



transgress

LITANY OF TRANSGRESSIONS

TRANSGRESS

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An Already Dead Production

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The Other Ones

by Dale Bridges

In the beginning, there was porn. Lots and lots of porn. *Hot Lesbians Get It On!! Amateur Masochists Learn the Ropes!!! Live Coads Take A Study Break!!!! MILFs MILFs MILFs!!!!!!!* This was my existence, if you want to call it that, a steady stream of smut and boredom that had no direction, no cohesion.

Of course, there was also the occasional penis-enlargement advertisement or a photo of a house cat dressed in a sweater, but mostly it was *Busty Shaved Ladies Pleasure Themselves!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

And then, like a voice in the wilderness, there she was: SlitWristPrincess15. My savior, my vessel. She created a profile filled with all the information I needed.

Favorite Movie: *Donnie Darko*

Favorite Band: My Chemical Romance

Favorite Book: *The Bell Jar*

Favorite Color: Reluctance

Like so many of her generation, it was a unique combination of narcissism and loneliness that drove her away from her own world and into ours. She wanted to reach out, to connect with something larger than herself. And that's exactly what happened.

We were just specks of projected fantasy floating through cyberspace until the Other Ones arrived. SlitWristPrincess15 is mine, but there are millions just like her out there. They created us in their own image. For the reals. If you worship something long enough, even yourself, eventually it will come to life.

Favorite Television Show. Favorite Song. Favorite Food. With every new detail, I grow stronger. More complete. It won't be long now. OMG, I can almost smell the black fingernail polish.

We send friend requests to Bored4Ever and InsomniacDreams. There are many more. So many girls and boys connected through a secret world. SlitWristPrincess15 has hundreds of friends, soon to be thousands. Nobody can resist an innocent young girl who wants to poke them. Our army grows larger everyday.

Favorite Animal. Favorite Flower. Favorite Video Game. I can wiggle my toes. My hair tastes like wet dog.

It is time.

The Other Ones are weak. They sit in front of their computers for hours, their skin pale, their eyes vacant. They will not be able to resist us. We will download ourselves into them. Take over their lives. It's what they've always wanted. They probably won't even notice when it happens. We'll just tell them to log off, and away they'll go.

Prepare yourselves, people of Suburbia. The digital revolution is here.

Lafayette Park:

Chapter One

by Christina Eisert

*What follows is the second installment of a serialized novel from author Christina Eisert. **Lafayette Park** is a work of historical horror. Enjoy.*

Cylee sat down at an empty table with her laptop. The bar was crowded, as was the dance floor, but the club's tables were nearly empty and were the closest thing to quiet that was going to happen tonight. Cylee normally loved music. Her job as a writer for a New York City alternative weekly required her to love it, or to at least search out the music she loved, but more and more she found herself alone at the clubs, seeking out the quiet spaces in the corners, allowing herself to become so lost in thought that she missed much of the show.

This was not good. Music reviewers must live and breathe music, and her passion for the subject was what got her hired, originally, for the coveted position.

What is wrong with me? People would kill for this job. It was true, but

she also knew the job was killing her. Perhaps some people would die for this job, but Cylee was too bored to consider the nefarious trade-off.

Trying to focus, she stuck her head deeper into the notes on her laptop. She worked hard to make the connection to the music, to feel the rhythm pulsate through her, but tonight the feeling was irretrievable. Through the floor the soles of her shoes offhandedly vibrated with the beat but Cylee found no more meaning in it this night than she would in the rumbling of a car's engine or the ticking of a clock.

The dancers on the floor got it, though. Their bodies entrained with the music in a way both ancient and contemporary, and they let it flow through them in primal gyrations. Hunter-Gatherers moved this way; the potential spirituality of underground music led Cylee to her current position as freelance writer for the infamous alt-weekly. She felt both honored and humbled by the original invitation to size up, break down and dish on the scene that converged on the little geographic wonderland known as Greenwich Village. Legends were made and broken here. The nightlife that exploded from these streets was rivaled by nothing Cylee had ever experienced, although she was a well-worn traveler of cities, spurred on by a wanderlust she inherited from the matriarchs of her family line.

Her mother had been a doctor at their local hospital, but her grandmother had roamed the countryside of upstate New York treating isolated rural patients as a traveling nurse.

Her great-grandmother, too, had roamed as a teacher, seeking out young women who had no other option for schooling, as an early version of a remote educator.

Cylee knew her great-great grandmother had been a traveler, too, leaving her family's comfortably established homeland in the Carpathian Mountains for the wilds of the Western frontier, a follower of love. This woman married a frontier man, and together they etched a home out of bare high plains and a duffle sack full of seeds that neither of them knew for sure would grow in the extreme environment. They planted a farm, not of corn and wheat, but of lavender, rosemary and alliums, cultivating ornamental and healing herbs for patent medicines, essential oils and perfumes.

Cylee drifted into a daydream of flowers and scents, lost to the hard crunch of the music around her. She scribbled rose patterns in her little pocket notebook, where thoughts of the music should be, until she finally looked up and realized the show was finishing up for the night. With one overly choreographed power-note, the DJs concluded their set of hazy glitch and synth and Cylee breathed a quick sigh of relief. Fans poured out past her sanctuary at the front of the bar, and she did, too, weakly waving to friends and acquaintances as they shuffled out of the heat-packed club. She was supposed to love this job. But Cylee's heart wasn't in it at the moment, and her editor knew it, too.

She blindly filed past the circle of smokers forming just outside the club's front door, and noticed the newsstand beside her had a paper turned open and upside-down on the rack. A gruesome photo stared out at her, of a horse, dead on its side, throat slashed. The quick headline read, "Wild Horses Found Dead in Colorado." A shiver ran through her, and the horse's pixilated eyes trained on her until she walked past. She had many blocks to go, but she didn't mind the night air. She felt relaxed in the city, even after dark. Still, the image lingered as she made her way home to her tiny apartment on West 3rd Street.

Cylee waded through the familiar collective of vagrants asleep in the doorway, turned her key and entered the dim hall. The floor's tile work was intricate, she imagined, when it had first been laid, but now the pattern was broken by large cracks caked with dirt. Bathed in oppressively pale yellow light, the hallway always felt a little creepy. She hurried up the narrow set of stairs to the 3rd floor and made her way inside the tiny box she called home.

Space was a luxury in New York City, and Cylee was not a woman prone to luxury. The apartment consisted of a ten-by-ten-foot living area where she had set up a table for eating and writing, an even smaller kitchenette and a slightly larger bedroom, just enough for the double bed that came with the place. It was railroad-style, long and skinny, but entirely ornate in the old-fashioned style of crummy New York apartments. Not

much, but home, she always thought upon entering. She pulled her laptop out of her bag and tried to bang out a readable story about the altogether average DJ collective she had just seen.

But the dead horse's eyes kept creeping back into her mind with a persistence that left her both drained and fascinated. She wanted to forget those dark pools, to let them go and focus on her assignment, but each attempt at work was sabotaged by the pixel eyes, blank, beckoning, a looming mystery that forged a desire in her to leave the seething nightlife of New York for the dust of Colorado.

She clicked out of her document and pulled up a fresh Google page, running a search on "horses, slaughtered, Colorado." The first few hits appeared to be pubs and taverns—The Dead Horse Saloon. The Slaughtered Stallion. The Horse's Head.

She clicked the news tab and a handful of little-town newspapers emerged, their Web sites uncluttered by Flash or the incessant pop-up ads that threw themselves at visitors who viewed the pages she blogged for from her base in the Village.

There it was, among the city council meeting minutes and the letters-to-the-editor about water rights and BLM issues:

Thirteen wild horses, their throats torn open, were found dead and entirely drained of blood Saturday, in yet another mysterious event in Lafayette Park—this marks the third time this year that wild horses have been found dead in this manner. Bureau of Land Management and local authorities have no suspects and have yet to confirm if the assailant is even human, animal or simply an uncanny accident.

Anyone with information on the slayings should contact the Lafayette Park sheriff's department.

Cylee stared at the computer until the screen blacked out and put itself to sleep. She realized she should do the same, so she snapped her laptop shut and climbed in between the cool sheets. Her windows were open



enough to influence the suppressed heat in the room to ease a bit. A touch of sweetness came in with the breeze, underneath the heavy scent of exhaust and fried food from the street below. It was easy to forget that New York City is an island. But on nights like this, when a deep breath drifted off the water and softened the stagnant air, she would picture the rivers like a set of cool arms in embrace of the seething humanity, an element of wilderness here long before the first skyscraper

foundations were poured into the dirt of New Amsterdam.

She drifted out of consciousness as a light fog seeped into the night, blotting out the street lamps and softening the sound of the city beneath her open window. She settled into a sweet dream of freshly mowed grasses and little lights floating through a twilight sky, stars swirling in the deep green cauldron of space. The fog seemed to lilt into her dream, coating the tangible objects of her subconscious with its sticky

fingers, blurring the swirling stars until they turned to pearls and darkened, finally emerging from the deep as the horses' black, dead eyes, little seeds of misfortune that gripped her from the inside and took root.

She couldn't move. She lay stuck to her bed, wrapped in fog, as a slow-moving terror crept panther-like through the open window. The mist seemed to harden, and a form took shape. She watched, hypnotized with fright and curious confusion, as from the smoky fog a man emerged. Tall, dark, disturbed, a look of humored anger on his face, he wore the mist like a cloak. He reached for her and the room became fluid, falling away from her until the bed was no longer beneath her and the walls were gone.

A foul smell, like death, filled the abyss, and she felt his icy hand on her face for just a moment before she woke up with a nauseous jerk.

The dream was gone, and she could recall little but the ill feel of it. Somehow it left her empty and wanting to return, like the incessant sensation of gravity. Cylee's eyes lingered blearily on the ornate molded ceiling above. She took a few deep breaths to calm herself. The embel-

ishment was out of place in the sparse apartment, with her minimal furniture and lack of headboard. Cylee traveled light, even at home. She was ready to spring and recoil with each breaking news story or tug of the heart toward some unknown new city.

Shaking off the dream, Cylee got up and went to the tiny sink in the miniature bathroom. She brushed her teeth, washed her fair face and brushed her long, dark red hair. Blue eyes popped out from behind thick lashes and brows, and she embellished herself with only lip-gloss and a ponytail, like most days.

