

UNINTERVING

ISSUE #18

Magazine

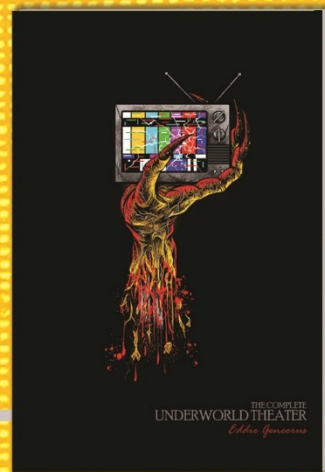
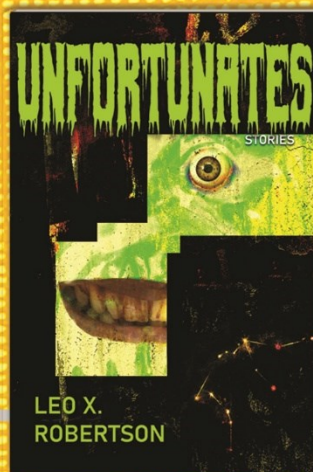
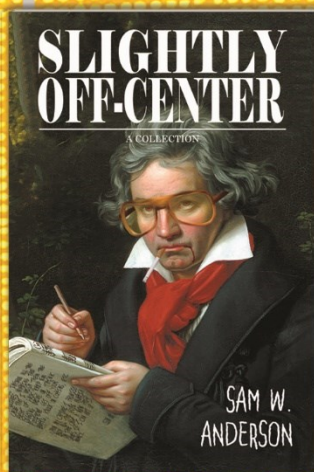
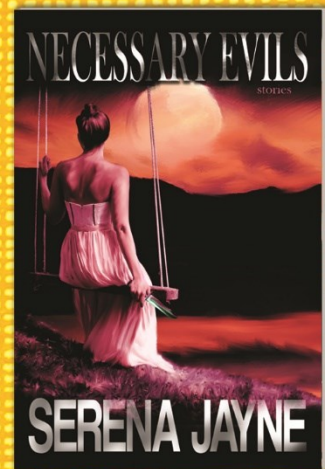
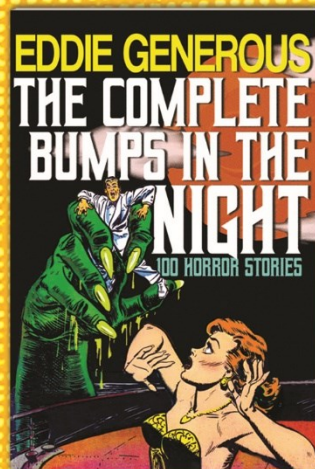
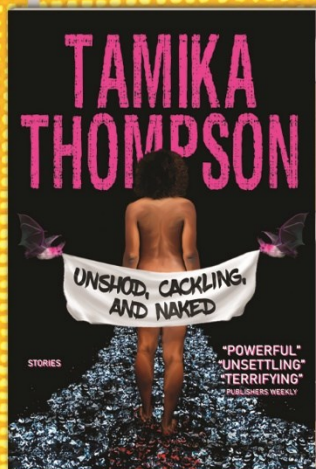


EXCERPTS FROM
**FUZZY, NO SCORE,
HARVEST RITES, & SLOE**

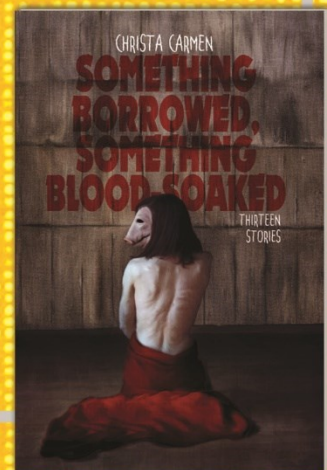
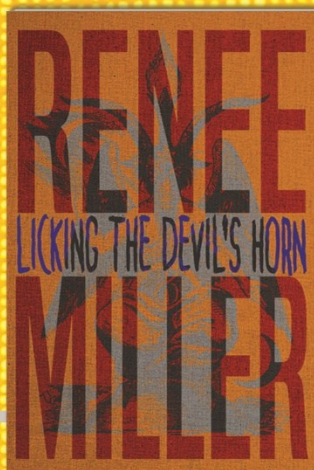
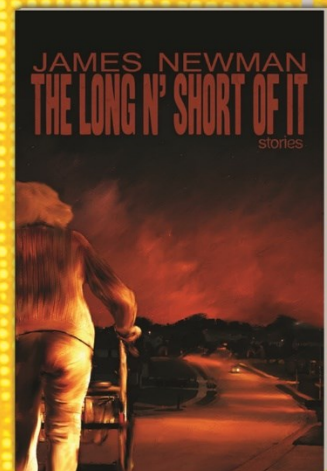
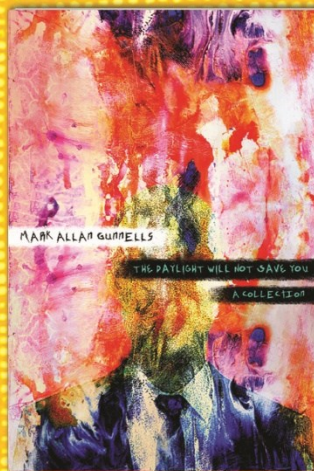
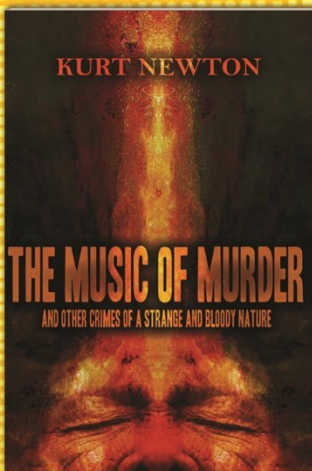
FEATURES BY
**MARK ALLAN GUNNELLS
& RONI STINGER**

NEW FICTION FROM
**MICHAEL BRACKEN
SOMER CANON
DECLAN BURNETT
ROWAN HODGES**

UNNERVING COLLECTIONS

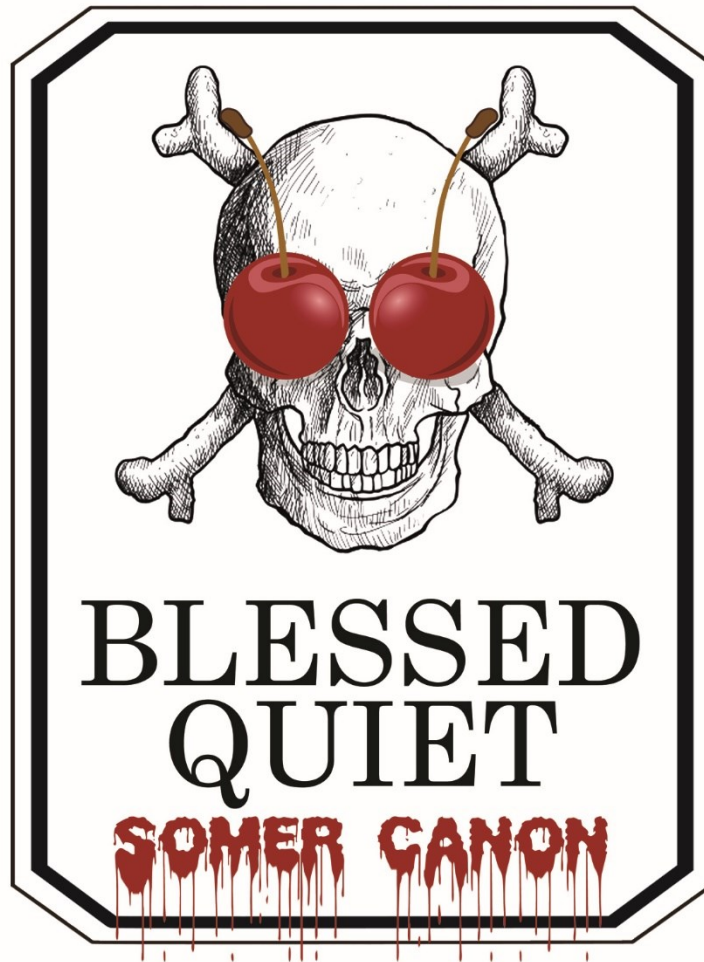


GET YOUR HORROR GET YOUR SUSPENSE GET YOUR WEIRD



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I'm going to poison the fuckers. Frankly, it's the most inspired idea that I've had in years.

I came upon this illumination after dinner tonight. I'd been deep cleaning the kitchen all day (something the internet is all too happy to tell me only the best homemakers do regularly) and I was able to look pathetic enough that my husband offered to treat me and our two kids out to dinner.

The entire day had been long and disappointing. It started by being awakened by my husband's morning

breath in my face and his morning erection being shoved into my hand. At first, I was not obliging and he flung himself back to his side of the bed with much drama and exaggerated sighing. There was a whole berating conversation in his purse-lipped silence that said much to me. He'd chosen me over the mistress. He didn't need to do that. Where the fuck was my gratitude?

He wanted waffles and sausage for breakfast, because, apparently, he had worked up an appetite guiltling me into sex. As I pattered in the

kitchen making from-scratch Belgian waffles, he sat in another room engrossed by his phone screen. Both kids peeked into the kitchen and complained about the menu. Pop Tarts, apparently, are preferable to anything homemade.

My husband ate his breakfast without looking up from his phone screen and the kids complained so much that I excused them from the table with half a waffle still on their plates. I cleaned the kitchen alone, without a word from any of them. Certainly not a “thank you.”

After that, it was time to heckle the kids to get dressed and tend to their dental hygiene while my husband disappeared into his office to do “work” on his computer. If I dare look at him sideways or mention that he acted similarly while he was philandering, he tells me that our marriage will never heal until I learn forgiveness.

I work out. Since the affair and a comment that my husband carelessly threw out during couple’s therapy, my weight has been a consuming distraction. I’m always hungry and empty feeling, and I run four miles every day, seeking something. Approval, maybe. My value in this marriage goes down with every year I age and every pound that I gain above my high school weight.

After my workout, I shower, shave, moisturize, fix my hair, put on makeup, and dress casually but attractively. Then I spend three hours on a Saturday cleaning. Alone.

So, it was a real treat that my husband offered to cover dinner. We go to a sports bar with TVs covering several channels on every wall. The kids kick each other under the table, squealing to me. My husband can’t look away from the college aged girls playing softball on one of the screens.

In the minivan on the drive home, as my kids said nothing to me, even when I tried to lure them into conversation, and as my husband belched loudly and patted his gut, I got my great idea.

I offered to make my family dessert. They all love hot fudge sundaes. They ignored me as usual, treating me like the help. To them, I live to serve them.

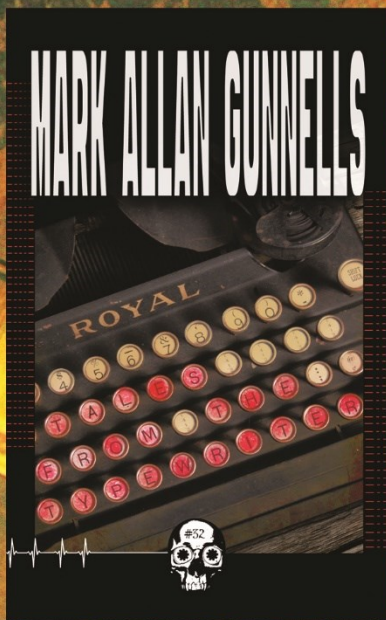
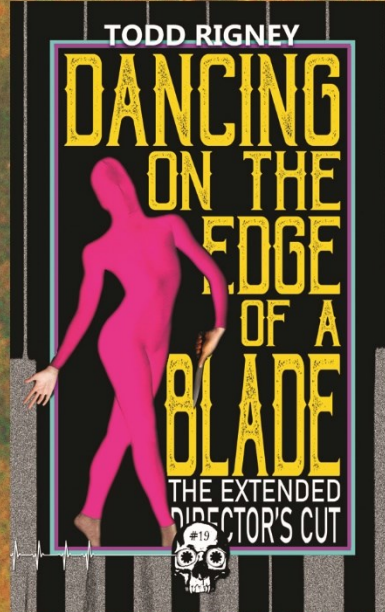
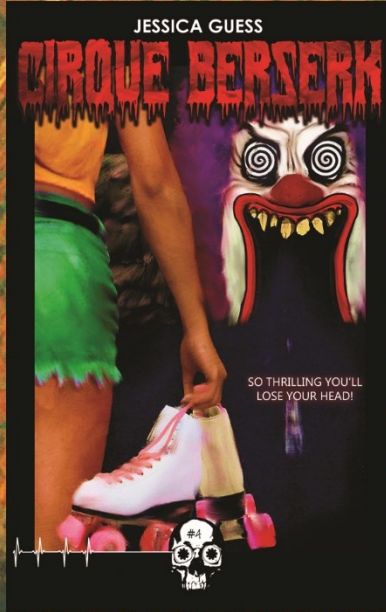
For once, that tendency was a blessing. Out in the garage was a jug of antifreeze that was in a lovely cherry red color. What hot fudge sundae is complete without an extra sweet drizzle of maraschino cherry syrup? With a good amount of antifreeze in there, hopefully I can look forward to being free of the bizarre servitude that I’ve found myself in.

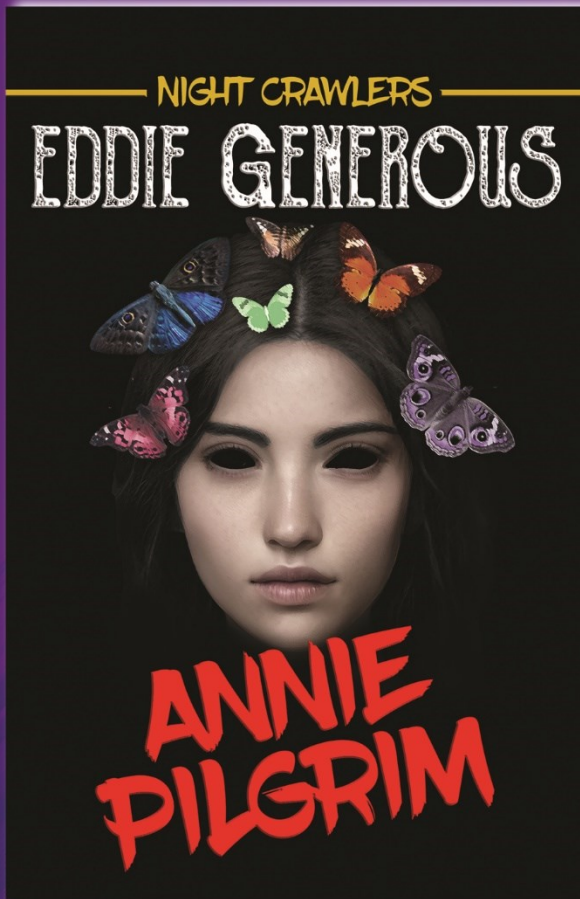
As I watch my family eat their sundaes without acknowledging me, I smile with true satisfaction. I won’t even mind washing the dishes.

