

NOW I LAY ME DOWN
TO REAP



EDITED BY GLORIA BOBROWICZ

Now I Lay Me Down To Reap

Sirens Call Publications

Edited by Gloria Bobrowicz

Copyright © 2012 Sirens Call Publications
www.sirencallpublications.com

Preview Edition

All rights reserved

Individual stories are the copyright of
their respective authors

Cover art © Sirens Call Publications

All characters and events appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

License Notes

This eBook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This eBook may not be resold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for the recipient. Thank you for respecting the hard work of these authors.

Table of Contents

[Fugue State](#)

Christian A. Larsen

[Gable's Leatherworks](#)

J. Marie Ravenshaw

[Me and the Monster](#)

Ryan C. Anderson

[Sweet Addiction](#)

Aspen deLainey

[Good Taste](#)

Adrian Tchaikovsky

[The Game](#)

Amber Keller

[You Should Have](#)

Lori Michelle

[A False Odor of Sanctity](#)

John H. Dromey

[Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!](#)

Jeffery X. Martin

[Beasts of Burden](#)

Thomas James Brown

[The Fairies in the Wood](#)

Bill Read

[The Eater](#)

Sergio Palumbo

[The Author's Biographies](#)

Fugue State

Christian A. Larsen

The skyscrapers hunched over the wandering man like curious children studying ants. None of them had magnifying glasses, but they looked sinister enough—black, faceless monoliths with no emotional connection to a lone man adrift, just a cold, distant intellectual interest, the way a vivisectionist cuts into a live animal just to see what makes it tick. The funny thing was, the man wanted the same kinds of answers. He just couldn't afford to be as dispassionate with the scalpel, be it literal or allegorical.

He had woken up in an alleyway next to a dumpster on a pile of empty cardboard boxes wearing a gray suit, expensive, by the looks of it, and shoes to match, but no watch or jewelry, though there were pale outlines suggesting that he had been wearing a watch and a wedding band. His pockets were turned inside out. He had no keys, wallet or cash—even enough loose change to buy a newspaper—so he crouched down in front of the newspaper box to read the date above the headline, something about a Senate race.

It was Tuesday, August 5th, and now that he knew it, he didn't know if that information helped him or not. His eyes drifted downward over the text of the top story; something about how one of the candidates was promising tax breaks to gay couples. Was he for that or against it? Was he a Republican? A Democrat? A Libertarian? Constitution? Green? These were the kinds of issues that made people run to their ideological bunkers. He had an inkling that he might have come down hard one way or the other before... well, before he came to in the alley, an alien in his own skin.

His eyes refocused on the glass of the newspaper box, and he saw his own reflection. There was nothing familiar in the face staring back at him, and he was a little distressed to find that he was thinning and graying up top, either prematurely (which he hoped) or right on time for a man in his mid-40s. Either way, he didn't really feel old, at least until he tried to stand up and his knees crackled like a bowl of Rice Krispies. Did he have bad knees? Some injury from his past (assuming he had a past)?

"That's crazy," he said. Of course I have a past.

"Excuse me?"

A woman in a dark uniform (police, paramedic?) was staring at him with her hands on her hips. She had a tired look on her face that fell somewhere between annoyance and concern, the kind of expression single working mothers carried like their own personal cross.

"Sorry, I was thinking out loud," he offered. It was the truth, but it was far from convincing, even to him.

She looked him up and down without hearing him. "You need some help, mister? Are you in trouble?"

Gable's Leatherworks

J. Marie Ravenshaw

A shrill scream rang out across the pasture.

Abigail snapped her head up upon hearing the jarring sound. A brisk evening breeze filtered into the room, sending a chill up her spine. She glanced up at the fluttering curtains, pushed out her chair, and stood. As she walked over to the open window, she rubbed her arms trying to stave off the goose bumps.

With her palms resting on the window jambs, she gazed out over the pasture. There was nothing out there that she could see, but she had an unnerving feeling that she was being watched. She knitted her brow and allowed her eyes to scan the field one last time before closing the window and drawing the curtain. Like every other night, the scream had come from the direction of Mrs. Gable's barn.

Her father, Joseph, blamed the wildcats in the area. However, deep down, Abigail knew those screams were the result of something far more sinister.

She walked back to the desk and plopped down in her chair. As she grabbed her pencil, she yelled out, "Hey Dad! Sounds like the wildcats are at it again!" She rolled her eyes and started to read through the notes that she'd taken in History class.

