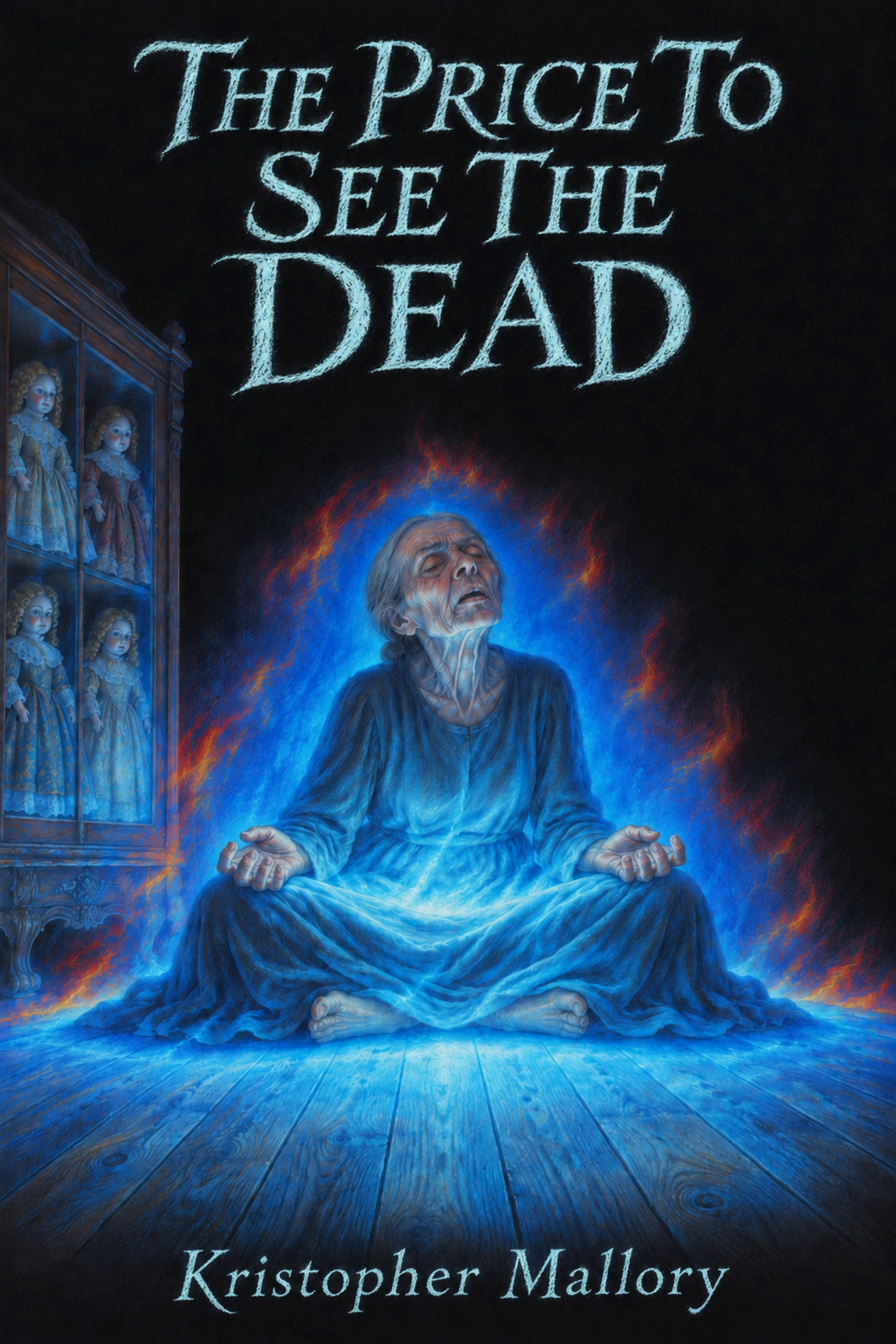
# The Price To See The Dead



Kristopher Mallory

# The Price To See The Dead

by

Kristopher Mallory

# The Price To See The Dead

*A Ghost Story, Maybe?*

# Copyright




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**The Price To See The Dead**

eBook Edition
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*A Gift Of Bone*

*Payphone*

*What I've Learned of the GPS Glitch*

*The Diary*

*Ruined Sheets*

*The Scarecrow Corpse*

*Watchtowers of Carthage Key*

*Another Small Burn*

*The Absinthe Smuggler*

*The Special Christmas Ornaments of Mr. Everett*

*The Death Agreement*

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***The Special Christmas Ornaments of Mr. Everett:***

"Well done!! Very creative, I loved it." – *skeptikay*

# Special Thanks

*For all the twins out there, you creepy bastards.*

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# The Price To See The Dead

*“Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,*
*Had a bad cold, nevertheless*
*Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe”*

~ T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land

My name is Hannah McCormick. On my sixteenth birthday, I received a prize-winning pony from Mother. My twin sister, Hadley, received a pink Corvette from Father. It didn't matter; we never had problems sharing our birthday gifts. The pony was worth twice as much anyway.