—

Somer Canon is the Imadjinn Award winning and Splatterpunk Award nominated author of works such as *Killer Chronicles*, *The Hag Witch of Tripp Creek*, and *You're Mine*.

SURE, THE VIDEO STORE IS DEAD BUT REWIND OR DIE LIVES ON

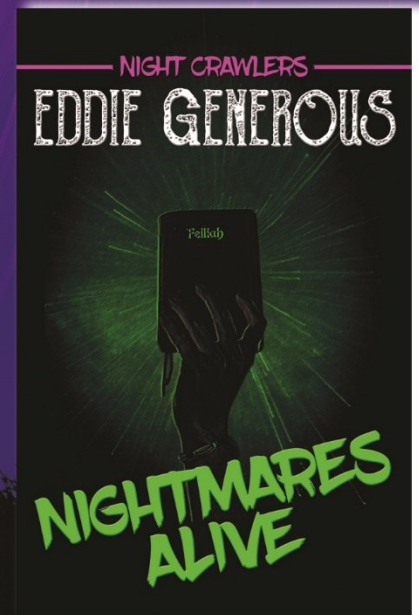
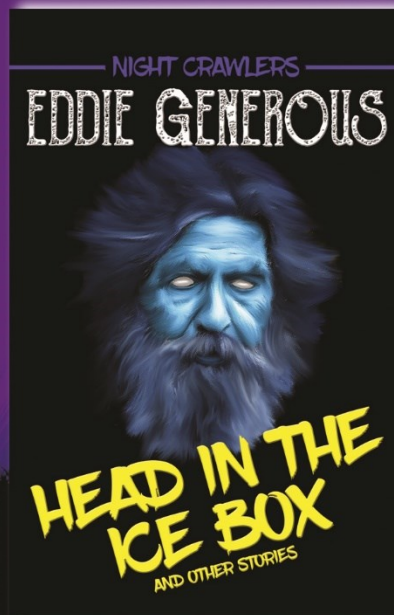
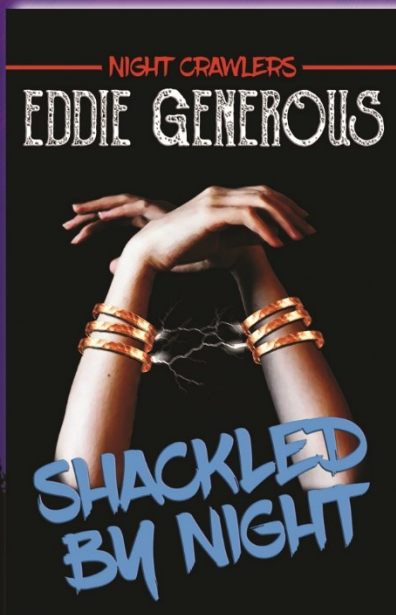




OLD SCHOOL HORROR

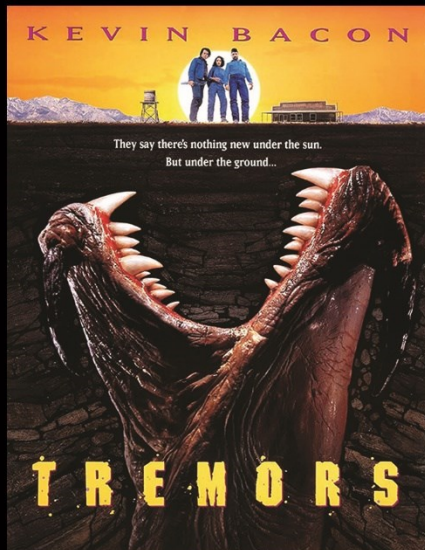
EDDIE GENEROUS PRESENTS...
NIGHT CRAWLERS

SUSPENSEFUL HORROR STORIES TOLD IN
THE VEIN OF THE GOLDEN YEARS OF THE
GENRE: EVERYDAY CHARACTERS, ACCESSI-
BLE WRITING, AND BUCKETS OF BLOOD.
BOOKS TO BE ENJOYED IN ANY ORDER.



PICK FIVE

WITH RONI STINGER CREATURE FEATURES

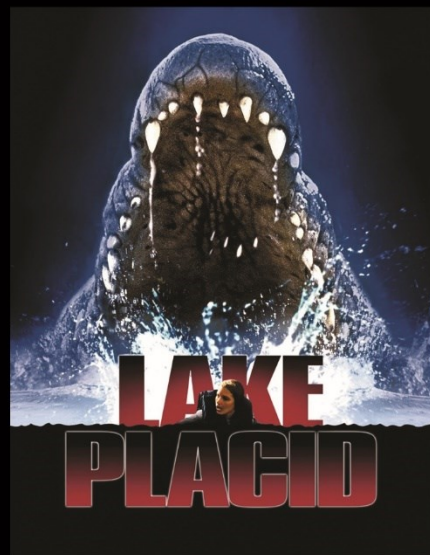


Tremors (1990)

The monster we can't see coming is often the scariest. That is until we get a good look at the graboid. Giant underground worm-like creatures are hunting humans. This fits into the comedy horror genre, although all five of my favorites have stellar moments of dark humor within the scares, this one goes all the way with the laughs.

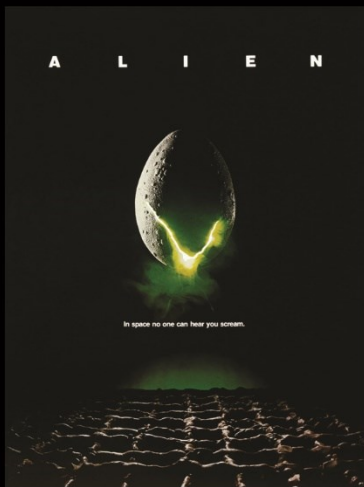
Lake Placid (1999)

Giant crocodiles are always a great time, but the thing that sold this one for me is the cringy sexism that our female characters confront so admirably. "If I had a dick, this is where I'd tell you to suck it!" says Betty White, as Mrs. Bickerman. This is the character that earned Lake Placid a top slot for me. Wise humans know that sometimes the most dangerous monsters aren't the most obvious.



The Blob (1958)

A gelatinous blob of goo from outer space that grows as it slowly rolls up and consumes its human victims. Who wouldn't be terrified by something so inhuman that there's no obvious target for killing it? Turns out the blob has a weakness, and as the polar ice caps continue to melt, we may be in trouble.



Alien (1979)

Our first introduction to the xenomorph. Need I say more? There's nothing as creepy as that first face hugger, except perhaps watching it be reborn slippery quick with multiple clacking jaws as it rips through an unsuspecting human's torso.

The Thing (1982)

The Thing is my favorite creature feature. An alien that can transform into other biological entities and perfectly—almost perfectly, jewelry and scars prove a bit of a problem—replicate them. Even your closest friend might be The Thing. And the only thing more terrifying than that is watching The Thing caught in partial transformation. You'll never forget that spider head running across the floor.



I hope you've enjoyed revisiting these classics with me. If you haven't seen them, fix that quick. I envy you the enjoyment of watching them for the first time.

— Roni Stinger

Crickets sang to their potential mates in the provincial park forest. In the full moonlight, Mark Miller didn't need the headlamp he wore, but it would come in handy once he and Sandy were inside the hot springs cave. He didn't want to miss a second of Sandy's sexy body or any additional skin off his shins. The rocks had a habit of grabbing a taste of flesh if you weren't careful.

About a kilometer left to hike, Sandy snuggled into the crook of his muscular arm, the forest path unfolded. He'd been hitting the weights all winter, excited to show off his efforts come springtime. Now he'd have a chance.

"What about bears...mountain lions? Is it safe?" Sandy shivered in the crisp spring air, folding her arms across her chest, enhancing her cleavage rather than hiding it.

Her raven curls hung below her shoulders. Mark had no doubt she was ready for him. There was a certain way women walked when they were ready. Sandy had that walk.

"The team doesn't call me Macho Mark for being a chickenshit."

Steam tendrils rose in the distance, reaching towards the sky. Silhouettes of trees and bushes lined the trail. A rustling, crunching, whoosh interrupted the horny cricket chirps. Sandy stopped. Mark nearly tripped over her. Rolling around in the dirt would be fun, but better to warm her up in the springs first if he didn't want her getting squeamish.



"Mark?" Sandy pointed into the trees. "Did you hear that?"

She stepped back. The crickets went silent.

"I don't—"

A dark shape swooped down from a giant evergreen. Sandy let out a squeak of a scream, covering her head. They'd all heard stories about bats getting caught in hair.

Just last year, Dionne's cousin's friend got one stuck in her hair while rowing around Lake Louise. Whole colony flew over the boat. Missed everyone but her. While the bat struggled to get untangled, the girl panicked, fell off the boat, and drowned. Locals say that you can still hear her screaming at dusk. Whether true or not, a story like that stuck with a person.

The little black demon flew in a circle above. Mark let out his breath

with a slight chuckle. He wasn't afraid of no bat. Besides, he'd traded his mullet for a short spikey cut last year.

"Come on. That nosy lady warden is just looking for someone to fine." Mark grabbed Sandy's hand.

With the bat a safe distance away, Sandy smiled.

"Quit talking then." She planted a kiss on his lips, ducked and ran ahead.

The trail opened to a bubbling spring at the base of a rocky hill, lit in moonlight. The cave entrance merged with the darkness at the edge of the springs that butted against the rock, but Mark knew where to find the opening. Hadn't failed to find one yet, even in the dark.

Yellow caution tape disturbed the fairy tale image. It ringed the pool, a new addition since Mark had snuck in last summer. On that trip, he'd never made it to the water before ol' iron tits warden caught him. This time, he'd left his truck down the road from the parking lot, hoping she wouldn't hear or see him. No reason for her to be out at this time of night, but you never knew. The lady was a strange one.

"Woah, this is amazing." Sandy bent down and pulled off her boots. "Why'd they close it anyhow?"

In the middle of removing his shirt, arms extended overhead, cotton covering his face, Mark whispered, "Sh."

Sandy jumped out of her clothes

in seconds, giving Mark a quick smile over her shoulder before entering the water. Obviously, she'd done this sort of thing a few times before. His kind of girl. Cheap and easy. He'd bought her a dollar rose at the gas station and she'd been as grateful as if he'd bought her a diamond ring. Perfect.

Her boobs glistened in the moonlight.

"Ah, it's so nice! What are you waiting for?"

Mark, wearing nothing but his headlamp and a smile, didn't let that caution tape slow him down any more than Sandy had.

The hot waters enveloped their bodies, soothing every bit of skin. Mark inhaled the steam, warming his lungs. There was nothing better than that first plunge. His dick grew hard in anticipation.

Sandy dipped lower into the water as she entered the cave. Mark didn't want to lose her in the darkness but didn't want to turn on his headlamp yet. If he did, they'd risk alerting the warden by shining their presence outside. Her cabin wasn't too far as the crow flies, and she really was out for him.

She'd caught him sneaking around on a few occasions. Besides, she might mention the other girls to Sandy. That wouldn't help him out any. Once he and Sandy were far enough inside the cavern, he'd turn on the light without worrying about the old lady.

He grabbed Sandy and pulled her

behind him. That would earn him points. Chicks loved hiding behind their men. He felt his way along the curvature of the rock wall, slick and smooth with steam. He caressed the wall with his free hand. Delicious.

“Stop it, Mark. That tickles.” Sandy slapped his arm.

“What—” As he turned toward her, he smacked his shin on a protruding rock. “Shit! Ow, that fucking hurt!”

He let go of Sandy’s hand and reached down to assess the injury. A couple centimeters’ deep divot nestled into his calf. Mineral water stung the open wound.

“Sandy?” Mark heard her splashing. How the hell had she gotten in front of him? “Wait for me.”

“Mark, stop. That hurt.” Sandy’s voice echoed off the cavern walls, a couple of meters away, maybe? It was hard to tell.

Absolute darkness rendered Mark’s hand invisible when he held it in front of his face. Hopefully, they’d gone far enough inside. Either way, he had to do it.

He turned on his headlamp. The cave walls were coated in salmon-colored slime. Stalactites hung from the ceiling like swords, only centimeters above Mark’s head. He hadn’t realized how close he’d been to spiking his brain. Good damned thing he wasn’t any taller. Obscured by steam, the light illuminated only a short distance. Anything farther than a half-meter away was nothing more than white billows.

“Sandy?” She couldn’t have gone

far.

The water ahead churned in agitation.

He stepped forward.

“What the fu—” Sandy’s scream went silent as if submerged beneath the water.

“Sandy?” Mark’s heart raced, panic spreading through every nerve.

He put his hands out, searching for her. Empty air. More splashing ahead. The water bloomed with red bubbles. Something scraped his leg. Sharp. Biting.

“What the—”

Mark tried to run, slamming into the rock wall. His headlamp, knocked from his head, sank to the bottom, briefly illuminating a swirling blue-green mass that engulfed the red, leaving clear water in its wake. Mark didn’t understand what he was seeing. Still, those stinging bites lit his skin on fire. If only he had his hockey stick, he’d fight back. His naked body assured him he had no weapons.

Slow and awkward, his legs and torso covered with needle-like punctures as if he’d been pressed into a pin-lined iron maiden, he attempted to escape. Tingling and numbness spread from each tiny prick. His legs no longer obeyed his command to run. Catching his left calf with his right foot, he slipped beneath the swirls of red and blue-green.

Rising again, he gasped for breath. He had nearly reached the cave’s opening. The full moon, bright in the night sky, offered hope. Stupid water

bugs, or whatever they were, wouldn't be the end of him.

He lunged for the light, moving as if in a dream. A clump of red, oozing tissue stuck to his arm. Globes of flesh and fat in shades of pink and yellow floated atop the water, whether from him or Sandy, he wasn't sure. This wasn't his lucky night.

He pulled through the water with both arms. Those fiery pinpricks crawled up his neck. He screamed. His vision went dark.

Clawing at his face, the pain unbearable, Mark fell beneath the water for the last time...