Her Father's roughened voice echoed into the study from the hallway, getting ever closer, "Yep. I heard it Abby girl. Don't concern yourself 'bout that." Joseph Daniels strode into the room, his brown eyes gleaming in the overhead light. With his hands buried deep in the pockets of his torn denims, he nodded toward the desktop and said, "You've got far more pressing things to worry about."

A contagious smile that crinkled the skin around his eyes spread across his face. Abigail couldn't help but smile back. He wrenched his hands out of his pockets, leaned over, resting his palms on the edge of the desk, and examined the papers in front of her. His eyes met hers. "You worry 'bout getting that 'A' in history and we'll go to town for the ice cream I promised, 'kay?"

Abigail nodded and turned her attention back to the workbook spread out in front of her. As a small smile graced her mouth, she mumbled, "You know I'll get it too."

Joseph walked around the desk, leaned toward her, and gently brushed her flaxen hair away from her face. He kissed her forehead and whispered, "Of course you will, Abby girl." He turned to walk out of the study.

Abigail glanced up from her work. "Dad?"

He stopped and turned around in the doorway, raising an eyebrow in question.

Abigail bit her lower lip, her eyes slowly rolled up to meet his as she asked, "Could we... um... do something *other* than ice cream? I mean, I *am* sixteen now..."

He sighed. "You're right, Abby. You're not a little girl anymore. What'd you want to do?"

She thought for a moment, then flared her eyes in excitement. "Can we go shopping?"

"Alright baby girl, that's what we'll do." He started to turn away.

"Wait, Dad?"

Me and the Monster

Ryan C. Anderson

There was something sinister about Phil Winikoff, and even though his skin was sun-kissed and he smelled of expensive, French cologne, I could see the darkness that festered deep below.

“Dr. Skidmore, your two o’clock.” My receptionist protracted his neck around the door.

“Send him in,” I said.

Phil passed through the threshold of my office like a wounded creature, being mindful of his steps and careful of his surroundings, fearful of some far off thing beyond the boundaries of my spackled walls. He reached for my hand and thanked me for seeing him on such short notice. “It’s really hard to find good people these days,” he said in shallow utter. His fingers wrapped around mine like tentacles, and I could feel the sweat of his palms mash together with mine. His eyes were beady bloodshot balls of sleepless jelly. We stood there, our hands entangled in a strange, sweaty chimera, until finally he released and I was able to skulk back to the safety of my imported, Carpathian Elm desk.

“Please, have a seat.” By the time I said this, he had already done so, his long, gangly legs crossed with one another in a most unnatural way. Dara slammed the door shut, retreating back to his reception desk to continue his feverish search for homosexual pornography.

“You come highly recommended,” Phil said fast, his mouth barely opening to form syllables

He was strikingly handsome, and his apprehension to the light made me uneasy. I squirmed in my plush, leather chair. The suit he wore was clearly Italian. I could tell by the worsted wool fabric and tailored royal blue pinstripes, which led the eyes directly up to a chiseled chin that jutted out like the bow of some mighty ship. A strange period of silence overtook the room, and after what felt like days, I spoke. “Mr. Winikoff, how can I help your mouth look better?”

I saw when he smiled.

What he wore on the outside was no more than a cocoon, a casing to hide his evil from the natural, human world. His mouth agape for my observation, I saw rigid pikes of teeth; rows of jagged points that shot out of raw, bleeding gums, in no conservative or organized direction, only agreeing upon the similarity of sharpness and rot.

I cleared my throat. “So, I take it you want them removed?”

He adjusted his silk tie. “They say you’re the best.”

“Well Mr. Winikoff, that all depends on who you ask. There are plenty of highly qualified professionals in this town. For instance, just a mile down the road there’s the Blueberg and Smitwitz practice. They’ve been featured *twice* in New Jersey Family Magazine. They put you up to this, didn’t they?”

He thought quietly for a moment. “I’d rather not say.”

A dribble of sweat escaped my underarm and voyaged down my ribcage. It just so happened that I was the worst oral surgeon in New Jersey...

Sweet Addiction

Aspen deLainey

Aeryn peered cautiously around the corner of the schoolyard. Although dusk had fallen, that didn't necessarily mean they'd be gone. He just had to ensure guardians weren't nearby.

Standing silently, he considered prancing towards the swings. Two, he counted. Two of the precious things. Just waiting for him!

He shook his mane and tail free of any tangles. He rubbed his hooves on a convenient bush. He licked his lips. He so wanted to look enticing.

A snarl came from directly behind him.