Bored with the endless barrage of well-wishes and cheek-kisses, Hadley and I decided to sneak away from the party.

"Hannah, do you want to brush Peppercorn?" Hadley asked. "We can walk down to the stables. Oh, and I swiped a bottle from the barman."

"No, I have a better idea," I said. I flashed a mischievous smile and turned toward the Corvette.

**

By sunset, we were driving down coastal highway US 17. I texted friends while Hadley took swigs of the peach schnapps she stole. If that wasn't reckless enough, I decided it was a good time to put on makeup.

While I applied the lipstick, out of the corner of my eye, I saw Hadley hang her leg out the window, and then I cracked up laughing when the wind stole the *Christian Louboutin* sandal right off her foot.

"Hey, turn around," she said.

I smirked and drove faster. The speedometer pushed past the ninety-mile-per-hour mark.

Hadley shrugged, took off the other sandal, and threw it out. "Fine, bitch," she said, "I'll take yours when we get home."

"I dare you."

A text from James Poole lit up my phone.

"He stole blow from his grandmother," I laughed. "Wants to know if we'll do it with him."

Hadley got excited. "Tell him to invite Trevor."

She watched me type my reply, so neither of us noticed the Corvette crossing the center line. By the time we saw the minivan coming around the bend, it was already too late.

**

Time slowed to a fraction of its normal speed. Hadley was screaming, or maybe it was me, probably both of us. I remember being fascinated by the approaching headlights, then the windshield shattering into a million pieces, and then the feeling of the seatbelt crushing me into darkness.

The driver of the minivan, Kevin Howard, died instantly. Robbie Howard, his ten-year-old son, was also killed. Greta Howard, his wife, was flown to shock trauma.

In the smashed ruin of the pink Corvette, a barely injured sixteen-year-old girl woke up and stared at the destroyed head of her sister.

**

Father and Mother considered the crash an *unpleasant situation.* They were extremely worried about Greta Howard's well-being. Mother called several times, but the doctors told them the same thing: Greta was still in a coma.

A week after the accident, Greta finally took a turn for the better.

**

"Now the entire family's dead," Father said, "no one can argue against the official report. We're home free."

"Is it true, Bert?" Mother asked. "We're not getting sued?"

"Oh, Lucinda, hardly a chance of that," he laughed. "The police are on our side."

I waited for the police to come, but manslaughter charges were never filed. Mother claimed it was because the McCormick family was lucky; she meant filthy, stinking rich. Kevin Howard was a middle-class man, so of course the police blamed him for the wreck.

It sounds simple, but even for the rich, a cover-up doesn't magically happen. Grease a palm here, promise a promotion there, agree to owe a future favor. In exchange, a whole bloody mess can get swept under a rug. If there's a how-to guide on the subject, I'm sure Father wrote it.

“My reputation’s safe,” Father said. “I’ll get the sympathy vote, and that rat-bastard Talford won’t weasel his way into my congressional seat.”

A shrewd man, Father. Somehow he calculated a way to benefit from the death of a daughter. Bravo, well done.

**

My complete breakdown happened at the funeral.

Father and Mother cried their crocodile tears for their dead daughter. Only it wasn’t for their daughter; it was for the camera crews covering the event. As they continued with the fake sympathy bit, I was a complete wreck. If I had to name the feelings that came over me, pain, remorse, and despair topped the list, all of which I had never experienced before the accident.

I had a shocking revelation about childhood: The McCormick twins knew nothing of the real world. To say Father and Mother raised them poorly was an understatement. Even rich girls don’t care about jewelry, country clubs, or Paris vacations after they’ve killed innocent people; at least in my case, they don’t.

All of it was shit.

