

Mental Ward

STORIES FROM THE ASYLUM



Sirens Call Publications

Mental Ward:

Stories from the Asylum

Edited by Gloria Bobrowicz

Sirens Call Publications

**Mental Ward:
Stories from the Asylum**

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A Crown for a Red Queen

Jennifer Loring

"Whatever ails you, Katherine, we shall find it and cure it."

The alienist's attendants slipped a jacket over Kate's head and her arms into the absurdly long sleeves. They folded her arms over her chest, then fastened the five straps tightly behind her, binding her arms into immobility. She did not resist. She hadn't the energy; not to eat or drink, dress or bathe herself, nor even to read her favorite books.

The ride out of the city and to the isolated island, linked only by a causeway that flooded with each tide, lasted at least two hours. Though the alienist and two attendants accompanied her as if she were a violent madwoman and not herself the victim of an unspeakable crime, Kate did not wish to be alone with her thoughts. She had trained herself to stay awake, and had not slept since that night a week ago.

But it wasn't enough. If her mind began to wander, she saw her sister in her blood-drenched dressing gown, her accusing eyes gleaming with the madness into which she had slipped before her death. Her hair had been plaited around her head, not yet taken down for bed. Her golden locks turned crimson, a crown for a red queen.

Kate twitched a little in the dingy white contraption that bound her. Her rear end ached from the hard, cold seat.

"Almost there, Katherine," the alienist reassured her in his kindly voice. But she knew better. Men were anything but kind.

Bloodworth Asylum looked every bit the part it was intended to play. This is why you pretend your mad relatives no longer exist, whispered the barred windows. The enormous iron gate shrieked like the damned when it opened, and barbed wire looped along the thick stone walls. And yet the perfect irony of the asylum's name was the only thing in a week that had brought a semblance of a smile to Kate's lips. *We shall find out*, she thought, *what my blood is worth indeed*.

Kate's arms had gone to sleep. Once the men escorted her into the mouth of madness and left her alone with the alienist, he removed her restraints and her arms flopped listlessly at her sides. She studied her new surroundings as he filled out an intake form. The ceilings and windows were very high, like a cathedral, the plastered white walls bare of any decoration that might put troubled minds at ease. Because, of course, those same decorations might set off other troubled minds.

"It is likely melancholia," said the alienist. "We will need to start treatment first thing in the morning." He pulled a gold pocket watch from his trousers. "Follow me, Miss Mayberry. I will show you to your bed."

As if she were in a fine hotel and not incarcerated in this dark, stale prison where the screaming never stopped, and in fact after a time became as normal as birdsong, or the train whistles blasting from the mainland across the otherwise silent channel. Pain was imprinted into the very atmosphere of the building. Were it empty Kate believed she could still hear the phantom screams...

Whispers

Alex Chase

"Please, tell me it won't hurt, doctor," Douglass looked at Doctor Harris with tear-filled eyes. Douglass was sitting in a plastic chair in a viewing room of the Eastburn Psychiatric Rehabilitation Facility. Doctor Harris was sitting across from him, separated by little more than empty air and a few feet of space.

The facility itself was fairly isolated. Set a few miles out from the nearest town, the location was far enough away that any escaped patient could easily be caught before reaching civilization. At the very least, those towns would be notified in time. A series of metal security gates, along with thick concrete walls, limited movement within and blocked cell phone communication entirely.

Doctor Harris was a plump man who was old enough for people to probe him about retirement plans, but not so old that they'd express surprise upon finding out that he was still employed. The pepper in his salt-and-pepper beard was the only thing protecting him from 'Santa Claus' jokes.

The doctor fought to appear objective; it wouldn't do any good to become emotional. It would be unprofessional and could result in the patient developing an unhealthy attachment to him. He forced himself to focus on the bland walls, the shining linoleum floors and the grate-covered windows as he launched into the same speech he'd given so many others in the past.

"Douglass, it won't hurt at all. You see, we give you a powerful anesthetic before the procedure. That way, you'll be unconscious. You'll lie there, sleeping peacefully while we use a controlled electrical..."

"I know what you'll do; I want to know that it won't hurt!" Douglass snapped. He doubled over, groaning and clutching at his head. "They're so loud," he whispered. "So loud, so angry. Voices like knives, like darkness, cutting at my soul."

Doctor Harris grimaced. This particular patient was afflicted with one of the most severe cases he had worked with. He was rarely violent, but there were four orderlies- two at each end of the room- just in case. The few times he'd physically reacted to something, it had proven nearly impossible to restrain him.

Douglass was a poor soul who was lost in a psychological void; he was too ill to live a normal life, but not ill enough to be blissfully mad. He'd heard about the Eastburn facility on the radio and wandered from town to town until he'd arrived at their doors, covered in rags, dirt and blood.

