THE LITTLE OLD LADY



Kristopher Mallory

The Little Old Lady

by

Kristopher Mallory

The Little Old Lady

A Ghost Story

Copyright



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The Little Old Lady

eBook Edition
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Another Small Burn

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The Special Christmas Ornaments of Mr. Everett

The Death Agreement

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"This is one of my favorites!" – *DrJamie*

The Special Christmas Ornaments of Mr. Everett:

"Wonderful. Very well written." – *Kodakaidojo*

Special Thanks

To everyone who ever helped a stranger across the street. Maybe don't.

Table of Contents

Copyright
Other Releases
What People Are Saying
Special Thanks

The Little Old Lady

About the Author
What's Next?
Hear It Read Aloud
More from Kristopher Mallory
More from Stealth Fiction

The Little Old Lady

“Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –”

~ Emily Dickinson

When people talk about the little old lady, their words often come in hushed whispers.

So much has faded from memory. It's impossible to state her age, where she came from, or when she moved to the small cottage at the edge of town.

Even her name has been lost to the years.

Most remember that she kept to herself, never bothering a soul. Some recall that during the summer months she tended her rose garden, and when winter came, she stayed inside knitting, warm by the fireplace. Others claim that she'd wave back to passing travelers, but never spoke to them, or that she'd bake cookies and leave them in a jar on her porch for the children riding bikes home from school.

One fact everyone in town can agree on is that the little old lady only left home once a week—every Sunday to attend Mass. She went, rain or shine, snow or sleet, never missing a morning service, though most days she'd arrive late.

Occasionally, someone in the congregation would happen to notice her sneak inside. They'd see her move far to the back, nodding along until Pastor McCann finished his sermon.

After final prayers, she'd make the sign of the cross over her chest, then begin her long walk back home, limping slowly to the corner where Highway 451 cut through the center of town, intersecting the church at 20 8th Avenue. Hunched over her cane, she'd smile at the cars zooming left and right and wait patiently for the light to change.

But when it became safe to cross, her smile would fade. She'd continue to stand in the same spot, only shaking her head at the white pedestrian lines painted on the cracked asphalt. If anyone ever approached her, she'd look at them with pleading wide eyes and trembling lips.

She would never cross alone, but she never asked for help either, instead choosing to wait for a kind heart to appear. Some mornings, the traffic light would turn and turn and turn again. During those times when

no one was around, or no one would offer, she'd remain unmoved for hours.

Eventually, someone would take pity and ask the question. With a whispered thanks, she'd accept the arm of her champion, allowing them to lead her to the other side.

And so it went, week after week, year after year.

One cold December Sunday, Christopher Charon, ten years old, spied the little old lady as she left the church, trekking into the snow flurry. He watched as several people quick-stepped across the slick, icy road. One by one, they abandoned her at the intersection until she was left alone.

Chris could tell she was afraid. In that instant, he decided he was big enough to assist. In fact, it was his duty as a scout; the good deed would even earn a merit badge. Without another thought, he let go of his mother's hand and rushed away, leaving his parents strolling lazily behind his footprints left in the few inches of snow.

As Chris ran towards a new crowd forming at the intersection, his father called him back, but he ignored the summons, pretending he hadn't heard. Instead, he slowed his pace, expecting to be called back once again. He wanted to help but knew not to press his luck too far. When the order did not come, he turned to see his mother had stopped near the corner of the church, and his father shifted from foot to foot, caught in a deep, animated conversation with Pastor McCann.

Chris shrugged and continued deeper into the crowd. After squeezing through to the front, he stopped next to the little old lady and watched her from the corner of his eye, building up the courage to speak.

She wore a bright yellow scarf patterned with red and white swirls that reminded Chris of dinner mints. Her pine-green pea coat hung open over a thick-knitted red turtleneck, and an old-fashioned plaid skirt, black and red, nearly reached the flat-bottomed shoes whose brown shade just didn't quite match each other.

"Hi!" Chris suddenly chirped. "May I cross with you?"

He presented the crook of his arm, then glanced towards the church, seeing both his parents proudly smiling. After Pastor McCann laughed and gave him a big thumbs-up, he looked at the little old lady and found the sad expression he'd seen on her face had disappeared.

"I've been waiting," she said, and a friendly smile began to spread across her face. Millions of lines at the corners of her mouth changed in a way that made her appear angel-like to Chris, somehow more beautiful than even his mother.

