

THE NEW WEBZINE FOR SCI-FI, FANTASY, AND HORROR!

# Schlock!

WEBZINE  
www.schlock.co.uk

THIS WEEK'S  
FEATURED STORY:

**A WEEKEND ALONE, PT. ONE**

BY JAMES TALBOT

ALSO FEATURING:

**SUPER DUPER, THE FINAL INSTALLMENT**

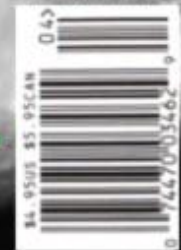
BY JAMES RHODES

**HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD**

BY R TODD WOODSTOCK

**FANTASMAGORIANA  
CONCLUDES...**

Vol. 2 Iss. 2  
20 Nov. 2011



Welcome to Schlock! the new webzine for science fiction, fantasy and horror.

Vol. 2, Issue 2  
20 November 2011

Schlock! is an exciting new weekly webzine dedicated to short stories, flash fiction, serialised novels and novellas within the genres of science

fiction, fantasy and horror. We publish new and old works of pulp sword and sorcery, urban fantasy, dark fantasy and gothic horror. If you want to read quality works of schlock fantasy, science fiction or horror, Schlock! is the webzine for you!

For details of previous editions, please go to the Archive.

Schlock! Webzine is always willing to consider new science fiction, fantasy and horror short stories, serials, graphic novels and comic strips, reviews and art. Feel free to submit fiction, articles, art, or links to your own site to [editor@schlock.co.uk](mailto:editor@schlock.co.uk).

We will also review published and self-published novels, in both print and digital editions. Please contact the editor at the above email address for further details.

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### This Edition

This week's cover illustration is "*Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's monster in the 1935 film Bride of Frankenstein*" by The Man in Question.  
Cover design by [C Priest Brumley](#).

[Fantasmagoriana - Part Four](#) by Mary Shelley - *The student of the unhallowed arts...* GOTHIC

[A Weekend Alone - Part One](#) by James Talbot - *Sometimes Rosemary likes to go on holiday on her own...* HORROR

[Ebook Review: Peaceable Kingdom](#) By Shauna Klein - *Krista has been sacked from her job as a vet's assistant for refusing to put down a client's pet because "the bitch had grown tired" of it.* FEATURE

[Super Duper - Part Twenty Six](#) by James Rhodes - *Smith inherits the Earth...* SCIENCE FICTION

[State of Emergency - Part Fourteen](#) by David Christopher - *Fuck-fuck-fuck da police...!* SCIENCE FICTION

[Head of Household](#) by R. Todd Woodstock - *An unusual witness to murder...* HORROR

[Prayers for a Thousand Western Fronts](#) by Obsidian M. Tesla... *In muddy fields with fears entrenched they fell...* POETRY.

[Toilet Roll](#) by John Jennings - *A Faustian pact with a scatological twist...*  
HORROR

Schlock! Classic Serial: [Varney the Vampire](#): Part Thirty ascribed to Thomas Preskett Prest - *Before Twilight... before Nosferatu ... before Dracula... there was Varney...* GOTHIC HORROR

Schlock! Classic Serial: [Brigands of the Moon](#) (Part 26) by Ray Cummings - *The stars and the Earth were visible over us. Somewhere up there, disclosed by Grantline's instruments but not yet discernible to the naked eye, Miko's reinforcements were hovering...* SPACE OPERA

EDITORIAL

[unfortunately this editorial has been lost]

*Gavin Chappell*

FANTASMAGORIANA,  
OR, TALES FROM THE VILLA DIODATI

PART FOUR

*The most famous of the stories to come out of that famous night at the Villa Diodati, Frankenstein is regarded as both a classic work of gothic horror and an early example of science fiction. It shares level pegging with Bram Stoker's Dracula in influence and the popularity of its monster (always 'The Monster' and never 'Frankenstein,' of course.)*

*The circumstances in which Mary Wollstonecraft (who had not yet married Shelley) conceived the story are outlined in the introduction: weeks of writer's block followed by inspiration from a dream. She was eighteen when she wrote it, and twenty-one when she published it, anonymously in the case of the first edition, although her name was included in the French edition of 1823.*

*The novel's subtitle of The Modern Prometheus underlines the connections Frankenstein has with Romanticism. Prometheus, the Titan who was punished by the gods for stealing fire to give it to Man, his creation, shared popularity with Lucifer as a rebel figure for Romantics such as Shelley and Byron. In 1820, Shelley published a play entitled Prometheus Unbound and earlier, in 1816, Byron wrote a poem named after the character. All three works are connected by the theme of creation, although while in the Prometheus myth, the Titan is the creator of Man, in Frankenstein Man is the Creator, although his eventual fate is almost as tragic as that of Prometheus.*

*Something that continues throughout the many adaptations of the novel is the Monster's identity as a sympathetic character. Like Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights, the Monster is guilty of terrible acts, but the reader comes to understand him and to*

*understand his crimes, and to see him as a heroic and tragic figure. Victor Frankenstein himself, while not the mad scientist of the films, is far less attractive, even though he narrates much of the story.*

*Mary Shelley's original work was a short story, but with her lover's encouragement she expanded it a three volume novel. The following excerpt, however, represents the earliest part of the novel to be written.*

#### FRANKENSTEIN - Mary Shelley's original fragment

... natural philosophy, and particularly chemistry, in the most comprehensive sense of the term, became nearly my sole occupation. I read with ardour those works, so full of genius and discrimination, which modern inquirers have written on these subjects. I attended the lectures, and cultivated the acquaintance, of the men of science of the university; and I found even in M. Krempe a great deal of sound sense and real information, combined, it is true, with a repulsive physiognomy and manners, but not on that account the less valuable. In M. Waldman I found a true friend. His gentleness was never tinged by dogmatism; and his instructions were given with an air of frankness and good nature that banished every idea of pedantry. In a thousand ways he smoothed for me the path of knowledge, and made the most abstruse inquiries clear and facile to my apprehension. My application was at first fluctuating and uncertain; it gained strength as I proceeded, and soon became so ardent and eager that the stars often disappeared in the light of morning whilst I was yet engaged in my laboratory.

As I applied so closely, it may be easily conceived that my progress was rapid. My ardour was indeed the astonishment of the students, and my proficiency that of the masters. Professor Krempe often asked me, with a sly smile, how Cornelius Agrippa went on? whilst M. Waldman expressed the most heartfelt exultation in my progress. Two years passed in this manner, during which I paid no visit to Geneva, but was engaged, heart and soul, in the pursuit of some discoveries, which I hoped to make. None but those who have experienced them can conceive of the enticements of science. In other studies you go as far as others have gone before you, and there is nothing more to know; but in a scientific pursuit there is continual food for discovery and wonder. A mind of moderate capacity, which closely pursues one study, must infallibly arrive at great proficiency in that study; and I, who continually sought the attainment of one object of pursuit, and was solely wrapt up in this, improved so rapidly that, at the end of two years, I made some discoveries in the improvement of some chemical instruments which procured me great esteem and admiration at the university. When I had arrived at this point, and had become as well acquainted with the theory and practice of natural philosophy as depended on the lessons of any of the professors at Ingolstadt, my residence there being no longer conducive to my improvement, I thought of returning to my friends and my native town, when an incident happened that protracted my stay.

One of the phenomena which had peculiarly attracted my attention was the structure of the human frame, and, indeed, any animal endued with life. Whence, I often asked myself, did the principle of life proceed? It was a bold question, and one which has ever been considered as a mystery; yet with how many things are we upon the brink of becoming acquainted, if cowardice or carelessness did not restrain our inquiries. I

revolved these circumstances in my mind, and determined thenceforth to apply myself more particularly to those branches of natural philosophy which relate to physiology. Unless I had been animated by an almost supernatural enthusiasm, my application to this study would have been irksome, and almost intolerable. To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death. I became acquainted with the science of anatomy: but this was not sufficient; I must also observe the natural decay and corruption of the human body. In my education my father had taken the greatest precautions that my mind should be impressed with no supernatural horrors. I do not ever remember to have trembled at a tale of superstition, or to have feared the apparition of a spirit. Darkness had no effect upon my fancy; and a churchyard was to me merely the receptacle of bodies deprived of life, which, from being the seat of beauty and strength, had become food for the worm. Now I was led to examine the cause and progress of this decay, and forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel-houses. My attention was fixed upon every object the most insupportable to the delicacy of the human feelings. I saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted; I beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life; I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain. I paused, examining and analysing all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life, until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me—a light so brilliant and wondrous, yet so simple, that while I became dizzy with the immensity of the prospect which it illustrated, I was surprised that among so many men of genius who had directed their inquiries towards the same science, that I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret.

Remember, I am not recording the vision of a madman. The sun does not more certainly shine in the heavens, than that which I now affirm is true. Some miracle might have produced it, yet the stages of the discovery were distinct and probable. After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter.

The astonishment which I had at first experienced on this discovery soon gave place to delight and rapture. After so much time spent in painful labour, to arrive at once at the summit of my desires was the most gratifying consummation of my toils. But this discovery was so great and overwhelming that all the steps by which I had been progressively led to it were obliterated, and I beheld only the result. What had been the study and desire of the wisest men since the creation of the world was now within my grasp. Not that, like a magic scene, it all opened upon me at once: the information I had obtained was of a nature rather to direct my endeavours so soon as I should point them towards the object of my search, than to exhibit that object already accomplished. I was like the Arabian who had been buried with the dead, and found a passage to life, aided only by one glimmering, and seemingly ineffectual, light.

I see by your eagerness, and the wonder and hope which your eyes express, my friend, that you expect to be informed of the secret with which I am acquainted; that cannot be: listen patiently until the end of my story, and you will easily perceive why I am reserved upon that subject. I will not lead you on, unguarded and ardent as I then was, to your destruction and infallible misery. Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much

happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow.

When I found so astonishing a power placed within my hands, I hesitated a long time concerning the manner in which I should employ it. Although I possessed the capacity of bestowing animation, yet to prepare a frame for the reception of it, with all its intricacies of fibres, muscles, and veins, still remained a work of inconceivable difficulty and labour. I doubted at first whether I should attempt the creation of a being like myself, or one of simpler organisation; but my imagination was too much exalted by my first success to permit me to doubt of my ability to give life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man. The materials at present within my command hardly appeared adequate to so arduous an undertaking; but I doubted not that I should ultimately succeed. I prepared myself for a multitude of reverses; my operations might be incessantly baffled, and at last my work be imperfect: yet, when I considered the improvement which every day takes place in science and mechanics, I was encouraged to hope my present attempts would at least lay the foundations of future success. Nor could I consider the magnitude and complexity of my plan as any argument of its impracticability. It was with these feelings that I began the creation of a human being. As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of a gigantic stature; that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionably large. After having formed this determination, and having spent some months in successfully collecting and arranging my materials, I began.

