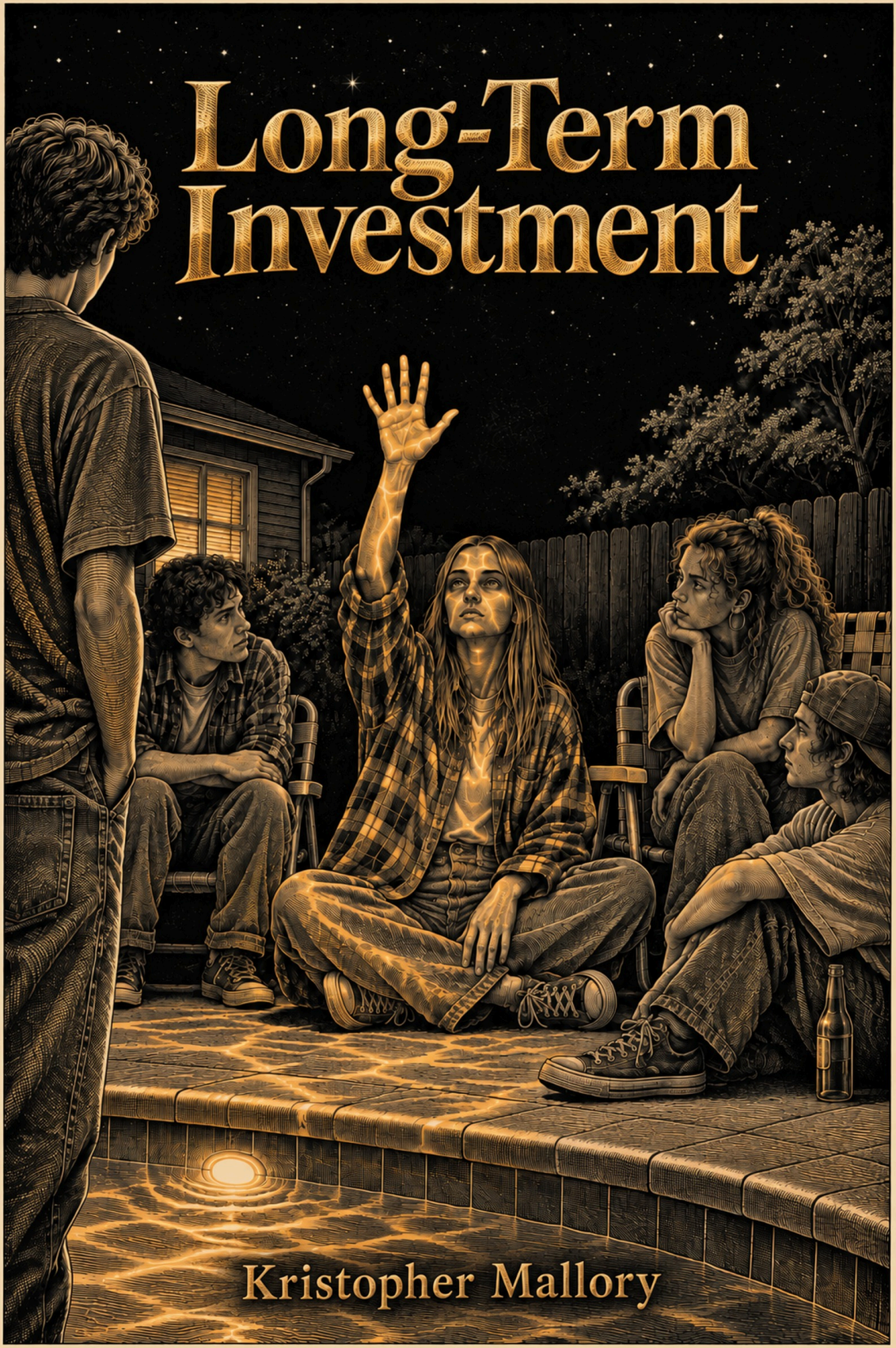

Long-Term Investment
Kristopher Mallory

Long-Term Investment

by

Kristopher Mallory

Long-Term Investment

A Sammy Fowler Story

Copyright



www.StealthFiction.com

Long-Term Investment

eBook Edition
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Other Releases by Kristopher Mallory

Road Trip Down A Dark Memory Lane

She's Not Human

Universal Transmission

The Little Old Lady

The Price To See The Dead

Attempted

A Gift Of Bone

Payphone

What I've Learned of the GPS Glitch

The Diary

Ruined Sheets

The Scarecrow Corpse

What People Are Saying about Kris's Stories

I Know What They Are:

"Brilliant. Everything came together at the end and I got chills as I finished it. Well done." – *Asaroki*

The Death Agreement:

"This is award winning writing material right here. Big props to Kristopher Mallory." – *thequietintrovert*

The Special Christmas Ornaments of Mr. Everett:

"Great read, very well-written, and I totally believe this." – *NoobZeke*

Master Stargazer:

"A short but excellent sci-fi story. The ending is unpredictable but it logically makes sense." – *Luci*

Special Thanks

For the peace I hope you're resting in.

