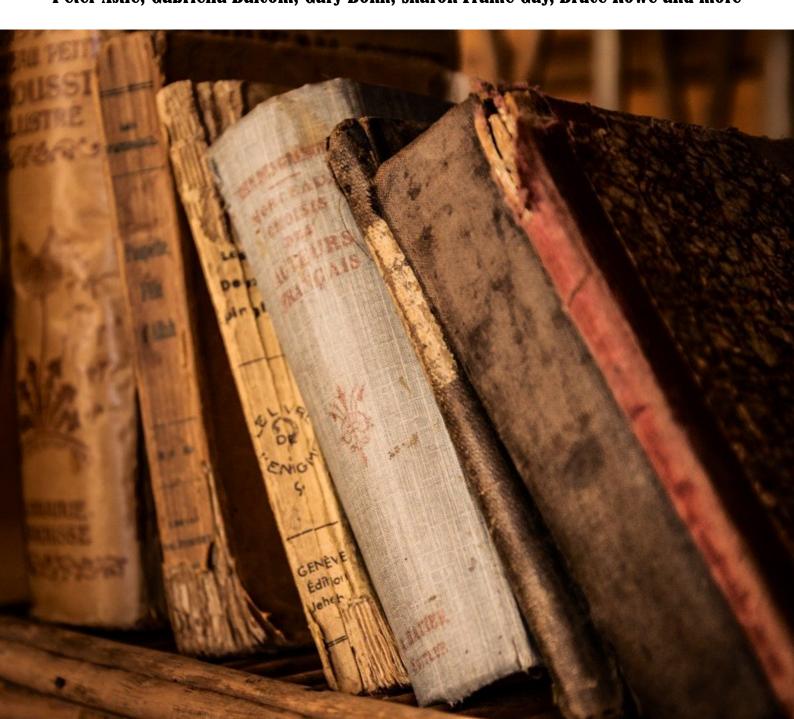
Clarendon House Short Story Magazine

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Issue # 3

Seven gems from some of the best storytellers on the planet Peter Astle, Gabriella Balcom, Gary Bonn, Sharon Frame Gay, Bruce Rowe and more



Clarendon House Short Story Magazine

Satisfying Fiction from Clarendon House Publications

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In this issue:

Masquerade by Peter Astle

'In the darkened corner of the ballroom Humpty Dumpty removed the egg-shaped mask...' —but whose face lies beneath? This contest-winning story takes us back to intrigue during Regency times.

Mission Ryan by Gabriella Balcom Siona has been assigned to gather as much military intelligence as she can by infiltrating Earth's government — the form she takes to do so will surprise you.

Birthday Girl by Sharon Frame Gay Charlotte reaches 104 years old, and is reminiscing — a heart-tugging story from an award-winning writer.

The Wizard and Sorceress of Crater Lake by Bruce Rowe

If you are one of the fortunate few that accidentally stand in perfect alignment between Wizard Island and The Lady of the Woods, you can still feel the vibrations of magic at work. The magic of Love...

Black Marvel's Downfall by Alexander Marshall Blue Wonder steps to the fore, to once again confront his arch-enemy Black Marvel.

Wishes Can Come True by David Bowmore 'Considering I had spent ninety-nine years on this planet before my resurrection, I felt pretty good—never felt fitter, actually....' A spooky little tale from an amazing storyteller.

Still Alive by Gary Bonn

Welcome to another world from a true weaver of wonders. Be prepared to view Life from completely new angles — and yours may never feel quite the same again...

We hope you enjoy the magazine!

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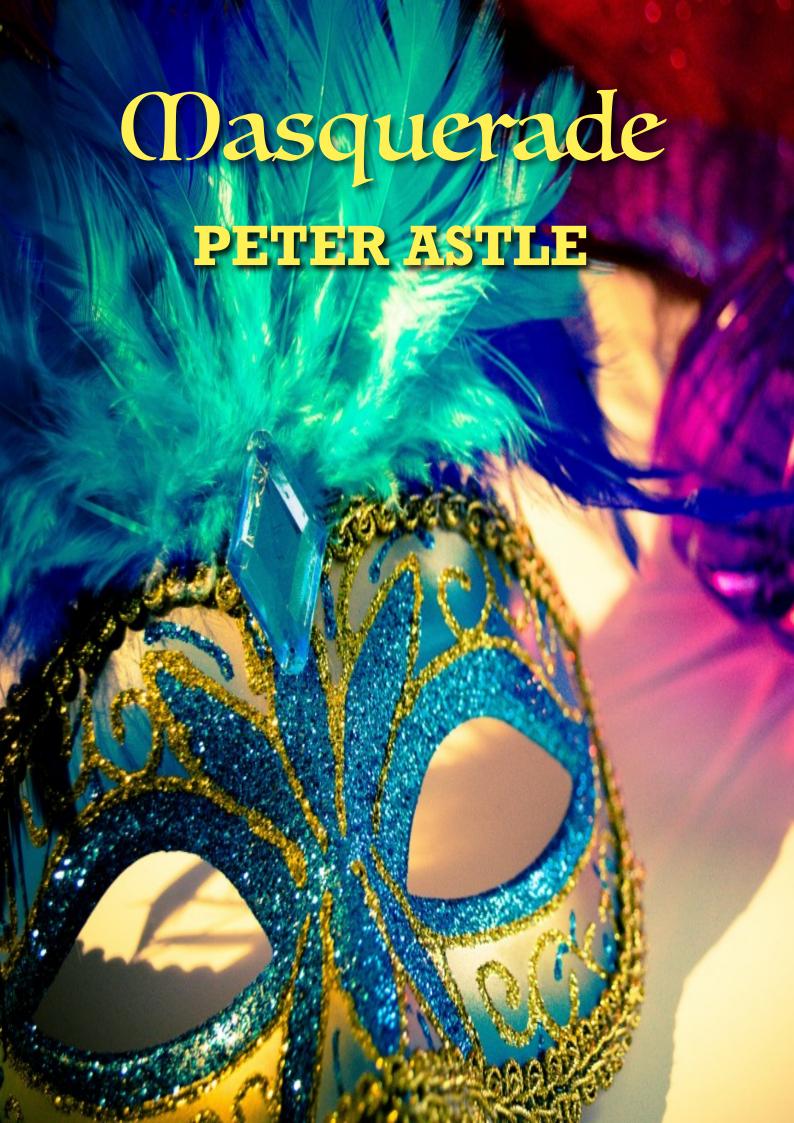
How to Blog Every Day Possibly Forever by Grant D. Auchar)

How to Blog Every Day Possibly Forever

So you'd like to be able to **generate volume blog content** so that you can create a new blog post **every day of the year** — including

weekends and holidays?

This short e-booklet gives you an approach that will work. It tells you how to choose a topic, what routine you'll need to adopt to overcome obstacles and sustain your output for years, and how creating a daily blog has **tremendous spin-off benefits** that you probably haven't thought of.



HAYWARD HOUSE. BRIGHTON. 1817.

Lavinia Beaumont and Lady
Comerford linked arms as they strolled
the long gardens at the rear of Hayward
House; the sweet summer perfume of
freshly cut grass hung in the air as they
passed the ornamental pond. The old
gardener and coachman, Hawkins, lent on
his long-handled rake and offered a
cautious wave as they passed in silence
and Lady Comerford gave the slightest
nod of her head in his direction. It was
early June and the sun was not yet warm
enough for the shade of a parasol.

Lady Comerford led Lavinia towards the gazebo at the end of the lawn saying nothing until they were seated inside. Fresh lemonade awaited them on the circular table along with a folded copy of the latest edition of the satirical scandal magazine, *The London Insider*.

"I know this will be difficult for you, Lavinia, but the time has come to deal with the Lord Ridlington issue," Lady Comerford said quietly. "The man is a cad, an improvident spendthrift and a womaniser. Agatha deserves to hear the truth about her philandering husband, especially now she is with child—and close to full term at that."

Lavinia's cheeks coloured as she poured herself a small glass of lemonade from the heavy jug. Ever since she had confessed to Lady Comerford her affair with the sea captain, who was evidently not a sea captain, she had been on tenterhooks. Lavinia had been Lady Comerford's personal companion for almost ten years and they held no secrets from one another. On this occasion, however, she might have been tempted to hold her tongue, had she not discovered the awful truth.

"Agatha and I have been friends since we were children," Lady Comerford continued.





"That wretched young husband of hers is wasting her fortune and making a fool of Agatha behind her back, but alas, she refuses to listen to me. Fortunately, her family persuaded Agatha and Reginald Ridlington to sign a marriage settlement agreement with a London solicitor before the wedding, which means she can divorce him and cut him off from all her assets should she have proof of his infidelity."

Lavinia's eyes flashed wide. "I am saddened and ashamed at my foolishness, and I am angry that I was deceived I such an underhand manner, but I cannot possibly bring myself to confess to Lady Ridlington in person."

Lady Comerford gently tapped the magazine with a gloved hand. "There is to be a summer breakfast masquerade ball at Trowbridge Manor on the first Wednesday of next month. I wish for us both to attend. Anthony Appleby, the editor of *The London Insider*, will be there. You can tell him your story quite anonymously; sources do not have to be named these days."