He was too detached from reality to give them a family history, though later discussions led Doctor Harris to believe his family was deceased. He didn't remember his own name ("Douglass" was a pseudonym) so they could not search for a social security number. His finger prints didn't turn up any records and his face was not matched to any existing driver's license. He could've been a ghost for all anyone knew about him. They'd taken him in out of pity, diverting finances from other departments to cover the cost of his stay.

Since being committed, he'd hesitantly admitted to being coerced into criminal activities by the 'black voice' and that the 'twisted one' convinced him that he wasn't wrong in doing so. During moments of clarity, he realized that what he'd done was unacceptable and attempted to resist the influence of the voices in his head...

The Doctor's Session

Russell Linton

You followed her home, unable to contain the excitement. As she entered her house, you pretended not to notice and sidled along the street whistling a made up tune that sounded fantastic. Professional even, like you were a composer or artist. And you were. The thoughts made you giddy and high in that moment, the one before what would come next. It was always that way. You kept walking and smiled bright and big at the wonderful surprises the future held.

You saw her again, the very next day, as she left the laundromat with a green mesh bag slung over her narrow shoulders. She was there every Tuesday, while you drank your coffee at the shop across the street, watching her pass by through the steam in your cup.

Sometimes, she would look. Her dark eyes darting with urgent hops or scrunched in thought about the things on the edge of her senses. That told you she knew. The secret had floated to her on the insubstantial drift of heat you peered through. A secret whispered only to the chosen. You shivered, with delight.

That August day in the rain - her hair clung to her soft, round cheeks. Her skin was prepared and made pale and cool by a gray world. You thought for sure that was *the* time. The moment where she would become. She would transcend. She would fulfill the fevered whispers.

You pushed open the gate, left unlatched and ajar, the excitement of invitation rushing through your veins. Red and bright was the door, so bright! It glowed in the cloud scattered haze. It spoke to you of the beautiful future trapped within. It wanted to be released. She wanted to help you.

But as you closed your hand tightly on the brass handle, the surface still warm from the clutch of her delicate fingers, the latch would not give. You were uninvited.

No, no, not today, impatient little boy. Gathering your pieces, your scattered remnants, you stepped away from the door. Your blood returned from places unclean. Patience and time were all you needed. You just didn't know how much that was going to be.

CONFIDENTIAL

PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Name: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Age: 25 years, 9 months

Tests Given:

Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

Brown ADD Scales

Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale- Third Edition (WAIS-III)

Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory MMPI

Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory (SASSI)

Hierarchy

Joseph A. Pinto

I have learned a great deal in my time trapped here. If only the others could say the same...

If only these walls could speak.

But Gloria does. Incessantly. And has not stopped since first admitted to this ward. *Ward*. I cannot help but snicker at my Freudian slip. The word, cold and unforgiving in its own right, nonetheless suggests the tiniest sliver of hope when spoken in my mind. But cold and unforgiving would be a welcome reprieve for the hell these husks of wasting flesh find themselves trapped within; nothing more than common livestock to be herded, slowly quartered. I will recognize it for what it truly is, then—an *asylum*, alive of its own accord, its sickened heart bloated with the poison coursing through this decrepit place.

Since first wheeled on the gurney through these doors, Gloria has not shut up.

Chattering to invisible entities —friends, family, perhaps? Always, no one is there; of this, I am quite sure. No soul, living or dead, aspires to linger within this rotted canyon of the lost. Gloria does not truly speak, however; she mouths unintelligible, disconnected exhalations that one would assume are sentences. In truth, they are nothing more than neurotic blatherings. I am sure Gloria did not ask for this. No sane person would. Still, she finds herself here, like so many of the others, the corners of her lips moist with drool, soiled rag of what passes as a nightgown hanging about her emaciated body. Aside from the haunts in her mind, she remains alone. Still, I possess no pity for her.

Not for any of them.

Today, Gloria sits before a crooked wooden desk, a tepid bowl of tomato soup atop its warped surface. She shoves a rusted spoon and a single piece of moldy white bread to the side. Into the coagulating surface of the soup she dips her hand, and then proceeds to greedily suck upon her slickened fingers. The sound simply unbearable, is still a welcome reprieve from her babbling. She slurps each finger down to the knuckle until the bowl is half consumed. Face and gown now a pink slathered mess, she slumps forward.

Then she talks to the walls.

She rambles, a mad incantation of mangled syllables, every so often chortling over her stream of nonsense. Every so often she nods, some sense of approval discovered within the conversation polluting her brain. Today, however, something is different. I have listened to her ravings with as much patience as one could expect, tirelessly enduring as the sun rises and falls beyond the bars of her grime-stained window. Now her endless torrent of gibberish ceases. Now something coherent comes forth from her lips. "*I... hear...*"

Anxiously I await more, but her focus shifts from the shadows of nether that only her cloudy eyes seem to pinpoint to the orderly that shuffles through the doorway.

