

Original scan and conversion by  
LC and CallerX  
~ ~ ~  
October 2001

This is a complete and original  
scan and conversion from the  
original digital ebook.

Remember:  
If you enjoy it... buy it!

The Book of Counted Sorrows

Otherwise Known As:

The Book of Counted Sorrows  
Being the Mind-Bending,  
Heart-Stopping, Bowel-Freezing,  
Spleen-Tickling History of the Most  
Dangerous Book of Poetry Ever  
Written, Including the Text of That  
Cursed Book Itself, With the Prayer  
that God Will Protect You from a  
Spontaneous Head Explosion  
(and Even Worse Potential Fates)  
If You Dare Read It.

Introduction (c) 2001 by Dean Koontz  
Poetry (c) 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991,  
1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997 by Nkui, Inc.

Poetry (c) 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 by Dean Koontz.

Cover design (c) 2001 by Ray Downing

This edition published by Barnes & Noble Digital, by arrangement with Dean  
Koontz

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any  
manner whatsoever without the written permission of the Publisher.

2001 Barnes & Noble Digital  
ISBN 1-4014-0022-1

## Dedication

To all the readers who have written to me over the years, demanding this book. Without You, it would never have been written. If Hell exists, perhaps all of you should be worried.

## Table of Contents

### For the Introduction

The Dark, Peculiar, Mysterious and Ultimately Incomprehensible History Of the Volume in Question.

1. Before the Glass of Sherry.
2. After the Glass of Sherry.
3. The Hideous Fate of Langford Crispin.
4. The Hideous Fate of Langford Crispin, Resumed.
5. The Hideous Fate of Langford Crispin, For Real This Time.
6. The Curse of Too Much Knowledge and a Trail of Frightful Destruction.
7. Bruno Kronk, Masseur Extraordinaire and Monkey Mechanic.
8. Everything Additional That I Know About The Cursed Book.

And Now the Text of the Cursed Book...

The Book of Counted Sorrows  
Being the Mind-Bending,  
Heart-Stopping, Bowel-Freezing,  
Spleen-Tickling History of the Most  
Dangerous Book of Poetry Ever  
Written, Including the Text of That  
Cursed Book Itself, With the Prayer  
that God Will Protect You from a  
Spontaneous Head Explosion  
(and Even Worse Potential Fates)  
If You Dare Read It.

By

Dean Koontz

The Dark, Peculiar,  
Mysterious, And Ultimately  
Incomprehensible History Of  
The Volume In Question.

1  
Before the Glass of Sherry.

In 1981, I began citing lines of verse from The Book of Counted Sorrows as epigraphs at the beginnings - and occasionally at the part divisions - of some of my novels. Little more than a decade later, mail from readers, specifically inquiring about this exotic volume of poetry, had risen to 3,000 letters a year.

Dealing with these earnest but exhaustingly repetitious inquiries became so annoying to one of my assistants - Basil Keenly - that he gave up his lifelong dream of serving as a novelist's right-hand man, signed up for a series of university courses toward a new career in body waxing, subsequently worked as a customized-cake salesman (your face or favorite body part

realistically rendered in exquisitely subtle shades of icing), briefly returned to personal-assistant work as the right hand to Porky Pig, but was dispirited by the endless jokes about stuttering and ham that came with the job, attempted to hold up a 7-Eleven with a lump of cake cunningly decorated to resemble a handgun, and eventually took a leave from the secular world by joining a tiny and somewhat curious religious community that worships squirrels. Tragically, while working with other cultists in urgent preparation for a hard winter, he was crushed when the community hoard suddenly shifted, burying him under millions of acorns, walnuts, and dried legumes.

I miss him.

We all miss him here at the Koontz manor.

Well, not Mrs. Scuttlesby, whose standards of excellence are so high and whose commitment to her work is so complete and unrelenting that she feels nothing but contempt, and rightly so, for the rest of us engaged in this enterprise. She said good riddance to Basil when he left our employment, as she says good riddance to all, as she says good riddance to me and my wife each time that we depart on a brief holiday, and when she received the news of Basil's death, she shed not a tear, but said only, "This is precisely the end I expected he would meet.

In the receiving room, on the north wall, which we call the Wall of Honorable Service, dear Basil's photograph is handsomely framed and hung among the equally handsomely framed photographs of other former members of our staff who have performed their duties with exceptional ability and conducted themselves with moral probity, with great courage, and with no fear whatsoever of the words "Girl Scout Cookie sale," in even the most difficult times. Some of these much missed employees have moved on to enjoy stellar careers assisting far more luminous literary figures than I: Among the most notable of their new employers have been Nobel-nominated novelist William Shatner, self-help guru Caesar Zedd, and the anonymous copywriter of the Calvin Klein advertisements; indeed, our very special Emily Vlick, who was with us seven years, accepted a position with the late V.C. Andrews, who has produced more novels following her demise than she did during her lifetime. Other beloved employees have left our service due to fork-lift accidents, alien abductions, non-cancerous but weird chin tumors the size of pumpkins, incurable addictions to Spam, and, of course, due to that greatest of all impediments to the maintenance of a full and happy staff - death.

I am deeply pained to recall how some of our most cherished and enormously missed employees perished, but I have committed myself to revealing the inside story, the unvarnished truth, and the full poop about Counted Sorrows; consequently, it seems to me that I absolutely must relate to you how these adored and grievously missed staffers died, although at the moment I see no connection whatsoever between the circumstances of their deaths and this book. Perhaps we will achieve enlightenment together. One died in a cataclysmic rickshaw collision, two in separate incidents of spontaneous human combustion, one while spiritedly arguing the fine points of creative napkin-folding with Martha Stewart, one in a gorilla suit that had been manufactured from toxic fabric, and three in the panic and turmoil that arose at a Dali Lama look-alike contest. One died by flaming arrow, one by the excess fizz in an irresponsibly over-carbonated sparkling beverage, one by catapult, two by parakeet. Two bought the farm when they fell off the high wire at a circus while tap dancing to "Mr. Bojangles," and another bought the farm after literally buying a farm, only to discover too late that the cows that came with that particular property were ill-mannered and vindictive. And Basil, of course, pinned beneath a deadly weight of assorted nuts.

This recitation of misfortune has left me unable to go on. I must pause to brood on the fragility of life, on our powerlessness in the face of great cosmic forces, and on the meaning of these untimely deaths, not one of which occurred precisely on the hour, on the half hour, or even on the quarter hour, but always at odd minutes.

Fortunately, a glass of fine sherry has appeared at my side as if by magic, offering me the consolation of its nutty flavor and alcoholic content. Although lacking any corroborating evidence, I am morally certain that the sherry placed on the table beside my armchair was put there by Mrs. Scuttlesby, whose sense of what is required at any given moment is so uncanny as to suggest divine omniscience, although serving sherry is not, as far as I am mare, any more a part of her job description than crocodile wrestling, at which she is also more than merely proficient.

Now I shall raise a sherry to toast the dear departed, brood deeply as we novelists are frequently wont to do, and continue with the story of Counted Sorrows once I have come to terms with all these losses and with the madness of existence.

Cheers.

2  
After the Glass of Sherry.

Where was I?

Oh, yes, we are at Basil Keenly's handsomely framed photograph on the Wall of Honorable Service in the receiving room of the Koontz manor. Under this long row of former employees' photos stands an equally long and richly carved rosewood altar table: Chinese, from the Tang Dynasty. Neither the table's country of origin nor its period have any significance, as relates to the photographs. We just think it looks pretty here.

From time to time, on the table, under the various photographs, members of our family, many friends, and our surviving employees -once, even a burglar - place items in memory of those who have passed on to other employment or who have simply passed on. Flowers are popular memorial leavings. Ribbons, candles, inexpensive jewelry, sticks of chewing gum, and on-the-anniversary-of-your-death greeting cards. Under Basil Keenly's photo, one often sees acorns, walnuts, and dried legumes, quiet and touching reminders that he died in the practice of his faith. A few times, road-kill squirrels have been left for him - and once a rabbit, offered by the same type of well-intentioned but ignorant person who might mistake a High Episcopalian for a Catholic; discreetly, but with characteristic efficiency, Mrs. Scuttlesby removed the rabbit minutes after it was deposited, whereas our practice is to leave the squirrels on display for twenty-four hours.

Librarians in particular, when visiting the Koontz manor as invited guests or as members of a tour group, or in kamikaze assaults in the black of night, inevitably gravitate toward Basil's photo on the Wall of Honorable Service. Basil, you surely remember - unless you have guzzled two sherries while I enjoyed a single serving - was at one time responsible for answering reader inquiries about The Book of Counted Sorrows. (You knew we'd come back to that eventually.) Among those 3,000 letters a year, a few hundred were from librarians, who had often spent ten or twenty hours - or, in the case of several dangerously obsessive types, even a hundred or two hundred hours - searching for this rare book without success, at the request of their patrons. In his inimitable and gracious way, Basil explained to each that (1) Counted Sorrows is the rarest book on the planet, with only one known copy extant, (2) this copy is in our possession, (3) we decline to lend it or to photocopy it, and (4) in any event, it is inadvisable for anyone to read the entire contents of the book, because everyone who absorbs every word of the text is driven mad by the terrible burden of the knowledge thus acquired - or he explodes.