No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. Pursuing these reflections, I thought, that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time (although I now found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption.

These thoughts supported my spirits, while I pursued my undertaking with unremitting ardour. My cheek had grown pale with study, and my person had become emaciated with confinement. Sometimes, on the very brink of certainty, I failed; yet still I clung to the hope which the next day or the next hour might realise. One secret which I alone possessed was the hope to which I had dedicated myself; and the moon gazed on my midnight labours, while, with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, I pursued nature to her hiding-places. Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay? My limbs now tremble and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but then a resistless, and almost frantic, impulse urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit. It was indeed but a passing trance that only made me feel with renewed acuteness so soon as, the unnatural stimulus ceasing to operate, I had returned to my old habits. I collected bones from charnel-houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame. In a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and staircase, I kept

my workshop of filthy creation: my eye-balls were starting from their sockets in attending to the details of my employment. The dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials; and often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation, whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which perpetually increased, I brought my work near to a conclusion.

The summer months passed while I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit. It was a most beautiful season; never did the fields bestow a more plentiful harvest, or the vines yield a more luxuriant vintage: but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent, and whom I had not seen for so long a time. I knew my silence disquieted them; and I well remembered the words of my father: "I know that while you are pleased with yourself, you will think of us with affection, and we shall hear regularly from you. You must pardon me if I regard any interruption in your correspondence as a proof that your other duties are equally neglected."

I knew well, therefore, what would be my father's feelings; but I could not tear my thoughts from my employment, loathsome in itself, but which had taken an irresistible hold of my imagination. I wished, as it were, to procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature, should be completed.

I then thought that my father would be unjust if he ascribed my neglect to vice, or faultiness on my part; but I am now convinced that he was justified in conceiving that I should not be altogether free from blame. A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow passion or a transitory desire to disturb his tranquillity. I do not think that the pursuit of knowledge is an exception to this rule. If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind. If this rule were always observed; if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquillity of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved, Cæsar would have spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually; and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed.

But I forget that I am moralising in the most interesting part of my tale; and your looks remind me to proceed.

My father made no reproach in his letters, and only took notice of my silence by inquiring into my occupations more particularly than before. Winter, spring, and summer passed away during my labours; but I did not watch the blossom or the expanding leaves—sights which before always yielded me supreme delight—so deeply was I engrossed in my occupation. The leaves of that year had withered before my work drew near to a close; and now every day showed me more plainly how well I had succeeded. But my enthusiasm was checked by my anxiety, and I appeared rather like one doomed by slavery to toil in the mines, or any other unwholesome trade, than an artist occupied by his favourite employment. Every night I was oppressed by a slow fever, and I became nervous to a most painful degree; the fall of a leaf startled

me, and I shunned my fellow-creatures as if I had been guilty of a crime. Sometimes I grew alarmed at the wreck I perceived that I had become; the energy of my purpose alone sustained me: my labours would soon end, and I believed that exercise and amusement would then drive away incipient disease; and I promised myself both of these when my creation should be complete.

## A WEEKEND ALONE by James Talbot

### Part One

Time the insidious killer, the stealer of dreams, and the bringer of despair and hopelessness. As soon as we're born, we're dragged in an inexorable headlong rush towards our own death; we just don't realise it until it's too late. Put that together with fate or destiny or what ever you want to call it and what have we got to look forward to? Perhaps it is true that in life each of us is dependent on the Moirae, the three fates, as they spin individual threads of destiny which ultimately lead us to our predetermined final acts. Do we participate willingly? Some do, yet others meet their end with apparently no conscious choice on their part. They walk blindly forward until the inevitable realisation that they may have been an agent of their own destruction.

\*

Joel waved as Rosemary walked through the security gate and disappeared from his view. He was suddenly gripped by a momentary sense of disassociation as though he had no connection to the here and now. Shaking his head and trying to lose the unsettling feeling, he turned and made his way from the airport building and back towards his car. 'It's only for a couple of days,' he reassured himself as he walked.

\*

Rosemary handed her boarding card and passport to the glum looking airport official who duly scanned the home printed document before carefully scrutinising the passport. He looked closely at Rosemary who smiled her best, most friendly smile in response.

'Thanks,' said Rosemary as the official handed her documents back to her without a word. The walk to the departure gate was longer than Rosemary remembered it being. 'Must be because of all the improvements,' she thought as she followed the neon numbers towards the gate. The duty free shops had been full of overpriced perfumes and sunglasses and she wondered if anybody ever bought anything from them. 'They shouldn't call it duty free but *see how cheap you can buy this stuff when you get where you're going.*' Rosemary laughed out loud at her own joke and the tall man in front of her in the queue turned around.

'You're happy about something,' he said smiling.



Rosemary looked him up and down and silently approved. He was around six feet tall and casually dressed in blue jeans, a light cotton shirt, brown boots, and a dark leather jacket. A pair of Oakley sunglasses was pushed up on top of his blonde hair and a battered leather holdall was at his feet.

‘I was just thinking that the duty free shop would be better titled if they called it *see how cheap you can buy this stuff when you get where you’re going.*’

The stranger’s eyes crinkled at the corners as he smiled.

‘You’d wonder how they ever sell anything, wouldn’t you? My name’s Saul,’ he said as he extended his hand.

Rosemary hadn’t expected this. A short conversation about the overpriced goods in the shop was one thing but introductions and handshakes? He’d want to sit next to her on the plane next. Despite herself, she saw her hand take his as she replied.

‘Hi Saul. I’m Rosemary.’ His handshake was firm but without the fierce grip some men used which she found so intimidating.

‘Travelling light?’

Rosemary looked down at the rucksack she was carrying. ‘I’m only away for the weekend so all I’ve got are some essentials, a couple of tee shirts, a clean pair of jeans, socks, you know. All I need for a couple of days.’

‘Is it business or pleasure?’

Rosemary wasn’t sure she liked the number of questions Saul was asking so decided to be a bit more discreet with her answers.

‘A little bit of both, to be honest.’

At that moment, the steward at the desk switched on the microphone and asked for priority passengers to make their way to the gate. A sizeable number of people surged forward and began to file through.

‘We’ll probably all end up queuing together outside before they let us on the plane and they’ll all have wasted their €8-00 or whatever the charge is now.’

‘You’re probably right,’ Rosemary replied, smiling.

Five minutes later Rosemary and Saul found themselves in a long queue four people wide as they waited to be allowed onto the waiting plane.

‘Told you,’ said Saul as the queue of jostling passengers made its way towards the aircraft.

‘Front or back stairs,’ Rosemary thought to herself. The decision was made for her as Saul made his way to the front of the aircraft and she headed for the rear. Saul smiled

at her as she passed him and he joined the line of passengers waiting at the foot of the front stairs.

‘Please put your bags in the overhead lockers and take a seat anywhere,’ repeated the stewardess again and again, as she checked the boarding cards and ushered the passengers onto the rear of the plane. Rosemary spotted an empty window seat and threw her rucksack into the overhead locker. She had no sooner sat down and fastened her safety belt when the familiar blue jeans and dark leather jacket eased onto the seat next to her.

‘Hi again,’ said Saul smiling at her.

Rosemary decided the time for being nice was over. ‘Look, Saul. I’m not interested in meeting anyone or getting friendly with anyone. If you’re looking for an easy pickup, you’d better find someone else, OK?’

Saul looked shocked and surprised.

‘I’m sorry, Rosemary. I didn’t mean you to think I was being so crass as to try and pick you up. I just thought we could have a chat and pass the flight together. Would you rather I sat somewhere else?’

The clear guileless blue eyes and easy smile disarmed Rosemary. ‘I don’t think there are any spare seats,’ she said looking up and down the cabin. ‘I’m sorry. That was probably rude of me but I just didn’t want you thinking that because I spoke to you we were somehow friends.’

‘Please don’t worry. I can understand how you feel. You’re an extremely attractive young woman and travelling alone you have to be on your guard.’

The rest of the flight was passed in a companionable silence.

\*

Joel could hear his mobile ringing in his jacket pocket as he pushed the key into the lock on the front door of the flat. The drive back from the airport had been uneventful and he had stopped at the local supermarket to get half a dozen cans of beer and some bread and milk. He just managed to get to the kitchen with his shopping when the telephone stopped ringing.

‘Shit!’

Joel quickly put the beers and milk in the fridge, dropped the bread into the bread bin then retrieved his mobile from his jacket pocket. The display told him there was a message waiting so he quickly dialled the answer phone.

‘Hi Joel, it’s Keith. I was wondering what you had planned for tonight? I know Rose is away so was wondering if you fancy coming out for a few pints with the boys tonight? I’ll try your mobile again later, mate.’

Joel sat down at the kitchen table and wondered if he felt like going out tonight or not. He had been looking forward to some freedom and the chance to catch up with his friends but now he was having second thoughts.

‘Maybe I’ll go out for a pint tomorrow night?’

As Joel sat there pondering his next move, the mobile started to ring again.

‘Hello?’

‘Alright mate, its Dave. Did Keith ring you earlier about going out for a pint tonight?’

‘Yeah, he rang about five minutes ago and left a message. But you know I think I’m going to have a quiet night tonight and just watch a bit of television or something.’

‘Up to you mate, but I thought you’d jump at the chance of getting out with the lads on a Friday night. Did you hear about that dirty sod Phil?’

‘No, what’s he been up to now?’

Phil was a man of few morals and was well known as a selfish womaniser who would, and in some cases had, done some unspeakable things in pursuit of what he liked to call the perfect fuck.

‘He only went on the internet and got himself in touch with a couple who wanted a threesome. Turns out he went to their house and ended up in bed with them. He got a real shock though, cos’ as he was going down on the bird her husband tried to fuck him!’

Joel collapsed into fits of laughter while Dave was equally speechless with un-suppressed mirth on the other end of the phone. Wiping tears from his eyes and struggling to contain himself Joel tried to speak but once more subsided into peels of laughter. Finally getting himself under control, he managed to talk.

‘He won’t have liked that, will he? What did he do?’

‘You’re telling me he didn’t like it. He couldn’t get his pants back on and get out of the house fast enough. Called the bloke a queer and told his missus she needed a new bloke who didn’t want to shag other men while they fucked her.’

‘I’d have loved to have seen that. You couldn’t write that kind of stuff in a fucking story, could you?’

‘You should hear Phil tell the story. He goes into all the details of the way she stripped off and sucked his cock before all the other stuff happened.’

‘How did he find them?’

‘Some website, Swingers Paradise or something.’

‘I’ll give him some stick about that when I see him.’