Aeryn didn't even chance a look. Better safe than sorry. He galloped off, down some alleys, hoping he'd evaded pursuit. Damn he was getting hungrier and hungrier. Finally, he stopped in a shadowy alley, panting.

"Can I touch?" A voice from the shadows whispered.

Aeryn sniffed. Yes, it smelled delicious. A human; chaste and celibate. It even seemed female. He stretched out his neck, seductively shaking his long mane, luring it out of its nest.

A musty smell of rags, rotting cardboard, dirt and neglect preceded it as it crept close. Its hand stretched out to touch his gleaming white nose.

Aeryn allowed it to pet his velvet muzzle, waiting till he felt its fingers curl up into his mane. When its head was directly under his mouth, he struck. His dislocated jaws opening wide enough to swallow it whole.

He would have preferred younger, sweeter meat. Unfortunately, in this state of hunger, right now he would take anything he could get his teeth into, literally.

He ate as quickly as he could manage, fearful this might be his last decent meal if *they* caught up with him.

They, the Fey Enforcer International Squad—FEIS for short—had been alerted on his release from the grove paddock. His image had been telepathized to every FEIS department around the world.

Yes, he had served his time. Nevertheless *they* followed him, checked up on his activities. Just another part of his parole.

Aeryn cleaned up. Like a cat, he licked his hooves, rubbing them over his lips. He shook his mane, just in case it'd been splattered, though he usually ate very cleanly. He didn't feel his meal would be missed any time soon. On the other hand he didn't want the FEIS able to home in on him by any stray blood spatters. He checked around on the ground, licking up the odd blood spot.

He wanted to satisfy his hunger here, in this city, before taking off. If he kept moving, they wouldn't catch him again. One city, one meal had been his passport to freedom for the past five years. He longed for his own quiet hunting ground, with no FEIS to hinder him. Fatigue and no place to call his own preyed on him; mind, body and what was left of his soul...

Good Taste

Adrian Tchaikovsky

The instructions said not to eat for 24 hours beforehand, but, seriously? There are articles in the Geneva Convention about that sort of thing. I had a light breakfast; that was all. The appointment was 11.30am and I read somewhere that bacon gets digested faster than most foods anyway. Or maybe I dreamt that.

And if I had a Twix on the tube, well, I have blood sugar issues. A man of certain dimensions needs a bit of an energy boost when he's out and about. I can't think that I was setting back medical science a hundred years or anything, not just a few mouthfuls of chocolate.

I hate travelling by tube. The way people look at you like you're some kind of freak. They judge you. We're the last minority it's safe to hate. Taking up two seats, they think, and they tut and put their self-righteous noses in the air. There was this woman with a kid who was really glowering at me all the way to Great Portland Street. Seriously, if I could have got up, I would, but there wasn't the space. I'd have bounced her out of the window and her little brat too.

It's because of all you judgmental thin types that fat people aren't jolly any more.

It was a long damn way to the Harley Street clinic from the station, too. I'd have flagged a taxi, but last time the sod kept the meter running all the time it took me to get out – *and* didn't offer a hand – and charged me for it. Being short on money was why I had volunteered to take part in this stupid medical experiment in the first place. Just half an hour of my time, they said, and no drugs or operations or anything, and the *money!* I was completely puffed by the time I got to the address, but £500 for a little quackery was hanging in front of me like a carrot. Maybe something more substantial than a carrot. Who the hell's going anywhere with nothing more than a carrot to motivate them?

Five hundred pounds, though. I mean, it's not that I don't have a day job, but when you tend to eat beyond your means, a nice fat cheque is always welcome.

There were seven steps up to the door. I stood there looking at them for some time while I waited for my breath to come back and my heart to slow down. A very prim and proper woman pushed past me with an audible sniff, trotted up them double time and cast a glance back at me like I was soiling the pavement.

In the end I took the wheelchair access. It was a long way plodding up the switchback ramp, but those stairs looked pretty steep and I have big feet, just like the rest of me. They say inside every fat person there's a thin person trying to get out, but take it from me, my inner person was pretty big to start with and very happy with where he was.

There was an awkward moment at the desk, because to be honest I'd lied a bit when I gave them my details over the phone. I may have dropped a few stone when I gave my weight, and hedged a bit over medical conditions, but you have to be competitive in this game. If you start bandying the word 'obese' around, you'd be surprised how many studies that gets you barred from. Thankfully, after that initial double take – or maybe it was a triple take – she just gave me the disclaimer to sign and sat me down with the others...