Legend warns of this dire curse, and our distressing personal experience confirms it. One of our esteemed and adored employees, Thelma Kickmule, as rock-ribbed and tough-minded an individual as you will find this side of the Marine Corps, read Counted Sorrows from first word to last, certain it would not affect her, and within nine minutes of closing the volume, she became convinced that she was a chicken. No amount of therapy, drugs, or slaps upside the head could dissuade her from this new perception of herself. Thelma now lives in a coop in Iowa, where she is shunned as the "Featherless Hen" by other residents and mercilessly threatened by the farmer who resents that she consumes so much grain without producing a single egg.

Anyway, with fond memories of the charming correspondence they so much enjoyed with Basil Keenly, every librarian is drawn to his photo. Perhaps moved by his handsome face and by the thought that he was called from this world at such a young age, Basil's librarian friends evidently kiss his portrait, for after a group of them has passed the Wall of Honorable Service, the glass over his image and the frame around it are literally glistening with saliva.

The high point of every tour of the Koontz manor, especially for librarians, is a walk across the Bridge of Nails, through the Curtain Devouring Fire, along the Tunnel of Deadly Spring-Loaded Spears, to the Great Vault of Unimaginable Torment, where The Book of Counted Sorrows is kept on display in a case ten-inch-thick, bomb-proof glass. Flanking the display are supernaturally alert and lightning-quick Ninja assassins. Flanking the Ninjas are seven-foot-tall, massively muscled guards so pumped full of steroids that their livers are bigger than basketballs. Flanking the guards are genetically engineered, two-hundred-pound pit bulls trained to kill any visitor who matches at least seven of ten indicators on the FBI's standard psychological profile of a typical rare-book thief. Having been drilled in those ten indicators by the finest dog trainers in the world, the pit bulls cannot be easily deceived - although a dried dribble of gravy on a visitor's neck tie or sweater is also likely to instigate horrendous violence. Finally, flanking the pit bulls are attorneys who insist that each visitor sign and have witnessed, on the spot, a statement to the effect that he or she swears that he or she has no intention of committing an act of larceny while in the Great Vault of Unimaginable Torment and will not attempt to damage, deface, dog-ear any page of, or lick The Book of Counted Sorrows.

Librarians, a dangerous and fearless lot, have not always been deterred by the Ninjas, the

steroid-pumped guards, the pit bulls, and the bomb-proof glass. Because of their respect for the written word, however, every last one of them, at least thus far, has been deterred from reckless action by the document of forswearance presented by the attorney. As an extra precaution, to encourage the expression of their basic genteel nature, we serve scones and Robertson's lemon marmalade immediately upon entering the Vault, as well as tea laced with Prozac.

What the librarians see beyond the thick, impurity-free glass is a slim leather-bound book with a sewn-in ribbon page marker. The same thing is seen, of course, by visitors who are not librarians, which includes but is not limited to teachers, bankers, stevedores, peg-legged pirates, pirates without handicaps, butchers, bakers, candlestick makers, software designers, politicians, obstetricians, mathematicians, electricians, professional underwear models, nuclear physicists, artists, car-wash guys, the odd people who design and manufacture those tacky musical toilet paper dispensers, clergymen, grocers, carpenters, worm farmers, hat designers, hat makers, hat blockers, hat dealers, hat critics, post-market hat customizers, clowns, mimes, peanut vendors, private detectives, successful thugs involved in every aspect of criminal enterprise, dentists, dessert chefs, specialty plumbers, mink ranchers, mink gutters, mink sinners, mink-rights activists (that was a bad day on the tour), florists, film-makers, show girls, phlegm analysts, painters of elaborate scenes on collectible thimbles, hair salesmen, and any number of wealthy snots who haven't done anything all their lives except live off the money earned by their parents.

The binding of the book is enhanced with a geometric Art Deco design crafted with inlays of leather in blue, black, green, and a fourth color for which no one has managed to find a name. Although the volume bears a copyright date Of 1928, the slightly creamy off-white paper has suffered no yellowing in all this time, and it has an exceptionally soft smooth finish equal to the flawless skin of a king's concubine, supposing that kings in these classless times still possessed the discretion and good sense to keep concubines instead of chasing off after girl pop singers of dubious talent and topless lap dancers, as does every common gink in the kingdom. In spite of its age, the book is as pristine as any tome just off a printing press, with no smudges or spots, no creases or soiling - with the sole exception of the dried maroon smear of blood on page 22, which recent DNA tests have proven to be extraterrestrial in origin.

The name of the publisher is Inevitable Doom Press, of which no record exists in any country on the face of the earth, although there was an Inevitable Doom Soup Company operating out of Cleveland in the 1950s and '60s. Inevitable Doom Soup was a thriving business with ninety-six varieties of soup, consommé, and chili con carne. In 1968, several cans of their Crunchy Bean Chili with Goat Meat, contaminated by botulism, left nineteen customers indisputably dead and resulted in the bankruptcy of the firm following successful legal actions brought by families of the victims. More than a few in the media and in the hotly competitive soup industry noted a certain irony in the company's name, in light of the Crunchy Bean tragedy. Fate is funny. Personally, I would feel uncomfortable eating any product produced by an enterprise calling itself the Inevitable Doom Soup Company, though I will admit to being a finicky eater. Not that I am entirely lacking in culinary adventurousness; I would, for instance, have no problem eating any product whatsoever produced by an entity calling itself the Possible Doom Soup Company.

Where was I?

Oh, yes: I was telling you what little is known about the mysterious publisher of The Book of Counted Sorrows. Inevitable Doom Press never produced another book (or any soups, for that matter), never paid taxes, never sued or was itself sued in a court of law. The publisher's colophon, which appears at the bottom of the title page and at the top of the copyright page, is an image of a startled hedgehog.

The book is copyright 1928 by one "Leonardo DiCaprio," but this certainly cannot be the acclaimed star of James Cameron's Titanic, because that Leonardo DiCaprio had not been born in 1928, but also because the actor does not make a practice of bracketing his name with quotation marks as does the "Leonardo Di Caprio" who holds the copyright on Counted Sorrows. Since this mysterious volume first came into my possession, in 1980, I have hired a series of private detectives in a thus far vain attempt to learn just one telling fact about "Leonardo DiCaprio," and in pursuit of this enigmatic figure I have spent a sum of money that, were I to cite it here, would make you vomit. Considering my abject failure to sweep up even a single crumb of knowledge about "Leonardo DiCaprio," the book might as well have been copyright by " ".

I have been able, however, to ascertain the name of the first person ever to own The Book of Counted Sorrows. His name will be known to those of you who are film buffs and/or knowledgeable about the history of performing capuchin monkeys.

Before continuing, I would like to pause to brush my teeth. While composing this introduction, I have been eating string cheese, and now my teeth feel furry. I dearly love string

cheese, but this fuzzy plaque is the regrettable and unavoidable consequence of indulging in the stuff. Annoying, yes, but better than botulism.

Until I return, you may wish to stretch your legs or have a beverage.

3

The Hideous Fate of Langford Crispin.

I wish someone would produce a pleasant-tasting toothpaste with something other than a mint-based flavor. The insistent, not to say relentless, not to say psychotic use of one mint or another in all available products in this category has made toothpaste a cliché in a tube. I'm convinced a huge market exists for cinnamon- or lemon-flavored toothpaste, not to mention chocolate, and I for one would buy an entire case of veal-Parmesan toothpaste if I discovered it in the market. The same criticism could be leveled at mouthwashes and Christmas candy canes. A good lobster-flavored mouthwash or a salmon candy cane would go a long way toward improving the quality of modern American life and make our world seem less medieval. I forgot to floss.

Excuse me.

4

The Hideous Fate of Langford Crispin, Resumed.

I didn't intend to take quite so long for a flossing break, but once the task was completed, I had to carry the used floss to the former carriage master's cottage adjacent to the old carriage garages at the back of the estate, which is a considerable distance from the main house, especially as one cannot walk it in a straight line due to the 2,743 works of topiary that grace the back lawn.

Most topiary depicts animals: dogs, cats, dolphins in mid leap, horses, deer, hulking grizzly bears savagely gutting each other in ferocious territorial disputes, bunnies, wildebeests, copulating penguins, and the like. Here at the Koontz manor, we encourage creativity among the gardening staff, as among all our exceptional and adored employees. As a result, we boast the world's only collection of topiary that takes for its subject flora instead of fauna. Here, an immensely tall length of boxwood hedge is carved into a series of pine trees. And here, the dense foliage of a line of dwarf yew trees has been trimmed to resemble a boxwood hedge. Oh, and look here: A great mass of oleander has been meticulously shaped into what appears to be a moss-hung magnolia. And over there: A potentially massive California live oak was stunted and deformed with chemicals, brutally trimmed, pinched at the roots, and ruthlessly compressed until it now appears to be a four-foot-tall, gnarled, eccentrically shaped bonsai evergreen. And how about that giant tulip formed from a thoroughly terrorized phoenix palm?

This essay is not about topiary, however. Neither is it about flossing, although now that you've insisted upon knowing why I took such a long floss break, I must finish the account of my journey through topiary to the old carriage master's house at the far end of the estate.