A puzzled look upon his greasy face slowly fades as he scans her room for the sound. He has little to check over—sparse, generic furniture squats upon the squalid floors. Characterless, colorless. Lifeless, like so much here. He blows a disgusted sigh from his pudgy cheeks. "You're a mess."

Gloria reaches for her white bread. Nibbles disinterestedly on a broken corner of crust...

Count Nefario

Tom Howard

"I prefer being called Count Nefario," said the strange little man with bright yellow hair. Dr. Imogene Stone smiled, glancing around at the other members of the therapy group, aware everyone was watching her. "We've discussed this before, Mr. Doe. Think how disruptive it would be if we all hid behind nicknames."

"It's not a nickname," he said. "It's the title I took when I became a super-villain to strike terror into the hearts of my enemies." His voice grew louder and his pale face redder.

"Yes, a super-villain. Please control yourself, Mr. Doe. You don't want to spend the session in a straitjacket again, do you?"

He slunk down in his chair and didn't answer.

"Now where were we yesterday? Angela was telling us about her purple teddy bear and Mr. Doe was telling us about the world he was from. Again." She pointedly opened her notebook, poised her pen, and stared at the strange man expectantly.

He sighed. "It's not another world," he said. "It's this world, only different."

"Yes, so you've said. On your world, you're from the United States of the Americas and not the United States of America?"

"My country is called the United States of North America and includes what you call Mexico and Canada."

She looked at her notes, searching his descriptions from the previous sessions for discrepancies. As always, his delusion was pervasive and consistent. "And your parents were from a continent called West America?"

"Yes," he replied. "That's where I was before I was dumped here."

"I was abducted by aliens the last time I was in West America," said Mrs. Lentz, not looking up from her pretend knitting. Although they'd taken away her potentially harmful needles, she still felt the need to create imaginary and unfinished scarves, hats, and sweaters. "They probed me real good."

"Thank you, Clara," said Dr. Stone in her commanding warden voice. "Let's let Mr. Doe speak now."

The little man glanced at the old woman. "Why don't you help her?" he asked. "Isn't that your job?"

"I thought I was a cave shaman, Mr. Doe, drilling holes in patients' heads to release evil spirits?" She glanced down at her earlier notes. "Or was I a nefarious member of an organization called the Crime Lords?"

When he didn't answer, she tried a new approach. "What would a doctor do for her on your world, I mean, your dimension?"

"Not just her," he said, "all these people – except Angela."

She looked at a blushing young woman sitting in the circle of plastic chairs. A man was leaning against her. "Mr. O'Hara, do you think it's a good idea to be sitting beside Miss Atkinson? You know how...excitable you get."

The middle-aged man grinned sheepishly and moved to an empty seat beside an old man who was busy staring at the ceiling and twitching. Dr. Stone wondered how much longer Mr. Snell's meds would help his spasms and checked his folder...

Visiting Hours

Megan Dorei

Drumbeat like gunfire raps through my mind. I dig my nails into my scalp as the percussive explosions rack my brain. The frantic beating will not stop. It's been playing in my mind for hours.

Tears flow, fast and hot, down my cheeks. I whimper, wanting to cry out but knowing I can't. If I make any noise, Kurt will come for me again, and this time he won't hesitate to use his fists.

He came at dinner time with my food and a syringe filled with bright yellow liquid. It reminded me of police tape at a crime scene. I haven't been eating for the past three days; refusing to after I realized that they were mixing some kind of medicine in with it to get us to sleep. He threatened me with the mysterious liquid, telling me that if I didn't start eating he'd fill me full of it.

I punched the tray of gray-looking food out of his hand, leaving a few bright red welts on my knuckles. I tried to scramble away before he could grab me, but his fingers gnarled in my hair and yanked me back. My neck cracked, and for one terrifying moment I thought he'd broken it. A scream ripped from my chest but it was cut off quickly as he tossed me into the wall.

The breath left my lungs in one quick rush. My stomach flattened against my spine and I dry-heaved convulsively. Through the tears, I barely had time to register the boot flying toward my face before it struck my left temple.

Blinding pain flared across my eyes. I skidded across the linoleum floor, skin ripping as it tried unsuccessfully to stick to the scuffed tile. For a moment, I couldn't see anything. I blinked my eyes several times to clear them of tears and sudden blindness.

Kurt pulled me up just as my hazy eyes cleared, popping my shoulder out of place. I cried out in pain and he grabbed my throat, choking me. He said something but I couldn't hear it through the ringing in my ears. Then he stuck the needle into my arm and pushed the plunger.

Now I'm sitting against the wall under the only window in the room besides the tiny square of glass on the door. I rock desperately back and forth as the drumming pummels me.

After- what? Hours? Days?- of this violent noise, I lift my head and open my eyes. As soon as I do, my gaping mouth closes over my tongue, and I feel a bright burst of blood against my teeth.

Stretching from my wall to the opposite wall, on either side of my curled body, is a line of young boys in black-and-steel marching uniforms. All of them are carrying marching snares and the same mindless, unblinking expressions.