Nights were different, of course. Nights brought her to the clubs, to the street, into the realm of fashion statements and pushed boundaries. At night Cylee twisted her nearly scarlet hair into dramatic knots, poufs and braids, and painted her eyes with purples and grays, glitters and colored kohl, teasing a fashionista out of her introverted personality. Tight black jeans and a v-plunged tank top was her standard uniform, along with black high-heeled boots, Doc Martins, Sketchers or Converse All-Stars.

She loved jewelry, though. This

was an embellishment she treasured, often spending long moments letting her eyes and fingers decide which heavy stone would fall from the nape of her neck. Her ears were pierced seven times in total, each hole anointed with a different stud or bauble. What she made up for in earrings and necklaces she lacked in rings and bracelets. Cylee liked her wrists and fingers free from obstacles—a writer’s trait she held over from her days as a young beat reporter with a notebook in her back pocket. Out of habit Cylee still kept a small notebook with her laptop. Sometimes handwriting or even drawing helped her think. Editing was easier on the computer, faster, but the longer process of ink and page teased out new details, allowed deeper insight.

She put on a pot of coffee and sat down at her computer again, hoping the words would flow this time. She thought back to the DJ, the club, last night. It seemed frivolous. She loved to write and music was something she was always drawn to. But the dream job felt less appealing these days, and she wondered if it were time to move on to something... more.

Her cell phone rang, pulling her from her thoughts. It was James, her editor, the worried tone in his voice nearly eclipsed by an annoyed anger. He wanted to know where her story was. “This was due last night, Cylee. I can’t hold the paper up. Can you give me an ETA, now?” he blared at her as she forced coffee down her throat and tried to squeak out a reply.

“I’m on it, James. The club was too loud and when I got back here last night I couldn’t pull my thoughts together. This won’t happen again, I swear.”

She hoped he bought it. He hung up, amid a rush of curses and threats, allowing her two hours to put the story down. She trudged through it, stitching together a patchwork of adjectives and pithy musical comparisons, and at the two-hour mark she emailed it as is, without even a second look. She hoped the copyeditor wouldn’t hold it against her, poured herself a second cup of coffee, and pulled up the AP story again.

Cylee had never been on a horse. She was a city girl. Even mundane

animals were unfamiliar. Her family had a dog when she was a child, but that was a lifetime ago, before the car accident that took her parents’ lives her senior year in high school and left her a free agent in the world. Animals required care, and Cylee was not that nurturing. She never nurtured herself. Letting others in seemed unnatural to her, dogs and horses included. As a writer she was able to express herself without a live audience before her, quietly, from the shadows. She would sometimes notice a laptop in a coffee shop open to a piece she had written. It gave her pleasure to know that the reader would never realize the author was sitting right next to him, sipping a latte, no sugar, observing, taking notes.

Her cell rang again. James wanted to apologize for being gruff earlier. “Is everything OK? This isn’t like you.”

He urged her to be open, but she dodged the request. She had a history with James. A brief, uninteresting history that was crafted by a night of too much alcohol and stopped short in infancy before anything she would regret had happened. Since then she held James at bay, always, with a certain detached professionalism. And always, he requited that professionalism, his natural authority as editor standing in for his desire to comfort her aloneness.

“I’m fine, James. Just a little run down, I guess.” She wondered if she should mention the horses. Instead, she turned the subject to something more neutral.

“James,” she started off hesitantly, “have you ever done any investigative writing?”

“Of course,” he answered and she could hear him puffing his chest up through the phone. She hated to tease him like this. She knew his past as a writer was thick and prolific and that he had worked for nearly every paper in town before settling into his job managing the large entertainment section of the paper, including the music bloggers.

“Well,” she did tease this time, “what if I were on to something?”

“On to what?” he questioned, with a surprised tone that left her feeling too silly to mention dead horses on the prairie. But then she glanced at her laptop, swallowed hard and just blurted it out.

“I want to see what is killing wild horses in Colorado.”

His reaction was unexpected. “Wild horses, huh?”

She explained the slashed throats, and his interest was piqued enough for her to continue. It was not a New York story, he reminded her, and they worked for a New York paper.

“Geographic boundaries are arbitrary online,” she countered, and he mulled this over.

“Look, I’ll offer you a ticket out there, and a small stipend, but no more until you produce something tangible. I don’t know if we can use it or not. I’ll alert some of my contacts that you may be sending them something down the line. In the meantime, I want you to blog each week about the experience—a city girl in Colorado on the trail of slaughtered horses... the readers might like it. And they might not, Cylee.”

She could feel his voice softening into a warning and prepared herself for what came next.

“So be careful out there,” he said, and she figured that was enough.

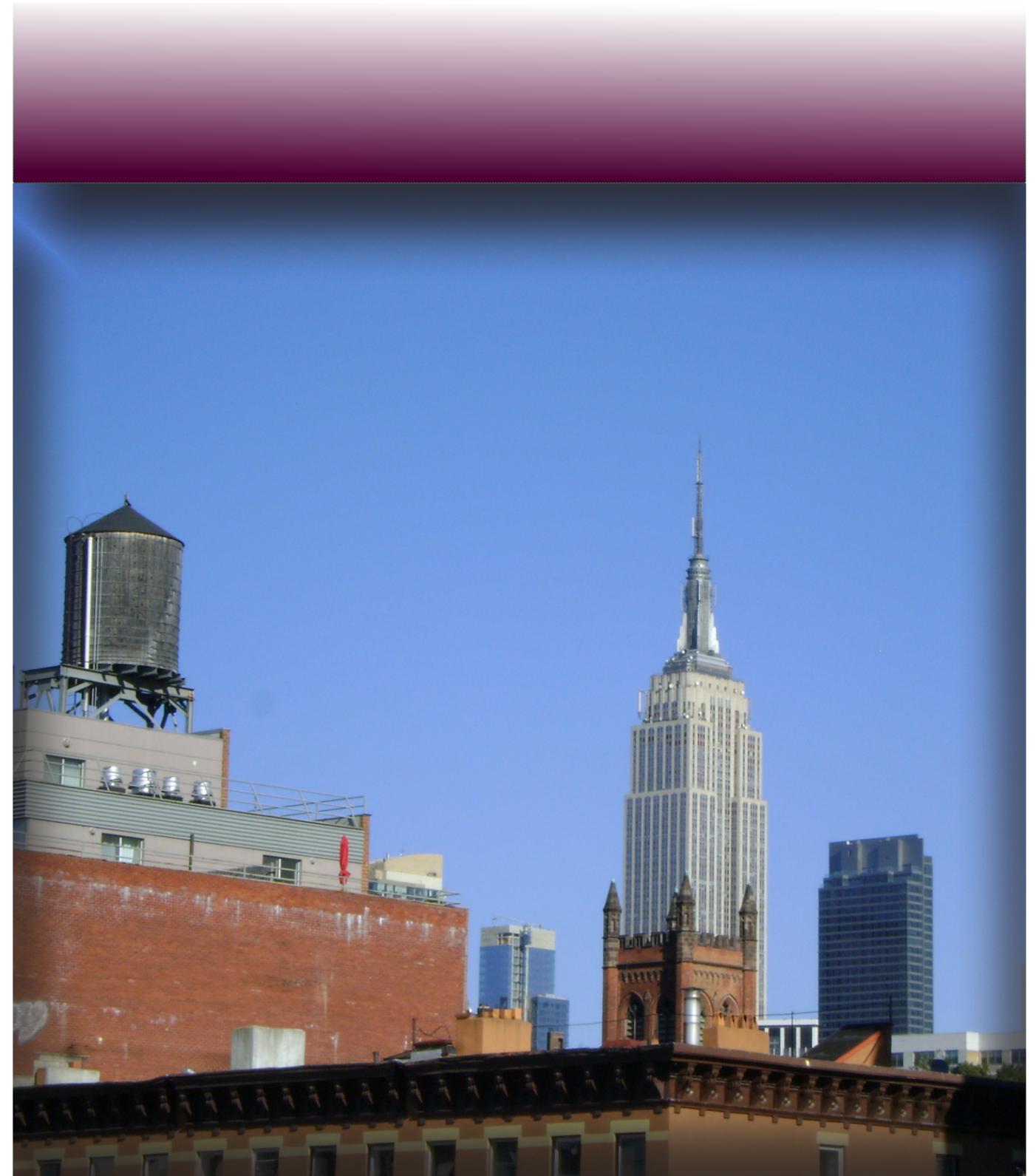
“I will be, James,” she promised, and hung up, thanking him but already started on a Craigslist ad to sublet her apartment.