By the way, please understand that I do not mean to imply that the carriage master himself is old. He is, indeed, a strapping young fellow who, if only he produced leaves, could easily be trimmed and trained to resemble a sturdy oak. He is remarkably handsome, as well, and would surely be a film star of the magnitude of Tom Cruise were it not for the perpetually bloodshot third eye that sits slightly off-center in his too prominent forehead.

For the longest time, Skippy - the carriage master - had so little to do here on the Koontz estate that he turned in quiet desperation to a correspondence course in boredom management, offered by Harvard University. We have no horse-drawn carriages, you see. Furthermore, we keep our automobiles, SUVs, trucks, motorcycles, tanks, missile transports, ice cream wagons, and bulldozers in more modern garages closer to the main house.

Skippy's duties became markedly more complex and fulfilling upon the establishment of the floss-collection project. In excess of two hundred dedicated individuals are employed and housed on the estate, as well as a variety of less dedicated but much appreciated and much cuddlier animals of many kinds. Our Mrs. Scuttlesby requires that every last one of them - including me and my incomparable wife - floss after breakfast, lunch, and dinner, as you might expect, but also after every snack and even after consuming something as apparently inconsequential to dental health as a diet cola or a glass of water. When I say "every last one of them," I mean to include the animals. Mrs. Scuttlesby is a demon about oral hygiene regardless of species. On a difficult day in the Great Vault of Unimaginable Torment, when the genetically engineered two-hundred-pound pit bulls are called upon too frequently to protect The Book of Counted Sorrows from would-be

thieves and deranged poetry haters, these dogs alone can use hundreds of feet of unwaxed and waxed floss to remove stubborn shreds of visitors' flesh from between their teeth. By the explicit and vigorously enforced order of Mrs. Scuttlesby, all used floss must be conveyed to the carriage master immediately upon completion of the flossing procedure, which is most vividly, not to say painstakingly, described - with diagrams, charts, graphs, and satellite photos - on pages 376 through 394 of the official estate manual. (An accompanying videotape demonstration of the required procedure, with compulsory flossing techniques, stirringly narrated by James Earl Jones, can be obtained from the estate librarian.)

Upon receipt of each length of used floss, Skippy measures it with a laser micrometer, photographs it against a black velvet cloth, fills out an official floss receipt (pink copy to the user of the floss, yellow copy to Mrs. Scuttlesby, white copy directly to the nuclear-proof archives deep under the carriage master's cottage), and only then ties the latest contribution to the correct ball of accumulated floss.

The old carriage garages, next to the carriage master's cottage, no longer house carriages, but contain hundreds of balls of floss, of varying sizes, each clearly labeled with the name of the person or animal who has contributed to it. In recognition of the fact that the extraordinary frequency of flossing required on the estate will lead to enormous floss balls, the walls and roof of the old carriage garages were raised from one story to four, providing forty-foot-high interior clearance. The corroded gas lamps were replaced with top-of-the-line, cold-cathode lighting that makes it easy to read the labels on the balls and to find loose ends of floss.

Skippy - or sometimes his assistant, Werner - securely adds the latest contribution to the proper ball, under the watchful eye of the contributor. Thereafter, the necessary legal papers are signed and notarized, and one is free to go about one's business until after the next meal, snack, or diet cola.

Skippy and Werner conduct themselves at all times with the very deepest respect - nay, with reverence - for the rules in the official estate manual. Were either man to tie a floss contribution to the wrong ball, and were this mistake to be recognized by Mrs. Scuttlesby when she reviewed the 24-hour-a-day videotape record of the floss collection, the offender would be offered his choice of punishments: (1) His right thumb would be cut off with a dull cheese slicer; or (2) his nostrils would be stuffed with peanut butter and his nose offered as a canape to a ravenous weasel; or (3) he would be hung by his testicles from the carriage garage rafters and flailed with live rattlesnakes.

Such punishments may seem extreme, but at Mrs. Scuttlesby's insistence, these - and other more frightful potential chastisements - are incorporated into the employment agreements of all workers who serve in sensitive posts on the estate. Having been admitted to the California Bar Association by a sheer act of stubborn will, she has defended these contractual terms - in the case of another employee, Casper Nork - all the way to the United States Supreme Court, where the justices delivered a precedent-setting unanimous decision in her favor, thus requiring Nork to surrender his left ear to be used as Mrs. Scuttlesby's key fob.

In triumph, addressing the lopsided Nork, Mrs. Scuttlesby said, "Never underestimate the determination of a British head housekeeper. You useless idiot, have you never read Rebecca?"

After delivering my used floss to Skippy, I pocketed my pink copy of the receipt, made my way across the back lawn, through the stunning topiary, to the main house. Thirsty, I considered stopping in the kitchen to acquire a diet cola from Sedley Nottingham, the Commander of Beverages, but my thirst was cured by the thought of returning so soon to the carriage master's cottage with another length of floss.

Thus I returned here to my study to offer you my sincere apologies for such a prolonged absence.

5

The Hideous Fate of Langford Crispin, for Real This Time.

The first recorded owner of The Book of Counted Sorrows was Langford Crispin, the immortal film star. Born Nate Furt, the only child of Sepsis and Donna Furt of Cheese Falls, Wisconsin, he went on the vaudeville circuit at sixteen, tap dancing while singing and simultaneously juggling flaming snakes, in blackface.

Certain unnamed associates of the legendary performer Al Jolson -who did not himself juggle snakes, flaming or otherwise, but who did frequently appear in blackface, which is surely no less bizarre to our modern sensibilities - waylaid poor Nate in an alley behind a theater in

Cleveland. These show-biz rowdies terrified him with much aggressive finger wagging, rude use of the word foam (the verb form, not the noun), and with dire threats to tell his saintly mother, back in Cheese Falls, that while on the road he had become a sissy boy who wore women's clothes and conducted an immoral romantic relationship with the woolly half of Laura Lunney's famous act - Laura Lunney and Her Singing Llama. This was, of course, a filthy lie, but Nate never again performed in blackface. Partly to make himself less visible to Jolson's ruthless associates and also as a consequence of a belated realization that Nate Furt was not an ideal name for a would-be vaudeville star, he legally changed his name to Bob Furt, later to Burt Furt, later still to Melbourne Furt, then to Foghorn Leghorn, subsequently to Yosemite Sam, then (only briefly and in desperation over his floundering career) to Al Jolson, and finally to Langford Crispin.

Although a miserable failure in vaudeville, Langford Crispin was a huge and immediate hit in films, which was a new and exciting art form that had not yet been taken over by the dreaded Stupid Mafia - a criminal conspiracy of the intellectually challenged - which had fully seized control of the movie business by the late 1960s. Langford was nominated for an Academy Award in 1930, for All Quiet on the Western Front. If you have seen this classic movie, Langford's astonishing portrayal of Lew Ayres' brother, Jinky, will stay with you forever. Jinky, a carefree circus clown, trades in his polka-dot jumpsuit for a uniform and his giant floppy shoes for combat boots, to go off to Europe and fight for his country and for the dignity of humanity. In the brutal trench warfare against the Germans, on blasted landscapes smoky with mustard gas, Jinky learns to his surprise that war really is hell -and that a unicycle is more difficult to pilot through bomb craters than around Barnum Bailey's center ring. Nevertheless, through the unrelenting horror, he holds fast to his sense of humor, and even as he is dying, he manages to squeeze the hand-pump bulb that operates the squirting flower in the lapel of his torn battle jacket, thoroughly wetting the startled face of the medic who is trying without success to staunch his wounds.

Langford was again nominated for best actor for his role in in Cimarron, 1931, the epic adaptation of Edna Ferber's novel, in which he starred with Richard Dix and the lovely Irene Dunne. In this tale of a pioneer family determined to build an empire in early Oklahoma, Langford played Richard Dix's gentle brother, Soupy, who wants only to spread Christian fellowship and a proper appreciation of flower arrangement to the crude communities of the primitive prairie. His sweetness and innocence are ultimately met with mockery, gunfire, and a blazing wagon loaded with dynamite.

Langford was first seen reading The Book of Counted Sorrows between takes on the set of Cimarron, during filming in 1930. By the time he was making Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde with the brilliant Fredric March, in 1931, he kept the book always within reach and carried it with him wherever he went, when not actually before a camera. If his hands were full of parcels, he carried the book on his head, balanced with the confidence of a man who had begun his vaudeville career juggling flaming snakes. If his hands were full of parcels, and if something was already balanced on his head - such as a basket of bread or a big water jug, or a dwarf (his vaudeville friend, Tiny Johnson, shorter than a yardstick, enjoyed the view from this high perch) - then Langford carried the precious book in his teeth. If his hands were filled with parcels and if a water jug or a cheerful dwarf was balanced on his head, and if also he was involved in a conversation, then he carried the book between his knees, which required him to walk funny and drew stares from strangers, but he was not a man who ever cared what others thought of him.

In Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, you will remember Langford as Fredric March's half brother. Jerry Jekyll, who was on the lam, pursued by the London constabulary for roughing up a group of children carolers when they insisted on singing "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" instead of "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree", which he had requested in return for a donation of a shiny half pence. By the end of the film, Jerry learns all the wrong lessons from the disgrace and death of his arrogant brother. Vowing to achieve a scientific breakthrough even more dazzling than that of the late Dr. Jekyll, Jerry flees to Europe, changing his name to Victor Frankenstein, with the intent to prove that sundry parts of various dead people can, through the miracle of electrical shock, be assembled into a presentable new person capable of providing cheap but nevertheless high-quality domestic labor.