Chris smiled back, and the little old lady gripped his arm and took a step forward.

Later, Chris wasn't sure when exactly it had gone wrong. He wondered if it was the way her embrace came on so quickly and so tight that it hurt his arm. Or was it when she began crossing the street? Maybe, he thought, when he tried pulling away from her grasp?

All Chris knew for sure was that a split second after offering his arm to the little old lady, he screamed. And he kept screaming. Because as she dragged him a step into the intersection, Chris realized something more terrifying: the traffic light was still green.

A blaring horn, a flash of chrome, and screeching tires. Time slowed as horrified screams stretched out, playing for Chris a distorted symphony of horror. Then the crescendo ended with a sickening, sickening thud.

Everyone in town bore witness to the tragedy: Shopkeepers and patrons rushed from the businesses along the main strip. Men pushed their way through the crowd while yelling at everyone, demanding they step back. Women stood on the outskirts, quickly spreading the gossip via a morbid game of telephone. Soon the rest had arrived, too. Young and old, rich and poor, stern-faced or crying. Even the children came to see; those big enough to walk marched in tow of their fathers while infants pressed close to the breasts of their mothers.

All the bystanders formed a crescent around the accident, a kaleidoscope of Christmas colors huddling together so everyone could get a good, long look.

On the far side of Highway 451, a teenager climbed through the broken window of his smashed pickup truck, the front end wrapped around a metal light pole. He pressed his left hand to a gash on his forehead, and stumbled towards the church at 20 8th Avenue, dazed, eyes wide, and mouth agape.

Several churchgoers who had been waiting at the light ran over to the teen, their Sunday best splattered red. They repeated over and over that it wasn't his fault, that God would surely forgive him.

Pastor McCann stood at the front of the crowd. He mumbled prayer after prayer, part of his mind straining to remember the last rites, another part struggling to choose who needed comfort the most. Paralyzed by fear and indecision, he could help neither Chris nor the little old lady. Something inside of him broke, and step by step, his feet carried him backward, deeper into the crowd, as he looked to the heavens, sobbing.

Chris lay on the icy road, moaning. A jagged bone protruded from his left leg, and a pool of blood grew around his mangled hip. His left arm hadn't fared better, twisting at an unnatural angle above his head. His eyes flickered and rolled into the back of his head; his breathing quickened, each exhalation transforming into a stuttering wheeze. Then his small body went still.

Mrs. Charon quickly knelt by her son. She took his wrist, feeling for a pulse. She begged for a doctor in one breath and begged Chris to wake up in the next.

Mr. Charon's eyes darted back and forth, searching for someone with medical experience to step forward. A heartbeat later, his face turned grim. "We'll take him ourselves!" he screamed. He reached down and cradled his son's head with one hand. With the other, he hoisted the dead weight to his shoulder. "Grab his legs!"

Mrs. Charon carefully took hold of her son's hips, trying not to complicate his injuries. As she did, her mind couldn't comprehend that the person held in her hands was her son, her perfect little boy. She shuddered as blood flowed from the broken body as freely as water flows from a tap.

Together they pushed through the crowd, shuffling away fast toward the family car.

In the center of it all lay the little old lady, pink gore bubbling from her lips. She writhed in agony, then dragged herself toward the crowd, her fingertips ripping apart as they dug into the shards of shattered glass. Though wearing a mask of blood, her eyes were sharp with awareness. Inch by inch, she moved forward, leaving a smear of crimson in her wake.

The people in the crowd looked on, many with shocked expressions, some covering their mouths. As she drew nearer, they parted, staying just out of her reach.

The little old lady met every horrified stare. She spoke to them all, saying the same thing over and over: “I…neeeed…tooo…croooooss. I…neeed…tooo…croooooss. I…I…I…nee—” She stopped suddenly and looked around as if confused. Then she slowly turned her head back towards the puddle of blood where little Chris Charon’s mangled body had fallen. “Cross with me.”

The crowd looked on as she spoke to the falling snow.

“Wait,” the little old lady cried out. “No, don’t leave.” She tried to make her way closer to her invisible companion, reaching out to the empty air. “You…you…ca—” Her eyes bulged, and her jaw clenched as she willed her body to move just a few more feet. But it was too much. Her shivering arms buckled, and she collapsed. Her face lay on the frozen asphalt, twitching. Each ragged breath came out in a small puff of white vapor.