The Game

Amber Keller

David kept glancing at Stephanie from the corner of his eyes. His nerves were amped up and sweat was running in a thin rivulet down his chest. He reached up and fanned his shirt real quick to cool off, running his palm across his neck, mopping even more sweat away. It was a hot, end of summer day, and the sun was low in the sky. They were going to his parents' lake house for the weekend. It was a trip they had planned for months.

Stephanie sang the song on the radio like an angel. Her ice blue eyes closed, her head tilted back, the sun glowing off of her cheeks and shoulders, she had her knees tucked up into her chest. Her golden hair spilled down her shoulders in soft waves.

David reached into his pocket and rubbed the small, velvet box. This was the moment he had been anticipating for weeks. He would ask her when they got to the lake.

The winding road was starting to become covered lightly by leaves. With fall almost here, the late afternoon sun warmed the breeze that swirled through the trees, bringing the smells of summer's last moments. A golden glow cast across the hood of his car as he crested a small hill, reflecting into his vision and temporarily blinding him.

David's eyes filled with tears and he rubbed at them vigorously to try and clear his vision. White spots danced before his eyes, and he let off the gas, not able to see the road.

Stephanie's piercing scream suddenly filled the car.

"DAVID! LOOK OUT!"

He felt her hand reach out and clamp tight onto his upper arm.

Slamming on the brakes, he still couldn't see much more than the dancing dots.

When the car hit the deer, the impact from the force swung the vehicle around in circles. The world flew by in streaks and blurs. Stephanie's screams blended with the screeching tires.

The car left the road and plummeted down the steep embankment on the right. Small trees and brush each yanked and tugged at the speeding missile. Something large clipped the side, and the car began to roll.

David was tossed and turned throughout the inside. His face smashed against the headliner one minute, and then he felt the cool, sharp glass of the splintered windshield. The noise of grinding metal was deafening. When the car came to a rest, at first David couldn't see anything. He reached out blindly through the haze of his confusion. After a minute he could tell he was lying partially on the dashboard and ceiling. The strong smell of gasoline stung his nose. Warmth hit his senses like a sledgehammer, and he knew then that the car was on fire. He had to find Stephanie fast and get them out.

Fanning the beginnings of wispy smoke away, he saw her.

Stephanie was crumpled down under the dash where her legs should have been. She was covered in dark red blood. Her hair no longer blonde, was a deep crimson, matted with gore and glass.

"Stephanie! No, Stephanie! Answer me!"

You Should Have

Lori Michelle

Henry Jones liked order. His clothes had to hang in his closet a certain way. His coffee had to be made just right. Anything that disrupted his schedule was immediately loathed. This OCD-esque perfection drove everyone crazy and it wasn't surprising that Henry lived alone. So when he found out that his secretary had to take leave for personal reasons, he wandered through the bank in a haze.

That's when *she* walked into his life.

He saw her across the room and tried not to stare. She had an air about her that he hadn't seen in a woman in a long time. She looked over at him and smiled; he was taken aback by how confident she was. He smiled back and walked over to her.

"Can I help you miss..."

"Williams, Clarissa Williams. I am looking for Henry Jones, I have an appointment with him at 12:00."

"Well, you're in luck Ms. Williams, you've found him."

They shook hands; the sexuality exuding from her pores impressing him. It was as if she knew she was in complete control of the situation. "So nice to meet you, Mr. Jones."

"Please, call me Henry."

He led her into his office and sat her down in one of his chairs, never once letting go of her hand. He wasn't sure where this act of chivalry came from since he had never done this for anyone else that walked through the doors. "So what can I do for you, Ms. Williams?"

She waved her hand dismissively. "Clarissa. And I understand that you are looking for a temporary replacement for your secretary."

Henry was shocked. His secretary just told him yesterday that she needed to take a sudden leave of absence for a couple of months. "How did you know...?"

"That's not important. I just know you need someone and I can use the temporary work."

"Well," Henry said, clearing his throat, "tell me a little about yourself, Ms.... Clarissa."

"I am familiar with the inner workings of a bank office since I worked at Dunder-Holtzcraft as Mr. Dunder's secretary for several years. I left the position just a few years back to pursue my writing career. But recently I found myself needing more public interaction and some ideas for my next book, so when I heard about this opportunity, I decided to call you up."

She shifted in her chair to expose her cleavage and Henry tried not to stare. She was poised, confident, sensual, and he was instantly drawn to her. "You're a writer, Ms. Williams?"

"Yes, I use a pseudonym: Callie LaRue. Perhaps you've heard of me?"