In 1932, Langford Crispin's performance as Jerry Jekyll brought him the Academy Award for the best supporting actor. He was the first winner ever to thank "all the little people," and when he spoke this phrase, which countless winners would use after him, he doffed his enormous top hat to reveal an actual little person, Tiny Johnson, sitting on his head. In our time, this stunt might seem politically incorrect or at least insensitive, and perhaps tasteless to some. In those long-ago days, however, the entertainment community wasn't as refined as it has become in this most genteel age of Charlie Sheen, Howard Stern, Eminem, and Freddy the Farting Chimp. With



perhaps the exception of Mary Pickford and Francis the Talking Mule, entertainers in those days were largely an unseemly, unrefined, unpolished, uncouth, undulant, unplumbed, unzipped, undone, uncaged, unearthed, unbonneted rabble. When Langford removed his top hat to reveal Tiny Johnson perched on his pate, the crowd at the Academy Awards show roared with laughter, howled and stamped their feet, and hooted and spat copiously.

Only sixteen years later, accepting his Best Actor Oscar for Hamlet, when Laurence Olivier thought it would be great good fun to repeat Langford's stunt, he doffed his top hat, revealed the same Tiny Johnson - and was met by the stunned silence of a disapproving audience so painfully refined and classy that every last one of them was wearing clean underwear. Olivier stood in utter mortification, his smile as frozen as a bananasicle. When Tiny Johnson lit a sparkler and began to wave it and an American flag, in what must have seemed, in the planning, to be a stroke of show-business genius, the offended audience griped in shock, drawing in so much air at the same time that ushers, standing in the aisles, came dangerously close to imploding in the brief ensuing vacuum. That the Queen of England, even many years later, could overlook this shameful spectacle and bestow a knighthood on Olivier is incontestable proof of the resiliency and the compassion of the British monarchy - or proof, perhaps, of the sadly short memory capacity that has resulted from the inbreeding of all European royalty over the centuries.

I am happy to tell you that Langford Crispin - a kind and most considerate man who helped many orphans and deserved no one's scorn - was not humiliated by Olivier's awards-show performance, because Crispin had by then been dead many years. I can also assure you that dear Langford was not subjected to the discomfort of having to spin in his grave, because after his emulsified body was scraped off the ceiling of the library in his lovely Beverly Hills mansion, his remains were not in suitable condition to be shaped into a suit for viewing at his funeral, and the several jars of his mortal substance were at once cremated. It is possible, I suppose, that in response to Olivier's capering at the Academy Awards show, Langford's ashes whirled in the urn where they were stored, but that is a far more pleasant image than a decaying carcass tumbling around and around among worms and filth and rotten grave cloth inside a termite-riddled coffin.

Where was I?

Oh, yes. Langford triumphantly accepted the Academy Award for his role in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and thereafter his career fell as hard and fast as the bludgeoned body of a troublesome neighbor dropped into an abandoned well after midnight. Not, I hasten to add, that I would know anything about the disappearance of my neighbor or anyone else's, or about the location of any abandoned well, or about the relative speed and force of impact of a falling body that has been thoroughly bludgeoned. I am speaking, of course, entirely metaphorically, with the free and supple imagination of a novelist.

Although, in 1933, Charles Laughton won the Academy Award for Best Actor in *The Private Life of Henry the VIII*, Langford was not merely criticized for his work in the same picture but loudly reviled by people who should have known better. His decision to play Lord Havingstoke as a mincing, one-armed, twelve-toed tyrant in a funny hat and elfin shoes was, in retrospect, not a proper interpretation of the role. But nothing in his performance warranted food being thrown at him by members of the film community when he went to dine at the Polo Lounge, nor the attempts of paring valets to run him down with his own vehicle.

In 1934, when *It Happened One Night* swept all the major awards - Best Picture, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Director, Best Screenplay - Langford Crispin was not present to share in the glory, because though he was not yet smeared in a disgusting emulsification across the ceiling of his library, his role in the film had been left on the cutting-room floor. Not by accident, you understand, but by the intent of the producer and director. Langford had played Clark Gable's deranged brother, Norman Bates, who at one point hacks to death Claudette Colbert and eats her liver with some fava beans and a good Chianti. Although this was a brilliant performance and far ahead of its time, the studio ultimately decided that the entire character of Norman Bates was out of place in a light comedy meant to lift the spirits of a Depression-era audience, and Langford was eliminated in the final cut.

Only ten days after the picture received its five Academy Awards, Langford's remains were discovered by his housekeeper, Mrs. Scuttlesby, when she entered the library to serve him a glass of port wine and a wedge of wickedly sharp cheese.

(A parenthetical aside: This was not, of course, the same Mrs. Scuttlesby who serves with such honor and obsession as our head housekeeper on the Koontz estate. Langford's Mrs. Scuttlesby was 46 when she discovered the actor's remains that evening in 1934, which would make her 113 years old as I write this. Our Mrs. Scuttlesby, however, is only 46 years old as I write this, and will probably still be only 46 when I finish writing this, if I ever do. I've been assured by our Mrs. Scuttlesby (whose assurances are delivered with such adamancy that they cannot be ignored or

taken lightly) that she is no relation to Langford's Mrs. Scuttlesby, in spite of the curious fact that each of these women lacks a first name. Our Mrs. Scuttlesby was born in Nome, Alaska, the daughter of an ice farmer, and educated in domestic service at Oxford University, whereas nothing whatsoever is known about the birthplace or the education of Langford Crispin's Mrs. Scuttlesby, which is proof positive that they cannot be the same woman, even if our beloved Mrs. Scuttlesby looked 113, which she most certainly does not.)

Where was I?

More important: Where was Langford Crispin?

Yes, I remember now: spread in a ghastly emulsification across the ceiling of his library. May the same never happen to you. Nor to me. I do have a list of people I wouldn't mind seeing emulsified and pasted to ceilings in their various residences, though I'm too discreet to provide that list here.

So, Mrs. Scuttlesby - not ours, the other - entered the library with the port wine and cheese on a silver tray, and a clothespin on her nose. She didn't ordinarily go around with a clothespin on her nose, you understand. She wasn't an eccentric. On this fateful night, she had a clothespin on her nose because she was serving, as you may recall, a wickedly sharp cheese with the port wine. From this exotic and peculiarly green cheese, a favorite of Langford's, issued an aroma so powerful and penetrating that it knocked small dogs unconscious, turned particularly sensitive young children into lifelong catatonics, and caused automobile headlamps to explode at a distance of half a block. Nevertheless, in spite of the cheese stench, Mxs. Scuttlesby - not ours, the other - might have smelled the hideous remains of dear Langford Crispin, pasted and putrefying on the ceiling, had she not been breathing, of necessity, through her mouth. In his official report, the first police officer on the scene noted that the stink of Langford's remains was, indeed, more terrible than that produced by any cheese in the world, and when he tried to commandeer Mrs. Scuttlesby's clothespin for his own use, a fight ensued that left the husky young constable with one broken leg, six broken fingers, two broken arms, a broken jaw, five dislodged teeth, a nose that looked like a crushed cactus blossom, and no hair; while Mxs. Scuttlesby - not ours, the other - sustained a bruise on her right thumb.

But I'm getting ahead of my story.

Let's back up to where the police haven't arrived yet.

Remember the scene: Mrs. Scuttlesby - not ours, the other - enters the library with a silver tray on which are port wine and cheese, her nose pinched by a clothespin, unaware of the horror overhead, perhaps thinking sad and deeply personal thoughts of the young man who never returned to her from the bloody battlefields of World War I, if such a young man ever existed. She put down the tray on the exquisite French marquetry table beside Langford Crispin's favorite armchair - and saw The Book of Counted Sorrows tumbled on the floor between the chair and the toad-leather footstool. Being a tidy person by nature and a housekeeper by profession, she picked up the book and put it on the table beside the tray.

In recent days, ever since the opening of It Happened One Night, sans Langford's brilliant portrayal of Norman Bates, the actor had been obsessed with Counted Sorrows. He had read the volume into the wee hours of the night, and then into the even more wee hours, and then finally into the most wee hours of all, so wee that they could not be measured by any but the most sensitive weenometer. More than once he had told Mrs. Scuttlesby - his, not ours - that this volume contained such stunning insights into the nature of life and the condition of humanity that he was afraid his mind could not contain the dazzling knowledge he'd received from these pages. "Oh, Mrs. Scuttlesby," he had said earlier that very day, "sometimes I fear that the pressure of this dazzling knowledge will cause my head to explode and paste my brains to the ceiling, leaving you with a frightful mess to clean up."

At this memory of her employer's expressed fear, the faithful housekeeper - and, according to the historical record, highly skilled bird mimic - looked up at the ceiling. She did not actually expect to find the handsome mahogany coffers splattered with gray matter, for she assumed that the actor had been speaking metaphorically, with that free and supple imagination that actors do not naturally possess but which he might have acquired by hanging around with a bunch of screenwriters, who do possess it, though not to the degree that you'll find it in novelists. Instead, she discovered that he must have meant to be taken literally. Not merely his head had exploded, but seemingly his entire physical entity, which now festooned the library ceiling in glutinous swags that were decidedly not an improvement to the decor.

