

MAY/JUNE 2018

# B&P

Books 'N Pieces Magazine

SHORT STORIES | INTERVIEWS | ARTICLES & more

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## Steena Holmes

USA Today & NY Times Bestselling  
Author On Finding Indie Success

**ALSO WRITER INTERVIEWS WITH**  
**Sarah L. Johnson**  
**Miranda Oh**  
**A.C. Salter**

**SHORT STORIES BY**  
**Jay Seate, Charles Hitchcock**

**BOOK REVIEWS BY**  
**Jill Hedgecock**

**PAGE ONE featuring**  
**Mike Wells, Bestselling Author**  
**BIG WORDS • COVER DESIGN • PROMOS**  
**BOOKSHELF • VISUAL CHALLENGE**

## Idaho Authors

**THE FASTEST GROWING STATE**  
has no shortage of bestselling authors. In the next few years, expect a boom in local culture. Check out what Idaho offers and meet the authors you should know..... See page 3

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See Inside For Details

*Fresh Ink: From the Publisher*

# HAPPY FIRST BIRTHDAY!

**W**e're celebrating our **FIRST YEAR!** Time flies. This past year we have had many wonderful interviews, including the very notable science fiction author, Robert J. Sawyer [Dec 2017 issue].

When we began, B&P Magazine was intended to be a magazine of short stories and information for writers. Along the way we have expanded to include items of interest for both readers and writers alike.

Now, in our second year, we are expanding even more, adding new columns, new features, including local Idaho features—since we are an Idaho-based publication. In order to grow, we need to include advertising, and in order to have a viable product, we need focused content.

Having local content to the Boise, Idaho area means that advertising can be targeted, allowing a print edition to happen. The print version, which will begin with this issue, will be an

8.5" x 11" glossy magazine format, running, ultimately at 40-50 pages (although this issue is shorter.) It will be distributed to physical locations through S. Idaho area (10,000 copies), and will also be available from select distributors in other parts of Idaho, and the country.

People in other areas of the country/world (we have many readers in the United Kingdom and Australia,) can subscribe to receive a print copy in the mail.

Inasmuch as people claim that print is dead, it has been my experience that print continues to live, perhaps not as vibrant as it once was, but present, nonetheless.

In this issue we have **FOUR** interviews in this issue, **TWO** short stories, and a whole lot of articles, columns and other features that I hope you will enjoy. I would appreciate your feedback: what you enjoy, what you can do without, what you would like to see? Also, how do you feel about a print version? Which would you prefer?

I'd also like to ask a favor: if you read any of the books listed in this magazine, please be sure to leave a review for the author at the source site. Reviews make a **HUGE difference** to an author's credibility, and sales ranking. Reviews help Amazon to promote books, adding better placement for the book and, in short, keeping the author inclined to write more.

Enjoy this issue. Tell your friends to sign up to be on our mailing list. They can find it on our Website at [www.BooksNPieces.com](http://www.BooksNPieces.com).

Regards,



William Gensburger  
Writer/Publisher  
Alt Publish/Misterwriter LLC.

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**Submissions:** We accept submissions for columns, articles, short stories, poetry, reviews, free book promotions made from our Website [www.BooksNPieces.com](http://www.BooksNPieces.com) (SUBMIT tab). Submissions should be made in .doc, .txt formats. We are unable to offer payment for anything except short stories. Short stories should be around 2,000 words unless prior approval is given for longer works. See Website for current payment rates.

**Disclosure:** Please note that some of the links listed herein are affiliate links, and impose no additional cost to you. We will earn a commission if you decide to make a purchase (no obligation) after clicking through the link.

# IDAHO *News*

We are an Idaho-based company, and that's great news if you consider that Idaho is the fastest growing state in the country.



Of course, this magazine has a wide reach, with strong readership in Canada, Great Britain, Australia, as well as within the United States. If you have been a regular

reader, you will recall all the interviews since our first issue, including big-name authors, such as **Robert J. Sawyer**, as well as other bestselling authors, new authors, local authors, and more.

And so we will start embracing our Idaho location, offering you interviews, short stories, poetry, articles, regular columns, writing tips, marketing ideas, and much more.

The Idaho Writers' Guild (<http://idahowritersguild.blogspot.com>) just held a two-day conference. Like many cities, writers abound, offering a wide array of talent.

There are many Idaho bestselling authors. Among them **HJ Bellus**, a *USA Today* bestselling author, a third-grade schoolteacher who lives on a pig farm near Gooding, Idaho, now passed her 21st steamy romance novel. You can learn more about her on her Website: [www.authorhjb.com](http://www.authorhjb.com) and on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/AuthorHjBellus](http://www.facebook.com/AuthorHjBellus).

Another Idaho bestselling author, **Brenda Stanley**, whose four novels are mystery/thrillers, has enjoyed solid amazon sales rankings. She also does stories for her local NBC affiliate in Eastern Idaho where she was a News Anchor.

You can visit her Website at [www.brendastanleybooks.net](http://www.brendastanleybooks.net).

**Vardis Fisher** was born in Annis, Idaho, penning a guide to the state and a 12-part series, "Testament of Man," from cabin by Thousand Springs. His gritty account of fur-trade trappers titled, *Mountain Men*, was made into the 1972 movie, *Jeremiah Johnson*, starring Robert Redford. You can buy his most famous book, *Children of God*, at [amzn.to/2KJMCNf](http://amzn.to/2KJMCNf)

Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *All The Light We Cannot See* by **Anthony Doerr** (Boise, Idaho), remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for over 117 weeks, back in 2016.

Read more about him at [www.anthonydoerr.com](http://www.anthonydoerr.com).

**Emily Ruskovich** grew up in the Idaho Panhandle, on Hoodoo mountain. She was a winner of the 2015 O. Henry Award for her novel, *Idaho*, a stunning novel about love and forgiveness, about the violence of memory and the equal violence of its loss. Learn more at [amzn.to/2jGYD9D](http://amzn.to/2jGYD9D) or at [www.emilyruskovich.com](http://www.emilyruskovich.com)

**Donna Cook**, one of this year's speakers at the Idaho Writers' Guild Conference, is an award-winning author and freelance editor living in Boise, Idaho. Her debut novel, an epic fantasy, *Gift of the Phoenix*, won First Place Fantasy in the North American Book Awards and Best New Idaho Author, as well as several other awards. She's also published two series of contemporary romances under the pen name, Jordyn White.

Visit her at [www.DonnaCookEditor.com](http://www.DonnaCookEditor.com).

**Cynthia Hand**, another author at this year's conference, is a *New York Times* bestselling author of several teen books, including *The Last Time We Say Goodbye*, *My Lady Jane*, the *Unearthly* trilogy, with more due out in 2018. She resides in Boise, Idaho.

Learn more about her at [www.cynthiahandbooks.com](http://www.cynthiahandbooks.com).

**Brandilyn Collins**, bestselling author of over 30 suspense and contemporary novels, divides her time between Northern Idaho and the Bay Area. Among the awards for her novels are the ACFW Book of

the Year (three times), Inspirational Readers' Choice, and Romantic Times Reviewers' Choice.

Read more at <https://brandilyncollins.ditdat.com>.

So you can see that Idaho offers a lot of literary talent, and a smaller, competitive market, if you look at a total statewide population of just under two million people.

The Idaho Commission for the Arts offers a *Writer in Residence* program complete with a \$15,000 award. Visit [arts.idaho.gov](http://arts.idaho.gov) for more information.

The current *Writer in Residence* is **Kim Barnes**, born in Lewiston, Idaho. Her books: *In the Wilderness*, and *Hungry for the World*, both memoirs, as well as *Finding Caruso*, detail the North Idaho landscape in great detail.

She is also a Distinguished Professor at the University of Idaho where she teaches creative writing. Visit her Website at <http://kimbarnes.com>.

The University of Idaho offers a *Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing* program. Visit their "unofficial" Website at [writeinidahomfa.wordpress.com](http://writeinidahomfa.wordpress.com).

**Elaine Ambrose** is a bestselling, award-winning author and contributing author of sixteen books, as well as a syndicated Blogger on several sites. She lives in Eagle, Idaho, close to Boise. Visit her Website at [www.elaineambrose.com](http://www.elaineambrose.com).

**Barbara Perry Bauer**, an historical author, received her B.A. in history from Boise State University. Join her on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/bpbauer1>.

And **Rediscovered Books**, Boise, not only serves as an old-fashioned book store, but supports local authors with a passion. Visit their Website to learn more at [www.rdbooks.org/idaho-authors](http://www.rdbooks.org/idaho-authors), some of whom are listed here.

Based on the current growth, Idaho could well become a cultural center for the arts in the next few years. It's a great place to visit, and for writers, a place filled with history and inspiration. Δ



**WRITERS: SUBMIT YOUR SHORT STORIES**

## MEET MEGAN BRYANT

### Is There Anything She Can't Do?

Boise native, Megan Bryant, can make most people feel exhausted; she never stops, appears to have endless energy, and no shortage of creative outlets.



She is a variety comedian and a truth activist who is known around town for her one-woman shows featuring stand-up, improv, humorous poetry, parody songs, and more!

She is the Creator/Director of Idaho Laugh Fest (<http://idaholaughfest.com>), an annual celebration of comedy in all shapes and sizes, featuring many local, and out of state performers, now coming into it's fourth successful year.

Megan also runs corporate improv training throughout the country, and also speaking engagements about the raw and real stories that have shaped her into the woman she is today.

Her book, *Not My Plan: Sucking It In Until I Had to Push It Out*, is available, detailing the story of her life when, at

eighteen years of age, she was faced with how to handle a pregnancy she knew she could not handle.

From the book's blurb on Amazon, "For a full nine months, 18-year-old Megan Bryant kept her pregnancy a secret. With an ever-growing stomach, her senior class production of *Little Shop of Horrors*, and high school graduation in her midst, Megan did the only thing she could think to do...hide herself from her family and friends.

That is, until she no longer could." After keeping her story closely guarded for years, Megan, in her book, *Not My Plan*, (winner of the 2016 Idaho Author Award for Nonfiction) authentically and intimately shares how the path toward adoption can change a family's trajectory forever. Her story also includes important messages about how this experience has influenced her religiously, and ultimately helped steer her into a career as a variety comedian and improv instructor.

The book, with 35 five-star reviews, directly, and thoughtfully, explains all



aspects of her life, decision and the follow-up to that.

The book is rapidly approaching Kindle best-seller status.

You can learn more and buy it at <https://amzn.to/2rFfUoi>

Visit her Website at <http://meetmeganbryant.com>, or on Facebook at <https://www.fb.com/MeetMeganBryant>.



Photos courtesy MeetMeganBryant.com

## BRENDA STANLEY

### Popular Author Book Signing in Idaho Falls Barnes & Noble

Idaho Falls author, Brenda Stanley, enjoyed a book signing at Barnes & Noble, May 12, for her newest book, "The Treasure of Cedar Creek", which reached bestseller status on Amazon Kindle.

The novel is set in the Idaho wilderness areas of Montpelier and Challis in 1896, weaving together journal entries from three (fictional) young women fleeing from forced marriages and abuse in a religious compound. Their quest for freedom allows them to discover shocking revelations about the sect, and its implication to their lives.

"The signing was wonderful," Stanley said. "There were people who came from all over the state, and I was able to meet and talk with many people that I've connected with over the years, through my books."

Watch her book trailer at [https://youtu.be/H-ygL3Vv\\_5Y](https://youtu.be/H-ygL3Vv_5Y)

Learn more and buy the book at <https://amzn.to/2IfYKtJ> or from her Website at [www.brendastanleybooks.net](http://www.brendastanleybooks.net). Δ



Photo courtesy: Brenda Stanley

### REMEMBER A SIMPLER TIME WHEN MILK TASTED AMAZING?



IDAHO FRESH

# Interview Steena Holmes

Wife, Mother, Author, Chocoholic, World Traveler and much more...



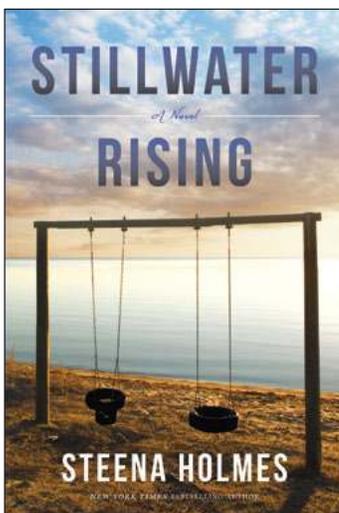
**S**teena Holmes is an extremely successful author of fiction. She has had a great deal of success with focus on romance, Women's Fiction, and now a psychological thriller. The key to success for Steena has been to always stay grounded and true to roots in her writing. It's how she has sold two million copies of her novels worldwide, and this was most definitely the formula when she released a series of popular mainstream titles including *Finding Emma*, *Stillwater Rising* and her acclaimed novel series *Saving Abby* in May 2016. Holmes' ability to provoke reader emotion and create works that people can identify with, has reinforced the Canadian as one of the true mainstays of female Canadian fiction, with numerous accolades including being a *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author.

On April 1, 2018, Steena released *The Forgotten Ones*, her thirtieth novel and one that was written with her daughter's influence in mind—her own daughter has battled with mental health and potential suicide issues for the past three years.

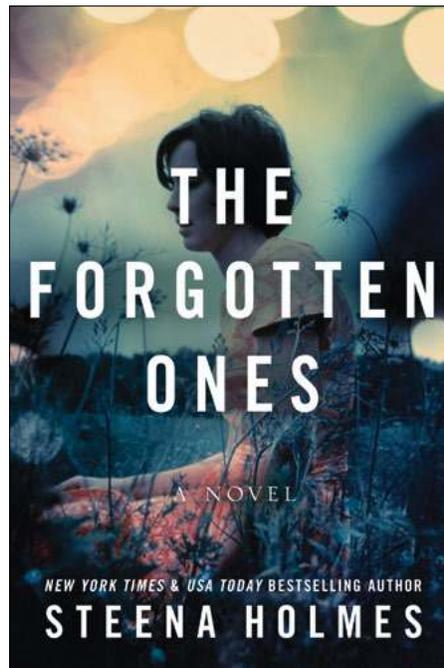
That battle has led to numerous medical emergency visits, stresses of possibly losing her daughter on multiple occasions, and a substantial number of counseling sessions that have hurt both financially and emotionally.

Turn the clock forward three years and Steena's daughter is in a much better place..

The novel was an Amazon Best-Seller in its first week, but Steena didn't write it for



the accolades or the sales, she wrote it as a means of exercising her own demons and poured her heart and



grief into this novel.