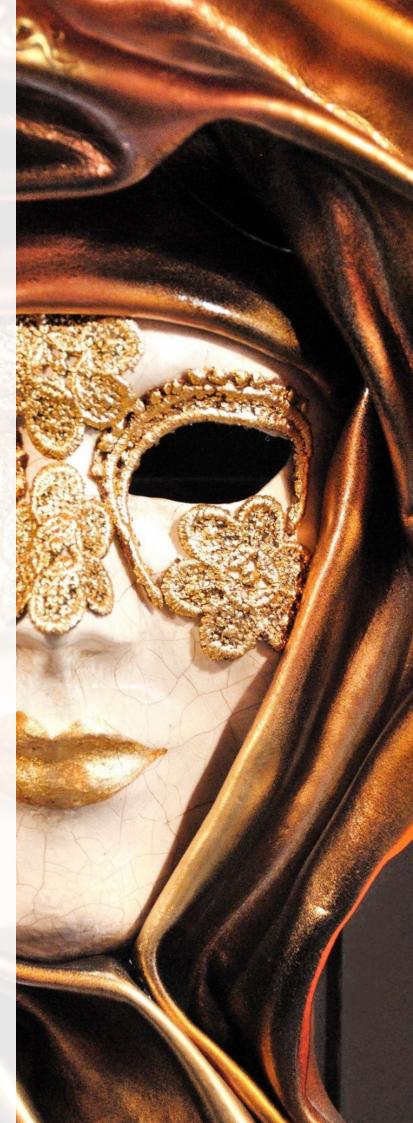
Having inspected herself in the fulllength mirror from every conceivable angle, Lavinia Beaumont had to agree with Lady Comerford that no one could possibly recognise her in the elaborate Roman empress costume, and that the black and white mask, adorned with a wild fan of flamboyant blue and green peacock feathers, ensured complete anonymity. Even so, she was nervous as she and Lady Comerford walked arm in arm through the grand entrance of Trowbridge Manor. Lady Comerford was equally unrecognisable in a brightly-coloured gypsy costume with layered skirts; the black face mask encrusted with sparkling diamond freckles was the only hint to the woman's wealth.

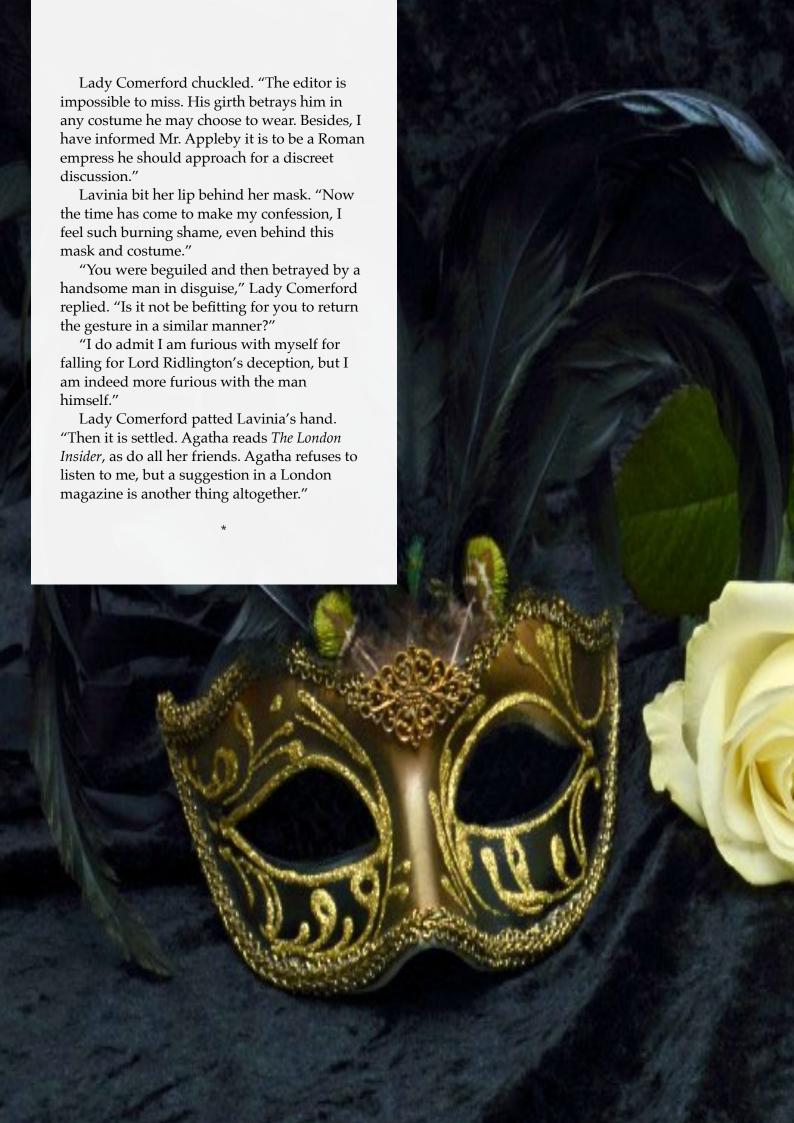
Over the last three weeks, in preparation for her inevitable meeting with the sensationalist editor, Lavinia had read several editions of The London Insider with growing dismay. Lord Ridlington might well be a cad, but Anthony Appleby was, by all evidence, a shameless peddler of the worst kind of gossip that she had ever read. The man had a clever way of insinuating rather than actually stating anything as a single fact, and, as such, had so far managed to avoid any attempt at prosecution for libel. Lady Comerford had explained that the larger than life editor, Appleby, was known to pay servants, coachmen, and butlers for inside information, and pay them handsomely for the most salacious tales of indiscretion.

When they were ushered by a young masked servant, dressed as an Indian, through the huge gold gilded doors at the top of the broad staircase into the Grand Ballroom, Lavinia could not help but gasp. Although it was not yet ten o'clock in the morning there must have been five or six hundred people adorned in brightlycoloured costumes, some gathered around tables, others milling in small groups; a string quintet on a raised platform, playing what might have been something by Mozart, was somewhat drowned by the cacophony of chatter and laughter in the cavernous high-ceilinged room. Lavinia had read of such occasions in society magazines, but to witness it for herself was so enthralling it was enough to take her breath away.

They found a seat close to the refreshment table where morning tea was being served in the finest china tea cups. "There's an amusing game we play at these occasions," Lady Comerford said. "When the dancing begins at eleven o'clock and the guests start to mingle, we make guesses as to whom is behind which particular masquerade costume. When you engage with Anthony Appleby, it might be to your advantage if you could point Lord Ridlington out, caught in the act of flirting. The scoundrel is most likely to be here, courting young ladies whilst Agatha lies heavily pregnant in her bed."

"I know very few society people," Lavinia replied, "but I fancy I could now spot Lord Ridlington even in deepest of disguises. But how will I spot Mr. Appleby?"





The breakfast party was in full swing when Humpty Dumpty approached Lavinia at the buffet table just before noon; the white eggshaped mask had a single blue tear beneath each eye. His girth was unquestionably ample and the colourful outfit well suited his rotund figure. Lady Comerford slipped away into the bustling ballroom to dance as the string quintet struck up a lively rondo and Lavinia followed as Humpty Dumpty wobbled towards a quiet table in the corner lit by a single candle.

"This is a delicate matter," Humpty Dumpty said in a low voice, much softer than Lavinia had expected, "but it is an issue of great

importance to Lady Ridlington, should the rumours be true."

Lavinia blushed fiercely behind the peacockfeathered mask. "I will confess I am grateful for this disguise, Mr. Appleby, and I will further confess that Lord Ridlington and I did share a single night of intimacy. I had no idea he was Lord Ridlington until shortly after our encounter, as he was dressed as a sea captain."

Humpty Dumpty nodded slowly. "Lady Comerford tells me you followed him."

"I was both curious and saddened at his haste to leave. I admit that I spied from a distance and





saw him climb into Lady Ridlington's royal blue carriage, which I recognised immediately from her visits to Lady Comerford's house. Once inside the carriage, Lord Ridlington stripped off his costume and changed into a gentleman's attire with the swiftness of a stage performer. I have since witnessed two others fall for his charms at the Marlborough whilst using different guises."

Humpty Dumpty leaned forward. "I will not enquire as to the level of your intimacy, but may I ask if Lord Ridlington had any distinguishing features about his body?"

Lavinia blinked behind her mask. "He did indeed have a port-wine stain on his lower

back that resembled the continent of Africa; I took it for a tattoo until he explained it was a birthmark."

Humpty Dumpty sat very still as the quintet concluded the rondo. "You have been most helpful, Lavinia." The voice was softer still. "I will now instruct my solicitor to divorce my husband."

In the darkened corner of the ballroom Humpty Dumpty removed the egg-shaped mask and Lady Agatha Ridlington offered the briefest of smiles before replacing it and retying the knot at the back of her head.

CLARENDON HOUSE AUTHOR

PETER ASTLE

'This isn't a book you'll find easy to set aside until tomorrow: make a cup of tea, get comfortable, switch off your phone and be drawn into the little worlds of this book to emerge content and refreshed by the work of a master author.' — Grant P. Hudson, 2020



INSSISSEMENTS

Derbyshire Tales with a Twist

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Mission Ryan

GABRIELLA BALCOM



She'd chosen her present form—that of a Maine Coon Cat—after careful deliberation, partly because she'd been intrigued by the animals' history and appearance, but more because she'd believed her choice could help assure a satisfactory mission. Her success had been guaranteed, and she'd known it! She always accomplished what she set out to. Always.

Command-One Zo'Ras had provided detailed intel about Ryan Webb's liking for animal companions—what earthlings called "pets"—but less common varieties. A chinchilla, python, and wombat were his latest, but Zo'Ras had wisely demolecularized and tranzwarped them to the Oryton ship, where they'd be out of the way and available for closer study. They had little to do with the current mission, of course, but getting them out of the way had been feasible. And Siona's people never passed up an opportunity to study and learn more. The animals' tranzing had been fast and painless, taking less than one-eighth of an earth nano-second, and their disappearance had provided Fe'Yah—now Siona—the necessary opportunity to be "discovered" by Ryan. And discover he had! Even while he'd been bemoaning the loss of his missing "babies," what he called his pets, his eyes had widened at the sight of Siona. Almost falling over his own feet, he'd made all kinds of weird 'ooh', 'lala,' and 'ahh' noises before whisking her straight into his home.





With Ryan's position as United States Secretary of Defense and his constant interaction with Earth's government and military leaders, those of other countries' also, Siona had been assigned to gather as much military intelligence as she could. Her planet Oryton's own rulers not only wanted to know Earth's defenses and nuclear capabilities, but how to crush them. Attacking was not the plan yet, but being prepared was always best.