‘He deserves it mate, dirty bugger. Right, I’ll leave you in peace. I’ll let Keith know you’re giving tonight a miss and maybe we’ll see you down the pub tomorrow night?’

‘Yeah, I’ll see you tomorrow night, mate.’

Joel tapped the end call button then dropped the mobile back on the table. He looked thoughtful for a minute then quickly got up and left the kitchen. A minute later, he returned with the laptop under his arm.

\*

Rosemary walked out of the train station and made her way over the bus lanes outside before crossing the wide dual carriageway and heading towards the old town. It was hot and she took off her fleece and threaded it through the handle of her rucksack slung over her shoulder. The twenty minute train ride from the airport had taken her through some picturesque countryside but now she was back in the hustle and bustle of the city and would be glad to get to the small hotel she had booked.

As she walked through the rows of trees that ran parallel with the road and shielded the compact terraces of houses from the road noise, Rosemary was lost in thought. She thought about how difficult it had been in the beginning but how understanding Joel was now. It had taken him a long time to realise that she loved him and wanted to be with him but she needed to get away and be on her own sometimes. She had given up trying to analyse her strange cravings; she only knew that every so often they had to be satisfied or she could not function. Her life gradually became a living hell of tortured imaginings and debilitating sleepless nights. She had endured the condition since she reached puberty when the changes that rushed her towards womanhood had begun.

Rosemary had experienced her first release from the pressure cauldron of her feelings when she was sixteen years old and had seen the car accident in town. The body of the young man thrown through the air and the sickening crunch as he hit the ground had left her breathless and almost unable to stand as the warm feeling flooded through her. It seemed to start in the pit of her stomach and radiate through her body, leaving her senses bristling with pleasure. She had to lean against a shop doorway to avoid slumping to her knees, so intense were the feelings.

Not realising what was wrong with her daughter, Rosemary’s mother slipped an arm around her shoulder to comfort her.’ ‘Don’t look, love,’ she said, putting her hand across Rosemary’s eyes as she tried to obscure the view. Rosemary wanted to look and she desperately wanted to slip her hand between her legs but resisted the urge although she did manage to look through her mother’s fingers.

\*

As Rosemary crossed the dual carriageway, Saul watched her from inside the railway station. They had said their goodbyes in the airport arrivals hall and he had walked away towards the taxi ranks outside while Rosemary made her way towards the

railway station. Once he was sure Rosemary was out of sight, he quickly doubled back towards the railway station. It had been easy to follow Rosemary from a distance as she boarded the local train. He had gambled she was making her way to the city and it had paid off when he stepped onto the platform at the city station and he caught sight of her ahead of him as she made her way towards the exit.

\*

Rosemary signed the register and took the key from the clerk at the desk. He had looked disappointed that she did not have any luggage for him to carry and had directed her towards her room on the first floor. Once inside the room Rosemary stripped her clothes off and walked into the bathroom. She laughed at the opaque glazed door from the bedroom and wondered how whoever had designed the hotel décor thought people would react to a glazed door as they sat on the toilet. 'Takes all sorts,' she thought as she turned on the water and the shower head sprang into life.

\*

Saul had discreetly followed Rosemary and now he watched from outside the hotel. He spotted Rosemary as she closed the heavy curtains across the window and he made a mental note of the location of the room in relation to the main door into the hotel. Smiling to himself, he walked away.

\*

Rosemary stepped out of the shower, towelled herself dry, then walked into the bedroom. She tipped her small pile of clothes from the rucksack onto the bed and selected a clean pair of white panties. She dressed quickly, jeans, dark tee shirt, trainers, dark fleece, and a dark beanie hat into which she scooped her long hair. Checking her look in the mirror, she pulled the hat down a bit lower to hide most of her forehead then left the room, walked quickly and quietly down the stairs and through the hotel foyer. The desk clerk looked up briefly but only caught sight of a dark jacket and hat as whomever it was left the hotel. Shrugging his shoulders, he went back to the book he was reading.

\*

Saul finished his meal and sipped the last of his water. The steak had been delicious and perfectly cooked. He sat back and contemplated how the rest of the night was going to unfold. His desire to indulge himself had been getting steadily worse over the preceding months and now was like a burning fire within him. 'At least I've managed almost a year this time,' he thought idly as his imagination raced over different scenarios but each with the same outcome. His erection strained at the confines of his trousers and he had to force his mind away from his fantasies in an effort to calm himself.

\*

Rosemary paid for the black miniskirt and dropped it into the bag along with her other shopping. She had made each of her purchases in different shops and paid cash for

everything. She didn't want any kind of electronic trail left. 'Only one more thing to buy,' she thought as she left the clothes shop and walked across the street towards the hardware store. She was tempted by the wicked looking tanto but opted for the more pragmatic razor sharp Global carving knife. On a whim, she also bought the thick black plastic handcuffs she saw, then left the shop and made her way back to the hotel. Rosemary waited until a couple entered the hotel foyer and obscured the desk clerks view before she slipped past them and walked quickly up the stairs to her room.

\*

Joel looked at the selection of options in front of him and opted for couples seeking men. He filtered the results by those closest to him and was surprised at the number within five miles of the flat. He had found the website easily enough and once the short registration was completed, he had access to the main part of the site. As he was looking at the photographs, a couple had posted on their advert and who claimed to live in the same postcode as him, his mobile rang.

'Hi Joel.'

'Hi Rose. How was the flight?'

'It was great thanks, except for this guy that started talking to me at the airport and then sat next to me on the plane.'

'Was he trying to pick you up?'

Rosemary thought Joel sounded concerned so she played down the story and changed the subject.

'No, I don't think so, he just wanted some company. After we'd landed he left the airport through the main doors as I was walking to the station, said he was getting a taxi home. Are you going out with the lads tonight?'

'No, I thought I'd have a quiet one tonight and meet them down the pub tomorrow night. What are you going to do tonight?'

'I'm going to have a quiet meal and then an early night. I'll do some serious walking and sightseeing tomorrow. I probably won't be back at the hotel until late on so I'll leave ringing you until Sunday, if that's OK?'

'Of course. Just look after yourself over there, OK?'

Rosemary laughed and the sound filled Joel with sadness.

'I miss you, Rose.'

'I miss you too. Don't worry, I'll be back in a couple of days and I'll give you a big hug and kiss you so much you'll soon be fed up of it and wish I was still away somewhere.'

They laughed together and chatted for a few minutes more before saying their goodbyes.

Joel had gradually become used to Rose's sporadic weekends away. At first, they had argued about her need for time away on her own but now Joel knew how important they were to both of them. Slowly he'd been able to spot the signs of Rose becoming restless. She'd start to lose weight and pale dark circles would begin to show under her eyes. She'd be irritable and the slightest thing would arouse her anger. Bizarrely, her libido would increase and Joel would be mystified by the contrast. One minute Rose would be screaming at him, the next she'd be ripping his clothes off. He knew when she returned from this weekend away she would be at peace with herself again and that once her hugely increased desire for sex subsided their life would return to normality. Until the next time of course.

\*

Saul strolled through the city centre in the warm evening sunlight. The streets were busy with shoppers and tourists, some loaded down with carrier bags which carried the logos and advertising the multitude of shops which crowded the closely built streets. A noisy group of brightly clothed young women bustled out of a shop and almost collided with him. Laughing, they streamed around him and made their way across the narrow street towards another shop on the other side of the road. Saul halted momentarily as they passed, then as discreetly as he could, followed them. It was easy to covertly watch the women as they searched through racks of clothes and held various items up against each others' bodies. They spoke loudly amongst themselves about how each of the items looked or compared to others they'd already tried.

'They sound like a flock of birds,' Saul thought to himself as he watched. 'A flock of brightly coloured screeching parakeets.' Tiring of their incessant noise Saul turned and left the shop. One of the young women nudged her companion and motioned her head towards Saul as he walked away. The women laughed together as they watched him go. They'd spotted him as soon as he changed direction and followed them into the shop.

Walking back onto the busy streets, Saul was angry and did his best to subdue his feelings as he strolled along. 'I can't afford anger,' he reminded himself. 'Anger leads to haste and mistakes and that is something I can't accept.' Saul wandered into a small deserted park hidden amongst the buildings and found an isolated bench beneath the branches of an overhanging sycamore tree. Sitting down he leant back and allowed his eyes to close as he tried to bring his rage under control. 'I need to find a release soon.' A noise caused him to sit up straight and his eyes snapped open. A couple who looked to be in their mid twenties were at the gates to the park and they were arguing loudly. The man suddenly pushed the woman away as she moved towards him and stalked away from the park gates. The woman watched him go then with her head slumped down towards her breasts walked into the park and sat down on the grass under a small copse of trees a short distance from the park gates.

Carefully, without making any sudden movements, Saul gauged the distance from the park gates to the trees beneath which the woman sat and how visible she was to

passers by. Normally he would never consider such an opportunity but today was different. He knew he was angry and he hadn't planned this properly but his anger made him less concerned about the danger. Picking up his holdall, he began to stroll towards where the woman sat. Something, he didn't know what, alerted her and she looked towards him as he approached. He smiled trying to make himself look friendly but something about him scared the woman and she quickly stood up and left the park.

Saul was seething now. First the group of young women had been laughing at him. They thought they hid it well but Saul knew they were laughing. He could tell from the way they looked at each other and the way they tried to tease him as they tried the clothes against their young bodies. He knew that they were aware of him and the way his eyes devoured them as much as he tried to hide it from them. Now the woman in the park had gone and he was alone. He knew he had to leave the park and the surrounding area. He couldn't take the chance that the woman wouldn't think his behaviour suspicious and report him to the police.

A cold calculating calmness descended on Saul and he gratefully welcomed its presence. His mind focussed on the here and now and the need for anonymity. He slipped his leather jacket from his shoulders and stuffed it in his holdall then pulled his sunglasses down from his head to hide his eyes. It was evening but the sun was low against the horizon, creating sudden blazes of sunlight as it appeared between the buildings and his dark glasses were in no way out of the ordinary. Walking slowly, Saul made his way back into the hubbub of the centre of town and found a quiet pavement café where he chose a seat at a table set in a shadowed corner and ordered an espresso.

\*

From a chair on the other side of the room, Rosemary looked at the new clothes she had bought today and had laid out on the bed. On the floor was a pair of shoes with stiletto heels while on the bed the dark maroon coloured blouse with its low cut neckline sat on top of the black miniskirt. The black thong and black hold up stockings were on top of the miniskirt as though she was creating a flat bodiless mannequin lying on top of the bed. The Global carving knife lay across her lap as she sat and looked at the clothes. Picking up the knife Rosemary ran her thumb horizontally across the blade. She could tell it was razor sharp and if she had allowed her finger to traverse vertically down the blade, it would have cut deeply into her flesh. The aching inside her was becoming unbearable but she tried to think clearly, as she examined her options. She was booked to stay at the hotel for two nights and any sudden departure might arouse suspicion. Taking the clothes from the bed Rosemary packed them away into the bags she had been given when she purchased them. She felt sick and her head was filled with visions of her other weekends away. 'Tomorrow night,' she promised herself. 'Only one more night to wait.'