Sorry to be so blunt, Mother. I knew she would frown at vulgar language, but it was still shit. Nothing can bring back the dead, not her fine china collection, or her vacation home in the Hamptons, or even her plastic surgeon. Shit. Shit. Shit.

In a rage, I wanted people to know I was responsible for everything. I wanted to be punished for my actions. I wanted my twin to be with me, to feel like I did, united as one, in guilt.

Father’s betrayal felt like a hot knife stabbing through my gut. Mother’s nonchalant attitude only served to twist the blade. My sister, whom I loved more than life itself, remained forever silent, and somehow free of the punishment we deserved to share.

There is no way to describe to you how lost I was. Maybe if I were older, I could handle it, but I was only sixteen, and having an emotional

meltdown… in front of everyone… and no one cared.

**

Time passed. People forgot and moved on to the next big news story.

My situation was so much worse than the early days after the accident. I moped around the house. I didn't eat. I didn't talk to anyone. Most of all, I tried to avoid seeing Father and Mother. I hated them both, and I don't regret saying it either.

It got to the point where I couldn't stand the loneliness any longer. Maybe it was silly, but I needed to talk to someone, and the only one I cared about was my sister, so I began to have one-way conversations with her. I explained over and over again how sorry I was for causing the crash. I talked about all the things little Robbie Howard would never get to do because of us. I prayed Kevin and Greta would forgive our family. A few times I allowed myself a moment of reprieve from my penance, and even then, all I did was imagine happier days my twin and I would never get to spend together.

I was alone in my own personal hell, but one day something happened, something I knew was impossible … my sister talked back.

On her end, she said things were pretty great, and that first night we fell asleep talking to each other, just like when we were little. It was the happiest I had ever been, but deep inside, though, I still wanted her to feel the same pain.

We spent many nights going over nothing important, and as much as I loved our chats, questions began to haunt me.

How come she got off so easy? If the situation were reversed, would she have felt as hurt as I did? And if I were in her place, could I have put aside my role in the destruction of the Howard family? I tried my best not to allow the spite to show. Maybe it wasn't her fault. Do the dead get to choose how they feel?

Eventually Father and Mother found out about our nightly sessions. They weren't happy, of course. The idea of ghosts was silly and childish,

they said. Not that it mattered. After their snide remarks, they either forgot about it or ignored the issue. Daughter problems were of little importance when they needed to focus on Father's coming election.

**

When election day came, Father and Mother were on edge. After the ballots were counted and Father had won, my sister and I both decided to try once more to change their minds. With the campaign behind them, they wouldn't be able to ignore the fact that their other daughter had returned home.

We tried, but it made no difference. They refused to listen to anything either of us had to say.

"We don't need to be congratulated on a well-earned victory by a ghost, any ghost," Father said to the ceiling. "Now cut this bollox, or else. See how silly I look, Lucinda? I forbid any more of this ghost nonsense. Maybe we should look at boarding schools again, what do you think?"

Mother wanted it to stop too. "Yes, Bert, perhaps Switzerland?" She cleared her throat. "To all spirits, please refrain from breaking any more of my seventeenth-century porcelain dolls. They are priceless."

It was so irritating being in the same room as them. I didn't know how I used to stand it. They could go to hell for all I cared. I refused to give up my sister. I made sure we stuck together, no matter what. Even if Father and Mother refused to come around, we would be inseparable.

**

Close to midnight on a moonless night, the night before the anniversary of the accident, I figured out that talking wasn't enough. As is the case with most materialistic people, Father and Mother needed to see to believe. Was it possible to find someone with the power to show the dead to unbelievers? Where would I look for such a person? Maybe all I needed to do was ask the question, because as soon as I did, such a person appeared.

“My name is Madame Sosostris,” her voice echoed throughout the house. “There is a price to see the dead, girl. If they see, they will believe. If they believe, they will hear. If they hear, they will pay. What is paid is decided by the dead.”

We sat in the dark and spoke for many hours. She told me she was a shaman, unconcerned with the material. No amount of money could sway her, and no offer of luxury would bring her. Madame Sosostris only served the will of the dead. She only showed up where the dead needed her to be.

“I’m just a family-killing spoiled brat. I don’t have the slightest clue how magic works,” I said, excited to be a part of it.

“The family must pay the price to see the dead,” Madame Sosostris said.

“I’m glad you came,” I told her.

“The family must pay the price to see the dead.”

“Still, I’m glad you came.”