They force the beat, this tribe of drumline boys. It's not just in my head.

Unfolding arthritically from my curled position, I stumble in front of the nearest drummer, waving my hands in front of his face.

"Please," I croak, hissing as a jolt of pain bursts through my dislocated shoulder. "Stop making that racket."

The drummer doesn't seem to notice me, doesn't seem to blink or move anything except his arms...

Best Kept Secrets

Sergio Palumbo

The old medical building in the Klyza enclosure was located on a grassy hill about 100 miles north of the town of Colchester in Vermont. It was surrounded by a dense forest that made getting to it fairly difficult. Not many were interested in the region to begin with as it was sparsely populated, and far enough away from the rest of civilization to be virtually forgotten. As a matter of fact, given its location and the peculiar patients who were cared for there, no visitor had been seen coming or going in a very long time.

Overlooking a small stream in the distance, the building itself seemed to be watching the clear, swirling waters cascade down the greenish slope. It was a huge, light gray structure designed in the Victorian Gothic style that resembled a castle. Outside its walls were beautifully elaborate gardens, set-dressings for the casual on-looker. The patients were certainly not encouraged to make use of them; they were, in fact, discouraged in every way possible. The exterior of the building is where the illusion ended. Beyond the imposing wooden doors, the facility had been completely modernized; transforming it into a well-equipped, fully functioning psychiatric hospital that would rival any of its modern-day equivalents.

The original architectural design of the site allowed for sufficient light and ventilation, so the structure itself was not in need of updating. The main section of the ground floor housed the clinical and administrative offices, as well as the meeting rooms. The upper two floors were reserved for operating rooms and staff quarters. But the real poison lay underground on three different levels, where the lodgings for the 'special guests' were located. The lower levels were comprised of reinforced walls; that formed stone arched galleries, and the patient rooms. No larger than ten-foot by ten-foot square, each cell held a single bed, a basin and a commode, and was capable of housing a single patient at a time.

On the first night of admission, new patients received a hot bath, a nourishing meal and a clean bed. But the kindness towards them ended there; continuous constraints, strict rules and painful treatments began from that point on, with no means of escaping either the premises or the cruelty that took place within it.

Walter Hesku seemed a frail and sickly young man; his limbs were bony and thin, while his chestnut eyes seemed to possess a deep tinge of sadness. Only thirty-years-old, with black hair and pale skin, he didn't give the impression of one who enjoyed a sunny day, or appreciated the brilliant rays that lit the reinforced narrow window that overlooked a meadow of flowers outside. At least his room was clean, with its small bed and white walls. This represented the entirety of his tiny world at present. He was housed on the first of the basement levels, and was actually rather fortunate in that regard. The patients living in the lower levels didn't have a window, not even the unbreakable locked variety.

Why did they keep him in here? Hesku wondered incessantly, he was not insane, of this he was absolutely certain. Why couldn't they see that, and why didn't they recognize him as a man of higher than average intelligence? He really didn't understand it. How could he show them he was mentally competent and convince them to free him? He was deeply convinced that a strange madness reigned over the place...

I Didn't Know You Were There Matron

D M Smith

Michael stood still and jerked his emaciated shoulders round so he could face Matron. He was careful to keep his eyes looking down at the polished floor. The hem of her starched white apron lay like a ruler against the dark blue of her uniform dress.

"I didn't know you were there, Matron." He spoke fast, trying not to show his surprise at her sudden appearance.

Matron could always find fault, even when you were totally innocent. Matron did not understand innocence; you were guilty if she said you were guilty. Staff began scuttling from their hiding places now that Matron clearly had someone else in her sights.

"Has Nelly McAndrew been taken down to the mortuary yet?" Matron's eyebrows rose to meet the edge of her starched white cap. Its complicated folds and ruffles signalled their own agitation as she spoke.

"No matron, I was just g—" Michael tried rushing his excuse to prevent a violent eruption of her easily-provoked temper.

"Go up to Daffodil Ward. Get a move on, Michael. Now Michael, now. I cannot be kept waiting." Matron continued to sail serenely down the corridor, looking directly ahead. She barely slowed as she spoke; her words trailed after her, an invisible cloud following in her wake.

"Yes Matron. Immediately, Matron. I'll go right away," Michael said to her retreating back, his voice seeming to lose energy like some rundown clockwork mechanism.

Pulling themselves into the corridor's darkest crannies, porters, nurses and cleaners waited, barely daring to breathe, until Matron had passed them by. They remained lurking silently in the shadows until they could be sure she had moved on. As Matron's shadow passed, each one allowed their breath to escape under close control. Matron's vast apron front led the way, while the rest of her corpulent body flowed along the corridor like a galleon under full sail. No one could remember ever hearing her footsteps echo on St Columba's shiny linoleum.

Michael turned back the way he had come and headed for Daffodil Ward. His breath was rasping in his throat by the time he had climbed the staircases to the top floor.