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Long-Term Investment

“Please allow me to introduce myself, I’m a man of wealth and taste.”

~ The Rolling Stones, Sympathy for the Devil

Kristi Kurtis crosses my mind from time to time, a passing thought of an old friend. But things have been much different lately; I'm thinking about her more and more. Last night, I couldn't get her face out of my head, and the demons wouldn't stop whispering her name.

++++

I looked her up and smiled at the Facebook page full of birthday wishes from the day prior.

"No wonder," I said to myself, guessing my subconscious must have recalled her birthday.

How long had it been since the last we spoke? Over a decade? I had to be twenty-one or twenty-two when we ran into each other at that pizza joint, me holding the hand of my toddler son, her hands resting on her very pregnant stomach.

I don't remember all the conversation, but I remember enough.

"Wow, look at you!" I said, leaning in for a hug.

"You too! God, it's been forever." Kristi's eyes were dark and tired, but her face glowed. She smiled and held up her hand, flashing a diamond engagement ring.

"Congratulations."

"Thank you! And who's this? May I ask?" She knelt down in front of my son.

He smirked and covered his eyes.

"He's shy."

"Little stinker," she teased him. "You guys, want to join me for lunch?"

"What do you say, bud?"

He nodded.

I shrugged. "All right, let's get a table."

We ate pizza and chatted about old friends and old enemies and all the drunken teenage house parties at her place. I quietly joked about her father nearly catching her sister and me in the shower. She reminded me about stealing my clothes when we were all skinny-dipping. I reminded her that was okay because I stole her dress and wore it for the rest of the night.

After our laughter had died, she sighed and looked at me thoughtfully. “Sammy, this might sound stupid but…”

I raised an eyebrow. “What’s up?”

She clenched her jaw and shook her head. “Nothing, forget it.”

I laughed. “No way! Tell me.”

“Seriously, never mind. You probably wouldn’t remember.”

“This’s gonna be good. What?”

She clicked her tongue. “The time I sold you… something. Remember?”

I grinned. “Of course, I remember! I’m surprised you do.”

“It’s stupid.”

“I know, I know. I was an idiot at sixteen.”

“No, not you. I think about that night all the time.”

“Didn’t Erik end up with alcohol poisoning?”

“Yeah. I haven’t seen him in a while. How’s he doing?”

“Jail. Violation of probation.”

“Figures. So, do you still have it?”

“Of course, dude. I keep it in a box of old photos and other things.”

“Lemme have it?”

“No way,” I laughed. “I told you I was making a long-term investment. It will be worth a fortune one day.”

“Ass.” She smiled.

I smiled back. “Yup.”

Kristi and I made plans to meet up again, plans that were completely forgotten about by the end of the week. That’s how it goes, I guess. Over time, a job became a career, a girlfriend became a wife, one kid became two, and Kristi became another friend with whom I’d lost touch.

I replayed our last meeting over and over while stalking her profile photos. She seemed so happy: smiling at a baby shower, smiling at a wedding, smiling in a hospital bed with her baby in her arms. The comments on each picture were a mixture of *‘congratulations’* and *‘miss you’s’* and *‘love you’s.’* From then on, all the photos were of her and her

daughter together, still smiling, still happy. The blonde-haired baby girl slowly grew before my eyes. The final picture showed her in front of a pastel pink birthday cake adorned with six red candles. I stared at the last picture for a long time, taken in by the tired sadness in Kristi's eyes.

After more than a few moments' hesitation, I clicked the *add friend* link, worrying Kristi might accept the invite.

Though the time Kristi and I had pizza together was the last we spoke, I ran into her sister a year or two later. I asked her to pass along my best to Kristi and her family, and she joked, "Oh, by the way, Kristi says she still wants you to sell her thing back or whatever."