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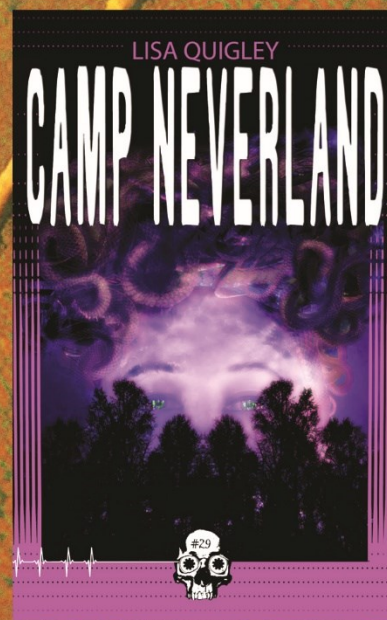
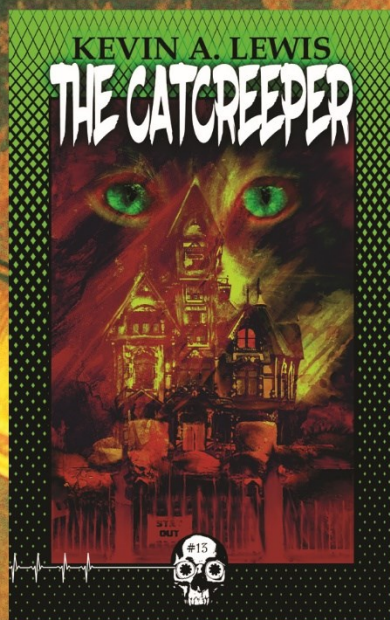
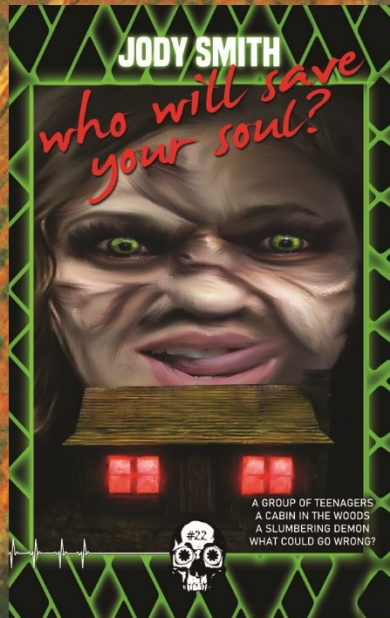
Roni Stinger is a speculative and dark fiction writer living in the Pacific Northwest, USA.

A high school dropout and teen mom, she later went on to earn a Bachelor of Science in Human Services with minors in English Literature and Philosophy. She has worked as a social worker, a small business owner, and an editor, among various other odd jobs.

She's an Active member of the Horror Writers Association, The Write Place coordinator at Willamette Writers, and is also a member of Codex Writers, and Science Fiction and Fantasy Poetry Association.

Her short fiction and poetry have been published in various magazines and anthologies, and she is currently shopping *Penumbra of Innocence*, her debut novel. *Fuzzy* is her debut novella, and is book #34 in *REWIND OR DIE* series from Unnerving Books. When she's not reading, writing or spending time with family and friends, she's wandering the streets, forests, and beaches in search of shiny objects and creative sparks.

SURE, THE VIDEO STORE IS DEAD BUT REWIND OR DIE LIVES ON





OBEY
AND WE'LL BE
HAPPY

Declan Burnett

Macy stood at the jewelry counter of Sears, feeling melancholy and pointless. She was nursing a shocking, unexpected parting from her boyfriend of three years. A pain she'd never felt before.

There'd been a pipe burst at work a week ago, and though it did not affect her department, the store was closed early. She arrived at their apartment, bubbly over the surprise afternoon off, with a pizza from Luigi's and a liter of Coca-Cola in a weepy glass bottle. She'd opened her mouth to call out to Wayne, her boyfriend who long-hauled pigs across the country but had four days off just then, and closed her mouth when she heard the animalistic grunting of a woman.

She did not want to see but had to see, and what she saw, hardly demands explanation. Wayne didn't even try to explain himself, even went so far as asking her to leave so that he and Brenda could have a little privacy. Macy being who she was, did leave, going to the park around the corner of the apartment building to eat pizza she wouldn't recall eating and drink pop she wouldn't recall drinking. Strangely, she did recall a newspaper page that stopped at her bench before blowing by, a headline declaring that Carrie Fisher and Paul Simon were through.

Her emotions roiled like waves beneath clashing stormfronts. Eventually, granted only seven days had passed, she settled on melancholy and pointless. Who was she without

Wayne? Most of their friends were his. Most nights they went out were up to his having an idea. Without him, Macy felt like she was nothing more than a peg set to a hole, ringing up customers and going home to feed her cat, McGavin.

"Excuse me, any chance I can ring this through your till? There's a mean line out front."

Macy lifted her head and met the dreamy brown gaze of a tall man in a fine suit. He was fidgety and seemed nervous. She wondered how a man so good-looking and so well-dressed could possibly be nervous. Men like this owned the world, and most times, they damned well knew it.

Macy took the four-slot, stainless-steel toaster and checked the tag.

"It's for my wife. It's her birthday."

Macy, overwrought and exhausted, tittered, then covered her mouth. "I'm sorry, that was rude."

"It's twenty-six bucks. Best toaster you have."

"Sure," Macy said, and when she met the man's now defeated looking eyes, she laughed again. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm sure she'll love it."

"Is it bad?"

Macy took a deep breath to halt any untoward reactions. "Not if she loves toast." The helpful breath became moot as Macy burst into uproarious laughter.

The man, his hands shaking, lifted the toaster from the glass counter. "I don't suppose you'd care to tell me what kind of gift I *should* buy her?"

The fun drained away at the pain and discomfort clear in the man's expression. Macy knew of wives who did this to husbands and wondered just what kind of woman could do this to a man with so much going for him.

"Please," he added.

"Well, you can get her the toaster, but you also need to get her more frivolous things. Flowers, perfume, chocolates, things like that."

He nodded slowly. "Can I leave this here—what kind of perfume?"

"I'll watch this," Macy said, putting a hand on the toaster. And now, she needed him to come back so that she could check on his gift progress—this man was proving himself a fantastic distraction from the gaping hole in her life. "You'll have to smell some to choose."

"There's hundreds!"

Macy nearly laughed again.

"What do you wear?" the man said, leaning in to smell her. He took a great inhalation through his nose. "You smell wonderful."

Macy blushed. "I'm not...that's just my shampoo."

Perfume had become a luxury item the moment Wayne cleaned out his things and left her the sole household income. She had a bottle on the go, but until things steadied concerning her budget, it would have to be saved for special occasions.

"Oh."

"But...Charlie's good, by Revlon. My favorite ever is Coco. Whenever there's an ad sample..." Macy trailed, blushing.

The man was nodding. "Okay. Okay, and what kind of chocolates?"

"Anything in a box or a tin, really. And before you ask, we don't sell flowers, not real ones."

The man scrunched his cheeks in a squint. "That's okay, though, right? Perfume and chocolates and the toaster's good?"

Macy said that it was. Half an hour later, the man reappeared with two boxes of Russell Stover chocolates and two bottles of Coco by Chanel.

"She'll love these," Macy said as she tabulated the total: \$131.94.

The man put one box of chocolates and one bottle of perfume on top of the toaster after paying and accepting his change. He then pushed the two remaining boxes toward Macy.

"Thank you," he said, then added, "You're very beautiful."

—

"I'm sure he'll be back."

Macy was in the breakroom eating a tuna sandwich and chatting with Kendra from the cosmetics department. Kendra was twice divorced and went very few weekends without a date, often having two dates with two different men in the matter of two nights. Compared to Macy, Kendra was the Einstein of the opposite sex.

"How can you be so sure?" Macy said.

"No man spends that kind of dough on a stranger without expecting something, eventually. He planted seeds and he's waiting for you to grow."

Macy huffed. "He's married."

“As if that ever stopped a man before.”

“I don’t even know his name and he doesn’t even know mine.”

Kendra popped a striped candy into her mouth before standing. “He’ll be back. Trust me, he’ll be back.”

—

Macy glanced to her watch, then to the doors outside. It was a miserable day: cold, rainy, and windy. People were walking by the doors on a lean, hidden behind umbrellas that could only abysmally impede the rain’s slantways effort. She felt cold all over.

“Can I give you a ride home, when your shift’s done?”

Macy turned and there he was. He wore a long woolen peacoat with water drops dappling the shoulders. The smart move would’ve been to say no.

“Okay, I’m off in eighteen minutes.”

The man nodded, nearly bowing. “I shall return.”

He did return and Macy had to swallow a swarm of butterflies parading up her throat as she clocked out. On her way by, Kendra gave Macy a gentle elbow and a playful smirk.

“I’m Sidney, by the way. Sidney Blue,” the man said a moment before opening his umbrella and pulling Macy close by his side.

Macy was about to offer her own name but realized he’d almost certainly read it on her nametag. She instead said, “Hello, Sidney Blue.”

He gave her a timid smile then pushed open the door. Immediately,

the weather battered them. No words were spoken all the way to his car: a Lincoln Continental. Macy fell onto the plush seat after Sidney opened the door, and before he could go around and get in, she felt the soft, soft leather. It was like a fine jacket rather than a car seat. The moment the door opened, her hands went to her lap.

“Do you like coffee and pie?” he said. Of course she did; who didn’t? Sidney drove them to a small diner not far from her apartment called Ginger’s. They each shook out a coat before sitting. She asked what kind of pie he liked, her mouth moving automatically to fill the weighty silence threatening to build between them.

“I’ll have whatever you’re having,” he said.

Of the four options, Boston cream was her favorite and he smiled at her, revealing teeth white as pearls. She blushed. His presence felt like a light beam, somehow heavy and all too revealing. She lowered her face and on the way down saw his wedding band. A little of her fluster crashed and died.

A waitress came by. She was plump with enough moustache that even a nun would’ve felt the pride to pluck. Macy gave her order and Sidney asked for the same. The woman left and was back in less than a minute. The pie looked fantastic and the coffee smelled wonderful.

With something else to focus on and keep her grounded, Macy decided it was best to do away with the

elephant sitting in some other room, some other building, and yet, there all the same.

“You’re married. What does your wife think of you taking out women from the jewelry department?”

At the mention of his wife, Sidney paled and his demeanor shifted. He became fidgety and nervous.

“She doesn’t know,” he said after five long seconds of silence between them. He began studying a bit of pie he’d carved from the slice. “It’s complicated with her.”

Macy suddenly felt in charge, suddenly felt like sticking it to this man for being just the kind of man Wayne had been—maybe. “Explain it to me, because it really seems like you’re out looking for side action.”

Sidney lifted his face, his expression agonized. Macy now felt very guilty for her assumption, felt awful about being so brash. This man was not Wayne, had done nothing but be more than nice to her.

“She’s...sick.”

Now Macy felt even worse. “Ah, geez, I’m sorry.”

He waved her away. “Let’s not talk about her. Let’s talk about you.”

And they did. She told him about her upbringing, an only child to an insurance salesman who’d died of cirrhosis and a maid from the town’s Marriot. She got to Wayne and glossed over her heartbreak and the unwelcome changes to her life. She explained how she’d gone from high school directly to Sears and that someday she thought she might go to

community college or night school, but for what, she didn’t know. Lastly, she got to McGavin who was waiting at home for her to come fill his dish.

Sidney offered up but a modicum in comparison. He was a scientist working in a field she was sure to find boring—she’d eventually get out of him that it involved autonomous mechanics...whatever that meant. He said his parents lived on the East Coast, both holding doctorates—one a psychologist and the other a geologist. He lived north of the city—Macy could guess the neighborhood by how flippantly he described being a scientist, and by his attire, and by his car, and by the gifts he’d bought her seemingly effortlessly.

More than an hour after taking their seats, Sidney offered to drive Macy home. Once into the apartment building’s parking lot, Macy invited Sidney upstairs for a drink. Though she’d been heartbroken by Wayne, it was the physical presence of a man she’d missed lately.

“All right,” Sidney said as he pulled between the faded and deteriorated white lines of a visitor parking space.

—

Macy watched him leave, his silhouette like a ghost in the moonlight pouring through her bedroom window. He put on his shoes, his coat, rattled his keys as he walked. Once she heard the door close, she giggled, then screamed a little, kicking her mattress beneath her in glee. Never had a man of Sidney’s caliber ever taken her out, and certainly none had

ever shared her bed.

That was the closest Sidney ever came to spending the night.

—

They saw *Ghostbusters*, *Gremlins*, *Cannonball Run*, *The Karate Kid*, *Star Trek III*, and *Revenge of the Nerds* inside an eight-week courtship. They went on picnics. They went on two trips: Seattle and Banff. Sidney bought her things, nice things like jewelry and flowers, but also useful things like new shoes and groceries.

They always ended up back in her apartment, and always he left before midnight. She begged, cajoled, made wild offers of a sexual nature.

“I love you, I do, but I can’t stay. I’m married,” he said, eyes moist with emotion.

“Just leave her,” Macy said, her own tears budding. “Leave her and marry me!”

“I’m sorry.”

It was on the tip of her tongue to demand him out of her life for good, but she never voiced it, didn’t dare. He was the best thing in her life for as far back as she could remember. Better than Wayne by a longshot. Better than the three men she’d dated before Wayne. Better than all the stolen kisses at high school dances.

At work, Kendra was little help, simply because she did not understand the depth of the connection that had been made.

“Give him the ultimatum. He’ll dangle you along forever if you don’t.”

Macy could only shake her head to

this. It felt like betting your home and job on a hockey score. What happened when he held firm?

“It’s not the worst thing, to be a...mistress,” Macy said, feeling the exact opposite.

Kendra huffed. “That wife of his must be something.” The way she said this was almost a question, almost a challenge.

“I guess.”

Kendra’s jaw dropped. “You don’t know?”

Macy shook her head. Sidney had made it clear that she would never meet his wife, as she was housebound, and Macy must never, ever visit his home.

“Why not?”

“He forbade it,” Macy said, face downturned, suddenly embarrassed for what might seem like a weakness when really it was a strength. To keep from driving to his house and snooping took a tremendous effort on her part.

“Girl, he doesn’t own you. You can go anywhere—say, I’ve got the car today, let’s go see his marital nest.”

Macy was incapable of saying no. It reminded her of the first time she drank vodka, coaxed into action by a fellow thirteen-year-old. That night ended in tears and vomit.

—

“He lives in *this* house?” Kendra said.

They were parked on the street with the windows down and the engine off. The August heat was pleasantly moderate and the humidity was low. There were no kids on the

on the block. The lots were all three and four times the size of lots everywhere else in town.