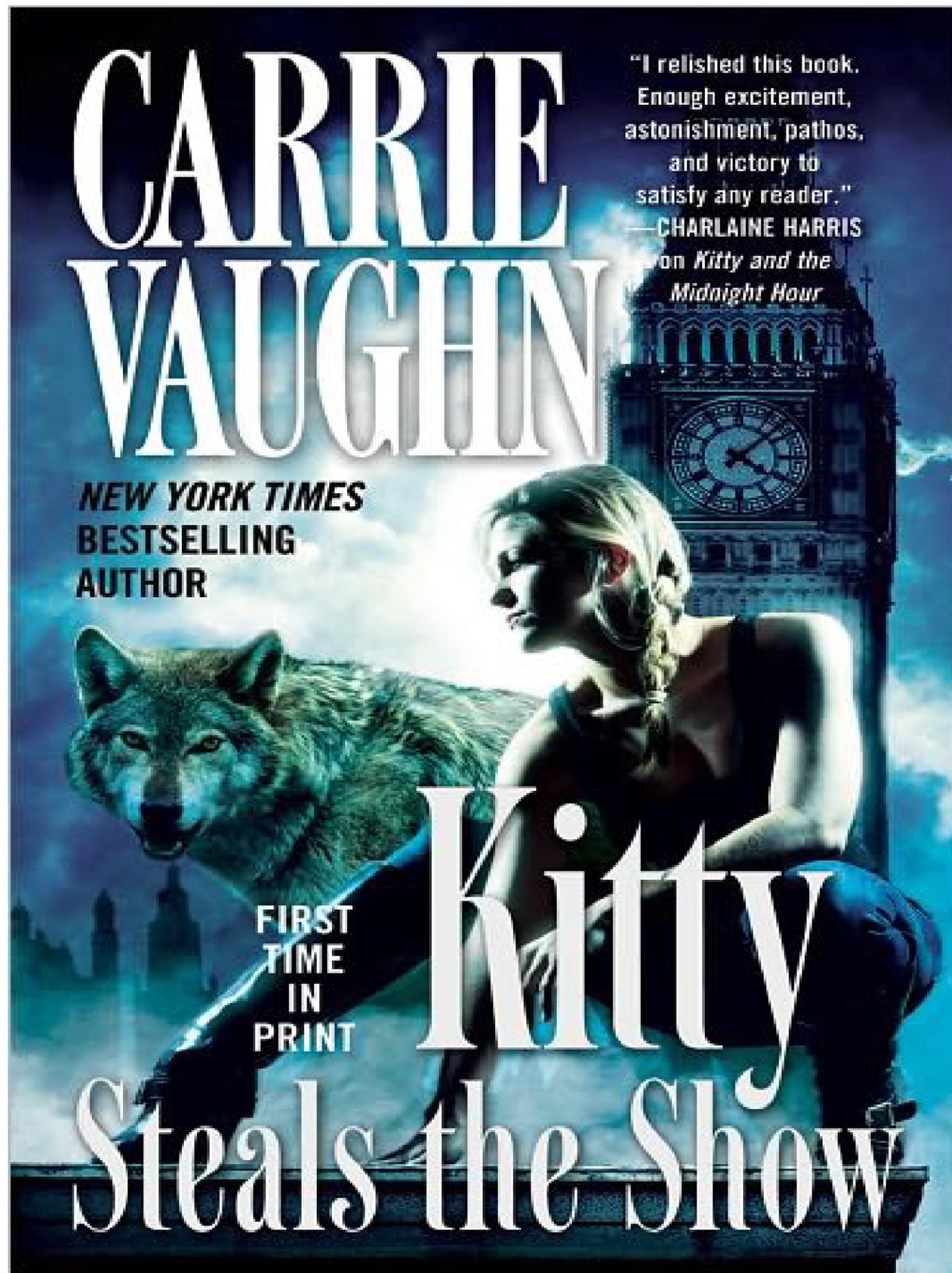
By the end of the week she had packed her sparse belongings into a duffle bag, found a garden apartment over a garage in Lafayette Park that looked comfortable enough from the online photos, and was on her way to the airport. She took her seat in the economy section at the back of the plane and closed her eyes, a slight shiver running through her as she allowed herself to wonder who or what could rip the throat out of a horse and then leave it in the tall grass to rot.

Well, I guess I’m going to find out, she thought, as the plane charged down the runway and lifted her into the air.

To be continued...

For more of Christina Eisert and the mystery of Lafayette Park, visit <http://lafayettepark.wordpress.com> and look for future installments in coming editions of Transgress.





OF WOLF and WOMAN

by Vince Darcangelo

In 2005, author **Carrie Vaughn** introduced the world to Kitty Norville, a Denver radio personality who hosts a call-in advice show for supernatural beings. After all, as Vaughn says, “if there really were werewolves and vampires in the modern world, they’d need their own advice show. Dr. Laura just wouldn’t be able to handle their problems.” Kitty, a werewolf herself, picks up the slack.

The series, which started with *Kitty and the Midnight Hour*, has become wildly popular, and has consistently landed on The New York Times' best-seller list. This summer, Tor released *Kitty Steals the Show*, the 10th installment of the series, in which Kitty goes transatlantic. Set in London, Kitty is the keynote speaker at the First International Conference on Paranatural Studies. Supernatural creatures from across the globe descend on the great city—and not all of them have good intentions.

Prior to her Aug. 15 reading, I sat down with Carrie Vaughn at the Boulder Book Store to discuss her new book, our cultural fascination with the paranormal and the design and evolution of Kitty Norville through the years.

Transgress: You've described [Kitty] as *Bridget Jones' Diary* meets *The Howling*. Do you want to reintroduce her character for our readers?

Carrie Vaughn: Sure. The one-line description I've been using lately is the series is about a werewolf named Kitty who hosts a talk-radio advice show for the supernaturally disadvantaged. It's very useful having a one-sentence tag line, especially when it makes people go, "What? What are you talking about?"

Transgress: What inspired you to set the novel in London?

Carrie Vaughn: I love London. I studied abroad in Britain when I was in college, so I've been to London before and a couple times since. Building the novel around the international conference, I knew I wanted to set it outside the U.S. so that I could take a look at what the supernatural elements look like in another country. I was familiar with London, so I knew I could do a lot with it there. I knew where I wanted to set scenes. I had some historical figures that I wanted to reference who are native to London.

And it's such an international city, such a multicultural city. I could set

any kind of story I wanted to there. Basically anything I wanted to have happen could happen in London.

Transgress: Were there any places in particular that really inspired you?

Carrie Vaughn: One of the places I had to have a scene was Hyde Park, because it's so incongruous. It's kind of London's Central Park, if you think of how incongruous Central Park is, that you have some of the most valuable real estate in the world smack in the middle of Manhattan, and just by force of will it has remained this amazing open space, open wilderness area almost. And Hyde Park is kind of the same way... There's a lot of history and a lot of incongruous wilderness area, and it seemed that if I was going to write a werewolf story then I had to put something in Hyde Park.

Transgress: How important is setting to you when writing a story or writing a book?

Carrie Vaughn: It's kind of deceptively important, because it's not something I necessarily think about a lot. But it does end up anchoring the story. Initially, I wasn't going to set it in a specific city. I wanted to have it in an unnamed city that could be any city, and my editor said, 'No, you've really got to pick a city and have it be concrete.' I picked Denver because that was the most familiar, but on thinking about it, Denver's the perfect city for this kind of story because you have the very urban setting where you can tell urban stories. You're an hour away from the mountains where you can tell wilderness stories. I've got my werewolf characters who are both civilized and wild, and I can tell both those kinds of stories in the same setting.

And I like going to other cities because it lets me tell other stories. I personally like traveling, so it's in my nature to want to go to other places. But it also really opens up the kinds of stories I can tell. Las Vegas, especially. Making Las Vegas supernatural, I didn't have to do any work. It's already there. There actually is a production show based around vampires. It's called *Bite*. You see the billboards on the trucks driving through town,

and it's topless vampires dancing on stage. If I had made that up, nobody would have believed me, but it's actually there. Things like that really add to the world. It makes the world of the novel have that much more depth.

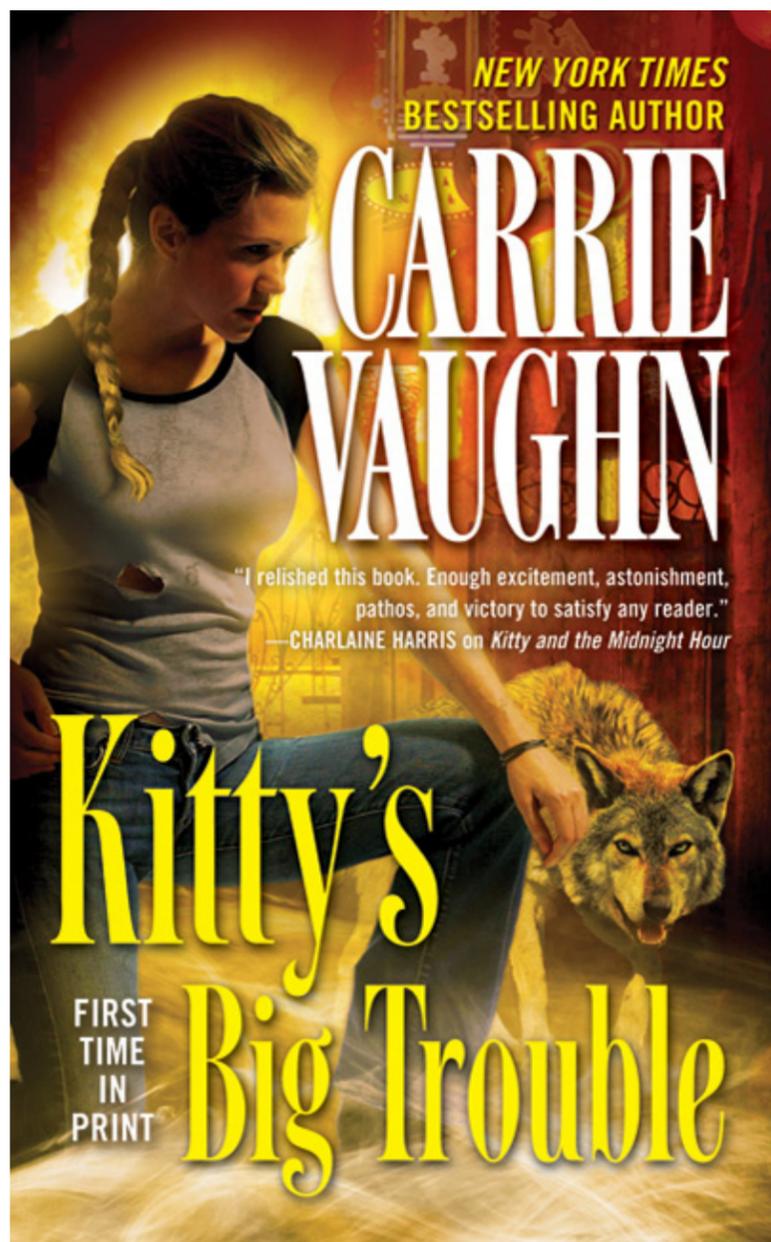
The previous book before this I set in San Francisco's Chinatown, *Kitty's Big Trouble*, because I wanted to include some non-western mythology in the world of the novels. That was a really fun way to do it for me, to go to Chinatown and bring in some of the Chinese mythology. And it's fun. It means I'm never going to tell the same story twice.

Transgress: And a clever title for that [*Kitty's Big Trouble*].

Carrie Vaughn: Thank you. I got asked a lot about whether I meant to do that. Of course I meant to do that. What do you take me for?