Henry swallowed; Callie LaRue was the most famous mystery writer of the last decade. He was ashamed to admit that he had never read anything by her; but here she was, sitting in front of him in all her glory. She slowly uncrossed and re-crossed her legs, reminding him of the slut in that movie, *Basic Instinct*. He felt himself go flush.

"Yes, Ms. LaRue, I have heard of you. Why would you be interested in a temp job at a small bank like ours?"

A False Odor of Sanctity

John H. Dromey

Financial arrangements had been made in advance, so there was no need for conversation. By the flickering light of a lantern, the two men worked in a grim silence, broken only by the susurrus of twin shovels slicing through the packed earth and an occasional grunt of exertion as the loosened clods were tossed high in the air to land outside the pit.

Farther up in the sky, a gibbous moon played hide and seek with slow-moving clouds. Although more than half of the lunar orb he called home was open intermittently to earthly view on this particular evening, the Man in the Moon could bear witness with only one eye. No one else was watching.

When a new sound emerged from the surrounding shadowy darkness—a faint metallic clinking of chains—the diggers were too absorbed in their work to notice.

As the depth of the excavation approached four and a half feet, one of the men paused long enough to cover his mouth and nose with a heavy scarf, and then he resumed digging.

Soon afterwards one of the shovels turned up a shard of splintered wood.

Both men stopped digging. A muffled request of “Hand me the lantern” followed.

Holding the lantern with one hand, the chief digger knelt down and used his other hand to push away some dirt.

“Empty,” the man said, unwinding the scarf from around his neck and breathing deeply. “The Resurrectionists were here before us.”

“Who?” the other man asked in a quiet voice.

“Grave robbers.”

“Why would they want this body? Is there a university nearby or a teaching hospital?”

“There’s neither.”

“What about a doctor?”

“I only know of one, Dr. Ferguson, and he’s already established himself in a good practice.”

The two men climbed out of the grave. Unable to conceal his frustration, one of them angrily jabbed the cutting edge of his shovel with all his might into the mound of loose dirt, then bent downward to get a firm two-handed grip on the smooth, sweat-stained wooden handle. He straightened up again, swinging his arms backwards a short distance, as he prepared to hurl a heaping shovel full of soil back into the gaping hole in the earth.

“Leave it,” the other man said. “There’ll be another candidate for this grave soon enough. The town is full of paupers.”

“My son was not a pauper.”

“So you told me earlier, Mr. Brewster. Why then was your lad buried in Potter’s field?”

“I don’t know. When I learned Howard had died of consumption, I sent his landlady sufficient money to cover the cost of his burial and the purchase of a modest marker.”

“Not Mrs. Kingsley by any chance?”

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!

Jeffery X Martin

Listen. This is important.

Your mother had pale blue eyes that sparkled like ice in a crystal decanter. She was beautiful and she was strong. She loved you.

Listen. Remember. This is important.

One time, when you were little, we were in the car. All of us. You, me and your mommy. Your mommy was messing around with the radio in the car, trying to find some music to listen to. She landed on this one station, far right on the dial, and there was an old preacher, rattling on about the End of Days. I made a face. Your mother giggled a little and reached down to change the station.

You were in back, in your car seat, and you said, "Who's that man talking?"

Your mommy said, "Just some guy telling stories."

You laughed and clapped your hands. "He's funny! He talks funny," you said. "He says funny things!"

And the guy did have that cadence going on, that deep Southern rhythm, adding extra syllables onto his words. "Jesus-ah! He is-ah coming back-ah! He is coming-ah! To retrieve his people-ah! To take his people-ah! Into the sky-ah! Up to his holy kingdom-ah! The holy kingdom of heaven-ah!"

You laughed like it was the funniest thing you had ever heard. We ended up listening to that shit on the radio all the way home from the grocery store.

All the way home.

All the way home.

Listen.

It was Tuesday. We were asleep, fast asleep. It was the middle of the night.

And the sky exploded and began to scream at us.

The moon went away. Constellations disappeared and the sky looked like wrapping paper that a child had ripped apart at a birthday celebration. Shreds of black, where you could still see the stars, seemed to dangle in front of an overwhelming brightness. The night had reversed itself.

And then the Angels came...

Beasts of Burden

Thomas James Brown

'Avarice has ruined more souls than extravagance.'

Charles Caleb Colton

I

"Four months ago we could barely afford to eat and now this... By the Seven Courts of the Seven Sins, the land itself would not satisfy you, Frederick!"

For three generations, Hanker Farm had endured in the Dorsetshire region. When just a boy, Coll had watched studiously from the fields as his father managed the land. The lessons in those days were many, and taught the merits of diligence, hard work and glistening sweat, in favour of parchment or prayers.