"Pfffft." I over-exaggerated a shrug. "Nothing I can do. I made a long-term investment. Hell, it's got to be worth way more than I paid. There's no way she can afford to buy it back."

"You two are weird."

"Shut up; you love it."

"If you say so."

I hugged her goodbye and never saw her again.

Over the next few years, friends mentioned Kristi in passing. Some would joke about the thing I practically stole from her. I would always laugh and remind them I paid fair market value, knowing it would be a good, long-term investment. Sometimes I commented that I never expected the silly proposition would turn into a twenty-year running joke.

"Was it a joke?" I said to myself, looking at my lockbox full of old photos and other things. "Was it, Sammy? Did you know?"

I'm not sure. I haven't been sure in years.

When Erik first shared the rumors about Kristi, I dismissed them. There was no way she was into drugs, no way the police arrested her for smuggling. Then the story came out in the paper. She still looked like I remembered, though the hint of darkness I saw in her eyes several years back had grown into a void. I hated knowing a friend had spiraled out of control. I wished there were something I could do. I asked Erik to meet me for a drink to talk it over.

Erik sipped his beer. “Sammy, man, you don’t know her. That girl looks like an angel, but she’s deeper in the dirt than I am.”

“Hard to believe. She was always so—”

“Bullshit. Kristi’s been trouble for years. There are so many things you don’t know about that girl.”

“Like what?”

Erik tapped the bar impatiently. “Not my place to say. All I can tell you is she lost her damned mind but hid it well.”

“That I do believe.”

“Hey, remember the last pool party, how you all called an ambulance on me for no reason? It started after that.”

“Um, you were going to die, Erik. I’m pretty sure we saved your life.”

“Nah.” He laughed and took another drink.

I nodded. “I made the investment that night.”

“What?”

“Ah, don’t worry about it. You were passed out by then. And thanks for coming out, by the way.”

“Thanks for the round, Sammy.” Erik chugged the rest of his beer, then looked at me, raising his eyebrows. “Oh, right! I remember that thing. She wanted it back. Said so each time I ran into her.”

He shrugged and turned away, holding up his hand to catch the bartender’s attention. “You know, actually, I think I’ll buy my own.” He laughed. “No offense.”

I clenched my jaw, feeling the blood drain from my face.

A few weeks later, I heard Kristi made bail for the drug charges. I hoped she would find help and turn her life around. Instead, she found misery. Much of her story was pieced together from rumors and gossip, but the facts are undeniable.

2:30 PM, Kristi woke, still high on painkillers. She poured a drink right away. The house was quiet, and she thought the silence would help her focus enough to clean up a little before her husband returned home from

work. She wasn't used to a quiet house; her daughter usually made a lot of noise. Where was she?

Kristi searched room to room. Her daughter was hiding, playing games. Kristi wasn't in the mood, so she called her daughter's name again, louder, more severe. The girl still didn't come, and after Kristi had searched the last room, she ran out the front door, sure her daughter had to be playing in a friend's yard. She ran up the street, calling her name.

The next-door neighbor heard Kristi calling. She decided to check the backyard where the girl would sometimes play. Kristi's husband pulled into the driveway, home early. As he stepped out of his truck, the next-door neighbor called for him, saying his daughter was in the backyard. The police arrived a short time later. They charged Kristi with drug possession and child endangerment.

I remember the last party at Kristi's fondly. Erik and I were sitting on the pool deck, drinking liquor from the bottle. Kristi's sister sat in his lap, sucking on his neck. Kristi lay on her back, staring at the stars, humming a song. Other friends were at the house, swimming in the pool, grilling hamburgers and hot dogs, starting fights, and drinking. Lots and lots of drinking.

We talked and argued about a million things. Drunk as we all were. Eventually, the conversation turned to religion. None of us particularly cared for church life. Erik made a joke about homosexual priests, and I shared a story about not being welcome back to a teen prayer group I had attended once; apparently the pastor didn't like my questions about the loopholes of being saved.

Several people claimed to be atheists, Kristi amongst them. They argued that God didn't exist, pointing out reasons why people were stupid to believe. It seemed like a perfect time to goad them on, see if I could get a rise by playing devil's advocate and pushing a few buttons. I stood up and said they were all full of shit, that I could prove they all believed in God.

Kristi's daughter was six years old on the day her drunk and stoned mother couldn't find her. She celebrated her birthday only a few days before. All the memories leading up to the party are there for anyone to see: the pastel pink cake and red candles, the happy smiles, and the vague hint that a secret hid behind her mother's eyes. That photo is the last one that Kristi ever shared online. After that, there's nothing of Kristi or her little girl.