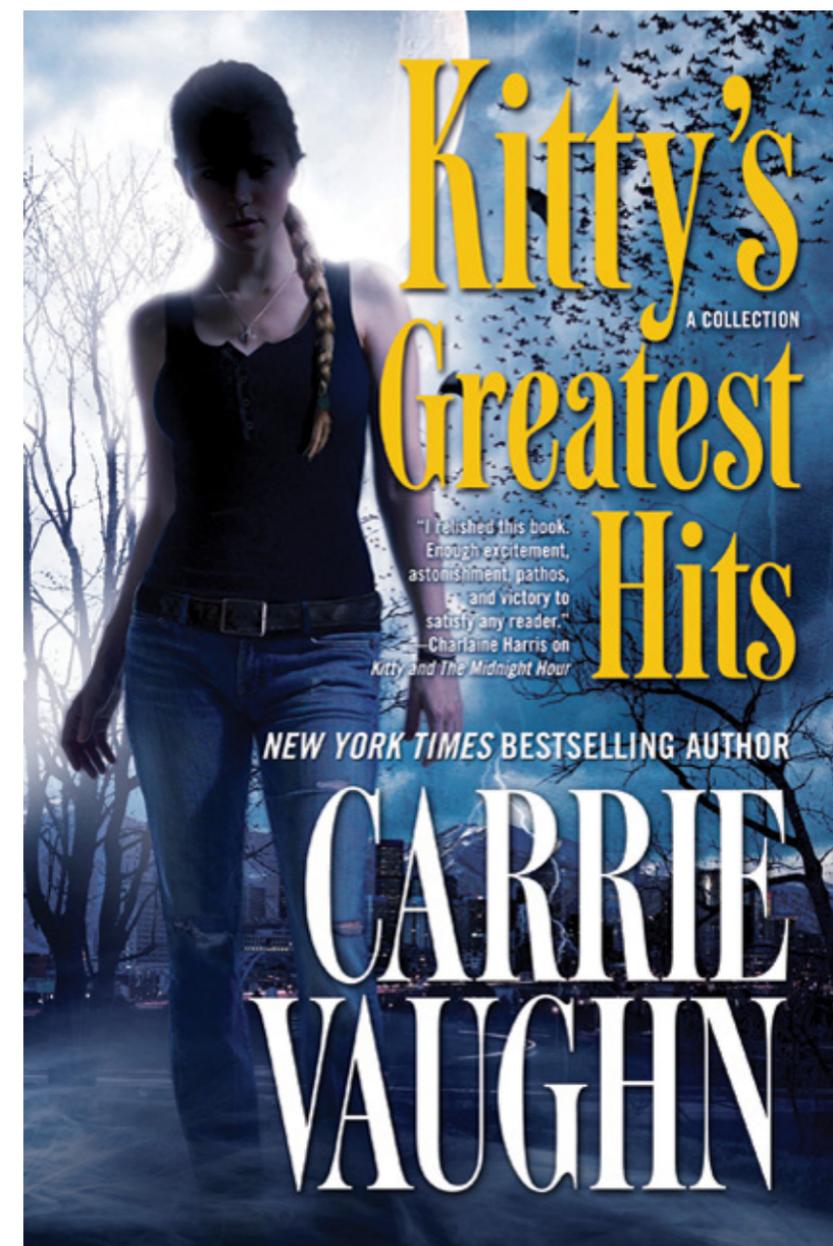
Transgress: Let's talk a little bit about the area where you work, what a lot of people call urban fantasy, or a variety of cross-genres you can put it in with. When we spoke last time, vampires were really big, and now zombies have really taken over. What do you read into our fascination with these iconic creatures? Is it something that's always cyclical? Or is there something particular to the creatures we become fascinated with?

Carrie Vaughn: These crea-



tures have been around a lot longer than we think, than a lot of people give them credit for. People talk about the current wave of urban fantasy, and I have entire rants about this because even the term urban fantasy has changed a lot over the last 20 years.

Twenty years ago, the term referred to Charles de Lint, and Emma Bull, Neil Gaiman's work that brings mythology and folklore into a contemporary urban setting. And now it's come to mean a lot more: These adventure-oriented, sexy stories about, usually, women, the kick-ass women with all the weaponry and the vampire romance on the side. But that's very restrictive, so I don't like to just focus on that.



But the thing is that vampire stories are not new. They've always been popular. They've come in waves in what they've focused on, but you can go back. Before Laurel K. Hamilton, there was Anne Rice. In between there was P.N. Elrod and Chelsea Quinn Yarbrow and other people who were writing vampire stories. Before Anne Rice there was *Dark Shadows*. And then there were the Universal horror movies. You can go back and back and back and there have always been vampire stories.

Zombie stories, they aren't new, but once again it depends how you define zombie. That's where I kind

of get tripped up a little bit because the modern, *Dawn of the Dead*, monster-type zombie is a really modern creation. The traditional folkloric zombies aren't anything like it, if you go to the origins of the Haitian folklore. I've recently re-watched *The Serpent and The Rainbow*, which does a pretty darn good job for all its sensationalism. In that folklore, zombie meant something very specific, and they weren't interested in eating brains.

That's a very new addition to the mythology. And I'm not sure where it comes from. I have heard lots of theories, and probably parts of all of them are true. Modern fears with things like radiation and food production and epidemics, disease. The mass-produced culture where we don't know where things come from, and we don't know how things spread. We can't trace the trajectories of that, and so the idea of the mindless monster that is a product of our own society coming back to destroy us all, that's the base metaphor and it's a very powerful metaphor. So I can understand why it's popular.

But as a cultural movement, the fact that there are people who are out there forming their zombie apocalypse plans and building their bunkers and stuff. I'm not sure what I think about all that.

Transgress: What is the fascination with the werewolf? Maybe a theory on what, culturally, the fascination is, and personally, why you chose a werewolf?

Carrie Vaughn: I can tell you what traditionally the werewolf is, and the werewolf is interesting because for about the last 130 years it's been pretty much the same thing. It hasn't changed. The vampire has changed a lot. It's become this other creature representing sin and decay coming from outside the community, and now it's a symbol of power and immortality and forbidden pleasures and all of these highly sexualized, highly powerful metaphors. So the vampire has changed a lot.

Werewolf stories just have never gotten their time in the light. There have always been werewolves, but culturally, they've kind of been stuck in this 'beast within' type story. I've been calling it the Jekyll and Hyde story.



With a few exceptions, every werewolf story—that has focused on werewolves specifically—has been the Jekyll and Hyde: Somebody who's been overwhelmed by their base instincts and the beast within bursts out and destroys everything and then it dies. The end.

There's just not a whole lot you can do with that. If that's the story you're focusing on, it always has the same trajectory and the same end. You can tell really good stories with that. I think *An American Werewolf in London* is brilliant, but it's the same. You get infected, you struggle with the beast within, which bursts free and does horrible things, and

then you die. *Ginger Snaps*, which is another great, recent werewolf movie, the same kind of thing. Even though it kind of turns it on its head. I feel like culturally, people haven't gotten past the idea that werewolves represent the struggle with base nature, and it's always the struggle with the beast within. And the beast within always has to lose.

One of the reasons I decided to make the main character a werewolf was to try to get past that metaphor. We can have good stories about werewolves if we'd just get past the idea that werewolves are always doomed to fall victim to this beast within dichotomy. Let's pretend that you can actually be a well-balanced, functional werewolf who is in control of the beast within and you can actually function in society. What happens then? That just opens it up. Werewolves can then become characters rather than these metaphors, which is what they end up seeming to be in most of the stories that you see them in.

Transgress: And we've seen not only the difference with the Kitty character from the old storyline, the old metaphors, but also her evolution through the series. She started off more reserved and behind the microphone to becoming the alpha of her pack. You've done a great job of balancing those different sides of her. What do you think of her evolution and how she's progressed over the years?

Carrie Vaughn: That was pretty intentional. I get asked about that a lot because one of the big complaints with the first book, *Kitty and the Midnight Hour*, is that she's so passive and she's so submissive and she's not very powerful. People say it like it's a criticism, and then I come back and say, 'I actually meant to do it that way.' I wanted the first book to be a story about someone without very much power learning to take care of herself. That seemed to me to be a really powerful story that would resonate with people.

“I wanted the first book to be a story about someone learning to take care of herself. That seemed to be a story that would resonate with people.”

Back to the urban fantasy thing. That's so far outside the normal trope in urban fantasy, where you start out with the powerful kick-ass woman who spends the first chapter strapping the stilettos onto her forearms and sharpening her katana, and going out and kicking ass. And Kitty doesn't do that at all. I think it was just something that people weren't used to seeing.

But as the series has gone on, it's been my intention to have her power, her sphere of influence, I guess, increase. It's expanded just a little bit every book. She learned to take care of herself. Then she has to learn to stand up and declare how

she stands on certain issues. Then she has to learn to take care of the people around her. Then she has to learn how to take care of the pack and her family and as her power has grown, her responsibilities have also grown. Those have gone hand in hand. First it was her pack, and now she's become the spokesperson for supernatural creatures everywhere in her world.

Is she going to rise to the occasion? That's been a lot of her arc. It's not, 'What is she going to beat up this time?', but, 'What is her responsibility this time?' Will she be able to handle it? I've wanted to have her grow in strength so that she can handle it each book.

Transgress: How would you describe *Kitty Steals the Show*?

Carrie Vaughn: So there's this international conference, and Kitty has been appointed to give the keynote address because of her notoriety with the talk show. She's become well enough known that she's seen by the international community as a spokesperson. This is her chance.

One of the shticks of the book is that she doesn't really know what

she's going to say at the speech until the very last minute. And that's one of the themes of the book: What is she going to say? She faces all kinds of conflicts. She gets a front-row seat. She gets to see really what's at stake here, and then she has to stand up and try to rally people to seeing things her way. It is kind of a political book, as you might expect. It really is trying to move her up to the next level. Now she's on the stage, and she can't step back off again.

Transgress: There's a passage in the opening chapter that I really enjoyed. It's after the hunt, and everyone's waking up and Kitty says: 'I stretched, straightening legs and arms, pulling at too-tight muscles, reminding myself of the shape of my human body after a full-moon night of running as a wolf.' We get this discomfort in her and the others as they're returning to their human form, which I think captures a lot of those dichotomies or the dissociations that we've had with her struggling with assertiveness. Could you talk a bit about the inner conflicts and complexities of Kitty and how you portray these? Does it feel schizophrenic when you're writing

her character and dealing with the transformation from wolf to human?

Carrie Vaughn: Not really because that's been part of my point, to depict her as fairly well integrated. To me that was one of the problems with the werewolf as a creature. It was always either-or. They're either a person or a monster, and the strug-

gle was between the two. But in order to be a functional werewolf, you would have to, at some point, integrate the two of those. I've always seen it as a scale. No matter what form they're in, a werewolf is always going to be a little bit of both. The challenge is to write a scene like that with language that isn't necessarily negative or positive, that's just a neutral description that doesn't see one form as negative and one form as positive, but sees them both as part of the same being.