In the blackness, a light began to shine. The shimmer grew around Madame Sosostris until she was engulfed in a faint blue glow which radiated from her, and in it I saw many great and terrible and wonderful things.

“Will Father and Mother see your light as I have?” I asked.

“The family mu—”

“Yeah, yeah, I know. The family must pay the price to see the dead. Come on, follow me.”

I showed her to the living room. She sat down in the middle of the hardwood floor and closed her eyes. As she meditated, the blue glow momentarily flickered red and yellow, reminding me of a flame.

“The family must pay the price to see the dead,” Madame Sosostris screamed, and her voice thundered throughout the house. I’m sure that even Father couldn’t have slept through it.

**

“Who’s down there?” Father demanded from the hallway. His shadow on the wall confirmed he was carrying a gun.

Mother was right behind him. “I’ve called the police,” she yelled.

My sister stood at the foot of the stairway. She tried to explain everything to them, but they were still not listening. They still didn’t see.

Mother flicked the light switch and screamed when she saw Madame Sosostris.

Madame Sosostris was a scary sight. Her eyes were closed, and she rocked back and forth at an odd pace, chanting under her breath.

Intimidating as she was, I think my mother screamed, not because of the old woman sitting in the middle of the floor, but because she saw the ghost of her dead daughter standing there with her arms crossed and tapping her foot.

I said, “Hi, Mother, Father, Hadley… Happy Birthday, by the way.”

Father dropped the gun. He stood there, his mouth hanging open, understandably stunned. Mother—well, this is embarrassing—she actually peed herself, but I guess that’s understandable too, considering.

“I can’t believe I can actually see you, Hannah,” Hadley said. “I was starting to think I went bonkers, as Daddy says.”

“Oh, I’m real,” I said while looking down at Madame Sosostris. Her flame was now solid red, crimson actually, the color of blood. “Heh, looks like I’m angry too.”

“Darling! Oh, my little girl,” Mother said as she moved forward with her arms stretched out. “I’ve missed you so, so much.”

I pointed my finger at Mother.

“No, you haven’t *missed me so, so much*,” I mocked. “You’re a lying bitch. You care more about all of this SHIT than you care for your own children.”

I pointed my finger at Father.

“And you…” I said through clenched teeth. “You used my death. You’re filth, undeserving, worthless, filth. You’re words that I am not old enough to say, damn it!”

“Buttercup, that’s not fair,” Father protested.

“Stuff it!”

Hadley smiled at me. I smiled back, but it wasn’t the warm kind of smile.

“And you, Hadley, my other half, we shared everything. How could you abandon me like that? Don’t you feel anything?”

“Oh my God, what are you talking about?”

“This whole year, I haven’t seen a single drop of remorse. Not one iota of sorry for the lives lost, or a single shit given over our *massive* stupidity, not from any of you!”

Hadley tried to say something else, but I screamed over her, “I paid a heavy price, and you continue on like nothing ever happened! You didn’t even say goodbye when they buried me.”

“That’s not true!” Hadley protested.

“If you cared, why didn’t you confess to the police? Why not beg for forgiveness as I did? Why was I the only one upset at my funeral? You’re still the spoiled little brat, glad that Daddy got you off the hook. My poor sister, I love you, but you don’t make it easy.”

“I…”

“Don’t.”

Hadley looked down in defeat.

“The price to see the dead must be paid,” Madame Sosostris said. “Dear girl, dear girl, what shall the price be? Tell me, I beg.”

I stared at my family for a long time. My expression made them afraid to utter a single word. In their silence, I knew they experienced a thousand million possible tortures, each one related to losing the material wealth they had and loved.

A single tear fell down the shattered side of my face. Just one, that’s all any of them deserved.

Father and Mother took it as a sign of hope. It wasn’t. I didn’t care for them, nor did I care what happened when they joined the dead.

“Father,” I said, “you and Mother are forsaken. Madame Sosostris showed me her light, and you wouldn’t like what I saw within.”

I locked eyes with Hadley. Even after all of that, I couldn’t deny the love I felt for her.

“You’ve wronged the Howard family, and you wronged me.”

Madame Sosostris stared up at me, waiting. I didn’t know what to do; even the dead have a hard time making decisions, you know.

“The price to see the dead must be paid,” Madame Sosostris said with a nod.

I needed to set the price. In death, I had been granted forgiveness and understanding, so really what other choice was there?