Steena has decided to generously donate fifty-percent of her sales proceeds on her print books—not cover price, but her royalties of *The Forgotten Ones* print format—to “The LifeLine Canada Foundation” out of British Columbia.

“The LifeLine Canada Foundation” is a registered non-profit organization committed to positive mental health and suicide prevention in Canada and Worldwide.

Named in the Top 20 Women Author to read in 2015 by Good Housekeeping, she won the National Indie Excellence Award in 2012 for *Finding Emma* as well as the USA Book News Award for *The Word Game* in 2015. Having her Author brand featured repeatedly on sites such as Goodreads, BookBub, RedBook, and Goodhousekeeping, Steena is an authority on creating an effective author brand and has been invited to speak on the subject at various author forums around the world.

**Q:** You are on the cover of this issue and I noted that your focus appears to be on Indie-publishing. Your site offers tips,

an email course on branding, and you give talks on the subject, including having won, among other things, the 2012 Indie Excellence Award.

**A:** Even though I started out as an Indie author, the tips and email course on branding is focused on every author, regardless of their publishing journey. In today's publishing world, the author is responsible for their branding, their social interaction and building a reader base. My goal is to help them do that and to make it as easy as I can.

**Q:** How did you manage to get on the *NY Times* and *USA Today* bestseller lists as an indie publisher?

**A:** By focusing on my readers and connecting with other authors who had the same dreams and goals as I did.

**Q:** At what point in your life did you decide that you would go for a writing career? And at what point did you decide that you had made it?

**A:** It wasn't until my mid 30's that I had the courage to attempt to write. I wrote while working full time—I spent my evenings, weekends, lunch hours typing on my computer. The day I realized I could do this full time was when I realized I'd 'made it' as an author.

**Q:** You've sold around 2 million copies (congratulations). Are you surprised, and if not, what does continue to surprise you?

**A:** I'm always pleasantly surprised when I find out someone has not only bought but also read my book! When they contact me to tell me how much they loved the story, how parts of it felt like I'd written it just for them...those are the things that surprise me. Those are the things that matter to me.

**IT BROKE MY HEART AND CHALLENGED ME TO ALWAYS WRITE WITH MY HEART.**

**Q:** You are now breaking into the German and European markets. How are you doing this—by yourself, with agent, etc?

**A:** I'm doing this with Amazon Crossing as well as an agent. It's been fabulous to discover readers in Hungary, Israel, Germany etc are reading my books.

*[Note: Her books have been translated into 5 languages and counting.]*

**Q:** Why should an author consider being an Indie, versus traditional, or a hybrid of both, which some authors do?

**A:** I don't think it's so much deciding between Indie versus traditional publishing, or even being hybrid; but more about choosing the right path for each book.

Maybe the story you're writing isn't long enough for a traditional publisher or it's meant to be a book that comes out quickly, or you're wanting to use it as a loss-leader for a new series... there are so many different reasons why someone would choose to self-publish a book over publishing it with a mainstream publisher. There's no right or wrong answer; it all depends on what is best for *that* book and how it meets your readers needs.

**Q:** What is your writing process like? Long hand while eating chocolate? Computer while outdoors? What makes it work for you?

**A:** I start with a notebook where I work on my plot and then it's 100% Scrivener. I love to sit outside on my patio or in my comfy chair, and I drink pots of coffee.

I love to snack on chocolate covered almonds or cake that my daughters consistently make. I tend to write late afternoon and evenings as well.

**Q:** What is the worst mistake you have made (professionally)?

**A:** This is a hard one as I tend to think of things as experiences. I agreed to work in series that wasn't part of my branding and while I enjoyed writing the stories, my readers didn't follow me to that series.

**Q:** Milk chocolate (Swiss), Dark chocolate, Infused chocolate (ie: brandy), Mixed (nuts/berries)?

**A:** Hands down milk chocolate! I don't mind if it's mixed with coconut or some nuts either. The best chocolate I've tasted was found in Brugge, Belgium at a place called Mary's.

**Q:** What is the absolute best moment you have experienced?

**A:** The absolute best moment was when a reader contacted me about a story I'd written and she told me I'd written her story, that I'd place what she'd gone

through into words she had never been able to say. It broke my heart and challenged me to always write with my heart.

**Q:** Any tough advice for new writers (tough because everyone always tells new writers how wonderful they are)?

**A:** You're going to have days when you want to give up, when you'll find any

excuse not to be writing. If you are serious about this as a career, then put on your big boots, sit your butt down and make writing a priority. Life will always get in the way, there will always be reasons why you didn't write, but if this is truly your passion, then you will find the time to sit down and finish your book - even if it takes you a few years. Δ

*[Editor: Our thanks to Steena for this interview. She is not only a prolific author, but also, her involvement in many facets of writing, branding, and promotions need to be examined closely by any serious author.]*

*Below we have included links and material from Steena's websites and to other source material and interviews you may like to examine.]*

Websites: [http:// www.steenaholmes.com](http://www.steenaholmes.com) and <http://www.steenatravels.com>.

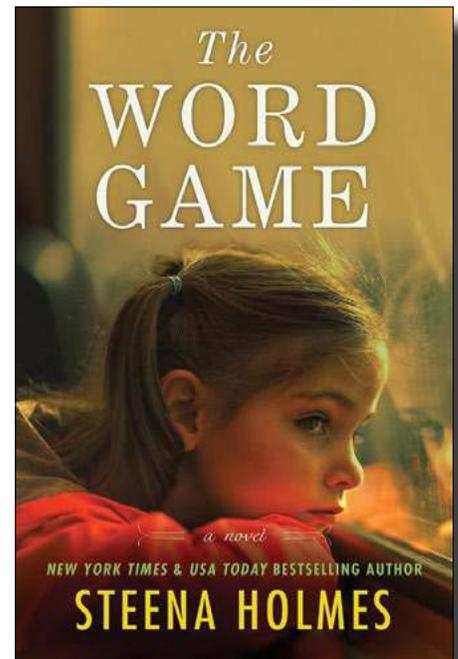
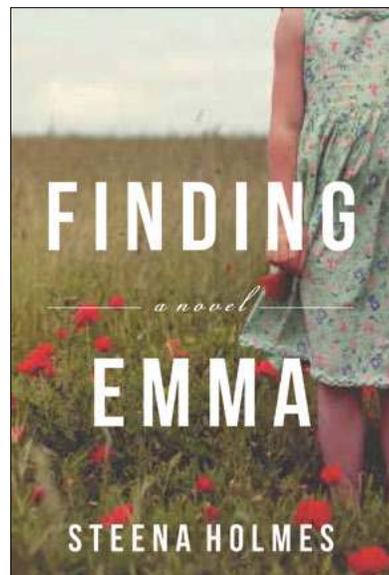
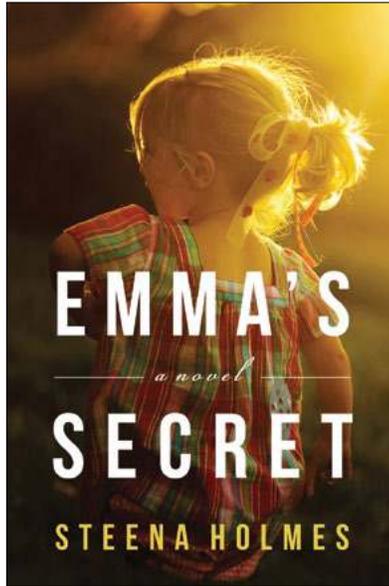
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Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/authorsteenaholmes/>

FREE Five-Step Branding Course: <http://eepurl.com/c12AnH>

Branding with Intent Course: <http://www.steenaholmes.com/branding-with-intent/>



Cover Photo credit: Vanessa Pressacco Photography. Article photograph courtesy steenatravels.com

# ABOUT NEXT DOOR

by Jay Seate

## “A YOUNG MAN’S INFATUATION WITH HIS NEIGHBOR TAKES AN UNEXPECTED TURN.”

From my bedroom, I look at the house next door. Beneath an eave, its windows look like shiny black mirrors reflecting moonlight...all but one. My eyes come to rest on the window lit from within. There are no sounds to distract me. It is as if nothing exists other than the light in my neighbor’s bedroom. I think about Lucy a lot—the woman next door. Two in the morning and she is still awake like me. She is home, but not her husband. He’s on the road this week.

She can’t sleep. Neither can I even though I’m exhausted. I never sleep when Lucy is home alone. We’ve only exchanged a few pleasantries during the time she has lived next door, but she has always given me pleasant, pretty smiles, and the chance to admire her womanliness. Our house is without a female, my mother having abandon me and my father years earlier.

If I keep looking I might catch a glimpse of Lucy and her curvy shape. Her shadow is moving behind the curtain now. Maybe she will look out her window and see me looking back. What then? I try to picture what she might be wearing...or not wearing.

Only one thing for me to do, what I always do when I see that light and know she is alone. I walk from my room and down the stairs. I pour a glass of milk and scarf down a bite of one thing or another, trying to think of something besides what I’d like to be doing in the house next door. I am vulnerable to any random erotic thought. Down the hatch with the milk and then the slow climb back up the stairs thinking about what will come next if her light is

still on.

The light is on. I again stand at the window all fidgety. I feel like squeezing the life out of something to ease my distress. My mind wanders to the first girl in my life, the one I started school with, the one who swore she would love me forever. It lasted until the ninth grade when she finally realized how many fish there were in the sea. Our destinies were not linked

might be whiskey. She’s wearing a pink nightgown. It has spaghetti straps and is cut way down almost to her nipples. Her breasts are large. They almost beg to be fondled.

That’s the limit. My hand slips into my boxers. It is the only thing I can do to keep myself from leaving the house, knocking on her door, telling her I can’t sleep when she’s alone, and that I want to spend the rest of my life with her. I think about all the strange or unusual or wonderful things we could do to each other with her bedroom light turned off. What other teenager might have such desires I couldn’t know. My fingers do their work while my brain repeats the mantra: Lucy and me. Lucy and me.

She remains at the kitchen window sipping her drink. I wonder if she would see me if she happens to glance up. I want her to see me. I want her to smile and wave me over. If she looks up I swear to God I’m going to raise my window and climb down the side of the house like Spiderman. She’ll laugh. Then she will have to let me in.

It is then that I hear our front gate swing open. I back away from my window a step. A man wearing black is walking along the sidewalk past our fence. He stops and opens Lucy’s gate.

“What the hell?” I mutter. Lucy has seen him as well. Panic seeps into my marrow. She disappears from the kitchen window and out of sight. I can’t hear anything but my heartbeat. Should I grab my cell and call 911? If I can save her from an intruder, I’ll be her hero.

Then the kitchen light winks out. A moment later, the bedroom goes dark as well. My member has gone flaccid in my hand. I stand at the window dumbfounded. This is no intruder. This has all been some kind of show, a preview for an expected visitor, a mating call. Not for me, but for...

Sweet Jesus. My dad.

after all. Funny things come to mind when you can’t sleep.

Then a second light comes on. This one is in her kitchen. She must need to eat when she’s restless like me. I see her walk in front of the window. She is only a silhouette lit from behind until she turns on a light over the sink. She pours something into a glass. It’s not milk. I think it

It's not easy when a new reality crashes into one's life. I didn't want to think about what was happening in the darkened room. The facts struck with the force of a 2X4. How many times has my old man tapped my lovely Lucy? Is this the first, or the hundredth? Had it started long ago, or just tonight? Who knows? I feel like running into a wall, my dream shaken, lost hope strong enough to bring tears.

I lay on my bed and fight imaginary demons. My thoughts fan out like shatter-shot from an exploding muzzle. I think about other houses up and down my street and wonder what secrets they too hide. I could throw a monkey wrench into the mix and squeal, tell Lucy's hubby what is going on. But that would make me the worst kind of rat-fink.

My mom had a saying: "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." My dad is a big time stone-thrower, but maybe he and Lucy are in love? Maybe she will get a divorce and move next door...in with us? Maybe she will decide my dad is too old? Just this morning I saw him as he walked into our kitchen scratching his butt through his boxer shorts. Could Lucy go for that? She could do better...me. I will be eighteen soon and old enough for her, and with lots more juice than Pop. I can tell her I'm a big chip off the old block and have the advantage of youthful vigor.

I turn from the window and look at the room I'd lived in since I was a child, the room my mother used to dust. If only my world could change for the good. New scenarios flit across my mind, but I must block them out and think it all through tomorrow because Lucy is no longer alone, and I am suddenly very tired and very lonely. Δ

### About the Author



Jay is a writer who stands on the side of the literary highway and thumbs down whatever genre that comes roaring by. His storytelling runs the gamut from Horror Novel Review's Best Short Fiction Award to the Chicken

Soup for the Soul series. His memoirs and essays report fact while his fiction incorporates realism, fantasy, horror, or humor featuring the quirkiest of characters. His longer works can be found Online at Amazon and B&N.

Photo credit: Jan Andersen/123rf.com

## Interview

# Sarah L. Johnson

Sarah L. Johnson lives in Calgary where she wrangles literary events at an indie bookstore for money, runs ultra marathons for fun, has a filthy mouth, and does daily battle with curly hair.

Her writing skates across multiple genres: literary, sci-fi, fantasy, noir, and horror. Her short stories have appeared in a number of journals and anthologies including Room Magazine, Plenitude Magazine, the Bram Stoker nominated Dark Visions 1: A Collection of Modern Horror (Grey Matter Press), and Year's Best Hardcore Horror Volume 2 (Comet Press).

Her short story collection *Suicide Stitch* was released in 2016 by EMP Publishing, and her debut novel is *Infractus*.

A member of Calgary's queer writing community, Sarah is a vocal advocate of LGBTQ+ representation in all forms of literature. Sarah is also the 2018 Writer in Residence for the Calgary based Alexandra Writers' Centre Society.

**Q:** Your writing isn't limited to one genre (although you appear to have excused yourself from romance). Is that because your interests are that wide, or you have yet to find one niche that you believe will serve you better? [Off the record, I don't believe in niche writing: the most interesting authors are out of the box]

**A:** Oh, I don't excuse myself from romance at all. Most of my stories have some kind of romance (however twisted). It's only that I'm not very good at making romance the primary story thread. My biggest problem is that I don't choose a genre when I write. It comes out a fusion of many genres, literary/sci-fi/fantasy/noir/thriller etc. I'm entirely untidy that

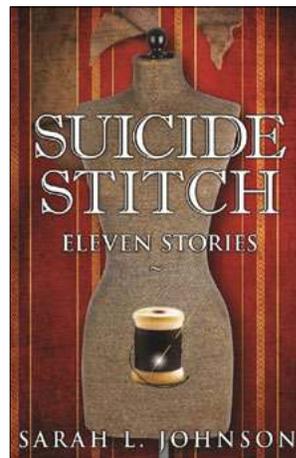
way.

