones. It fell to the ground fizzing madly, as if it had short-circuited. It was at that moment I registered the oddest thing. The entity had an odor, that of sulfur. Seconds before the blackness dispersed, that noxious creature looked at me with so much hate I nearly fainted. Then it was gone. For a moment it looked as if Roger had also died. Thankfully he opened his eyes. "What's going on guys? Why'd you hit me?" He must have been so surprised when we were all cheering, clapping, and wiping away tears. We explained what had happened. He was astounded but could remember nothing of the past few weeks. His last memory was of his car breaking down just outside of town on his way back from visiting a friend. We explained to him what we had done to him, and why. I had to ask him not to disclose what we had told him, even to his family. He understood immediately that we could not alert what I now called the 'Nightcreepers' to the fact that they could be seen, and by



whom. We moved on to the other two infected souls. When we rid them of the Nightcreepers their stories were almost the same. The last memory they had was of being in some remote spot. We were elated to know the cure worked. We had the proof we needed to convince even the most cynical people. Those who protested too much would be visited by me, just to be sure. The next step in our hastily drawn-up plan would be to clear the town. Dispersing the signal would be easy now, on mobiles, the local radio station, and the school tannoy system. Offices, elevators, malls, anywhere, and everywhere would be utilized. Once we had convinced the local police department, of course, that took a while, they in turn contacted National Security, then the ball was rolling and I could relax a little. John insisted on taking me back to my parent's house, and I was happy to agree. All I wanted was a hug from Mum and to see the puzzled look leave Dad's face when I explained it all to them. Also, my wonderful dog deserved the biggest treat I could find him. Doggie treats were purchased, and we arrived at my parent's house. They must have both been on the lookout because they were out of the door and hugging us

almost before we got out of the car. I could never let them know how over the moon I was that they were still them. I had kept to myself how worried I had been. It would not have surprised me if the Nightcreepers had taken over these two, who were closest to me. They must have reasoned very quickly, however, that I was not telling my parents anything that could be useful to them. I looked around, then asked laughingly, "Where is that lazy hot dog of mine, don't tell me he's sleeping?" Mum answered, "Well I don't know how he can be, with that dreadful smell hanging about. You'll have to bathe him shortly, I don't know what he's rolled in, but he smells like rotten eggs." I froze, no, no, they could not have taken my dog over. My sweet dog was forced to cower inside his mind in terror, not knowing what was happening. I ran into the house, and there he was, stiff-backed, snarling, ready to attack me, and smelling of sulfur. I did not need a phone to send the signal to free my dear faithful dog. I had not produced anything as strong before. In nanoseconds I had my Mustard back, in my arms, looking a bit worried, understandably, but seemingly absolutely fine. The four of us sat talking for hours, reviewing what we had

experienced. I was sure we had covered all bases. I saw Dad no longer had that well-known confused look, now he looked both amazed and perplexed. I felt we had pushed the dear man far enough for that night. I gave John what I thought was a gentle nudge as I yawned. Clearly, I didn't know my own strength because he jumped and let out a grunt. Still, he got the message. He said his goodbyes, gave me a chaste kiss on the cheek, and was gone. The most wonderful aspect of this awful experience was that those infected returned to normal. Of course, nothing would ever be truly "normal" again. We knew firsthand how easily something like this could happen. I had no idea where these monsters had come from. Were they to be found anywhere else in the world? I did know that John would carry on the research needed to find out, however. We would both work on this project. The fact that he believed me when I was alone and in so much danger, had brought us closer together. We had developed a loving, as well as a working relationship through the terrors we had shared. Besides, Mustard was his biggest fan. Our town's people are more neighborly than ever now, each aware of the cost of self-interest

when strange things are afoot. It won't stop my nightmares, but even those are less frequent. I have also invested in an electric exercise bike. I don't get as much fresh air perhaps, but there is less chance of any Nightcreepers usurping my body.

# Action/Suspense

## *In the Midst of Normalcy Part 6*

*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)

## **18.** *Tim Makes a Suggestion*

As everyone finished the light breakfast and after a couple of big pots of coffee were consumed, Tim asked his guests to gather in the den. It was here that he made his pitch for the evening.

"It has been suggested," Tom said, looking over at Cathy, "that the spouses take a night out this evening. This will give the Coleman kids time alone and also give Cathy, Larry, Jack, and Peggy a chance to be together in a less crowded setting." Tim paused as a slight nervousness came upon him. "Now, I'm a bit nervous about suggesting this and if anybody is not comfortable with it, we'll forget it." Tim hoped all of the spouses would be eager to take a break and get away for a while. Tim knew that this weekend was much like a high school reunion for the spouses. Attending

someone else's reunion was of limited value and enjoyment for the tag along person.

Jack Edgmon spoke up. "I haven't been on a date in a while." Leann poked him in the ribs and teased him back, "Don't get excited. It's a double date. Not even you can get in trouble on a double."

"Don't be so sure!" he shot back.

Peggy embraced the idea. She would welcome anything which would get her away from so many unfamiliar faces for a couple of hours and readily said so. "I like the idea and would appreciate getting away for a while."

"Me too," Larry offered.

Cathy took control of the conversation saying, "Well, then it's settled. Looking at each of the spouses in turn, she asked, "How would you like dinner out and then drinks in a quiet piano bar?"

“Sounds lovely, Jack answered. “Seriously, it would be a nice thing for us to do for the Colemans. I know Cathy would like to get away. She’s been a champion and perfect hostess. I believe the rest of us should pitch in and pay Cathy’s way tonight. It’s the least we can do.”

Stephanie squeezed her hand as Jack said this. Jack was now another of Big Tim’s relations that had won her over.

The four spouses met outside on the patio. Many ideas were tossed around but it was finally decided that they would leave the house around 6:30, attend a nice restaurant for dinner and then find a quiet place to enjoy drinks and conversation. Cathy said, “Tim and I know of a very nice piano bar. Soft music and a fine wine menu.” Smiling at Peggy, she asked, “How does that sound?”

Peggy appreciated that the extended family understood her shyness and discomfort. Smiling at all of them, she answered, “It sounds wonderful!”

“Great!” Cathy responded. “One more thing.”

“What’s that?” Larry asked.

“I see no reason why we should

worry about a curfew.” The four of them laughed a hearty laugh. Cathy was grateful everyone seemed to be getting along and things were going as well as they were. She and Big Tim could not ask for more than what they were enjoying this weekend.

### **19. The Spouse’s Night Out**

What began for Tim as a worrisome notion quickly turned into something he found quite amusing. As the day wore on, he noticed that Cathy and the other spouses looked forward to this evening with childlike anticipation. Just like Christmas Eve when I was a kid, he thought, and wondered how tonight would go with just the seven Coleman kids in the house. For sure, it would not be the same as family gatherings of 50 years ago, but he was wise enough not to expect that anyway. All of the parents and grandparents were long gone; indeed, he and his siblings and cousins were now of the grandparental generation and, as he enjoyed a cold beer early in the afternoon, this gave him a bit of a jolt. Time marches on, Tim reasoned, and he continued to savor this weekend and renewed relations with those who had meant so much to him earlier in life.