“Mother, Father… I’m not going to hurt you. All I ask is for you to give a final goodbye to your daughter, please. That shouldn’t be too much, even for you two.”

Father grinned his politician’s smile, and Mother cried. They thanked me for forgiving them. The price I set was low, which they gladly paid, but the idiots paid it to the wrong child.

“No,” I said. “Give your goodbyes to your other daughter.”

It was a simple matter to force my way into a body that I knew so well. As an identical twin, Hadley’s body *was* my body. I experienced vertigo as the pull of gravity was felt once again. Breathing took some getting used to, but I’d done it for sixteen years, so I was an expert.

As for Hadley, she was cursing me out. She wanted her body back, and she tried to force me out of the shell, but since she had only been dead for a few seconds, each attempt was pathetically hopeless.

“Hannah!” she screamed. “What the hell are you doing? Get out!”

“Do you feel it?” I asked. “All the hurt you’ve caused? All the pain?”

Hadley didn’t need to answer. I saw it written on her face.

“Oh, God! What did we do? Make it stop! Daddy, help me!”

“Father can’t help. I’m sorry, but this is the only way I can save you from becoming like them.”

“The price has been paid by the living,” Madame Sosostris said with a relieved nod.

Once I was seeing through actual eyes again, Madame Sosostris’ aura wasn’t visible, but I’m sure it was back to blue again.

“Hannah, don’t do this to me,” Hadley pleaded. “It’s not fair.” Her image faded until she was gone completely.

**

With all the commotion, no one noticed the sound of the sirens growing, or the red and blue flashing lights dancing across the living room wall. As I wiggled my fingers and toes, trying to get comfy, someone began to pound on the front door.

“Police! Open up,” the voice demanded.

Father and Mother stood there slack-jawed. Neither made a move for the door. I looked down and saw that Madame Sosostris had disappeared. She’s sneaky, that woman.

“Fine,” I huffed. “I guess I’ll get the door.”

Once they realized help had arrived, Father and Mother began to rant and rave about a woman who helped their dead daughter take over the body of their living daughter. They say they’re afraid I’m going to kill them in their sleep and take their souls. I have to admit it was hilarious to see them disheveled. I could have watched that go on for hours, but once they paused for a breath, I decided it was time to join the conversation.

“My parents are just upset,” I told the officer. “Mad because I killed some people.”

“Hadley!” Father screamed. “You be quiet this instant, young lady.”

Mother leaned over and whispered, “I think it’s still Hannah, Bert.”

“Keep your mouths shut,” I said. “I’ve been around the house for a year. Cross me, and this won’t be the only crime I talk about.”

I dared them to speak, and, luckily for them, they didn’t. Even the cop stared at me, speechless.

“My name is Hadley McCormick,” I continued. “I am responsible for the deaths of Kevin, Greta, and Robbie Howard.”

**

Years later, as I sit in a jail cell writing this, I still hear Hadley. She’s felt the pain of death for a while now, and, like me, managed to find peace within the hurting. It took a while, but she’s also glad I turned myself in. So in the end we’re both paying for our sin.

She’s still upset I stole her body, though. She swears Madame Sosostris will come and help her get it back… once I make parole.

“I doubt it,” I say.

“Hannah,” she says, “the fact that you’re not eating organic bothers me more than anything!”

Some things, I guess, will never change.

Hannah McCormick

Arrendale State Prison, Georgia

January 11, 2013

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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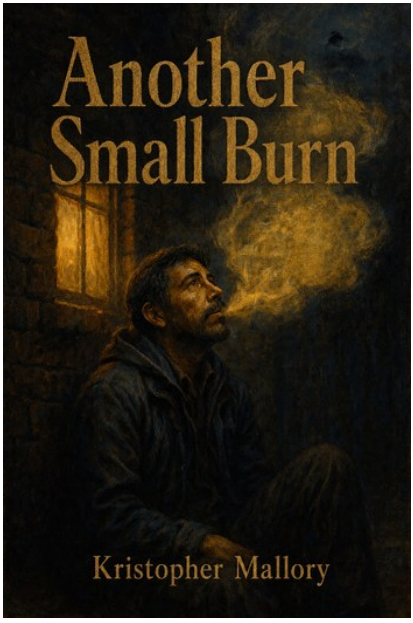
# Hear It Read Aloud

*Some stories are better heard in the dark.*

*The Price To See The Dead* has a complete audio narration, read by Riley, a digital voice. It runs 20 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.