“*This* house?” Kendra said again.

Everybody had seen the huge place with sterile grey paint, a tall wooden fence around the yard, and wrought iron gates. Many called it the fortress, others called it Hitler’s Compound. Nobody knew anything about the inhabitants, so they made it all up.

“You’re sure it’s this house?”

“It’s what was on his license,” Macy said, shrugging almost to her ears.

—

133 days after meeting Sidney, Macy dreamed she’d taken a stand and Sidney crumbled beneath her will. He promised he’d leave his wife, but Macy had to break the news to the woman. Macy was suddenly standing at the yawning gates of Sidney’s home. She knocked on the door, pounded on it with righteous wrath. The door opened. The woman, Sidney’s wife, had no face, otherwise she was identical to Macy herself. The sight was so jarring that Macy rocketed from bed.

It couldn’t be put off any longer, especially not with the happy accident now growing in her womb. She would simply take a cab and visit Sidney’s home to meet her competition.

—

The gate was closed, but the position of the horizontal bars offered sufficient space for footholds. She scaled. At the top, she got a little

dizzy, suddenly questioning just what in the hell she thought she was doing. It also fell far too late to turn back; the allure of a mystery satiated commanded like the drive to breathe. Stepping down the backside of the gate happened with frightening quickness.

She moved closer, seeing only the hint of lights on within the building. It really did seem like a fortress. She sprinted to the wall of the home, now imagining guard dogs and tripwires. There were two floors and a basement. The basement wasn’t fully submerged and gated windows appeared every eight or so feet. The windows were narrow, the bars over them thick and rusty.

Macy stopped at each window of the basement and main floor, trying to steal a peek. Curiously, the windows of the second floor were barred as well. She imagined an old money scenario, family heirlooms worth small fortunes in each room. Silliness.

Around the side of the home was a small shed. A wheelbarrow was parked by the wall next to one of the basement windows. The bars over this window were doubled, the window itself more than twice as long. At the center between the bars was a padlock...an open padlock.

Seconds mounted as Macy stared at the access point. She wanted to see this woman who claimed so much of her man, had to see this woman, but was it enough to break into Sidney’s home like a thief on the prowl?

The answer came when she knelt

and silently took away the lock, then spread the hinged bars. She tested the window. It slid with a quiet squeak that made her heart thunder. Hands on the window frame, she listened to the night.

Nothing.

She slid the window the rest of the way open and pushed aside heavy curtains. The space was dim, but not fully dark. Below her was a stack of cement bags. The floor had a great dip in its center, about big enough for a hot tub. Macy turned and slipped down the wall like a spider in a shower stall. Her tummy scratched against the seams of the paneling, though the annoyance was short-lived. She climbed off the stacked cement bags and rushed across the space, eyes on her feet.

There was a hallway of skeletal framework beyond the staircase; obviously Sidney was in the midst of renovations, though a place that big and old was likely in a state of constant renovations. It was clear Macy would not even find a photo of the woman down here. She had to go upstairs.

On her fours, Macy climbed the carpeted stairs. She paused at the heavy door, listening. A gentle glow played beneath, suggesting that it was unlikely anyone would be in the immediate vicinity. She reached for the brass door handle, halfway hoping it was locked, and turned. The door creaked open, and Macy found herself in the kitchen. Risen to her feet, Macy moved onward, pushing the door all but latched closed behind

her. There were two options and she headed away from the light. The goal now was to locate a photograph, drink it up, and skedaddle out the way she'd come in, unnoticed.

She only just reached a hallway when she heard footfalls behind her. She pressed her back to the wall and waited, terrified over the sum of her daring and the possibility of being caught by a jealous wife, or even an angry Sidney. She so wished she hadn't come here at all.

The footfalls drew nearer, but strangely, no kitchen light lit. Macy then heard the quick rushes of air, as if someone were sniffing.

"Coco by Chanel," a woman's voice said. It was tinny and droning like an automated message left for after-hours callers.

There was more sniffing, then footfalls came her way. Macy stumbled backward, deeper along the dark hallway. The footfalls continued in her direction. Macy lurched until she thumped lightly into a wall, a door-knob nailing her hip. She grabbed for it and broke into the dark room, closing the door without letting it latch. She listened for the footfalls and heard nothing through the heavy wood.

A sniff, sniff sounded from behind her. "Coco by Chanel," a voice said, this one having the same tinny drone as the last, but obviously from a different set of vocal cords.

Macy burst back into the hallway. To her right, floating in the blackness, were a handful of small blinking lights. She turned left, swallowing a

scream. What in the hell was going on? Ten feet ahead, a door opened and blinking lights hovered into view.

Sniff, sniff. “Coco by Chanel.”

Macy tripped trying to halt her forward motion and slammed forehead first into the baseboard. Footfalls and flickering lights approached. She curled her knees up and covered her face, feeling the blood trickle down next to her eyes.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry,” she mumbled.

An overhead light lit. Macy saw three naked women coming toward her. Each wore a vapid expression, eyes like camera lenses, necks replaced by glass with steel brackets. Within the glass was a conglomeration of bone and wires, blinking lights.

Irregular feet tapped quickly over the carpet. Macy didn’t dare look, her face buried in the crook of her elbow, the only space of relief from this nightmare.

“Macy,” Sidney said, sighing the word. “We could’ve been happy...but you’re like the rest.”

Macy lifted her head upon hearing his voice. He was coming toward her with a needle in his hand.

“I expressly forbade you from coming here, from seeing my wife...wives.”

Sidney knelt. Macy was a statue in horror and shock. The needle pierced her skin and within a handful of seconds, her mind winked away.

—
Macy came to briefly. She was strapped to a table. Sidney Blue and

his six wives loomed above her. All were busy with tasks, the women moving in slow, methodical motions.

“Soon all will be fine. I will marry you, my darling,” Sidney said.

Macy felt a pinch and was almost instantly relieved of consciousness.

—
“Thank you for loaning me your automobile,” Macy said, her voice tinny and droning as she held out the keys so that Kendra could take them.

“You okay?” Kendra said.

“Better than okay,” Macy said. “I am with child; Sidney and I have been wed and I no longer need to mind the jewelry counter. Our friendship has been important to me, but now I must go.”

Kendra scrunched her face. “Go? You’re quitting? Married? Pregnant? You moving into that place?” The words rambled from her mouth in a confused fury.

“It has been a pleasure to know you.”

“What?” Kendra shook her head, taking long, confused blinks. “What in the hell are you talking about?”

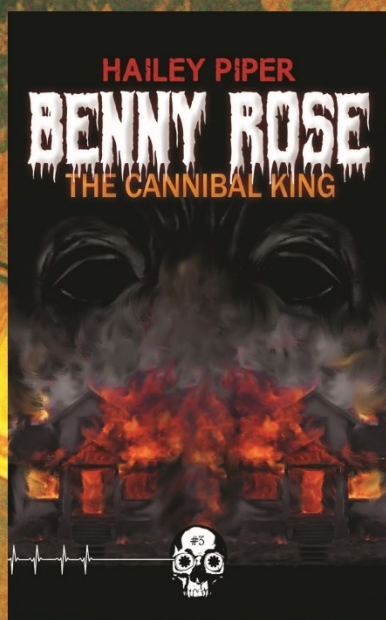
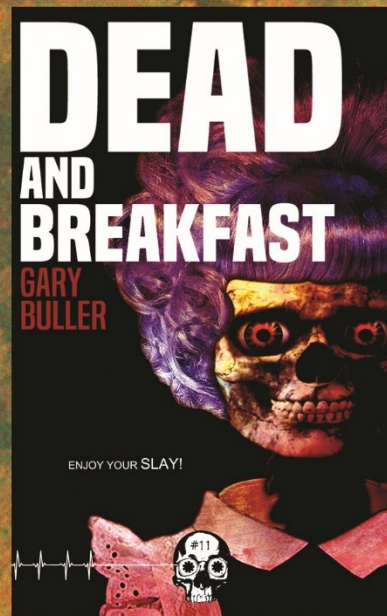
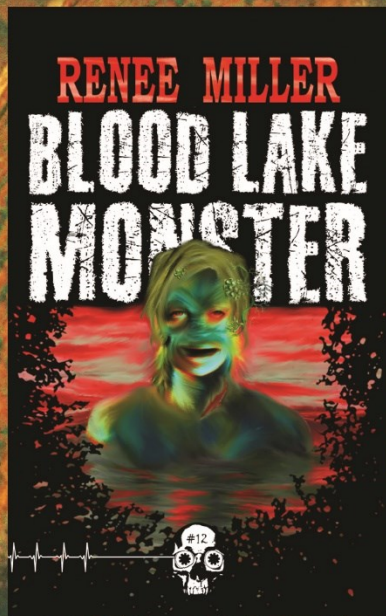
“I am wed and have moved in with Sidney. I forbid you from visiting me.”

“Forbid? What the—what’s with the scarf? It’s like a hundred degrees!”

“A gift from my love. Goodbye, Kendra.”

Kendra watched her friend walk away, motions stiff and slow. It was obvious something was fishy. This couldn’t stand, not on her watch. She really liked Macy. After her shift, she’d go right out to that freakshow of a house and get to the bottom of this.

SURE, THE VIDEO STORE IS DEAD BUT REWIND OR DIE LIVES ON



Kendra needed a vacation from her vacation. Sending Jack off would certainly cover part of it.

“Did you ever do much camping?” she asked Jay, setting aside her book.

Jay had returned from dropping Jack off at the campsite. He was sweaty, sipping on a cold can of diet Lipton Iced Tea—zero calories, heavy on aspartame.

“Funny, Harold asked if I wanted to go on an adventure, some kind of man wilderness thing. Harold and me, and another pair: Alden and Charlie.”

“Who are they?”

Jay shrugged.

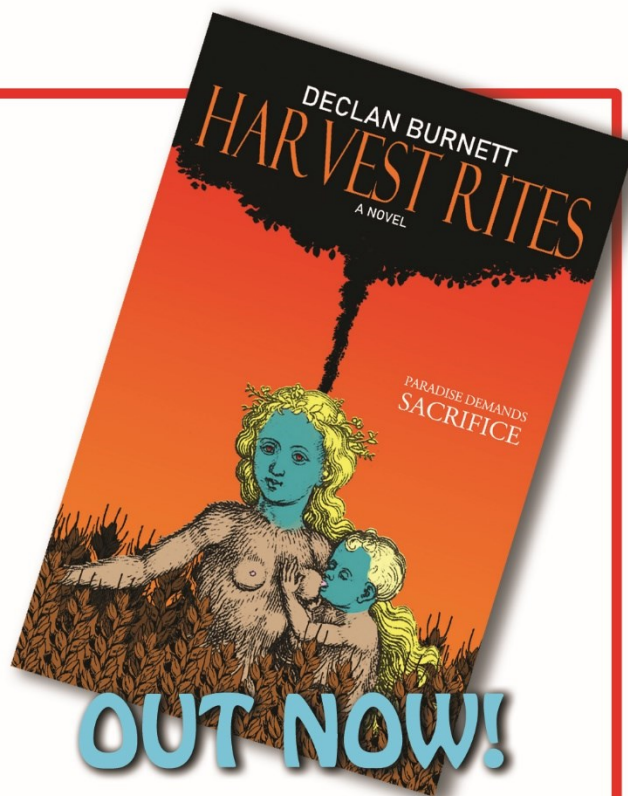
“I still feel weird about letting Jack go. The Lion Cub leader promised in his twenty-nine years of minding the kids on the ‘Den,’ Kendra mimicked the abbreviated lingo, “that he hadn’t seen a mountain lion. He actually sounded sad about it. As if he wanted a bunch of mountain lions hanging around camp.”

“If the camping doesn’t settle Jack down, I guess we’d better leave.”

“Maybe it was stupid to come before we worked things out,” she said.

Jay crushed his empty can. “I’m not sure we’ll ever work things out,” he said and stepped down toward the boat shed where they stored the recycling until Harold picked it up and carted it off to the dock.

Irrationally, she’d come to assume when Jay spanked their son, it evened out the bad tally. But



it wasn’t even and not close either. She knew Jay, it was a surprise that he’d hit the boy, though it wasn’t hard enough to teach any lesson. In actuality, it made Jack worse.

Jay returned to the main level and stood over the light pink, blood blotch that had seeped into the treated wood. “I’m going to go with them. I just decided. I need some space from you, to gather perspective.” He stepped inside to assemble what he’d need for a trip into the bush.

Kendra tried to read, tried not to cry. John Irving demanded more focus than most. She imagined herself as an apple picker.

“How long will you go?”

“I don’t know, three nights maybe.”

The buzz of a motorboat engine approached the dock.

“Have fun.”

“Try not to fuck anybody while I’m

gone,” he said and stomped away.

It suddenly seemed over, completely and utterly over. She and Jack were set to take the next boat, transfer onto the following boat, ride the waves, and then return to reality. Tears welled.

Suddenly, a rush of feet pounded up the steps. Jay crossed and instead of making for the door, he lifted Kendra’s body from the lounge chair.

“That was rotten and I’m sorry. I love you. I’m stressed over the boy.”

“I love you. I love you.”

His arms slackened and her back drifted down into the seat. “I’m going, but once I get home, we’ll work out all of this shit.”

“Do you forgive me?” Now happy tears flowed.

“Time, Kendra, it will take time. I have to go. See you in a few days.”

She watched him go and called out, “Have fun!”

—

The cottage was different empty. Jay’s parting sentiment left her feeling fuzzy and warm. She flipped the switch on the radio and listened to the real world. A short news report stated that Raonic fell to Djokovic in the semis of one open or another, the Prime Minister made an announcement about Aboriginal rights, and there were to be clear skies with only the slightest chance of a thunderstorm to wash away the humidity. A tweeny pop song blared then and she swayed her hips to the auto-tuned voices.

She fixed a tuna fish sandwich and opened a bottle of wine. She ate standing at the sink. As for the wine, the first glass led to a second and the second to a third. Warm and soft, she uncorked a second bottle and turned the volume dial.

Alone, alone, alone, in short stints it was magic.

She was free.

Alone, alone, alone, she ran a bath and undressed, walked naked around the cottage. She finished her fourth glass and poured a fifth. She stood in front of the bathroom mirror while the water ran. The wine softened the edges and the wrinkles she’d started to see had all disappeared. In the washroom cupboard, she found a bottle of bubble bath and tipped a serving into the half-full tub. Back to the mirror. Steam rose behind her and she lifted her breasts, let them fall. They hardly moved. There was peace inside.