**Q:** You hold to a realistic perspective that writers are not usually financially independent enough to sustain themselves that way. As such you edit, teach, work in a bookstore (does that help placement of your book, by the way?). While these may help pay the bills, how do you find the energy level to sustain jobs and writing, enough to push through to a conclusion?

**A:** I'm fortunate that I'm able to make a living with work that allows me to be deeply involved in the writing community. I never knew how important it was until I started, not merely networking, but building real relationships with other writers. Those relationships have yielded more benefit to my career than any kind of personal branding or social media strategy. Energy is a struggle but I think that's true for anyone with a day job and three kids. My writing time is more precious because of those constraints on my time. I guard it jealously, and you have to. There's no end to tasks and people who aren't afraid to tell you that writing shouldn't be a priority.

**Q:** Short stories led to your first novel *Infractus* which is a science-fiction story that ultimately makes readers question religious absolutes. Your own religious conflicts led you to this tale, you had said in a different interview. How difficult is it to write on such a polarizing topic (religion, politics etc.) and why did you feel the need to highlight the lack of absolutes?

**A:** It's difficult for me not to write about those topics. I'll think I'm writing about loneliness or marital strife and whoops! There's a religious reference, and here we go again... As for moral absolutes, I think they're simple and comforting, which is always suspicious to me. Life isn't like that.



People are messy. We get dealt a shit hand and we make shit decisions. We also get lucky. We're compassionate and forgiving. We act on rage. We have a nasty habit of hurting the people who love us most. We're rarely at peace with ourselves. It's great and terrible, and it's what makes us human. You can write about the most ordinary person having the most ordinary day and still find some fascinating nuance to explore.

**Q:** What's your writing style like? Fixed/rigid, casual, as the mood strikes, cocktail in one hand, pen in the other?

**A:** Flurries of productivity followed by extended periods of screen staring. Breaks for research that lead to watching cat videos. I drink when writing rough drafts at night and edit by the sober light of morning. If I have a deadline I'm quite disciplined. Otherwise I tend to wander. I do a lot of writing that isn't ostensibly for anything, just blating out thoughts, or impromptu collaborative storytelling with friends where we each chip in a bit (ask



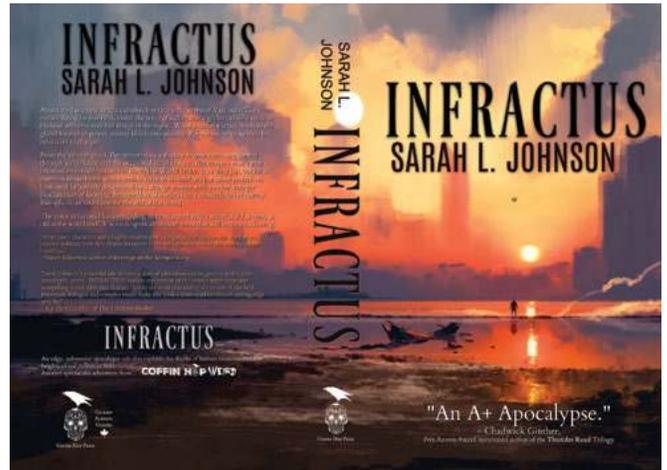
me sometime about Barbara and Carol, or the Gentleman and the demon baby). I think as writers we ought to do more pointless writing. It's healthy. It brings us back to the reason we do what we do. Not for publication or external validation, but for the sheer joy of creating art and sharing stories.

**Q:** You have a sequel to *Infractus* in the works. How long does it take you to go from idea, through plotting, writing, to finished product?

**A:** It really varies. If I have a deadline I get it done. On my own I'm pretty slow. Sometimes I can't figure a story out so it goes in a drawer for a couple years. The sequel to *Infractus* is already in the works so it won't be too long, but starting from scratch? I can't see myself being able to go from idea to finished novel in less than 2-3 years. It takes me a long time to know the characters, to develop them fully, only then can I polish on the level of the sentence. John Green says he has yet to finish a book in less than 3 years, so I think I'm doing okay.

**Q:** You are also Writer in Residence for the Alexandra Writers' Centre Society. For writers with no idea about residency, what is that about and how did that come about?

**A:** Writing organizations, universities, and public libraries often have Writer in Residence programs where a published writer is paid an honorarium to engage



with the community, give one on one manuscript consultations, and teach workshops. These programs provide amazing opportunities for aspiring writers to get professional critique, and for seasoned writers to give back to the community while having the financial support to work on their own project. It's been a marvelous experience for me. Δ  
Website: [www.sarahljohnson.com](http://www.sarahljohnson.com)



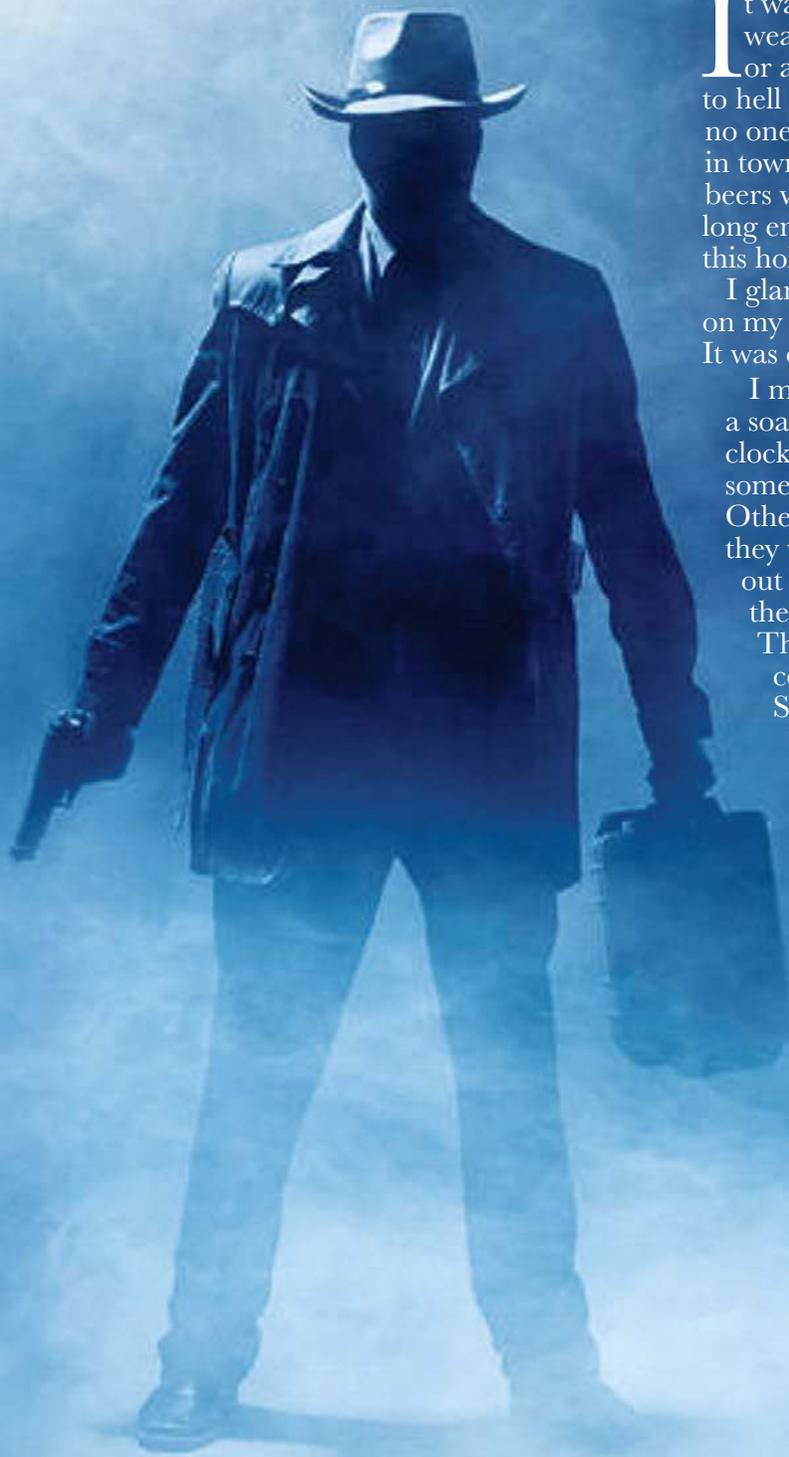
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# ONE STORMY NIGHT

by Charles Hitchcock

**One of the women screamed at the sight of the blood and I was suddenly aware that a crowd had gathered.**



It was raining. Man, how it was raining. The weather man had forecast a tornado to hit in or around Wyleville before dawn. I figured, to hell with it. If it was going to hit this town, no one could care less than me. I had only been in town long enough to down a half-dozen beers while I waited for my train, but that was long enough to know I'd be glad to get out of this hole.

I glanced at my watch, turned up the collar on my top coat, and headed for the train depot. It was only a block up and three over.

I made the depot without taking too bad of a soaking. It was 7:25 in the evening by the big clock on the wall. The usual crowd was there, some leaving, some staying.

Others laughed and joked, weeping because they were parting. I pulled the last twisted butt out of the crumpled pack and started for the counter to pick up a fresh bunch.

That's when it happened. I saw her coming.

She was trying to watch for something behind her. I caught her in my arms as she slammed into me. An effeminate tremble swept through her body and her head jerked up for a look at what ever was holding her. Not bad looking, sort of plain because the rain had washed most of her make-up off. Her hair would have been a soft, yellowish blonde if it hadn't been wet but now it served to outline the purple shiner developing around her right eye. She was soaked to the skin and out of breath.

"For God's sake, let go of me," she panted. "I've got to make the train."

She was traveling light. The only thing she was taking with her must have been what she was wearing; woman's trench coat tied tightly around her waist. No purse. No luggage.

"Maybe I can help," I grinned. "I'm taking it out of here too."

"Then lets get out of here." She took my arm and squeezed it tight like she had found a friend. The frightened look faded from her eyes.

We made for the train ale, half-run. The wind lashed at use trying to hold us back but I grabbed the hand rail and jumped aboard. I turned, grabbing her hand to pull her up after me. Lightning slashed the sky and the roll of thunder smothered out all other sounds. Her mouth opened with a twist of agony, a stare of dishonor clouded her eyes. Her body stiffened and went limp. I grabbed at her with both hands but her weight dragged me down.

I gathered her in my arms and beat it back to the depot. Something was wrong. Maybe she was hurt more than the shiner indicated. I stretched her out on the floor near the door and started to put my top coat around her. I was wrong. She wasn't hurt. She was dead. My hand was covered with blood where I'd tried to put my coat in back of her.

One of the women screamed at the sight of the blood and I was suddenly aware that a crowd had gathered. I shoved one of the guys standing there and told him to call the cops. I needn't have bothered. A big fat guy with a cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth flipped a badge at me and knelt down for a look at the body. His face twisted and I could tell he wasn't too experienced in murder first-hand.

"Who is she?" I whispered. I could tell by the frown on his face that he recognized the girl.

He answered without realizing he was speaking. "Mildred Collins. She's Ernie Collins' wife." He snapped out of it and stood up. "What's your name and where are you from?"

"Joe Barker-L.A.," I said following him away from the crowd. "You're not figuring me for this?"

His eyebrows narrowed suspiciously. "We'll let you know later. Let's go."

Outside the rain and wind were still howling their crescendo of laughter at the world and the stupid people in it. And right now it looked like I was the stupidest. When you're an ex-con you can't take the risk of going to jail again. How damn dumb can a guy get I, wondered, being picked up on suspicion of murder for a dame you've never seen before, and just missing your train by a matter of minutes.

Nuts. How damn dumb?

The cop yanked the car door open and waited for me to get in. The rain poured off his face and I couldn't afford to wait any longer. I let him have it with the heel of my hand, right on the button. His head banged off the side of the car and he piled up in the street. I didn't hang around to see if he got up.

I ran for what seemed to be a mile before I hit the main drag. The wind whipped the neon signs about with a fury, and the rain beat angrily against me.

I made a break for the first joint I spotted. Nobody even bothered to look up from their beer. This kind of weather seemed to be the usual thing and the patrons were used to seeing guys soaked to the teeth.

I grabbed a stool at the and of the bar after shaking what water I could from my coat and hat. "Something large and strong," I told the big moose behind the bar. A couple of minutes later it was half gone and I felt better as the warmth flowed into my stomach.

I knew it wouldn't be long before the cops started combing the city for me, and the joints would be the first place they would start to look.

I figured on having just one more before I scrambled. I wondered about the dead woman. Who beat her up and why was she running? Whoever shot her was in the clear, and the way things looked I was going to be nailed for it unless I could find the real killer. It would be useless to try grabbing any type of transportation leaving the city. I tried to figure an angle, but came up with nothing. Only two people know that I didn't pull the job. Me and the killer. Maybe I could get him to come after me if he thought I saw him do it. I put on my hat and coat and left.

It was nine-thirty when I finally found what I was looking for; a rent-a-car garage that was still open. I gave the attendant the required fee plus a substantial bonus in return for the hottest Ford on the lot, and a map of the city. The map said Wyleville had a population of one hundred-thousand. Great. Out of that I had to find one man—or woman.

I cruised around the city for about an hour listening to the monotonous chopping of the windshield wipers. I wondered how many people's lives were cut off with each chop of the blade. I saw the name Collins linked with several of the dives around town. It looked like he must be a big-wheel. What I needed was information. Wait a minute—where do most people go when they want to find out something? The newspapers of course.