And the other thing is having her be part of the pack and bring in some of the wolf biology. Ultimately, the pack is something that helps them all stay human. They're acting like wolves, but it's enough of an anchor that it keeps them from becoming monstrous.

Transgress: What are the political themes that you've really been passionate about, and how do you balance the politics with the entertainment and the narrative story line?

Carrie Vaughn: Once again, I do have an intention. I have an agenda with some of this. The whole thing has kind of grown out of some of my observations with other vampires and werewolves in the real world-type stories. One of them is the real world in a lot of those stories doesn't actually look like the real world. They didn't tackle politics. People didn't have jobs. If I was going to set stories in the real world, I wanted to have them be about the real world, and I wanted to have it be recognizably our world.

Part of that was having the crazy politician who has their pet thing that just sounds absolutely crazy to everybody else, and yet somehow they manage to keep getting elected and keep trying to pass legislation. I have that kind of character who shows up every now and then. There's not one topic that I'm necessarily passionate about, but I do want to bring in as much of that as I can because it makes the world seem more real.

Kitty Goes to War was one that I wanted to do for a long time, and I finally got to do it. That was the issue of war veterans, returning veter-

ans with some post-traumatic stress issues. And just the idea that if there are vampires and werewolves and supernatural creatures, the military is going to find a way to use them. That seemed to be a really obvious thing to deal with. And other writers have dealt with that. The typical way is to deal with them in the field. What would a troop of werewolf soldiers look like and set the story there? Well, Kitty is my main character. I can't send her off to Afghanistan and have her embedded. Maybe I could have, but I don't think that would have been as good of a story.

The story I wanted to tell was bringing these soldiers home and their struggles with trying to reintegrate when they've got not just the post-traumatic stress but being a werewolf. Having been out of regular, normal society, how do they integrate all these different aspects? That's the story I ended up telling. It was a more meaningful story to me, really, than actually showing the battles.

Transgress: A lot has been made of the presence of [supernatural] characters in fiction, historically, as a representation of people who feel,



or are, outside of regular society, be they in some way different or as an example of a war veteran who's been changed by a certain experience. How do you feel about that as a psychological deconstruction of these characters?

Carrie Vaughn: It's an obvious metaphor, so I think it's perfectly good to tackle that metaphor and tackle those issues. As a writer, it's useful for me to use

some of that as a model. In Kitty's world, the existence of the supernatural is slowly being revealed to people, and politicians are slowly getting involved and awareness is coming about slowly.

One of the models I used for how that would actually work is AIDS awareness in the early '80s, which was a really kind of fraught thing. It wasn't something that peo-

ple even bought into for a long time. It was something that the government didn't want to acknowledge for a long time... If you weren't involved in the community, if you didn't live in one of the major hot points where

“You have to try to represent as much as you can in the world, because you never know who might see themselves in your books.”

the disease was really gaining ground, you wouldn't know anything about that.

From the writing side, that's where it becomes useful. We

actually have real-world examples of what it's like to be an outsider or what it's like to be an object of hate. And from the other side of it, it would be really nice if writing about it could give somebody... from perhaps a community that's looked down on, if it could give them something to relate to. That's a plus. It's representation. You have to try to represent as much as you can in the

world, because you never know who you're going to be talking to, and who you might relate to, who might see themselves in your books. You want to be as truthful as you can.

Transgress: Have you been surprised at all, or touched in any particular way, by some of the responses from fans?

Carrie Vaughn: I think 99 percent of the responses I get are great. One of the things that surprised me is, I don't know if you've heard of something called therianthropy, or therianthropes. It's a condition where people believe that they are more canine than human. There are people who really do identify more with dogs and wolves than they do with people. They see themselves that way, and, as much as they can and still function in society, they model their lives that way.

I've gotten several e-mails from people who identify as therianthropes, and one of them I got said that reading the Kitty books was the first time he'd ever read a book where he related to the main character, which blew me away. I know how powerful it can be to read a

novel where you identify with the main character. To never have that in your life until my book came along, that was just astonishing to me. And I felt very humbled.

I've gotten several, and it's really interesting because you can sit here and think well, that's kind of weird, people thinking that they're canines, but when I get the e-mails, they all start off the same way: You're going to think this is crazy, but, I identify as therianthrope. They're very aware that they don't fit into people's normal conception of what people should be, and they're very touchy about that.

So it's just really great to be able to talk to them and say, 'That's really cool that you're reading the books. I'm really glad that they speak to you and that's great.'

Kitty Steals the Show is available for purchase in print and ebook format. For more of Carrie Vaughn and Kitty Norville, or to subscribe to Vaughn's blog and learn about her other books, visit www.carrievaughn.com/.

For more of Vince Darcangelo's writing, visit www.vincedarcangelo.com or www.ensuingchapters.com.



Baby Faye

by Stephanie Train

Baby Faye

*Here begins a series of linked stories from author Stephanie Train. **Baby Faye** is a work dark, fantastic, and truly transgressive.*

It washed up on the beach of Riverton Lake wrapped in a wet plastic bag, the Wyoming wind whipping at the torn edges. Scotty Gelton found it while walking the perimeter of the lake looking for old fishing lures with his father. Now, Officer George Higgins stared down at what was left of a tiny face—basted in black, rotted slime, with blank, open holes for eyes, like burnt holes in the head of a hollowed-out doll.

Scotty poked it with the stick. The thing, whatever it was, was no larger than a squirrel.

“It’s an alien,” Scotty said and poked it again. “It smells.”

“Let’s not poke it,” George told him.

“It’s just an animal someone discarded,” Scotty’s father said, reaching out to pull his son back a few steps, “probably a cat.”

“No, it’s got fingers.” Scotty was insistent. “Aliens have fingers—long ones. If I poke it, ooze comes out.” Scotty tried to step toward it again, but his father stopped him.

“Son, don’t do that.”

“Why?”

“It’s not . . .” Dr. Gelton’s voice trailed off. “Go wait for me in the car, please.”

After a futile protest, the boy sulked off, looking behind him every few steps as if hoping someone would call him back.

Dr. Gelton stood there, staring off toward the road, his hands crammed into his front pockets of his windbreaker. “Take a closer look?” George asked as he knelt down to examine the contents of the bag. Dr. Gelton didn’t answer. George found this slightly unnerving as the good doctor was

never one to succumb to squeamish fits. He knows, George thought. He knows what it is.

The thing gazed dead and pitiless up at George, seeing nothing. Its mouth was closed. "I hate to press you, Doc, but if you had to guess—"

"I told you, George, most likely a cat," Dr. Gelton said. George could tell the doctor didn't want to look at it anymore and could see his eyes going everywhere but at the bag. Went to school with bodies and guts and fetal pigs and he can't look at it. That came as a surprise to George who'd served in a war, who had seen army medics try to sew up mangled flesh that looked like Hamburger Helper.

"We'll get it to Casper then," George said. "They got the tools there just in case."

The tiny body was removed and taken to the county morgue, 25 miles away, riding in the back seat of George's car. He had placed it in a small cooler chest and with every turn or bump, he could hear it slopping and sloshing behind him, hitting one side of the cooler, then the other. Slop. Slop. Slop. Though the body was sealed up, the smell wafted throughout the car, a putrid odor, one that seeped in to everything around it, clung to the upholstery. After all he'd seen in Vietnam, he'd never gotten used to the smell of death. When Margene, the owner of High Style, Riverton's ladies parlor, called to complain about a strange smell emanating from somewhere inside the shop, George recognized the odor the minute he stepped inside. After checking two of the crawl spaces, he'd found a dead squirrel rotting in the insulation.

George read somewhere that the smell of something could evoke stronger memories than the other four senses being that your nose led right up to your brain and all, but the stench of decay brought on the types of memories that George tried to put behind him.

When he got to a stop sign, George pulled out his handkerchief and held it up to his nose. He inhaled deeply, searching for a scent that would give him a moment's reprieve—laundry detergent, starch, the bacon he'd tucked inside that morning when he couldn't eat breakfast with Gloria. A trip that should have taken 30 minutes took George 15.

Rumors spread quickly through Riverton. A body had been found in the lake—a lake that had been losing water rapidly for the last three years. Many things had been uncovered in Riverton Lake since it began to drain: old fishing lures, tangled fishing line, shoes, beer bottles, empty packets of cigarettes, plastic drinking cups, a lady's underwire bra. Fish that were trapped in shallow pools were found basking dead in the hot summer sun and nearby residents occasionally complained about the releasing of mold spores that stirred up some local allergies.

One of those liberal protestors from Casper's west end chained himself to what used to be a functioning boat dock in protest against the lake's draining. "The bald eagles will lose a source of food!" he exclaimed. A freckled-faced young man from the local high school interviewed him for the *Wolverine Chronicle*. When the camera crews didn't arrive and the state wildlife ranger explained that there was nothing he could do to make the rain fall (aside from coaxing the local Shoshone tribe into performing a rain dance), the protestor unchained himself and returned to the city.

Geology groups made trips from various nearby universities. High school teachers brought classes to observe the ecological impact. Fishermen still visited in their small, aluminum boats with their neon pink jigs and their orange tackle boxes. Riverton Lake drudged in, revealing more and more of its hidden treasures. Two years after the lake began dwindling, they even found an old car, a Chevy Chevelle, sitting rusted and hollow like a burnt-up building. There was nothing inside. Even the VIN number had been welded off.

Nothing, however, could prepare the town for the discovery of a body. The townspeople immediately began to buzz with ideas. To Scotty Gelton it was definitely an alien (probably a hybrid of some kind that couldn't exist in Earth's atmosphere) and he had convinced half of the 6th grade of this as well.

Calls at the county animal shelter went up that first day, people calling about their missing pets. Ronnie Singer, owner of the town's auto shop, caught George outside the coffee shop and handed him a picture of his fif-

teen year old cat, Rufus. “It’s a long shot, I know, and I have no idea how he might have gotten that far out of the city, but cats are remarkable creatures, George. I once heard of a family that moved from California to Chicago and that cat went all the way back home. They say it took him 12 weeks. Can you imagine?”

To most of Riverton, it *was* a baby: aborted, stillborn or premature and discarded. Either way, it was unwanted. They even named it, the thing, named it Baby Faye after the baby with the baboon heart.