Siona contemplated her next moves and smiled thinly, anticipating No'Tar's rage when she advanced to Oryton's Prime Directorate, the body working hand-in-hand with their Supreme One. They held all the power on their planet, although several leading families had a limited say in decisions also. She would have everything No'Tar had sought for so long, and she knew she deserved it more than he did. She'd been awarded this choice assignment to Earth, despite his repeated requests—no, demands at first and near pleas after—he should get it because of his seniority. "Because of who I am" is how he'd put it. Siona sniffed in disdain, eyes contemptuous. He should have known better. Seniority assured nothing. Only results and superior achievement did, and she far outweighed him and his usefulness on those fronts. She knew it. Zo'Ras knew it. The Prime Directorate must have known it, since they'd made the final decision of choosing her over No'Tar and relegating him and his infantile whines to lesser duties. As long as she'd known him, he'd exuded contempt of her, and to her knowledge, of every other Oryton around him, believing his blood lines made him superior in every way. As such, he'd felt entitled, disdaining hard work and effort, the very things she'd used to surpass him at every turn.

Padding to the large windows in Ryan's front room, Siona sank to the floor, eyed Earth's sun high above in the sky, and thought of the sun back home. It had prompted her mission in the first place.



Many millennia ago, her people had lived on a planet given light by a sun as equidistant to it as Earth was from its sun. However, their sun had grown brighter and brighter before going nova. In the process, it had swallowed their planet and several others nearby. Fortunately, their scientists and leaders had anticipated the destruction and planned in advance. They'd chosen a new planet for their kind to relocate, doing so before theirs was destroyed. Their new home, which they'd renamed Oryton, had worked out well. However, one and a half nars—equal to three earth years ago, their Supreme One and Prime Directorate had decided it was prudent to find another suitable habitation. They'd worried about a repeat of the past and a possible need to move again. At least, that had been the official reasoning given to their people for mission ships being sent to scout out likely planets.

Siona personally thought the real reason was

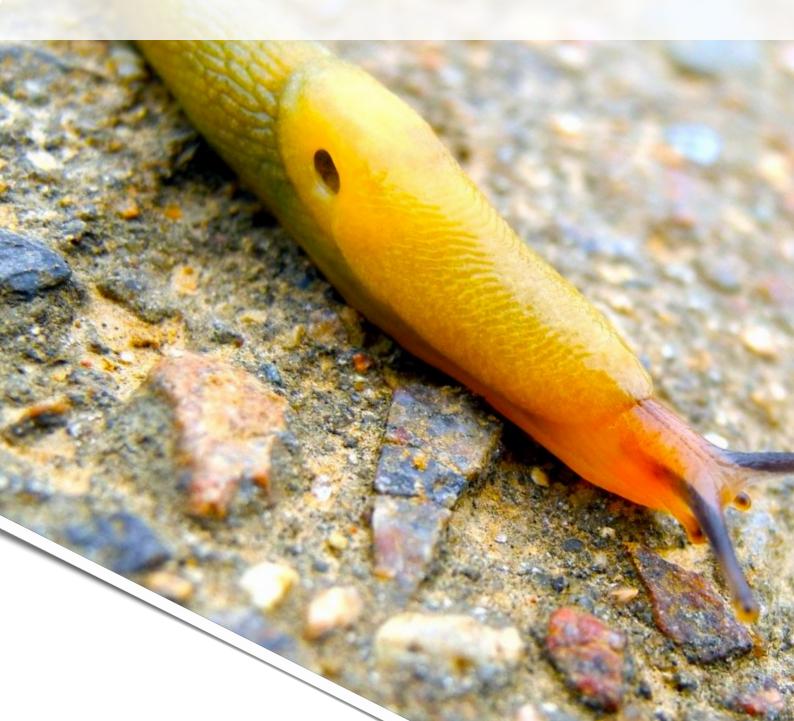
something different: overpopulation. Everyone knew resources weren't what they'd once been, although this was denied, and their population had multiplied well beyond the predicted levels. She had been prudent in keeping her views to herself. Trusting the wrong person could lead to banishment or, worse, relegation to an eternity in a despised form—for example, that of a sleer, which was akin to Earth's slug but bright green and four times larger. At least one former military-man-turned-militant had ended up as a sleer, before he'd been smashed underfoot.

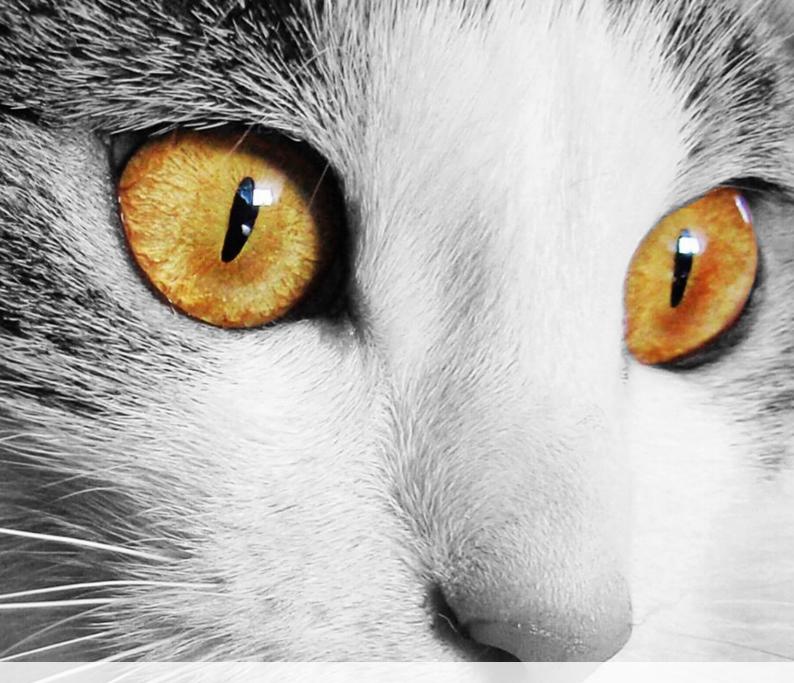
An initial report had claimed Earth was a viable option for relocation, if needed. Siona had no idea what her leaders would decide in the end, but fully anticipated her role in this mission and the data she was tasked with acquiring would help her people a great deal. And, of course, she anticipated a promotion following very quickly.

Eleven earth days had passed, but Siona had learned nothing of import. The delay in making progress on her mission had been disappointing, but she'd accepted it was outside of her control. It hadn't really chafed at her until a few minutes ago when visitors began arriving to Ryan's home. She didn't have to be a real earthling to recognize uniforms when she saw them. Military people coming here had to mean something, and she anticipated learning what—if she could just get into Ryan's office.

His last visitor had stepped around her, turned around, and used one of his shiny shoes to shove her away from the doorway before rapidly stepping inside and shutting the door behind him. If she'd been in her true-form, she would've scorched him. As things stood, however, she didn't have her weapons and was trapped in this small, furry body. She growled menacingly from down deep in her chest. All she could do was glare, while imagining what she'd *like* to do.

Stalking back and forth outside the door twenty Earth minutes later, she continued to fume. She'd gleaned from raised voices that two of the men who'd come were the Secretaries of the Navy and Army, but that was the extent of her knowledge. She needed to be *inside* with them, and didn't want to miss an Earth second more of what was being said. But how could she get in?





Flexing her right front paw, she scratched the door on purpose, then did so again. Again. Again.

A creak sounded near the door, and she quickly moved a couple feet away, and began grooming herself.

"Are you making that sound, Siona, honey?" Ryan spoke from behind her, and she turned in his direction. "I haven't gone far, just into my office, and right now I'm kind of busy." He turned to retreat.

Siona's mind raced feverishly. What kind of noise do Earth coon cats make, she wondered, and thought about the research she'd done prior to setting foot on this planet. Ah, yes! She'd read coons' sounds were a mixture of a mew and a growl, and they sometimes chirped. Thus far on earth, she hadn't bothered to make the effort, but this situation just might warrant—.

Concentrating hard, she gave it her all, and uttered, "Meeowrrrrr-ip!"

Ryan turned quickly. "Oh, what a sweetheart," he crooned. He picked her up, crushed her body to his chest, and planted a kiss on her nose.

Fighting the urge to rake his face with her claws for the affront, she froze. It took effort not to gag at his nasty breath—reeking of rotten fruit and other things—which had shot up her nose. Trying to look forlorn and abandoned, she spoke to him again. "Meeowp!"

"Yeah, yeah, baby," he said, bussing her under the chin. "You're right. I wasn't thinking. I left you by yourself, but I promise I won't abandon you again. Of course Daddy's bootiful snookems can come inside the office with him!"

In her mind, she rolled her eyes. Sucker!

CLARENDON HOUSE AUTHOR

GABRIELLA BALCOM

'Some authors have a range so wide and a scope so varied that it's difficult to 'pin them down' in a few words. Best-selling author Gabriella Balcom can write science fiction, fantasy, children's literature, literary fiction, poetry, horror, humour, romance and more — and you'll find all of the above in this eclectic collection of tales...'



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The faces around the table are blurred. They've lost their hard edges, my vision deteriorating. In front of me is a cake, decorated in pinks and greens, with enough candles to set off the sprinklers in the ceiling.

I am one hundred and four years old today. April the 11th. The time of year when spring lambs are born. I came into this world in a small town in North Carolina. Father named me Charlotte, after the city where he grew up. He said he wanted to move to the shadier side of the Carolinas, up into the Smoky Mountains, where you hear owls as you fall asleep, and count the hills and ridges as they rise from the smoke of dawn. Over a century later, I'm still living in the same town Daddy moved us after he and Momma started their family.

When I married, I moved from my childhood home to a house near Main Street, and from there to a tiny apartment above the drugstore. Finally I came to this retirement home, not five miles from my earliest memories in these beloved hills.