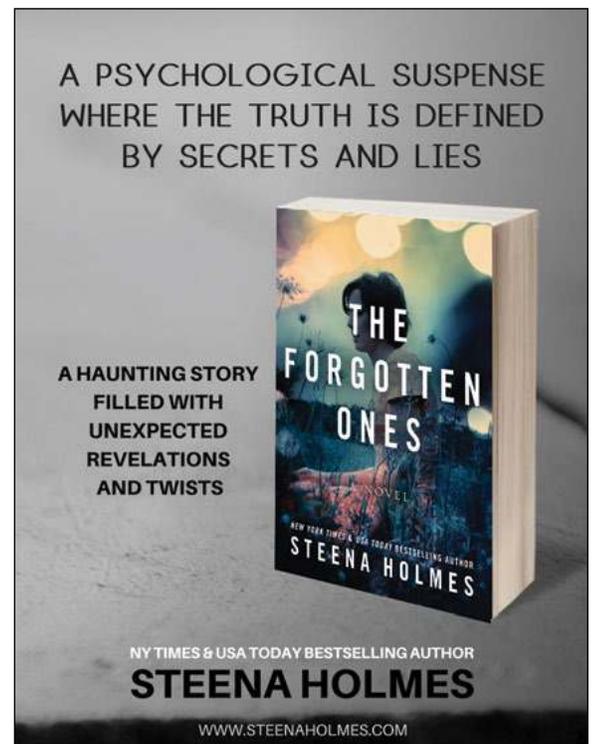
I pulled up to a small cafe where a couple of panhandlers were trying to mooch a free cup of black. The phone was right inside the door. I flipped a dime on the counter and they hushed arguing. I dialed "0" and the operator came up with the number I wanted. I asked for the reporter covering the Collins' killing, was transferred once, and the man I wanted greeted me with a tired, but alert, "Al Miller speaking."

"Never mind who I am. You just listen," I said. "I'm in a position to get you the biggest story you ever had, if you play your cards right. You name a place we can meet—in private, understand?"

He was a careful man. "How do I know you're not just another crackpot?"

"Listen, damn you. It's about the murder of a dame named Mildred Collins. I was told you were covering the story. Are you interested or not?"

"Okay, okay, don't get so hot under the collar. I'll meet you at the Pink Lady, out



on Forty-first and Line, in fifteen minutes,” he said with the tiredness disappearing from his voice.

“I’ll be there,” I said, and hung the receiver back on the hook.

The drunks heard me mention murder and were staring at me wondering if they should try something and maybe collect a reward. I put on my best snarl and they went back to their coffee. I chuckled to myself because they didn’t have a nick’s to call the cops, and were a little too yellow to do the job themselves.

The Pink Lady was a small tavern near the outskirts of town and I made it with time to spare. I pulled in from the side and cut the lights.

Five minutes later a car swung up in front and the driver darted inside to keep from being drenched by the onslaught of water.

I sat there for another ten minutes to make sure there wouldn’t be any cops showing up. I listened to the wind whip the rain against the car until I was satisfied we would be alone. Then I went in.

The inside was just like the outside. Everything was pink, inside and out. There was a small U-shaped bar over on the left side with nude pictures of women decorating the outer edges of the chip inlaid mirror.

The guy in the back booth had a press card in his hat. It lay on the table so it could be easily seen. I tossed my hat next to his, and sat down facing him and the door. He appeared to be medium-height. Thin, the type with ulcers. His eyes squinted as he looked me over and he fingered his smoke nervously. “You kept me waiting long enough, Barker,” he said with a teed off attitude.

I must have flinched unknowingly at the use of my name because he added quickly, “Don’t look so surprised. The cop at the train depot gave a complete description of you, along with the name you so foolishly gave him. They wired Los Angeles and found out you’re an ex-con that just finished a stretch about a year ago, for assault with a deadly weapon. Before that you were a private dick. The cops here work fast, and they’ll have you nailed within twenty four hours.”

“Don’t make book on that,” I said flatly, trying to dampen his complete faith in the ability of the police and at the same time bolster my own self-confidence. “Since you know so much about me, you know I’m in

a spot. How come you didn’t turn me in?”

He mashed out his butt in the ash tray. “You mentioned you had a hot story for me over the phone. Let’s have it,” he said impatiently.

I motioned for the barkeep to send us a round of Bud and told him to keep us supplied.

“I’m going to set you straight before I go any farther,” I said, “I never laid eyes on this Collins dame before tonight. I had no reason to rub her out.”

“How about that roll of bills you carry?” he asked, watching me peel one loose for the bartender.

“A year’s pay from the oil fields in South America.”

He appeared satisfied with my answer. “Okay, I’ll settle for that. What’s your deal?” he asked in a serious tone.

“The way I figure it, I’m trapped. I can’t leave town, and if I stay I’ll get picked up. If the cops get me I’ll be lucky to get off with a life sentence. I’ve got to work fast and get the killer or I’m a dead duck. With the odds I’m up against I don’t have anything to lose. Besides I know the ropes and I can roll a few heads if I have to. That’s about the only advantage I have over the cops.”

He studied his drink for a moment before answering. “That sounds logical. Where do I fit in?”

I leaned forward. “Before I got off the train here I never heard of this place, not to mention this Collins dame. What I need is information. Who were the people she knew? Was she married: I need background. Anything you can dig up for me.”

He stalled. “What happens if you don’t find the killer? “I smiled back at him. “I go to jail and you haven’t lost a thing.”

He fired up another butt and began to furnish me with what I asked. “Mildred Collins was the wife of Ernie Collins, a local war hero.

He came back from the war, went into business, and is a regular big shot now. He either owns or controls every tavern in town, plus a few other places he doesn’t want his name connected with, except of the money end. His partner is Bart Sager. Collins saved his life during the war and now Sager figures he owes him something. He watches Collins like a hawk.

I guess he’d do just about anything for Collins.

As far as any of Mildred’s old boyfriends

go, I only remember one. Ralph Garner. He’s a doctor now and seems to be doing all right for himself. As far as I know him or Mildred neither have been seen around with anyone else. The way it looks they were both leading pretty clean lives.”

Great. Now it looked as if no one had any reason to kill her; but she was dead just the same.

“I want you to go see this Doctor Garner and find out anything you can from him. I’ll phone you when I want to reach you just in case you come up with something. You won’t be able to contact me so hang on to anything you get.”

“Don’t trust me, huh?” he grinned.

I didn’t answer. I finished my beer and asked, “Where can I find Ernie Collins?”

“His home is out on Old South Aced, 1171, but right now he’s probably out at the Flamingo. One of the places he owns. Ernie’s a pretty tough guy and he won’t be at home crying. If I know him, he’s probably looking for the killer too.”

“Thanks,” I said, and beat it back to the car. The rain had lessened a bit but the wind was still laughing at the world like it held all the answers, blowing them out of reach in a kind of sadistic game.

On the way back to town I tried to frame a mental picture of Ernie Collins, a guy who doesn’t spend time weeping about the loss of a wife.

I wondered what he did during the war that made him such a big hero.

I found the Flamingo and had to elbow my way to the bar. The joint was jumping with people who thought they had found their answers, and had outsmarted the wind.

I sat there eying the crowd while I sipped a cool one and waited for the waiter to see if Collins came in. He came back with a big, good looking guy and introduced him as Bart Sager.

“Mr. Collins can’t see anyone tonight. What is it you wanted? Maybe I can help you,” he said, but his tone of voice meant he wanted to cut our meeting short.

“Yeah, maybe you can,” I said and showed him an old I.D. badge which I carry for sentimental reasons, but didn’t mean a thing. “I was at the train depot when Mrs. Collins was killed. We almost got to be friends. At least we both had something in common.”

“What was that?” He frowned at me like I said something wrong. “We were both going in the same direction.” Sager was

getting interested now and he sat down and lit a cigarette.

"I don't like people getting killed, especially friends of mine," I told him. Now he was beginning to catch on. I figured the cops had told him and Collins about the suspect. I figured right because his left hand started a movement to unbutton his jacket. "You pull a rod on me here and there's going to be some innocent people get killed—and you'll go with them." He didn't know if I was bluffing or not but decided not to chance it.

His face turned a bright red and he began to get nervous and strained the spit between his teeth. He wasn't good looking anymore. He hadn't been talked to like that for a long time, and he didn't like it, but there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it.

"Where was Mildred Collins running to and who was chasing her. She knew somebody was after her and she was scared. Her eye was turning black from a beating she had taken. Who was after her?"

"I don't know. She didn't have an enemy in the world that I know about. Besides she stayed at home most of the time." He almost choked on his words because his neck muscles were strained against his collar.

"How about friends. Most people aren't killed by their enemies anyway because they are watching for them. But they aren't watching their friends.

Maybe her old boyfriend, this guy Doc Randle?"

"Could be but it's doubtful."

"Why?"

"See, like I said, she stayed at home most of the time because she was going to have a baby, but she was being seen by Dr. Jefferson. If she still wanted to see Randle she would have been going to his office wouldn't she?"

"Maybe. How about her old man? Insurance maybe?"

"Hell no. Ernie didn't carry insurance on her. He's got all the dough he needs without knocking off his wife for it. Besides he's after the killer himself, and when he catches him the guy will wish it had been the cops that got him instead of Ernie."

"Yeah, I heard he was a tough guy. A war hero. What did he do for you?"

"He risked his own life to save mine, that's what he did. He got a bayonet

wound in the gut out of it, and they pinned all kinds of medals on him."

I looked at the door to the back room. "Let's go have a talk with your boss now. You lead the way."

He got up and I followed him. As he opened the door I snatched the rod from its holster under his arm. His eyes narrowed into thin slits of hate, but now he was like a snake with its fangs removed.

I slammed the door closed. Ernie Collins rose from behind his desk. He was a small man and didn't look too tough at all. He demanded, "What's going on here Bart?" Bart didn't answer. He just leered at me wishing things were going the other way.

"Get rid of your boy here so we can talk in private, and tell him to stay away from the phones." I said.

Collins nodded for Bart to leave, then turned to me. "Well?"

The door closed and I put the rod away. "It's about your wife. I was with her at the depot when she was killed and they are trying to nail me for it. I didn't do it but I intend to find out who did. How about your wife's old boyfriends? Could any of them have done it? Maybe this Doctor Randle?"

He studied for a moment while pouring himself a drink. "Are you trying to imply that my wife was running around on me?" Before I could answer he continued. "I've thought about it and I can't come up with anyone who would have done it but I've got some of my men working on it. You say you would have done it, but I've got some of my men working on it. You say you were with her when it happened. Mind telling me about it?"

I poured out as much as I knew just like it happened. He sat there calmly pouring one drink after another. There was no sign of emotion at all. One thing about him. He was tough inside.

I left by the back way and made my way to a phone. It took a couple of calls to locate Miller before I got him at his home. He answered with a yawn, "Hello?"

"Al, this is Barker," I said.

"What in the hell took you so long about calling? You sure like to keep a man waiting," he said with sarcasm.

"Shut up. What have you learned?" I said.

"Plenty! First of all, she was shot with a .45 automatic. I checked with Dr. Randle, too. He hasn't seen Mildred since her

and Ernie were married, so I didn't get anything from him. But hold your hat boy cause here's the big one. I got hold of Collins' war and medical records. Don't ask me how because I'd never tell anyway, but here's what I found out. Ernie was decorated all right, for action in Korea, but he suffered a bayonet wound. He recovered except for one thing. It left him sterile. Now get this...."

I interrupted, "Don't tell me, I already know. The medical examiner found out she was pregnant."

It must have stunned him, "Yeah, but how...."

I hung up the receiver. So that's how it was. Ernie, the tough guy was sterile. He found out his wife was knocked up and in a moment of wild rage he must have started beating her. Somehow she got loose and ran for it, but he must have been right behind her. No wonder he could be so calm.

I went back to the Flamingo but Collins had already left, so I made for his home. I parked the car a block away and went through the alley. I jumped over the fence that surrounded the house. At the side was a patio with French doors leading into the house. The lights were still on so I eased the rod out of my belt. I opened the doors and headed for the living room but I didn't make it. A cold icy voice from behind me said, "You shouldn't have come here, Barker."

I whirled around. The .45 automatic pointed straight at my head and I knew the guy wouldn't miss at this close range if he pulled the trigger.

I let mine drop to the floor. His thumb pulled the hammer back on the rod as he squeezed the trigger. Now all he had to do was let go of the hammer and I would be a dead man. Tiny beads of sweat ran down my cheeks. My mouth felt dry and my eyes strained in the dim, half-lit room.

"All I have to do is let go, Barker, and have the police come and remove your corpse. I'll tell them you killed Ernie's wife and came here to kill him. Simple isn't it?"

I bit my words off, "You cold blooded son-of-a-bitch. It's simple all right. I wondered about Collins war record. I had him all figured for a psycho. He killed for the love of killing. I even figured he liked to work himself into a fit of rage first, and that was why he made such a good killer during the war. I thought if he got himself in such a frenzy nothing could stop him.

Then came his wife. When he found out she was pregnant, he went out of his head again because he knew it wasn't going to be his kid. But I figured wrong. I had it all laid in my lap at once it didn't take time-to fit the pieces together. But I've got it right this time. The rod in your hand is the one she was killed with. She also had a black right eye. It would have been pretty hard for a right handed man to black the right eye. You unbuttoned your coat with your left hand and the rod is in your left hand." I swallowed hard.

There was a shadow moving slowly in the doorway behind Sager. I hoped I could stall death for a few more seconds. "Let me see if I've got the picture put together right now," I said, "You told me Mildred wasn't running around, that she stayed at home most of the time. That made things easy for you, but you didn't count on what Mildred might do. What was she doing? Blackmailing you? Were you around the house too much and she fell in love with you? She probably threatened to tell Collins about you, and you couldn't stand that because you owed Collins your life from the time he saved yours during the war. You couldn't let anything come between you and Collins, so when she told you that she was going to have a baby and was going to tell Collins, you knew what you had to do. I should have known this when you knew Mildred was pregnant and Collins didn't. A woman always tells the father first. Am I right so far?"

He grinned at me with all the hate pouring into his voice. "You're right except

on one point. I wasn't the father of the baby. Oh, that's what she was threatening me with and I knew that Ernie wouldn't believe me because of his sterility. But that's not the way it was. Mildred was seeing a doctor. Ever hear of artificial insemination? That's how she was going to pin this thing on me. With Ernie still in town I can take care of you, tell the police my version of what you were doing here, and I'll have covered all my mistakes."

The shadow behind Sager was almost in position to jump him. "You're wrong Sager. The first mistake you made was when you killed Mildred. The second when you kept me from talking to Collins when I first got here. I suppose, though, had you let Collins take the rap, you would have defeated your own purpose in killing Mildred."

The shadow suddenly came to life and the explosion that rocked the room knocked me to the floor. My hand clutched at the hole in my arm trying to stop the red fluid that spilled between my fingers. I managed to pull myself up and see the finish.

Ernie had his hands around Sager's throat and was squeezing until his fingers disappeared into the fat. Sager's face was puffing and turning blue. There were tears running down Collins' cheeks.

"You've been dead for five years, Bart. I'm going to forget about you except for that day on the battlefield where I left you to die. That's where we are now, back on the battlefield. This time I'm letting you die."