\*

Sitting in the lounge with the laptop perched on the small coffee table, Joel looked carefully at the photographs on the advert. The woman was blonde and slim and although the features of her face were obscured, he could tell she was very pretty. The



man she was with was slightly overweight with some fat around his belly but his erection was on full view. The blonde woman was on her knees and her tongue was extended and licking the underside of the man's penis as the photograph had been taken. The next photograph had the women facing towards the camera and sitting astride the man, Joel assumed it was the same man, as he penetrated her. *Looking for an unattached male tonight* said the headline above the advert. Joel wondered if this was the same couple Phil had visited, as he typed what he thought would be a witty and interesting reply to the advert. He pressed *send* then went into the kitchen to make himself a cup of coffee.

As he walked back from the kitchen, the red *email received* icon was blinking. Joel took a mouthful of coffee and tried to steady his nerves as he sat down in front of the laptop and clicked the open mailbox icon. The couple wanted to meet that night and would he be available? They suggested a local pub for the initial meet and if they all got on and felt good in each other's company, they could return to their house later for some intimate fun. Joel was in a desperate quandary. Did he reply, did he just ignore the email? He honestly hadn't expected a reply, assuming that the adverts on the site were merely posted by dreamers and people with nothing better to do.

\*

Saul left the café an hour later. It was dusk now and the lengthening shadows reassured him with their welcoming darkness. The temperature had dropped and he was wearing his leather jacket again. The bright lights of a busy looking bar attracted him and he made his way towards the door. The burly looking doorman gave him a smile as he made his way into the smoky interior. The bright lights of the exterior were not present inside. The interior was dimly lit with dark intimate recesses and corners where couples could keep clandestine liaisons. The bar was nearly empty with few people at the tables and a small group of young men standing together at the bar drinking.

Carefully he made his way to a vacant table towards the back of the bar. A young waitress appeared as he sat down and asked if she could get him a drink. Saul smiled at her as she spoke and let his eyes roam over her young firm body. 'A Perrier please,' he replied giving her his best and most friendly smile. The waitress disappeared but soon returned with a glass full of ice and small bottle of Perrier which she opened and placed on the table in front of Saul along with the glass. Saul paid for his drink and gave her a sizeable tip. She beamed at him before returning to the bar.

Saul sipped his drink and thought about what he was going to do tonight. He had decided to save visiting Rosemary until tomorrow night. He wasn't due to fly to his next destination until Sunday evening so he had plenty of time. He smiled as he thought about how easy it was to travel the world these days. As long as you weren't too concerned about where you were going and the day you travelled, you could move around Europe for next to nothing. Something inside alerted Saul to the fact that he was being observed. Sipping his drink and looking over the brim of his glass, he carefully scanned the dimly lit room. He saw a quick movement in the corner of his vision as his observer looked away. The woman at the bar who had been looking at him was now staring down into her drink with a studied concentration. Saul waited until she looked over at him again then smiled at her.

\*

Rosemary took the last bite of food from her plate and sat back contentedly. The small Italian restaurant across the road from the hotel had been recommended to her by the desk clerk. The home made lasagne she had chosen from the menu had been delicious and the small glass of red wine had complemented the food brilliantly. The restaurant owner and his extended family did everything; they cooked and waited tables and really made an effort to give each guest an enjoyable evening. Rosemary complemented them on the food and the service as she paid the bill, leaving a reasonable tip. As she left, the owner wished her a good night and hoped she would call again. Rosemary assured him she would and made her way back to the hotel.

Alone in her room Rosemary once more sat in the chair and fingered the blade of the carving knife. She hadn't bothered to switch on any of the lights and the only illumination in the room came from the trickle of light seeping under the curtains from the street lights outside. The knot in her stomach was like a lead weight and she wished she could relieve the tension and be free of the tormenting ache inside her.

\*

Standing at the bar, Joel nervously turned his mobile phone over and over in his hand. He had no idea what he would do if it actually rang. He'd summoned up his courage and replied to the couple's email. They'd arranged a time and swapped phone numbers and now here he was. Thankfully, the pub they'd suggested to meet was not the same one that Keith and Dave would be in so he felt relatively safe from prying eyes.

'They said they'd phone at nine pm,' Joel thought looking again at his watch.

It was now 9.20 and he'd had enough of waiting. Downing the last of his coke he was about to turn away from the bar when his phone vibrated in his hand and then began to ring.

'Hello, is that Joel?'

'Yes,' Joel answered feeling as though everybody in the pub was looking at him and was aware of who he was talking to and what they were planning.

'Hi, it's Adam we spoke earlier. Sorry we're running a bit late and can't get there until about nine forty-five. Do you still want to meet up?'

Joel was racked with indecision; on the one hand, he felt as though he wanted to try something new yet on the other his conscience was telling him how wrong what he was doing actually was. What would Rose do if she knew what he was doing?

'Hello Joel, are you there?'

'I'm sorry, Adam. I'm having second thoughts about this. I'm not sure I can go through with it, sorry. Let's just call the whole thing off, OK?'

‘Alright mate, it’s your call but don’t contact us again, OK? Ruth and I don’t mess around with no shows and people who get cold feet.’

Despite the fact that he was the one cancelling the meeting Joel was slightly annoyed with the accusation that he hadn’t showed up and was somehow letting them down.

‘That’s odd, Adam. I’m here and you’re the ones who haven’t arrived yet.’

There was silence on the other end of the telephone so Joel continued.

‘I think that after waiting over twenty minutes and then being asked to wait for at least another twenty minutes that it’s you who’s the no show and I don’t see why I should wait any longer, do you?’

There was no answer from the phone so Joel pressed the *end call* button. ‘Wanker,’ he thought as put the phone in his pocket and walked out of the pub.

\*

Saul carefully watched the woman at the bar. She sat alone and appeared to be drinking glass after glass of spirits. At the rate she was drinking, Saul wondered if she would be able to stand soon. He waited until he had almost finished his Perrier then looked towards the woman. She sensed his gaze and turned towards him. Saul lifted his glass towards her, drank the last of his water, then made his way out of the bar. The doorman wished him goodnight on his way out.

‘Oh, I’m sure it will be,’ Saul replied, smiling, as he made his way to the other side of the road and ambled towards the corner of the street where he slipped into a shadowy doorway. Looking back, he saw the woman walk out of the bar and stumble slightly as the fresh air hit her. She turned around in a complete circle, much as people who have consumed too much alcohol do when they’re trying to get their bearings. She looked both ways along the street as though deciding which way to go. Saul walked out of the doorway, turned slightly away from the observing eyes of the doorman and walked around the corner out of his line of sight. The woman spotted him and walked unsteadily towards the corner of the street.

The doorman watched her go with a smile on his face. He knew her type well. Drinks to forget and ends up sleeping with anyone who will have her. When she wakes up the next day, she’s consumed by guilt and self recrimination for her actions but is so trapped in the cycle of guilt and self-pity that she drinks and does the same thing night after night.

Saul walked down the street until he was away from the muted illumination of the street lights and once more moved into the shadows of a doorway. The woman walked around the corner but could not see him. She was confused and stopped at the corner. She waited for a few moments but could see no sign of the man she was following. She was about to turn back and retrace her steps to the bar when Saul moved out of the shadows. Full of confidence now she sauntered towards him trying to make her slightly unsteady walk look as sexy as she could.

‘Hello stranger,’ she said in slightly accented English as she stopped in front of Saul. ‘Looking for some company?’

Saul looked her up and down. She stood with her legs slightly apart, one hand planted on her hip and her head tipped slightly to one side. She was probably in her late thirties and the passage of time was beginning to make its mark on her. Even under the dim streetlights, he could see the crow’s feet around her eyes and the lines beginning at the corners of her mouth. However, now was not the time to be critical.

‘What did you have in mind?’ he asked quietly.

The woman moved closer to Saul and he could smell the alcohol on her breath.

‘How about you come back to my flat and we have a drink and then see what happens?’

Saul could sense the desperation and the need in her as she ran her tongue over her lips.

‘Sure, that sounds like a good idea. How far is it?’

The woman linked her arm through his and guided him as she started to walk down the street.

‘It’s only five minutes from here. My name’s Marie. What’s yours?’

‘It’s Gabriel,’ he lied.

‘Like the angel,’ she said, laughing.

‘Something like that,’ Saul replied laughing along with her.

Arm in arm they walked along the street and anyone seeing them would have easily mistaken them for a couple who had been out for an early evening drink or a meal and were now making their way to another bar or returning home.

\*

Joel popped the ring pull of another can of lager and took a long swallow. He was still feeling angry about the fact that he had been accused of not showing up for the meeting he had arranged with Adam and his wife. ‘If that’s his real name,’ Joel thought to himself. He’d tried to watch some television when he arrived back at the flat but had soon become bored with the pointless soaps, even more pointless game shows, and home improvement or cookery programmes which seemed to be on offer on every channel.

‘I wonder who sits and watches this bloody rubbish?’ he thought as he pressed the standby button on the remote control, silencing the inane babble of the woman in the low cut dress who was trying, in words of as few syllables as possible, to explain the

rules of the latest win-a-million-pounds game show. Joel switched on the CD player and the smooth sounds of some late sixties soul began playing. He relaxed back into his chair then laughed to himself as he listened to the lyrics.

‘Not to be fucking around with swingers,’ Joel said out loud in answer to the singer’s impassioned plea, ‘What does it take to win your love for me.’ Downing the last few drops of lager, he thought about getting the sixth can out of the fridge but decided it was probably time he was in bed. ‘Friday night and on your own, Joel,’ he said as he switched off the CD player and the lights before taking his empty can out to the rubbish bin. ‘I should have gone out with the lads, instead of messing around with that website,’ he thought as he walked through into the bedroom. The sight of Rose’s clothes on the end of the bed made him feel even guiltier about what he had nearly become involved with earlier that night.

\*

Saul unsnapped the bra clasp and Marie’s heavy breasts swung free as she lowered her arms and let the bra slip to the floor. She unfastened her skirt and stepped out of it as Saul pulled his shirt over his head before placing it carefully on a small chair on the other side of the room. He looked over towards Marie who was pulling her black panties over her stocking clad legs.

‘Leave your shoes on,’ Saul said as he took off the rest of his clothes before carefully placing them with his shirt. His holdall was open and resting on the end of the bed. He walked over to Marie and she ran her hands over his naked body, moaning quietly to herself as she stroked his erection.