To prepare for the party, I was bathed and brushed like a poodle in one of those fancy pet salons. The nurses and attendants in the facility fussed over me with lotions and hair dryers until I was exhausted. Then they stood back, smiled, and flourished a mirror. I stared long at the reflection.

Peering back was an ancient woman. My face looked like one of those storage bags they sell on television, where they put a vacuum hose in it and suck all the air out. I have dark brown eyes, but they're cloudy now, covered with overhanging lids, two tiny orbs peering out of fleshy curtains. There are skin tags and age spots scattered across my face and neck like a map of a heavily populated state. Hair, once long and thick, the color of an oak leaf in the fall, is now wispy and white, my scalp shining through like a baby's bottom.

Thank God I still have my mind, I thought, and burst out laughing. Then I think, That's what they all say, and laugh again.



The gals give a hug, then leave me in my room in a wheelchair. It's not time for the festivities yet, so here I sit, fingers laced in my lap. The skin on my hands are paper-thin and fragile. I'm afraid of banging them on a doorknob, or bruising them knocking against the nightstand reaching for water, so I wear soft white gloves for protection.

I'm in my best nightgown, light blue with tiny white dandelions sprinkled across it, the bodice smocked with embroidery. It's my favorite piece of clothing. I insisted on wearing it today. On my feet are pink slippers with nonslip bottoms. I never wear shoes. I only walk to the bathroom and back. The rest of the time, I'm in this wheelchair, my feet in retirement.

My daughter Esther knit a yellow shawl I wear every day. I wrap it around my shoulders and pretend she's here with me, although she lives three hundred miles away. She'll be here today, along with my son Gerald and his wife, kids and grandkids. Esther will bring her sons, too, and their wives and families. Esther's husband Roy passed away five years ago. She still has to work, well into her seventies. After retirement she's moving back here, to be closer to me. I think to myself, *Hurry*, *Esther*.

Four years ago, my hundredth birthday was quite the shindig. I suppose everyone thought they would celebrate my natal day and have a hail-and-farewell party all at the same time. It was something to behold. The party was in a rented hall, and over fifty people attended. There were speeches, little kids reciting poetry, live piano music, and a potluck dinner. They announced my birthday on national television. A photo of my face peered out of a Smuckers jelly jar on the Today Show.

Most folks don't make it another four years, but I surprised everybody, including myself. Family and friends have gathered every April 11th and twisted paper streamers through the dining room of the facility, brought vases of peonies and jugs of lemonade and ice tea, and sang "Happy Birthday".

While waiting for the party to begin, I glance around my room. My eyes rest on a photograph of Peter, my husband, dead so long ago I barely recognize him. I wonder if that will change in heaven. Will I walk right past him, or run into his arms?







One by one, I am approached by my guests. As always, after they kiss my cheek or shake my hand, they wish Happy Birthday, then ask what the secret is to my longevity.

Truth be told, I have no idea. But they want to know, they are eager to know, their faces peering at me with such yearning and hope. So I set out to oblige them.

I tell the stout, sweating young man who works for the local newspaper that my secret is exercising every day and eating plenty of vegetables. I assure the spinster in the corner it was years of living alone after Peter died and my children left home that afforded me this luxury. To the tightly wound nursing facility manager, whose very breath comes out in spirals of angst and tension, I say that a glass of wine every night is the key to survival. And once, just to see what might happen, I announced to my fellow residents that daily masturbation does wonders to loosen the body and enhance one's longevity.

I am not sure why I'm still here, or what God has planned for me. I don't know what I did to maintain my body and give it cells and atoms that are more robust than someone else's.

What I do know is this: I lived. I laughed and played as a child, and I grew into a woman under the shadow of the mountains. My heart was broken and pelted with the heartache of many storms. I got back up and tried again, and again, and again.

I held sick babies in my arms, and a dead husband in my lap, waiting to hear the squall of the ambulance. There were Little League games. Weddings. Christmas trees and funerals. Quiet, magical days that drifted into one another like waves on an autumn pond.

I had friends who helped, friends who hurt. Scares. Oh, so many scares. Frights that kept me up nights and cursed my days.

And joy. The kind of joy you can only get when those frights go away and are replaced by love so magical, so sweet, that the sun pours itself into your soul.

My life is like this old nightgown. Faded from many washings, but soft as a summer's morning, yielding and cozy. I remember when it was bright and starched and filled with promise. Over time, it learned to give in, to fold without a whimper, yet still cover with a sense of purpose. Every button knows my fingers, a rosary of sorts, as I twist and stroke them in my hands.



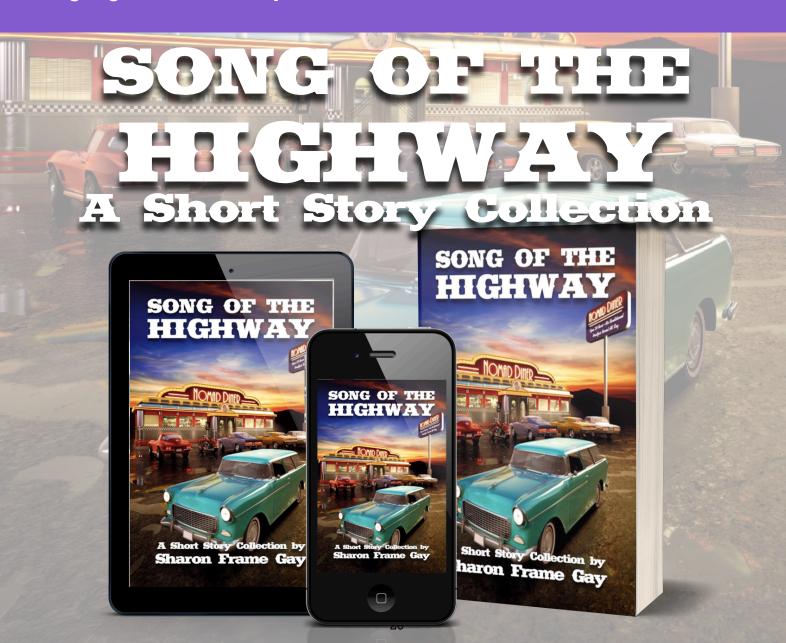
CLARENDON HOUSE AUTHOR

SHARON FRAME GAY



'Some stories are prose compositions that, while not actually broken into verse lines, demonstrate a depth of symbology, metaphor, and other figures of speech common to poetry, producing literary works of acute beauty in which the expression of feelings and ideas is given an intensity beyond the norm.

In this collection of tales by the extraordinary writer Sharon Frame Gay, you will find yourself again and again both moved emotionally to rapture and grief while also being entranced by an exquisiteness of language and a close eye for human detail.'

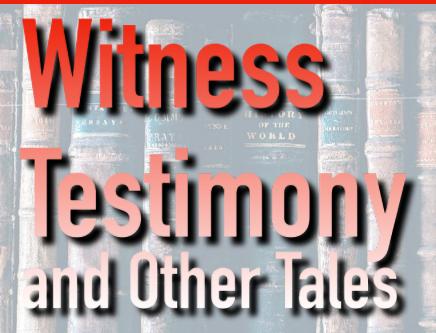


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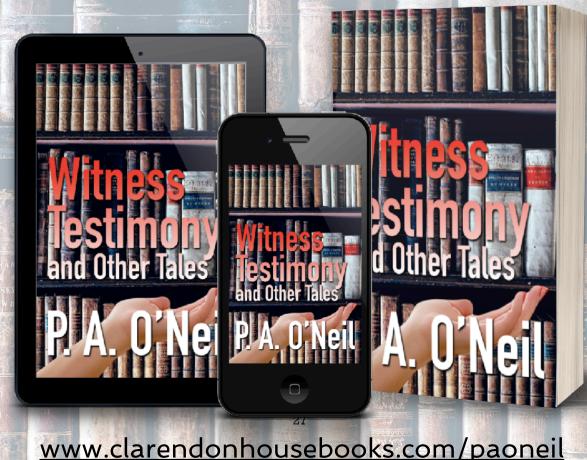
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CLARENDON HOUSE AUTHOR

P. A. O'NEIL



'Some authors paint such vivid pictures with their words that the reader feels as though he or she is actually present, a silent observer or phantom, almost participating in the events of a tale...'



The Wizard and Sorceress of Crater Lake

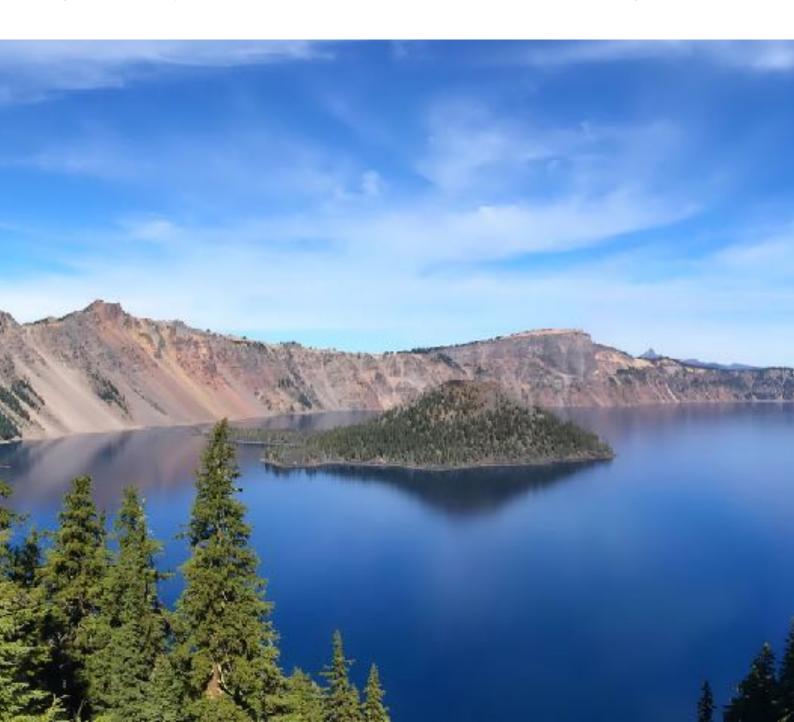
Bruce Rowe

The tall phantom ship sailed through the asteroid belt with sails billowed and thrust along by a magical wind and swaying side to side to avoid the large boulders that lazily rolled through the emptiness of the dark empyrean. The wizard and his warriors of faeries were a half league behind flying the same path as the ship. The wizard chanted ancient verses that created bolts of lightning that blasted from the end of his staff, exploding the rudder of the massive ship piece by splintered piece.