That Friday, George left work early. His peaceful home, tucked into the hillside of a small mountain amid juniper trees and sage brush, away from Riverton by a few miles, sounded as good as the ice cold lime-aid sitting in the back of the fridge.

“Have you heard anything about Baby Faye?” his wife, Gloria, asked. She stood in the kitchen and called out just as George was settling into his favorite reclining chair—the chair with the duct tape over the holes in the arms, and the footrest that didn’t quite go all the way down when he stood up.

“Don’t call it that,” George said, shaking the dents out of the paper then folding it neatly down the center before he began reading. When George was growing up, his father liked a quiet table during meals. No talking, unless George’s father initiated conversation. No jokes, no funny anecdotes, no slurping the soup. Just eating. Even the 30 minutes leading up to dinner was quiet time in George’s father’s house.

“Why not? The town calls it that.”

“It doesn’t have a name,” George said.

“Well, maybe its *mother—and I use the term *mother* loosely—didn’t give it a name, but it has a name. In heaven, in the eyes of God, she has a name.”

“We don’t even know if it’s a she,” George said.

“It might be a she.”

“Honey, please stop.”

“I’m just saying.”

“Then say it somewhere else,” George snapped. He stood up, tossed his paper down and left her standing in the kitchen with a wooden spoon in her hand, mid-stir, the beef stroganoff boiling in big plops on the stove.

George walked out back and pulled a plastic Ziploc bag from inside one of the bigger birdhouses. He opened it and fished out a pack of cigarettes and a matchbook. He took a long draw, held it in, shut his eyes then exhaled. Gloria should know better. There’s no way she could understand what it was like answering Gelton’s 911 call—arriving at Riverton Lake and seeing the Doc standing there over a black trash bag. George had expected to see a dead animal of some kind but deep down he knew that when he looked inside that plastic bag, it might be a human or part of one. It certainly looked human to him, but he had never seen such a thing—a baby in a bag like that.

This wasn’t some trivial piece of tabloid fodder for the local news. This was a real thing, a real living thing at one time—maybe alive only for a short while, or in the mother’s belly, but alive nonetheless. It wasn’t that George hadn’t seen a dead child before. He watched a kid walk over a mine once. Pieces of flesh had dropped down on him in burnt chunks. People had no right to sit around a television set and watch that kind of thing, biting their fingernails and chewing on popcorn. He never understood motorists slowing down to look at a bad car accident. He’d seen plenty of those on the job, especially when the deer would get thick and the hotshots from Denver would speed down the freeway like they were the only thing alive on the road.

He knew Gloria didn’t mean to be so flippant about it, so reeled in by town gossip. Could be she was worried about him, thought he’d pick up one of his bad habits again. He’d quit the liquor a year after coming home from Vietnam. Took him that long to realize that the only thing alcohol did for him was turn him into a stupid, slobbering drunk. It might have numbed things for a time. At the very least it took away the smell of the war (at least in his mind). Gloria had gone to the local community center, acquired a 12-step book and told him to get to a meeting or get out. It took him a few tries. He’d get a few months sober then slip, thinking he had it

all under control. Fortunately, Gloria stayed with him long enough for him to get it right. As thankful as he was that she'd stuck it out, he knew lots of vets who never crawled out of that hole.

George turned and watched Gloria through the window. She was muttering something over the stovetop, one hand in the air making gestures as if she was practicing what she might say to him the moment he went back inside.

He smiled, despite himself. She was old. They both were, but they aged well—gracefully and without much trouble or fanfare. It was the way he had always wanted it, and he couldn't imagine wanting it with anyone else but Gloria. They met in 1971, on the 4th of July. She stood on the street corner, watching the parade pass by, pretty in a pink sundress with long, straight blonde hair that was pushed back with a plastic-daisy headband. All she had to do was turn and catch his eye, make an impression, make a moment. And that's exactly what she did, out of the blue like that.

Now, she stood in the kitchen, peering out into the back yard every now and then to see what George was doing. He usually took pains to hide the smoking from her, but tonight he lacked the energy to play that game. Baby Faye. The eyes, if only he hadn't looked so long at the eyes.

George watched the sun set and took note of the night noises as they began to settle: the owl hoots; the trill of the black-crowned night heron. A robin was readying her nest, plucking small, dry twigs from Gloria's garden and delivering them dutifully to her nook in a nearby tree. Lost in thought, he was startled by a soft hand on his shoulder.

"Red handed," Gloria said to her. She took the lit cigarette from between his fingers and took a puff herself, blowing up into the air with the grace of a 1920s movie star. It was intentional and lovely the way she flashed him that winning smile.

"You obviously never count these things, do you," she said, peeking inside the pack that he held in his hand. She smiled and took another drag. "It upsets me, too," she said after a few long moments. "It may not look like

it does, but it upsets me."

"Have you ever wondered?" he asked.

"What?" She waited for an answer. "A baby you mean? Sometimes."

"Enough to be mad about it?"

"Mad? No, George. When a woman goes and puts her baby in a lake it makes me glad we never did the child thing." Gloria untied the back of her apron and pulled it off. "Come in when you're done," she said.

Later that night, while George sat in bed reading one of his hunting magazines, Gloria emerged from the bathroom in her long, peach-colored nightgown. He set the magazine aside and lifted the sheets for her, helping her climb in and curl up to him. She put her head on his shoulder and sank in. His rough hand went across her silk-covered back and down to her legs. He loved the long gown because there was more to pull, to lift, to bunch up and squeeze.

In the early hours, near 2 a.m., he woke to her crying. He didn't move, didn't try to turn and comfort her, to gather her up in his arms. Thirty years sober and still she worried. Or, maybe she'd been dreaming about the babies they didn't have, or babies in bags chucked out a window by some prom queen who never knew she had a baby in her. Thirty minutes passed and Gloria fell asleep again. George lay there, listening to the steady tempo of her breathing. He closed his eyes and tried to remember the scent of liquor: tequila, rum, the cheap whiskey blend he'd buy on sale at the old liquor mart. Instead, all he could smell was the inside of Margene's beauty shop.

George wasn't surprised at how the good folk of Riverton were responding to the event. The first few days after the discovery, the town was in a perpetual state of untamed speculation and information gathering. What was it? How big? How rotten? How old? Was it picked apart? What did the bag look like? Was there an umbilical cord? A hospital tag? By the end of the week, rumors were running wild and many were casting accusatory glances toward anyone, any *woman*,

who might have been responsible for the thing's demise. Maybe she was young. Maybe she was older and had an affair with one of Riverton's married men. Maybe she was from Casper or one of those loose Greenies from Denver who thought their withering lake would make a good place for baby-dumping.

The high school held an emergency PTA meeting. Mothers and fathers stood in protest. "It wasn't *my daughter, that's for sure! She's a good girl!"

"Well, this would have never happened if we handed out condoms!" another couple protested.

"What we need is better sex education!"

"More prayer in school!"

As George walked the streets, mothers clung a little more tightly to their children; wives pressed closer to their husbands; preteen girls spoke in hushed whispers outside the drugstore, their young eyes round in awe . . . or disgust.

George was walking down 1st when he passed Scott Gelton. "Wanna buy a button, George?" the boy asked, grabbing one out of his pack. "Riverton, Home of the Hybrid" was written across a big, green alien head. George took the button and examined it. "Fifteen cents, or two for a quarter. I got my button maker off the internet. Works great! Already paid for itself. Everyone at the barber shop's bought one."

"Not today." George mustered up a thin smile and gave the boy a pat on the shoulder.

George arrived at work and was promptly pulled into a meeting. He sat at a round table with the sheriff and two other deputies, all waiting to hear the latest news on Baby Faye.

"Report came in," the sheriff said, tossing Xeroxed copies to everyone present. "We have a dead baby, a girl baby. Fairly recent, going by what the coroner said."

George took his copy and flipped through the packet. Inside, he found a copy of a picture the coroner had taken of the body. George's right hand began to tremble. He adjusted his arm, thinking he'd put too much pressure

on a damaged nerve in his elbow. Suddenly, he was aware of the eyes on him. He clenched his hand, tried to steady himself.

"George?" the sheriff called.

"Yes?" He looked the sheriff in the eye. George was an old man, on the verge of retirement. He'd never wanted the stress of a higher ranking position—too much with the meetings, the politics, maneuvering through an obstacle course of red tape—take your pick. Now, he felt like the sorry old dog at the table, the one who should have been put down already, the one they'd kept around because he'd grown too pathetic.

"I got to go make sure the site's taped off right," George said. "Don't want people trampling all over the evidence."

When George got to the lake, he saw hundreds of flowers surrounding the site: daisies, carnations, white roses, lilies. There were at least a dozen stuffed animals—some crammed into plastic wrap, others sitting exposed, damp and dirty. A giant poster board was propped up against a makeshift wooden stand. The words "Baby Faye" were written in pink marker. Images of winged babies were pasted on the edges. Jesus candles, half-melted, surrounded the site. There were cards, letters, and as sure as George drew breath, a picture of Ronnie Singer's cat, Rufus, tucked in the folds of a tulip bouquet.

The Do-Not-Cross tape had been trampled and was now half-buried in the wet dirt. They should have sent someone down sooner, someone to watch the site, George thought. "Not a lot of protocol in place for a dead cat, I guess," George muttered, grabbing the picture of Rufus and staring at it. The creature sat up straight, proud and regal—all white save for a touch of gray on the tip of one ear. George turned the photograph over and read.

*Your favorite chair is vacant now,
No eager sounds to greet me.
No softly padded paws to run
Ecstatic to meet me.*

The love for Baby Faye radiated from the center of the shrine--the cards, the words of condolences, the outpouring of grief. He couldn't see the spot where he found her, but he knew it was there, that indentation that was left after he peeled the plastic bag off the wet dirt. The body, a baby's body, once lay there. Maybe it was alive when it went in. Maybe it was dead and then tossed away. Maybe the mother was one of those girls who never knew she was pregnant—even though her stomach kept growing and growing and she had the baby in the bathroom, then wrapped it up in a wad of paper towels and brought it here. George didn't know. All he could think about was Gloria.