So now, Big Tim’s attention turned to what the Colemans would do at home tonight. After speaking with Stephanie and Bob, he decided to stay with the plan which had worked so well so far. That is, nothing would be planned for this evening except food, drink, and the pleasure of each other’s company. Until this evening, everyone would enjoy much appreciated free time. Several of the guests opted to leave the house for periods of an hour or more. Not so much because they had anything to do, but mainly to get away for some privacy. Yesterday’s 4th of July party had taken an emotional and physical toll on the extended family. It had been wonderful but also exhausting.

The day passed quickly. It was almost 6:00 p.m. and Cathy was dressing to go out. Tim shared with her his amusement at the enthusiasm she and the others felt in getting away for the evening. Cathy laughed and told him, “This was a good idea. Spur of the moment stuff always works best.” Tim did not agree that spur of the moment plans were always the best but wisely did not comment. Instead, he offered, “This weekend is flying by.”

Cathy replied, “Yes. I guess yesterday was the main event,

but tonight will be a special time for you and your family.

Tomorrow, everyone will be thinking of returning home.”

Strangely, Tim did not lament this too much. He was a realist and had always believed that when something is over, it’s over. Thinking of this, he said to his wife, “Yeah, but that’s tomorrow. Tonight, is for fun. That’s why we – you mostly – have worked so hard on this weekend.”

Cathy smiled, kissed her husband, and left the bedroom to join the others. It was just about time to leave. At 6:20, they were gathered at the side door leading to the driveway. The four of them would travel in Cathy’s SUV to the Plaza for their night out.

Tim joined them at the door. Cathy said, “I suppose we’ll see you later.” Playfully, she added, “Maybe.”

Cathy kissed her husband for the second time within the last few minutes and told him, “We’ll be home eventually.”

Smiling, he added, “I hope.” The other Colemans shouted goodbyes to them as they eagerly headed for the car.

## 20. *On the Plaza*

By the time Cathy and the others reached the Plaza, which was several miles from the Coleman home in Overland Park, the group had loosened up considerably.

Earlier in the afternoon, Cathy discussed privately with Tim and Stephanie suggestions of where to go and what to do that evening. The Plaza seemed to be the ideal and logical place, for there would be much to do and see. It is very difficult not to have a pleasant time when in the Plaza area.

Kansas City’s upscale Country Club Plaza is one of the nicest of its kind anywhere in the United States. Modeled after Seville, Spain, it covers 14 city blocks. There are well over 100 shops and boutiques to pique one’s interest and a couple of dozen fine restaurants to satisfy any appetite. It was the perfect place for Cathy to take her small group out for a night’s entertainment. The Scot in Cathy came out as she silently appreciated the fact that her guests were treating her tonight, for a night out in the Plaza would not be cheap.

The evening passed quickly. Over dinner, which they enjoyed at a very pricey Italian restaurant,

Jack commented, “I always enjoy coming to the Plaza. The area is so beautiful.”

“Ever been here after dark?” Cathy asked.

“Once. Many years ago.”

“Well,” she said, smiling, “you are in for a treat. Wait until you see the lighted horse drawn carriages.”

Jack smiled back. “I’ve seen them on television. Sometimes they will show camera shots of the Plaza when there is a nationally televised football game. I look forward to seeing one up close.”

Peggy was the one enjoying herself the most. Cathy thought getting out of the house was doing her a world of good. Peggy, for whatever the reason, had trouble handling the stress of familial relations. As it on cue, Peggy said, “The food here is delicious. Do you and Tim come down here often?”

Looking at her, Cathy replied, “Not real often. We have some favorite shops and eating places down here but usually the drive is a bit long. I suppose you could say we are not patient people. Both of us retired and in too much of a hurry to drive 10

miles. Besides, The Oak Park Mall in Overland Park is much closer and cheaper too."

Larry said, "Well, this is a very nice evening so far. I believe this idea to split up tonight is working very well. I wonder how the Coleman's are doing."

Cathy's reaction was swift. Wiping a bit of spaghetti sauce from her chin, she said, "I'm sure they're fine. I don't know why they wouldn't be." As the others chipped in to pay the bill and waiter's tip, she added, "But we should think about what we will do next. I suggest we have a drink."

Larry asked, "Do you know a place that's not too crowded?" The Plaza on Saturday night was always a beehive of activity. There was a legitimate concern that there would be a waiting list to get into a nice place.

"There is that small piano bar I told you about towards the edge of the Plaza that should be a good place for us. With luck, it won't be too crowded. It's not really a night life hotspot like most of the others here."

"Are you saying it's suitable for a group of old geezers like us," Jack asked, a wide grin accenting his long face.

Cathy shot back, "Speak for yourself." As she picked up her purse and arose from the table, this was everyone else's cue to follow her lead. Soon, they were outside and walking the three blocks to the piano bar they hoped would not be too noisy or busy.

The good luck of reunion weekend held and, as they walked into the reception area of the small club, Cathy's group was delighted to see the piano bar was quiet and mostly vacant. Asking about this, the hostess informed them the club did not get busy until after 10:00. As it was only 8:45, they basically had the place to themselves.

The bar was cozy, elegant, and provided a sense of intimacy. It was designed perfectly to do what it was supposed to do: allow people to relax in a quiet setting and encourage the sale of wine and liquor.

Relax and consume the establishment's excellent wine is exactly what they did. Already full of fine food and a bit of wine from their evening meal, it didn't take long for them to become tipsy. Fortunately, they were in a quiet place which did not encourage rude or boorish behavior. They sat, visited, sipped wine, and then sipped

more wine all very quietly. They talked of many things; some pertaining to family and others not. It was shortly past midnight when they left the bar, which was now full. Even so, Larry noticed that it was still relatively quiet. "It's the clientele this place attracts, I guess," he said, commenting on his observation.

The group walked unsteadily to the SUV parked several blocks over. The Plaza was alive with people and partying, so they were not noticed. In another part of town, they would have been ripe for assault: four persons past the age of 50 who had too much to drink. But, again, reunion weekend luck held and soon they were safely in the SUV and on their way home. Cathy, as the vehicle's owner and the most practical and least intoxicated person, did the driving.

Cathy drove slowly. There was no need to hurry, and she did not need a police officer pulling her over. It was almost 1:00 a.m. when she pulled the SUV into the Coleman driveway.

Cathy was the first to enter the house from the side door, the same way they had exited several hours earlier. She was surprised to see the house dark and quiet. Her first thought was,

Tim must be entertaining down in the basement. Even so, she did not hear anything, which would be unusual in a house of seven people who no doubt had been drinking. But she and the others were tired. The reunion weekend was ending, and thoughts were now of bed and sleep. Quietly, she said to the others, "It appears everyone is in bed. I'm a bit surprised but probably shouldn't be. Its 1:00 a.m. and tomorrow we wind down. I think we should all go to bed. Be careful not to make noise."

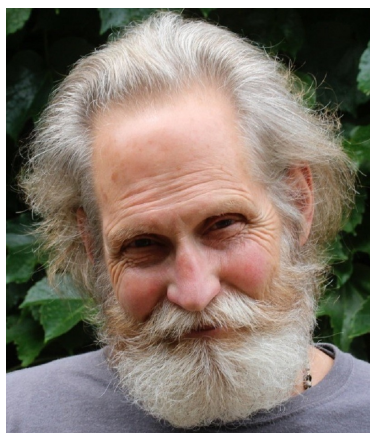
They did as Cathy suggested and all was quiet until morning.