"As you reap, so shall you sow," his father used to say, "sow bad seeds and happen you'll have a bad harvest." Even in those early days, he had realized his father was imparting more than agricultural wisdom; he was a moral man with just beliefs, which did not indulge slovenliness or ill manners. Coll had been fashioned from these morals, he liked to think; the very best of his father's produce. Certainly, he did his best to honour his father and the farm he had dutifully inherited, on his passing. Perhaps this was why he'd felt Frederick's liberties with the oxen so keenly. Disappointment cut him like the north wind against his face. Frederick displayed none of the same respect he had nurtured in his other six sons. He often caught himself wondering where he had gone so wrong with Frederick. He had sown good seeds; why had this one grown askew?

The focus of Coll's anger that afternoon could not have been more apparent: two burly oxen rested their heads on the fence outside Hanker Farm. It was a wonder the rickety slats of wood withstood their weight; the creatures were monstrous, with vast, curling horns and shoulders as broad as the family's cart. Slabs of muscle shifted beneath their flesh, each larger than any of the eight men standing around them, and their breath blew hot and wet on the air.

At the sound of his name, Frederick grinned. "Don't you see, Father? With these beasts we can plough twice as fast and twice as far! Hanker will be spoken of as far off as the White Cliffs!"

"With these beasts..." The old man spluttered into his beard from the other side of the assembly. "Look around you, Frederick. The fields are already tilled. We don't need more oxen, especially not these overpriced beasts!"

"Then we shall buy more land! Hanker Farm will make a name for itself, Father, and we'll reap the just rewards!" Beside Frederick, some of Coll's other sons began to nod. Barthold scuffed at the upturned soil with his boots, Thomas bit nervously at his lip and from next to Frederick, Richard caught his father's gaze. He glanced quickly away, studying the massing clouds as though they might burst any minute and with a terrible clap of thunder drown Hanker Farm forever...

The Fairies in the Wood

Bill Read

Even from a distance, Edward Carter had no problem spotting her. Every other arriving passenger was garbed in suits, anoraks or tee-shirts - but not his daughter. Even though he hadn't seen her for six months, there was no mistaking the figure in the dress standing next to an out of date poster advertising a talk at the village library on local superstitions. She was even wearing a straw hat – she looked like a character out of a Pollyanna book.

“Sorry I wasn't here to meet you off the train,” he apologised giving her a hug. “I took the wrong turning on the way to the station – I don't know the roads around here yet.”

“That's all right dad,” replied Maribel pecking him on the cheek. “The train got in at 10.30 and I've hardly been waiting at all. A few seconds is hardly a matter of life and death.”

If only her mother had been as considerate as she was, mused Edward. Perhaps then things would have turned out differently.

“Is that all your luggage?” he asked.

“Oh yes,” replied Maribel. “I didn't bother bringing much – just a couple of summer dresses and some overnight stuff.”

Bizarre, thought Edward. Most girls of her age would have brought black tee-shirts and ripped jeans– but then most teenage girls wouldn't want to have anything to do with their fathers – particularly divorced ones.

They walked to the car.

“Is it far away?” asked Maribel. “I'm so looking forward to seeing it!”

“Only about five minutes,” said Edward. “I think you can walk through the woods to get there but I thought I'd better take the car.”

Two puritanical-looking ladies emerging from a shop across the road shot an invisible wave of disapproval as he opened the car door for her. Edward felt like going over to them to explain that he was sorry to spoil their day but his youthful companion was not only young enough to be his daughter but really was. Admittedly they didn't look alike. Maribel had got her looks from her mother and her temperament from Enid Blyton.

Which reminded him.

“How's Lois?” asked Edward, not because he wanted to know but he felt he ought to.

“Lois?” said Maribel absently. “Oh you mean mum. Sorry - I don't call her by her first name like I do with Rob.”

Rob! So that was Lois' latest. There was no chance of Maribel calling them anything else until his ex-wife got round to marrying one of them.

“Oh mum's all right,” laughed Maribel. “She's still doing her painting and running the art class.”

Oh yes, Edward remembered the art class. It had been because of the art class that the trouble had first begun after Lois starting staying late to help some of the male students with extra-curricular activities...

The Eater...

Sergio Palumbo

Only a few people really know the true story of Jenó De Carignano. In fact, he was a peculiar nobleman living in an ancient and windy European seaport. He was born in a northern Italian town in 1800, long ago, but nowadays he doesn't think much about that city. It has been a very long time since the man was back there and, with the passing of the years, he has almost forgotten its name.