Within half an hour, more than twenty police vehicles crowded the circular driveway in front of the mansion, and the cobblestones were littered with shards of glass from the automobile headlamps that had shattered under the assault of cheese stench. In the great house, uniformed and plainclothes personnel, noses wisely pinned, puzzled over the meager evidence and vigorously

debated whether the victim should be scraped off the ceiling or sucked off with an industrial vacuum cleaner, or simply painted over.

According to the official report of the Chief Medical Examiner of the City of Los Angeles, whose business card had to be unusually long to accommodate his full title, the cause of death was "forces unknown and unknowable, of perhaps a supernatural nature, but at the very least damned peculiar. Even a medical scientist trained in forensic investigation is left with a palpable sense of dread and a desire to move back home with Mommy." The same report described the remains as "monumentally icky," and "too repellently grotesque to be depicted in a motion picture for at least another sixty years or until Quentin Tarantino is allowed to direct, whichever comes first."

The following morning, in the Los Angeles Times' front-page story, no mention was made of Langford Crispin's Academy Award for his performance as Jerry Jekyll, but he was described as "the actor who, in *The Private Life of Henry the VIII*, chose to play Lord Havingstoke as a mincing, one-armed, twelve-toed tyrant in a funny hat and elfin shoes, in total disregard of the wishes of the film's director and in spite of much advice to the contrary provided by a consulting board of 312 prominent and deadly serious historians." Los Angeles is a hard, cruel town.

The *Book of Counted Sorrows* was sold with the other volumes in Langford's extensive book collection. The purchaser was a rare-book dealer named Ed Thomas, from Orange County, who at that time operated out of a former burlesque house that had been stripped of its seating and its strippers, and that boasted one of the odder smells of any book shop of its era. This Ed Thomas is not to be confused with the Ed Thomas to whom - with his wife, Pat - I dedicated my novel *Midnight*. The Ed Thomas who purchased Langford Crispin's library from the actor's estate was 58 years old in 1934, which would make him 125 as I write this. Even if my dear friend Ed Thomas looked 125, which he pretty much does not, he could not possibly be the same man who acquired *The Book of Counted Sorrows* with the rest of Langford's collection, because in 1942, that Ed Thomas was run down by a 30,000-pound Acme steamroller driven - according to witnesses - by a coyote.

For a while, *The Book of Counted Sorrows* fell into hands unknown before surfacing, in 1938, in the possession of a doomed poet by the name of Addison Heffalope.

Now excuse me while I pause to eat a cracker, drink a lemon beer, floss my teeth, present the floss to Skippy at the carriage master's cottage, obtain my receipt, witness the tying, sign the appropriate legal forms, visit the bathroom, complete an entry in the official lavatory log, wash my hands with three soaps, finishing with Aunt Jemima's Maximum-Power Lye Cake, present my hands to Mrs. Scuttlesby for inspection, and return here to the study, wonderfully refreshed.

You might wish to nap.

6

The Curse of Too Much Knowledge and a Trail of OFrightful Destruction.

I feel wonderfully refreshed. Sedley Nottingham, the estate's Com-mander of Beverages, provided a lemon beer and a wealth of amusing stories about his days as Defender of the Ardent Spirits at the Queen of England's secret getaway castle in Misery Lake, Arkansas, where he was more than once forced to maim and even kill commoners who tried to steal a bottle or two of Her Majesty's most precious vintages of fine Cabernet, some of which date to the time of Moses, and her most exquisite Merlots, some of which date to the time of Og the caveman and the age of the mastodons. Sedley is a marvelous storyteller with an appearance that greatly enhances his every tale: a mane of white hair, huge muttonchop sideburns, twinkling blue eyes as bloodshot as those of a survivor of any Megadeath concert, a nose the size of a formidable yellow squash and the color of an overripe tomato, pendulously fat lips, a tattooed tongue, a robust and barrel-chested body, and hands large enough and strong enough to strangle an ox. Indeed, to keep fit for his work, he had just finished strangling an ox quite near the back door to the kitchen as I arrived for my lemon beer, and we sat on the cooling hulk of the enormous horned beast while we chatted - or at least until Mrs. Scuttlesby arrived to drag it away.

Justin Parsimonious, our mumbling but esteemed Comptroller of Cookies and Crackers here on the Koontz estate, provided me with the single saltine that I requested, served on a plate of polished jackal bone, and then sat with Sedley and me upon the unfortunate ox until Mrs. Scuttlesby dragged it away, whereafter we all moved to the bench-style veranda swing, upon which we sat uncomfortably close to one another, pondering the meaning of existence, until Mrs. Scuttlesby arrived to drag Justin away for God knows what purpose.

At the carriage master's cottage, while Skippy measured my floss with a laser micrometer and photographed it against a black velvet cloth, he wondered aloud if there might be a Mr. Scuttlesby and, if so, what the lucky man might be like. The possibility of a Mr. Scuttlesby had

never occurred to me, and I was so thoroughly boggled that I needed to sit down. Unfortunately, Skippy occupied the only chair in the measuring room, and no dead ox was handy. I could tell that Skippy himself was boggled by his question, for the third eye spun like a pinwheel at the pinnacle of his handsome face.

On my return trip here to the study, exercising the free and supple imagination of a novelist, in an uncharacteristically lewd mood, I found myself puzzling over what positions the Scuttlesbys, husband and wife, might assume in their marital bed, and in what mutually satisfying actions they might engage - assuming, of course, that Mr. Scuttlesby actually existed and that there was not, in his place, merely a disgusting electrical-powered eros machine fashioned from pig iron, latex, Spandex, cow hide, skin of eel, and cadaver cartilage, with giant meshing gear wheels and rattling pistons and whirling thingies and lights flashing in the urgent and insistent rhythms of animal lust.

For reasons entirely mysterious to me, I suddenly found myself in a state of absolute terror, running this way and that, weaving through the topiary as though I were a pathetic panic-stricken piece of potential road-kill on a freeway streaming with hurtling semis. I collided with two topiary gardeners, frightened the mustache off one of our decorative-rock technicians, and caused our worm auditor to drop his sonic nightcrawler-detection device and lose count in his vitally important worm census, before at last dropping to the grass in exhaustion in the scrub-pine grove that we have whittled out of a once-majestic grouping of giant redwoods.

I'm okay now, feeling wonderfully refreshed, and happy to be back here in the study, grateful that you have waited for me, and thankful that fate has not seen fit to visit upon you any of the horrors that have befallen some visitors in the past when they have been left alone in this room.

Where was I?

Perhaps the more profound question is: Where am I going?

I do believe that life has purpose and meaning, that there is a fabulous (and tasteful) design to our days in this troubled world, and that every one of us has been put here with an important mission that he or she must discover and fulfill. Should we fail to fulfill these missions, we might be forgiven and generously granted a studio apartment in Heaven, with chintz curtains and cable TV, or provided with another life in which to try again - or our souls might be ripped out of us like pits being torn from peaches, to be cast down into an abyss of eternal darkness crawling with film-studio executives and other things that feed on the damned.

Some of us may have humble missions, and others may have grand missions. Perhaps you are meant single-handedly to rescue 104 helpless young children from a burning orphanage, while I am here to write a few pretty metaphors using roses as an image. You might be required to negotiate world peace, while I am expected only to help two or three elderly women across busy intersections at certain important points in my life. We don't know what's expected of us. It's very mysterious. What if I help the wrong elderly women across the street, and the one I fail to help is exactly the one I was meant to help, but she gets hit by a bus? Yet a fair God surely can't expect me to help even enfeebled elderly woman across the street; I'd get nothing else done.

When I was a naive but well-meaning boy, I believed that I knew my destiny. I had no doubt that I was meant to work in a meat-packing plant, bringing Vienna sausages and white chunk-meat chicken to a hungry world. You cannot ever know the depth of my despair when I discovered that I lacked sufficient physical strength to operate the massive levers of the sausage-arranging machine, which inserts the little sausages in concentric circles in each can, and that I was not possessed of sufficient judgment to be trusted to route the chunks of chicken, according to size, into cans variously marked "regular," "choice," "supreme," and "cat food."

I became a writer, and a fairly successful one, but some nights when I lie sleepless, I hear the meatpacking plant calling to me, calling, calling... On these occasions, a yearning of indescribable intensity fills me, rather like a gas bloat but poignant. Perhaps I have failed God by not making a life in meatpacking. But on the other hand, perhaps meat packing is my false destiny, and perhaps the plant that calls to me in such sweet melancholy tones in the night is owned by Satan, who means to mislead me from my one true mission into a frustrating and useless career in processed pork.

This is precisely the type of skull-busting quandary that has driven the great philosophers to fill libraries with their musings on the nature of creation and the plight of humanity. Therefore, I doubt that I will be able to resolve these weighty issues in a conversation with you, regardless of how long we sit here or how many lemon beers we consume. How much better if each of us had been born with detailed instructions tattooed on his or her buttocks. We would need a mirror to read them, of course, and an ability to decipher reversed images, but these would be simple problems compared to those we now face.

Which obviously brings me to Addison Heffalope, the doomed poet, who came into possession of The Book of Counted Sorrows in 1938.