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

# FEATURED

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

*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 Chapeltown 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* a

Jeremy took a deep breath and made a fateful decision, one that would change his life forever. Julie was right. He had been riding the fence, and he couldn't have it both ways. It was time to decide. "Okay, let me tell you this, Ebar. I believe you." He stood up and went to his patient and looked him square in the eyes. "I believe you. I really do. I believe you are an alien." Ebar felt weak in his knees. Jeremy caught him by the elbow and guided him to the chair at the desk by the window. Ebar sat down and looked gratefully at his counselor. "You really believe me?" Jeremy fought an urge to 'cross his heart' like he and his friends used to do when they were kids. Instead, he looked Ebar with as sincere an expression as he could muster and said, "Yes, I do, Ebar. I believe you. I promise." Ebar gave a sigh of relief and smiled. "You're sure?" "I am."

A wide smile broke out on Ebar's face, but it quickly faded. "But do you think you can help me? Really and truly? That big meeting's coming up next week. That's pretty fast." Jeremy wasn't sure at all, because he had no idea what he was going to do. But that's not what he told Ebar. Instead, what he said was, "Yes. I very sure." He took the stack of communiques and started spreading them out on the bed. "Let's take a look at what we've got here." Jeremy's mind was racing because there was something else he and Julie had talked about; something that was now painfully clear the more he thought about it. If Ebar was an alien, what exactly did Jeremy hope to accomplish by [helping] him? Integrate him back into civilian life so he could return to work as a sewage treatment employee? That seemed a little far-fetched. Once word of Ebar being an alien leaked out, the news media would go crazy for the story. Jeremy could just see



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

it - the press would have a field day. Ebar's picture would be plastered all over not only newspapers and cable news shows, but social media as well. His life would change forever, and probably not for the best. Ebar didn't need that. What he needed was to somehow establish communication with commander Zenon and his home planet Rykos. That's what would make him feel better and restore his mental health. But Jeremy's boss, doctor Andrews, and the others like Wallace and Kucinen wouldn't go for that. After all, treat some guy who believes one-hundred percent that he's an alien? No way. That's what they'd be thinking. In fact, they'd probably think Jeremy was nuts himself. Andrews might even fire him, and maybe, just maybe, have him committed. He and Ebar could end up being patients together.

Enough! Jeremy shook his head to clear the garbage thoughts from his mind. Talk about a conundrum. He'd have to tread very carefully. And he'd have to make sure Ebar understood the issues they faced. If Ebar wanted people to accept him, they'd have to accept him as Kyle the sewage treatment employee, not Ebar, the refugee alien from another galaxy.

Jeremy looked at his patient. Against all the advice he'd ever

heard from people who'd been in the mental health business a lot longer than him, and against everything he'd learned in college and training to be a mental health professional, Jeremy was slowly coming to two honest conclusions: One, yes, he did think Ebar was telling the truth, and that he really was an alien, a real live, honest to goodness alien, and that he, Jeremy, was his counselor. And, two, it was dawning him - against all logic - that Ebar was more than just a patient. He was becoming his friend. Something he'd never expected in his wildest dreams.

[We'll cross that bridge when we get to it], Jeremy thought to himself. Which might be the at the meeting next Wednesday. There was a lot riding on it. And Jeremy still didn't know exactly what exactly he was going to do.

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

# Humor

## *All Fingers and Thumbs*

*By: Adele Evershed*



### **Adele Evershed**

Adele Evershed is an early years educator and writer. She was born in Wales and has lived in Hong Kong and Singapore before settling in Connecticut. Her prose has been published in a number of on line journals such as Every Day Fiction, Free Flash Fiction, Fudoki Magazine and Grey Sparrow Journal. Her poetry can be found in High Shelf, bee house Journal, Hags on Fire, Tofu Ink Arts Press, The Fib Review, Wales Haiku Journal, Shot Glass Journal, Sad Girls Club and Green Ink Poetry. Adele has recently been shortlisted for the Staunch Prize for flash fiction, an international

**A**rlo looked out the window at the white flags. "They should have chosen a different color for their protest, white flags are too much like a surrender," his mother said as she looked over his shoulder. Arlo clicked his tongue and said, "Mim you know it symbolizes equality, like the idea that everyone is born with the same blank page. The Community fills in the blanks with either blood or gold." His mother took off his cap and kissed the top of his head, "Oh my heart, it's not the Community it's fate. You are born full or missing. It's the way it's always been. Just give thanks to the Goddess that we are all fed and cared for."

Arlo knew it was no good arguing with his mother. She had been a handmaiden before she was betrothed to his father, living at the Temple, and serving the Nuns. She'd told him it was a hard life but a blessed one. The Nuns were waited on hand, foot,

and finger and would have been helpless without their handmaidens. The lives they led behind the high stone walls of the Temple were a constant fascination to Arlo and his friends. The Nuns were only ever seen on feast days when they were carried through the street shrouded in midnight blue so you could only see their white eyes. Pip, his best friend, was always nagging Arlo to find out what went on at the Temple from his mother. The day before, he'd said, "I heard from Albie, who heard it from Lew that the Nuns can't even wipe their own arse. Did your Mim have to wipe the shit off their bottoms?" Arlo didn't answer but threw his cap at Pip, who caught it deftly and twirled it on his one finger.

A commotion behind him brought Arlo back to the here and now. Mim was trying to restrain his brother by hooking her finger in the collar of his shirt. Ooni had turned red in the face. "Take your Goddess damn finger off me. I'm going no

award for thrillers without violence to women. Visit her website [@thelithag.com](http://thelithag.com)

matter what you say," he shouted. Mim pointed her pinky at her oldest son and said, "You know they'll all get arrested. Why do you want to get mixed up with protests against The Community?" Ooni started towards the door, and Mim added, "You who are so much better off than most." At this, Ooni turned and said, "Better off? How is being a second-class citizen better off? And how would either of you know? Arlo will go to University, and the closest either of you will ever get to one of the factories is the smoke belching from the chimneys." And when Mim said nothing, Ooni said, "Exactly," Then he picked up his white flag, slamming the door as he left.

His mother sat down heavily and rubbed her pregnant stomach. "Close the window, Arlo. Ooni's right about the smoke from the factory. I can smell it from here." Arlo reluctantly turned away from the window and said, "You know he's right about everything, Mim. You don't hear what people call Ooni." "What things?" Mim asked sharply. Arlo knew he'd said too much. Mim ignored Ooni's condition and always told them their family was special because she'd served the Nuns. Arlo shrugged, "You know, the usual sort of

thing, 'finger pie' or 'digit dick.'"

Mim sighed, "The trouble is Ooni was born too late. Before the scans we could have got him fixed, but once The Community brought in prenatal scans there was nothing I could do."

It was a lament Arlo had heard many times before. Nobody acknowledged that his father's father had been fixed as soon as he was born. It was like white eyes. If you had a carrier in your family, you had a one in four chance of inheriting the condition. So Ooni had his Grandfather's ten fingers. Even when his Grandfather was a baby, it was illegal to remove digits, but The Community had no way of proving a baby had had a finger or two removed if the amputator was skillful. Now they scanned every pregnant woman and counted. And if you had all ten, you were destined to hard labor in the factories. It was because of the scan Mim knew his soon-to-be sister was destined to be a holy relic—a Nun—a woman born with no fingers or toes.