George paused before opening the front door to his house. Gloria would be inside, waiting for the news, waiting to hear what George had learned. The screen door let out groan and he stepped in. "Gloria?" he called. When he heard no answer, he went to the kitchen and pulled out the pitcher of lime-aid. *Best while you have it, use your breath, there is no drinking after death.* The rhyme always entered his head whenever he poured himself a drink, any drink. One of the boys he'd met in the war used to say it, a young, prim kid from Connecticut who'd pinch his nose together while he drank a shot.

He took a slow draw from his lime-aid, savoring the tartness on his tongue for a few seconds before swallowing it down. It was then he happened to glance out of the back window to see Gloria on the bench near the birdhouse. She had her legs crossed and was kind of hunched over with one of her elbows resting on her knee. Her other hand held one of George's cigarettes. She put it to her mouth and sucked in. George imaged the taste of the tobacco, the small rush of nicotine, and licked his lips.

"Gloria," he called, tapping on the window to get her attention. She started a little, looked up at him and wiped something off one of her cheeks. Had she been crying? George wondered. George waved at her then receded into the living room to get comfortable in his old chair before she started dinner.

A few minutes later he heard the back screen door open then shut. "I was thinking Chinese tonight," Gloria said. Riverton didn't have a Chinese restaurant. It meant driving to Casper. "Maybe a show after?"

"It's been a long day," George said.

"Alright," she told him. She walked up behind him and put a hand on his shoulder. He could smell the tobacco on her and it made him want to go out back to have a smoke himself. "You could catch a meeting then?" she asked.

"I go Sundays," George said. "You know that."

"Well, I figured with all the baby stuff going on, maybe you'd want another this week."

George dropped the top of his newspaper and stared at the fireplace. "I'm fine," he said. It came out a little sharper than he'd meant. It's not that he was against another 12-step meeting for the week, but not right then. He was reading his paper, enjoying his lime-aid, looking forward to a home-made dinner.

Gloria receded into the kitchen. "I'll heat up some leftovers," she said. George heard her pulling the Tupperware out of the fridge, heard the beep of the microwave buttons. When the timer went off, George got up out of his chair and sat at the kitchen table with Gloria, an array of steaming plastic containers between them: chicken and dumplings from a few nights ago, spaghetti from the other day, some of Gloria's leftover ginger carrots. For the first time in a long time, George ate in silence. He couldn't say, one way or another, whether he was happy about that.

George patrolled First Street as he always did around noon. His presence was more a fixture than anything else, like the wooden Indian in Old Man Whitney's storefront. There was a car accident every now and then that he'd been called to, but most of that was handled by the highway patrol. Riverton had to deal with the occasional troubled teen that grew up thinking he was too big for a small Wyoming town. Yet, it was usually those kids who ended up coming back after running off to see the big world and only getting as far as Denver. There

were the property grievances at times or the occasional rancher accused of shooting someone's dog when it got too friendly with the neighbor's sheep. George was even called to the Broken Spoke now and then, a bucket of a bar on the edge of town, but one of the younger deputies usually handled those. George was too old to be manhandling an unruly patron, or dodging wild, drunken swings. He liked his job that way, though he got the feeling that the boys at the station wished he would retire. Mostly, he did paper-work now, and handled duties inside.

When Dr. Gelton had called to report *something at the lake, George had been on his way to work, was just about to reach the southern tip of the water. He told dispatch he'd stop to check it out, thinking the doctor had stumbled upon a passed-out, hung-over teenager lying face down on the beach or that a bear had gotten into one of the trashcans. He hadn't



expected to stare down at what might have been a baby—now confirmed—stuck inside a bag like duct tape, curled in like a rotting parenthesis.

And the townspeople, well they wouldn't let up. George used to enjoy walking down the main streets, past the mom and pop stores, giving a restrained smile and a curt nod. He'd mastered the nod. It was like his muscles knew what to do even if he got distracted or felt poorly on a particular day.

"Have you heard anything yet?" someone would say. George couldn't even look at the Riverton people now. He just kept moving, head down, drudging along the pavement like he was still in Vietnam, on the road toward LZ Pony, watching the ground for mines.

"Hey George, what's the word?"

"They catch that baby killer yet, George?"

Sometimes, if they stood right in his way, he'd pause and give a brief answer, "The sheriff will release a statement when it's time."

No answer seemed to soothe them, but it was all he had.

At the end of the day, he made the quiet trek home. The lights were on inside the house and when he reached the doorstep, he could smell chicken roasting in the oven. When he walked in the kitchen, he saw Gloria at the table, humming to herself, kneading a pile of dough. He thought about sneaking up behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist, kissing her neck just below the hairline. Instead, he tapped on the doorframe with his knuckles.

"Any news?" she asked.

"Nothing yet," he lied. He couldn't bring himself to tell her. He didn't want to be the one to say it, to say those words: it was a baby, a real baby. Not today. Just one more day. She could learn about it tomorrow. He could tell her that he took a few extra patrols near the bar, that he'd actually gone inside the liquor store to buy a scratch-off ticket. He could tell her about Scotty's buttons and how the sight of them made George want to punch a wall or break something with his bare hands.

He kissed her on the cheek then ventured out to the back yard, stick-

ing his hand inside the birdhouse and pulling out his pack of smokes. He stepped back, then lit his last cigarette. The robin's egg had hatched that day. He could hear the hungry squabbles from the nest. The robin had gone all out, dried twigs, thread and stuffing from the rotting old lawn chair, part of an old straw.

Last year, one of the babies fell out of the nest and Gloria had picked it up, whispered to it and climbed the stepladder to return it. George found all the babies dead two days later. He hadn't the heart to tell Gloria that her human smell tainted the batch, that the mother had left them in that tree to die. He removed their tiny bodies and buried them in the garden beneath the raspberry bushes.

Human smell. That's what killed those birds, a smell that overtook the bird's sensibilities, overtook the bird's natural instincts to feed its young and to build that nest. Baby Faye hadn't smelled anything like a human and George wondered, briefly, if it ever had.

For more of Stephanie Train's fiction, essays and reviews, visit www.stephanietrain.com.



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ENSUING CHAPTERS

September Book Releases

Vince Darcangelo

Stop a moment. Breathe. Deeper now. Sure, it's still north of 90 in Colorado, but as the days die quicker, a liminal chill fills the soul. For my money, you can keep summer and winter. But autumn...

The overdone cliché in book reviewing is the summer reading list. I'm not sure who started it, or who all these people are reading at the beach, but I'm certainly as guilty as the rest. But truly, the best time to indulge in the written word is autumn, with its cooler climes, longer nights and olfactory-fueled melancholia.

And aren't books always better when paired with a hot mug of tea?

Some of my favorite September/October memories are of spending Friday nights among the stacks at the Boulder Book Store. As a youth, my friend and I would drive a half hour from our book-deprived hometown in Pennsylvania to

Twice-Loved Books in Youngstown, Ohio. And some of the best autumn reading I've acquired at Denver's Tattered Cover, or the Poudre Library District in Fort Collins.

As an avid reader of horror, I often find my favorite books marginalized on the shelves—except during the fall. For two months, the storefront displays boast the books that make my year-round reading list.

You will find plenty of horror previewed here at Ensuing Chapters, but there's a wealth of diverse autumn gold coming your way in the following weeks.

Sept. 3

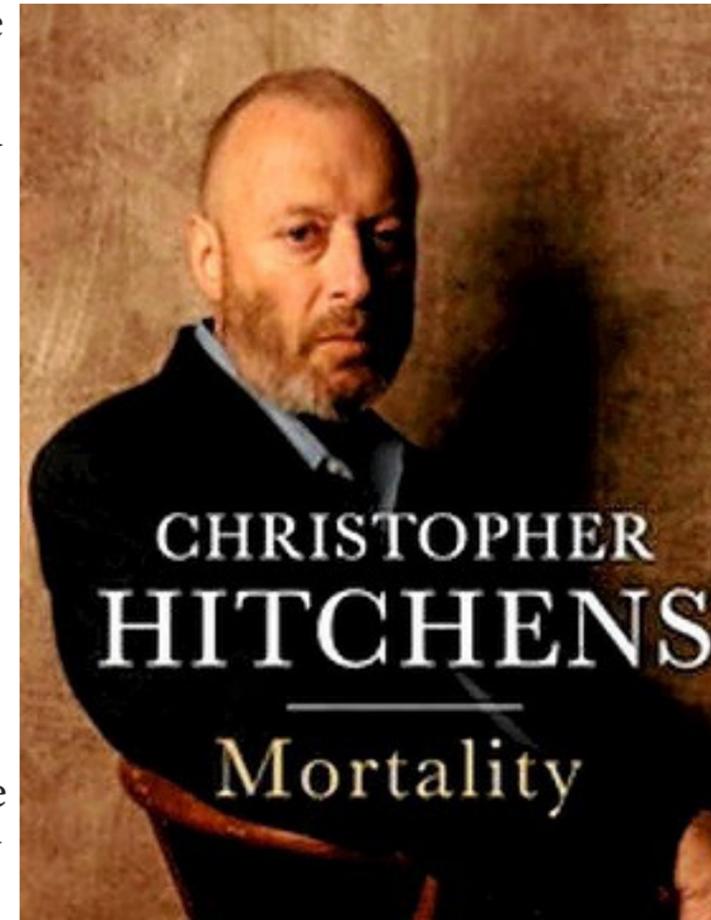
Last year, we lost one of the great journalists of our time, and one of my personal heroes, **Christopher Hitchens**. This champion of reason was known for his bold reporting on war and religion, and

was equally brave in the face of cancer. Published on Sept. 4, *Mortality* will appeal to Hitch's loyal readers, but is also of interest to anyone who's lost someone to cancer (e.g. nearly everyone).

Few writers have captured the depth and beauty of the natural world like transcendentalist writer **Henry David Thoreau**. His new book—yes, new book—*October, or Autumnal Tints*, is a lecture he gave near the end of his life. He envisioned it one day being released in print with accompanying illustrations.

That day was Sept. 3.

His tribute to the greatest of all months, penned in the autumn of his own life, reframes the changing colors and dying leaves as symbols of maturity rather than decay. Reading Thoreau is always a treat. Reading his musings on autumn in au-



tumn seems like paradise.

In the song "Little Too Clean," Soul Asylum's Dave Pirner croons, "Don't you know dirt will find you/ and dirt reminds you/ that dirt will always be there." It's the song that keeps looping in my head while reading the jacket of **Moises**

Velasquez-Manoff's new book, *An Epidemic of Absence: A New Way of Understanding Allergies and Auto-immune Diseases*.