Unable to move on, she uttered five final words that only one person was close enough to hear.

She closed her eyes just as the fire truck sirens were heard fading in from the distance. When help arrived, the crowd began to disperse. The whole ordeal was over in the span of ten minutes’ time.

Many questions remained, however. The answers, while not everyone will accept them, are the only answers we have. Take from them what you will.

Three weeks passed, and Christopher Charon woke up from his medically induced coma. He was no longer ten years old. Birthday balloons filled his room, leftovers from the party his parents had thrown while he slept.

The doctors told him that his parents' quick decision had saved his life. They also said that he would be able to learn to walk again, but he'd always have a terrible limp. As for his arm, they would need to wait and see.

Pastor McCann had visited Chris frequently, often watching over the boy as he slept. When Chris had finally woken, his parents called and said that Chris wanted to see him right away, that he had something to confess. On his arrival, Chris shook his head, unable to bring himself to broach the subject.

After several more visits, Chris hesitantly opened up about what had him so upset. The things he revealed shocked Pastor McCann to the core.

Chris remembered events differently than the story everyone at the hospital had told him. He was adamant the accident happened while he was still standing at the intersection. He said his parents were helping someone badly hurt, but it wasn't him. He said he watched the whole thing and was frightened by how the little old lady crawled toward the crowd. He described the whole scene in detail, mentioning even what people had been thinking at the time, mimicking their actions.

Pastor McCann shivered. He sat quietly for a few moments. Finally, he said, "There's no way you could know all that."

"But I was there. I ran when she came towards me," Chris said, ending his tale.

"Okay, Chris." Pastor McCann smiled sadly but said no more on the subject.

Months passed.

Recovery was long and painful, but Chris did recover. When released from the hospital, he quickly learned that the little old lady had already

recovered, and many speculated she hadn't visited him in the hospital out of remorse.

The consensus was the same: no blame fell on her for what had happened that day; everyone was certain the accident was just that—an accident. Chris tried to share the truth, but no one wanted to hear it, not even his parents. The lesson he learned that day on blissful ignorance, he'd remember the rest of his life.

Mr. and Mrs. Charon still took Chris to church each Sunday, where he'd always watch for the little old lady, worried she'd drop the act if ever there came a moment the two of them were alone.

Over time, the mood around town slowly went back to normal, and the years passed, too.

Not much has changed. The little old lady still stays alone in the cottage at the edge of town, and she still comes to listen to Pastor McCann's Sunday sermon.

Chris still lives in town, but he no longer goes to church. He doesn't like being the subject of gossip when he limps into a room.

Everyone knows the story, and it's slightly different, depending on who's doing the telling. When Chris gives his version, he does so in the third person, needing to separate the traumatic event from the life he has now.

Even so, some things he just can't escape.

When the Sunday bells ring, Chris looks out his apartment window and sees the little old lady standing at the corner where Highway 451 meets the church at 20 8th Avenue. The light turns, and the crowd moves on. No one offers her help anymore. Deep down, they know better; they know the truth.

Waiting patiently, she catches Chris watching from his window and waves.

Chris waves back, remembering all the fatal accidents that have happened at that intersection over the years. Before closing the blinds, he

utters the last five words the little old lady said the day she died on the blood-soaked street: “I’ll never cross without you.”

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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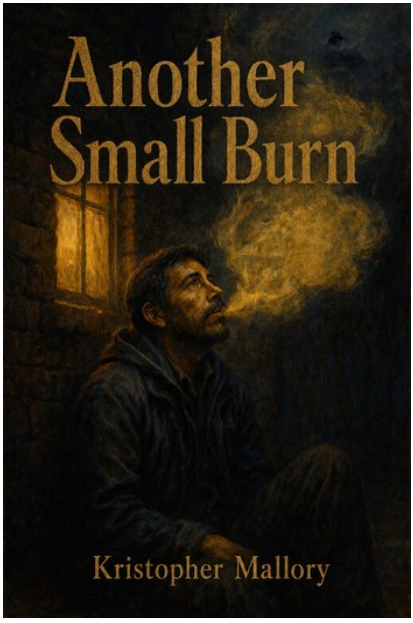
Hear It Read Aloud

Some stories are better heard in the dark.