Collins turned him loose and the lifeless body crumpled to the floor. I felt a wave of pity for Collins. He wasn't really such a tough guy. He was mostly misunderstood. He was a lonely, mild-mannered man until aroused, and then he was a very competent, angry man.

I looked outside through the French doors that had swung open. The tornado had hit Wyleville alright, but in the form of a man. Now dawn was breaking, and the laughter of the wind was in its death throes. We had found those elusive answers. I was done here. Δ

### About the Author



*Charles (Charlie) Hitchcock was born in Hooker Oklahoma in 1931. Hooker was in ground zero of The Dust Bowl in the 30s and 40s. Charlie always had an active inquisitive mind that helped him throughout his*

*life and enabled him to escape the Oklahoma Prairie and build a life in Southern California.*

*While in the Air Force in 1952, Charlie caught the writing bug, and he wrote several short stories to see if he could pen a story as well as his favorite author, Mickey Spillane.*

*Those who read his stories encouraged him to continue, but as is with most folks, living life and trying to earn a living took priority.*

*He did periodically return to writing and wrote a handful of great songs and short stories.*

*Charlie passed away June 2006. His son, Cliff, has assembled his work for an upcoming book. This is one of the stories.*



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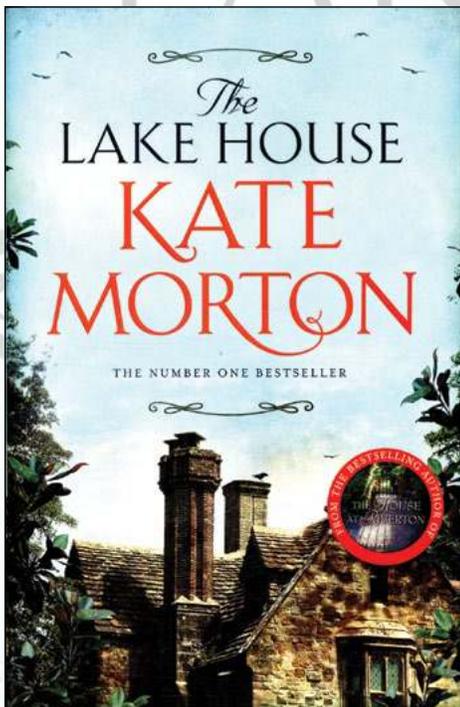
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# The Lake House

by Kate Morton



What happened to little Theo? Was the toddler kidnapped? Murdered? This is the major premise of *The Lake House* by Kate Morton (2016, Washington Square Press; Reprint edition, paperback, 512 pages \$12.02.) Theo had disappeared from the Edevane estate in Cornwall, England, during the Edavane's annual Midsummer party in June 1933. The case has remained unsolved for 70 years.

Fast forward to 2003 in London when Sarah, a former policewoman who has been put on leave and has returned to Cornwall to stay with her grandfather, stumbles upon the abandoned Edevane property while out running. The derelict house intrigues Sarah because it appears that the former occupants up and left without packing a single possession. When Sarah learns about the tragedy of Theo's disappearance, her detective skills kick in. She contacts one of Theo's sisters, Alice. Theo's sister wants to bury the past, but

through Sarah's prodding, Alice learns that one of her assumptions about what happened on that fateful evening in 1933 has been wrong.

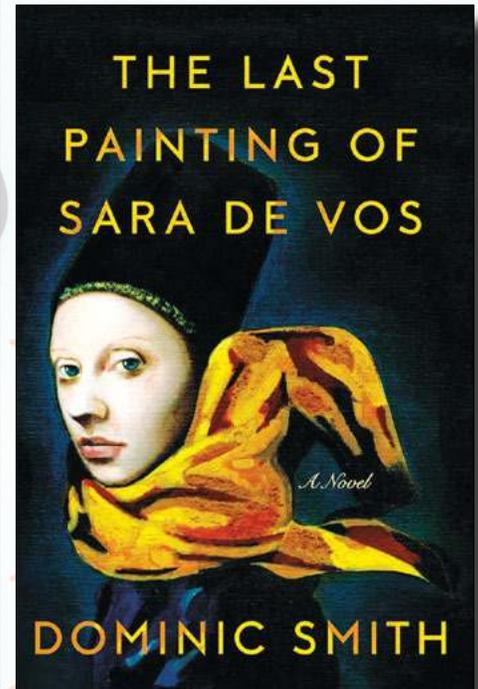
The story unfolds in pieces between Alice's childhood and the Edevane family saga in 1933 and Sarah and Alice's current lives. Red herrings tucked into the novel keep the reader guessing about Theo's fate. Several nannies, a retired medical doctor, and a handsome young grounds keeper could have played a role in Theo's disappearance. Then there's the backstory of Theo and Alice's parents: Eleanor, a fiercely devoted wife, and Anthony, a nature lover, war veteran, and loving father.

*THE LAKE HOUSE* received a Woman & Home Reader's Choice Award for Best Historical Thriller (2016) and a Goodreads Choice Award Nominee for Historical Fiction (2015). Readers who enjoy a compelling mystery, learning about the effects of World War I on servicemen, and poetic prose will love this book. The mystery of what happened to Theo launches this otherwise quiet book into a page-turning frenzy.

Kate Morton is an award-winning, New York Times bestselling author. Her five novels are published in over 40 countries, in 34 languages, and have all been number one bestsellers around the world. Kate grew up in Queensland and now splits her time between London and Australia. She has degrees in dramatic art and English literature with a focus in nineteenth-century tragedy and contemporary Gothic novels. Morton says of her experiences as a reader and novelist, "I fell deeply in love with books as a child and believe that reading is freedom; that to read is to live a thousand lives in one; that fiction is a magical conversation between two people - you and me - in which our minds meet across time and space."

## THE LAST PAINTING OF SARA DE VOS

by Dominic Smith



*The Last Painting of Sara De Vos*, by Dominic Smith (2017, Picador, paperback, 304 pages \$11.00) is the story of three lives intertwined by a famous Danish painting: the painter—Sara de Vos, a forger, Ellie Shipley, and Marty de Groot whose de Vos painting was stolen and replaced by Shipley's forged painting. Sara de Vos' story depicts a slice of life in Holland in the 1600s. In this fictional account of history, she becomes the first woman admitted to the Guild of St. Luke in Holland as a master painter in 1631.

The novel explores the intricacies of forgery in the art world through the eyes of Ellie Shipley, an art history professor and skilled art restoration who, during her graduate years in college, gets caught up in a scheme in 1957 to create a forgery of Sara de Vos' *At the Edge of the Wood*. The artwork depicts the ethereal form of a young girl clad in black that was created by Sara to remember her only daughter after the child's devastating death from the plague. Manhattan lawyer Marty de Groot, whose determination to recover the stolen de Vos painting that has been in his family for 300 years, completes the triangle of lives interconnected by this haunting painting. Ellie thinks she's dodged a bullet when her complicity in generating the fake goes undetected, but her world

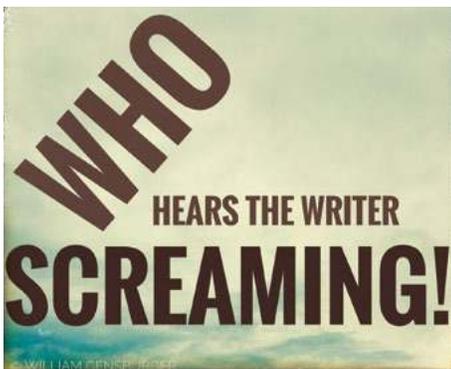
## PAREIDOLIA CHALLENGE

implodes in the year 2000 when a mix-up has two copies of the same painting surfacing to be on exhibit at an Australian museum event in Sydney—which happens to be where Ellie Shipley works as a curator.

Smith says of his novel, “I’ve always been fascinated by art forgers, who’ve been infiltrating the art world since the ancient Greeks. Having a fake at the center of the novel allowed me to explore ideas of authenticity and the notion that ‘every fake should tell a good story’—something I learned from interviewing and studying master art forgers. In my novel, though, there are two forgeries: a technical forgery of a painting and a moral forgery.”

**THE LAST PAINTING OF SARA DE VOS** is a New York Times Best-seller and a New York Times Editors’ Choice. Its popularity extends into more than a dozen countries. The novel was also selected as a “Best Book of the Year” by Amazon, Kirkus Reviews, Slate and the San Francisco Chronicle. Additional accolades include being long-listed for the Carnegie Medal for Excellence from the American Library Association, being chosen as the Fiction Indie Book of the Year by the Association of Independent Booksellers, and through its selection as the Literary Book of the Year as part of the Australian Book Industry Awards. Fans of Donna Tartt’s *The Goldfinch* will probably enjoy the book. But readers don’t have to be art enthusiasts to appreciate the novel because Smith has created an atmosphere of intrigue that will appeal to fans of thrillers and spy novels.

*Read more on Jill’s book reviews in the next issue of BNP Magazine, and also on her Website at [www.jillthedgecock.com](http://www.jillthedgecock.com)*



Pareidolia is a psychological phenomenon in which the mind responds to a stimulus, usually an image or a sound, by perceiving a familiar pattern where none exists. The human brain is wired to recognize faces and other familiar objects. We see faces in clouds, patterned surfaces and other surfaces.

People see the image of Jesus on potato chips, walls and other things. Rorschach inkblot tests use pareidolia to discern traits in subjects.

American cosmologist Carl Sagan, believed that pareidolia is a survival tool, allowing us to recognize friend from foe. Even Leonardo da Vinci wrote about mixing paints and finding patterns.

Above is a large image of a marbled wall. Whenever I look at it I see faces of all sizes, shapes, expressions. In the smaller image I have shown the shape of a few. I also see the Statue of Liberty. Can you? See how many you can come up with. If you have some good ones, email them to [info@altpublish.com](mailto:info@altpublish.com) and may include them in future issues. Δ



# PAYING MARKETS FOR WRITERS

by Erica Verrillo

<https://publishedtodeath.blogspot.com>

## Published To Death

For writers, getting paid is a perpetual struggle. The vast majority of literary journals don't pay, and more than a few charge writers to submit their work. Yet, just like everyone else, writers have to eat. And it is a matter of fundamental dignity to be rewarded for one's labor.

I have made it my mission to assemble paying resources for writers. Some of these only pay minimally, but all pay something. Even those that pay token amounts can make up for low remuneration with enthusiasm. Editors who love your work may be willing to nominate it for Pushcart and other prizes, which is worth a low fee.

Be sure to read any writing contracts these journals may offer very carefully. Some of the freelance sites for nonfiction articles may want all rights in perpetuity, or ask for the copyright. Unfortunately, that is a hazard of freelancing. But if a literary magazine asks for rights "in perpetuity," back away slowly. A reasonable contract with a literary magazine asks for first North American serial rights, and nothing more. Sometimes journals may request a delay before you can resubmit your story or poem as a reprint. But anything beyond that is not fair to the author.

Happy submitting!

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### 15 MAGAZINES THAT PAY \$500 OR MORE

Many of these journals specialize in niche markets, which means they have a loyal readership. If you happen to have expertise or a background that would appeal to their audiences, these magazines will be happy to read your pitch. Quite a few accept poetry.

[Note: The list changes. Please visit Erica's Website for the hyperlinks to click directly to the publication's submit page. Here is a shortlink: <http://bit.ly/PayingMarkets>]

### 1. LITMAG

Literary magazine publishing: Fiction: Short stories, novellas; Nonfiction: Creative nonfiction; essays on literature, art, and culture, music; biography, memoir; Poetry: No restrictions on style or form. "We are drawn to big minds, large hearts, sharp pens."

Length: Print: 15,000 words. Online: 4,000 words

Payment: LitMag Print: Upon acceptance, pays \$1,000 for fiction or nonfiction; \$250 for a poem (or the rare short-short). LitMag Online: Upon acceptance, they pay \$250. Charges \$3 for online fiction submissions.

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### 2. CATHOLIC DIGEST

"We are a lifestyle magazine that encourages and supports Catholics in a variety of life stages and circumstances. Our writers speak with the authority of experience, but always with an encouraging and positive voice. We recognize the importance of beauty and use beauty and truth to inspire our readers, but we also recognize real-life limitations. None of us is perfect. We are real-life Catholics who care deeply about our faith and our family."

Length: Approximately 550-700 words for Last Word. Features are approximately 1500 words and cover marriage, parenting, spirituality, and relationships, along with parish and work life.

Payment: \$500 for features and Last Word, upon publication.

How to submit: Query only.

### 3. EARTH ISLAND JOURNAL

"We cover the entire spectrum of environmental issues, including: wildlife and lands conservation; innovations in science and technology; public policy and the politics of environmental protection; climate and energy; animal rights; public health; environmental justice and cultural survival; and environmentally related film, music, and books.

Whenever possible, we seek to tell the stories of individuals and communities who are successfully defending and restoring the Earth. On-the-ground reports from outside North America are especially welcomed. These pieces should be appropriate for an educated, environmentally savvy readership. We do not consider technical or academic reports."

Length and Payment: 25 cents/word for shorter dispatches (1,200-1,500 words) and for longer investigative features (2,500-3,000 words). You can expect to earn about \$750-\$1000 for an in-depth feature story. For Online reports, the fee ranges from \$50 to \$100.

How to submit: Query only.

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### 4. VQR

"VQR strives to publish the best writing we can find. While we have a long history of publishing accomplished and award-winning authors, we also seek and support emerging writers. We read unsolicited fiction, poetry, and nonfiction submissions June 15 to July 15, and October 1 to November 1 each year through our Submittable portal. We read nonfiction

pitches from June 15 to December 1.”

Note: No genre fiction.

Payment: \$200 per poem, up to 4 poems; for a suite of 5 or more poems, payment is \$1,000. For short fiction, \$1,000. For other prose, such as personal essays and literary criticism, \$1,000 and above, at approximately 25 cents per word, depending on length. Online content is generally paid at \$100-\$200, depending upon genre and length.

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### 5. AMC OUTDOORS MAGAZINE

“AMC Outdoors inspires readers to get outside and get involved by providing high-quality coverage of outdoor recreation, education, and conservation topics throughout the Northern Appalachian region, from Maine to Virginia. Our goal is to provide a balance of coverage that appeals to people new to the outdoors as well as experienced backcountry users. Our primary focus is recreation, but we also work to educate our more than 90,000 members on environmental issues that could affect the activities and natural areas they love. AMC Outdoors is published six times per year.”

Payment and Length: \$500 – \$700 for features, which usually range from 2,000 to 2,500 words.

How to submit: Send query only.