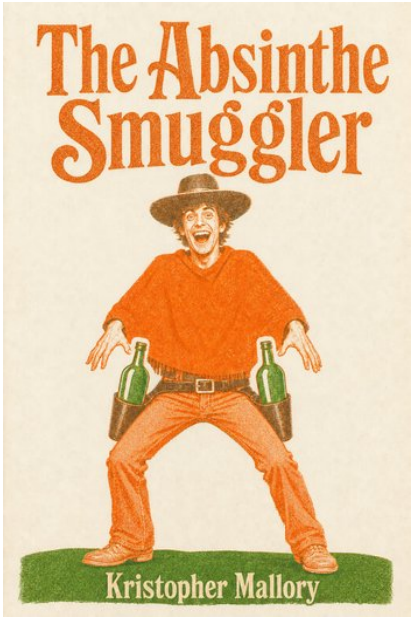
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Carlos can burn any memory into magic, the way everyone can now; the hard part is choosing which ones he can live without.

~~~~~

***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.

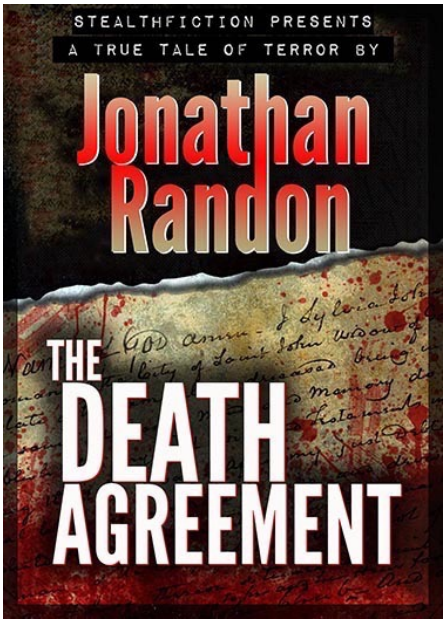
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Christmas Eve, a blizzard, and Hank agrees to sit with old Mr. Everett, twenty-two-time winner of the town's decoration contest, who insists he is not going crazy.

~~~~~

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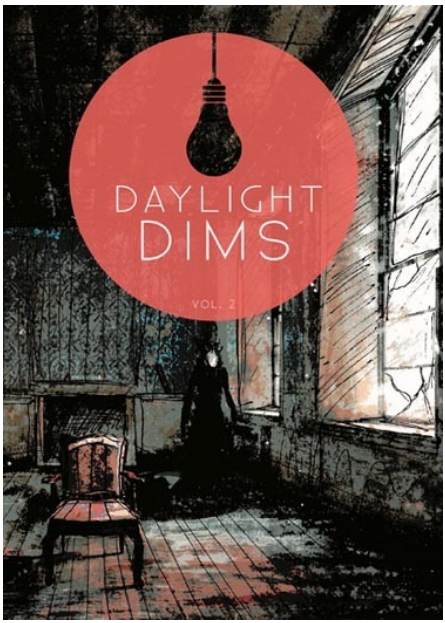
We made a pact. He lived up to his end by dying. I tried to live up to my end by following The Death Agreement.

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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**DAYLIGHT DIMS**
**VOLUME TWO**

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

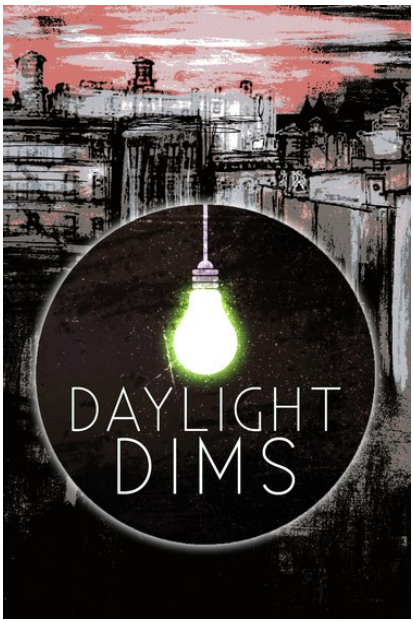
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Darkness descends again. Daylight Dims Volume Two features thirteen stories that cross the genres of surreal, dark fantasy, and heart-pounding dread. This annual horror anthology is guaranteed to twist your perception of horror. From the common, comfortable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

~~~~~

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"*