

Dedicated to:

Bruce "Boo" Smith

1 August 196X – 5 December 2007

Smiles and Tears

On December 5th, 2007, the horror writing community suffered a loss that is irreplaceable. Bruce Smith, known to many as Boo, passed away in a manner that truly leaves one reeling with sadness and awe. Although Boo's illness was common knowledge, his final hours were spent in the most inspiring manner. No one ever suspected just how bad Bruce was doing because of his amazing compassion for others and his wonderful sense of humor. In the days following his passing, the message boards that he frequented began to pile up with stories of how Boo had affected so many lives. One thing was soon realized; Boo had spent his final hours in warm hearted communication with numerous people and had never once voiced a single complaint or note of concern about his health! People were left shaking their heads and wondering how he could've been so sick, yet still be so happy and uplifting.

For those who didn't know Boo, his sense of humor was a highlight to many. The author Mark Rainey posted a wonderful memorial to Boo on his blog. Mark gives us a wonderful anecdote that shows the kind of person that Boo was and the kind of mirth that he delivered to so many:

"For the past three years, Boo has been a part of my life. Literally, every day, he would send me a funny picture he had made or found, or drop me a note wondering how I was doing, or tell me something about his own creative aspirations. Every Monday, he'd send me a photo of a bunny and tell me, 'Here's your Monday bunny.' One Wednesday, he sent me a picture of a bunny piled up on top of another, with the caption, 'Sometimes two Monday bunnies collide, and you have hump day.'"

Boo's passing has caused a shadow of mourning to rest in all our hearts. But his memory shall inspire us all to be a model of how we should face our days and focus our energies. Boo would have wanted us to remember him with a smile instead of a tear.

The Round Robin

A couple of years ago I read *The Challenge From Beyond* for the first time. (We'll get to its history in a moment.) It inspired me to try and round up some modern day authors for a whirl at the challenge. While I don't visit the *Shocklines* Message Board on a daily basis, I visit often enough that I felt my best bet would be to drum up some interest there. The results of that call for participation yielded nine other authors that worked together to write a pretty darn good story entitled *The Transformation of Martin Greystone* and weighed in at over 9,000 words. Finding a home for such a work causes many problems – the main one being how to sell the story and split the proceeds. So, our story sat on my computer to my dismay. Then, one day while searching through some old files, I found the story and decided it was time to find it a home.

Unbeknownst to me, Bradley Taylor had managed to spearhead another round robin by six authors (including Bradley). Their round robin is entitled *The Ghosts of Harlem*. When I announced my intentions and asked opinions on how to move forward, Bradley was keen enough to suggest combining the two stories into one package.

The only author to have participated on both stories was Jerrod Balzer. So it seemed fitting when Jerrod came up with the best idea of all: Make the stories a memorial to Boo. Who can argue with such a brilliant idea?

The Challenge From Beyond is probably the most well known round robin in horror. The authors who participated in it all went on to become giants: C. L. Moore, A. Merritt, H. P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, and Frank Belknap Long. The story was the brainchild of Julius Schwartz who was the editor of *The Fantasy Magazine*. The September 1935 issue featured two round robin stories, both with the same title but featuring different authors. One set of authors presented a science fiction version and the aforementioned authors presented a horror version. Robert E. Howard wrote to Lovecraft about the story:

"I was highly honored to be asked to contribute to 'The Challenge from Beyond' yarn, along with you, Miss Moore, Merritt and Long. I hope my share didn't weaken the strength of the story too much. The rest of you did fine work, as you always do. Appearing in such company will probably remain my chief claim to fame (December 5, 1935)."

Notice the date. December 5th. The same day that Boo passed away. It somehow seems fitting. And just as Mr. Howard understated his contribution to the round robin, anything I can say about the legacy of Mr. Boo Smith would be an understatement. Words just can't convey how Boo brightened all our lives.

David Maurice Garrett

For kind words about Boo, please see:

Mark Rainey's blog entry at -

<http://stephenmarkrainey.blogspot.com/2007/12/i-lost-friend-today.html>

Shockliners' remembrances of Boo -

<http://shocklinesforum.yuku.com/topic/1102>

The Transformation of Martin Greystone

Part 1 – David Maurice Garrett

How can I adequately describe the scariest night of my life for you? Well, I can begin by telling you that there was a violent thunderstorm that turned the sky into a seething cauldron of black clouds, booming thunder, and wicked flashes of obfuscated lightning. I could also tell you that the wind howled so furiously that the rain was falling near sideways; I was drenched to the bone. I could also tell you that I was running for my life through a cemetery trying to hide from my best friend Sedgwick Dalton. And finally, I could tell you that no more than an hour ago I put a bullet through his head.

Sedgwick and I met in high school. I'll never forget the day. We had Geometry together and the first few weeks of school went by before we even acknowledged the other's existence. He was tall and blond with bright green eyes. He had the look of the stereotypical surfer dude. I, on the other hand, was the dark one; dark brown hair and brown eyes to match. As Ms. Washington droned on about right angles and isosceles something-or-others, I sat reading the latest issue of *Bizarre Horror Tales* that I had carefully camouflaged inside my textbook.

Sedgwick, who was sitting somewhere behind me, approached me after class and told me that he had read that particular issue of *BHT* already and loved the story by Joel Heathersby entitled *The Echoes in the Forest*. And then, in typical Sedgwick fashion, he recounted the best part of the story while gesticulating wildly and creating his own sound effects while passers-by in the crowded hall snickered openly at his garrulous and erratic behavior. Even though I was thoroughly embarrassed, I couldn't help but laugh.

Although I was the complete opposite of the outgoing and charismatic Sedgwick, we shared a passion for things dark and occult. Once we recognized our shared interests in books, music, and films, we became inseparable.