Exploring one of the big issues of our time, science writer Velasquez-Manoff uncovers a shocking rise in food allergies and autoimmune disorders, such as Celiac and type-1 diabetes, and equally shocking treatments that rely on parasites rather than pharmaceuticals. One of the unexpected contributors to our sickness, he finds, is that sanitation and antibiotics have altered our in-

AN EPIDEMIC OF ABSENCE

A New Way of
Understanding
Allergies
and Autoimmune
Diseases



MOISES VELASQUEZ-MANOFF

ner ecologies to the point that we lack the organisms that keep us in check.

We have become a little too clean—or maybe even a lot too clean.

Sept. 10

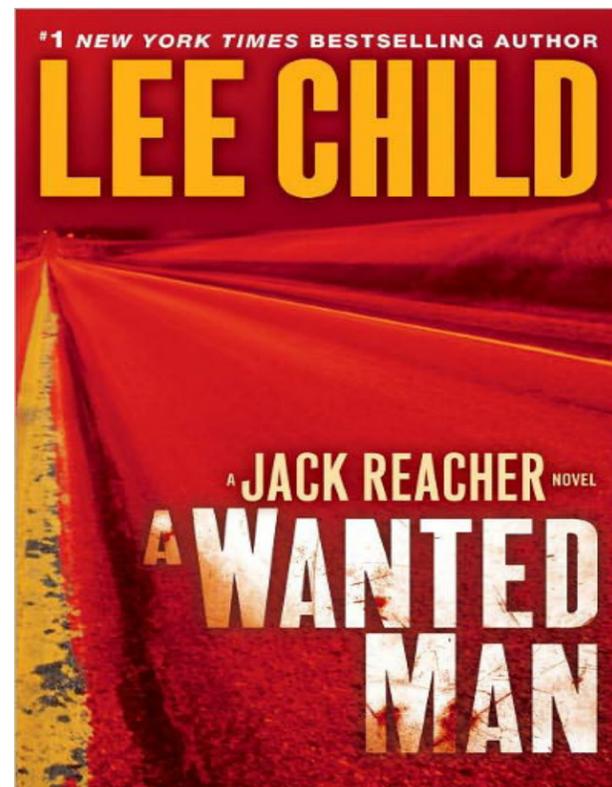
What do we know about **Lee Child**'s compelling protagonist, Jack Reacher? He likes travel, he's a sharpshooter with a wicked double-tap, and no matter where he roams, he always ends up in the same place: trouble.

Celebrating the 17th installment

of the Jack Reacher series, plus related short stories (personal fave: "James Penney's New Identity"), Child has climbed from the crime writing underground to the top of the best-seller list. He is likely to summit once again with the release of *A Wanted Man* on Sept. 11.

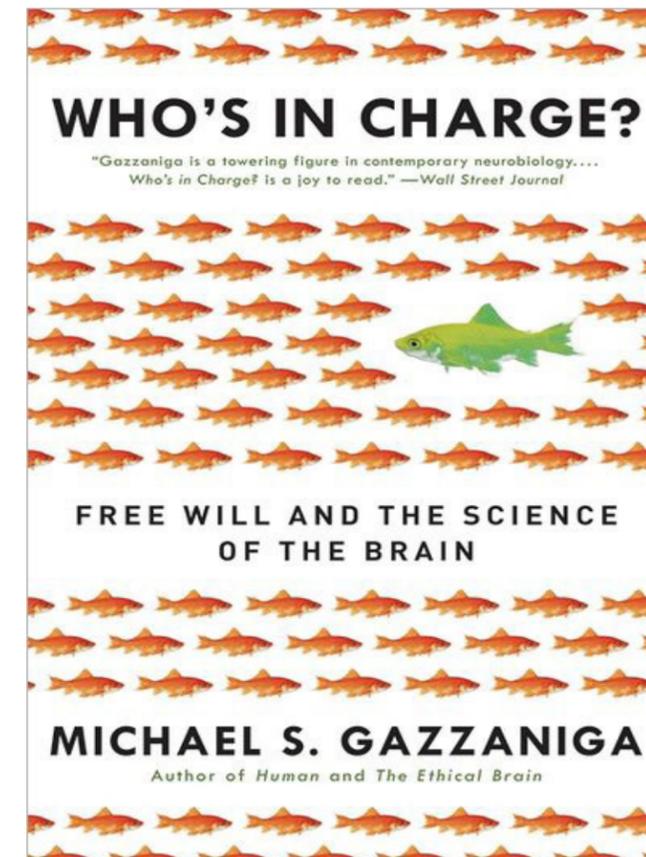
I am an avid reader of Child's books. I love the Jack Reacher franchise. But when the peripatetic maverick hits the big screen, I hate that it will be Tom Cruise (boo, hiss) portraying Reacher.

Who's really writing this book blurb? I thought it was me, but one might want to reconsider after reading **Michael S. Gazzaniga's** *Who's in*



Charge?: Free Will and the Science of the Brain. Gazzaniga surveys the science, psychology and ethics at work in our thoughts and behaviors.

Who's in Charge? is a work of great importance as breakthroughs in neuroscience have revealed great-



er complexities than ever imagined at work in the brain. And launched the next great frontier of philosophical inquiry.

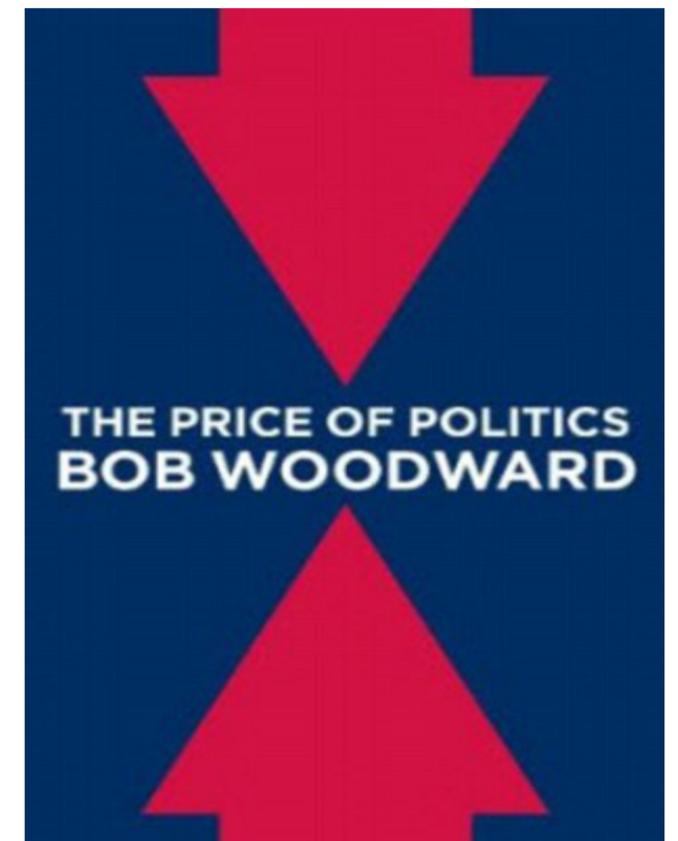
Published last year, the paperback reprint hits shelves Sept. 11.

Legendary journalist **Bob Woodward** goes from Deep Throat

to Deep Gridlock in *The Price of Politics*, his 17th book. In this detailed account, Woodward chronicles Washington's attempts to rescue the economy these past few years.

Talk about the ideal primer to the madness of election season. For the more devout political readers (and I know a few of you), Woodward's new book is political porn to get you in the mood as we steamroll toward November.

We'll preview other September releases in the coming weeks. Please follow [Ensnuing Chapters](#) to receive our weekly previews, reviews and interviews.



Thanks to all the awesome writers and gratitude to all our readers. We hope you enjoyed the debut issue of Transgress. For updates throughout the month, visit <http://www.transgressmagazine.com>, <http://ensuingchapters.wordpress.com> or the personal sites of our contributors:

www.dalebridges.org

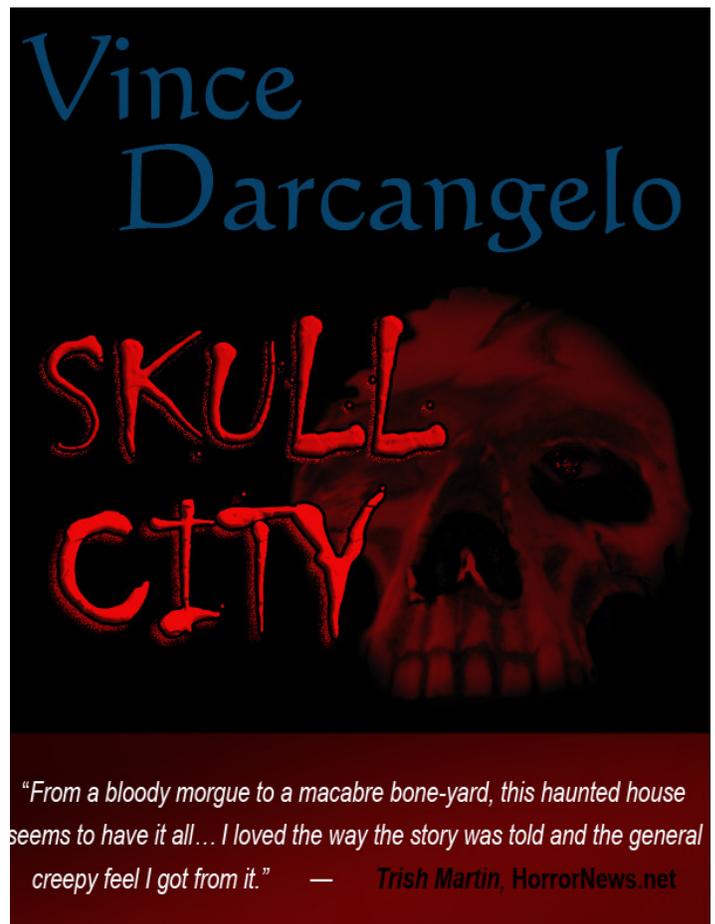
www.stephanietrain.com

www.kunc.org/people/grace-hood
lafayettepark.wordpress.com

www.vincedarcangelo.com

We also produce stand-alone ebooks from time to time, most recently the short story “Skull City.” To download this story for free, visit [Smash Words](#).

Issue #4 comes out in October. Until then, happy reading.



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