At the figurehead of the ship was a beautiful woman, a sorceress who was singing a siren's song of sadness. She was the wizard's beloved and sang to him of her rescue. Taken against her will by four magicians employed by Captain Blyth—known as The Thief of Magic—they had bound her to the large oak beam that jutted out from the bow to

prevent her from waving her enchantments over them. To thwart the captain's intentions and his evil purposes for her, within her mind she used what magic she could muster and turned herself into part of the oak beam so that once the ship reached its destination her removal would be difficult if not completely preventable.

Another spear of lightning from the wizard's staff shook the ship so violently that it caused the stern to slam against the last asteroid splintering a hole in the right side of the broad hull large enough for a man to enter. At the captain's order, two chase guns rolled out of the stern of the ship and fired grapeshots at the wizard. The wizard was able to dodge all but one iron ball that knocked his staff from his hands, splintering it into small shards and sawdust. Three faeries met their demise colliding with the other iron balls from the grapeshot.





"What are we to do, captain?" asked one of the four magicians. "Even without his staff the wizard is gaining on us and our collective magic cannot equal his." The captain waved the magician off and began pacing the deck in an effort to devise a plan.

After the ship flew past Mars, the captain looked over the railing with his spyglass and spotted the next planet. On Earth, he saw through the powerful lenses a capacious snow-capped mountain. "There! Have the helmsman put us down on that peak." At the cranking of the wheel—what good it did without the rudder—and pushing forward on a lever, the fore, and main and mizzen mast tilted forward and the ship descended toward the mountain.

Nearing the mountain, the captain spotted what appeared to be a hollow at its peak. 'An auspicious find,' he thought. "Set her down in that bowl at the top!" he yelled at the helmsman. The ship leveled then lowered perfectly into the bunker. As the anchor dropped along the side, the four magicians hurriedly wove a protective dome over the ship to prevent the wizard and his faeries from overtaking them.

Reaching the mountain, the wizard called for a halt to his warriors. His eyes quickly surveyed the ship under the blue transparent dome. He could no longer hear the distressing song of his beloved. He took his faeries to the bottom of the mountain where he fashioned a castle of pumice rock to hold his beloved in safety after rescuing her. He then knelt down and placed his hands in the snow and, closing his eyes, fell into a deep trance peering past the surface of the mountain and into its very core. After a moment, the wizard opened his eyes and rose up.

"Meeka," the wizard said to the commander of the faeries, "take your warriors to the top of the mountain, keep watch over the ship, and keep your bows drawn. After a careful study of this mountain, I have a plan as to how to dislodge the ship from its resting place."

"As is your will, my lord," the fae said. Then she directed the troop to the top of the mountain and hovering there, they kept watch over the ship with bows drawn.

At the bottom of the mountain, the wizard began to fly around its base. He increased his velocity as he moved up the heap in increments of ten feet per passing, snow spraying outward behind him from the airstream created by his passing. As he neared its middle, the men in the ship felt a rumbling and began to tremble and scurry to and fro on the deck in a mass confusion of fear. It was as if the great mountain was breathing, heaving outward, and then retracting. However, the sorceress smiled knowing her true love was nearing her rescue.



"Steady men," called out the captain to his shipmates. "The old sorcerer can't touch us as long as we are under the magicians' protection."

The bowsman rose up from peering over the side of the ship. "Captain Blyth, if we tarry here much longer we'll be torched to cinder. A red glow is growing beneath us, sir. I believed he has conjured a dragon."

The captain looked over the railing of the ship and seeing the red glow increasing at a rapid rate and moving up toward the ship, yelled, "Cut the anchor and full sails...NOW!" The four magicians, in near exhaustion, released their energy from the dome which quickly disappeared and refocused their concentration back onto the sails. The sails bellowed and the ship rose awkwardly out of the bunker as the mountain violently shook with great slabs of snow ascending rapidly downward, uprooting cedars and pines like a woodsman chopping down trees with a single blow.

The faeries began loosing arrows at the deckhands and magicians. The instant a sailor would ready a cannon toward the faeries, they met their end in an array of arrows. Meeka alone took out two of the magicians, which slowed the ship's escape from the mountain as one by one the sails fell lifeless.

Finishing his flight, the wizard flew upward joining the faeries with his hands extended outward as though lifting something heavy. At that moment, a copious pillar of lava exploded from the top of the great mountain, tearing through the bow of the ship torching it at one end and sending it hurling into the forest beyond. Hearing the cries of his beloved sorceress, he soared after her dodging the large

glowing lava boulders that were being flung across the night sky. Catching her above the tree line, with a breath of frost he quickly extinguished the flame near her feet and gently set her on the ground.

"Don't leave me, my love," spoke the wizard in a trembling voice. "I cannot finish this without you. Your powers far exceed my own."

She opened her oaken eyes as tears of sap rolled down from their corners. "I don't know what help I can be bound so to this oak beam. But I can endow you with my powers and together put an end to the evil of Captain Blyth."

"Then we will finish it together."

The wizard picked her up and stood the beam on its charred end and together they looked upon the mountain. He held her with one arm as he extended the other toward the mountain. He could feel her powers seeping into his mind, then down through his arm. Together they spoke an enchantment of implosion and pulled the pillar of lava back into the mountain. In mere seconds, the great mountain growled and crumbled into itself with a mighty sound.

With the magic that once filled the sails now gone, the lofty ship was plummeting to the bottom. The wizard then focused their powers on the ship, turned it, the dead crew members and Captain Blyth into erosion resistant lava so as never to take flight again, and secured it along the shore of the lake that was now forming from the melting snow. (If visitors were to look upon it today from Sun Notch, it resembles a small 16 story tall island nestled against the shore bearing the name, Phantom Ship.)

After completing their task of felling the crew, Captain Blyth and the remaining magicians, the faeries joined the wizard and his beloved in the forest. As to the bodies of the magicians, they watched as the wizard brought them up from the lake, and using volcanic gases and ash that burst forth from deep within the earth, he transformed them into 100-foot-tall pinnacles, which still stand to this day but far removed from the lake. (They are abandoned and alone forever in a valley with only the low-lying clouds that pass by in the early mornings or the occasional visitor willing to make the 6-mile drive from Rim Rock to keep them company.)

With exhaustion overtaking them, and their magic all but depleted, the wizard and the sorceress fell to the ground, her body cradled in his arms. The faeries gathered around them in quiet reverence.

"It is done," she said looking up to the wizard.

"Yes, but I cannot leave you in such a state, my love," he said as he laid her gently on the ground. He stood over her and with the last of his magic, he released her from the oak bow.

Unexpectedly, one by one, the faeries, who are usually evil, horrid, and mischievous creatures, began transforming into beautiful butterflies—a pledge made by the wizard for their compassionate deeds in assisting him in rescue of his beloved. Meeka looked sadly at the wizard as though to say 'Farewell' then turned into a beautiful bright orange butterfly. For a moment, they fluttered above the wizard and his lover then dispersed into the forest. (To this day thousands of California tortoiseshell butterflies take wing over the park feeding on wild lilac and drinking nectar from a variety of flowers. If their flight was not so swift, you could possibly see a remnant of what was once a fae.)

The sorceress tried to stand but found it difficult to move her legs. "I don't feel right, my love. I feel...stiff...rigid. I do not feel the magic regenerating in my heart as I did in our universe."

"Unlike our universe that is filled with magic, I fear we have traveled to a place that no longer believes in magic," he answered as he picked her up in his arms.





"Then we can no longer be as we once were. Lay me upon that rock and stay near until I am no more." The wizard laid her on the boulder and gave her one last kiss. Feeling her lips turn to stone he wept bitterly, then turned toward the lake. (To admire her fading beauty, take the 0.7-mile trail, aptly named, Lady of the Woods and you'll find her located directly behind the Steel Visitor's Center and the Park Headquarters. Blending almost perfectly into a subalpine forest of mountain hemlock, she lays naked on her right side with her right foot behind her left knee and left arm bowed near her face.)

In his sorrow, the wizard found within his heart the power to fly high above the lake. With a resounding cry that echoed in the ears of the Klamath Indians that had settled over the southeast ridge of the mountain, he flew directly into its depths. He twisted and turned in pain and agony as he descended toward the lava glow at the bottom. His feet remained

buried in the lava until the lava cooled and took hold of him. He looked up through the water and saw the brilliance of the sun beaming down turning the water into a sapphire jewel. Desiring one last look at his beloved, in an effort to loosen his feet from the lava, he pulled upward breaking the surface until he created a large island 755 feet tall where he could see the sun as well as over to his beloved from across the lake. Exhausted through grief, the wizard gave in to the stiffness that now overtook his body and became a part of the uppermost peak of the island. (From any location along the rim of the lake, one can easily see the island appropriately called, Wizard Island. If you are one of the fortunate few that accidentally stand in perfect alignment between Wizard Island and The Lady of the Woods, you can still feel the vibrations of magic at work. The magic of Love.)



CLARENDON HOUSE AUTHOR

BRUCE ROWE

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But its greatest deed will be in the
Service of Dragons.'







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ALEXANDER MARSHALL

'What we're looking for,' said the director in a concluding tone, 'is someone slightly... unconventional.'

'And so you came to me,' Blue Wonder said in the quasi-aristocratic tone that was expected of him, deciding not to make a fuss. There was an awkward pause, as the director's hidden motives found themselves thrust into the centre of the table. Blue Wonder broke the silence, tugging his quasitron blaster from its concealed holster.