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### 6. THE SUN MAGAZINE

“We publish essays, interviews, fiction, and poetry. We tend to favor personal writing, but we’re also looking for provocative pieces on political and cultural issues.”

Payment: From \$300 to \$2,000 for essays and interviews, \$300 to \$1,500 for fiction, and \$100 to \$200 for poetry. Reprints considered at half the rate.

No electronic submissions.

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### 7. THE NATION

“We are a weekly journal of left/liberal opinion, covering national and international affairs as well as the arts publishing in both print and digitally. On the domestic front, we are particularly interested in civil liberties, civil rights, labor, economics, environmental, privacy and policing and feminist issues and politics. Because we have readers all over the country, it’s important that stories have national significance. In our foreign affairs coverage, we are interested in pieces on international political, economic and social developments. We are strongly committed to investigative reporting.”

Payment: \$250 for short comments of about 750 words and \$500 for articles, 1,500-2,500 words.

Accepts poetry.

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### 8. THE AMERICAN GARDENER

“The American Gardener is the official publication of the American Horticultural Society. The 64-page, four-color magazine goes out bimonthly to nearly 20,000 members. We stress environmentally responsible gardening practices, including minimizing use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, preventing illegal collection of plants from the wild, and avoiding plants with the potential to escape and damage natural ecosystems.”

Payment: Payment for feature articles ranges from \$300 to \$600 on publication, depending on the article’s length and complexity, and the author’s background and publishing experience. Reimbursement for travel and other expenses can sometimes be negotiated at the time an article is accepted.

How to submit: Send proposal only.

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### 9. ONE STORY

One Story is seeking literary short stories. “They can be any style and on any subject as long as they are good. We are looking for stories that leave readers feeling satisfied and are strong enough to stand alone.” Single stories are sent to email subscribers every month.

Length: Between 3,000 and 8,000 words.

Payment: \$500 and 25 contributors copies.

Simultaneous submissions okay.

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### 10. THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

The American Scholar is a quarterly magazine of essays, fiction, poetry, and articles covering public affairs, literature, science, history, and culture. Published since 1932 for the general reader by the Phi Beta Kappa Society, the Scholar considers nonfiction by known and unknown writers, but unsolicited fiction, poetry, and book reviews are not accepted.

Payment: Up to \$500 for accepted pieces and up to \$250 for pieces taken only for their website.

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### 11. HERIZONS

“Herizons’ audience is a feminist readership. Articles about applying feminist principles in work, in relationships and organizations, and in social justice are welcome. Our readers are interested in health issues, social and political issues, environmental issues, equality issues, justice issues, spiritual issues; parenting issues and all issues informed by diverse racial and cultural experiences. Articles in which the writer is engaged with the material work best; personal experiences, journalism style articles, interviews, articles which bring in current research and a clear feminist perspective are all things we look for.”

Payment and length: Features - 1,000 to 3,000 words. In depth articles on feminist debates, current social/ political/legal/ environmental/culture emerging issues or personal stories with a broader social relevance. Can be interview style, essay style or journalism style. Non academic. \$250-\$750 depending on length. Also publishes short new pieces for \$175 and reviews for \$65.

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## 12. THE NEW HAVEN REVIEW

“We like to see submissions from writers who can claim some connection to Greater New Haven, no matter how spurious, though it’s not mandatory. We also like to see book reviews that are better than the book reviews you usually see out there, for whatever reason. But that said, we mostly publish essays, fiction (of any genre), poetry, and occasionally photojournalism.”

Payment: At least \$500 for prose pieces, fiction or nonfiction. \$25 per poem, will publish more than one of an author’s poems.

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## 13. ONE TEEN STORY

“One Teen Story is looking for great short stories written for the young adult audience ages 13 and up. These stories should deal with the teen experience (issues of identity, friendship, family, coming-of-age, etc.) and should be geared primarily toward an audience of teen readers. With that in mind, gratuitous profanity, sex and drug use are best avoided. We’re open to all genres of literary fiction between 2,000 and 4,500 words.”

Payment: \$500

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## 14. OREGON HUMANITIES

“As a publication of ideas and

perspectives, Oregon Humanities magazine offers a forum through which Oregon writers, scholars, and readers can use the humanities to explore timeless and timely ideas and themes. We only accept submissions of nonfiction writing and artwork when we announce each issue’s theme. All personal essays and features focus on a particular issue’s theme.”

Payment: \$50 to \$200 for shorter department pieces and \$300 to \$800 for personal essays and features; payment varies depending on the length and complexity of the piece.

Note: Oregon writers only.

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## 15. POETS & WRITERS MAGAZINE

“Poets & Writers Magazine reaches a national audience of 100,000 readers from emerging to established literary writers. The magazine has a strong following among both students and faculty in creative writing programs across the country. In addition, many of its readers pursue creative writing as an avocation, often pairing their literary lives with other careers.”

Payment: Up to \$500, query first.

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## 325 PAYING MARKETS FOR SHORT STORIES, POETRY, NONFICTION

These magazines represent everything from speculative fiction, to poetry, to gardening. Payments range from \$1.25 to \$1,000. You will find a home for your work in this list.

[This list is continually updated. Please visit Erica’s Website for the hyperlinks to click directly to the publication’s submit page. Here is a shortlink: <http://bit.ly/PayingMarkets>]

*Erica Verrillo has written seven books and published five. She doesn't know why anyone with an ounce of self-preservation would ever want to publish. But, if you insist on selling your soul to the devil, learn how to do it right: marketing, literary agents, book promotion, editing, pitching your book, how to get reviews, and ... most important of all ... everything she did wrong. Find her at <https://publishedtodeath.blogspot.com>*

# WRITER'S BIG WORDS

Some of these are just fun to know, while others may prove to be useful in your writing. If you have some words to share, email them to [info@altpublish.com](mailto:info@altpublish.com)

**POLEMIC** (n): controversial argument against an opinion or doctrine

**ANOESIS** (n): state of mind consisting of pure sensation or emotion without cognitive content.

**ERGATE** (n): a worker ant

**ULTRACREPIDARIAN** (adj): someone who gives criticism or advice outside his area of expertise.

**LUDDITE** (n): someone opposed to, or resistant to new technology.

**DOX** (v): *slang-* to publish personal information of another; to reveal identity of someone Online without their consent, *Doxed*

**AVARICE** (n): insatiable greed for riches, miserly desire to gain wealth.

**PUFFERY** (n): undue or exaggerated praise

Interview

# MIRANDA OH Chin Up:

## CANADIAN AUTHOR CONTINUES SUCCESS OF HER POPULAR BREAKTHROUGH

Local Winnipeg author, **Miranda Oh**, exploded onto the literary scene with her debut novel *Remember, No Matter What; Chin Up Tits Out* in March of 2016. Critics and readers alike were fascinated with the novel which focused on the character of Hadley, a girl who thought she had it all and knew everything there was about life, until one day she meets someone who changes everything for her emotionally. With the fear of losing everything, Hadley travels halfway across the world to fight for what she feels she deserves and is justifiably hers, overcoming incredible odds in a story filled with love, tears, and learning life lessons.

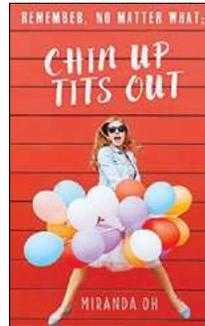
The second novel, *When All Else Fails Chin Up Tits Out*, published by Couronne Publishing continues the story of Hadley, only now she is now married and is ecstatic that she will be seeing her husband after years of fighting with immigration. Only now, Hadley's life takes a turn for the worse as an unexpected diagnosis threatens to change Hadley's life and married dreams forever.

Miranda has written a story that has elements of love, passion, and the series in total has been compared to Sex and The City in some circles.

**Q: *Chin-up, Tits Out*.** Two books now. At what point did you decide you could be a writer, and succeed as a quirky one? What sparked that?

**A:** Two books, will be three by spring of 2019, can't wait, this summer will be a blast writing the final piece of the story. You know those moments in life when you think to yourself, 'dang, how did I get here?'. Well, I was in a lot of those moments throughout my 20's, and every time those moments passed, a little light inside of my lit up, and said, 'Girl, you got a story to tell!' So when things got a little...calmer in my life, I finally had the gumption, the patience, and the strength in writing it out.

Did you just call me a successful quicker writer? Well that just made my day, THANK YOU! Just kidding, I write how I tell my stories in real life. I talk snarky sarcasm, and with a twisted sense of humor... why? Because life is life; I might as well try and find some humor in it, and enjoy every moment I can, even the dark ones. I try to walk through life with an open heart



and open mind, learning and watching from all things around me. When you are so open to what the universe has to offer, the MOST interesting things tend to happen. I simply document them, find a way to spin it positive, find growth and have a good laugh.

**Q:** Did anyone try to talk you out of it? If so, what did they say?

**A:** Haters are going to hate, William, we choose to hear 'em or not! I simply don't hear them. When I set my mind to something, I do it. It wasn't only an opportunity to share my story, there was a sense of healing through it, and there was a sense of connection that came from sharing my story, I related with my readers from around the world. The non-tangible benefits from writing this series has outweighed any expectations I set myself. No one could have talked me out of this one.

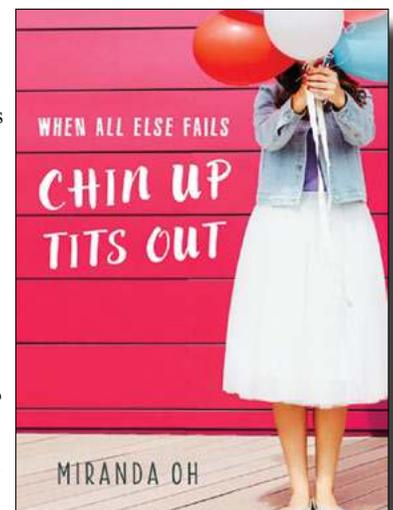
**Q:** What's your writing process like (if there is one)? Computer or paper? Set times or as the mood strikes?

**A:** When I set out to write a book, my process when

starting I write every day until I am done draft one. I usually end up writing about 5-6 days out of the week for about a three weeks. But only during the evenings and weekends, because I do have a full time career as well. After that; it is editing and rewriting for a month or so. My writing consumes me, I will typically hibernate for that time and you'll maybe see me out only once a week. Like a bear in hibernation, it is best to not poke that bear either while I am writing. Leave me be, please.

**Q:** Your biography offers little beyond the professional info. What do you do for fun, and how much of that related to your writing?

**A:** As much as we won't admit it out loud, we all judge a book by its cover, so my cover is professional! But fun is where I live, regardless of what I am doing, I am always jamming out to tunes, it ranges; pending on mood, from Classic Rock and Jazz, to



# Tits Out, Again?

**NOVEL WITH TWO SEQUELS!**



Hip Hop and Electronic music—you know, for working out and such. I enjoy working out, my schedule doesn't always permit a gym session, but outdoor runs, body weight exercise or yoga all are a constant in my life. I love to experiment with cooking, as long as I have wine to drink, while I cook. Priorities. It is all about the priorities.

My family means everything to me; they're an amazing bunch of loud, loving, human beings. My friends are my pillars in life, and often wind up as culprits, victims or accessories to my stories; without them, *Chin Up Tits Out* wouldn't have happened.

**Q:** How long did Book 1 take from start to finished product and what surprised you, disappointed you, during the process.

**A:** Book 1 was a completely different experience and approach than book 2. Book 1 was four, four-hour writing sessions, and then I passed it off to my publishing team to help refine and work on it. I felt, as a human, not as an author, that I needed to get that one off my chest, and move on.

Book 2, super different. For that one I was writing every day for weeks, and then editing, and rewriting for a month. Only then did I let two strategic people in my life read it and edit it, prior to me sending it off to my actual editor. I called on my mom and a friend from work. They both offered me a unique mindset that helped me refine the story even more. I wanted to evoke more emotion from the story, and they were key to achieving that.

Absolutely nothing disappointed me in any of this process. It was trying, frustrating, and emotionally exhausting. Some days I questioned why I was doing it, although looking back, it all happened the way it was meant to happen, and that's 100 percent okay with me. I have the future to look forward to.

**Q:** Your self-labeled tag-line (twisted humor, inappropriate laughter and the dirty, loud inner (bitchy) voice) is a fun way to describe yourself. Do you ever encounter resistance from potential readers, or are they enamored by those personality traits?

**A:** Most people that I have come across have been enamored by it. , They think I am NORMAL?! What?

I have had some resistance regarding the 'realness' of my story. We all make mistakes, and sometimes we make them more than once, twice or three

times.... Eventually we all learn, when we are ready. Keeping a *Chin Up Tits Out* attitude no matter how clouded our judgment may be—there's no judgment, just move forward, and be positive—it will all work out. It always does in time. If you want to resist that idealism, that is totally cool. Whatever floats your boat!

[Our thanks to Miranda for her fun interview. Be sure to check out her Website and links below.]

Website: <http://ohmirandaoh.com>  
Instagram: [@ohmirandaoh](https://www.instagram.com/ohmirandaoh)  
Facebook: [Miranda Oh – Chin Up Tits Out](https://www.facebook.com/Miranda-Oh-Chin-Up-Tits-Out)  
Twitter: [@ohmirandaoh](https://twitter.com/ohmirandaoh)  
Amazon.com: <https://amzn.to/2KkuRD7>

## Interview

# A.C. SALTER



British author A.C. Salter, author of the *Eversong* trilogy, was born a day dreamer. Is it any wonder that he became an author?

**Q:** Are you writing enough to have an income from your work right now?

**A:** As a father of four, I would struggle to bring in enough money to pay the mortgage, bills, and put food on the table with my royalties alone. The money is getting better as my readership expands but at the moment I do other work to substitute a good income. When I left the army, I was fortunate enough to get a HGV license and so I drive trucks.

**Q:** With your military past, is writing a cathartic process for you?

**A:** Being in the military gave me a discipline to push myself and put that extra effort into finishing a task. I've started writing many stories in the past and it's only by

different realm, I try to keep everything else as true to life as possible.

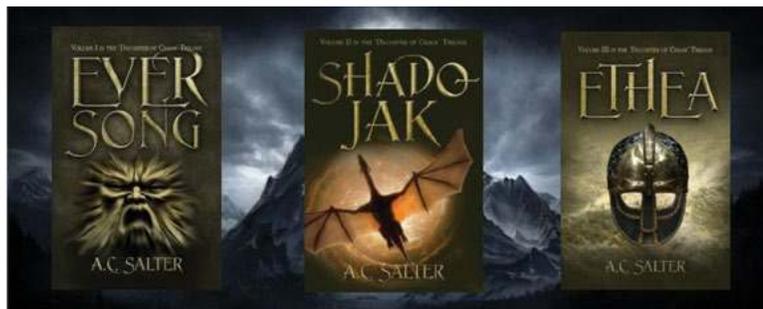
**Q:** How much do you write a day, or how long does it take to complete a novel?