“Alone, alone, alone,” she sang over the lyrics of a boy band track playing on the radio. “Not so old yet, but old soon.” She swayed as she sang.

Soapsuds ran over the lip of the tub. “Whoops,” she said and kicked a towel toward the streaming mess of white. She turned the faucet and opened the drain. She inhaled through her nose, the bubble bath smelled promising, soothing, and luxurious. Drain plugged, she moved her wine glass to where she’d reach it in comfort and slid down into the hot tub.

Alone and relaxed and drunk, she

she soaked. Her troubles melted into oblivion. The music was loud enough that she didn't hear the scratching or the sliding of the patio door. She hummed along with the tune, wishing for a '90s show just for her—N'Sync or Spice Girls would really hit the spot.

A hand ran over her soapy leg as she lifted it to the ceiling. Blonde stubble prickled her palms. "You're a squatch," she said. She shaved and sang on. Through with one leg, she lifted the other. Done that, she ran the razor along her pits and then considered her pubic region. Typically, she trimmed, but bikinis had a way of letting even the shortest hairs hang out.

"You see everything, you see..." she sang and finally peered beyond the bubbles.

A chill ran along her spine and she snapped her eyes closed.

It's not there.

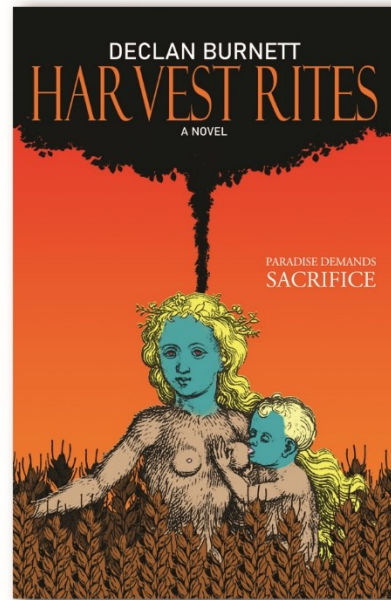
You're drunk and it's not there.

It's a wine vision, there's no cougar in the room.

No fucking way.

She fought a scream and peeked. The mountain lion stepped forward and dipped its nose into the tub. It lapped at the water, then sneezed at the soap and then shook its head.

"Good kitty," she mumbled stupidly, looking around for a weapon within reach...



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Declan Burnett is the author of the Severed Press novellas *Bloody Footprints in the Snow*, *Bloody Footprints in the Sand*, and *Bloody Footprints Around the Campfire*, as well as *Kidnap*, *Torture*, *Strangle*, a *Rewind or Die* novella from *Unnerving*. His short works have appeared in a handful of small press publications. He lives and works in Ontario, Canada.

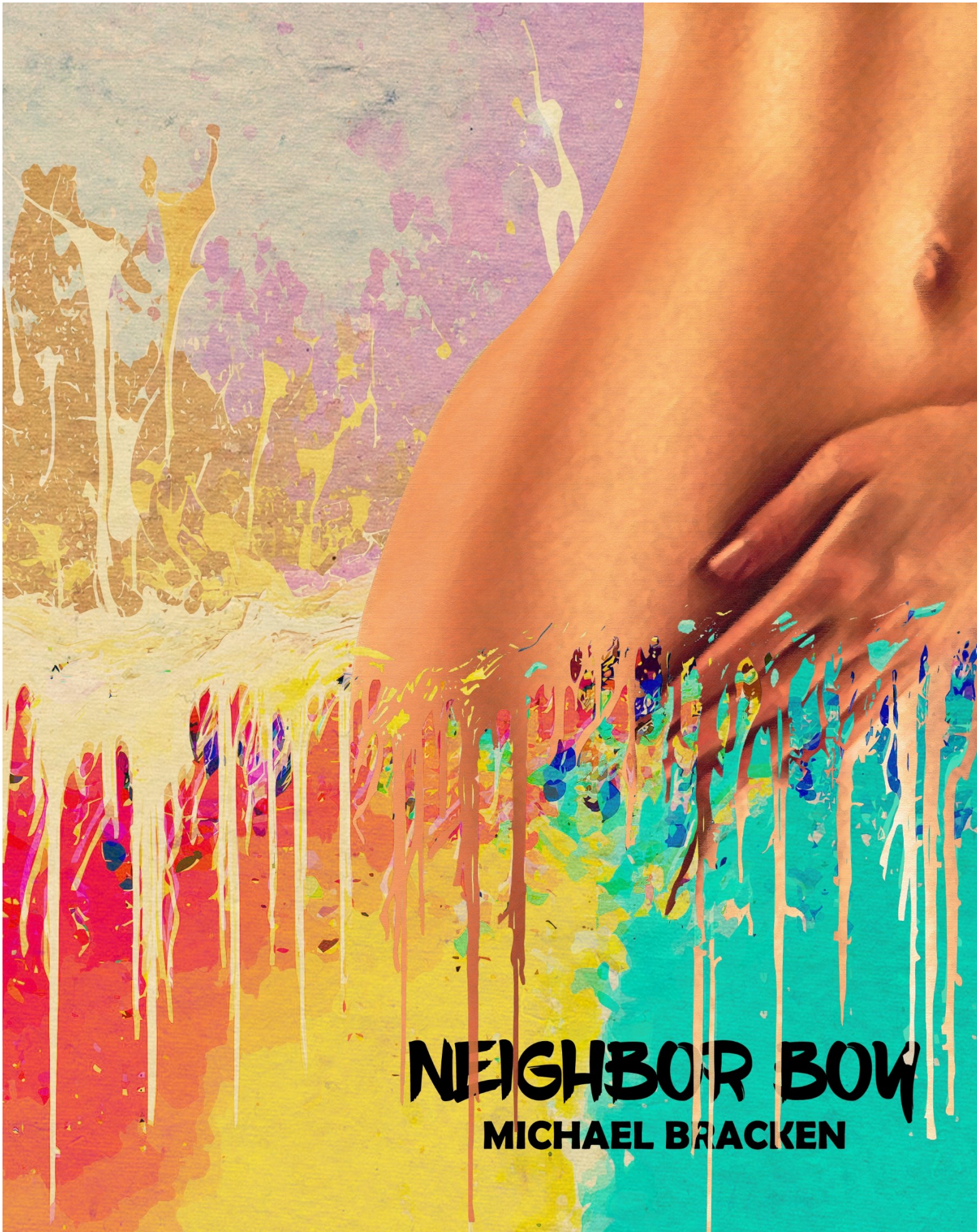


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NEIGHBOR BOW
MICHAEL BRACKEN

I had just stepped out of the shower when I thought I heard my husband return home. I wrapped a white towel around my torso and headed to the living room to greet him, finding instead my neighbor's seventeen-year-old son Arthur standing there with a plateful of chocolate chip cookies.

We were both surprised.

"My mom said you were still at work," he explained. He showed me the housekey she had given him. "She wanted to surprise you for your birthday. I was just supposed to put these on your table and leave."

I had not fastened the towel properly and at that moment it dropped to the floor, revealing my birthday suit.

Arthur swallowed hard.

I squatted to retrieve the towel. As I stood, I asked, "Have you ever—?"

"No, Mrs.—"

"Judy," I corrected him. "When we're alone you can call me Judy."

Arthur swallowed again as I rewrapped the towel around my torso. I took the plateful of cookies from his hand, told him to thank his mother for the thoughtful gift, and ushered him out the door.

After I returned to the bathroom to finish preparing for the evening, I caught a reflection of my smile. Several years had passed since my husband had looked at me the way my neighbor's son had, and I was surprised by how aroused I felt.

I was dressing in the bedroom a few minutes later when I heard the garage door open and close, signaling

the arrival of my husband, and I was fastening my pearl necklace when he stepped into the room with a half a chocolate chip cookie in one hand. The other half was in his mouth, and around it, Charlie asked, "Who made the cookies?"

"Marcie," I said. "Her son brought them over."

He threw his briefcase on the bed. "The funny looking kid, the geek who fixed my laptop that one time?"

"He sprouted up over the summer," I said, "and lost the acne. You might have noticed if you spent more time at home."

"Work," Charlie said, as if that explained everything. He stuffed the rest of the cookie into his mouth, slapped cookie dust off his hands, and, without any comment about how I looked in my little black dress, asked, "You ready?"

He wore the same blue pinstripe suit he'd been wearing every day that week. The once-crisp white shirt beneath it had wilted over the course of the day, and the knot of his blue striped tie had been loosened to reveal the unbuttoned shirt collar. I asked, "Aren't you going to change?"

"Nah," he said. "I'm good. And we'd better hurry. Carlotto's won't hold our reservation if we're late."

He was right about that. I gathered my clutch and a light wrap and followed him to the car.

—

Birthday sex that night was rote, my husband fulfilling an obligation rather than presenting me with a

gift, and throughout the ordeal I kept my eyes closed while I imagined the appreciative look on Arthur's face when my towel slipped off. Afterward—after my husband fell asleep—I showered away the residue of our coupling and used the handheld showerhead to finish what he could not.

Before I slipped into bed a little later, I stared at the snoring lump of my husband and wondered how matrimonial bliss had become a matrimonial blister I just wanted to pop.

Charlie traveled for work, gone nearly as many weekends as he was home, and Arthur's mother often picked up weekend shifts at the store to earn extra money. The Saturday two weeks after my birthday, both my husband and Arthur's mother were away. I caught Arthur's attention when he arrived home from a computer club meeting.

I wore a sheer summer dress with nothing beneath despite a slight chill in the air, and I felt certain he could see my silhouette through it when the light struck me just so.

"I need your help," I said as he approached. "I need to get something off the top shelf in the garage."

"I can get it," he offered.

"No, no," I said. "I just need you to steady the ladder."

"Okay, Mrs.—" He paused to correct himself. "Judy. I can do that."

As he held the ladder a moment later, I climbed. I knew exactly what caught his attention beneath my dress

while I rooted around on the top shelf looking for anything I could use as an excuse for asking his help. I found a ceramic pumpkin and eased back down the ladder. As I stepped off the bottom rung, I stumbled and fell backward into Arthur's arms. My rear end pressed against him and I felt his arousal.

My neighbor's son stepped away, distancing himself from me, but he couldn't go far before he backed into the fender of my car.

"I—I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to—"

I turned to face him. "It's okay, Arthur. You didn't do anything wrong."

"But—"

I reached around him and placed the ceramic pumpkin on the hood of my car, my breasts momentarily flattening against his chest until I pulled away. Then I took his hands in mine, stared into his eyes, and licked my lips with the tip of my tongue.

"You're sweating, Arthur," I said as I led him across the garage toward the kitchen door. "Why don't you come inside so I can cool you down."

Arthur didn't satisfy me the first time, but he was young and inexperienced. During our following encounters, he proved willing to try anything I suggested, even things my husband had long-before stopped doing or had never done.

One Sunday afternoon a few months later, I sat with my next-door neighbor in her kitchen. She'd been telling

me about Arthur's desire to remain in state after graduation and attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Electrical Engineering and Computer Science program. After a brief pause in our conversation, Marcie asked, "Have you noticed a change in my son?"

I held my cup steady and kept my expression as neutral as possible. "No. Why?"

"He seems more—I don't know—confident, more certain of himself," she said. "He's not my little boy anymore."

"No," I agreed. "Arthur's not your little boy anymore."

—

"I saw you," Arthur said. He lay on his back, staring up at the ceiling. "With him."

I rolled onto my side and placed my hand on his chest. "My husband?"

"You left the shade open," he said. "I watched."

I had left the shade open on purpose. "He's my husband," I said. "You know I can't—"

"I don't like him doing that to you."

I didn't enjoy it, either, but I didn't say that.

"I want you to stop."

"I can't," I said. "We're married."

"What if you weren't?"

"I can't divorce my husband," I said.

"I won't divorce my husband."

Arthur turned and stared at me for a long time. When we had sex again, it was hard and it was fast and for the first time he was in complete control.

—

Two weeks later, on his way to work one Thursday morning, my husband drove his car into a bridge abutment at a high rate of speed. An investigation blamed a malfunction in his car's computer system.

Charlie and I had not actually loved one another for several years, but neither of us had felt any urgency to end our marriage. Even so, I would miss him.

I wore black to the funeral, acted the grieving widow, and had everyone to the house afterward. Several hours later, after all the mourners had left, Arthur and his mother helped me clean up. Marcie went home first, leaving Arthur and I alone. He wrapped me in his arms and tried to kiss me.

I pushed him away. "Not now," I said. "I just buried my husband."

"But now we can be together," he said. "Just you and me."

—

Arthur grew more brazen after that, visiting my bed even more often than before. One afternoon, pounding on my front door roused me from post-orgasmic stupor. I pulled on my robe and went to answer it.

As soon as I opened the door, Marcie put both of her hands on my chest and pushed me backward into my house.

"I know what you're doing with my son! I want it to stop! I want it to stop right now!"

Before I could respond, I heard Arthur's voice behind me. "What's all the shouting about?"

“You!” Marcie pointed a finger at her son. “You get your clothes on and go home!”

By then, Arthur stood next to me, naked as the day he was born. He smiled at his mother and said, “I’m not your little boy anymore. I don’t have to do anything you tell me.”

Marcie grabbed his wrist and tried to pull him toward the door. He jerked his hand from her grasp and in doing so struck her face. She gasped, stared at me, and said, “This is all your fault! You, you, you—!”

Arthur pushed his mother out the front door and slammed it shut. The confrontation had excited him. He turned, tore the robe from me, and took me on the living room floor without a single thought about how I felt.

He left me there, returned to the bedroom to pull on his jeans, and stepped over me on his way to the front door. With his hand on the knob, he looked down and said, “Don’t worry, Judy. She won’t bother us again.”

Not until I heard the screams from next door did I truly understand what he meant.

I couldn’t save my husband. I couldn’t save Marcie. But maybe I could save myself.

I pushed to my feet, found my phone, and dialed 911.

—

Michael Bracken is an award-winning writer of fiction, non-fiction, and advertising copy. An Edgar Award nominee, he has received multiple awards for copywriting, three Derringer Awards for short fiction, and the Edward D. Hoch Memorial Golden Derringer Award for lifetime achievement in short mystery fiction. The author of several books and more than 1,200 short stories, he has edited twenty published or forthcoming crime fiction anthologies, including the Anthony Award-nominated *The Eyes of Texas*, and provides editorial services to book and periodical publishers. crimefictionwriter.com



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EDDIE GENEROUS

COMING NOVEMBER 22, 2023

...Leaving the trail, they skirted the edge of a farmer's field where the newly planted corn was only knee high. Crows made a racket overhead, swooping the field before returning to the safety of the high branches. A path on the other side caught them up with the gurgling Trace Branch, which they then followed until it joined Troublesome Creek. The road running alongside Timmelhorn land was nearly overgrown with weeds and bramble. It dead-ended at a rusted gate, allowing them access through the tumble-down wire fence. The ruined houses and barns lurked in the distance, barely visible in the dark shadow of the mountain.