After high school we matriculated together to Preston University. Of course we were roommates in the dormitory. It was during this time that our interests in horror and the occult took a more serious bent. Sedgwick was the catalyst for this descent into dark research that would eventually lead to his obsession to discover all manner of archaic books from the blackest and most clandestine secret societies the earth has ever known. And I, naïve in not ascribing much truth to the claims of such cults, was drug along willingly into Sedgwick Dalton's insanity.

I remember a particular episode that left me somewhat bewildered. It was the first time that I actually thought that Sedgwick had uncovered something that had best be left alone.

He set his eyes upon this one particular Goth chick that claimed to be

a witch. Of course, Sedgwick's and my knowledge of such things extended fathoms deeper than this little "poser". But, Sedgwick had it in his mind to use her as a sort of guinea pig for an experiment. He had recently secured a copy of the 1664 edition of the rare *Forbidden Rituals of Samhain* by Jonathan Taylor, the famous Witch Hunter General of England. This text was originally written as a means of identifying and exposing witches. However, the purpose backfired on Taylor and became a spell book used by many witches throughout Britain and Europe. Taylor was eventually accused of being the very thing he hunted and was killed by a mob of religious vigilantes bent on eradicating such texts and their authors from the Christian world. They flogged him with cat-o'-nine-tails from his house to the town square - a distance of ten miles - before burning him at the stake.

I walked in on Sedgwick having sex with the girl in our dorm room. I wasn't surprised, though. They had cleared the furniture from the middle of the common area and were doing it in the middle of a pentagram. The lights were off, but candles produced enough light for me to see the book lying open on the floor. I mumbled some sort of apology for my intrusion and left as they both looked at me. The girl's eyes were glazed and distant as if she were oblivious to my presence. But, I'll never forget the lurid smile on Sedgwick's face as he looked up at me entering the room.

The next evening Sedgwick sat making a voodoo doll as I did my homework. He explained that he had taken a lock of the girl's hair and had managed to inflict a small enough wound on her to get a few drops of her blood. I asked how he had managed this and he replied that she was willing to do almost anything he wanted once he convinced her that it was a Wiccan ritual. She was unaware of the real purpose, though.

Sedgwick spent several days experimenting with the doll. He stuck it with pins, burned it, and even tore one arm off. Nothing happened and Sedgwick grew frustrated. After a couple of weeks the doll was forgotten about. Sedgwick chalked it up to bunk magic and forgot about the entire episode. That is until I saw the girl the following semester coming out of a classroom. There was no mistaking her. Her hair was dyed black, her lips were painted a purplish black, her skin was pale white, she wore a plaid miniskirt over black stockings and her sweater was a deep dark red with one sleeve hanging empty. Empty because she had no arm.

When I told Sedgwick about seeing her he dropped the book he was reading and sat up on his bed. A broad, wicked grin spread across his face and he began to chuckle. That was the first time I saw that evil look in his eyes. The same look he had years later when I pointed the gun at his forehead and pulled the trigger.

Part 2 – William D. Carl

The storm seemed to be tearing at the walls of the crypt where I'd

taken refuge in the cemetery. Wiping rain from my face, I searched the doorway, waiting for Sedgwick's arrival, certain to be dramatic. The darkness obscured the tombstones outside the crypt until a brilliant flash of lightning caught the world in a strobe-like illumination. Although I didn't see my old friend, I could sense him out there...searching for me....the bullet-hole in the center of his forehead oozing black sludge instead of blood. He'd be coming for me soon. It was only a matter of time.

Our years at Preston University passed all too swiftly. My roommate continued his occult studies, making only token appearances at his classes, passing his curriculum, but only just. Meanwhile, I switched my major to biology, hoping to attend medical school in the future. Little did I know how Sedgwick's little experiments would alter my own pathway, shoving me in unexpected directions.

And all the while, my thoughts kept returning to that poor girl who'd been so naive as to place her trust in Sedgwick. Certainly, she'd desired to play the game, wanted to try out some spells, lure the handsome Sedgwick into bed. She'd never realized she was merely a tool to him, a pawn in some terrible game that had resulted in her own mutilation. In my dreams, I would witness her glazed look as Sedgwick shoved himself into her, the way her lips parted, the smear of lipstick on her perfect teeth. During these masturbatory fantasies, I would feel the caress of her one hand on my back as I nuzzled into the sweet area near her clavicle.

Eventually, I began to follow her on campus, watching her eat lunch alone in the ringing cafeteria, peruse the used vinyl records at the local music store, comb her hair awkwardly with her left hand, scurry back and forth from her job at the library. She became ever more beautiful to my eyes, and I knew the day would come when I'd have to face her, to speak with her. Perhaps, to love her.

Sedgwick gleefully continued his research, oblivious to anything so mundane as grades, school, or my moonstruck, unreasonable pursuit of a damaged girl. After his success with her voodoo doll, he attempted other effigies, usually with great success. He started with animals – cats and dogs – then he moved on to other young men in the dormitory – young men he didn't like. I felt guilty when I saw the local pets losing eyes or paws, but I became downright terrified when I saw some of the horrible deformities he began sculpting into the dolls adorned with the hair of a boy who lived just down the hallway. He'd fought with the boy, Jason something-or-the-other, earlier that week over some paltry bathroom issue. The new voodoo doll looked remarkably similar to the object of Sedgwick's hatred. Now, as he forced me to watch, he took his thumb and erased the doll's mouth and nose with the back of his thumb, smearing the doll's face. The next day, the boy had been removed from the dormitory, and I never saw him again. There were rumors, of course. Some whispered that Jason something-or-the-other had suffocated in his bunk, twisting and flopping like a fish struggling to get

air between his clenched lips.