Marie started to lower her head but Saul put his hands on her shoulders. ‘Turn around.’ Obediently Marie did as she was told. Forcing her legs apart, Saul pushed Marie forward so she was leaning over the bed as he rubbed his erection against her.

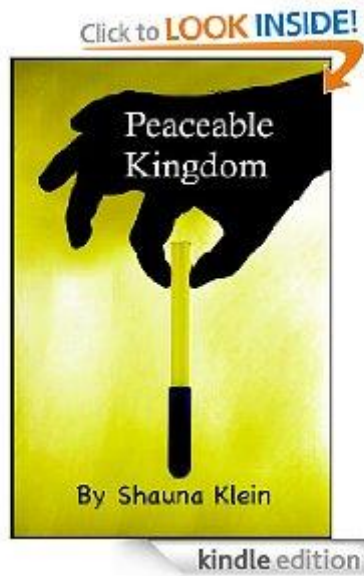
‘Do you like being bent over like that?’

Marie moaned as she pushed herself back against him.

Reaching into his holdall with his left hand, Saul pulled out a condom and a length of wire with wooden handles. The wire was wrapped in a tight loop and was easily concealed in his hand. Marie looked questioningly over her shoulder but was reassured when she saw him rip the condom packet open and roll the sheath over his erect penis.

Saul could feel the release he craved moving closer as he pushed himself forwards and slipped into the warm wetness. Marie moaned loudly as he entered her and he felt her legs tremble against his thighs. Reaching forwards with his free hand, he gently pulled backwards on Marie’s hair and she responded by moaning and lifting her head. As he climaxed Saul slipped the wire garrotte around her throat and pulled tightly on the wooden handles. The wire bit deeply into Marie’s throat and she was dead in seconds.

EBOOK REVIEW: PEACABLE KINGDOM BY SHAUNA KLEIN



Krista has been sacked from her job as a vet's assistant for refusing to put down a client's pet because "the bitch had grown tired of" it.

She's taken the "pug" home and is caring for it as best she can. A ham-fisted operation, spaying her new pet, leads to complications. In the end, she faces a stark choice.

I had to re-read the ending of this story a couple of times before I got it. Doh!

*Gavin Chappell*

Available from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) for £1.38 for download to Kindle.

Don't have a Kindle? Download free apps to read ebooks on your mobile or PC [here](#).

SUPER DUPER by James Rhodes

Chapter Twenty Six

Smith was not going to walk down the motorway and leave his two injured passengers in the car. Nor was he going to carry them up to the service station. Both Biggy and The Don had regained consciousness and he had stopped in the village to get them some drinks. He found a luxury coach depot and it gave him an idea. Then, he found a toyshop and it gave him an even better idea.

He moved The Don and Biggy to the coach. That is to say, he opened the door and told them to get into it, then he drove the coach to the field at the back of the service station. It was a trek of about half a mile uphill through mud to get to the place, so obviously Smith was not about to attempt it. He took out his three new toys, one was a remote control helicopter, one was a telescope, and one was a set of two walkie-talkies. He had managed to nab the display models so that they were all fully charged up (except for the telescope, obviously).

He secured one walkie-talkie to the helicopter and then set up the telescope so that it pointed at the service station. It was a bit of a long shot but Smith was done with long treks and trying hard. He was going to try the easy way even if it meant having to fail and give up.

The helicopter made it about halfway across the field before it started to become too small to see. Smith jammed his eye up against the lens of the telescope and much to his surprise; the helicopter was visible through it. He kept it flying forwards and level until it reached the car park, then he let it come down slowly. Once he was satisfied it had landed he pressed down the talking button on the walkie-talkie and then held the Morse code button down for about forty seconds. He left a space of about twenty seconds for someone to answer it. Then he pressed the button again.

After about half an hour, Smith was getting bored.

“I’m glad I am on morphine,” observed The Don, “because were I not, the sound of that beeping would certainly drive me to heroin abuse.”

Smith continued undeterred. It was getting close to four in the afternoon and the sky was beginning to darken. He had given up on the idea that someone might speak through the walkie-talkie but he had not yet given up on the idea of not having to walk anywhere else. Therefore, he continued pressing the button until his mind faded into a kind of repetitive trance. Then, all of a sudden, he was snapped out of the trance by the following noise:

“CCHHSSSShhHSHSHSH, Hello?”

It was a child’s voice.

Smith stared at his hand in amazement. The he operated his walkie-talkie.

“Hello, over.”

“Who’s that?”

“It’s Smith, who’s that? Over.”

The walkie-talkie went quiet for a moment. Then it crackled back into life.

“Smith, is that you?”

The Don nudged Smith.

“It’s Nicola.”

“Yes this is Smith. Over.”

“Is Don with you?”

“Affirmative. “

Smith really liked using walkie-talkies because it gave him a chance to talk like K9.

“We’re in the coach across the field. Bring everybody here. I know where there’s plenty of electricity and food.”

After three hours and about twenty-five conversations, Smith saw the children climbing over the car park barriers and heading towards him. All he had to do now was get them settled in a new place and he could finally get back to important stuff.

They were all there, all the children including Ellie. Corrine was there too. Smith explained about Sellafeld to everybody, except Biggy and The Don who had nodded off again. Then, he turned on his satnav and chose the “avoid motorways option.” The children all sat down but restlessly jostled each other at the excitement of the change of scenery. Nicola sat with The Don and stroked his hair gently. Ellie sat with her friends but she was quite glad both that her dad was not dead and that he had been seriously injured.

Smith turned on the engine of the coach and got it moving with a shuddering jolt.

“Where are we going?” Corrine asked.

“The Don’s house, my house, and then Church Farm in Thurstaston.”

“Why?”

“We need to pick up The Don’s mother, I need to pick up my Megadrive and then we need to live somewhere nice, with beautiful views, abundant food sources and large open spaces for children to play in and that’s the best place I can think of.”

“You thought of that?”

Corrine smiled teasingly.

“All by myself,” said Smith.

“My dad lives near there now.”

“Well, it’s in the satnav now; I’m not changing my mind.”

“When we get there and we have some peace, will you think about having some kids with me?”

“Perhaps,” said Smith “but certainly not on purpose.”

“That sounds good,” said Corrine.



Biggy woke up a little before Chester and looked around for Ellie. When he saw her, he hung his head in defeat.

“I’m afraid I didn’t manage to be a hero, love,” he said.

Biggy was sat in the seat behind Smith so Smith could not help but overhear him.

“Yes you did. You fought those wild dogs off so that I could get The Don’s medicine.”

“Did you really?”

Ellie’s eyes widened at the prospect. Smith could hear it in the tone of her voice.

“He did,” shouted Smith a little more loudly than was necessary. “he risked his own life and everything. When we get to the farm, he’s going to be the woodcutter and collect all the firewood – that way he can fight off any wild animals.”

“Can I really?” Biggy asked.

“Yeah, you can have a spear and everything. Plus, someone will need to let all the animals free at Chester Zoo because they’ll be really hungry by now, so there’ll be lions and bears and chimpanzees wandering all over the place. You can set them free and then protect us all from them.”

“Will you really, daddy?”

Biggy nodded his head enthusiastically and for the first time in his life had someone look at him with innocent pride.

“What did I tell you?” said Smith. “He’s Knuckles.”

“And what are you going to do when we get to this farm?”

Smith glanced backwards at Nicola who had asked the question, then he glanced quickly at Corrine. There was a loud grinding noise. Smith corrected his steering and pulled the coach out of the ditch at the side of the country lane and back onto the tarmac.

“I’m going to complete Sonic the Hedgehog,” said Smith. “After that, who knows what I might accomplish.”

THE END

STATE OF EMERGENCY by David Christopher

Chapter Fourteen: Fuck Da Police

The debate was getting heated.

‘For the last time,’ said the police sergeant, ‘you are under arrest in connection with the shooting of a police officer in South Ruislip community leisure area. I’m going to have to ask you to open the gates and accompany us to the custody suite. And bring with you the woman my officers were questioning at the time of the murder.’

Mercer folded his arms.

‘You’re not coming in here, mate,’ he said. ‘I’m just as much a policeman as you are, and I tell you that that cop had it coming to him. They were raping that girl, not questioning her. You’ll get her back over our dead bodies.’

The sergeant drew himself up. He was quite a short, stocky man, with a red face. ‘The fact that you are masquerading as a police officer will not help your case,’ he said. ‘And since we are empowered to shoot to kill when faced by armed insurgents may well mean exactly that.’

‘You’re not coming in here,’ Will broke in impatiently. ‘Get away from the gate, or it’ll be us shooting to kill.’

‘You tell ‘em, mate,’ said the security guard. He glared at the police sergeant. ‘You’d better have a warrant, or you’re not effin’ comin’ in ‘ere! I know my job.’

The sergeant shook his head. ‘Resisting arrest. And you,’ he told the security guard, ‘harbouring known fugitives. You’re in a lot of trouble.’

Will shot him.

It was only in the leg, as a warning, but as the sergeant staggered back, screaming like a girl, the rest of the policemen reacted in panic, lifting their guns and blazing away. Will, Mercer, and the security guard, who had yet to introduce himself, dived behind the security lodge. The security guard grunted.

‘I’ve been hit,’ he mumbled in amazement.

The policemen were still firing, a ragged staccato of firecracker bangs from beyond the gate. Will took a look at the security guard. A dark stain was seeping through his jacket at shoulder level. He nodded to Mercer to look after the man, then swarmed forwards to a point where he could level his gun at the angry figures in the street.

He squeezed the trigger. Another policeman fell into the gutter. Immediately, the surviving police scrambled into cover behind garden walls, behind parked cars, up alleyways. Cowards.

He loosed off a couple more shots before returning to Mercer, who had lain the guard down on the ground, pillowed with his own jacket, and was exploring the gunshot wound. He looked up as Will joined them, and his face was pale.

‘What the fuck did you do that for, you retard?’ he hissed. ‘You’ve just shot another policeman and the rest are pissed off.’

‘Yeah, right!’ said Will, his bitterness over Quigley’s death suddenly boiling over. ‘If those fascist pigs pinned me down to the ground and shot me seven times in the fucking head because I was wearing a winter coat, do you know what would happen? Six months down the line, after everyone’s forgotten about it because of the latest celebrity scandal, there’d be a public enquiry at the taxpayers’ expense and the fucking bastards would be exonerated! I shoot a few of the cunts and it’s the end of the fucking world!’

‘We’d better work out what we’re gonna do,’ Mercer said, ignoring the outburst. ‘We can’t stay here. We’ve got to get away.’

Before Will could answer, there was a barrage of shots from the gates. He turned and peered out to see the police had advanced again. He fired twice, hitting another man with his first shot but missing with the second.