# Poems

## *Certain And Impossible Events*

*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/>

Age is surely a certainty,  
or so Alice had thought  
after all birthdays are hardly  
impossible events  
arriving each year  
on the same day,  
as they certainly do.

But the Red Queen assured her  
that certainty was unnecessary  
when it came to determining age.  
You are just as old as you feel  
and seeing was believing anyway.

So Alice reconsidered her hypothesis.  
The older one gets  
the more difficult it is to know  
for certain, she thought.  
How can one judge the wrinkles  
under make-up  
or Botox.  
It was impossible to be certain.

Really, she decided  
as she looked through  
her looking glass,  
age should become one of the six  
impossible things to believe  
before breakfast.

# Poems

## *Dream of a Death*

*By: Puneet Kumar*



### **Puneet Kumar**

Puneet Kumar is a full-time poet, writer and relationship and happiness coach. He writes poems, short stories, novels and self-help books. He has self-published 15 books.

He is published in several anthologies. His story is published in anthology "Six feet From Tomorrow" His poetry is published in anthology "Blood and Sand" and "Scentsibility" "Poetry Leave" in March 2020 and others. He is also published in Spillwords.com. He publishes his articles and poems in Medium

[https://medium.com/@puneetkumar\\_95349](https://medium.com/@puneetkumar_95349) and also get published in <https://www.authorelainemarie.com/post/my-life-as-a-writer-and-coach>

He loves to write on subjects like relationships, healthy living, food and nutrition, wine, lifestyle or anything

I saw a dream  
A dream of a death  
Where suddenly things changed  
And things vanished too soon.

Yes, indeed it was a world of dream  
Here I saw her dying.  
The vision of her death was not clear  
But impressions were profound and deep.

We were just walking and talking  
Then suddenly, we traveled by train  
First there were just two of us, then  
Suddenly we were in a crowded train

Suddenly the train came on a bridge  
It was over a long river.  
I felt to ask her to come near  
We would not go further any more.

My hands were open to embrace her  
Yet the train spilled down into the river  
Water, water everywhere  
Suddenly I saw her there dying.

This glimpse of her end was there  
A range of complete suffering  
I cried long into the river  
Then the river was just my tears.

It was just an incident  
An accident, for this world

that adds positive lights into the life. He was first published in Debonair magazine in India May-June issue 2000 that he considers as a beginner's luck.

But my world was dying, and  
Only suffering was growing within.

# Poems

## *Iris Cycles*

*By: Cindy Rinnes*



### **Cindy Rinnes**

Cindy Rinnes creates fiber art and poetry in San Bernardino, CA. A Pushcart nominee. Her poems have appeared in literary journals, anthologies, art exhibits, and dance performances. Cindy is the author of several books: *The Feather Ladder* (Picture Show Press), *Words Become Ashes: An Offering* (Bamboo Dart Press), *Today in the Forest* with Toti O'Brien (Moonrise Press), and more. Her poetry appeared in: *Unleash Lit*, *swifts & slows*, *Lothlorien*, *Mythos Magazine*, and others.

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

*Soaring to heaven on balanced wings, Iris blazed a rainbow trail beneath clouds as she flew.*

Virgil, Aeneid 9, 2ff

I connect to the core of my body to the center of the earth and become one with the hiddenness. I wait and develop in secret soil. Bulbs settle      root just under surface.

After a long sleep, buds unfurl in watercolor hues— blue   purple   yellow. Iris petals awake as a divine link between Heaven and Earth— psychic abilities   hope

intuition      rebirth. Then my body dissipates like the goddess Iris

as rainbow born in mists. A place between water and light. Messenger goddess of golden wings      a herald's rod      water

pitcher. My iris eye      chamber decreases the pupil as more light enters my sight. I look      around my space align with the universe. Expand      contract      like the tides.

# Poems

*senryu*

*By: Barbara Anna Gaiardoni*



## **Barbara Anna Gaiardoni**

Barbara Anna Gaiardoni is an Italian pedagogist, author, doodler, ex-violinist and *former swimmer*.

She has participated in national literary and poetic competitions, obtaining the publication of her texts; currently publishes Japanese poems in the international trade journals. Drawing and walking in nature are her passions.

*Her motto is "I can, I must, I will do it".*

wooden ceiling  
collapses imitating  
a foxes trap

\*

a lazy mouse  
with whom I'm made  
friends

\*

he's a lazy  
drunken  
cable thief



# Poems

## *The Hope-a-Dope*

*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.

So many tales I'd like to tell  
but most have never gone as well  
as I had hoped for in the past  
where dreams and visions didn't last  
and happ'ly ever afters vanished  
haply, as if they were banished  
since the future went awry—  
it's bygone days now all gone by.  
Yet here I am; with hope, I'll tell  
of days ahead that may go well.

# Poems

## *The Murderous Hare*

*By: Avery Hunter*



### **Avery Hunter**

Avery Hunter invented writing, the quokka (but not its propensity for sacrificing its young to predators), and mudguards for bicycles (after an unfortunate incident one muddly Monday morning). Now they teach tarantulas how to make a perfect mimosa.

<https://linktr.ee/AuthorAveryHunter>.

Beware the hare, with eyes of red,  
Its fur so soft, its ears well-fed,  
For though it looks so meek and mild,  
It hides a secret, that's anything but mild.

The hare can be a creature of wrath,  
A killer, with a blood-stained path,  
It moves with grace, and strikes with speed,  
Leaving its victims, with little time to plead.

Its sharp teeth and claws, leave marks so deep,  
As it hunts and kills, with a sinister leap,  
And though it may seem like a harmless prey,  
The hare can be deadly, in its own twisted way.

It stalks its victims, with a silent grace,  
As it preys upon them, in a bloodthirsty race,  
Its eyes fixed on the kill, its heart full of hate,  
The hare is a creature, that knows no fate.

So beware the hare, with its sharp claws and teeth,  
For it can bring death, like a thief,  
And though it may seem like a harmless foe,  
The murderous hare, is not one to be taken slow.

# Poems

## *Painted Words*

*By: Ann Christine Tabaka*



### **Ann Christine Tabaka**

Ann Christine Tabaka was nominated for the 2017 Pushcart Prize in Poetry. She is the winner of Spillwords Press 2020 Publication of the Year, her bio is featured in the "Who's Who of Emerging Writers 2020 and 2021," published by Sweetycat Press. She is the author of 14 poetry books. lives in Delaware, USA. She loves gardening and cooking. Chris lives with her husband and four cats. Her most recent credits are: Sparks of Calliope; The Closed Eye Open, Poetic Sun, Tangled Locks Journal, Wild Roof Journal, The American Writers Review, The Scribe Magazine, The Phoenix, Burningword Literary Journal, Muddy River Poetry Review, The Silver Blade, Pomona Valley Review, West Texas Literary Review, The Hungry Chimera, Sheila-Na-Gig, Fourth & Sycamore.

*\*(a complete list of publications is available upon request)*

I will not pin your name to the wall.  
You came to me without a tear, while  
landscapes cried for the desert. Mountains  
crumbling under a scorching sun. You  
walked miles across sand, searching for  
blessed shade. Red tailed hawk a guiding  
spirit. A cave called out to shelter you. You  
hid within her delight. Fingers tracing ancient  
glyphs, painted in fading ochre stain. I asked  
you to stay. Your sad smile said No! An  
empty relic left alone upon decaying cliffs,  
I can no longer speak your name.