I spent as much time away from the dorm room as I could after that day, preferring to study in the library, to distance myself from Sedgwick's evil craft. That's how I thought of the experiments now – evil. There was simply no other word for them. If he was going to cause more deformities or, God forbid, deaths, then I wanted to be as far away from him as possible.

I had been napping in the main library one afternoon, my books splayed out before me in haphazard fashion, when someone tapped my shoulder. Blinking, I raised my head to see who was awakening me from my much-needed nap. Imagine my surprise when I saw it was the girl with one arm! She'd touched me with her left hand, her only remaining hand, and I felt myself becoming aroused.

"You..." I stammered before I caught myself. "What is it?"

She gazed at me, and I noticed her hair had been allowed to grow into its natural honey-brown color, that she'd removed every vestige of Goth make-up. She looked clean and fresh, like some girl in a shampoo commercial. Then, I saw the right sleeve of her white blouse pinned at the shoulder, but it didn't ruin the effect. In fact, it electrified me.

"The library's closing for the night," she whispered. "You're gonna need to find somewhere else to take your nap."

I tried to ooze into Dean Martin suave. "Where would you suggest taking my nap?" It came out half-hearted, but she laughed at me.

"I think you need to stumble back to your dorm, loverboy," she said. "Unless..."

"Unless what?"

"Unless you'd like to join me for a late night pizza."

I sighed. "I would *love* to join you for a late night pizza. My name's Martin Greystone."

She held out her hand, and I took it. She said, "I'm Katie Salinger. I hope to hell you like pepperoni."

"I adore pepperoni."

Our courtship began quietly, over candlelight and pizza pie. It evolved into something stronger when we began holding hands and meeting between classes. I studied at her place, and on our eleventh date, we made love; slowly, sweetly. Nothing like the animalistic pounding Sedgwick Dalton had given her. Soon, we were spending almost all of our spare time together. We laughed. We talked. I never mentioned her lack of an appendage.

"You never said anything about my arm," she said, nibbling my ear.

I looked at the stump, smooth as baby's skin over a shoulder bone. There were no scars, no hint that surgery had ever been performed. In the shadow of her naked breasts, it appeared perfectly normal to me, like she'd been born that way.

"I didn't want to seem impolite," I answered.

"Always the gentleman, aren't you?" she said with a wry smile. "Truth is, I don't know what happened to it. I used to be into some weird shit. Drugs, witchcraft, black magic. I'm talking stuff you only read about in Lovecraft. One night, after a particularly bad trip through an ecstasy spiral, I woke up and my arm was gone. As though fairies had come during the night and stolen it away."

I couldn't tell her that I knew the fairy's name and that I currently roomed with him. As a matter of fact, I spent very little time in the dorm room, sleeping over at Katie's as often as possible. She lived alone, so it was much simpler. Whenever she questioned me about my roommate, I changed the subject or told her about how boring he was. Any aversion to steer her away from the truth.

That I knew who had done it to her; that I knew why he had done it; simply, because he could. He took her arm, because he could get away with it.

And I began to hate him for it.

I needed some new underwear the next morning, and I shuffled back to the dormitory at dawn. When I opened the door, I saw Sedgwick Dalton sitting in a leather chair, facing the door over a chalk-drawn pentagram. Candles had been lit and placed at the five corners. He was smiling at me, and a chill went down my spine as he spoke.

"I know where you've been hiding yourself," he said, his voice low with rage and disdain. "You've been with the sweet little Katie-bird – the Katie-bird with the broken wing. Don't deny it, Martin. All I want to know is one little thing." He leaned forward. The chair squeaked.

He continued, "Just what are the two of you planning to do to me?"

Part 3 – Eliza Rose

I knew that the time would come when Sedgwick learned of my relationship with Katie, but that didn't mean I was prepared. My mind raced with possible explanations. I never was good at thinking on my feet.

"Sedg, honestly, it's not like that."

"So what is it like, then? Wanted to taste what I've had? Curious to fuck a freak?" He raised an eyebrow, the smirk never leaving his face.

My palms became sweaty. I ran my fingers through my hair, refusing to meet his gaze.

"It was more of an accidental meeting. She doesn't even know that you're my roommate."

"Really? Let's ask her, then, shall we?" He rose slowly from the chair and glanced behind him.

I hadn't noticed before, but tied to a chair, barely visible through the flicker of candlelight, sat my Katie. She was gagged, her eyes wide. My stomach sank while my heart beat against my chest in a frantic rhythm.

"What the hell have you done to her?"

Sedgwick didn't say a word, but walked over to Katie, and removed her gag.

"You bastard! Let me go!"

"Shhh, little Katie. First, I have some questions for you. What do you know of me? And don't lie to protect your little boyfriend, I'll know," he said.

"I know that I spent one fucked up night with you, and after that, my world turned to shit," Katie said.

Sedgwick looked at me, a gleam in his eye; a twisted grin across his lips. "She really doesn't know, does she?"

"Enough, Sedgwick. Neither of us means you any harm, just let her go. We never have to speak of this again. Just leave us alone and we'll leave you alone," I said.

He chuckled, a low, guttural sound that made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up straight.

"I don't think so. You really think she's going to leave me alone, now? You really think you two can live happily ever after? You sat idly by and let your best friend torture her, maim her, and you never had the decency to tell her. I don't see a very happy future for you two lovebirds."

"Fucker!" I lunged at him, catching him off guard. We both fell to the floor and I started to pound on him. I wanted to kill him. I was going to kill him.

As I was about to strike him again, his eyes caught mine. He stared into me, there was no fear. His were not the eyes of my childhood pal. They were dark; almost black. As I looked into them I could feel myself being pulled; I could hear the screams of a thousand tortured souls ringing in my ears. He grabbed me by the back of the neck and pushed me off of him. Then, all was black.