Erik called me the night the police charged her.

"Did you hear the latest news?"

"Yeah," I said. "Child endangerment. She was high and wasn't watching her kid. It's sad."

Erik breathed into the phone heavily, then said, "No, man. No. That was yesterday. They're upping the charges."

"What are you talking about?"

Back at Kristi's last party, I remember telling everyone I could prove they believed in God. "All it will take…" I said, grinning. "All it will take is an offer." I reached for my wallet. "I'm ready to make a long-term investment."

"Upping the charges?" I said to Erik, shocked. "She made a mistake. She needs help, not a jail cell."

"Sammy, I don't know, man. Think about it. If you were her and woke up and couldn't find your daughter, what would you do?"

"I'd…"

"Go on, say it."

I swallowed hard. "I'd make sure she wasn't out back."

"Me too. First goddamn instinct. Why is that?"

"Fuck you, Erik."

"Look, I'm not saying it's true, okay? But answer me this: how come she checked the whole house and then ran out the front door looking for her? How come by the time the neighbor found that little girl, she'd been floating face down in the pool for hours?"

"What are they charging her with?"

“Murder.”

“Murder,” I repeated.

“She’ll need more than a good lawyer. Do you still have it?”

Back at Kristi’s last party, I remember telling everyone I could give them money. We just had to negotiate how much. All I wanted was something they didn’t think was worth anything at all. “So…” I said, holding up cash. “Who here would like to sell their useless soul?”

Not surprised none of the atheists accepted my offer, I sat back down, laughing.

Then Kristi looked at me with an odd expression. She raised her hand and said, “I’ll do it.”

The judge denied bail. He sent Kristi to the county jail to await her murder trial. She had other plans.

Back at Kristi’s last party, I remember telling everyone I needed a witness for the contract. Erik watched through slitted eyes, nearly passed out on the deck with an empty bottle of whiskey in his hand. Kristi’s sister wrote that Kristi Kurtis relinquished all rights of ownership of her soul. After Kristi and I had agreed on an amount, she signed her name, then kissed the paper as a seal.

In the county jail, one of Kristi’s cellmates woke in the middle of the night to use the bathroom and screamed when she found Kristi had wrapped a sheet around her neck, hanging herself from the top bedpost, her face dark purple, tongue protruding, and eyes rolled back. The fast response of the guards, however, saved her life.

Back at Kristi’s last party, I remember the slight hesitation in her eyes as she handed me the note in exchange for the cash. “Don’t worry,” I said, folding it. “I’ll keep it safe.”

In the hospital, Kristi stayed under close suicide watch for several weeks. Of course, it was a meaningless gesture considering Kristi was in a coma, nearly brain-dead. The doctors were surprised she had survived the hanging at all. She clung to life as if waiting for something.

Back at Kristi's last party, I remember the ambulance coming to rescue Erik, who had thrown up and nearly choked to death on his vomit. Everyone left in a hurry, terrified of getting busted by the cops.

Early the next morning, as the sun rose, only Kristi and I sat alone on her couch. "Here, Sammy, you can take your money back now," she said, holding out the cash. "Just rip up that note and throw it away. Okay?"

I looked at the five-dollar bill in her hand, the five I'd given her. It would've been easy to take the money back and end the stupid game. Instead, I turned towards Kristi and said, "It's gonna cost you more than that."

"How much?"

I shrugged and closed my eyes.

"How much," she repeated, resting her head on my shoulder.

"Everything."

In the hospital, after months and months of wasting away on life support, Kristi let out a final breath.

Sometimes when I think of her, I consider releasing my claim. Might the simple gesture free her from her incarceration in purgatory? Might she be able to see her daughter again?

You may think the events that happened after the sale may be unrelated to the tragedy, but there are things you still don't know.

The moment Kristi handed over that paper, a sudden surge of power coursed through my body. Kristi felt it too. So did everyone else. Erik began to convulse, foaming at the mouth. The house shook, and everyone fled, claiming police helicopters hovered overhead. We all kept to the unspoken rule that nothing happened, and it was only a silly game.

I could've relinquished the claim at any time, but I knew what I had and kept it in case the demons I don't believe in ever come. If those beasts from hell call to claim my soul, I plan to give them Kristi's instead.

Could you give up that kind of insurance?

It's a tough decision.