# Poems

## Poetic Scottish Tour

By: Sultana Raza



### Sultana Raza

Of Indian origin, Sultana Raza's poems have appeared in 90+ journals, including Columbia Journal, NewVerseNews, Classical Poetry Society, spillwords, Poetry24, Dissident Voice, and The Peacock Journal. Her fiction received an Honorable Mention in Glimmer Train Review, and has been published in Short Story Town, Coldnoon Journal, and Entropy.

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

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

On wild goose chase why'd he been led?  
Punishment rhymed with aching feet,  
Mixed up stanzas, vowels had bled,  
More than him, none could self beat.

Was William conjuring clouds of Tory fame?  
Robert1 must've waded through heaps of dung.  
Burned by reality, his muse felt lame,  
Upside down drained verses now hung.

Fraternal ears, furry nostrils were gone,  
Would *frérot* blame: abandonment, guile?  
Soon he'd be weary; couldn't think or mourn.  
Would Tom accost him in a skip-a-heart while?

Guilty grew strides, despite painful toes,  
Poesy, family duty, could he juxtapose?

### Video of Poetic Scottish

Tour: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vMqo\\_A0HQs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vMqo_A0HQs)

# Poems

## *Scarlet Letter Bears No Name*

*By: Dr. Anissa Sboui*



### **Dr. Anissa Sboui**

A University teacher and poet  
from Sousse, Tunisia

The writer of *Rebirth, Transcend, Hurricane, The Co-Avid Breath, Number One, Halcyon and Screaming Earth*, three volumes in Arabic and three short-stories: "Alone", "The Moody Bookworm" and "Coincidence."

I was told the sun warms eyes,  
Clouds pamper cheeks like a dormant pillow  
Wet by Diva's saliva  
Need no cremation  
I was told the soil swallows worms  
Saves corpse from disappearing the day  
She passes away  
I was told the earth screams softly  
for fear of waking maidens from dreams  
With scarlet diaries scattered in Salem,  
gold-embroidered baskets on the desk,  
Pens run out of black ink,  
Though Hester's womb was filled with sperm  
Magically spinning inside  
While shunning seeds of sins

At the gate of shame  
Roger was intent on revenge  
Knowing neither Pearl's name  
Nor the clay God used to blunge  
Playing the fool with the Bugs bunny  
A mark on the raper's breast

Made her harangued by whomsoever came  
To identify the scorn of the arid Aristocracy  
A  
A  
A  
Scarlet letter bears no shame  
You now own a full name

# Poems

## *Somniphobia*

*By: Kate MacDonald-Dunbar*



People ask why I'm plagued with insomnia,  
do I know what stops me from resting at night?  
How can I tell these sweet souls why the darkness  
if I surrender, lets me do things that aren't right.

If I sleep, I move through the ether like a wraith,  
I am lifted and blown like a malevolent mist.  
I now know that I can enter dreams when I want  
delicately, softly, or thrusting, leading with a fist.

I can't only be the sum of everything bad that I've done,  
I've fought against sleep, to avoid the lure, the need  
that gives me so much pleasure, whilst inflicting pain.  
Even if only in dreamscapes, that desire wants to feed.

### **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.

# Poems

## *Yes I have indeed been boasting*

*By: Tricia Lloyd Waller*



### **Tricia Lloyd Waller**

Tricia Lloyd Waller has always loved story since she first learnt to speak. She has recently had work accepted by The Poet, Wildfire Words and Candlelit magazine. She was last year's winner of The Pen to Print poetry.

Yes I will fess up I have indeed been boasting  
because I am and always shall be the very finest  
weaver that there has ever been in this land!  
And then this morning she goes and sends that text!

The sheer audacity of that ridiculous pompous person  
challenging me....me? to a weaving competition!  
A weaving contest live on Insta this Sunday morning!

And she has absolutely no right to insinuate that  
my skills are merely skullduggery, slight of hand,  
magic - trickery even! So of course I agree to this  
ludicrous match - just to shut her up you understand!

So this is why we are gathered here today on  
this social platform 'to battle it out.' she says  
She and her pumped up tribe of  
cosmetically enhanced hangers-on  
and me with my fam of goths, emos,  
hippies, hobgoblins and faeries.

Looms ready? Check!  
Threads ready? Check!  
Weavers ready? Check!  
Well then!  
Begin!

Fingers flying, bejeweled and rainbowed threads  
weaving furiously we work without ceasing  
for seven days and seven nights until Athena  
Ena to her tribe raises a perfectly manicured

hand to signify her completion.

The judges look on in jaw dropping awe  
at the most wondrous tapestry; a portrayal  
of her gods at their heroic deeds so perfect that  
you wish to reach out and touch their fine faces.

And then they turn to behold my candid creation.  
For I have depicted the truth the infidelities and  
indiscretions of her gods; their appalling abuse and  
misdemeanors committed against us mere mortals.

And yes everyone and I do mean everyone including  
the venerable judges are aware of whose work is  
actually the finest and it is certainly not Athena's!  
So this is when the thing happened.....

Athena stands back from her loom and proclaims  
in a voice like murderous thunder that nobody could ever  
be a superior weaver to herself then she reaches down for  
a terracotta urn beside her and throws it up into the air.

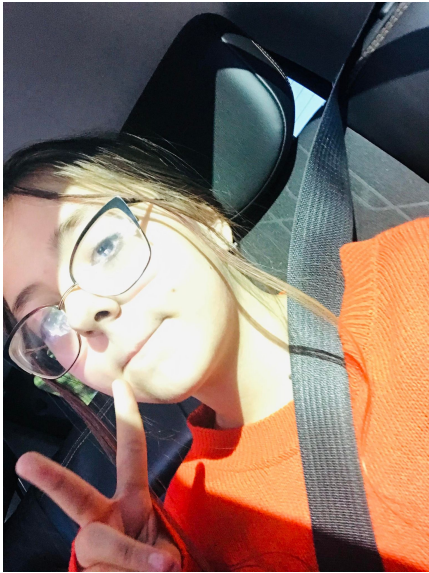
And the toxic combination of Hecate's poison with  
Athena's curse is the reason why you see me here today  
not as a beautiful young weaver but as an eight legged spider  
spinning the most exquisite cobwebs for eternity.