"Why don't you take the lift?" one of the other porters had asked.

How could he tell them the lift reminded him his surgery? Lying strapped to that trolley in the tiny moving space, doors clashing shut, on his way to theatre. Awake. Terrified, yet unable to move a muscle. Matron's face coming close to his own; dropping her shadow across his body and blotting out the light.

Stopping outside Daffodil Ward for a moment, he seemed unwilling to do Matron's bidding. The moment soon passed and once on the ward, Michael slid a skinny hand around the office door. The sleeve of his pewter grey porter's jacket fell back to reveal a bony forearm.

"I've come for Nelly McAndrew," he said from the doorway. Michael looked down at the charge nurse sitting behind a stack of patients' case notes on his desk.

The charge nurse looked up from the pile. His round, ruddy face and neatly pressed trousers seemed at odds with the dingy office and its damp spots on the outside-facing wall. Michael recalled hearing about the new Daffodil charge nurse from the day porters during a morning handover...

Interview with a Patient - #0494772

Delphine Boswell

Monday, December 21

“So, can you tell me, Damien, what exactly happened on the night of October 28?”

The man in the wheelchair grasped the vinyl arm rests, the veins on his hands rigid and purple. “When the police asked, I told them it wasn’t my idea; it was Miles’s. Miles told me I shouldn’t have to take the blame.”

“Go on,” I said, scratching the name Miles into the notebook on my lap.

“I was looking out the eighth-floor window. A light drizzle was falling. The asphalt appeared more like a mirror than a road, reflections from street lights, headlights, and the gold glow shining from the windows of Eloise Mental Hospital.” Damien chuckled. “...known around these parts as the crazy house.” He stopped and looked at me from the side of his eye. “Tanya, have you ever been in a crazy house before?”

I didn’t answer.

Damien closed his eyes and began to rock ever so slightly in his chair. “As a kid, I loved the smell of rain,” he reminisced. “The freshness reminded me of my grandma’s newly washed sheets that hung on the line to dry for most of the day.”

“Ah, yes,” I said, noting the man’s ability to quickly change topics. “Can you tell me what else you remember from that night—October 28?” In my schooling at Argonaut University, where I was in my third year, working toward a doctorate in psychology, my professors had often addressed the mental patient’s natural ability to drift off into their own thoughts, their own worlds. I had been told it would be my job to keep patient #0494772 on track, on task, yet to enter his mind and to see life from his perspective.

With his eyes squinted and his tongue moistening his lips, Damien went on. “People, people without umbrellas... their heads covered with everything from newspapers to briefcases rushed from their parked cars or the city bus, which had just stopped on the corner of Brent and 8th Avenue. Like a colony of ants, they hurried up the concrete steps. That’s when I spotted her.” His eyes glistened, and his nails tapped rapidly on the arms of his wheelchair.

“Who, Damien?” I jotted down that I sensed a sudden excitement in his behavior; no maybe a better word was anxiety.

Ignoring my question, the patient went on. “...probably visitors, I suspect. Stupid enough to think they had time to make it up on the ward to see their relatives and friends. Others, probably care givers and staff, who planned to clock in before eight o’clock.”

More backtracking, moving away from the question at hand, I wrote.

He paused for a moment before going on, and then with his eyebrows raised, he said, “Margaret... it was Margaret who I saw.”

On October 29, the newspaper headlines had read: *Head Nurse at Eloise Mental Hospital Found Stabbed to Death*

Damien’s expression resembled that of a child who had been given a double-scoop of ice cream. He rubbed his hands together, a slight oozing of saliva ran down his chin, which he caught in his hand and wiped in his pants.

Purposely acting ignorant, I said, “Damien, who is Margaret?”

Of Shadow & Substance

Suzie Lockhart and Bruce Lockhart 2nd

Wyatt Drake leaned against the wall of the recreation room, taking long, slow drags from his Marlboro. He blew little smoke rings towards the browning wallpaper, trying to copy the size of the circles dotting the hideous pattern.

God, how he detested working at Shade River State Asylum. He hated all the crazies in it.

Wyatt couldn't image spending his life inside such a wretched place; he despised it beyond words. He could hardly wait until his shift was over so he could go home and sleep for a few hours. When he woke, he knew his mother would have a hot breakfast waiting for him.

"Creak, creak, creak."

He'd been trying to tune out the annoying sound of Lyle, rocking back and forth in his chair as he muttered to himself. It wasn't a rocking chair, so the wooden legs protested against the linoleum floor with each movement.

It was enough to drive any sane person crazy.

The loathing inside of him bubbled to the surface, and he crushed his cigarette butt against the wall before tossing the remains into an ashtray.

Lyle was a schizophrenic who was obsessed with comic books, especially the Batman series. He fancied himself some sort of super villain; one that the dark knight was always chasing. Humph. Some super villain.

He was pathetic.