He returned to Mercer and the security guard.

‘I’m not having those bastards coming in here,’ he said. ‘They just want to rape that girl.’

‘We could have dealt with the situation!’ Mercer said. ‘We could have dealt with it without you shooting them.’

‘How?’ Will asked.

Mercer looked away. The gunshots from the policemen petered out.

‘We could have negotiated,’ he insisted. ‘Now we’ve got no chance. Now they’ve got us holed up in here. And you!’ - he turned round and jabbed a finger at Will - ‘you’ve got a job to do! We can’t afford to get stuck here. We need to get to Oxford as soon as we can.’

Will heard a distorted click, a blast of feedback, and a voice amplified by a bullhorn.

*‘Give yourselves up and you will face a lenient trial,’* the police sergeant claimed. Will could see him standing near the gates. *‘Come out with your hands up and open the gates. You have our assurance that you will not be harmed...’*

Will heard a rustle from behind him, turned, and saw that two policeman were climbing over the security fence behind them. He brought up his gun and squeezed the trigger twice. Both men fell screaming from the fence and vanished behind a large wheelie bin.

‘Trying to distract us, eh?’ Will said, returning to the corner. He was about to fire at the police sergeant who now stood with bullhorn lowered, gaping stupidly in their direction, when Mercer flung himself at him, dragging him and the gun to the ground.

Will struggled but resistance was useless. Mercer snatched the gun from his hands and flung it to the ground.

‘That’s enough of that!’ he bellowed. ‘This all started because you got trigger happy!’

Will lay back, his head against the concrete flooring. Mercer’s words were truer than he knew.

‘Are you gonna behave yourself?’ Mercer added. ‘No more shooting!’

Will nodded weakly. ‘Okay,’ he said. ‘But those coppers aren’t right. They’re bastards, you know it.’

Mercer nodded tightly. ‘I know it,’ he said. ‘I also know the two of us don’t stand a chance against twelve or thirteen armed police!’

Will wanted to say that he’d thinned their numbers pretty well, but seeing the dangerous look in Mercer’s eyes, he kept quiet. The man was right, anyway. They had to get to Oxford. Getting in a shootout in South Ruislip wouldn’t help things, and he’d already caused enough havoc.

‘We’ve got to talk to them,’ Mercer said. ‘Peacefully. If we’re very lucky, we might be able to get out of this.’

‘How?’ Will demanded.

Mercer looked down at him, tormented. ‘They just want the girl,’ he muttered. ‘We can offer to open the gates and let them have her, in return for letting us continue.’

‘No!’ Will shouted, struggling futilely to free himself from Mercer. ‘We can’t do that!’

‘This is more important!’ Mercer replied. ‘You told me that book is gonna save the country.’ His eyes were feverish. ‘We’ve got to get it to the publishers!’

Will wanted to tell him that he thought it had got too far out of control for any work of literature to change things, but he could see Mercer wouldn’t let him shake his faith.

The big man got up and walked towards the gate, hands high. The police opened fire.

Mercer flung himself to one side, crashing through the doors into the lodge. Will lost sight of him.

He grabbed his gun from the ground, seeing that Mercer’s lay next to it. The security guard sprawled nearby, apparently unconscious. Better off that way, Will thought.

He slung Mercer’s gun over his shoulders, and cradled his own in his hands. Then he burst out from the cover of the lodge, loosed off several shots at the crowd of police at

the gates, and raced towards the door to the lodge. Before he got there, he halted and fired from a kneeling position. Bullets whined around him but none of them seemed to hit.

He rolled across the concrete floor and burst into the lodge.

Mercer leapt up from behind the desk, clutching a chair leg. He halted when he recognised Will. Will handed him his gun, then turned to assess the situation.

Two or three policemen were climbing the gates. He raced to the door, flung it wide, and opened fire.

One policeman fell forward and hit the tarmac of the approach road to lie unmoving. The other two leapt back down into the street and raced for cover.

Will felt on top of the world. He had shot...how many of the bastards? And none of them had got him. He turned to Mercer. The man was staring at his side.

‘What is it?’

‘You’re bleeding,’ Mercer said.

Will looked down. His upper thigh was a mess of torn cloth, torn flesh, and crusted blood. When had they hit him? It looked like a bullet had just winged him.

He felt quite ill.

The phone on the desk began to ring.

The police outside opened fire again.

In a daze, Will went to the desk and picked up the phone.

‘Hello?’ he said.

A thin, nasal voice said, ‘Can you keep the racket down out there? I’m working the early shift tomorrow. There’s been noise for the last half hour. I’ll be complaining to the residents’ committee if this continues.’

Will was feeling astoundingly light-headed. It was like a dream.

‘My apologies, sir,’ he said smoothly. ‘We seem to be experiencing temporary security problems. We are now working to fix this matter and will return to normal service as soon as possible. Sorry for any inconvenience.’

There was a graceless grunt from the other end and the caller hung up.

Will went to join Mercer, firing at the attacking police from cover.

'I don't think giving up the girl will change things now,' he said, in a brief, peaceful silence. As the guns started up again from the front gate, Mercer looked at him with tormented eyes.

#### HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD by R. Todd Woodstock

She watched from the dilapidated chair that rocked back and forth on the front porch, as another train rushed through the trees. She moved gently, back and forth, thinking about how fast the years have come and gone, just like the trains. Thoughts of running through the dandelions and racing to the creek seemed so far away. The hot sun never bothered her when she was thirteen, but it was certainly taking a toll on her eighty-two-year-old body these days, even though it was October and the temperature couldn't have been over 70. Still, she loved to hear the sound of the locomotives, as they streaked only hundreds of feet away. She was anticipating tonight, Halloween night, the night all the children from town paid a visit to her rundown home, just to catch a glimpse of her carvings. She always kept one out for Halloween.

He witnessed, too; gazing between the small metal bars that kept him from running free. The windows were always left wide open in the summer months, so vision and a nice breeze were never issues. He observed for several years, from past the stained curtains and tore screen that drooped in the windowpane, as she rocked with her memories. It helped keep his interest, those strange conversations between her and her grandson; those ominous, but fascinating conversations.

"Dabner!" Betsy Woods said from her rocking chair. "Dabner! Damn, where is that boy!"

"Comin', Gran-gran," answered a large, powerful man, while running with a black spatula in his hands.

"When I call you, boy, I expect an answer."

"Sorry, Gran-gran."

"Now fetch me my cane. I wanna take a stroll in the field."

Dabner looked down at the dirty, wooden floor. "Well Gran-gran, I was just fixin' ya some lunch fer ya."

"Never mind that, can't you see the storm clouds are brewing? I need to see if they are gettin' ripe, before this damn rain floods 'em away. Now do what I say, boy."

"Yes, ma'am."

Dabner bolted from the front porch and retrieved her walking stick, while he watched from in the small metal cage. He grabbed a couple of seeds and shoved them into his pouches. The spinning wheel would have to wait, he knew some action was about to take place and he didn't want to miss it. It amused him from time to time, how they carried on. Sometimes it was better than when the strays would come from the woods in attempts to open his locked cage. Although he did enjoy that a great deal. Stupid cats, what were they thinking. Every time, those ignorant felines would picture him in their jaws, dreaming of tearing away at his small furry body, and every time they were chased away by Dabner and his sawed off shotgun. A couple of times the blast blew away portions of his bedding, but he didn't care, because often Dabner would nab one. This is why he felt safe, even if he really wanted to get out. It was only because the smell of his own urine would make him sick. The red cedar never really soaked it all up, there were still moist puddles that turned his stomach and especially at mealtime. The breeze helped, but it never completely rid the smell of ammonia.

*Oh, if I was only given the chance. Just let Dabner leave the cage open by mistake. I'll be gone away from the cesspool of piss and out in the fields where I belong, even if I'd miss how those two carry on. It only passed the boredom anyhow.*

"Here you is, Gran-gran," Dabner said, as he handed a wooden stick to her.

Immediately, she grabbed the handle and thrust it at Dabner's leg. "You fool, this ain't my cane. I ain't used this fer years. Now get me my cane before I wale on ya good."

"Sorry, Gran-gran. I don't know what's I was thinking. I'll get it fer ya right away."

Dabner ran back in the house, this time he brought out what Betsy was waiting for—the correct cane.

She snatched it out of his hands, just as he approached.

"There ya are, Gran-gran. Did I do good?"

"You're a dip-shit and always will be."

"Yes, ma'am," Dabner nodded.

"Now help me up before I gives ya another lickin'."

Dabner pulled her out of the chair, as he watched from the cage. He broke two seeds open with his large yellow teeth, and noticed she was getting worse in her decrepit state. Still, it amused him, as he twisted the sunflower seeds in his mouth.

*Come on Dabner, you clumsy idiot, drop her. I want to see her fall just like last time. Just like the day you slipped on the wet porch and both of you went down. Oh my, was that a riot. She clobbered you a good one, didn't she Dabner, just like the other ones.*

Soon, both of them were off the front porch and into the field full of long weeds. He could hear her complaining in the distance, as he broke another seed open. He waited for them to come back; and from the sounds of the darkened skies, it would be soon.

There was a startling crash that threw his eyes open. He felt groggy from his small nap and quickly he searched around to see if they returned. Then suddenly he heard her.

"See, ya knucklehead, I done told you that weren't the way to do it. Do I have to do everything?"

"Sorry, Gran-gran."

"Sorry. Is that all ya gotta say fer yaself, boy? Damn it, I just want ya to do it right."

"Yes, ma'am."

He could hear them, but couldn't see them. He scrabbled around for a better view, and they were still out of sight.

*Must be in the kitchen making that horrible smell again. Dabner must be burning something, just like he's done numerous times. Sometimes it's worse than my cage, that god-awful odor.*

"Give me the damn thing!" Betsy demanded. "See that's how it's done. Now pay attention, boy."

He could hear their voices growing closer. Now he could see both of them, as they approached the living room. There was something in Dabner's hands, but he had a hard time seeing what it was. It appeared to be a sack of potatoes.

"Boy, you are gonna get a waling, if ya don't stop dripping on the floor."

"Sorry, Gran-gran."

Suddenly, Dabner started running through the living room and out the front door. A puddle of red liquid had escaped onto the wooden floor.

“Stupid boy! Oh, by God, is he gonna get it when he gets back in here.”

He could see her leaning on her cane, and he wondered how Dabner could put up with it, her nagging and complaining about everything. He tries to please her, and it wasn't his fault he had mental problems. She made him that way. Ever since he was a little boy, after his parents were killed in the fire, the fire that destroyed his house in town. It was she that placed his mind in that predicament. It was a mistake, but she constantly told him he's been a loser for what he did.