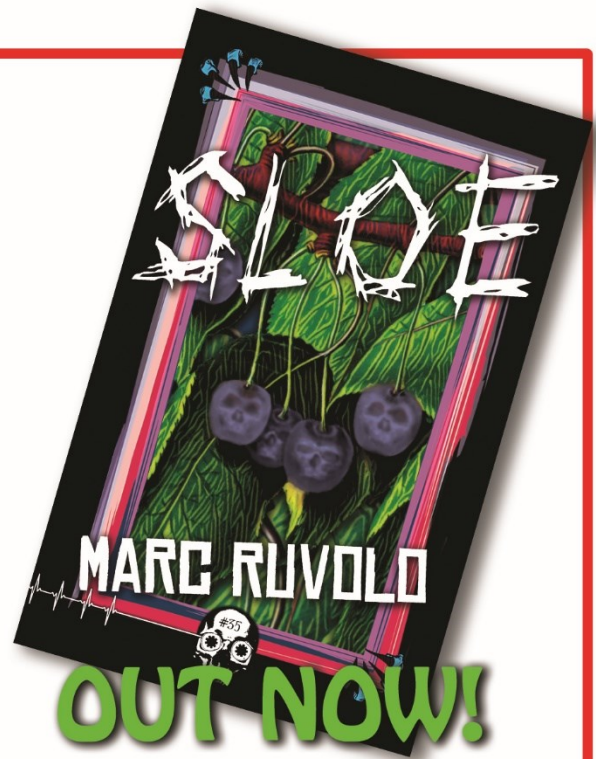
Ronnie's stomach fluttered. "Do we really have to go all the way there?"

"Don't be a baby," Medina scoffed. "I wanna look around."

Myles echoed her. "Yeah, Ronnie, only babies get scared."

Past the gate it was slow going, with all manner of trash hidden by the waist high grass and wild hydrangea. Rabbits fled before their feet. When they got close enough, Ronnie saw that there were five houses and four barns in total. Two of the barns had completely collapsed, now nothing more than overgrown piles of weathered boards and mossy rubble. A tin weathervane squeaked in the wind on the roof of the largest house, only adding to the feeling of abandonment and neglect.

"Let's try that big one," Medina said.



In its day, the two-story house with its wraparound porch and gabled windows would have been a fine sight, but now it sat forlorn, windows broken and door hanging ajar, the kudzu creeping up to engulf it. Climbing over the least overgrown section of the front stairs, Ronnie felt the house's history, its looming presence. She was sweating and happy to let the others take the lead. Medina and Myles paused at the sagging door, broken glass and plaster crunching beneath their sneakers.

"Do you think it's safe?" Myles asked.

Medina smirked. "Now who's being a baby?"

His face flushed red. "I'm goin' in."

The floorboards creaked ominously but held as Myles stepped into the foyer. He waved them through. "Come on."

Even though it was obvious that no one had been in the house for a long time, Ronnie still felt like they were trespassing. Remnants of the prior inhabitants lay scattered about the hall: the rags of a crocheted shawl and a water-damaged Bible, a plain clay pipe, a tattered black umbrella and rubber galoshes. Blue or not, these people seemed no different than those living in her town and invading their homes uninvited bordered on disrespect. Medina had picked up the Bible and was flipping through it when a yellowed scrap of paper fell out. She stooped and snatched it from the floor.

"It's a funeral card," she said. "In loving memory. Bettina Darling Timmelhorn. Born June sixth, nineteen-oh-one, died January twentieth, nineteen-forty-two." She showed them the card printed with the face of a woman wearing a crown of flowers in her hair. "She was real pretty."

"Don't look blue to me," Myles said.

Medina shook her head. "It's black and white, dum-dum."

The way ahead was dark, and the musty smell tickled Ronnie's nose. Myles once again took the lead, stepping gingerly over a tangle of mold-ering garden hose left in the middle of the hall. With a loud crack, his foot sank into the floor.

"Dang!" He hopped backward, arms cartwheeling.

"I wanna get out," Ronnie said.

"We'll fall in the cellar, like daddy said."

Myles rubbed his cheek. "Yeah, I'm not going anymore. Floor's rotted."

"Okay," Medina sighed. "Let's check the other ones, though."

Outside, they circled around to the back of the house, where an unexpected sight stopped them in their tracks. A sea of roses and wildflowers filled the overgrown backyard, the nodding blooms a patchwork quilt of vibrant reds, blues, yellows, and purples. Hundreds of bees zipped over the flowers, returning to a small tin shed nearly lost in the relentless grip of kudzu and ivy.

"Wow," Ronnie said. "So pretty."

Miles poked the flowers with his stick. "The hive must be huge."

"Careful." Medina grabbed his shoulder, and he looked surprised. "Those ain't bees, they're wasps. They can kill you."

Ronnie was the first to see her, a woman emerging from the trees where the gentle slope of the mountain began. The woman walked unhurriedly, at times disappearing from sight, but always closer and headed in their direction.

"Do you think this is her house?" she asked. "We should go before she gets here."

"Why, we're not doing anything wrong." Medina shaded her eyes. "Let's see what she wants."

—
Myles' viewing was scheduled under the waxy yellow fluorescent lighting in the mildew-scented basement of

First Baptist. Veronica had flown into Louisville on a redeye and rented a car at the airport. Mama was awake and on her second pot of coffee by the time Veronica bumped down the long gravel driveway. She checked three times that the rental was locked before going in.

Mama hugged her on the porch. "I've got some waffles warming." She looked ragged, hair tucked under a sleeping bonnet, eyes red and watery. "Medina said she won't be in for a few hours."

Like always, the house stank of cigarettes and cat piss, a slap-in-the-face childhood sense memory. Out of all of them, Daddy's passing from a stroke had been hardest on Mama and Myles. Mama because the man was her whole, finite world, and Myles because now there was no one to catch him when he fell. And everyone knew her brother had fallen a lot over the years: jail, rehab, a major drunk-driving accident, more rehab, with daddy always there to give him one more chance. After their father's funeral, Mama had whispered over the landline that Myles rarely left the house anymore. Then why on earth had he left and driven fifty miles to the bridge that day?

The waffles were stale and chalky, the syrup thin, but she washed them down with strong black coffee. Delton had come back a day early to watch Jessie, so home wasn't a concern, but the circumstances of Myles' death were. According to

police, he'd fallen or jumped into the river from the High Bridge south of Lexington. No note, no warning, no nothing. His SSI check had just come through, and Mama said he seemed fine. Happy, even. They'd made plans to go to the Ponderosa on Saturday.

Veronica's leg bounced beneath the table. "Do you need money for the burial?"

Mama chain-smoked. She exhaled a cloud of gray smoke. "His monthly will almost cover the rental and cremation. Can always use some more around here, though."

"Of course. Just let me know what you need, and I'll write a check." She tapped her spoon on the tablecloth. Three. Five. Three. "Sorry I wasn't here to help, Ma."

The cup clunked on the scarred tabletop. "You got your life, honey. And your trials. I don't blame you one bit."

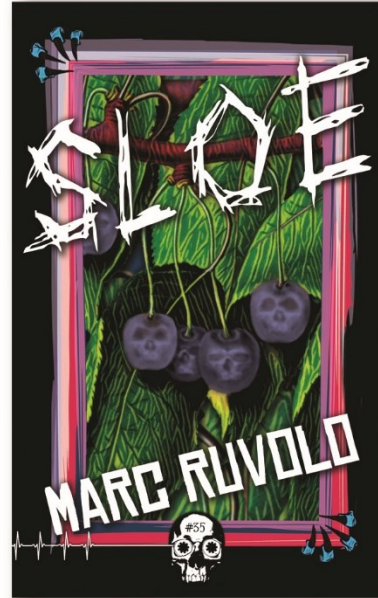
Veronica escaped to the barn as soon as she was able. Climbing the hayloft ladder left her breathless but lying down in the flattened straw was nothing but pure benefit, the stress of the morning soothed by a wave of calming nostalgia. The wooden book crate was still in its corner, uncovered and bare but for a single volume: a dilapidated paperback copy of *The Horse and His Boy*. She hadn't read Lewis since she was a child, but after a few pages the story came flooding back. The soft patter of rain tapped at the barn roof, and it wasn't long before she

heard the steady drip, drip, drip of water leaking through.

Miles killing himself hadn't been much of a surprise, and for that she felt guilty. Had the family done all they could to save him? Maybe. And even worse: now that he was really gone, was this feeling of relief for her long-suffering mother, as she'd like to believe, or for herself?

Find her, the voice said. Find my daughter. Six. One. Eight.

Veronica bolted upright, closing the paperback as the intrusive thoughts filled her mind. Words so much different than the past: findher, Six. One. Eight. Findher, findher, findher, Six. One. Eight. Findher, findher, findher, findher, Six. One. Eight...



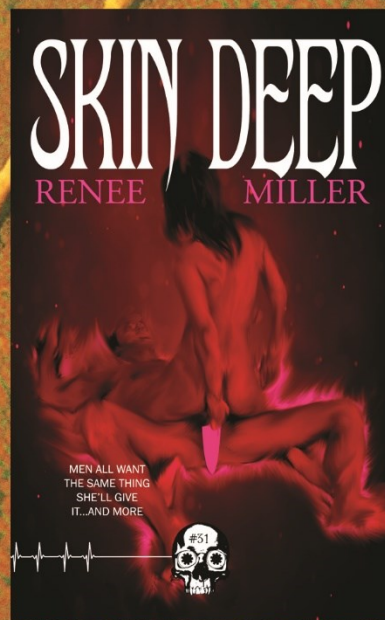
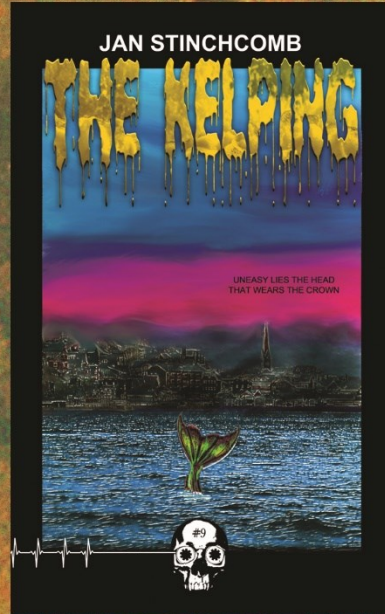
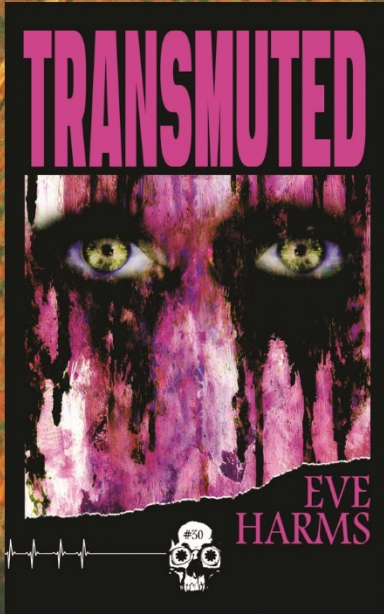
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Marc Ruvolo is a queer writer and musician living in Portland, Oregon who once considered himself a punk. Over a musical career spanning thirty-five years he has released dozens of albums to critical acclaim, many through his own DIY label Johann's Face Records. Touring regularly, he's performed shows in nearly every state in the U.S.A. as well as many far flung corners of the world. In 2010, he founded Bucket O' Blood Books in Chicago, a genre-focused book and record store which continues to host touring writers to this day. His poetry and fiction have appeared in Cynthia Pelayo's Gothic Blue Book Series, The Night's End Horror Podcast, HORNS, and The Best of Abyss & Apex Vol. 4. His debut horror poetry chapbook "Creep & Crow" is now available from Alien Buddha Press.

You can find him spouting nonsense and posting blurry photos on twitter at @RuvFur or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/marc.ruvolo.

SURE, THE VIDEO STORE IS DEAD BUT REWIND OR DIE LIVES ON





Renovations

ROWAN HODGES

Lana Rash stood before the cringing teller at the TD Bank on Fifth Street. She had a boney, gnarled finger pointed to the number printed in her checking book. Her smokey blue eyes pleaded for the young woman to understand.

“It says here I have forty-three thousand,” Lana said, her voice thrumming like a fingernail on a violin string. “I need to hire someone to fix my roof, and the man wants a cash deposit.”

“Mrs. Rash, did you buy gift cards online?” the teller said, easing into what was surely to be horrendous news.

Lana stiffened and bit her bottom lip, thinking. “Only once, but that

was to pay Microsoft. My computer was hacked, and a nice young man fixed it for me after accidentally sending me four hundred dollars.”

The teller tilted her head. “Wait. So...you purchased forty-three thousand in gift cards to pay him back?”

Lana tilted her head to match the teller’s. “Well, no. I didn’t understand, but I had to pay him back. He created an online banking account for me after I gave him the numbers from my checks. He was very nice.”

The teller closed her eyes. “You need to call the police and report a theft. He’s taken everything out of your checking account.”

Lana huffed. “That’s impossible. Stuart was a nice boy.”

“All I can say today is, do not give out your savings account information. It was dumb luck nobody had linked them in the system.”

Lana dug into her purse. “That’s in this book, not that book. But right here,” she pointed again at the last line in the checking account book, “it shows how much money is there.”

The teller leaned closer, her voice going husky and apologetic. “Mrs. Rash. Listen to me. That money is gone. You were scammed. Your computer almost certainly didn’t have a real virus, most likely it was simple malware.”

“Malware?” Lana said.

—

The old house was falling apart. Lana had been there since returning from her and Rusty’s honeymoon to Florida in 1962. She’d raised two kids there—both of whom had been sacrificed to the country while fighting in Afghanistan. She watched her husband get sick there, watched him die there, on the bed in the sunroom. For a while, her sister and brother-in-law had moved in; they’d passed as well—though courteously did so in a hospital only a few months apart. Everything important in her life seemed to revolve around that house: making it a home, filling it with love. That home was all she had left.

Twice the neighbor from a few miles down the road had stopped by to offer her assistance, should Lana ever want to sell. Lana was polite, of course, but had never called Diya Devi about listing her home. High

ceilings, intricate woodwork, original plaster, crystal light fixtures, the agent promised a mint should Lana ever change her mind. Even if the house was crumbling, the property values north of the city were soaring.