Wyatt doubted Lyle could hurt a fly.

But Wyatt could hurt *him*...

He slid noiselessly across the room until he was standing behind the disturbed patient. "Bats is coming for you," he hissed in Lyle's ear.

Lyle's reaction was instantaneous. He began screeching in terror as he hopped out of the chair, toppling it over. His hands began flapping as he screamed in distress.

"Augh! AUGH!" He ran around the room screaming and cursing and then he fell on the floor. He scooted into a corner of the room, sitting with his knees pulled up to his chest as he tried to hide from the imaginary threat. Just the reaction Wyatt had been hoping for. A sneer curled the corners of Wyatt's lips.

Wyatt was the real threat, not Batman.

He walked over and yanked the thinner man to his feet, roughly pulling his arms behind his back.

"Lyle, I think you need to cool off." He began dragging Lyle through the door.

Now he could blow off some steam.

"Augh! No! Nooo...!"

Windows to the Soul

A.A. Garrison

Why'd I kill them folk? Well, that there's a big hairy question, son, and I just might answer it. But let's first get something straight. You ain't here for *why* nothing. You come to hear old Barnaby Rick say a bunch of crazy shit for your paper. And that's okay, we all gotta eat. I'm gonna have to disappoint, though, because this boy ain't crazy, straitjacket or not.

Okay. Yeah. Why the killing.

My first was this whore in the town I's born, on account of her hurting me in a bad way. A hateful bitch, of the likes they warned you of in the Bible. I saw it in her eyes, right off the bat. Made me sick. I tried and help her, and she hurt me for it, so I killed her. Simple. Probably better off, but that's neither here nor there.

How'd I know her trade? Told you, was in the eyes. Windows to the soul? For me, that's literal - or *was*, I guess. Heh. See, back then, I could look in a body's eyes and something would *click*, in my head like, and I'd *know* that person, could *be* them, about. Had it all my life, long's I can remember. Thought everyone was like that, until I's about sixteen or so. Now, it wasn't nothing psychic or supernatural or what have you - *uncommon*, maybe, but that's it. I couldn't see specifics, like what you had for lunch, but I could sure tell if it was sitting wrong with you. I'm just sensitive, is all. I just see what is, I suppose.

And I don't need to see your eyes to know what *you're* thinking, that old Barnaby Rick's crazy as they come. Don't be afraid and say it, son, you ain't alone. I don't spite you, just like I don't spite these head-shrink fellers in here. They got all kinds of lingo for my sensitivity: *delusional* and *schizoid*, and big-ass words I can't even say - probably even got some made special, just for me. But that's okay. It's their way. Got to label everything, so's they can belittle it and cram it in a box and shelf it away. And that goes double for folk like me, those that leave them scratching they heads. Got to make sure there's some five-dollar 'disorder' to slap me with. Funny who says what's right and proper, and what ain't. If the world shit in diapers, they'd have *continence* a disorder. Outlaw the commodes!

But yeah, that whore, she had it coming. That make it right? Hell no, and I'll be the first to tell you. I'll bet you think you know how it went down - business transaction, right? Wrong.

Listen up, son.

She was hitching, is how it come to pass, hitching down a lonely road in the middle of the night - - a *cold* night. Can get right cold in them mountains, colder than you know. I's in my truck and heading home from work when I seen her along the curb, with ass-hugging jeans and a halter top and tits here to Tuesday - suicide blonde too, gave definition to it. At first I just went on - don't borrow trouble, yeah? But then my conscience got hold of me, so I doubled back and picked her up - and that's when I got a look in them eyes. They plumb whacked me in the face, right there alongside the road - because that's how it happens, that click I told you about. Them eyes said she was a user, a people-user - someone who'd been used and let it *sour* her - let it become her, so's she passed it on to others. Share the love. Wasn't whoring for the money, no, was so she could spray that hurt around, maybe with some critters and a disease in the bargain. It was... *vampiric*, that's the word. Except, she was a vampire you bit first...

Go Fish, Go

Sean Conway

The lawn sprinklers sounded like rattlesnakes. An unsettling, monotonous sound, coupled with Eddie Fish bouncing his knee rapid-fire, his rubber flip-flop tapping the stonework while he sucked cigarettes in long, desperate draws. I sat next to him, leaning forward in the thick heat to avoid pressing my sweaty back against the bench. I turned the plastic lighter over in my hand, looking down at it, calculating the hours I had left. I'd agreed, stupidly, to pull an overnight double, saying yes about ten minutes before the brown-out that quieted every single air conditioner on the unit. Out here, on this bench in the quad, it was ninety-four degrees. Upstairs, on the third floor, behind the locked doors and windows, could've been a hundred and ten easily.

Eddie took three or four hard pulls before exhaling in one long release that seemed to deflate him, smoke swirling from his mouth and nose, almost crawling from him like a ghost. I felt a track of sweat tickle down the side of my neck. I swatted at it like a fly.