The Little Old Lady has a complete audio narration, read by Ian Cartwell, a digital voice. It runs 17 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.

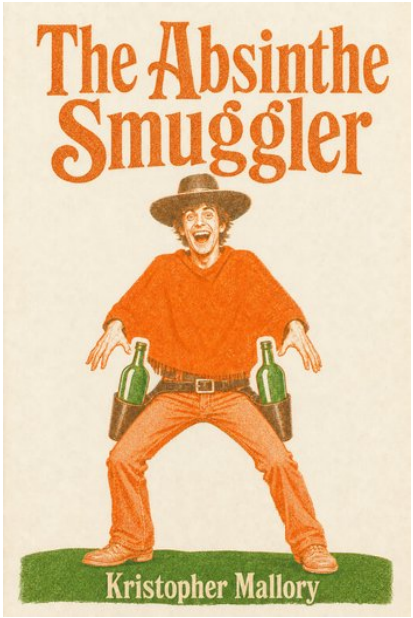
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Carlos can burn any memory into magic, the way everyone can now; the hard part is choosing which ones he can live without.

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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.

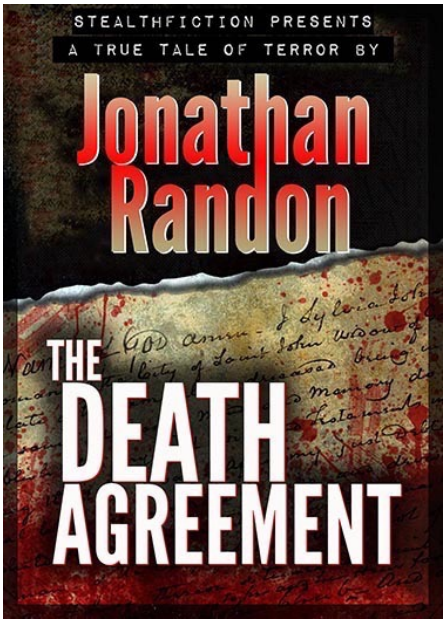
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Christmas Eve, a blizzard, and Hank agrees to sit with old Mr. Everett, twenty-two-time winner of the town's decoration contest, who insists he is not going crazy.

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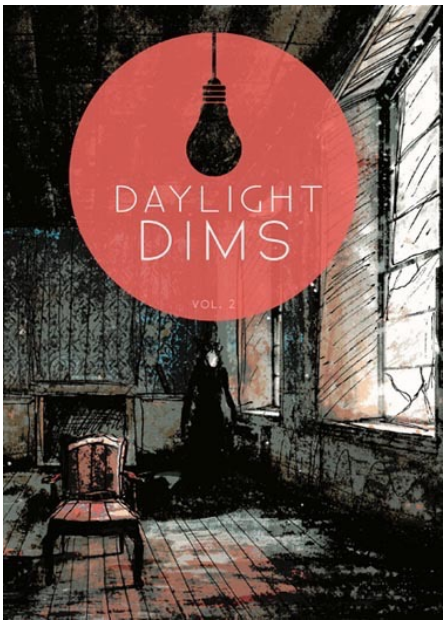
We made a pact. He lived up to his end by dying. I tried to live up to my end by following The Death Agreement.

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.

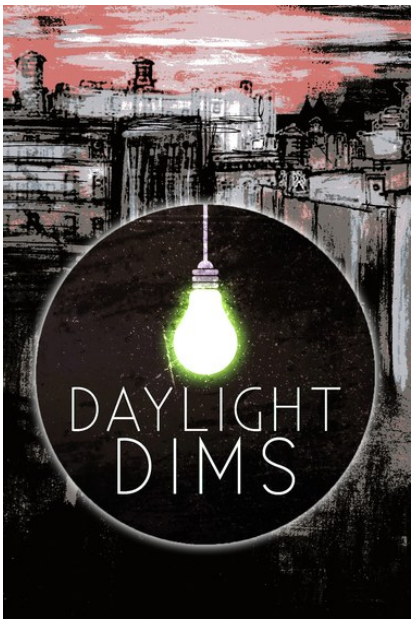
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Darkness descends again. Daylight Dims Volume Two features thirteen stories that cross the genres of surreal, dark fantasy, and heart-pounding dread. This annual horror anthology is guaranteed to twist your perception of horror. From the common, comfortable 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.

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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"*