When I came to, Katie was no longer tied to the chair... I was. She lay naked, spread eagle in the middle of the pentagram. Her ankles and remaining wrist were nailed into the hardwood floor. Puddles of blood congealed around the wounds. She was awake, but her face was expressionless, she didn't make a sound. Her shallow breathing was the only evidence of life.

"You sick bastard, what have you done?" I struggled against the ropes but they wouldn't budge.

Sedgwick stood outside of the circle, naked, holding a tattered, leathery book. He was whispering to himself, I couldn't make out what he was saying. My words didn't break his rambling.

"Sedgwick, look..."

Before I could finish he snapped the book shut. His eyes were almost glowing as he walked over to his desk and picked up a silver dagger.

"Sedgwick, no, please. Don't do this. You don't have to do this."

"You don't understand, Martin, she must be sacrificed. If I am to know

my full potential, I need to offer her to the Dark Lord. She was my first experiment, my first triumph. It's only fair she be my first sacrifice."

Again I struggled against the ropes, ignoring the pain, ignoring the blood that began to drip down around my restraints. "No, not her, I'm begging you, please."

He ignored me and walked over to my Katie. He knelt down next to her beautiful face. She didn't cry out, she simply turned her head toward me. One tear trickled down her cheek.

"Oh, Katie," I whispered, "I'm so sorry."

Sedgwick stared down at her face, forced her head back, and in one quick motion, slid the dagger across her throat. Her body twitched as she choked on her own blood. A dark red pool spread out around her face, soaking her once raven hair.

Sedgwick moaned as he threw his head back and opened his arms up to the ceiling. "Yes, my Lord, give me the power... give me the strength."

I couldn't look anymore. A twisted knot of bile swirled around in my stomach. I could feel it rising in my throat. I choked it down, worked furiously to get my hands free. When I looked back toward Sedgwick he was gone. I heard his voice behind me.

"Old friend, this is where I leave you. You will never understand what I've seen, the things I will do. But I will see you again. This isn't over."

Now fully dressed, he walked past me and to the door. He was blurry through the tears that welled in my eyes. He turned back to me one last time, only now the smile was gone from his face. He looked tired, almost sad.

"Don't worry," I said, "This is only the beginning."

He didn't speak again, just nodded his head and walked out the door.

Part 4 – Paul Dracon

I stood in front of the Secrets of Solomon book store with rain dribbling through my bangs. I wiped it away and adjusted my glasses. The last time I'd been here I'd been with Sedgwick Dalton, who'd still been both alive and technically a human being at the time. He'd laughed at some joke he'd made up in the car on the way here and had punched me playfully in the back and then jogged into the bookstore. He always had the "carrying the torch" look to him, and that boyish "picked first in gym class" smile.

The fool. Did he think that moral laws didn't apply to him; that there would never be consequences? That the innocent people he'd cut up like so much construction paper were extras in the low budget shitfest that was his life, and that they didn't matter?

There I go again: thinking of ol' Sedgwick in the present tense. Which is a mistake, because there is no more Sedgwick. I'd shot him through the head. Normally when you did that to a real person he made a small sound

and then slumped down with his brains all over his hands and shirt.

Sedgwick's gone. But I'm still here. Unfortunately.

As a small greenish car pulled into the lot, I stepped inside the Secrets of Solomon. The little bell over my head made a familiar dull clanking sound, and I breathed in the aroma of dollar store incense cones and body odor, with the faint sickly sweetness of last Christmas's joint, long since smoked and better off forgotten.

But it didn't smell quite right without the stench of too much spray deodorant and that inane cologne Sedgwick had always drizzled his chiseled chest with any time we were going out and there was one chance in a hundred of bumping into a girl, either literally or figuratively.

I stared across the counter at the hunched over gypsy dressed in a piebald shirt and black jeans. He glanced up at me and looked at me through squinting eyes, and then returned to whatever it was he was reading. He didn't even recognize me. Not like the last time Sedgwick had dragged me in here.

I wandered from shelf to shelf. Crowley, Butler Yeats, Julius Evola. And even Lovecraft, God bless 'im.

I envisioned Sedgwick standing in front of me. Not the lifeless, mocking thing that was still swooping around pretending to be him, but the one I'd known before he'd slit Katie's throat.

I imagined reaching out and closing my small pink fingers around his thickly-muscled neck. Thumbs positioning themselves over his Adam's apple. Squeezing. The cockiness evaporating from his eyes and facial muscles as he realized that my hands were made of iron and that all the juju bullshit in the world wouldn't save him. Justice coursed up my forearms and poured into him as his face turned first blue and then black, and he sank to his knees and I told him, *"Now I'm the one, you bastard. The one with the secrets."*

And what I'd meant to say was that now that I had the power, he'd never hurt anyone again, and he could lie there on the floor of Secrets of Solomon and writhe in a puddle of his own vomit. But what I actually said was, *"Now Katie will want me, really, really want me, and I'll have everything you always had, the orgies, the drugs, the impromptu surgeries even; it'll all be mine, and then they'll make an occult action figure out of me, and I'll be happy for once in my miserable life."*

I stared at my hands, which were suspended in air, squeezing the life out of an invisible demon. I stuck them in my pockets.

The gypsy had scuttled out from behind the counter and was staring at me. "Is there a problem?" he asked. Smooth good-Karma voice.

"No, does it look like there's one?"

"If you're going to stand there and make retarded noises, there are lots of good mental health facilities you can do it in. But we don't behave like that in here."

"Oh? And how do you behave?"

"Look, just get out of here. Go have your breakdown somewhere else."

"Aren't you going to read my tea leaves? Is that earthquake going to happen this year?"

He slid a knife out of his pocket and unfolded it, so I left. Quickly. But I planned on returning.