*No boy should play with matches. No boy should play with fire. You did it boy, ya killed your folks. You should be ashamed. You shouldn't even be alive. Don't give me your sob stories that 'It was a mistake, Gran-gran.' That's bullshit! You're a murderer, boy. A filthy, no good murderer. Ya did this and now I have to pay, too, by raisin' ya.*

“Okay, Gran-gran, it's done,” he said, as he bolted through the front door. “I puts it in the smoke room for a spell.”

“Boy, come here.”

Dabner could see the anger in her eyes, and he stopped rolling on the spinning wheel to witness, also. The seeds in his mouth were almost gone, so he grabbed a few more to really pack in his pouches, while he awaited the outcome of what was to happen to Dabner.

“Do ya see what is on the floor, boy?”

“Yes, ma'am.” Dabner replied, and he hung his head just like in the early afternoon.

“How many times, boy, before ya learn? How many?”

“Gran-gran . . . I'm . . .”

“Go get it, boy.”

“No, no Gran-gran. Please no, don't do me like that,” Dabner sobbed.

“Get the pan, before I really get mad. It's fer ya own good.”

He jumped off the spinning wheel and placed his tiny paws on the metal bars. His face protruded between them, as he wiggled his whiskers. The full pouches made it difficult to get any closer than he was, but he tried, because he knew something was going to happen.

Dabner slowly strolled into the kitchen, while tears rolled down his red face.

“It's fer ya own doing, boy. A couple of strikes from the pan always done ya good.”

Dabner returned with a black, heavy skillet. The look in Dabner's eyes was different from the other instances when Betsy demanded respect from him. He appeared to be even more terrified.

“No, Gran-gran, ya not gonna hit me no more!” Dabner exclaimed, while raising the pan high above his head.

“Dabn . . .” Betsy tried to scream, before he struck her in the head. Immediately, she collapsed on the living room floor. Blood streamed from her skull, as Dabner raised the black skillet a second time and gave her another blow.

He watched in amazement from the cage.

*He did it! I can't believe the big dummy finally put an end to the old bitch.*

Dabner dropped the murder weapon on the wood floor. Dabner watched, as her blood flowed like a tiny river across the living room. He stood silently for a moment, and had a look of confusion on his face. Then he bent down and tried to move her. She remained still.



“Awww! What did I do? Gran-gran, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to, but ya made me,” he sobbed heavily, while picking her frail body up off the floor. “Wake up, Gran-gran, wake up! It was an assident. I . . . I . . . didn’t mean it.”

Then he began shaking her, in hopes that she would come to. Harder and harder he rattled her and closer and closer he got to the cage, when suddenly Betsy’s foot knocked the metal enclosure off the small table it sat on. Frantically, he tried to run for cover and to protect him from the massive impact he could only imagine was going to occur. It seemed like forever before the cage finally made contact with the wooden floor below. The collision threw him hard against the metal framing. Water and seeds sprayed everywhere, as he bounced around like a pinball. Finally, the cage rolled to a stop.

He lay motionless, with the sobs from Dabner filling the room and the sounds of thunder from outside drawing closer. Although still dazed, he forced his tiny, furry frame up from the mess that was spread out everywhere. The cobwebs were not going to be easy to shake off from such an impact, but he was willing to try. His head hurt, though, and he anxiously looked all over for cuts and bruises. There were none, it seemed like he was okay. The seeds he packed in his pouches were still there and he was lucky he didn’t choke on them on the way down. He sighed, as he searched around the room to notice how much different it appeared from the angle he was at. Then it dawned on him. The cage was open.

*I’m free! Totally free! No longer do I have to smell the awful odors from the kitchen. No longer do I have to worry about how soon they are going to change my bedding, so I don’t have put up with my stinkin’ urine. No longer do I have to be terrorized by the cats . . . oh, my, the cats, forgot about them. Now the bastards will have the opportunity to hunt me down and rip into my inners. But I won’t let them; I’ll get away. They aren’t gonna ruin my freedom. No way! I’m free and that’s how I’m staying, a free hamster ready to take on the world.*

Slowly, he approached the opening. In a matter of seconds, he would no longer be considered captive. Just as he placed his tiny paws on the wooden floor, Dabner ran back in the living room and through the front.

“What did I do? What did I do? I’m sorry, Gran-gran. I’m sorry. I make it better, I promise. I promise I make it better for Gran-gran,” he cried, while slapping his forehead.

He was still timid about leaving the busted up cage, and he scampered back into it when he heard Dabner rush through the house. He figured he better wait a little bit, just to make sure. He didn’t want to be noticed by the big dummy, even if he was distracted at the moment. It was just a matter of time before he would be hopping around in open fields and burrowing underground, just like he has dreamed so many nights; so many long and grueling nights. But he would have to wait just a little longer, just until he knew for a fact that the coast was clear.

In a few seconds, Dabner returned quickly through the front door. He was carrying an axe in his hands. “I make it better, Gran-gran, you see. I make it better.”

He heard some noises from the kitchen, and they sounded familiar to noises he had heard in the past. At this point, he knew it was safe to rush out the door, but for some strange reason he become curious and he wanted to know. He needed to know what that big dummy was up to, so he left his old home and hurried across the blood-soaked floor. Once he reached the entryway, he stopped and peeked around the corner. He could see Betsy lying in the middle of the floor, headless. Dabner was holding her head by the hair and glancing in her eyes.

“I make it better. See Gran-gran, I make it better.” Then he put her head in a large pot.

That was enough for him. He turned and ran out the front door and into the field.

He arrived later that night by coincidence, because he was still new to the fields. He saw Dabner on the front porch as the children made their special trips to his house. The lights were off except for the pumpkins that were lit on the front porch. He noticed one of the parents comment on how life-like his pumpkin heads looked like. Dabner just responded with, “My Gran-gran taught me.”

Betsy’s lifeless head remained on the porch throughout the night, just as the other heads from the fields did, glowing and grinning. Then her head was put away with the others until the next Halloween.

#### PRAYERS FOR A THOUSAND WESTERN FRONTS by Obsidian M. Tesla

In muddy fields with fears entrenched they fell,  
One by one like mothers’ tears, hot brass spent  
On sodden ground. Names now forgotten, with  
Sepia smiles and khaki shrouds they lie. What  
Lasts of love and hope when lines are drawn  
And boys are sent to die?

Dressed in honour and brave beyond redemption,  
Those who lived beyond trench and bramble wire  
Have passed us by. In time’s due course we look back  
Less the more we hear the newborn baby cry.  
Those boys now gone, their epitaphs echo  
Prayers for a thousand western fronts.

#### TOILET ROLL by John Jennings

Rio looked at the roll in shock. “This is it for me.”

Monday, 7pm. Rio sat in the lavatory cubicle fast asleep. Suddenly her pencil case fell from her hand to the marble floor and woke her up with a fright. Quickly she jumped up, looked at her watch. “Oh no, not again,” and she hastily collected her things and ran off home.

Tuesday. The same thing happened, but Rio found herself without any toilet paper. “Hey!” she shouted... “Is there anybody there? I could really do with some loo roll in here,” but there was no response. “Typical,” Rio thought. “As if my life couldn’t get any more difficult, all I need is some toilet paper, I’d give anything for just one roll of toilet paper.”

Suddenly a roll of gold coloured toilet paper slid under the cubicle door. Rio finished up and as she left the stall, she said, “Thank you.” She grabbed the roll and stuffed it in her bag. “This won’t happen again.”

Wednesday. Rio was having a hard day. Miki, Riko, and Crissy were bullying her and she took refuge in the cubicle. They were kicking and banging at the door. Rio was inside nervously tearing strips of the gold coloured toilet roll and tossing them into the loo.

“I wish they would go away.”

Bored tormenting her, they began to leave. “Wait,” said Miki. “I gotta pee.” “Me too,” said Riko. “Me three,” said Crissy and they went into adjoining cubicles. Rio took her opportunity and ran. Suddenly there were loud screams from the three cubicles and then there was silence. Rio peeked under the toilet doors. The three girls were gone.

Thursday. It didn't take Rio long to figure out that the gold coloured toilet roll could help her get rid of a lot of her problems, or rather problem people. She went into a cubicle and started to rip the toilet paper. “I wish my maths teacher was gone, I wish the shop girl was gone...” She ripped until there was only a sheet left on the roll.

“Better save you for an emergency.”

Missing person posters started to appear for Miki, Riko, and Crissy. She looked at the posters and thought, “Maybe I'll start to collect these.”

Friday. Missing person posters appeared for all the people Rio wanted to go. She took one of each as a memento. Later that day she dropped her bag and they all fell out. Another student saw.

“Posters? Why?”

Quickly Rio grabbed the posters and forced the girl into the cubicle.

“I wish you were gone,” screamed Rio, ripping off the last sheet and throwing it into the toilet. A dark arm came up grabbed the girl and she disappeared. Rio was standing with the empty roll in her hand. There was writing on it.

“You have used the roll, you must pay the price.”

A dark arm appeared and grabbed Rio. She screamed. She disappeared.

VARNEY THE VAMPIRE ascribed to Thomas Preskett Prest

## CHAPTER LII.

### THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN THE MOB AND SIR FRANCIS VARNEY.—THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.—THE WINE CELLARS.

The shout that had so discomposed the parties who were thus engaged in a terrific struggle came from a party above.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" they shouted a number of times, in a wild strain of delight.

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

The fact was, a party of the mob had clambered up a verandah, and entered some of the rooms upstairs, whence they emerged just above the landing near the spot where the servants were resisting in a mass the efforts of the mob.

"Hurrah!" shouted the mob below.

"Hurrah!" shouted the mob above.

There was a momentary pause, and the servants divided themselves into two bodies, and one turned to face those above, and the other those who were below.

A simultaneous shout was given by both parties of the mob, and a sudden rush was made by both bodies, and the servants of Sir Francis Varney were broken in an instant. They were instantly separated, and knocked about a good bit, but they were left to shift for themselves, the mob had a more important object in view.

"Down with the vampyre!" they shouted.

"Down with the vampyre!" shouted they, and they rushed helter skelter through the rooms, until they came to one where the door was partially open, and they could see some person very leisurely seated.

"Here he is," they cried.

"Who? who?"

"The vampire."

"Down with him! kill him! burn him!"

"Hurrah! down with the vampire!"

These sounds were shouted out by a score of voices, and they rushed headlong into the room.

But here their violence and headlong precipitancy were suddenly restrained by the imposing and quiet appearance of the individual who was there seated.

The mob entered the room, and there was a sight, that if it did not astonish them, at least, it caused them to pause before the individual who was seated there.

The room was well filled with furniture, and there was a curtain drawn across the room, and about the middle of it there was a table, behind which sat Sir Francis Varney himself, looking all smiles and courtesy.