"You almost done?"

Eddie stared straight ahead, like he had been for three consecutive cigarettes, maybe looking at the bed of dead roses against the flaking side of Ruth House, maybe seeing something else entirely, something not even here right now. He stopped motoring his knee, exhaled again, the cigarette down to a crinkled nub between his fingers.

"Eddie, whataya say, you done?"

Off to the right was the staff parking lot where ten or twelve cars were parked, including my Tacoma pick-up my brother had given me last winter. I didn't like to look at it while I was working, made me homesick. I'd take patients out for smokes and glance over at it despite my best intentions and imagine leaving, poking my elbow out the window and putting the end of the game on the radio. I loved driving late at night, the warm summer air, the desolation, the splash of moonlight strobing between the rooftops as I accelerated through the neighborhoods on my way out to Route 128.

"Okay John."

I turned back to Eddie. Still staring straight ahead, his eyes small and beady but wide too, unblinking and glazed and faraway. I guessed he was overmedicated today. But what did I know—I was just a babysitter really. The badge on my belt loop said Counselor, but I didn't do a hell of a lot of counseling. I handed out cigarettes mostly, took patients for walks or drove them to their various appointments with social workers or halfway house directors. Once or twice a shift I'd be part of a team of other counselors and nurses that tackled, wrestled, pinned and restrained men and women, with leather straps, to their metal beds.

My name is Juan Sebastian. Eddie calls me John—I don't know why. I stopped correcting him. I stood up and slipped the lighter into my back pocket, then waited for Eddie to get up. Still staring at the roses, his mouth twisted into a grin and he laughed quietly. Whatever it was in that head of his that entertained him like that, I wanted some of it. I hadn't laughed probably in close to a year...

About the Authors

Delphine Boswell

Delphine's writing career began with freelancing and writing on assignment for such houses as St. Augsburg Press and Group Publishing, where her books for children were published. During this time, she had numerous articles for parents and materials for teachers accepted for publication.

During the last twelve years, her writing interests have switched to fiction. She has had several short stories, in various genres, accepted for publication in EZines, print anthologies, and a literary journal. Currently, her newly completed novel *Unholy Secrets*, a noir mystery, is under consideration by an agent.

Delphine quotes her passion for writing in the words of John Steinbeck, "I nearly always write, just as I nearly always breathe."

In addition to her love of writing, Delphine has been teaching composition for almost twelve years to college students and presently teaches at Lake Tahoe Community College.

Alex Chase

Alex Chase is a university student who has had short fiction accepted for publication with Siren's Call Publication, Pink Pepper Press and Angelic Knight Press in genres including horror, romance and everything in between. When not doing school work, writing and exploring the depths of the human condition, he enjoys tutoring, working on his student paper, and running.

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Sean Conway

Prior to teaching, Sean Conway had spent several years as a mental health counselor at two locked-door psychiatric facilities in the Boston area. Later, he earned his MFA from the University of New Orleans as well as undergraduate and graduate degrees from UMass Lowell. His fiction has appeared in *Solstice: A Magazine of Diverse Voices*, *Glassworks*, *fwriction review*, *Digital Americana Magazine*, and other literary journals both print and online. He is a recipient of a Jack Kerouac Award, funded by the Kerouac estate, and most recently a Norman Mailer

Center Fellowship. Currently he teaches writing and literature at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, and can be followed at www.seanconwaybooks.com.

Megan Dorei

Megan Dorei is a recent high school graduate who has just started delving into the publishing world. In October, one of her short stories- "Wings"- was published in Elektrik Milk Bath Press' *Zombies for a Cure* anthology. She is also currently scheduled to have four other stories published in various anthologies: "Haunt Me" in Less Than Three Press' *Kiss Me at Midnight* anthology, "Chasing Rabbits" in Sirens Call Publication's *Bellows of the Bone Box* anthology, "Half Jack" in Song Story Press' *Come to My Window* anthology, and "Love in a Laundromat" in Angelic Knight Press' *50 Shades of Decay* anthology. She lives in McLouth, Kansas with her family and the crazy friends who come to invade her house and steal her food.

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Aaron Garrison

A.A. Garrison is a twenty-nine-year-old man living in the mountains of North Carolina. His short fiction has appeared in dozens of zines and anthologies, as well as the *Pseudopod* webcast. His horror novel, *The End of Jack Cruz*, is available from Montag Press. He blogs at synchroshock.blogspot.com.

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Tom Howard

Tom Howard is a banking software analyst in Little Rock, Arkansas. He has published over twenty science fiction and fantasy short stories in the last two years, including sales to *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Resident Alien*, *Parabnormal*, *Epocalypse*, and several issues of *Crossed Genres*. His writing is influenced and inspired by his four children and the Central Arkansas Speculative Fiction Writers' Group.