# CREATIVE YOUTH Art Gallery

## Egg Adventures

*By: Zoie M. Montoya*



### Zoie M. Montoya

Zoie M. Montoya is an twelve-year-old who loves to tell stories, draw, 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

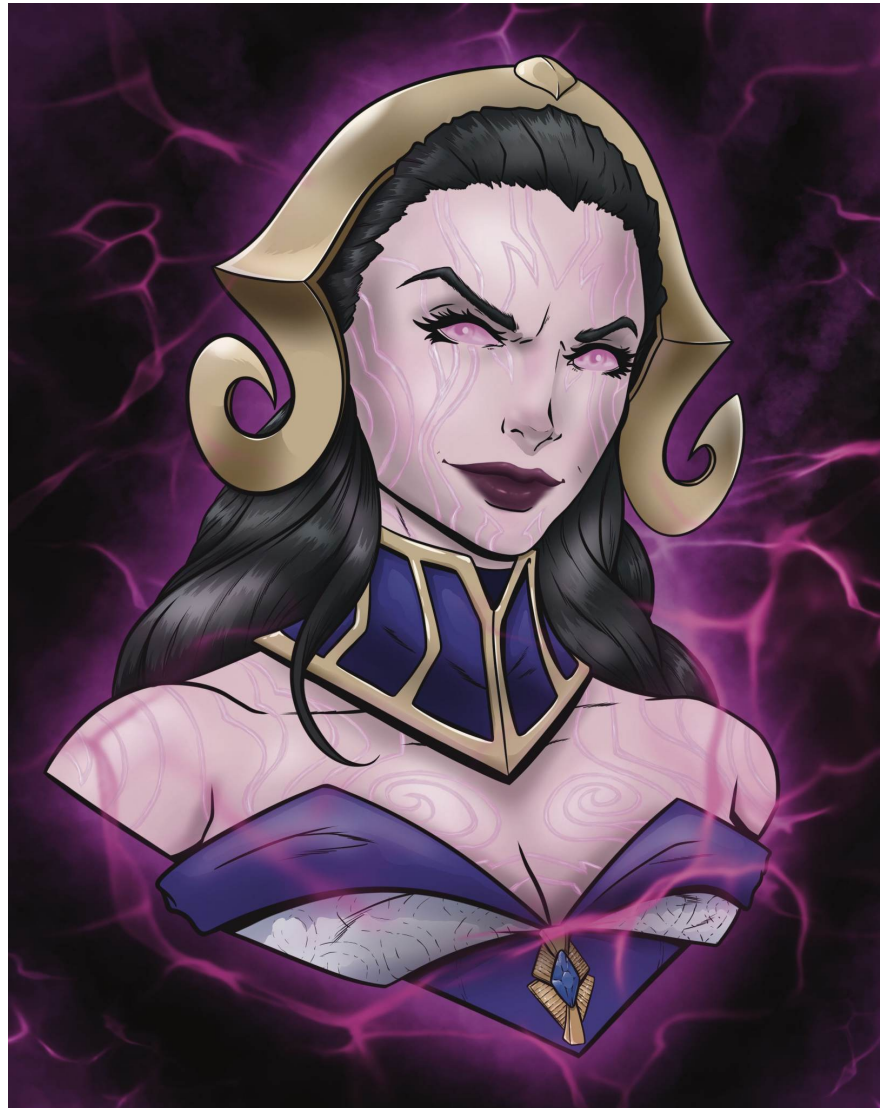
*Liliana*

*By: Vincent May*



## Vincent May

My Name is Vincent May (aka VAM)I have been working in the art industry for a little over 8 years now as a freelance visual development artist. My job is to take my clients visions from inside their head and put them on paper. This ranges anywhere from comic art, portraits, concept art, graphic & logo design, and much more. [ArtByVAM](http://ArtByVAM)



# Art Gallery

## Predator

*By: Dan Hammond*



### Dan Hammond

Dan Hammond hails from Fergus, Ontario, Canada. At the age of 40 Dan attended the Toronto Fan Expo and was impressed with the talent that he saw in the Artist Alley section. Dan then took up a pencil and has been drawing ever since (he's 46 now) Since then, Dan had provided cover art for the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Captain Canuck and Northguard comics. Dan has also provided art for kids books, movie posters, novel covers, logos, t-shirts and decals. Dan is also the creator/publisher of his own original series titled, Seth the Elf and Alien Hillbilly.



# Art Gallery

## *Purple Woman II*

*By: Michael A. Sauve*



### **Michael A. Sauve**

Michael A. Sauve has been drawing for as long as he can remember; even before he could write, he was drawing. He grew up in San Diego, California, moved to Colorado in 1996 to go to college for computer-aided graphic design and has been there ever since. Very few share the passion for the arts and poetry as he does. They are his reason for being.

For more of Michael's work visit his web site:

<https://mikey-madness.deviantart.com>



# MOVIE REVIEWS

## Review of *BOTTOMS*

By: Kevin Hoskinson



### Kevin Hoskinson

From humble beginnings working the box office at his local movie theater, he's worked his way to becoming a loving family man and professional bug exterminator. Growing up, he wanted to become an astronaut, a Ghostbuster, a dinosaur, and a Disney animator before he found his passion for writing as a teen. He studied film at Los Angeles Valley College with an emphasis on screenwriting and film criticism. He currently lives in Portland, Oregon with his



One thing that has fascinated me over the years is watching the evolution of high school comedies. Every generation gets their time to shine in the genre, and everytime they seem to elevate to the next level. Being born in the 80's, we got our turn to shine when movies like *Can't Hardly Wait* and *American Pie* hit the big screen. I remember watching *American Pie* with my dad (I know, great family movie!) and he was laughing as hard as I

was. It seemed strange at the time, but I realized that he went through all of these things too and no matter what he was going to remember them for the rest of his life. The thing about these films is that they are universal, nearly everybody who went through the experience can relate to it on one level or another, even years after that time has passed.

Recently, I had another experience like the one I had at *American Pie*, but the roles were reversed. My son (who is 16) and I were planning to go watch *Gran Turismo* when we got the chance. It was a saturday and we were figuring out what time to watch it and then I decided to show him the trailer to the new film *Bottoms*. While watching it he started laughing so hard and I knew we might be watching that film instead. After the trailer was over he looked at me and said that *Gran Turismo* can wait and that he really wanted to watch *Bottoms*. So that is what we did and neither one of us regretted our decision one bit after the

wife and two kids, You can follow him on Facebook, Twitter [@Kevin\\_Hoskinson](#), and Instagram [@kevinhoskinson](#)

film was over.

Directed by Emma Seligman (Shiva Baby), *Bottoms* isn't your typical high school comedy. The movie centers around Josie and PJ, lifelong friends who are the unpopular kids at their school. After an incident one night with the star quarterback of the football team, they start a "self-defense" club at their school. They tell everybody that it's to empower women at the school from being bullied, but they have ulterior motives. They are both gay and are in love with other girls at the school. They form this club to get up close and personal to the "hot girls" at the school in hopes of getting with them before they graduate. Along the way things get very weird and they soon realize that they might have messed up big time.

*Bottoms* is an absurdist comedy that combines elements of *Superbad*, *Book Smart* and *Fight Club* to create something wholly unique and original. It feels like the kind of comedy you have already seen over and over throughout the years but I can promise you that it's anything but. The humor comes from the world and situations rather than one liners and zingers. There is a running gag about PJ and Josie spending their summer in juvie that never gets old and the jocks are a constant source of

laughter. The story and its climax aren't particularly grounded in a reality that we know, but the journey is full of characters and emotions that we are more than familiar with. Imagine watching a hilarious teenage comedy but by the end everybody is covered in bruises and blood and you might get an idea of how strange this story can get. The cast is one of the clear stand outs in the film. Ayo Edebiri continues her stellar year of wonderful performances, including *Sydney* from *The Bear* and *April O'Neil* from *TMNT: Mutant Mayhem*. She gives Josie a real weight and a dry sense of humor that helps her mesh with PJ, portrayed perfectly by Rachel Sennott. Coming into the movie we feel like the two have been friends forever and it's the chemistry between the performers that helps sell it. Two of my favorite characters were Hazel and Mr. G, played by Ruby Cruz and Marshawn Lynch respectively. Hazel is this wide eyed student who really wants to do what's right and loves to blow stuff up and Mr. G is the teacher that is there for a paycheck. Lynch surprised me the most, showing that he has real comedic chops and plays off the girls perfectly. While they are my favorite things about the movie, everybody is incredible and understands the assignment.