**A:** I aim for 1k words each day. Most times I reach and sometimes triple that and other times I'll fall short and do little more than a paragraph.

In the early days, I would write out the first draft in note books and on A4 paper, keeping everything to copy up at a later date. Then when smart phones came out, I found it easier writing a chapter at a time and emailing myself (I wrote *Eversong* on a Blackberry). This took me over a year. When my wife bought a laptop for my birthday, I re-wrote and edited the work. Now I take my laptop everywhere and usually write a 130k story, edit and publish within eight to nine months.

**Q:** What do you read for enjoyment?

**A:** Anything that's well written. I love fantasy, horror, dystopian - anything with a real sense of escapism. Joe Abercrombie, Robin Hobb, Terry Pratchett, Philip Pullman...my list would be endless. Currently I'm reading *The Damned*, by Tarn Richardson and I'm really enjoying his writing.



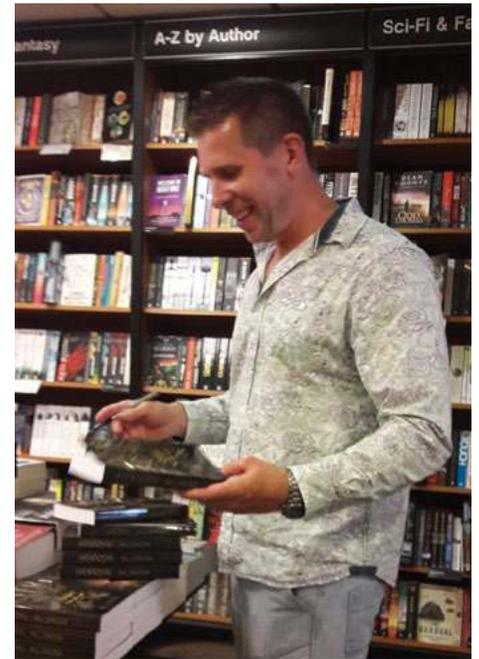
sheer dogged determination that I reached the end. It's so easy to simply give up.

Being in the forces has also given me a huge range of experiences which have helped when plotting scenes and threads. I like to keep things as real as possible: using weapons and vehicles that actually exist and knowing their limitations. Although, my stories contain fairies, elves and gumpkins, amongst other creatures of a

the window and having adventures in my head. Always trying to escape the mundane. I was around ten when I first read *Frankenstein* - the book which set me on a path of being a hungry reader - devouring stories, spending hours in the library and staying up late with a torch under my duvet. When I joined the army - to have real life adventures - I realized that I was still a daydreamer. This prompted me to

write and I found that I could have a lot of fun inventing my own escapism.

**Q:** What's the best marketing practice to get attention to your work?



**A:** Social media. It's free, you gain a lot of followers and it's immediate. I find if I get too bogged down in marketing it takes the precious time away from writing.

**Q:** Have you considered other genres? If not, why not?

**A:** I've read a lot of Stephen King, James Herbert and Dean Koontz. I love to read horror and have a few darker books up my sleeves that I would like to write at a later date.

Subscribe to Adrian's newsletter and receive a free copy of *Darkest Wish*

<http://ceepurl.com/cGXLk5>

Website: [www.acsalter.com](http://www.acsalter.com)

Twitter: Author A.C. Salter [@adri-ansalter315](https://twitter.com/adri-ansalter315)

Facebook: <https://www.fb.com/autho-racsalter/>

Buy his books at <https://amzn.to/2K-moz5L>

## Interview

# Judith San Nicolas - Book Covers

**A** Barcelona based graphic designer, Judith San Nicolas has more than 10 years of experience designing book covers, as well as other graphic design projects. Her rates are reasonable and her reputation solid.

**Q:** Many services offer generic book covers. Why is it important to have a striking book cover and is it one of the two most important parts to attract potential buyers?

**A:** A good literary work can't be "hidden" behind an inappropriate cover.

A High quality product can't be sold with a low quality presentation.

A cover has to catch readers attention just in a few seconds. Just few seconds is the time that our brain uses to decide if cover attracts us.

On my opinion a book cover should convey and provoke feelings, this is its mission.



One of the most important parts in book cover is an element that focuses the potential readers attention, one element with a special visual power.

Sometimes the title can be this other element that can turn a cover into an artwork. We should never underestimate its importance.

**Q:** What is your process like for designing a cover? Where do the ideas come from and how much attention to detail do you include?



**A:** The starting point is the first contact with authors.

The first question is, What did you feel during the literary process? What kind of feelings do you want to provoke on readers?

And of course, I base my work on a brief.

Depending on the case, I carry out an in depth study about the project

On the other hand, creativity is something that flows naturally in creative people, we have an open mind and we've learned to see things in a different way. In our mind everything's possible.

I pay close attention at small details although I know that sometimes people won't see them.

**Q:** Master artists always have a signature element infused into their work, a personal mark, if you will. Do you do that?

**A:** I especially like to work on light and shadows, they may be are my personal mark. That's why I love "Sorrilla" a Spanish painter, the master of light.

**Q:** When writers are looking

for a cover designer, what are some questions they should ask and how should they go about finding possible designers?

**A:** Exclusivity, is the key. Authors should ask for exclusivity, not a "cut and paste cover". And a good customer service. On my opinion a good designer should offer an unlimited number of revisions until total client satisfaction, due to, a literary work is something really personal, and deserves attention and dedication.

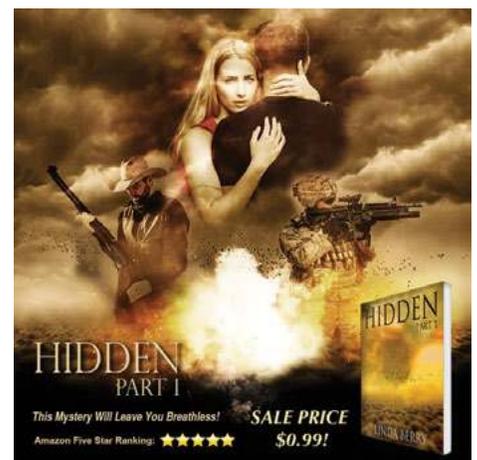
**Q:** Do you prefer simpler, cleaner covers, or rich, image heavy composites, and why? Anything else you would like to add?

**A:** Each cover is different, the best cover is one that show the soul of its story. Each project is totally different, simpler, cleaner or rich, image heavy composites, the cover must be true with its author, with the literary work, and, of course with the readers.

Learn more at Judith's Website

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## Article

# A TOUGH CROWD TO PLEASE

## What My Book Club Has Taught Me As A Writer

by Jill Hedgecock

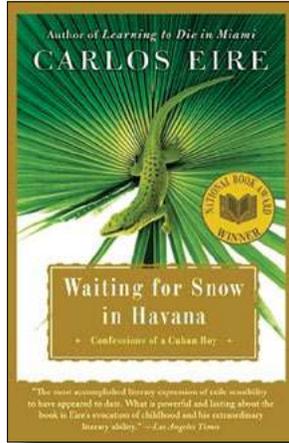
**N**o question about it. I am a better writer because I participate in a book club. What better way to understand your audience's whims than listening to what others have to say about books? I've been a member of the Avid Reader's Book Club since the group was formed. Most of the founding membership knew each other from their children's preschool. Though these kids have long since graduated college, these mothers still remain faithful readers.

What motivates the group to keep meeting? For some, it's the desire to engage in wide-ranging discussions about issues relevant to women and society in a comfortable setting. For many, it's a desire to expand their reading list to include subject matter they'd never pick on their own. Still others want to keep reading a priority in their lives. And let's face it, pleasant company, delicious food, and a glass of wine don't hurt. But for writers like me, it's an opportunity to learn.

I've discovered a lot through 162 book discussions over the course of more than 20 years. Readers want to be enriched. They want writers to be honest and portray their stories as believable. Readers will draw on their own experiences to measure the authenticity of a book. They are discerning. They are smart. And they are tough.

Nowhere is that more apparent than in our rating system. Our club scores books on a scale of one to five in 0.5 increments, with five being the best. Out of 162 books, how many have received a unanimous top ranking of five from all group members? None. However, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee on average did come close at 4.95. But even this classic novel received a 4.5 by one member.

But let's step back and examine the "A" book list. It would be easy to say these novels have nothing in common. Well, they



are all fiction. But statistically you would expect that since only a handful of titles we've read are nonfiction. Still, we've covered topics ranging from the experiences of three girls in Africa (*Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver), a biblical story from women's perspectives (*The Red Tent* by Anita Diamant), a woman swapping lives with her grandmother

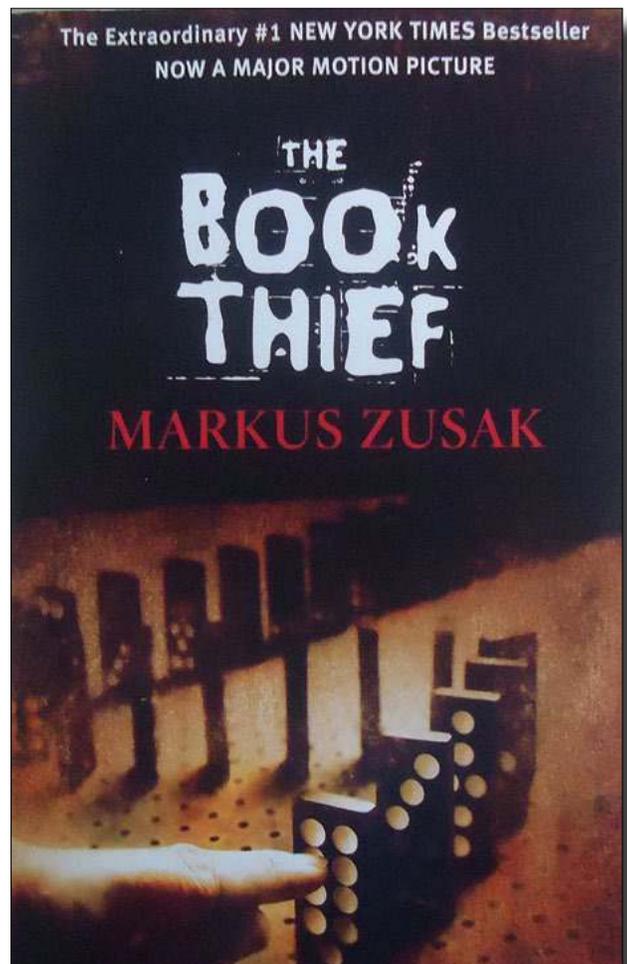
and vice versa (*The Mirror* by Marlyns Millhiser), the tragic events in the life of a migrant worker juxtaposed with a wealthy family (*The Tortilla Curtain* by T. C. Boyle), a book where death resides as a sympathetic narrator (*The Book Thief* by Zusak) and the childhood experiences of a boy in Cuba during Castro's overthrow (*Waiting for Snow in Havana* by Eire). Of the many books about World War II that we have read, the highest rated was *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr.

And how many books didn't receive any "five ratings"? A whopping 93 out of 162 books, or 57%. Think about that for a moment. More than half. And many of these books were selected off the New York Times Best Seller's lists.

This tough crowd grumbles most about unlikeable characters. These readers want to rally behind someone. Someone they can relate to and have sympathy for. And club members despise slow, unfocused, directionless plot. How do these books get published? Perhaps, one of the worst of-

fenses by authors is writing an ending that trails off into nothingness. Readers in my group don't care for gratuitous violence, blood, rape, or child abuse. But they do want a good story, a satisfying ending, and a sense of inclusion. Who could read *The Tortilla Curtain* and not reflect on their own reaction to a panhandler or homeless person? Who could read *Waiting for Snow in Havana* and not breathe a sigh of relief that we live in a democratic society? For all its flaws, our country still allows freedom of speech, freedom to write, and freedom to read. And within that privilege, we writers can aspire for a perfect five rating.

*Jill Hedgecock is the Program Coordinator for The Mount Diablo branch of the California Writers Club. You can read more on her website at [www.jillhedgecock.com](http://www.jillhedgecock.com)*



A useful tool for writers is to study the first pages of published authors to get a sense of how they constructed their work, beginning with the most important page.... **PAGE ONE** The FIRST PAGES of your work must grab the reader, giving them a reason to turn the page!

## PAGE ONE

Here is an excellent first chapter to help you start. But don't stop here. Head to your nearest book store and flip through the books of other bestselling authors.

### Lust, Money & Murder, Book 1

by Mike Wells

#### PROLOGUE

##### Italy – Present Day

The man picked her up in Vernazza, a picturesque village perched along the rugged coastline of the Italian Riviera.

From his salt-and-pepper hair, and his lined face, Maria guessed he was in his early 50s. He bought her a drink, then dinner, then a new dress and a pair of pumps and a few other things, spending lavishly on her in the quaint village shops.

There were no pretenses. They went to his plush villa, which afforded a breathtaking view of the sea. When she asked his name, he looked at her with his brooding dark eyes and said, “Are names important, Cara?”

All she knew was that he was a businessman from Rome. She supposed it didn't matter.

They were soon hungrily making love to each other on the king-sized bed. She hadn't expected such energy out of a man his age—he was insatiable. She often had to fake orgasms with older men, but not with this one.

They spent most of the weekend in the bedroom. In between sexual bouts, they hiked up and down the cobblestone streets of the village, admiring the view and the lovely, narrow houses that were painted in pink, blue and yellow pastels. They gorged themselves on the local cuisine—*cappon magro*, a pyramid made of fresh vegetables and a half dozen different types of fish, and the *torta pasqualina*, a cake made of 18 layers of light pasta and stuffed with ricotta cheese.

They spoke very little. Maria didn't care. Words might break the spell, and she didn't want this to end.

\*\*\*

On the third day, he felt that he had won the girl's trust.

The experiment he wanted to perform was far too important to delegate to one of his lieutenants. There was much riding on the outcome. He needed to see the results first hand.

But he had to be careful.

When she lay in his arms, spent, he said, “Did you know I am celebrating this weekend, Cara?” He stroked one of her full, firm breasts. “You are a gift to myself.”

She looked up at him with liquid brown eyes. “What do you mean? What are you celebrating?”

He rose naked from the bed and picked up a small leather Gucci bag that was sitting on the coffee table. He knew she was curious about what was inside—he had been carrying it around everywhere they went, keeping it close at all times.