++++

Kristi Kurtis crosses my mind from time to time, a passing thought of an old friend who sold me her soul as a game. I keep it inside a box of old photos and other things. Believe whatever you want about the story, but you have to admit I made a damned good long-term investment.

— Sammy Fowler

THE END.



About the Author



Born near Baltimore, Maryland, Kris has been writing short fiction since he was a kid. First sharing his ramblings on Stealth Fiction and then on Reddit, where most of his stories were posted to r/nosleep. His stories have been featured on The NoSleep Podcast, Chilling Tales for Dark Nights, Tales to Terrify, and Horror on the Rocks. The recording of The Scarecrow Corpse, read by Markiplier, has been heard hundreds of thousands of times. He lives in Melbourne, Australia, with his wife. And occasionally, he turns into a strawberry.

More stories: StealthFiction.com

What's Next?

LET ME TELL YOU HOW I LOST MY EYES

A Short Story Collection by Sammy Fowler

Coming one day. Maybe. Probably not.

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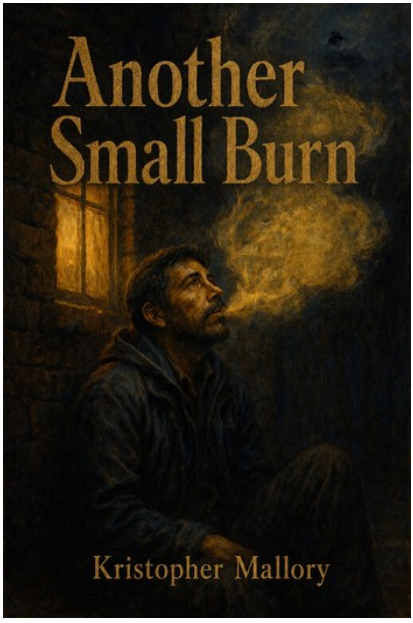
Hear It Read Aloud

Some stories are better heard in the dark.

Long-Term Investment has a complete audio narration, read by Jon, a digital voice. It runs 16 minutes and it's free: play it online, or download it as an MP3 or an audiobook with chapters.

Listen free at stealthfiction.com

More from Kristopher Mallory



ANOTHER SMALL BURN

This quiet horror short is now available on Amazon. For more information on this book, please visit Stealth Fiction.

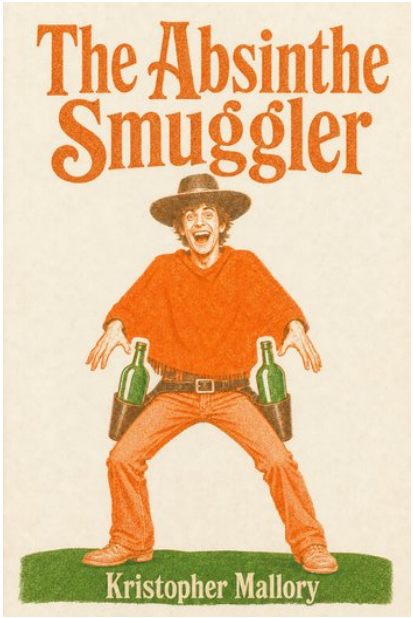
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Carlos can burn any memory into magic, the way everyone can now; the hard part is choosing which ones he can live without.

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Praise for Another Small Burn:

"That would make a fantastic Novella or novel, I was sad when it ended and wanted more." – *smoore*



THE ABSINTHE SMUGGLER

This comedy short is now available on Amazon. For more information on this book, please visit Stealth Fiction.

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A teenager on holiday in Madrid promises his friends two bottles of the green fairy, and customs turns out to be the easy part.
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THE SPECIAL CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS OF MR. EVERETT

This Christmas horror story is now available on Amazon. For more information on this book, please visit Stealth Fiction.