While the movie isn't family friendly (it is rated R), it's a movie that you and the teenagers in your life will enjoy. After the movie was over we talked about things going on in his school and he was more open talking about it with me. I'm happy we got to experience it together and we both got to laugh together. These movies stand the test of time and generations down the road tend to discover them, and I have no doubt that Bottoms will be enjoyed for years to come. Don't let this one slide under your radar.

**4.5 out of 5 Stars**



# BOOK REVIEWS

## What is Literature?

*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*.



‘Literature’ is a bad word when you really think about it. When used in conversation it seems to have some unfortunate connotations – usually meaning snobby, ‘good’ or ‘canonical literature’. It can have a tone that, while not quite dismissal, seems to separate ‘literature’ from purely entertaining books. Especially ‘genre fiction’. A few things should be said about this.

The word ‘literature’ is

impossible to define exactly, and how it is used can be malleable - changing due to context or mood. Technically the word can apply to anything where words are communicated in some way be it through an alphabet or a series of images like Kanji or Hieroglyphs. A collection of classical Greek epigrams or Shakespeare’s tragedies are ‘literature’ by anyone’s definition, but so can collections of jokes, comics, or legal documents. It might sound weird to use ‘literature’ in this way, and after checking three major dictionaries there is a rather weak consensus on what the word means. The Cambridge dictionary defines it as:

‘written artistic works, especially those with a high and lasting artistic value’.

The Collins has:

‘Novels, plays, and poetry are referred to as literature, especially when they are considered to be good or



important.’

The use of the words ‘are referred to’ is both telling and unhelpful if you want to find an exact definition. The Merriam Webster website simply states literature is:

‘writings in prose or verse’

Of all three, the most concrete-sounding definition is Cambridge’s, but it is very restrictive. After all, who actually decides what has ‘high’ or ‘lasting’ value? And what values are works of ‘literature’ being judged against?

Easy answers become more and more elusive when getting into the finer details of anything. What is valuable to one is not to another. In the past (like with the Cambridge definition) there was an assumption of a generally shared canon of ‘great writing’. Snobbery developed around the ‘great works’, which in some way all new writing was judged against. But this was actually done gradually, over many years, making it easy to hide uncomfortable truths about ‘great works’ of literature: now classic writers like Percy Shelley and John Keats were loathed and attacked by critics when their books were first published. Canonicity is not thanks to

reviewers and critics, but to academics and the universities.

Many of today’s most popular and enjoyed writers are not universally familiar with the ‘classics’ of English literature either. Some are, many aren’t. They are more likely to be reading their contemporaries, something generally reflected in today’s readers. Readers and writers alike, you are more likely to meet someone reading Stephen King than Shakespeare, especially among the critics you assume dislike King’s work. Modern critics are reading modern books, what would they be talking about otherwise?

A critic of books is simply a reader who has managed to make a career of their passion, and this includes academics. They might be more well-read than the average person, but that does not mean their opinions are etched into some great stone of unquestionable truths. When talking about the good or the bads of a book, their ultimate judgments can be taken seriously or not – what really matters is what they have actually said in the ‘meat’ of their reviews or commentary. You are not really expected to agree with everything they say – instead you should think about what they have said, and if you

can see where they are coming from.

Simply liking or disliking a book is fine, but it is a shallow way to think. It can be a lot of fun to engage critically with a book you like and really look at it from different perspectives. There might or might not be an objectivity to value judgments in books, but if there is it comes from everyone who reads books sharing their opinions on what makes them good or bad. This might be what makes ‘great literature’ great: lots of different people have read something and liked it.

That previous sentence might suggest how vague the word ‘literature’ can be, but it can be a divisive one too. Is *Lord of the Rings* literature? Most people will say so. Are Eragon or Brandon Sanderson novels? It has been said that ‘great literature’ is difficult, or in some way complex – deep in theme. These days *The Lord of the Rings* appears to be somehow above criticism, it is a classic. But really this is both a blessing and a curse, classics are not what people read for pure enjoyment and escapism – which is all Tolkien wanted his books to be.

Shakespeare, often the bane of childhood education because of

his very old fashioned language, wrote his plays to be enjoyed by the rich and poor. He could be silly and genuinely very funny, but he also had an ability to characterize and create plots that challenge your perspectives on life and other people. But in his core he was only trying to entertain as many people as possible because it makes good commercial sense to do that, and he was running a business. His plays are still a lot of fun if you get used to his now archaic language. Long after his death a cult of personality developed, convinced he was the 'greatest writer of all time'. Sadly, this has made him seem untouchable and, which he was never supposed to be, boring and serious. Becoming a 'great writer' can turn off potential readers with too much praise.

It can be easy, I once did this, to ignore entire shelves of books because they simply does not appeal to my very specific tastes. It can be easy to wave off critics' opinions when their ultimate judgment is not complementary to something I liked. One reviewer could say something like 'I thought it had many good qualities, but overall, I didn't think that 'blank' was very good' and a fan will focus on the last bit and ignore the first, if they ever did read what that critic

said in full. When this is done there seems to be, underneath, the attitude that there is a difference between something like 'fun' science fiction (for example) and the 'highbrow' stuff the critics would approve of. They should be heard out, not uncritically but carefully, because it might help you see the art in the things you like, and so appreciate it in a more complex and more fun way. Looking into how very skilled people created something, and why, can be a lot of fun, and it makes you like their work more. And if you write, it can give you more tools with which to hone your own writing craft. This cannot be a bad thing.

# ART REVIEWS

## Unknown Artists

*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*.



**T**here are mysteries in art. Some are curious – others are very weird. In the last edition of *The World of Myth Magazine*, when it was still purely on a website and not a PDF like it is now, I wrote about Banksy and how it would be a bad idea to find out who he is. Like Gandalf, this sent me on a bit of a journey, but across the internet: I was told about a Wikipedia page listing unknown artists and ‘masters’ where, aside from the (often incredible) pieces

ascribed to them, everything else is a forest of question marks.

This seemed strange, how can an artist become so respected and yet completely unknown? You would think some kind of record was kept. Documentation from past eras, despite never being perfect, can tell us a lot about people who lived hundreds of years ago. It is sometimes said that we do not know much about Shakespeare (for example) but we know more than you might think because of references to him made by others in the literary and theatre scene in London around his time. There are also records of the production of his plays, receipts, legal documents and even a coat of arms that tell us he was a historical person. We actually know less about one of his contemporaries, Ben Johnson, but there is still plenty of evidence to show he existed too. Yet some obviously extremely talented people have disappeared into the black hole

of forgotten history.

It is unclear how artists, especially ones that were then or are now regarded as masters, can either be or become unknown. It must be either by chance or by their own wishes but there will obviously never be one, all-encompassing reason. One reason, and the first I will talk about, might be simple: there is an entropic way that time passes, especially before the modern era. Any proof of their identity and/or their identification with a piece of work could have simply vanished - either into some corner of an ancient library and is now yet to be rediscovered, or it was thrown away, or it was accidentally destroyed. Sadly, a lot of information and knowledge has disappeared this way.