Heffalope - Heff to his friends, Alope to his enemies - knew that he was doomed from the day he was born. His first word, spoken even before Dada or Mama, was simply death, in a most somber tone for a mere toddler. His second word was despair, his third was hopeless; and his fourth was brontosaurus, because even suicidally depressed tykes love dinosaurs. He didn't get around to saying Dada or Mam a until he was nineteen, by which time he was already carrying a gold-embossed business card identifying himself as "Addison Heffalope, Poet (Doomed)."

In 1936, at the age of 21, Heff married a female wrestler named Bea Scuttles, whom he had met in a conga line at a funeral for his friend, Toynbee Doob, whose business card had read "Toynbee Doob, Songwriter (Doomed)." The doomed tend to find one another in this cold lonely world, and to take a warm fuzzy solace in their shared burden of utter hopelessness. By the age of 22, Toynbee had written six smash hit songs, whereupon he had been pecked to death by a flock of rabid young actresses who had come to Hollywood seeking fame, with stars in their eyes, with hope in their hearts, but without all the necessary vaccinations.

Bea Scuttles, by all reports, did not consider herself to be doomed, but she was drawn to Heff anyway. Together they produced a child named Hisser, of indeterminate sex, whom they tried so very desperately to love, but who was, in fact, a hideous mutant with six legs, four arms, sucker pads on its hands and feet, a mouth half as big as its misshapen head, blazing red eyes, and an adorable mass of springy blond curls that once made Shirley Temple weep bitterly with envy. Hisser spent most of the day hiding from the sun, most of the night crawling across ceilings, and would eat little more than raw carrots and live cats. Hisser would drink anything, but only through a straw, and it had the annoying habit of loudly blowing bubbles in whatever beverage it was consuming.

Eventually the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals became suspicious after Heff and Bea adopted 3,624 cats from various animal shelters in the greater Los Angeles area. When the ASPCA representative paid a surprise visit and interrupted Hisser at dinner - a live-cat sandwich and a side of carrot slaw - the jig was up. By order of the court, the child was made a ward of the state and was conveyed to the compassionate but high-security facility known as the Malibu Home for Monstrous and Dangerous Mutant Children.

To us, in this more enlightened age, it seems all but impossible to believe that mutant children, regardless of how monstrous or how dangerous, would ever forcibly be separated from their parents and kept in a locked facility. We now understand that the right thing to do is embrace even the most monstrous and dangerous mutants - nay, not merely embrace them but celebrate them - in recognition of our awareness that there is a little of the mutant in every one of us, even if we don't eat live cats, the brains of unwary schoolteachers, or masses of steaming cow guts. In that intolerant and ignorant era, however, all dangerous mutant children were sequestered, men were expected to be courteous to women, women were expected not to discuss gynecological problems over dinner in a fine restaurant, and all non-mutant children uniformly respected their elders and never used the word ass in any context whatsoever. We have come a long way, and we have every reason to be proud.

The court-ordered seizure of Hisser was the blow that destroyed the Heffalope marriage. After the divorce, Bea at first resumed her career as a female wrestler, but soon she disappeared from human ken. Heff struggled to earn a few dollars here and there, writing doggerel for tawdry magazines about naked female scientists and for other tawdry magazines about busty blonde philosophers. (Pornography was illegal in those days, very much underground, and salacious material had to be disguised as publications with redeeming social purpose. Fortunately for pornographers, most of the upstanding citizens were so innocent and naive that the thinnest tissue of serious intention could convince them that a collection of photos of bare-naked women fondling themselves was entirely pure if a microscope or Bunsen burner, or volume of Plato's writings, were included in each shot.)

Sickened by the venereal verse that he composed for these sleazy rags, and inspired by something that he had read in The Book of Counted Sorrows (which was at that time in his possession), Heff fled to a shabby room in a shabby seaside motel in a shabby beach town on the magnificent Pacific coast and in one week wrote Ode to My Mutant Child in 754 rhyming quatrains. The film rights sold immediately to Orson Welles for \$612,004, a colossal fortune in those days, and not exactly chump change in our own time.

This astonishing good fortune had a profound effect on Heff. He confided to friends that for the first time in his life, he did not feel doomed, and to those enemies who knew him as Alope, he confided the same thing. A cloud had lifted from him. A dark storm had at last passed through and moved on. A slough of despond had drained. His sinuses were clearer, too, and he

credited the wisdom of The Book of Counted Sorrows for all these improvements in his life. He purchased a fine house in the flats of Beverly Hills, made plans to marry a pretty and good-hearted former high-school sweetheart named Tess, purchased a cute little kitten with no intention of feeding it to a mutant, acquired a brighter and more cheerful wardrobe than the black robes that had been his usual attire, and in September, 1939, he began work on Ode to My Wrestler Wife: Good Riddance and Goodbye, which sold to films for \$806,045 on the basis of the first eight rhyming lines and a two-word synopsis.

In early October, 1939, his head exploded. This was as great a disappointment to his friends as it was good news to his enemies, but the most profound effect was on the tender members of the children's choir in front of whom it occurred. Because Heff always had as great an interest in music as in doom, and because his newfound optimism motivated him to give something back to his community, he had become the unpaid and highly enthusiastic director of the choir at Our Lady of the Timid Waifs Orphanage. The orphans were indeed waifs, and timid; consequently, the horrid spectacle of Heff's exploding head traumatized them so thoroughly that most never sang again, and one of them was unable to pee for a week, though all the others peed a split second subsequent to poor Heff's violent self-decapitation. And peed copiously, I might add.

In Heff's defense, if he'd known that his head was going to explode, he would doubtlessly have arranged to be elsewhere: maybe home alone or on the beach, perhaps in a rose garden or at a dime-a-dance hall in the arms of a lovely and coquettish stranger. He would never have intentionally detonated in front of children. After all, no one can reasonably be expected to anticipate such a thing as a head explosion, and the Los Angeles Times, as usual, was judgmental and sensationalistic when it headlined the story IRRESPONSIBLE POET TRAUMATIZES ORPHAN WAIFS WITH EXPLOSIVE DENOCCINIZATION, recalling their equally shabby treatment of Langford Crispin.

Upon his death, Heff's considerable fortune - enhanced by wise investments in Human Stupidity Bonds, the value of which soar with the rise of stupidity in the species, but fall with any indication of increasing human wisdom - was inherited by his only child, Hisser Heffalope, ward of the state. At the age of eighteen, having survived into more enlightened times, Hisser was released into society. It became a wildly successful criminal defense attorney, specializing in clients who were wealthy serial killers; Hisser won not-guilty-by-reason-of-entertaining-legal-defense verdicts for the most savage, unremorseful, bloody-minded, and ill-dressed murderers of its time, winning kudos, plaudits, accolades, and prize Cadillacs from the wards committee of the hoity-toity American Bar Association. Hisser also pioneered the profitable practice of suing the grieving families of a killer's Victims for damages, sucking them drier than an empty coconut husk. A secondary career as a cat rancher was far less successful, because Hisser routinely ate the profits.

Fortunately for the fate of mankind, The Book of Counted Sorrows did not fall into Hisser's several hands upon Addison Heffalope's choir-traumatizing death, but was reacquired by Ed Thomas, the Orange County rare-book dealer. By this time, Thomas was no longer operating out of a converted burlesque theater. He had moved his business into a former whorehouse that for decades had specialized in providing midget prostitutes for sailors of equally diminutive stature.

(A parenthetical aside: The term "midget prostitute," much in use in the 1930s, is not one we would use these days. Now we would say "height-challenged hooker." or perhaps "pocket Venus, if we were of a poetic bent, or possibly even "very small, not to say unusually small, not to say remarkably small, lady of the night.")

This whorehouse, by now a shop called Book Orgy, in a commercial district overlooking Newport Harbor, was a wonderfully atmospheric structure of many rooms, all filled with treasures upon treasures of magnificent books, and conducive to leisurely browsing, especially because the omnipresent odor, though as odd as that in the burlesque house, was frequently more appealing. Thomas, always present and assisted by his charming wife Pitty, was more of a host and friend to his customers than he was a retailer. By all accounts, he was an affable man and happy in his work, though he might have been dour if he had known that three years hence, in 1942, he would be run down by that 30,000-pound Acme steamroller and squashed flatter than a page of onionskin paper. Customers spent hours in this charming former bordello for midget prostitutes and height-challenged sailors, roaming room to room, and not one ever complained that the five-foot-high ceilings required them to browse on their hands and knees. If from time to time a small but highly aroused and extremely agitated sailor burst into the shop, looking for action and exhibiting little or no appreciation for literature... Well, this was no more awkward for Ed and Pitty than when they had been obliged to deal with the elderly strippers who had shown up at the former burlesque house, down on their luck and offering to take off their clothes for two dollars.

In 1941, Ed Thomas sold The Book of Counted Sorrows to Clete Reet, a breathtakingly stylish and hugely successful big-band leader who was as famous in his time as Benny Goodman and

Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey, but who is now, sadly, as forgotten as Cream-'o-Chaff, once the most popular breakfast cereal in America. On stage and off, Reet dressed the same, in top hat and tuxedo and white silk scarf, as if he had stepped off the cover of Vanity Fair. An Art Deco icon, he went everywhere with two elegant borzoi hounds on leashes, smoking a slim cigarette in a six-inch carved-ivory holder, with a monocle over his left eye - and with an incredibly witty wisecrack always on his lips, as was expected from every icon in that glittering era. In our own time, of course, icons are expected only to be surly, grunt out half-articulate sentences, scratch their crotches, and whine about their inadequacies and addictions on boring talk shows hosted by butt-kissing celebritymongers.