'Unconventional methods cut two ways, old chap,' he said, smiling his public school smile. 'This is made, believe it or not, from entirely organic materials, and so didn't show up on any security scan.' He fired the weapon — the beam passed through the window behind the director and shot across the street to an anonymous target in the insurance offices beyond.

(In a room in the Cosmic and Providential an anonymous assassin collapsed in an allconsuming energy field of hostile quasitrons, his long-range, computer-sighted particlebeam rifle clattering noisily to the floor.)

'Sloppy,' Blue Wonder commented. He disliked a lack of professionalism. 'Go on, director.'

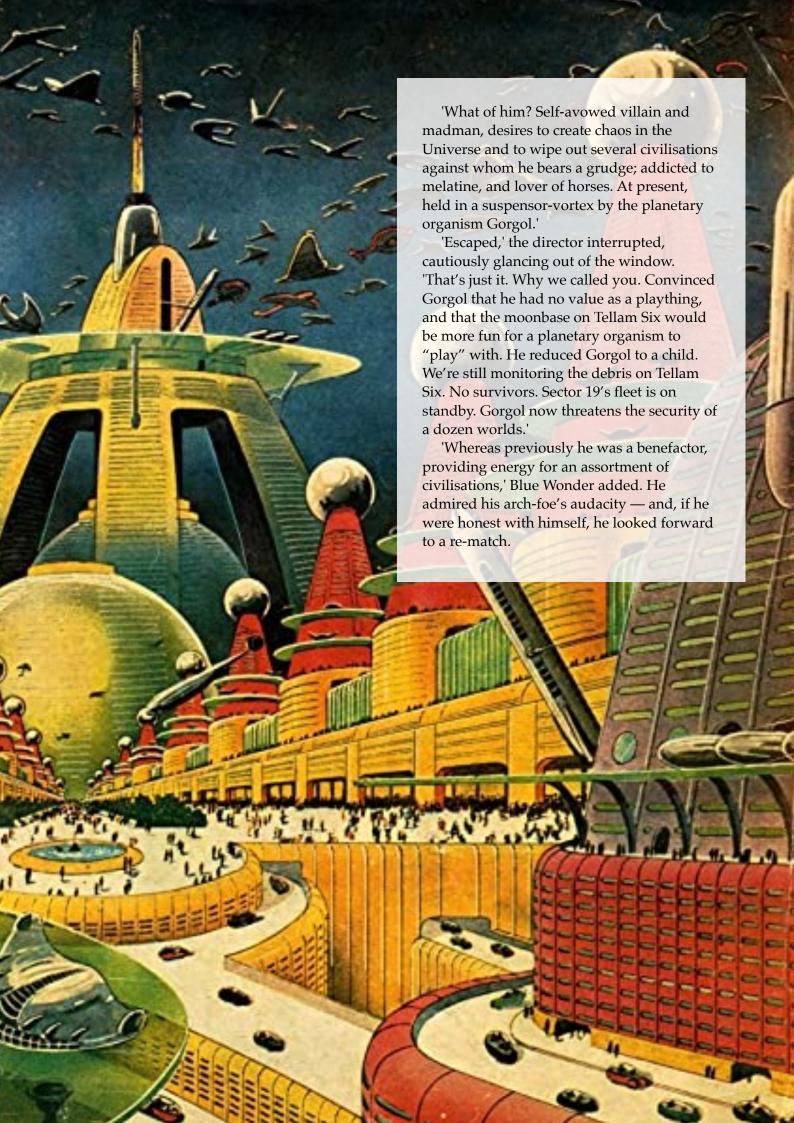
'Yes -yes, of course,' the director said, mopping his brow.

Blue Wonder allowed several minutes for the director to regain his composure and to call the security people to pick up the paralysed assassin. He pondered idly the significance of the robot's warning he had received only minutes earlier in the docking bay, and decided he would eat out that evening. He noted patches of dust had escaped the cleaner's eye on several articles of furniture in the room. 'The office is the mirror of the man,' the Wyze had told him once.

How true, how very true!

'Black Marvel,' said the director, suddenly capturing Blue Wonder's attention as though he had reeled in a fish.







'Yes, dear one,' Black Marvel's heavy voice crushed sound from the air, 'your beloved Blue Wonder is gone forever from the soiled page of time. And now it is time for you to follow him. Such a shame. But pity is a pleasant emotion. Before you die, however, I shall, according to custom, reveal my master plan.' He summoned an image to the screen, the bold and glowing shape of Weaver Seven, a golden world on the outskirts of the Dover Nineteen system, which Penny recognised.

'Yes, my dear, I see you know where we are. This must be grossly unpleasant for you, but Weaver Seven is instrumental in the orchestration of my plan, the very symphony of its fruition, actually. How joyous!'

As Black Marvel transported himself into a self-centred ecstasy, the figure in the shadows waded through silence towards his goal, placing his hand on the sphere on the console.

'Weaver Seven, where the Social Conference nears completion,' Black Marvel was concluding his elaborate explanation of his scheme for universal ruination, 'and where the fears of all the delicate parts of the League are about to be put to rest through the careful work of a thousand million diplomats and their secretaries, is about to be wiped from the Galaxy as though it never existed, plunging the whole of modern civilisation into a new barbarism of war and bloodshed. I love bloodshed! Don't you, my dear?'



He pointed his deadly blasterring at Pansy's stomach and grinned evilly. Sparks of auratic fire leapt from the jewel in the ring as the electric field built up to its lethal crescendo. He laughed his arrogant laugh.

Just then, Computer Module Seven struck him in the face. He fell flat on his back, stunned. A stream of power, surging in a tight beam from the ring, hit Module Seven's circuits so hard that it had no choice but to disintegrate dispassionately.

Pansy rolled free of her restrainers. Black Marvel cried out, protesting unintelligibly at the sudden turn of events. Then the whole floor, the entire ship, lurched over, and things flared and sparked around them.

Pansy saw the undeniable villain fall over a rail to his apparent doom some eight hundred feet below on the lower decks. Not one of the several robot-controlled suspensor safety fields acted to catch him.

Pansy stood up as the room re-established its sanity. Blue Wonder stepped from the shadows and held her hand.

'The omnitron finite reality override, I presume,' she said.

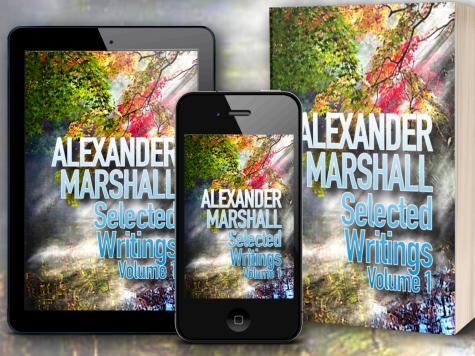
'Correct — all these models were fitted with them. It gave whoever knew the code to the sphere complete control over the automatons on board, as a safety back-up,' he explained. They kissed and watched the sun set behind the beautiful bulk of Weaver Seven.

'Dinner?' Blue Wonder asked.



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—Grant P. Hudson, Editor

Wishes Can Come True

David Bowmore



I can't blame Angelika, not really. We were always close, even before she came to live with me at the age of fourteen. Her mother had issues, but I can't blame her either, she never got over the death of my son.

I haven't made much sense, have I? Let me start again. Angelika is my granddaughter, and my son was her father. His wife, a French woman, had Angelika and never forgave him for dying or her daughter for ruining her own life. So, Angelika came to live with me when she was only fourteen, and I looked after her and her baby till she could stand on her own two feet.

Linda, my great-granddaughter works for the solicitor. Personal Assistant they call it now; we used to call them secretaries in my day. She better be careful, that Christopher Benton always had wandering hands. Well known for it, he is.

The things I could tell you about the people in this town. We've had murders, and people go missing with no explanation. We've had pop stars and TV personalities turning up for dirty weekends, but you can read about that sort of stuff in the papers.

Let's see: Jane Thirsk has never been the same since she walked in on that suicide. The woman put her house up for sale on a Friday afternoon, leaving the keys with Jane at the estate agents and said she was going to Brighton. Jane walks in on Tuesday morning—after the summer bank holiday—and finds the place full of blue bottles, the woman dangling from an oak beam. She had nearly been decapitated, so they say.

Then there's old Felix, who always said he was once married to a princess. He came here and nearly died of heartbreak, but the town kept him going.

There's a policeman in this town you wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of. Imagine it, in this day and age, a copper who takes advantage

of his power. He's quick with his fists if riled and will take payment anyway he sees fit for turning a blind eye. Mind you, his grandfather was just the same.

Who else is there? Let me think, there's plenty of drinkers, but don't ever go on a session with Darryl, he swears blind aliens that experimented on him. I don't know if too much partying scrambled his head, or if he really was abducted and now needs to hide at the bottom of a bottle.

There's Matt who works more jobs than is humanly possible. The Social Security would put him away for forever and a day if they ever bothered to investigate how much cash he earns while still claiming benefit.



Young Wally, well he's not so young anymore, but I can't help thinking of him that way. There is something so incredibly disarming about Wally. Many take him for a fool, but how many fools do you know with a multi-million-pound building company, eh? He's in love for the first time in his life and I'm happy for him.

Gilbert White doesn't know his son is planning on selling the family business as soon as he gets his hands on it.

There's a retired spy come to die in one of the old folks' homes. I'm telling you, there's something strange about him—I can't quite put my finger on it.

Then there's the ghosts. I often see Dickie Harris looking better than he ever did in real life. And if I go and stand outside the cottage where Jane got the fright of her life, I can see that poor woman who hanged herself with the cord of her robe. She stands at the window night after night just staring, with her head at an odd angle.

Know what I think? I think there is some sort of ancient magic in this town bringing waifs and strays here, and it is reluctant to let them go. Perhaps not magic, but certainly something mystical and mysterious from way back in the past. No, I am not being fanciful; I truly believe it because of the things I've seen.