But, the name of the place wasn't important anyway.

Dark haired, with a bristly, curly beard, and two wild eyes on a face glowing with health, Jenó was 32 years old when he got married for the first time. The birth of his son, Flavio, soon followed. The wedding was expensive and ostentatious, but as he wasn't from one of the most famous noble families in town, it was nothing like the wonderful marriages of the richest families in that community. Anyway, the man was very relieved about that, as he was mainly an introvert, and very mean in general. He had a lot of reasons to behave that way: Jenó was an alchemist and had discovered something very important while busy with his other studies, something he didn't want to share with anyone else.

Alchemical Science originally referred to a medieval quest for an elixir by which one could discover the truth about reality, its structure, laws and functions, making the researcher himself, for example, capable of turning base metals to gold. But Jenó's dark studies had gone even farther than that.

Evidently, the alchemist had soon started considering, if the perfect metal is gold, the perfect life must be endless... Being both a philosophy and an ancient practice focused on the attempt to accomplish this transmutation, investigating the preparation of the 'elixir of longevity', and searching for the divinization of matter and man, there were many heinous actions committed worldwide on the pretext of such an occult science. But some of the worst and bloodiest ones in history were undoubtedly performed by Jenó De Carignano himself.

The man was extremely interested in the human body, and apparently also in secret experiments performed on it. Claiming that his treatments were a sort of modern medicine, many servants of his household underwent heinous tests, along with their younger sons, some of which made them seriously ill. He didn't care much about the inferiors or the common servants - *his most trustworthy aides aside, of course* - because he was aware that the history of science could be described as the history of attempts. *Some failures undoubtedly couldn't be helped.* Moreover, he believed that all matter, including the human body, was nothing other than a mere vapor, which needed to be extracted from the elementary earth by the superior stars. Or as an alternative, transmuted by a knowing academician like himself. He had to admit that the passage from the imperfect to the more perfect, from the lower order into the higher, seemed difficult.

He told his assistants to dispose of packages in the night, somewhere in the countryside. These were the corpses of the many who had died during the bloody experiments gone awry inside his labs. Legend had it he possessed some devilish capabilities...

The Author's Biographies

Ryan C. Anderson

Ryan C. Anderson is an author based out of the sprawling suburban abyss known as Northern Virginia. He explores the darker side of fiction, whether it be the comically perverse, or the fantastically absurd; all of which are conceived in dungeons and whiskey workshops. He enjoys cats, self-loathing, and has an affinity for the weird.

Thomas James Brown

Thomas James Brown, Staff Writer for Dark River Press and postgraduate student at the University of Southampton, where he is studying for an MA in Creative Writing. Staples of his fiction include insects, decay and Dionysian Man. Huge fan of Nietzsche's 'The Birth of Tragedy', Blackwood's 'The Wendigo' and the stories of M. R. James.

Contact Thomas: TJBrown@darkriverpress.com

Check out his website: www.tbrownonline.com

Follow his Twitter: [@TJBrown89](https://twitter.com/TJBrown89)

Aspen deLainey

Aspen wrote her first story at three; in crayon on a picture book, for her little brother who wanted her to be able to tell him that story again. She received her first critical review minutes later in the form of a spanking. Not deterred, Aspen wrote on, using acceptable pages. All grown up now, her own family urged her to send her stories out and let the whole wide world enjoy them, too. She reluctantly agreed, let a few escape her clutches and saw her first story published in 2010. Aspen will never look back! You can find out more information on Aspen and her writing at www.aspendelainey.com.

John H. Dromey

John H. Dromey was born in northeast Missouri. He's had a byline (for brief, humorous items) in over one-hundred different newspapers and magazines. In addition to having a mini-mystery published in *Woman's World*, his fiction has appeared online at Liquid Imagination, The Red Asylum, Thrillers, Killers 'n' Chillers, and elsewhere, as well as in a number of print anthologies.

Amber Keller

Amber Keller is a writer who delves into dark, speculative fiction, particularly horror and suspense/thrillers. She has been fortunate enough to be included in various anthologies, and

features short stories on her blog. A member of the Horror Writers Association, she also contributes to many websites and eMagazines, including providing horror and science fiction movie reviews. When not at her laptop, she can be found looking for things that go bump in the night.