#

Katie had been the most beautiful girl I'd ever known; sadness and spunk wrapped together and stuffed in the body of a pretty Goth girl. She'd always looked a little dark and crazy, even without the freaky outfits and makeup. She'd only had one arm. Or maybe her other arm had been invisible – I could imagine the invisible fingers feeling up my heart, massaging it. Every time she'd even looked at me I'd felt my heart crawling up my throat.

Here in my flat I had a nice collection of buckets and chicken bones, and plenty of used glasses that I could never find the time to wash or throw out; and I had hundreds of paperbacks, mostly by crappy 80's horror authors, the ones who should have been put through a wood chipper along with their asinine books. Those were the kinds of writers I liked. I lied down in a bed without blankets and closed my eyes. The back of my neck had clenched up again, and I doubted that I'd sleep tonight.

Katie, lovely Katie with the one arm and the one smile, playing with my heart, squeezing it, running her dainty fingers all over it, thumbs inside me.

Sedgwick's just-scored-a-touchdown grin, as he slit her throat. Blood cascading down her breasts and stomach, running down the insides of her thighs.

I knelt down before Katie as I cried and licked up the blood wherever it flowed, and took both of her hands in mine, one of which was horribly cold. She tasted like rubies and honey, and I wanted to devour her sweet communion until the stinking waste of my life oozed down into oblivion, never to be lived again.

Sedgwick, I thought. You worthless, lucky bastard. I'll kill you again. I'll kill you so many times that you'll have to gather yourself in a bucket if you want to keep haunting me.

Part 5 - Tara Sayers

Katie's murder fucked me up for a long time afterward. Hell, who am I kidding? It did more than that – it pretty much destroyed me. I'm still messed up about it, but it took me a long while before I could even put up a façade of functioning like a normal human being again.

I don't remember exactly what happened in the hours and days and

weeks following Katie's death. What little sleep I got during that time was tormented by nightmares so realistic that I still don't know which things actually happened and which memories are purely the creations of my mind. That entire period of my life is covered by a hazy film, sounds and images swimming in a deep gray fog. I sometimes wish I could remember exactly what happened the morning Sedgwick killed Katie; what happened after he walked out the door of our dorm room that last time. But then I think, I'm probably better off not knowing for sure – because what if some of my nightmares weren't really nightmares?

I know some of the memories are false. They must be false.

Katie, smiling that glorious smile just for me, with two arms and two legs nailed to the floor and her raven-black hair fanned out beneath her, smiling sweetly at me as Sedgwick thrusts into her, the dagger clenched in one fist...

Katie working in the library, awakening me from my nap, then staring at me with shock and accusation in her eyes as blood begins to pour from a slit that suddenly appears in her throat, gaping wider as I stare helplessly...

Katie arising from the floor, dead but not, the nails tearing through her flesh as she pulls her hand and feet free, whispering promises of horrible things in my ear as I sit bound to the chair, helpless to move, unable to do anything but listen and watch as she makes her pledges and then leaves, following Sedgwick out the door...

Katie being zipped into a body bag while the police interrogate me, as I lie on the floor with nails through my hands and feet, trapped within Sedgwick's pentagram...

Katie giggling as she playfully taunts me with the dagger, slicing the arm off a voodoo doll that looks like Sedgwick before turning the dagger on me...

Katie pinned to the pentagram, Sedgwick standing by laughing as I slide the silver dagger across my love's throat and hungrily drink the blood that pours out...

Katie sitting next to me in geometry class, sneaking peaks at the horror magazine hidden inside her textbook; from the seat behind her, Sedgwick grabbing a handful of her honey-colored hair, yanking her head back, slicing her throat from ear to ear with the edge of a silver ruler...

Everything that had happened got mixed up in my head. My entire life played out before my eyes every time I fell asleep; but a horribly twisted and entangled version of reality mixed with Sedgwick's madness. I'll probably never know what happened that day, or in the weeks that followed, but I know the important parts: Katie is dead, and it's Sedgwick's fault.

And now he's coming for me, hunting me down in the very cemetery in which my sweet Katie lies. The sacrilege is almost more than I can bear, that he would dare to taint this place, Katie's final home. Almost sacred in my eyes, I could always find peace here, kneeling before Katie's headstone,

knowing that she at least had escaped from Sedgwick's evilness. I found comfort only in the knowledge that Sedgwick could no longer touch her, no matter what demons he summoned or powers he possessed.

No matter what he did to me, at least Katie was safe.

Standing there in the crypt, staring out into the pouring rain, my thoughts returned again to the events of the past that had all come together to lead me to this place, cowering in a crypt in the midst of the most vicious thunderstorm I'd ever seen, hiding from my former best friend who just happened to be wandering around despite the oozing bullet hole I'd created in the center of his forehead. I went back over all the things that had happened in the years since Sedgwick sacrificed the girl who was most likely my one true love to the darkness that he'd found. I wondered what I could have done differently to prevent all of this from happening, going back even to before Katie.

What if I'd picked a different seat in geometry class that day? What if I hadn't smuggled that issue of *Bizarre Horror Tales* to school? What if I'd drawn away from Sedgwick's growing obsession with the occult, denying rather than embracing it? What if –

There. In that flash of lightning – something had moved. I squinted through the downpour, trying to discern the source. It could have been a tree branch being lashed back and forth by the raging storm, or an animal hungry enough to brave the howling winds and torrential downpour.

But I didn't think so.

The sudden icy chill moving from my neck to travel down my spine, colder even than the rain that still dripped from my hair and clothing, told me that something darker, something more evil, was the source of that movement.

I dared to step out of the crypt, knowing that if Sedgwick had discovered me, the stone walls would afford me no protection anyway. Staying low to the ground, trying to use the larger headstones as cover, I slowly crept toward where I'd seen the movement.

That icy chill had been telling the truth. Sedgwick Dalton – or at least what *used* to be Sedgwick Dalton – stood no more than forty feet from where I knelt behind a large marble monument. But he wasn't looking in my direction – something else had preoccupied him, at least for the moment.