During the first year that he owned Counted Sorrows, overwhelmed by the demands of being an icon, with little time to read, Clete Reet sampled only a few of the verses in the book. In 1942, however, he became obsessed with the volume. He read it more than a hundred times, cover to cover, backwards, forwards, upside down, with monocle and without, abed and afoot, tipsy and sober, to his dogs with a keen eye for their reactions, at a distance of twenty feet with the assistance of high-quality binoculars - and finally at a distance of only sixteen feet but still with binoculars, this time bending forward from the waist, looking backward between his legs.

Two months after Ed Thomas met his end in a delicate dance of death with 30,000 pounds of rolling doom, on the fateful night of December 10, 1942, while having dinner at the Brown Derby, Clete Reet - dining with the suave William Powell and the delightful Myrna Loy, with dancer extraordinaire Fred Astaire and the incomparable Ginger Rogers - suddenly sat bolt upright in his chair and swallowed his tongue, whereafter he swallowed his teeth, his lips, his chin, his nose, the remainder of his face and skull, his neck complete with wing collar and black tuxedo tie, his shoulders, both arms, then his torso, his hips, his legs, and his feet, shoes and all, until nothing remained of him but a toothless red pulsing orifice. This toothless red pulsing orifice hungrily sucked in three poppy-seed dinner rolls, a champagne flute filled with Dom Perignon, Ginger Rogers' exquisite pearl necklace, one of William Powell's cufflinks, and a hapless busboy before at last imploding on itself and vanishing with a rude noise that would have embarrassed the stylish and impeccably well-mannered Mr. Reet if he had still been alive to hear it.

Clete Reet's last will and testament bequeathed his estate to his sister, one "Miss Scuttlesby," of Ennui Plains, Kansas. This third female Scuttlesby with no first name might seem significant, but I am assured by our Mrs. Scuttlesby (whose assurances have the fearsome conviction and the blistering heat of a long burst of hard radiation from a malfunctioning nuclear-power plant) that Reet's sister was no relation of hers. I also do not believe that Reet's sister was related to Langford Crispin's clothespin-on-the-nose housekeeper, the other Mrs. Scuttlesby, because the nine private detectives that I sent to the once bustling town of Ennui Plains, in search of leads, discovered nothing along those lines before they all perished, one by one, in a series of tornadoes. No, the appearance in this story of the three Scuttlesby women without Christian names is just one of those amazing coincidences that litter our lives, but which I, as a novelist, could never use in a work of fiction, lest I be criticized for perpetrating a plot full of improbabilities.

By the way, I say "once bustling," as regards Ennui Plains, because the town no longer exists. Shortly after Clete Reet's will was probated and after the full sum of the inheritance was settled upon his beloved sister, something catastrophic happened to this picturesque prairie hamlet. I say "something catastrophic," because I have insufficient information to be more specific. On the morning that Miss Scuttlesby was to leave on vacation, Ennui Plains ceased to exist. No smallest splinter or stone of the community was ever found, no roof shingle or bent rusty nail, not one shattered teacup or one dented soup pot, not one severed finger or mangled foot belonging to a resident, not one pile of steaming guts or even one freestanding kidney. Ennui Plains had simply vanished. Some scientists speculate that the town spun away into a time vortex, while others suspect that it came into contact with an anti-matter Ennui Plains and was swiveled into an alternate universe; theologians, however, believe that God used Ennui Plains as a cosmic Kleenex, filling it with a great wad of divine snot and tossing it away into deep space. Any of these explanations might be correct, although the truth is most likely stranger still.

In any event, I have not been able to trace Miss Scuttlesby, the big-band heiress, from that fateful moment. Perhaps she disappeared along with Ennui Plains. If she left on vacation just prior to the catastrophe, I've no way to discover her whereabouts, for any of her neighbors or friends who may have had knowledge of her travel plans have themselves vanished into a void.

Where was I?

Who am I?

From whence come I?

Wither do I go?

Wherefore art my thumbs?  
Is there balm in Gilead?  
Where is Gilead?  
What is balm?  
How much does it cost?  
Has it been approved for sale by the FDA?  
Is it available in a cheaper generic form?  
Which came first, the chicken or the egg?  
Who shot Liberty Valance?  
Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?  
Who's who?  
What's what?  
How's that?  
Why did the chicken cross the road?  
Or did the egg cross it first?  
Where did the egg go when it got to the other side?  
Do you want fries with that?  
Do you think this mole looks funny?  
I mean, not funny-ha-ha, but funny as in funny-creepy?  
Why do fools fall in love?  
Why ask why?  
Why not ask why?  
Who are you to tell me what to ask and not ask?  
Where do you get off ?  
For that matter, where do you get on?  
Does that feel good?  
What about this?  
HMMMMMM?  
And this?  
Do you want to find a motel?  
In a real dark night of the soul, is it always three o'clock in the morning?  
Or sometimes is it more like 2:45?  
What time is it?  
What is time, anyway?  
Is time a dimension or a force, or entirely an illusion?  
Does my Wristwatch serve any important purpose other than to reinforce a delusion that  
time matters?  
What time are we leaving?  
Wither do I go?  
From whence come I?  
Who am I?  
Where was I?

Oh, yes, Clete Reet swallowed himself in the Brown Derby, the heiress sister disappeared with Ennui Plains, and The Book of Counted Sorrows was not reacquired by Ed Thomas because he had by then been crushed under a steamroller driven by a coyote. But by diverse means far too diverse to divine, the magical and dangerous volume passed through the hands of a series of bibliophiles, always bringing with it the curse of too much knowledge, and leaving a trail of frightful destruction from 1942 until the present day.

I need a massage.

7

Bruno Kronk, Masseur Extraordinaire and Monkey Mechanic.

Bruno Kronk's mother was the best friend of my second cousin twice removed. Please understand: The cousin was twice removed, not Bruno's mother, and as far as that goes, the cousin was brought back twice, as well, after being removed, although by a majority vote of the family, she was removed yet a third time and never brought back again.

Bruno's mother, Brunetta, was an attractive but hulking woman, who drew whistles from lumberjacks, though they were as likely to be whistles of respect as whistles of romantic intention. She could bench-press a 400-pound Sumo wrestler, whether he wanted to be bench-pressed or not, and as a consequence, she was not welcome in Japan. As far as lumberjacks went, she could



bench-press them, as well, two at a time, even while eating a breakfast of buckwheat cakes in garlic syrup, and she could fell a mighty redwood with her breath.

Brunetta left home at the age of seventeen with twelve dollars and a suitcase full of shoes, determined to see the world, every remote nook and crevice of it, but she returned at eighteen, barefoot and six months pregnant. Trailing behind her was Babe the Blue Ox, bigger than a house and bluer than one of the sleazy sex-and-science magazines for which Addison Heffalope, the doomed poet, wrote erotic doggerel. Brunetta's mother, Brunhilde, was certain that the father of the unborn child must be the owner of Babe: Paul Bunyan, the legendary giant lumberjack and American folk hero, who was also an infamous womanizer. (Do you want to see my Douglas fir, baby? How about a little log-rolling contest, sweetie? Believe me, this is a side of Bunyan that you don't want to explore.) Brunetta's father, Brunplotz, whose friends affectionately called him Plotzie, would have traced Bunyan down and either killed him or done something unimaginably more brutal; however, Brunetta managed to persuade him that she had not been impregnated by the giant lumberjack but by Big Foot. Because Big Foot is mysterious in the extreme, as elusive as a ghost, and most likely mythical, Plotzie reluctantly conceded that a quest for revenge would be futile. Thus he resigned himself to living with the shame of his precious daughter's dishonor. Three months thereafter, the family was left without vengeance but with little Bruno and a lifetime supply of blue sausages.

Thirty-two years later, Bruno came to work on the Koontz estate as our Masseur Extraordinaire and Monkey Mechanic. His massages are so aggressive that they are not merely relaxing but nearly fatal. If you have ever received a rigorous traditional Japanese massage, which is arguably the most forceful massage in the world, then you might be able to understand the power of Bruno's treatments if you can imagine a Japanese massage performed by a tribe of methamphetamine-crazed gorillas wielding baseball bats and lug wrenches while driven into a frenzy by samba music played at full volume on 40,000-amp speakers. Bliss. As deeply relaxing as a massage by Bruno can be, the restful effect is further enhanced on those occasions when a short-term coma and hospitalization follow.

You have no doubt noticed that I've left you alone here in my handsomely padded and tufted study for a mere twenty-one minutes and nine seconds, which is not nearly long enough for a complete massage, and being observant, you will have further noted that I have returned not in a coma, nor even disoriented, but only in a wheelchair and with a dreamy expression on my face. This is because my massage was interrupted by Mrs. Scuttlesby, who rushed to the massage theater to alert Bruno that a repair emergency had arisen regarding the robotic monkeys.