It felt like pure serendipity when, as she was leaving the bank after the embarrassing and painful discovery, a contractor stopped her. He put a rough but gentle hand on her skinny wrist and said he’d heard what happened and was willing to bring his crew and work at a discounted rate, that “it was simply disgusting what advantages some people would take.”

Lana smiled and patted the rough hand with her own rough hand, rough for a very, very different reason. “Bless you, young man.”

They exchanged information.

—

Within a week, the roof was stripped of its pale and crumbling shingles, and a list of other undeniably necessary repairs was handed to Lana.

“Oh, Lord,” she whispered.

The contractor, Doug Moran, put one of those rough and meaty hands on her shoulder. “This is only the absolutely necessary stuff...but I bet you have insurance.”

“Bless you,” Lana said after she found the paperwork in her late husband’s filing cabinet, and to make things simple, signed over insurance proceeds to cover building supply costs. If Doug wanted to deal with that hassle, she’d let him. Rusty had always taken care of that stuff, when he was alive.

Day after day the three laborers appeared, always busy. Her home was a mess of dust and debris. The floor was stripped, and in some places gone. The electricity worked in only half the house. The new furnace was on back order, so Lana carried a little space heater from room to room, plugging it in wherever the power remained. She bundled herself beneath the rabbit fur blanket Rusty had bought her for her 49th birthday.

She watched the men. They'd gathered around a big white truck outside. For once, Doug was with them. The others didn't seem to like Doug, but obviously respected him, or at least feared him. That morning they'd gone into the office and carved a large hole into one of the walls to get at the ancient electrical wires, leaving the plaster gaping like a bloodless wound. That office was large, as the room had once been matching servants' quarters; two tiny rooms that, when Rusty removed a wall, became one. He'd done it on a week off from his work at the airport, wandering into the kitchen around the noon hour, white as a powdered ghost, then stumbling into their bedroom freshly washed and completely exhausted. He'd let a big smile stretch across his face, so proud of the effort, so proud of what he imagined the finished product would look like.

Now, at the beginning of the third week into the project, Lana began to worry. How much was all of this costing her? Minimum wage was something like \$15 an hour, and skilled

laborers earned more than \$15 an hour, surely.

"We've hit a few snags, but everything is going fine budget-wise," Doug said, stretching his winning smile across his face. "Remember, I'm giving you a discount."

"Bless you," Lana said, touching his hand again. The firmness was like a promise of quality but was also foreign; never had her home invited in such hands. "Did we fix a budget?"

Doug winked at her and patted her hand. "Of course."

Had they discussed an actual budget? She didn't think so, but she forgot things sometimes. If Doug said they had, they almost certainly had.

Things like that had happened even in her younger, sharper days. She'd always been a bit flighty with numbers, though it wasn't until recently that the world had changed so much that she felt consistently gullible, guilty of things that would've made Rusty pull out his hair.

"Don't worry, I'll take care of all the sticky stuff," Doug said.

Lana was glad. She had tried and failed to decipher the insurance paperwork and didn't bother reading the transfer of insurance proceeds paperwork. Doug was doing her endless favors, and for no reason she could see beyond being a nice young man.

—
Lana stood before the mirror of the downstairs washroom, remembering when she was younger, thinking how pretty she'd been, even if she didn't accept that at the time. She then

tried to imagine how pretty the house would be once all the renovations were done.

"If they ever finish," she mumbled.

They were into their fourth week, and she'd become unnerved and distraught. There was no way Doug had known when he agreed to this job. Thankfully, he seemed to like being there—when he could be there and not at other sites. He spoke highly of the floors and the fixtures, the high ceilings, even the archways in the doors. Spoke of how rare they were these days.

"They don't make them like this anymore," he'd said just the day before yesterday. "And the location," he'd added, shaking his head in awe. "Places like this just don't come along but once in a lifetime."

Every time Lana brought up the issue of money, Doug changed the subject, usually while placing a large, heavy hand on her shoulder.

—

"He's doing a wonderful job with the place," Lana said. "It's coming along splendidly. Insurance money must go much farther than I'd ever dare to expect."

"It can," Diya Devi said. "Is that Doug Moran?"

They were in line at the Valu-Saver. Lana had a basket and Diya, behind her in line, had a cartful. The store was bustling with mid-week life.

"That's right. One of his laborers actually gave me a ride here. I'm not so confident behind the wheel these

days," Lana said. "Ever since that thing with the bank account, I've been shaken."

"What thing was—?" Diya began but was cut-off by a woman passing by.

"Did I hear you right? Doug Moran?" the woman said.

Lana grinned and nodded gently.

"If I were you, I'd be careful with Mr. Moran," the woman said. She was a retiree, though younger than Lana, and looked vaguely familiar, but something was off about her person, or perhaps her clothing, or perhaps the setting. There was an ill-fit somewhere there.

"About Doug?" Lana said.

The woman nodded. She had a dignity about her that was different from most of the shoppers at the Valu-Saver. Lana's gaze fell first to the broach pinned to her wool coat, and then to the gaudy diamond next to a wedding band on her left hand.

"Be careful with billing," the woman said and then rattled her cart along.

Lana watched her go, squinting. "I can't place her."

"Selma Reinhardt," Diya said, also watching the woman go.

"Oh! Mayor Reinhardt's widow," Lana said. Up until recently, she'd lived in a mansion on the westside of town. It had been front-page news when it mysteriously went up for auction.

"I wonder if Doug—?"

Diya was again interrupted. "Ma'am? Ma'am?" the young man

operating the conveyor belt and till called to Lana.

“Oh!” Lana said and quickly got to unloading her basket.

On the evening of the thirtieth day, Doug showed up just after the men left the site. The house was in prime condition and all that was left to do was to admire the handywork. It was like winding a dusty but precious watch. If she could somehow do it, she would’ve sat in each renovated room, drinking in memories in real-time, because that’s just how close they felt now.

“One last thing, if you’ll indulge me. I love looking at old paperwork. Do you think you could find the deed to this place and let me have a peek?” Doug said.

Lana smiled. “Certainly. I know right where it is.”

Within two minutes, Doug had his phone out and took a picture of the deed. “I’ll swing by tomorrow morning to finalize the bill. Insurance covered a good sum of it—I fudged a bit on what happened, I know the adjuster, so he took my word. I won’t tell if you won’t tell.” Doug winked. “Should only be a couple thousand or so.”

Lana put her hand to her chest and sighed. “Thank goodness. I was so worried, what with the great number of hours and what a fantastic job you and the guys did.”

Doug nodded. “Appreciate the kind words.”

Birds sang in the morning as Lana



stepped from the upstairs washroom. She glanced out the window at the sound of an approaching vehicle. She sidestepped a couple boxes and hurried down the stairs. It was Doug in his big white truck. Nice to get this out of the way early because she had a busy day ahead of her.

“Hey, there,” Doug said, waving.

Lana waved back from the sunroom door. It had once been a simple boot room, a place to lessen the impact of winter’s cold sucking the heat from the home. Rusty had been so, so handy and surpassed all her expectations when he’d remodeled it—and now, fixed up, it was simply lovely.

“I’ve got the last two forms to sign, and I’ll need a check for two grand to cover the crumbs that insurance refused to,” Doug said.

They met on the stone steps out the door and Lana gingerly sat with her checkbook on her knee. She was tired and a bit sore, but gratified, mentally energized. She scanned the top sheet absently until she saw the number. She wrote a check for \$2,000 exactly and then signed.

“Just one more autograph for the file,” Doug said, his smile big as the Pacific Ocean.

Lana scanned just as absently, her eyes playing over the words TRANSFER/DEED OF LAND, the words ticking a brief and recent memory. She found where to sign and date and filled in both.

Doug breathed deeply through his nose, leaning over her shoulder. Lana

Lana handed up the pages and then the check and found Doug’s smile had changed and his eyes had hardened. He opened his mouth to say something, but up the lane came an entry-level Mercedes sedan, followed by a cube truck with two young men inside.

“What’s this?” Doug said.

“I’m moving. All you said about the beauty of the home got me thinking about how much I’ve enjoyed it, and how it’s someone else’s turn,” Lana said, grasping the wrought iron banister bolted to the stone steps and pulling herself to her feet.

“Oh,” Doug said, almost laughing it out, “that’s convenient.”

Lana gave a slow nod. “Yes, the new owners already officially have claim to the place. Were very eager to buy without competition before it could be listed.” Lana waved to Diya as the real estate agent stepped out of her car.

“No, but...” Doug trailed, his smile gone. “You can’t sell, you—”

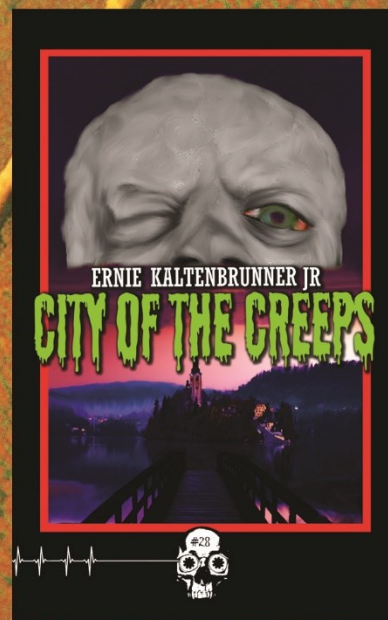
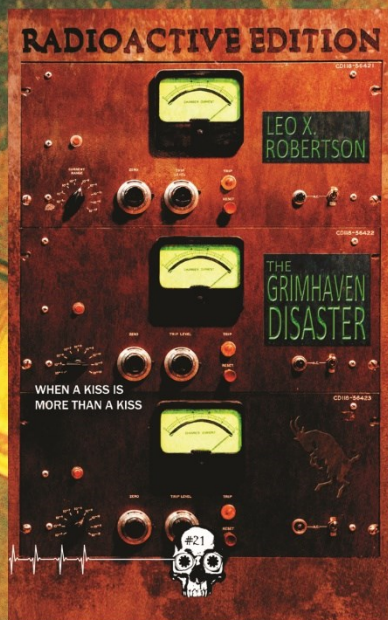
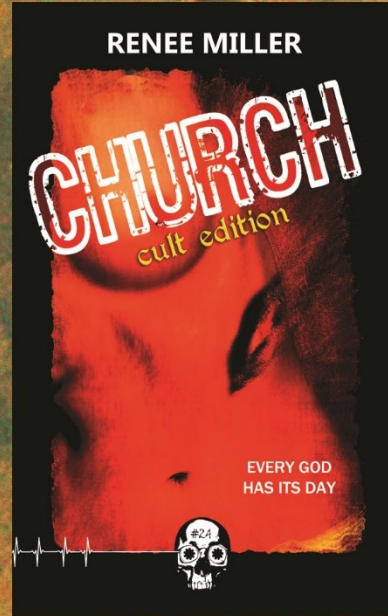
“Already sold,” Lana said, walking across the lawn and not looking back. “Thank you for giving an old lady a good price. I know you thought you’d be getting more.”

“Hold up,” Doug said, blinking at the useless deed transfer.

—

Rowan Hodges lives in rural New Hampshire, works in a stuffy office, has three cats, and writes crime stories with a twist.

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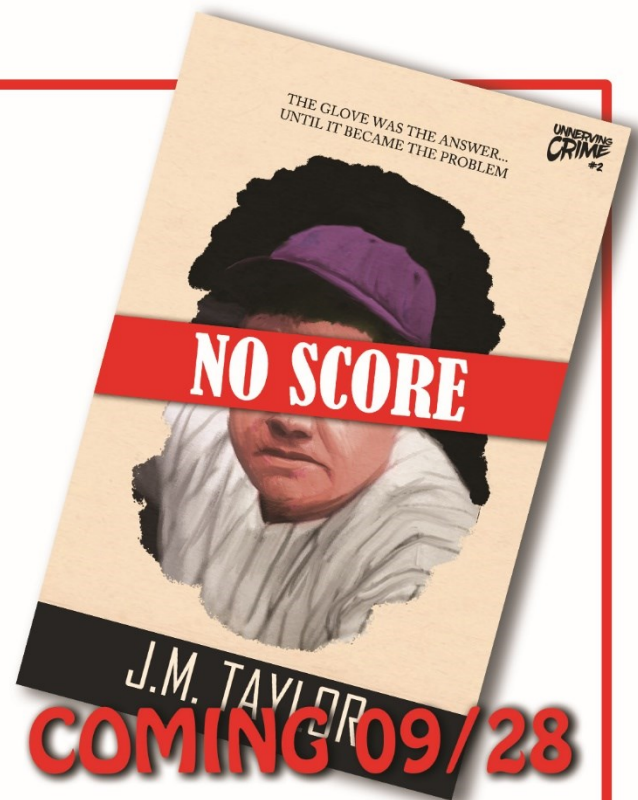


The apartment didn't disappoint. After a heavy door, a second hallway led off the delivery access into the living area. There was no mistaking that this was the home of the It couple Bernie-Dette: Bernie Oakes, star shortstop for New York, currently on the DL, and the Hollywood queen Dette St. Cyr, star of such hits as *Get Out of the Pool!* and *Murder in the Morgue*. Framed photos of each at every stage of their careers lined the walls, interrupted here and there by paintings that would surely be worth tens of thousands each. "Check this out," Jared said, pausing at one black and white photo. "She's stark naked here. How'd you like to walk past that on your way to the kitchen every morning?"

"Wouldn't care if I'd just left the real thing in bed," Drew said with a smirk.

The floors were checkerboard marble, black and grey. He parked his cart behind Steve's and scoped out the rest of the apartment. To the left was a kitchen gleaming in copper and stainless steel and crystal. Beyond it was a huge living room studded with leather furniture, a TV the size of a movie screen, and a bar with crystal stemware gleaming like icebergs. He moved around pulling phone cords out of the walls.

"You two get to work," Jared commanded. The boys scuttled into the bedroom and he followed them. "Keep the door open, so we can keep an eye on you." Michael and Steve started dismembering the old bed



old bed frame. Drew dragged Johnny's limp body into the living room and tied his wrists with zip cords.

The barber moaned as he regained consciousness. Drew slapped his cheeks until he was fully aware and sitting up on his elbows. "Is that the trophy room? Where's the key?" He pointed to the closed double doors.

"That's locked, my friend," Johnny croaked, loud enough for the delivery crew to hear. "No one goes in there."