I'd expected to see Sedgwick.

What I hadn't expected to see was Katie standing next to him.

Part 6 – David Niall Wilson

You've probably noticed along the way that if asked whether I'm of sound mind I'd have to give it thought. Sometimes my memories are jumbled. Something happened to me, and it started the night I walked into that room and found Sedgwick mounted on Katie – something that diluted

my reason and scrambled my memories. I probably should have looked for another Voodoo doll with my face on it and bugs dropped into the head where the brain should be.

There wasn't much light, and with the rain sweeping across the gravestones and washing out the color, I caught the world only in the brilliant flashes of lightning. When I was younger I thought the strobe lights they used at school dances were cool. With Sedgwick in profile and Katie slowly stalking him, the effect was more like that of windows snapping open and shut on another, darker world.

I took half a step toward the door of the mausoleum, and then I stopped. What I saw had the strong, enticing flavor of an inevitable clash, the white hats and the black hats squared off with everything on the line. I was terrified, and fascinated. I wanted to leap out and defend Katie, but found myself wondering if she needed my protection, or if it would end the other way round. The way she moved, slinking from gravestone to gravestone, was almost playful – a cat toying with a wounded mouse. Sedgwick stood his ground, but he wavered, leaning first to one side, and then to the other like a snake being charmed out of a basket.

And something was wrong with the images that would not release me. It hung on the outer edge of my thoughts and tugged at my heart until, finally, with the brilliant ozone-tainted sizzle of a huge bolt of lightning, I saw it clearly.

Katie had two arms. In one hand she held a doll, dangling limply. As she walked, she shook it. She held it up and taunted Sedgwick, bringing it to her lips as if she would grip the head in her teeth and rip it from limp, doll shoulders with a shake of her head. Her eyes glittered and her teeth flashed so white they seemed to glow.

I shook my head and closed my eyes. It felt wrong. I concentrated. I remembered Katie bound to the pentagram. I remembered licking the blood from her cold, dead hands. I also remembered holding her, my two arms holding her slender body close, her one arm wrapped around me and her nails gripping my flesh. Five nails, not ten. I remembered the body bag and – again – a single arm. I saw the lightning strobe in my mind and I opened my eyes.

Without thinking, I lunged to the side of the mausoleum. Another second and it would have been over. Sedgwick stood in the doorway, a long, sharp dagger extended and passed through the point that would have been my heart. His eyes were wild and vacant, all at once. His hair hung in sparse, haphazard clumps, and though it had healed, the hole in his forehead was crusted with something dark and runny that stained his cheek and trailed over his lip.

There was no sign of Katie. She wasn't there – had never been there. It was a final ruse, my weakness drawn from my mind and used against me. The lightning flashed again, and I dove for the door.

Part 7 – Julia French

Sedgwick moved surprisingly fast considering his physical decrepitude. He lunged at me clumsily, and the soles of his shoes slipped on the rain-slick grey marble. His head struck the threshold of the mausoleum with a meaty thud and the lambent green fire ebbed from his staring eyes. Sedgwick was dead – again.

I didn't dare assume that it was over. I had erred once on that score already and wasn't eager to make that mistake a second time. I moved quickly past my late friend's seemingly lifeless body and trotted through the rain toward my car, intent on putting as much distance between us as possible.

Lightning like jagged glass sliced the sky as I crossed the oldest part of the cemetery. The graves there were mostly old-style, many of them outlined in cement curbing or low iron fencing. A few of them were capped with lids of mossy stone, making me wonder who was buried underneath that needed to be kept below. If I lived through this night and if Sedgwick was still dead tomorrow I would see that he got the sturdiest, most expensive coffin money could buy. I would make sure that that the cemetery workers made the cement grave liner extra thick, so that even if Sedgwick managed to claw his way out of the coffin the grave liner would certainly hold him. Probably hold him. Or at least hold him long enough for me to flee once more.

I knew he would never leave off pursuing me until one of us no longer existed, and I was clearly outclassed as far as psychic warfare was concerned. With his unnatural vitality I would never feel completely safe from his murderous hatred until I myself was in my own grave, and perhaps not even then. Sedgwick must have bribed the proprietor of the Secrets of Solomon well to be given access to the rare and terrible volumes that he surely had studied, and he'd had years to practice and perfect his black arts. I had dabbled a bit, and on a good day I could influence dice and coins with my mind and perhaps sustain an erection beyond the norm if I concentrated hard enough. That was all.

I reached my car, slapped the soaking pockets of my jeans, and realized my keys were gone. I would have to go back and search for them in the driving rain, at the same time keeping an eye out for any signs of renewed life from Sedgwick's corpse. As I turned away from the car another flash of lightning revealed a gleam of metal inside. My keys lay on the driver's seat, draped in such a way that I knew they could not possibly have fallen out of my pocket. *Don't ask, just go*, my mind whispered, and I obeyed. As the car turned back onto the country trunk road that led to the highway I felt a tickle on the back of my neck. I slapped at it, but it came again and with it this time a low, sensual whisper: "Martin..."

In the rear view mirror were two eyes. The last time I had seen those eyes was a million years ago, in Sedgwick's room. That time, they had been framed in honey-brown hair dyed black and soaked in blood. This time there was no blood.

"Martin." The frigid exhalation from her lips fogged the mirror. "Martin, baby."

If I turned my head to look, the dream might vanish. I stared at the road, refusing to hope. "Katie. It's impossible. You're dead. I mean, you're *really* dead. I saw it, I felt it. I licked your blood."

Another icy exhalation, this time in my ear. "Nothing's impossible, baby. Don't you know that yet? And that blood thing, that was so hot. I was watching you the whole time."

"But I saw you in the cemetery, and you disappeared."