When he opened it, she gave a little gasp.

The satchel was packed with crisp, new U.S. \$100 bills.

“So much money,” she said in a hush. “Where did it come from?”

“I sold a flat in Portofino, a dilapidated hovel I have been trying to rid myself of for years. I finally found an American gullible enough to buy it, but he insisted on paying part cash. It's only about fifty thousand dollars.”

Even though she was trying to hide it, he could see the greed in her 21-year-old eyes. She was a *velina*, a soft hooker who survived on her good looks, roaming up and down the Riviera, living off one rich man after another, staying a few days or weeks in a villa or on-board a yacht until the current sponsor tired of her and threw her out, after which she moved on to the next.

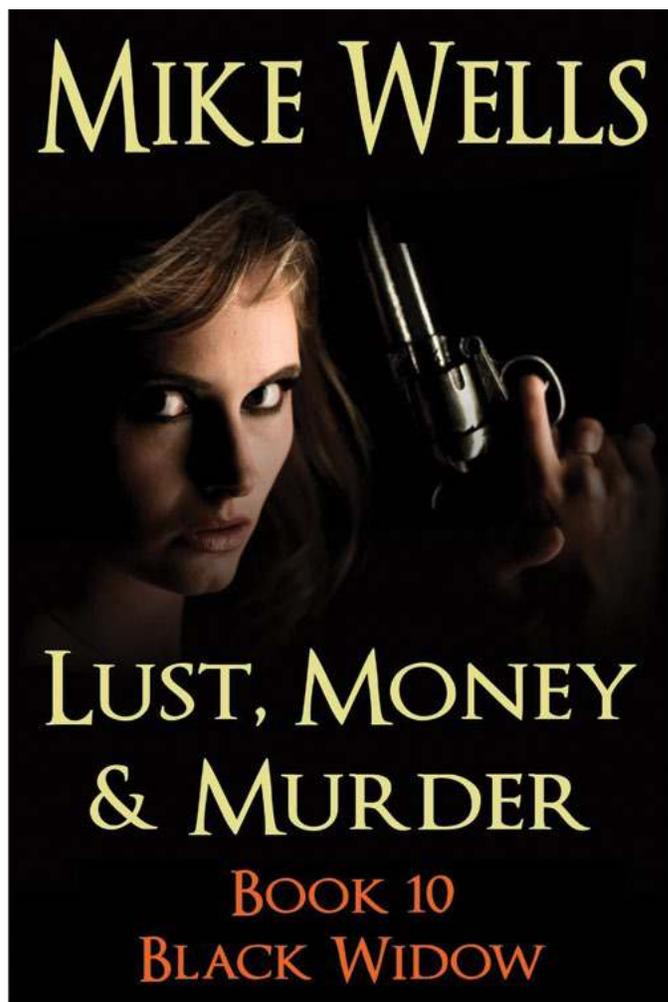
He said, “I was thinking of driving up to San Remo and trying my luck. Have you ever been to the casino there?”

“No,” she lied.

“You'd love it—it's the largest casino in Italy. All the richest people gamble there.” He also happened to know that the establishment had just updated its currency verifying machines with the latest software.

He motioned to the cash, feigning frustration. “Unfortunately, I left my passport in Rome. There's no way to change this kind of money without one.”

“I could change it for you,” she blurted, but then checked herself. “I mean, if you want me to.” When he didn't react, she said, “I have my passport right here,” and reached over to her purse and produced it.



He smiled. He already knew she had a valid passport. He also knew that she had left her home in Naples at the age of 16, and was unknown to anyone in these parts.

\*\*\*

Ten minutes later, they were driving up the coast, heading towards San Remo in a metallic blue Porsche Cabriolet, the wind blowing through their hair. It was just before sunset. The highway ran up and down the rugged cliffs along the shore. Soon, the sky exploded into a riot of orange and indigo and violet.

Maria was excited, looking forward to a few more days of luxurious meals, plush accommodations, and expensive presents. Maybe he would buy her a diamond bracelet at the casino gift shop. Why not?

\*\*\*

When they reached San Remo, he surprised her again. He pulled up in front of the sidewalk that led to the casino entrance and handed her the Gucci bag. "Take that inside and convert all of it to casino chips." He motioned to the other side of the street. "I'm going to have a cup of coffee and catch up on a few business calls I have to make."

Maria was astounded that he was going to let her walk away with all that cash.

When she got out of the car, he leaned over and looked up at her and smiled. "Try not to gamble it all away before I get there!"

She walked up the long sidewalk towards the casino. When the uniformed man opened the door for her, she glanced over her shoulder. Her generous friend was just sitting down at one of the tables at the cafe. He waved at her.

Maria was tempted to try and run away with the money. But she wasn't some stupid *puttana*—she knew better than to try and steal from a man like him.

Carrying the Gucci bag in one hand and feeling very chic and powerful, she went inside the busy currency exchange.

There were security cameras above each counter. Then she noticed a sign on the wall:

- WARNING - ANYONE CAUGHT TRYING TO PASS AS MUCH AS ONE COUNTERFEIT BANKNOTE ON THESE PREMISES WILL BE TURNED OVER TO THE POLICE-

Of course the money she had to change wasn't fake—she had nothing to worry about.

"Casino chips, please," she told the male

clerk, emptying the bag on the counter.

She was disappointed with his reaction—he only looked bored. "Passport?" he said.

Maria handed it over.

He studied the document, then took a few of the bills and studied them, rubbing them between practiced fingers.

Maria was suddenly terrified. What if this money was fake? She didn't know the man who had brought her here! He could be a criminal!

With a sinking feeling, she wondered if she was being used to change counterfeit currency.

The clerk began feeding stacks of the notes into a big, complicated-looking machine. It had a red digital display that showed the total amount, the numbers escalating as the bills were swallowed up.

If any of the money was fake, it was too late now. She would be arrested on the spot, just like the sign said. And the man who had supposedly given it to her?

Conveniently disappeared.

"Here you are, signora," the clerk finally said. He handed her a handsome, leather-crafted carrier that was loaded with casino chips.

Thank God, she thought, greatly relieved. She let out a little laugh as she carried the chips into the casino. It was silly of her to think badly of the man she had just spent the last three days in bed with—he was a nice person, she had known it from the start.

She began playing roulette, betting only €50 at a time.

A few minutes later, her friend showed up.

"Ah, there you are!" he said, rushing over to her. He took the chips and placed a drink in her hand and gave her a warm smile. "Come, Cara—I will teach you how to play baccarat."

\*\*\*

He gambled recklessly that night, delighted with the results of the experiment.

Within several hours, he had lost €150,000 worth of chips, but he didn't care. It was a drop in the bucket compared to the amount of money he would make in the coming months. He gave Maria €10,000 in chips to gamble with and sat back and watched her lose it.

By 3 am, she was tipsy, and he was getting tired.

"Let's go back to Vernazza," he said, stopping her before she placed another

bet.

"Vernazza?" she said. She looked disappointed. "I thought we would stay here..."

"It's silly to waste money on a hotel room here when I own a beautiful villa so close by."

A guilty look flickered across her face. "I'm sorry I lost all that money..."

"It's nothing," he said. "It was thrilling, wasn't it?"

\*\*\*

By the time they were back at the villa, he found his second wind. He drove his lean, hard body into the young girl, bringing her to a series of toe-curling orgasms. They lay there for a few minutes, and then he suddenly rose from the bed and started putting on his pants. "I'm buzzing with energy—I can't sleep. Let's go for a walk."

"A walk? Now?"

"Come," he said, pulling on her hand. "The fresh air will make you feel better."

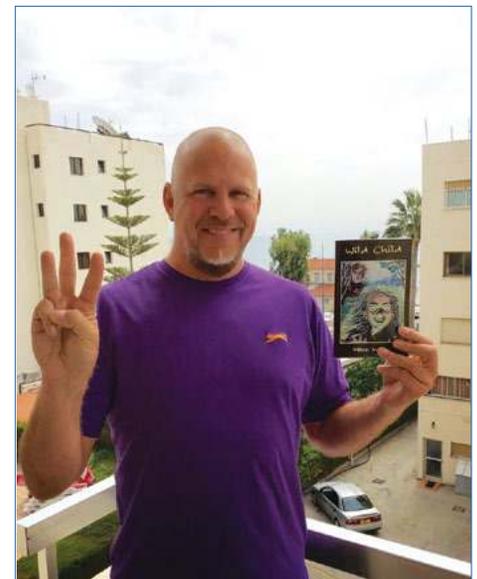
"But it's so late..."

He ignored her protests and helped her get dressed, making sure she wore only her own clothes and not anything that he'd bought for her. When she reached for her wristwatch, he grabbed her hand and impatiently said, "For God's sake, Cara, you're not going to a fashion show!"

It was windy outside, the sky just hinting at the coming dawn. They walked up the hill, along the cliffs.

Vernazza is part of a cluster of five villages known as the Cinque Terre. They veered off in the direction of Corniglia, the next closest village, which was only 3 km to the south. The path soon became so narrow that they had to walk single file.

"Be careful, Cara," he said, letting



her move ahead of him. "It's slippery in places."

The sea along this particular stretch of coastline was always rough, the waves breaking over clusters of jagged rocks that were covered with razor-sharp coral. It was not uncommon for hikers to slip and fall down the sheer 200-foot cliff face.

Within minutes, their bodies were pulverized into bloody slabs of unidentifiable gristle and bone.

"Isn't the view incredible?" he said, stopping her after the path widened again.

"Yes," Maria said, snuggling her back up against his warm chest. Far below, the waves were exploding over the rocks, the spray filling the air with brine.

He kissed the top of her head, hugging her tightly. It was a shame. She was a beautiful girl—he was already developing a paternal, protective feeling for her.

Even though the fake \$100 bills had passed through the casino's verifying machine, they would eventually be detected. She had shown her face on video. Her passport had been in the camera's field of

view as well.

He gently turned her around and kissed her again, aggressively, shoving his tongue deeply into her mouth.

When he drew away, her eyes widened—all at once, somehow, she understood everything.

He shoved her into the abyss.

\* \* \*

A few minutes later, he placed a call to a number at a sprawling dacha on the outskirts of Moscow.

A deep voice answered on the other end. "Da?"

"I have good news, my friend. Our experiment was a smashing success."

[Analysis: From the first line, Mike grabs his readers. You know where the story is set, the characters involved in this scene, easily flowing from moment to moment, never allowing you a pause until the moment on the cliff when the unnamed man pushes Cara off the cliff.

In developing this scene, Mike used

padding, description to mask his motivation; instead focusing on this girl being seduced by an apparently wealthy man. He is paternal, guiding Cara—and the reader—through the storyline, never stopping for wasted moments; each bring the next into clarity.

If you read your work and find that it lacks power, consider ways to trim it, tighten it. Find the motivation to use the words to draw the character, and reader, forward, at a steady pace.

Our thanks to Mike Wells for his permission to reprint this Prologue. Please visit Mike's Website and join his mailing list. He offers lots of FREEBIES, interesting articles, including the story of his success.

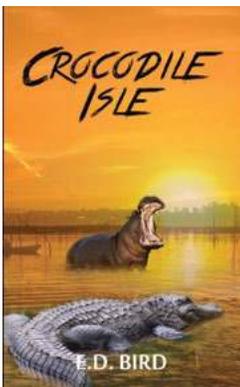
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### Crocodile Isle, by E.D. Bird



E.D. Bird is the author of several books. Born in Scotland, and living in Zimbabwe. *Crocodile Isle* is her most recent book.

Coral, her lover, and a number of friends visit a regular haunt known as Serenity

Island. Collectively, they've done this for the past few years in order to celebrate Coral's birthday, but this trip will be different, and causes Coral to rename their favorite spot!

Once they've settled in to enjoy their week's secluded holiday and celebrate Coral's thirtieth birthday, everything starts to go wrong. After many terrifying and tragic events, Coral begins to wonder if they'll ever get off the island in one piece, or indeed, at all...

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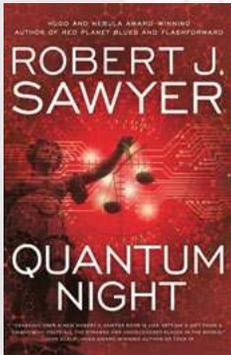
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At least that is what Michael Bradford tells himself. He struggles with violent tendencies while personally investigating the Crystal Moths, Edmonton's most notorious gang. His vigilante methods get caught on film and are uploaded to the web with the hashtag YEGman. These videos catch the attention of a rebellious journalism student whose aspires to cover the developing story on the city's underground hero. Buy it at Amazon.com: <https://amzn.to/2Iowpvn>



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2017 AURORA AWARD FOR BEST NOVEL

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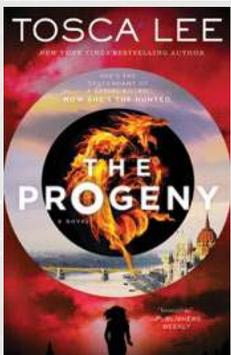
Experimental psychologist Jim Marchuk has developed a flawless technique for identifying the previously undetected psychopaths lurking everywhere in society. But while being cross-examined about his breakthrough in court, Jim is shocked to discover that he has lost his memories of six months of his life from twenty years previously—a dark time during which he himself committed heinous acts.

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Elle's world turns upside down when she receives a deathbed request from her grandfather, a man she was told had died years ago. As Elle's past unfolds, so does the truth—if she can believe it. She must face the reasons for her inexplicable dread. As dark as they are, Elle must listen...before her grandfather's death buries the family's secrets forever. Buy it on Amazon.com: <https://amzn.to/2IINTIC>



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There are twenty-five elite kidnap and ransom (K&R) specialists in the world. Only one is a woman: Thea Paris. And she's the best in the business. Twenty years ago, a terrified young boy was abducted in the middle of the night by masked intruders while his sister watched, paralyzed with fear. Returned after a harrowing nine months with his captors, Thea's brother has never been the same.

Her childhood nightmare resurfaces when her oil magnate father, Christos Paris, is snatched from his yacht off Santorini on his sixtieth birthday, days away from the biggest deal of his career. The brutal kidnapers left the entire crew slaughtered in their wake, but strangely, there are no ransom demands, no political appeals, no prisoner release requests—just obscure and foreboding texts written in Latin sent from burner phones. Knowing the survival window for kidnap victims is small, Thea throws herself into the most urgent and challenging rescue mission of her life—but will she be able to prevent this kidnapping from destroying her family for good? Buy it at Amazon.com:

<https://amzn.to/2IkccGM>