Russell Linton

In fourth grade, Russell Linton wrote down the incredibly vague goal of becoming a “writer and an artist” when he grew up. Taking a decidedly non-traditional route to this goal, he graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a Bachelor’s in Philosophy and went on to a career in Graphic Design. Briefly sidelining those pursuits to be a Stay at Home Dad and for a stint in investigative work, he more recently returned to graphic design on a self-employed basis. Throughout, Russell has continued to write collaborative fiction, ghost write for local business blogs and a few websites. However, his true passion is speculative fiction. His interests run the gamut from fantasy to science fiction and recently the dark paths of psychological horror. He has stories printed with Siren’s Call Publications and online at Wily Writer’s Podcast. Find him on his blog at www.russlinton.com.

Suzie Lockhart and Bruce Lockhart 2nd

After high school, Suzie Lockhart attended The Art Institute of Pittsburgh, but the gnawing urge to write always remained with her. Three years ago, she began working on an idea for a YA novel. When her son, Bruce, realized he had the same passion for storytelling, they teamed up.

Their joint efforts have produced short stories such as *Through the Looking Glass* in *Dionne’s Anthology*, *Arctic Weaver* in *Sirens Call December eZine*, and upcoming *Of Shadow & Substance* in *Sirens Call ‘Mental Ward: Stories from the Asylum’*, as well as *Ten to Midnight* in an anthology from *Horri-fied Press*.

Suzie’s first publication, *Instinct*, was in *DMD’s Frightmares, A Fistful of Flash Fiction Horror*. Another piece, *Be Careful What You Wish For*, appears in *Dark Moon Digest, issue #10*. She also has stories in the October and February *Sirens Call* eZines, and the March 1st issue of *Chicagoland Journal*. Suzie is delighted to be one of the female horror writer’s to appear in *Mistresses of the Macabre*; look for *Playing with Fire*.

Bruce has a flash fiction story published in *Dark Eclipse, Issue #7*, entitled *Afflicted*, as well as *Signed, Sealed and Delivered* featured in *Dark Lore*. Upcoming, *Death’s Final Request* will be in an August anthology entitled *Tales of the Undead-Suffer Eternal: Volume2*.

Both can be reached via e-mail at aspiringauthors2@gmail.com.

Jennifer Loring

Jennifer Loring has published nearly 30 short stories and poems in various webzines, magazines, and anthologies. She received an honorable mention in *The Year’s Best Fantasy and Horror* for

her short story "The Bombay Trash Service." Jennifer is currently studying for her MFA in Writing Popular Fiction from Seton Hill University. She is a member of the Horror Writers Association and YALitChat.org, and works as an editor for Musa Publishing's YA imprint, Euterpe. Jennifer currently lives in Philadelphia, PA with her boyfriend and two turtles.

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Sergio Palumbo

Sergio Palumbo is an Italian public servant who graduated from Law School working in the public real estate branch. He's published a Fantasy RolePlaying illustrated Manual, WarBlades, of more than 700 pages. Some of his works and short stories have been published in multiple publications, in both English and Italian, including American Aphelion Webzine, Alpha Aleph, Alpha Aleph Extra, Algenib, Oltre il Futuro, Nugae 2.0, SogniHorror, La Zona Morta, edizioni Lo Scudo, Antologia Robot ITA 0.1, Antologia Il Segreto dell'Universo, Antologia E-Heroes, WeirdYear Webzine, YesterYearFiction, AnotherRealm Magazine, Alien Skin Magazine, Orion's Child Science Fiction and Fantasy Magazine, Farther Stars Than These, on Digital Dragon Magazine, on Kalkion Science Fiction and Fantasy Web Magazine, Quantum Muse, Surprising Stories, EMG- ZINE, The Speculative Edge Magazine, Australian Antipodean SF, Schlock!Webzine , SQ Mag. Some of his short fiction can also be found in print anthologies from Sirens Call Publications, Schlock Magazine, by Chamberton Publishing, as well as soon to be released anthologies from Crushing Hearts Black Butterfly Publishing, Horrified Press, Sirens Call Publications, and Static Movement Publications.

Sergio is also a scale modeler who likes mostly Science Fiction and Real Space models; some of his little Dioramas have been featured in magazines and on websites. You can find some of his models online at his model clubs website at: www.lacenturia.it.

Joseph A. Pinto

Joseph A. Pinto is the horror author of two published books and numerous short stories; his most recent works can be found at Sirens Call Publications and Cruentus Libri Press. He is a member of the Horror Writers of America as well the founder of Pen of the Damned, a collective of angst and horror driven writers. Indulge in his unique voice on his personal blog josephpinto.wordpress.com and penofthedamned.com. You can follow him on Twitter @JosephAPinto. Joseph hails from New Jersey where he lives with his wife and young daughter.

D.M. Smith

D.M. Smith was a management consultant before quitting to study journalism and become a freelance writer. Her head still writes for the corporate world, while her heart is pulling her into creative writing. In another lifetime, she was once a biomedical scientist.