Links to Online Presence:

My blog: <http://adiaryofawriter.blogspot.com>

Twitter: @akeller9

Christian Larsen

Christian grew up in Park Ridge, Illinois and graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He has worked as an English teacher, radio personality, newspaper reporter, and a printer's devil, and has been published by What Fears Become (Imajin Books), and A Feast of Frights (The Horror Zine Books) and The Ghost IS the Machine (Post Mortem Press). Mr. Larsen received his bachelor of science in broadcast journalism from the University of Illinois and studied secondary English education at National-Louis University. He lives with his wife and two sons in the fictional town of Northport, Illinois. Follow him on Twitter @exlibrislarsen or visit www.exlibrislarsen.com.

Jeffery X Martin

Jeffery X Martin lives in Knoxville, TN with his wife, Hannah, and their two children. He writes about movies, music and other geeky things on his website, www.bettergeekthannever.com. He also writes film reviews for www.theGASPFactor.com. Martin has been a writer all of his life, according to his mother, and she should know. If he had a lizard, he would name it Gilgamesh.

Lori Michelle

Lori Michelle is originally from Los Angeles, CA where she was born and raised to be a classical ballerina. Having injured herself before she could start her dance career, she turned her creative talents elsewhere. Now living in San Antonio TX, she is the single mother of two children. By day, she is a bookkeeper/IT tech for a real estate company, and by night she is the managing editor of Dark Moon Digest Horror Quarterly and Dark Eclipse Monthly E-magazine. She has had stories published in several anthologies, including Slices of Flesh. Most recently, her novel has been picked up for publication by Rainstorm Press. You can find Lori at www.LoriMichelleAuthor.com

Connect with Lori:

Blog: www.lorimichelleauthor.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/authorlorimichelle

Twitter: @authorLMichelle

Other: www.darkmoonbooks.com

Sergio Palumbo

Sergio is an Italian public servant who graduated from Law School and works in the public real estate branch. He published a Fantasy role-playing illustrated Manual, *WarBlades*, of more than 400 pages. Some of his works and short stories have been published in a number of different publications including *American Aphelion Webzine*, *Weird Year Webzine*, *YesterYear Fiction*, *AnotheRealm Magazine*, *Alien Skin Magazine*, *Orion's Child Science Fiction and Fantasy Magazine*, *Farther Stars Than These*, *Digital Dragon Magazine*, *Kalkion Science Fiction and Fantasy Web Magazine*, *Quantum Muse*, *Surprising Stories*, *Australian Antipodean SF*, *British Schlock! Webzine*, *Australian SQ Mag*, and will appear in print inside two anthologies from *Chamberton Publishing* as well as an anthology from *Shlock! Magazine*.

Sergio's Sci-Fi/fantasy/Horror short- stories in Italian have been published in *Alpha Aleph*, *Algenib*, *Oltre il Futuro*, *SogniHorror*, *La Zona Morta*, *edizioni Lo Scudo*, along with others.

J. Marie Ravenshaw

J. Marie Ravenshaw is a mother of two hailing from the upper mid-west of the United States. She enjoys spending time with her family, at her job, and trolling the internet for riding crops. Sometimes, she writes.

You can find her at:

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

Twitter: @JMarieRavenshaw

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/JMarieRavenshaw>

Bill Read

A professional trade journalist, Bill Read has also written a large number of ghost stories which have been published in *Ghosts & Scholars*, *All Hallows*, *Supernatural Tales* and *The Silent Companion* as well as three humorous ghost story collections published by *Haunted Library* and *Sarob Press*. Bill is a member of *The Ghostly Company* group of ghost story writers and was a speaker at the first *Ghost Story Society* convention. He is also a member of *The Deadliners* story writing circle which includes among its members, fantasy writers *Adrian Tchaikovsky* and *Janine Ashbless*. Many of his *Deadliners'* stories have appeared in print - although *Oh Spider!* - a musical adaptation of *MR James' The Ash Tree* has strangely yet to find a *West End* backer. Bill will be singing in *York Opera's* production of *Iolanthe* in the autumn.

Adrian Tchaikovsky

Adrian Tchaikovsky was born in Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire, before heading off to Reading to study psychology and zoology. For reasons unclear even to himself he subsequently ended up in law and has worked as a legal executive in both Reading and Leeds, where he now lives. Married, he is a keen live role-player and occasional amateur actor, has trained in stage-fighting, and keeps no exotic or dangerous pets of any kind, possibly excepting his son. The self-styled foremost UK writer of insect-themed fantasy fiction, his series, *Shadows of the Apt* begins with *Empire in Black and Gold* and book 8, *The Air War* is out August 2012. Catch up with him at www.shadowsoftheapt.com for further information about both himself and the insect-kindens, together with bonus material including short stories and artwork.