Drew couldn't help feeling guilty. He knew this was all Johnny's idea, all part of the plan. After a lifetime of giving Bernie Oakes haircuts, of being the hanger-on to celebrity, he wanted his own cut. Drew sympathized, but nevertheless slugged him with another right-cross to the jaw. Johnny slumped to the ground. Suddenly, the delivery boys were shouting, but Jared barked at them to keep

keep working. The apartment fell silent. The boys grew pale but got busy again. In the bedroom, Jared was finding nothing but empty drawers. In the walk-in closet, though, he grabbed an armful of designer handbags and piled them in the hallway. Token shit.

The real score was behind the double doors of the trophy room. Jared lent a shoulder, and the two of them battered at the wooden panels, but they were too thick.

“We gotta get in,” Drew said, his chest heaving. “It’s what we came for.”

Jared went back to the bedroom and swiped the movers’ toolbox. He took out a screwdriver and tried wedging it into the lock. Drew found a hammer and used the nail puller to widen the gap between the doors to give Jared a better opening to work on. After a few minutes, a pile of splinters lay at their feet, but the doors still held. They were both sweating through their masks.

Drew put the drill to the wood. In and out, in and out, each new hole bleeding into the last. Then they were all in. He flung the doors open wide.

It was as though they had entered the Emerald City. One whole wall was lined with signed bats and gloves and row upon row of scuffed, dusty, signed balls, each in its own plastic shell. There were autographed jerseys and muddy socks. Drew opened one of a dozen leather-bound albums and found hundreds of baseball cards.

He’s got complete sets here. How the fuck did he get those?”

“Is that Honus Wagner on the wall?” Jared said. “I only ever heard of that card.”

“Get it,” Drew barked, as he put a screwdriver to the bat rack.

It was every bit a museum, with glass cases and pedestals everywhere. They cracked them open and piled their loot by the door. Then, when the delivery crew put the old dressers in the hall, Drew loaded their drawers with a bundle of bats, binders of cards, and a bunch of gloves.

“Babe Ruth?” Jared said, handling one of the lumps of leather. “Holy shit!”

“That’s what I told you. Oakes got it at auction a few weeks ago. The Babe wore it during the 1919 season, his last with the Red Sox. That’s the season he broke the major league homer record.”

“It was also the year of the ‘Black Sox’ scandal,” Jared said.

“Yeah, but that’s Chicago. Still, Boston got the curse when Ruth left. Go figure.”

They got back to work. The famous ‘Bloody Bernie’ World Series jersey was mounted in its frame, and that fit easily on the cart behind the loaded dresser. “Think we’ll be able to unload it?” Jared said.

“Maybe not for money. But I got a friend, it’ll go good in his basement, and no one’d notice.” He unhooked the nude photo of Dette St. Cyr, along with a color close-up of Oakes

making a catch that must have been ten feet off the ground. The pile was almost too much to fit in the truck.

A strangled voice came from the bedroom. "We're done in here," one mover said. "Can we come out?"

Drew and Jared examined the pilaged trophy room. They'd grabbed about half the stuff, but there was no more space in the two dressers that were going out. Johnny seemed to be swimming back to consciousness, and it was getting late.

"Yeah," said Drew. "Let's go. You're almost out of this."

The old bedroom set, every drawer filled, was stacked onto the carts. Then the four of them headed out, Drew in the lead, Jared in the rear. No one spoke in the elevator, nor when they loaded the truck. The boys moved as though they had weights on their ankles. "The faster you go, the sooner we're out of your hair," Drew urged them. When they finished loading the truck, Drew told them they'd take the rest of the trip riding in the back of the truck. Both of them wore expressions of resignation, but one said, "At least we're not dead."

"Not yet," the other choked.

A minute later, Drew and Jared were back in the cab. A minute after that, the truck was climbing out of the garage, back into daylight. The mid-afternoon Boston traffic moved just slow enough to keep the tensions high, but Drew

cut skillfully through downtown and into the South End. Near the Medical Center, he found a parking lot with abandoned construction equipment and rusted-out moving vans. He pulled into a space far in the back, behind an old MBTA bus with shredded tires and not a piece of glass in the windows. Jared went to the truck's rear and threw up the rolling door. Drew came around and met them.

"What are we doing here?" Steve asked, looking at the dead vehicles. "That's beyond your pay scale," Drew told him. "Get down."

Reluctantly, they clambered off the truck, and Drew and Jared, holding their box cutters again, each marched one into the cab. "Take the wheel," Drew told his, and in the next second, the boy's hands were zip-tied to the wheel. He hung his head in frustration. Before the other could protest, Jared did the same to him, forcing him into a bent position and tying him to the seat adjustment bar.

"Your phones will be in the back," Drew told them. "Shouldn't take you too long to work your way out." "You said we'd be able to go back to our regular schedule when you were done," Michael whined from the driver's seat.

"Yeah, well, sorry," Drew said. "But remember, we have your addresses, and all your contacts from your phones. Tell the cops we had guns on you the whole time, you never saw any identifying marks on

either of us, and you'll both get a nice, fat bonus. I promise it'll make this all worth it."

"Like you promised we'd be freed at the end?" Steve said.

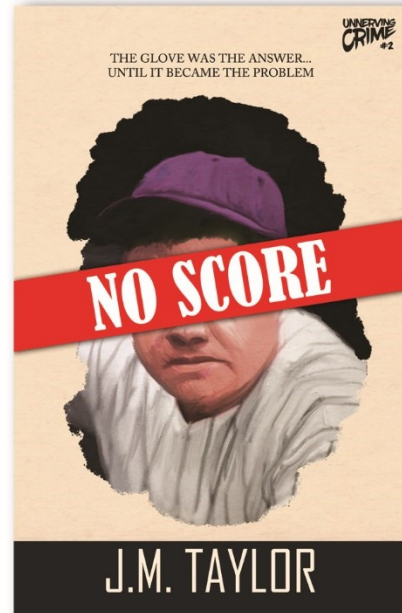
"Don't get smart," Drew snapped. "We've been pretty straight with you so far. You made our job easy, and we'll thank you for it. And look, we rolled down the windows so you won't get overheated like a forgotten dog. See you See you later."

He turned the mirror until it was facing away from the truck. Jared did the same. Not long after, they heard Ramon in the rental truck pulling up.

"Our buddy," Drew said. They listened as the back-up signal of the invisible newcomer sliced through the atmosphere like a razor through cardboard.

Ramon had already slid the first dresser into the rental truck when Drew and Jared joined him. In less than five minutes, they'd transferred all of what they'd stolen. It was the last, the biggest, the easiest job Drew ever pulled. With it, all his troubles were reduced to zero.

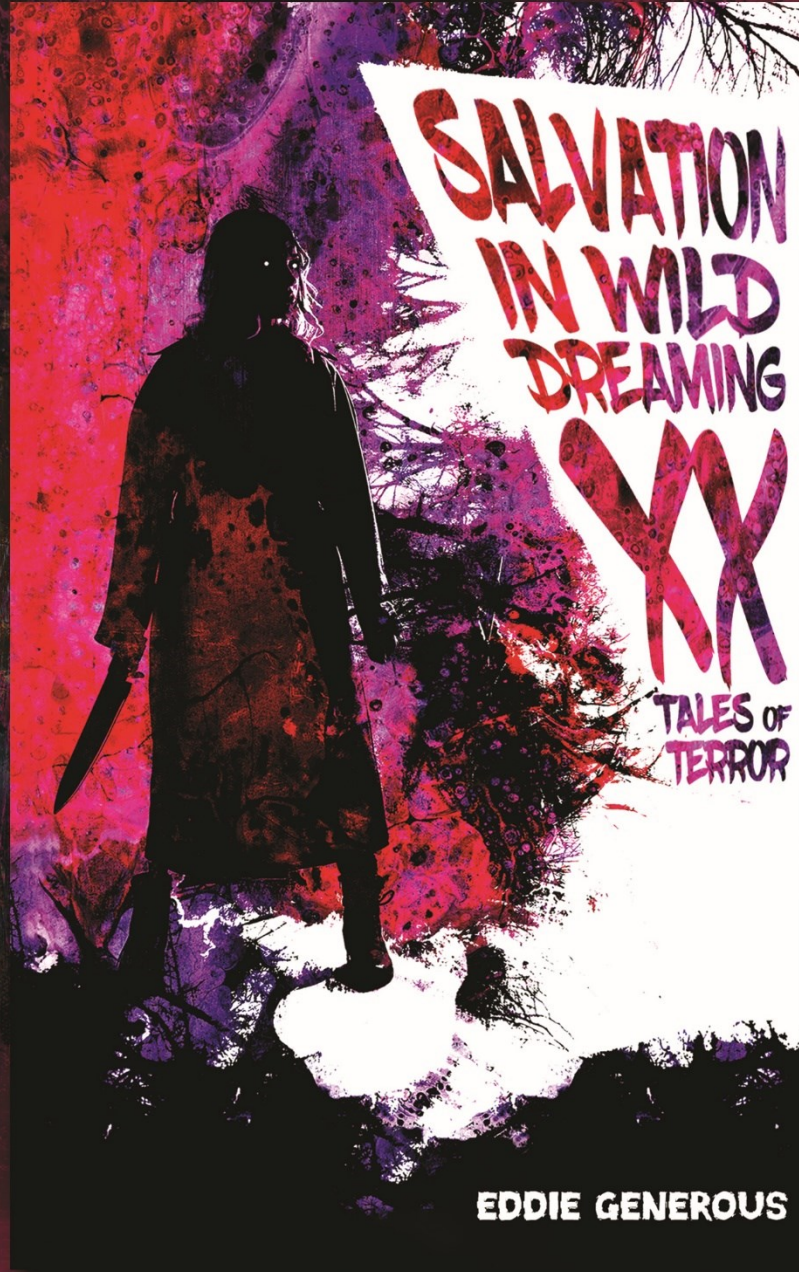
Except, in fact, they had multiplied. Multiplied to far more than he could ever have imagined...



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J.M. Taylor has published two novels and more than two dozen short stories, appearing in such mags as Thuglit, Crime Factory, Crime Syndicate, Wildside Black Cat, and Out of the Gutter. His story, "The Mark of a Good Deal" was the inaugural post in Tough Crime, and he has a story forthcoming in Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine. Taylor's first novel, Night of the Furies, was listed in Spinetingler's Best of 2013. A member of the New England chapter of Mystery Writers of America, he lives in Boston with his wife and son, and rescue dog, readers all. When he's not writing or reading, he teaches under an assumed name.





**SALVATION
IN WILD
DREAMING**

XX

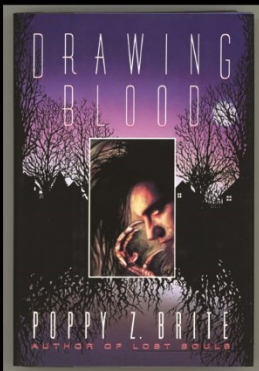
**TALES OF
TERROR**

EDDIE GENEROUS

OCTOBER 2, 2023

QUEER HORROR AT ITS FINEST WITH MARK ALLAN GUNNELLS

Coming of age in the late 80s/early 90s, as both a queer person and a voracious horror fan, I longed to find horror novels with queer representation. I rarely found them, but that didn't stop the search. As the decades have passed, it has been my experience that when it comes to mainstream New York publishing, queer horror is still something of a rarity, but thankfully in the small press it is flourishing and I'm happy to be a part of that. I thought I'd share my top five queer horror novels, in no particular order.



DRAWING BLOOD (1993)

Drawing Blood was Poppy Z. Brite's sophomore novel, following the wonderful Lost Souls. While Lost Souls had queer elements and a definite queer sensibility, it was really with Drawing Blood that Brite put those elements front and center with a steamy queer romance that anchors the book.

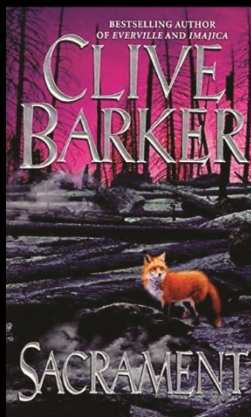
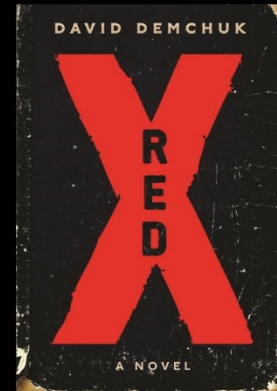
STATIONS OF SHADOW (2020)

J. Daniel Stone's Stations of Shadow is urban horror at its finest and most deliciously bizarre. Exploring the queer counterculture and drag world of New York in a way that is brash and unapologetic and utterly engrossing. To me, this novel is a perfect example of what queer horror should aim to be.



RED X (2021)

David Demchuk's *Red X* has a large cast of diverse queer characters, stalked by an entity that preys on the community. What I love so much about this particular book is that it isn't merely generic horror with queer characters thrown in but one in which the queerness of the characters is essential to the story.

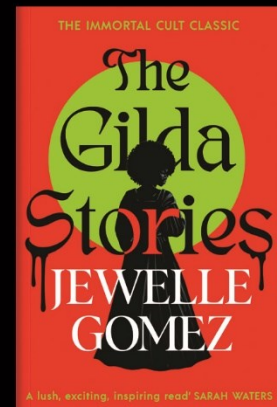


SACRAMENT (1995)

Clive Barker's *Sacramento* is the first mainstream horror novel I ever remember that featured a gay man as the main character, and the themes of extinction were inextricably linked in the narrative with being a gay man at the height of the AIDS epidemic. Fascinating stuff.

THE GILDA STORIES (1991)

Jewelle Gomez's vampire novel spans centuries and employs the sort of romantic themes of Anne Rice's work, but this one explores both race and sexuality in a very frank and upfront sort of way. Originally published in 1991, this is a groundbreaking novel not enough know about.



I could name many more novels because the joy is that there are so many more to choose from these days, but these five are a great place to start. I recommend everyone seek them out and give them a read.

– Mark Allan Gunnels

SURE, THE VIDEO STORE IS DEAD BUT REWIND OR DIE LIVES ON

DECLAN BURNETT

KIDNAP
TORTURE
STRANGLE

EVERY MAN HAS
A SECRET SIDE

#53

★ ZACHARY ASHFORD ★

BIGGER
BADDER
HUNGRIER

SOLE
SURVIVOR
!!

DROP BEARS ON THE LOOSE

#25

KIRBY KELLOGG

TRAMPLED
CROWN

HOMECOMING'S GONNA
BE A BLAST THIS YEAR

#10

EDDIE GENEROUS

TALES
FROM
THE

MEAT
WAGON

YOUR TALE
MIGHT BE NEXT

#15