"Sedgwick made that fake image of me to fool you, but I'm the real deal, right here, right now. Don't you love me any more?"

Memories came flooding back to me then, good and bad, and I might have cried if I hadn't had to keep control of the car. When we pulled up to my flat I got out of the car without looking round – I was afraid I would break the spell, or dream, or whatever it was – but then she went into my arms and I knew that it was real, just as she had told me. Nothing was impossible, and if evil could live on after death, why couldn't good?

Then we were at the door. Just as I put the key in the lock Katie laid her soft hand, her *one* soft hand, over mine.

"Martin, baby. You knew about Sedgwick, and you never warned me. You could have stopped him but you didn't. That's bad karma." Her hand pressed down, grinding my fingers into the head of the key. "It took me a long time to forgive you, Martin, but I have." Her long nails dug scarlet lines into the back of my hand. "You've been a good boy to try and avenge my death, even if it was too little too late. It isn't your fault the son of a bitch can't die. And now you're almost done paying for your sins."

"My sins...almost?"

Her grip on my hand turned to steel, and wet strands of her hair whipped across my face as her laughter shrieked in my ears.

Part 8 – R. Thomas Riley

Her laughter wound down, like what occurs when you slow down a record player. Her grip was like iron, immovable. Try as I could, I couldn't pry my hand from under hers.

"Almost." Her voice gave me pause. It was Sedgwick's voice coming from her mouth. The wound on her neck blossomed like a grinning mouth. In the folds of her neck flesh, I saw Sedg's eyes gleefully peering through. Was this another nightmare? Was this real? It sure as fuck felt real. My hand had since grown numb beneath the creature's grip. It wasn't Katie, I

knew that now. Or did I? Everything was askew; I was feeling all the sensations, the drying rain on my forehead, the wind whipping greedily at my coat, and the pain from her grip upon mine. I felt all of that as sure as I knew my name, but at the same time, an uncertainty filled me. I didn't trust any sensations at this point in the game. The Katie thing leaned in close. I cringed but managed not to pull away. Her breath was ripe with decay, but there was an underlying scent of something sweet. She licked my left cheek. "Mmm," she moaned. I was crying. "You're almost ripe," she whispered. Her head popped back like a Pez dispenser and Sedgwick's grinning face pushed up through her neck with a sickening oozing sound. I screamed and squeezed my eyes shut at the horrendous sight.

The door gave way behind me and I fell back. I grunted with pain as I collided with the floor. I opened my eyes. I couldn't trust *them* anymore. Every sensation was suspect. What my eyes revealed to me caused the tendrils of madness to tighten even more. I was back in the mausoleum. The trek to the car, my apartment, all of it had been Sedgwick's doing. A groan sounded in the darkness to my left. With a laugh, Sedgwick lumbered to his feet. He tilted his head to the right, then the left. The bones in his neck ground and he grimaced slightly. "Ahh, well, that feels interesting," he mused with a sickening grin in my direction. "You plumb the nature of my game yet, my dear Martin?" His voice was like a snail slithering through my head. I tried to gain my feet but he planted a foot on my chest and pushed me back to the floor. When he was certain I would remain where I was, he started pacing. He placed his hands behind his back and for all intents and purposes, he resembled a professor addressing a room full of eager minds.

"I've been working towards my greatest accomplishment," he said.

"This where the villain reveals his diabolical plan?" I interrupted.

He paced and fixed me with a look that chilled my already cold body. It was filled with so much anger it practically transformed his dirt-encrusted face into that of a fiend from the Abyss. The illusion passed as the light traveled past his face.

"There are only a few acts in this life that will enable what I hope to accomplish," he continued. "Acts of self-sacrifice, true love," he paused and stared at me.

"Fuck me," I said as Sedg's plan struck me full on. My love of Katie had been his plan all along. My desire to save her no matter the cost was his desire.

"Ah, now the diabolical plan is revealed," Sedgwick chuckled as Katie waltzed into his arms from the shadows.

In that moment I tried to hate Katie with all of my being. But, I couldn't...

Part 9 – Jerrod Balzer

Her sweet smile and schoolgirl giggle still had a grip on me, even when seeing her rest her head on *his* shoulder instead of mine. With the obvious truth standing there, their silhouette against the lightning as they stood in the open doorway, I still couldn't accept the truth. Sedg had been manipulating my mind too much to buy into it again.

"No, Martin my friend," he said, reading my every thought, "This time it's the real deal. While you were avoiding me all those years, I was teaching Katie-bird all kinds of nifty things. You saw how eager she was." He laughed. "Especially that one night."

Katie joined in his laughter and said, "It's too dark in here." With a snap of her fingers, candles blazed throughout the mausoleum. Although the darkness could no longer allow his imagination to contort their images, the clear sight of them was almost as bad.

"By the way, loverboy," Katie said, "Thanks for the immortality. We couldn't have done it without you."

I pushed myself back along the floor and tried to hold in the tears. I couldn't allow them any more satisfaction. "But..." My voice cracked, causing just enough of a tickle to make me cough. "But after all that time together. You never felt anything for me?"

Katie looked into Sedg's eyes and they exchanged mischievous smiles. She walked closer to me and said with a serious, sarcastic tone, "Yeah, like I'm going to see you sleeping in that library, drooling all over the books, and think 'Oh my God, I must have this man. He's so studly!' You had nothing to offer me but what Sedg promised me through you."

I shook my head in despair. "It was all a lie." I was the tool all along, not the seemingly naïve and innocent Goth chick.

"Shit, Martin," Sedg said as he crouched down next to me, "Do you really think she'd choose you over me? You weren't even any good in bed!"

"What?" Present situation aside, that was really offensive. I looked at her for some sort of defense, to at least tell him I wasn't *that* bad, but saw nothing in her face.