"Well, dang my smock-frock!" said one, "who'd ha' thought of this? He don't seem to care much about it."

"Well, I'm d——d!" said another; "he seems pretty easy, at all events. What is he going to do?"

"Gentlemen," said Sir Francis Varney, rising, with the blandest smiles, "pray, gentlemen, permit me to inquire the cause of this condescension on your part. The visit is kind."

The mob looked at Sir Francis, and then at each other, and then at Sir Francis again; but nobody spoke. They were awed by this gentlemanly and collected behaviour.

"If you honour me with this visit from pure affection and neighbourly good-will, I thank you."

"Down with the vampyre!" said one, who was concealed behind the rest, and not so much overawed, as he had not seen Sir Francis.

Sir Francis Varney rose to his full height; a light gleamed across his features; they were strongly defined then. His long front teeth, too, showed most strongly when he smiled, as he did now, and said, in a bland voice,—

"Gentlemen, I am at your service. Permit me to say you are welcome to all I can do for you. I fear the interview will be somewhat inconvenient and unpleasant to you. As for myself, I am entirely at your service."

As Sir Francis spoke, he bowed, and folded his hands together, and stepped forwards; but, instead of coming onwards to them, he walked behind the curtain, and was immediately hid from their view.

"Down with the vampyre!" shouted one.

"Down with the vampyre!" rang through the apartment; and the mob now, not awed by the coolness and courtesy of Sir Francis, rushed forward, and, overturning the table, tore down the curtain to the floor; but, to their amazement, there was no Sir Francis Varney present.

"Where is he?"

"Where is the vampyre?"

"Where has he gone?"

These were cries that escaped every one's lips; and yet no one could give an answer to them.

There Sir Francis Varney was not. They were completely thunderstricken. They could not find out where he had gone to. There was no possible means of escape, that they could perceive. There was not an odd corner, or even anything that could, by any possibility, give even a suspicion that even a temporary concealment could take place.

They looked over every inch of flooring and of wainscoting; not the remotest trace could be discovered.

"Where is he?"

"I don't know," said one—"I can't see where he could have gone. There ain't a hole as big as a keyhole."

"My eye!" said one; "I shouldn't be at all surprised, if he were to blow up the whole house."

"You don't say go!"

"I never heard as how vampyres could do so much as that. They ain't the sort of people," said another.

"But if they can do one thing, they can do another."

"That's very true."

"And what's more, I never heard as how a vampyre could make himself into nothing before; yet he has done so."

"He may be in this room now."

"He may."

"My eyes! what precious long teeth he had!"

"Yes; and had he fixed one on 'em in to your arm, he would have drawn every drop of blood out of your body; you may depend upon that," said an old man.

"He was very tall."

"Yes; too tall to be any good."

"I shouldn't like him to have laid hold of me, though, tall as he is; and then he would have lifted me up high enough to break my neck, when he let me fall."

The mob routed about the room, tore everything out of its place, and as the object of their search seemed to be far enough beyond their reach, their courage rose in proportion, and they shouted and screamed with a proportionate increase of noise and bustle; and at length they ran about mad with rage and vexation, doing all the mischief that was in their power to inflict.

Then they became mischievous, and tore he furniture from its place, and broke it in pieces, and then amused themselves with breaking it up, throwing pieces at the pier-glasses, in which they made dreadful holes; and when that was gone, they broke up the frames.

Every hole and corner of the house was searched, but there was no Sir Francis Varney to be found.

"The cellars, the cellars!" shouted a voice.

"The cellars, the cellars!" re-echoed nearly every pair of lips in the whole place; in another moment, there was crushing and crowding to get down into the cellars.

"Hurray!" said one, as he knocked off the neck of the bottle that first came to hand.

"Here's luck to vampyre-hunting! Success to our chase!"

"So say I, neighbour; but is that your manners to drink before your betters?"

So saying, the speaker knocked the other's elbow, while he was in the act of lifting the wine to his mouth; and thus he upset it over his face and eyes.

"D—n it!" cried the man; "how it makes my eyes smart! Dang thee! if I could see, I'd ring thy neck!"

"Success to vampyre-hunting!" said one.

"May we be lucky yet!" said another.

"I wouldn't be luckier than this," said another, as he, too, emptied a bottle. "We couldn't desire better entertainment, where the reckoning is all paid."

"Excellent!"

"Very good!"

"Capital wine this!"

"I say, Huggins!"

"Well," said Huggins.

"What are you drinking?"

"Wine."

"What wine?"

"Danged if I know," was the reply. "It's wine, I suppose; for I know it ain't beer nor spirits; so it must be wine."

"Are you sure it ain't bottled men's blood?"

"Eh?"

"Bottled blood, man! Who knows what a vampyre drinks? It may be his wine. He may feast upon that before he goes to bed of a night, drink anybody's health, and make himself cheerful on bottled blood!"

"Oh, danged! I'm so sick; I wish I hadn't taken the stuff. It may be as you say, neighbour, and then we be cannibals."

"Or vampyres."

"There's a pretty thing to think of."

By this time some were drunk, some were partially so, and the remainder were crowding into the cellars to get their share of the wine.

The servants had now slunk away; they were no longer noticed by the rioters, who, having nobody to oppose them, no longer thought of anything, save the searching after the vampyre, and the destruction of the property. Several hours had been spent in this manner, and yet they could not find the object of their search.

There was not a room, or cupboard, or a cellar, that was capable of containing a cat, that they did not search, besides a part of the rioters keeping a very strict watch on the outside of the house and all about the grounds, to prevent the possibility of the escape of the vampyre.

There was a general cessation of active hostilities at that moment; a reaction after the violent excitement and exertion they had made to get in. Then the escape of their victim, and the mysterious manner in which he got away, was also a cause of the reaction, and the rioters looked in each others' countenances inquiringly.

Above all, the discovery of the wine-cellar tended to withdraw them from violent measures; but this could not last long, there must be an end to such a scene, for there never was a large body of men assembled for an evil purpose, who ever were, for any length of time, peaceable.

To prevent the more alarming effects of drunkenness, some few of the rioters, after having taken some small portion of the wine, became, from the peculiar flavour it possessed, imbued with the idea that it was really blood, and forthwith commenced an instant attack upon the wine and liquors, and they were soon mingling in one stream throughout the cellars.

This destruction was loudly declaimed against by a large portion of the rioters, who were drinking; but before they could make any efforts to save the liquor, the work of destruction had not only been begun, but was ended, and the consequence was, the cellars were very soon evacuated by the mob.

BRIGANDS OF THE MOON by Ray Cummings

XXVI

"Gregg, you're safe!"



She had heard the camp corridors resounding with the shouts that Wilks and Haljan were fighting. She had come upon a suit and helmet by the manual emergency lock, had run out through the lock, confused, with her only idea to stop Wilks and me from fighting. Then she had seen one of us killed. Impulsively, barely knowing what she was doing, she mounted the stairs, frantic to find if I were alive.

"Anita!"

Miko was coming fast! She had not seen him; for she had no thought of brigands—only the belief that either Wilks or I had been killed.

But now, as we stood together on the rocks near the observatory platform, I could see the towering figure of Miko nearing the top of the stairs.

"Anita, that's Miko! We must run!"

Then I saw my projector. It lay in a bowl-like depression quite near us. I jumped for it. And as I tore loose from Anita, she leaped down after me. It was a broken bowl in the rocks, some six feet deep. It was open on the side facing the stairs—a narrow, ravelike gully, full of gray, broken, tumbled rock masses. The little gully was littered with crags and boulders. But I could see out through it.

Miko had come to the head of the stairs. He stopped there, his great figure etched sharply by the Earthlight. I think he must have known that Coniston was the one who had fallen over the cliff, as my helmet and Coniston's were different enough for him to recognize which was which. He did not know who I was, but he did know me for an enemy.

He stood now at the summit, peering to see where we had gone. He was no more than fifty feet from us.

"Anita, lie down."

I pulled her down on the rocks. I took aim with my projector. But I had forgotten our helmet lights. Miko must have seen them just as I pulled the trigger. He jumped sidewise and dropped, but I could see him moving in the shadows to where a jutting rock gave him shelter. I fired, missing him again.

I had stood up to take aim. Anita pulled me sharply down beside her.

"Gregg, he's armed!"

It was his turn to fire. It came—the familiar vague flash of the paralyzing ray. It spat its tint of color on the rocks near us, but did not reach us.

A moment later, Miko bounded to another rock.

Time passed—only a few seconds. I could not see Miko momentarily. Perhaps he was crouching; perhaps he had moved away again. He was, or had been, on slightly higher

ground than the bottom of our bowl. It was dim down here where we were lying, but I feared that any moment Miko might appear and strike at us. His ray at any short range would penetrate our visor panes, even though our suits might temporarily resist it.

"Anita, it's too dangerous here!"

Had I been alone, I might perhaps have leapt up to lure Miko. But with Anita I did not dare chance it.

"We've got to get back to camp," I told her.

"Perhaps he has gone—"

But he had not. We saw him again, out in a distant patch of Earthlight. He was further from us than before, but on still higher ground. We had extinguished our small helmet lights. But he knew we were here and possibly he could see us. His projector flashed again. He was a hundred feet or more away now, and his weapon was of no longer range than mine. I did not answer his fire, for I could not hope to hit him at such a distance, and the flash of my weapon would help him to locate us.

I murmured to Anita, "We must get away."

Yet how did I dare take Anita from these concealing shadows? Miko could reach us so easily as we bounded away in plain view in the Earthlight of the open summit! We were caught, at bay in this little bowl.

The camp was not visible from here. But out through the broken gully, a white beam of light suddenly came up from below.

Haljan. It spelled the signal.

It was coming from the Grantline instrument room, I knew.

I could answer it with my helmet light, but I did not dare.

"Try it," urged Anita.

We crouched where we thought we might be safe from Miko's fire. My little light beam shot up from the bowl. It was undoubtedly visible to the camp.

Yes, I am Haljan. Send us help.

I did not mention Anita. Miko doubtless could read these signals. They answered, Cannot—

I lost the rest of it. There came a flash from Miko's weapon. It gave us confidence: he was unable to reach us at this distance.

The Grantline beam repeated:

Cannot come out. Ports broken. You cannot get in. Stay where you are for an hour or two. We may be able to repair ports.

I extinguished my light. What use was it to tell Grantline anything further? Besides, my light was endangering us. But the Grantline beam spelled another message:

Brigand ship is coming. It will be here before we can get out to you. No lights. We will try and hide our location.

And the signal beam brought a last appeal:

Miko and his men will divulge where we are unless you can stop them.

The beam vanished. The lights of the Grantline camp made a faint glow that showed above the crater edge. The glow died, as the camp now was plunged into darkness.