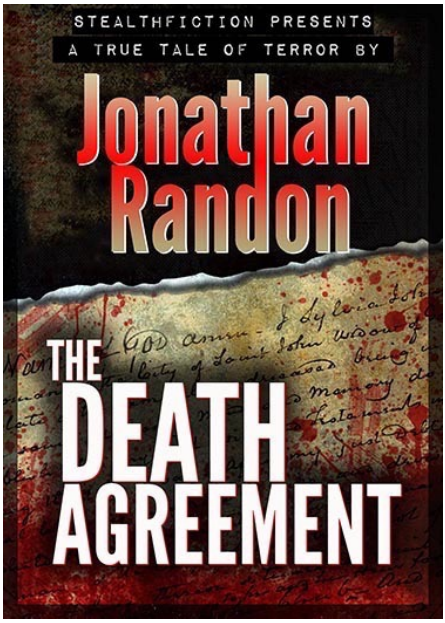
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Christmas Eve, a blizzard, and Hank agrees to sit with old Mr. Everett, twenty-two-time winner of the town's decoration contest, who insists he is not going crazy.

~~~~~

Praise for The Special Christmas Ornaments of Mr. Everett:

"Quite a story, mixing snowy Christmas magic with delightfully dark humored chills." – *leavnsoon*



THE DEATH AGREEMENT

This horror novella is now available. For more information on this book, please visit Stealth Fiction.

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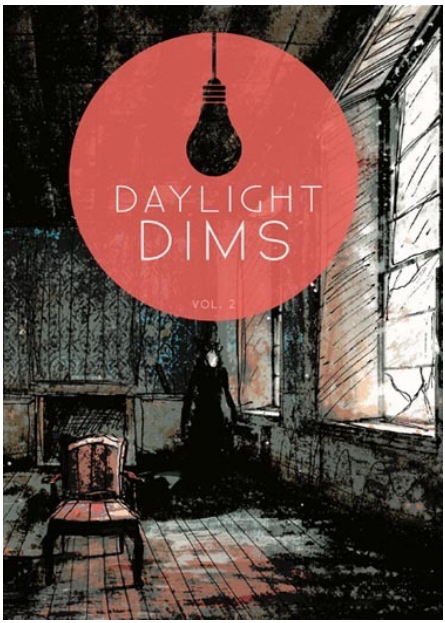
We made a pact. He lived up to his end by dying. I tried to live up to my end by following The Death Agreement.

What you will find within these pages is a true recounting of a man's life as seen through my eyes. It's almost an impossible task when some of what you see can't be real and what is real you may refuse to see… My name is Jon Randon and I'm going to tell you a story.

Praise for The Death Agreement:

"This was one of the best things I've ever read." – *GrandMoffJed*
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More from Stealth Fiction



DAYLIGHT DIMS
VOLUME TWO

This horror anthology is now available. For more information on this book, please visit the Daylight Dims website.

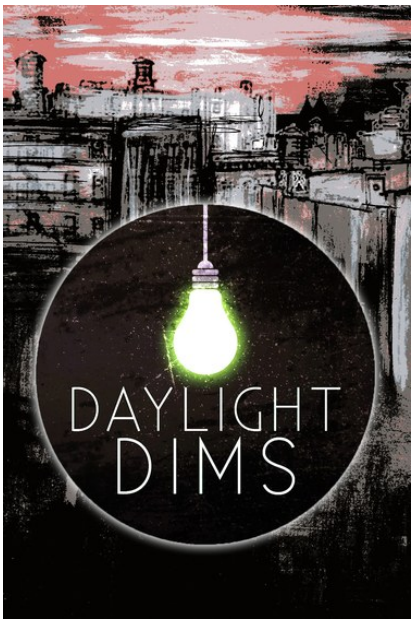
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Darkness descends again. Daylight Dims Volume Two features thirteen stories that cross the genres of surreal, dark fantasy, and heart-pounding dread. This annual horror anthology is guaranteed to twist your perception of horror. From the common, comfortable tropes to the more taboo, these handpicked tales have a literary aspect designed to showcase what true horror can be.

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Praise for Daylight Dims Vol. 2:

“This was probably one of the most entertaining collections of horror stories I've ever read. And I don't say this to suck up or to stroke any tail feathers. I was happy to have the opportunity to read through this before release, and I implore anyone on the fence about picking this up to do themselves a favor and take the plunge into the abyss. You will not be disappointed.” – *Human Gravy*



DAYLIGHT DIMS

VOLUME ONE

Second Edition — now with two new stories from the editors.

This horror anthology is now available. For more information on this book, please visit the Daylight Dims website.

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The editors chose 13 stories from over 100 premium submissions. DD contains some of the best horror around.

~~~~~

Praise for Daylight Dims:

"This is a fantastic horror anthology. All 13 stories are exquisite. The book was not what I expected initially, as I thought that it might be all vampire or werewolf tales. Not so! These are original stories from authors of the macabre. From dark fantasy and pure suspense to classic horror tales, it shows the extraordinary scope of fantastical fright fiction. The stories in this anthology are a tour de force of fear, which will haunt you, terrify you, and stay with you." – S. Mahaffey, *"neverjudge"*