"He's right," she said, "Come on, think back. You saw how good he was giving it to me the night you walked in. Have you ever seen that look on my face whenever you were inside me?"

For the first time, the memories became clear and she was telling the truth, Goddamnit. They had plenty of time between her "accident" and when we got together to plan all this out. When she was sure I was hooked on her, she went to him and allowed herself to be tied up for my arrival. I was so blinded by my love for her that I didn't see any of it. I was a deer in the headlights and this was the moment of impact.

"I was completely addicted to what Sedg had to offer," she continued, "I wanted his body, his mind. What Sedg possesses is better than any drug or Wiccan book anywhere!"

Her face brightened up. "Shit, Martin, I'd give my right arm for it, so

do you think I'd bat an eyelash over fucking some half-limp nerd? Besides, we had a lot of time to kill before the moon and stars were properly aligned. I had several weeks to make sure your love was true. As it turns out, that was the easy part." She chuckled and looked back at Sedg, who only shook his head with a smile.

Katie's expression turned serious again. "I'm almost there, Martin. There's just one more thing I have to do before I have everything." She lowered to one knee and leaned closer to me. "If I kill you in front of him, I'll get my fucking arm back!"

There was a look of determined fury in her eyes that showed she meant business. Sedg backed away as I watched her lips grow into a crooked smile. I wished I still had my gun. I'd carried one with me every since Sedg had "killed" Katie. Every morning after that, I'd been expecting to wake up mutilated by one of his voodoo dolls but he was right that it was only the beginning. Dolls were just child's play to him now and my fate wouldn't be so simple. I'd thought it was finally over when he approached me in the cemetery while visiting Katie's grave. I didn't care that it was storming. I had to see her, and I suppose now that it was just Sedg luring me there. He stood next to me and said, "Ah, the best freak I ever fucked."

I didn't waste any time putting a bullet in his forehead. When his body twitched on the ground and rose back up, I turned to run and slipped in the mud. The gun was gone from my hand and I didn't bother looking for it. I just ran.

My mind was wandering again. I had to stay sharp, had to focus. The love of my life, the one who betrayed me, was leaning over me with a silver dagger in her hand. It looked like the same dagger Sedg had used to slit her throat.

Part 10 – M. J. Euringer

My breathing was shallow, like the beat of my heart. My love – sweet Katie – betrayed. The loss of her was all I could focus on at the time, even as she leaned over me with that pristine, polished dagger.

"I know how you feel, darling – you'll get over it. The gods will care for you in your sacrifice." She traced the tip of the blade over my lips before slitting them. Warm blood flowed into the back of my throat. My will to fight was sapped by their betrayals, anger and apathy rendered numb my body. As I now consider these confluences of circumstance, their path to my corruption is self-evident.

But I have made no greater error than that of thousands of men before me, and I pay just as great a price as they who've put their trust in another's heart. Certainly, no mortal with an open heart ever expects such pain, and, yet, it's a behavioral pattern the species repeats time and time again, forcing the individual to rationalize that this time – yes, this time – it

will be different.

It's a ruse, of course, an empty comfort of which we convince ourselves in an attempt to be certain those rationalizations turn to fact.

But it never does.

And I lay here as proof.

Before my dead friend, my armless desire, with my split lips as I choke on my own blood.

Of course, they didn't only take my arm. They took my toes, one by one, with a branch pruner. They sawed off my feet with a hack saw. They smashed my knees with a five pound mallet – just to break up the monotony of my wailing – and they chopped my legs off at the thigh with a hatchet.

I screamed and cried.

They laughed and prayed.

It was a blur for me after the first toes were taken. All I was able to see was the ballet of colors before my eyes, dancing to a minuet of shock that reverberated in my head. I tried, oh, I tried to focus on the games that had led me to this entrapment orchestrated by their betrayals, but the agony, my God, you have never known a sweeter siren's song.

I would not survive this night, I understood that after some time, as shock was able to relax my nerves and I began to wonder what it was I would leave behind.

Not much – my family's confusion and their subsequent years of wondering to where my corpse had got. Not much after that, however, not much at all. I was a little too old to wind up on the back of a milk carton, but perhaps that was not the manner in which to judge a legacy.

Our occult fascination – me and Sedg – had always been about pushing the boundaries of the perceived without any consideration of what would wind up in our wake. Without worry for whatever warp of the world we created, we'd net and webbed Katie into our little weave. Fool am I for not considering the penis was so easily led astray. I am my own prize and punishment for my foolish fascinations. I trusted a stranger with my ambition, another with my heart, and the toll for my short sightedness would be charged in flesh.

Mother Night descended upon me when enough of my blood had seeped onto the floor. She closed my vision as I watched my best friend copulate my beloved amputee in the stew of my own gore and parts. I was grateful for the Dark Lady, and I welcomed her.

She, the elegant shade who passed through time, in her dark, scarlet ribbons and her mane of fire, whose very touch brought an end to thought and fear. She, who I now realized, was the reason I sought out Sedgwick in the first place; Mother Night.

She did not reach for me, however, instead passed through me and I was changed as Katie began to scream. A change aided and abetted by something I had gleaned from one of those rare books sneaked from the

Secrets of Solomon.

The nub at her shoulder began to ripple, pointed bone pushed through ill-healed flesh. The marrow stretched toward the sky as she held up her re-constituting arm. I could not see her in a conventional sense, but my perception of the room allowed me a glimpse of her pale face and slack-jawed scream as she watched her arm reappear.

Her forearm soon became my torso, my head sprouted from her fist, my hands reached for her beautiful, horrified face from the bones of her wrist. They watched me, my betrayers, come again, form upon the phantom of Katie's dismembered arm, re-grown, in flesh, as my body. I screamed – my only natural voice – my tiny arms flailed as I reached for her god damned throat.