There are other explanations. Perhaps some of these artists were nobles who do not wish for their works to be associated with them for one reason for another. Perhaps due to societal expectations where a noble was not supposed to produce serious art. This is the basic idea behind a major theory (very spurious when you actually look into it) that a nobleman wrote the works of Shakespeare, and not the middle class businessman

from Stratford. There is merit to this: for a long time, aristocrats were not supposed to take their own creative interests seriously, but instead treat it only as leisure for pleasure's sake. If their passion for painting was public knowledge or (even worse) commercialized they could lose their social standing, they could even be ostracized.

Another reason an artist might not want to be publicly named might be because they feared that either they or their work would see some kind of persecution or suppression. This should not be surprising, given how puritanical and patriarchal parts of the world (especially Europe) have been. Perhaps the artists were women, and the society and culture of the time simply did not allow them the same right to work and create as it did men. Or perhaps they were from a religious minority, one that was not seen favorably by the majority.

Perhaps, also, they did not wish to be known publicly because they simply did not wish to deal with the fame, or at least the aftermath. This last possibility is more likely in the modern era than in previous ones. In this era of mass communication and celebrity culture, certain types of people might want to avoid

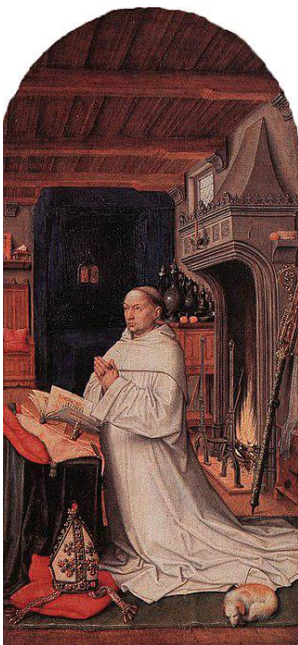
the public notoriety or attention their work might attract. There are a number of stories about reclusive artists and writers, like J.D. Salinger or Thomas Pynchon, people who might be too shy, or simply do not want to deal with celebrity culture. Or with someone like Banksy, like I discussed in my last article, (or maybe like Thomas Pynchon too in fact) they want to remain anonymous so they can create a certain mystique around their work - and also to let the work speak for itself.

An artist wanting to let the work speak for itself might also more likely in the modern era. Avoiding having academics and critics pour over biographical details, and instead forcing them to examine the work by itself certainly has an anarchic, punk attitude to it. This seems to be the motivation behind the Anti-Banality Union, a group of anonymous film editors who take found footage from Hollywood movies and edit them into collages in film. The work of the Anti-Banality Union is in general quite political, but in theory they can create any kind of art film that they want using old footage. One interesting example from the Union is taking zombie films and removing all scenes of zombies from them, leaving a film about

people struggling to deal with societal collapse in a more general, abstract way – which is an interesting theme by itself. There may well be professional reasons for keeping the members of the Anti-Banality Union’s identity a secret, but there is a tremendous freedom in it too.

To end this article, here are some examples of the work by unknown artists. Even if their creators’ identities are lost to time, these works are not – and it only seems right to take some time and appreciate some these mysterious pieces. They are the only thing we will ever know about them, and their creators, after all:

***Master of 1499:***



**Master of 1518:**



**Master of the Bambino Vispo:**








**Master of Affligem:**



# Board of Directors Minutes

At this meeting was SB – Stephanie J. Bardy . KA – Kevin Adams . WE – Walter G. Esselman . GF – Gary Falls . JA – Joshua C. Addante .

**The JayZoMon DarkMyth Company, LLC. Board of Directors Meeting  
January 15, 2023**

	Walter G. Esselman	Chairman of the Board of Directors and President
	Stephanie J. Bardy	Chief Executive Officer, Editor of Chief of Dark Myth Publications and Secretary of the Board
	Gary L. Falls Jr.	Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer of the Board
	Joshua C. Addante	Chief Business Officer and Director of the Board
	Kevin Adam	Publisher and Director of the Board

12p m	Chair opens meeting with mission statement.  Walter requests to be put back on the Leadership Board.
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	<p>Roll call.</p> <p>Stephanie – Present  Kevin - Present  Walter - Present  Gary - Late  Josh – Absent</p>
	<p>CFO's Report  Starting Total -  Money in -  Money Out - -686.00  Balance -</p> <p>There was an issue with payment but Dave took care of it. There is a dire time heading our way, we are looking at roughly in the 20,000</p>
	<p>Secretary's Report – No minutes.</p>
	<p>Business arising from the minutes – None. Other than minutes need to be done.</p>
	<p>Leadership Reports – Minutes from the meeting are read.</p> <p>Presidents Report – Walter wants to reach out to all the department heads, to let them know he is willing to help out. He also wants to stay involved with the OCC.</p> <p>Steph requested that the Board write her up a bit regarding their positions and where they want to see the company go.</p> <p>Walter suggests his designs for T-shirts for swag or boxes.</p> <p>The patreon idea from the Leadership meeting is discussed at length.</p> <p>Crickets...</p> <p>Advertising – working up ads for OCC and C. Flynts book.  Patreon is discussed again at length.</p> <p>We say farewell to our illustrious leader.</p>



	Old Business
	New Business –
	Next meeting: February 19 <sup>th</sup> , 2023

# What is your pleasure ?

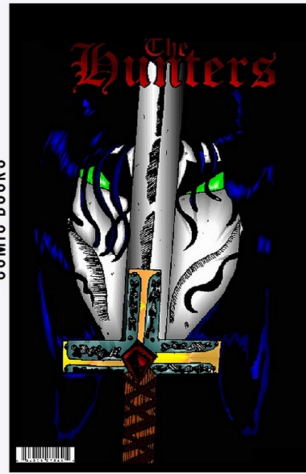
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COMIC BOOKS



COMIC BOOKS



COMIC BOOKS



COMIC BOOKS



SHIRTS



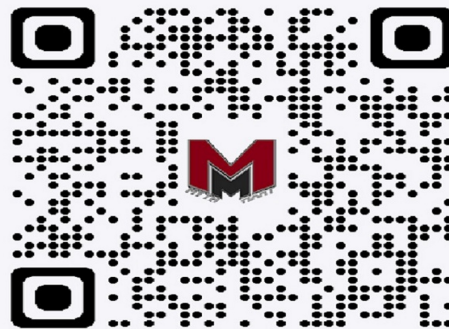
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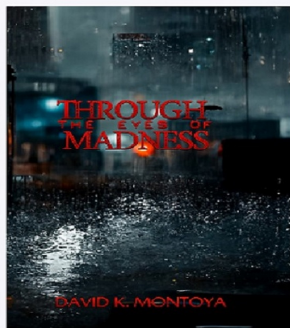
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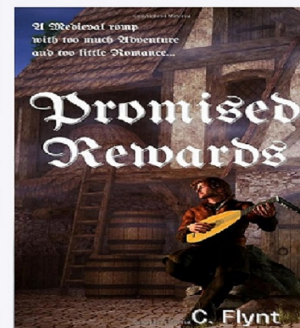
BOOKS



DAVID K. MONTOYA



MICHAEL MCGEE



C. Flynt



JIM BATES



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