I was talking to Moony about it once, years ago, and he said, 'Some o' the things I seen at sea will straighten yer short an' curlies.' That's Moony for you, salt of the earth fisherman that he is. He's lived a long, hard life the best way he could. Loved a lot of people and damaged a few that hurt those he cared for.



Nevertheless, never believe a fisherman.

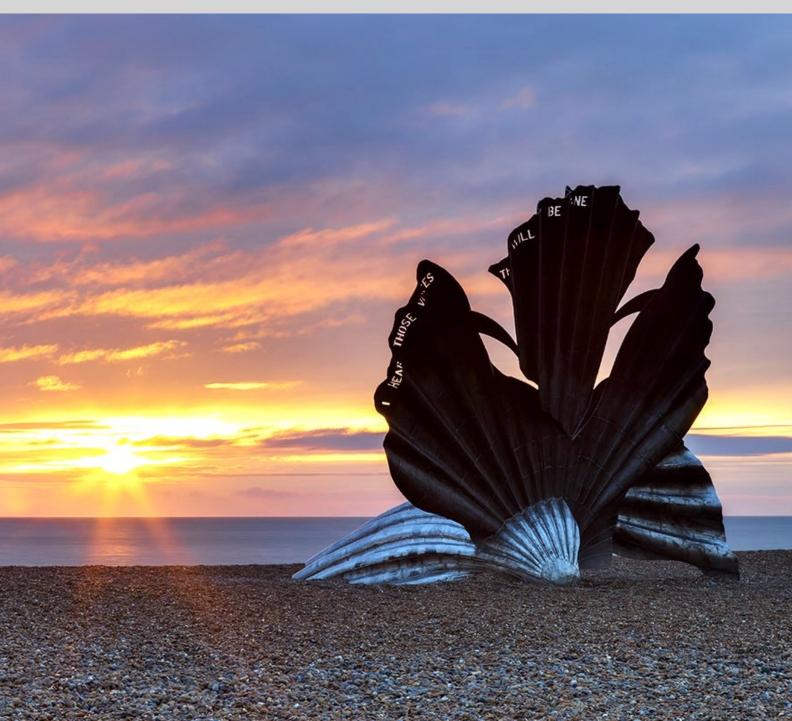
There's a boy who can bring animals back to life. He's special, like my Angelika, but he doesn't know it yet.

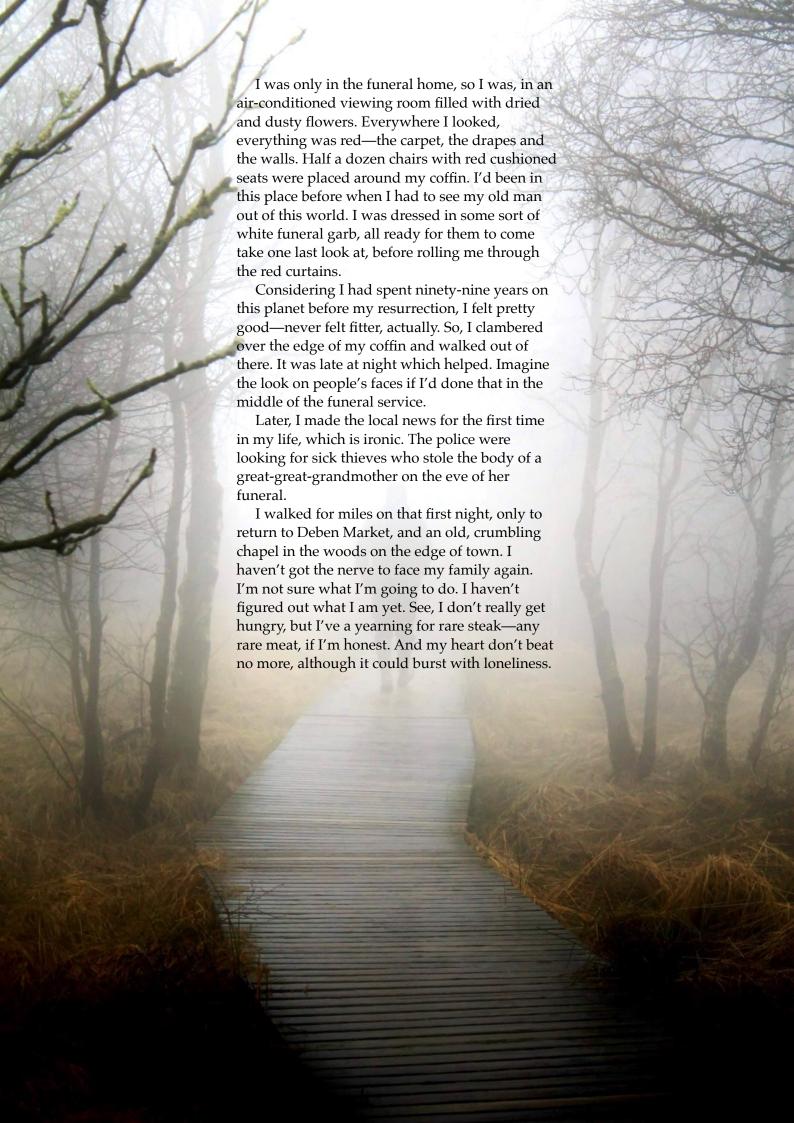
Sorry, I'm rambling – where did I start? No, I don't blame her. It broke her heart when I died. After all, we were very close, and although she never said it out loud, she wanted me back so much that she wished me back from the dead.

There I was not exactly dead but not alive, in some sort of limbo. It wasn't dark, but with not a prick of light it felt pitch black. And I was floating or maybe drifting, but I knew I was

standing on my feet and walking. I was all alone, yet knew many more like me weren't far away. I should've been scared witless and out of my mind, but I felt really peaceful, really calm.

I don't remember a tunnel or a light or hearing people calling me back or anything like what people talk about when they're on the telly. All I know is I opened my eyes and still couldn't see a blessed thing. I raised my hands and realised the coffin lid was only inches above me. Luckily, they hadn't nailed it down, so, when I pushed, it lifted easily enough.



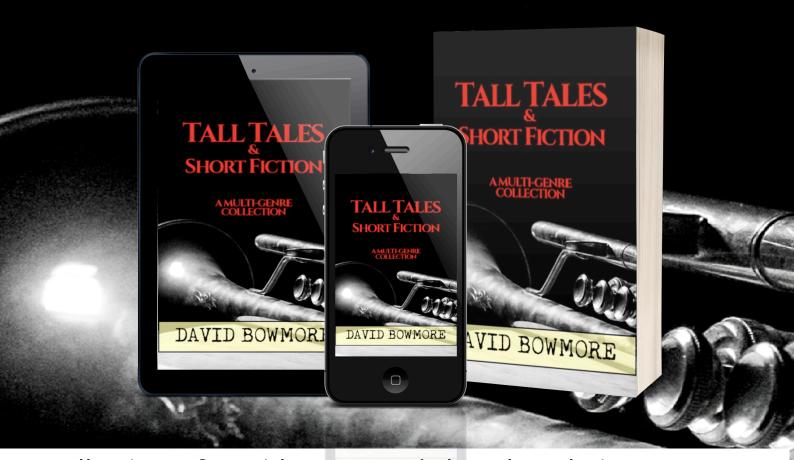




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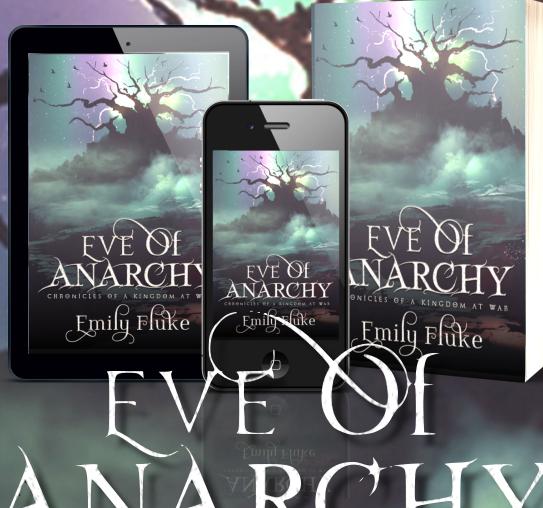
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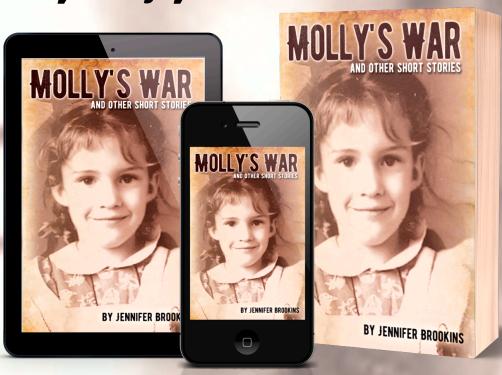


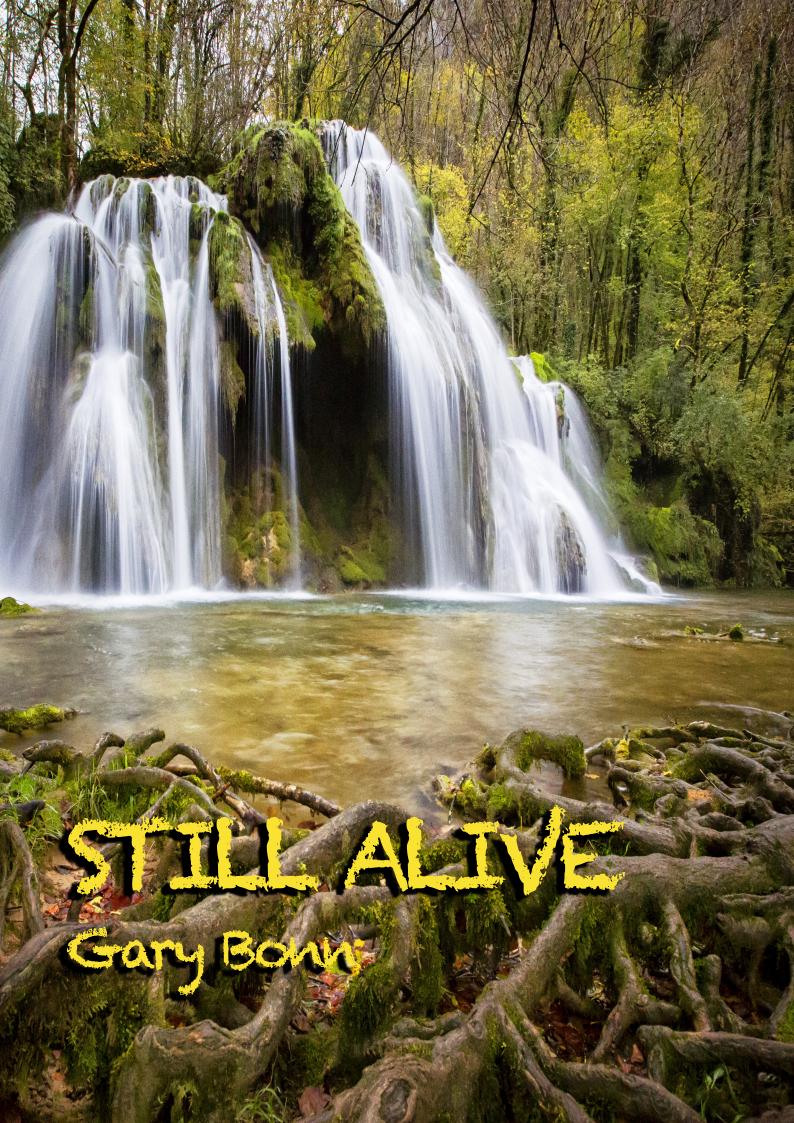
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Shonnie sits on a rock. He's often sitting on rocks, hands on knees, watching. He's part of the landscape. His scrawny legs and small but flaccid stomach are familiar to all around; so too his bald head, gnarled knuckles and stiff grey beard.

He's watched teenagers playing in the fairy pools for as long as he can remember. He wants to find the teenager he used to be, though that person was never really far away and still lives within him. He carries a message to all teenagers: 'don't worry'. Of course they will, teenagers are balled-up self-hugs of seething worries. What he's trying to tell them is worry as much as you like but you don't actually have to. They won't listen. He never did. His point is to be there to tell them anyway.

Now he's watching younger children. They're clambering on rocks, some unsteady, paddling ankle-deep and unsure. Shonnie is trying to span the gap in himself between teenager and child. It's like a bridge lost somewhere and only children can help him find it again. He needs to be called from their side.

He loves the children of course and is there to tell them not to worry too. They don't need him to be around: there is no danger. Even the plunging waterfalls, fiercest whirlpools and most treacherous cliffs are nothing but a source of fun, wonder and delight. Danger is part of an older perception, a world they left behind.

Once he's found the child he was, he will feel more complete. There's no reason to undertake this task except he wants to. That's all.



He's watching Isbell. She's been here a long time and has settled in completely. She's racing through the water, plunging over a fall, crashing among rocks, shrieking with laughter – showing the other children what to do. Showing off kindly. She becomes the motion, the speed, the forces at one moment chaotic and in the next ordered. Tangling and untangling.

Isbell sometimes sits hugging her knees, staring into space, shaking with sadness. Occasionally she comes to Shonnie for hugs and stories or simply to be with someone strong and tranquil.

Sometimes he goes to her just to show he cares, and is always ready to be rebuffed from a loneliness not for sharing.

Shonnie has been here long enough to see the lines connecting each person to everyone else, an elastic three-dimensional web which, in itself, is a greater being: tangling and untangling. Sometimes he flows into all of it but he's not ready to stay there yet. He has more watching to do. There's still love in him to spend in a very human way. Nor is he ready to

relinquish his body, however insubstantial. He's happy with things the way they are.

Isbell approaches him, she has a little boy in tow, water dripping from hands held. "Have you met Lewis?" she calls.

"Aye, Isbell. Lewis is a fine lad."

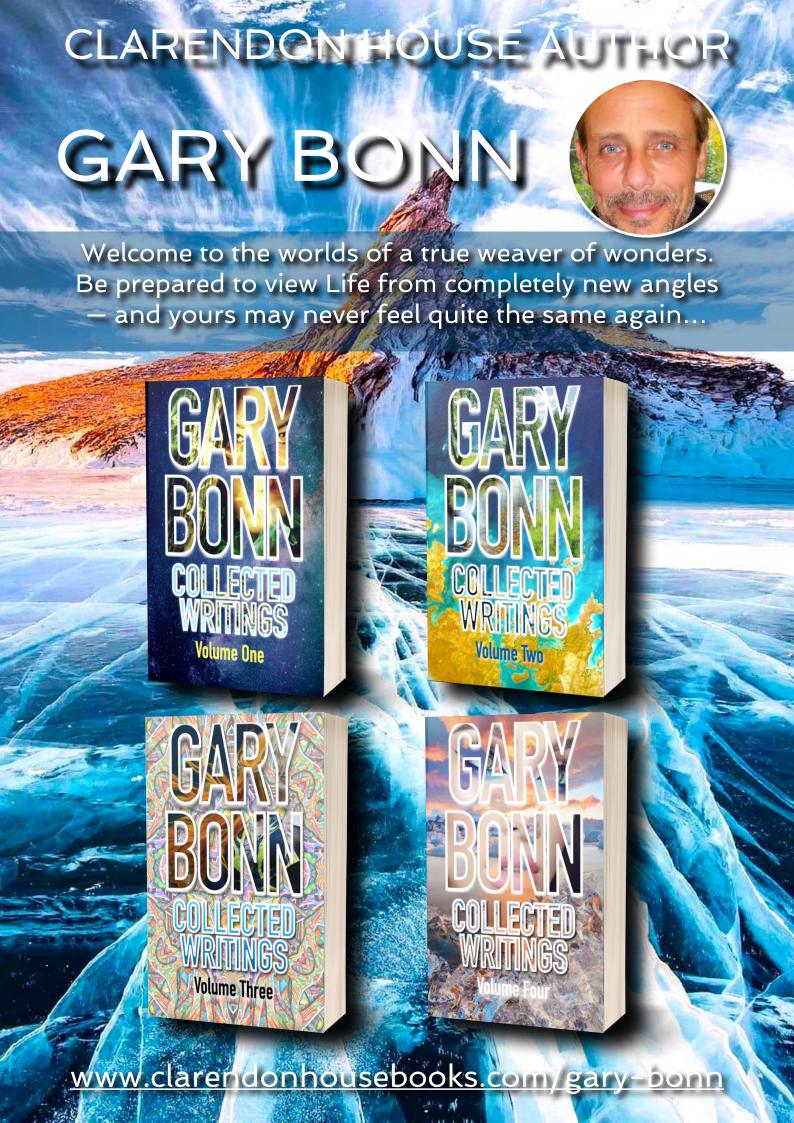
"He's new here."

"Aye, and he watches you at all your antics. He'll be doing the same things before we know it." Shonnie opens his arms. "Lewis, my man, you're looking sad. There's always a hug between these two arms."

Lewis doesn't come forward but presses himself against Isbell. Shonnie sees towering Cuillin mountains behind the two children, the lonely ice-bound crags from which comes this tumultuous water. Water that carves these falls and enchanting pools.

Lewis withdraws a thumb from his mouth. "My mum and dad are still alive."

"Don't worry. It won't be for ever. They'll come here for you one day." Shonnie smiles. "Parents always come eventually."



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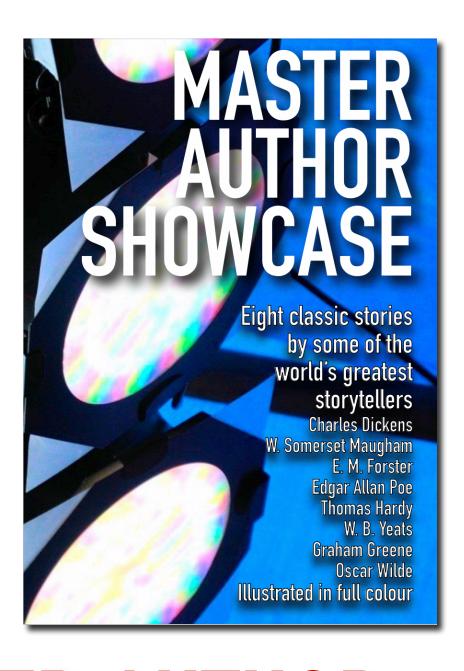


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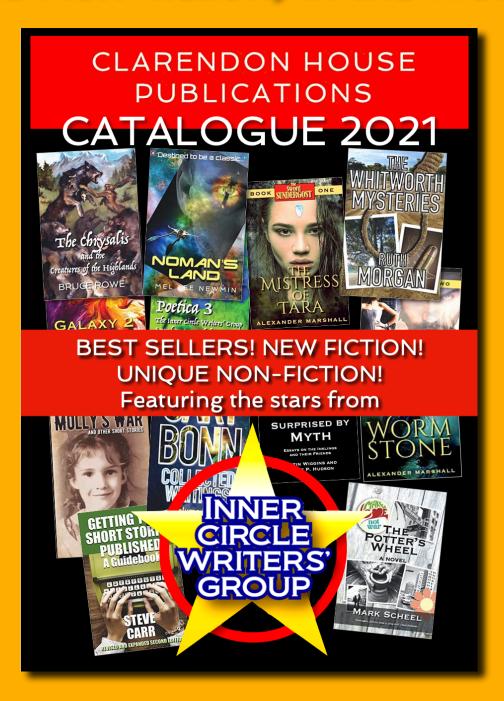


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