Although I myself possess no other talent or skill besides a certain humble gift for writing fiction, we are fortunate that this world harbors some exceptional human beings who can do two - or even more than two - things with equal ability. Albert Einstein was not only the greatest physicist who ever lived, but also the highest-scoring professional basketball player of his time. General Douglas MacArthur, brilliant commander of our Pacific forces in World War II, also had a profitable and acclaimed career as a stand-up comic in the Catskills and later in Las Vegas, under the name Shecky MacArthur, and in addition, he wrote best-selling romance novels under a name that I am sworn never to reveal, under penalty of instant spleen removal by descendants of the general. Likewise, our highly esteemed Bruno Kronk not only gives the most strenuous and most exquisitely debilitating massages on the North American continent, but he also is to robotic-monkey repair what Jackie Chan is to martial-arts movies.

Few estates in this country feature robotic-monkey displays, and I am burstingly proud to say that none - not even those vast sumptuous domains owned by Donald Trump, the Sultan of Brunei, Bill Gates, and Mick Jagger - none can boast as elaborate a collection of robotic monkeys as that which capers, tumbles, scampers, frolics, chatters, dances, and occasionally simulates copulation on our south lawn, albeit I will admit that Mick's collection, while smaller than ours, does contain more monkeys engaged in grossly obscene acts. Though if I were him, I wouldn't brag about this dubious distinction. Ours is largely a G-rated bunch of charming mechanical primates. On a warm spring afternoon, we enormously enjoy spreading a blanket on the south lawn and watching the monkeys pretend to pick lice out of one another's thick nylon fur, while we eat cucumber-and-cream-cheese sandwiches and wash them down with fifths of bourbon.

Will you please adjust my lap blanket? After even an incomplete massage from Bruno, I'm not at once able to control my arms, and in attempting to adjust my lap robe, I might spasmodically knock over that priceless Tiffany lamp or gouge off my nose.

Thank you. That's just right.

What?

Where?

Oh, be not afraid. No, really, there's no danger. That was nothing more than a robotic

monkey flinging itself at the window.

See, there's another one.

Yes, I know they can be daunting, with their gnashing steel teeth, gnashing and gnashing, but they are merely malfunctioning machines, not possessed of malevolent intent.

Well, you see, the windows will not shatter because -

Now that was a furious little Curious George! What an impact!

- because they are fabricated from inch-thick bulletproof glass.

Really, please sit down.

No, really.

Good lord! Impressive noise, wasn't it?

No, no, that wasn't a bigger monkey. They're all approximately the same size. That was just a pair of them, throwing themselves at the window while pretending to copulate.

I would offer you a little Scotch to quiet your nerves, but when you had finished it, you would be required to floss and convey the used length to the visitor's window at the carriage master's cottage. Until Bruno has ascertained the precise cause of the malfunction of the robotic monkeys and has effected repairs, it would be unwise for any of us to venture outside.

Where was I?

8

Everything Additional that I Know about The Cursed Book.

I have told you heretofore and foursquarely that to track the ownership of The Book of Counted Sorrows is to follow a trail of frightful destruction.

I was not exaggerating.

I never exaggerate. The exaggeration nodule of my cerebellum was surgically removed when I was six years old, as part of a religious ritual performed on every child in the cult to which my parents had committed themselves and from which I didn't escape until I was fourteen. Though I sometimes yearn for my lost ability to exaggerate, I am most grateful that it was not the policy of the cult to neuter every six-year-old child.

But allow me to return - which I must, as surely as the swallows return to Capistrano and occasionally fry themselves by perching on insulation-stripped power lines - to the subject of Counted Sorrows, and to the truly frightful destruction and the violent death and the madness and the severe dental crises that found those who came into possession of that tome.

After Clete Reet swallowed himself in 1942, Sorrows eventually passed into the hands of Rupert Cling, of the peach-fortune family. In 1944, in a state of tremulous excitement, he told friends that he had discovered the meaning of life in The Book of Counted Sorrows and felt as though he might explode with the power of this knowledge. He did not explode - as you were no doubt expecting he would - but two days thereafter, he threw himself into the peach-handling equipment, whereupon he was peeled, sliced, processed, and canned in heavy syrup along with two million pounds of Georgia's finest.

In 1946, Henry Dubonnet, an apprentice spittle-valve cleaner for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, came into possession of the book. One week later, during a performance of 101 variations on Ravel's Bolero, as Henry was standing by with his spittle-collection jar, his vacuum siphon, his spittle-sample camera, his log book, and the necessary legal forms requiring the signature of each donating musician, this dear man, this well-liked nonentity, suddenly began to spin. Faster and faster he spun, so fast that his spittle-collection jar and the other items vital to his trade were flung away from him at such high velocity that they decapitated and otherwise inconvenienced seven members of the audience. Yet faster Henry spun, faster, faster, churning ever faster, until he was a blur, and then something less clichéd than a blur (though the word eludes meà, faster. When at last he stopped spinning, he was no longer a man at all, but a column of butter in the shape of a man. The Enforcer of Official Orchestra Systems, one Lucifinda Scuttlesby, happened to be standing near Henry Dubonnet when this transformation occurred, and she is quoted in the Los Angeles Times as saying, "It was most distressing. Our apprentice spittle-valve cleaner, whatever his name might have been, was such a huggable little chubby nonentity. I know everyone involved with the Philharmonic will pause this evening for perhaps a quarter minute of silence to honor his memory. But in spite of whatever grief we might feel sticking like phlegm in our throats, I believe that all of us would agree that the butter into which this humble little nobody spun himself looked as creamy and delicious as the finest spread you have ever seen served in any five-star restaurant in the world. Had there been muffins and scones handy, we would have slathered them at once. With great affection, we would have devoured what's-his-name in a New York

minute, which is the most touching tribute I can imagine being given to a man with so little to offer the world prior to this event."

(A parenthetical aside: Some of you, having read this far, are by now sophisticated enough to understand that what often appears to be a significant event is not in fact significant at all, and here I refer, of course, to the appearance of a fourth Scuttlesby in this saga. In this instance, I didn't even have to ask our Mrs. Scuttlesby if she were related to the Enforcer of Official Orchestra Systems who served the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 1946, because, for one thing, that Scuttlesby had a first name - Lucifinda; and for another thing, nowhere in the Los Angeles Times account is either the title Miss or Mrs. coupled with her name. These variations from the pattern of the previous Scuttlesbys make it clear that this is but an anomaly, with no connection, and certainly not worth investigating at the expense of nine more detectives dead in nine more tornadoes. Although I never put the question to our Mrs. Scuttlesby, she came forth unsolicited to assure me that indeed she had never heard of Lucifinda Scuttlesby. For me, that put the matter to rest, because the assurances of our esteemed Mrs. Scuttlesby have the same quality of irrefutable finality as death by dynamite, and they are delivered with a sincerity that equals in intensity the ghastly pressure of those great oceanic depths that can crush the steel hull of a submarine as though it were tissue paper.)

(Yes, this is another parenthetical aside. I sincerely apologize for the proliferation of these annoying interruptions of the main narrative. I am acutely aware of the stress you experience when you are required to read the parenthesis at the top and bottom of the aside, first the left-oriented convex "(", and then the right-oriented convex ")," which place considerably more demands on the mind than any letter of the alphabet or other form of punctuation. To compensate for this, I have attempted to use fewer italics than is usually my style, and I have edited out a slew of semicolons that I would have liked to include. We are in this together, you and I, and since you were kind enough to adjust my lap blanket, I feel obligated to make your experience of this narrative as pleasant as possible.)

(You may be grinding your teeth at yet another parenthetical aside - or perhaps that is only the sound of the robotic monkeys gnawing at the bulletproof windows. In any event, if you will bear with me, I am sure that you will find this particular aside of some interest, especially if you are a classical-music buff. Were you aware that the Los Angeles Philharmonic, of which we've so recently been speaking, is the only symphony orchestra in the world that has a six-chair theremin section to provide eerie here-comes-the-monster moments where applicable in the compositions of Beethoven and Bach? No, I didn't think you were aware of that. Furthermore, no other orchestra can boast a two-chair gun section in which a pair of fine musicians are armed with everything from simple revolvers to fully automatic combat weapons to produce punctuations of sound that help the audience more fully imagine the bloody shootouts that are such important themes in everything by Tchaikovsky and George Gershwin.)

You'll notice this paragraph is not preceded by a parenthesis, nor does one of those damnable things come at the end, for now we have returned to the primary narrative, where I will tell you about Buddy Vishnu, investment adviser to the criminally insane. Buddy came into the possession of Counted Sorrows in 1947, while on a trip to Colorado to purchase a 120,000-acre cattle ranch for the real-estate portfolio of the Cleveland Strangler. Not three months thereafter - in fact, it was only one month - at the opening of a new Manhattan art gallery owned by the Milwaukee Mauler, as Buddy Vishnu was engaged in a discussion about the merits of investing in antique codpieces, his head exploded.

In June of 1948, Phylo P. Phillium, a world-renowned architect of vomitoriums, was given the fateful book by his niece, as a present on the occasion of the third anniversary of his successful buttocks-reduction surgery. On the ninth of August, Phylo entirely swallowed himself while having dinner at the beautiful Bel Air Hotel, an event covered extensively in a lovely article in that December's issue of Bon Appetit.

In March of 1950, Sam Iam, the massively wealthy inventor of green eggs, who sold such volume every St. Patrick's Day that he could afford not to work the rest of the year, claimed to have gotten Counted Sorrows from a leprechaun, which is an obvious and despicable lie. The truth of his demise, however, is well known: He was found inexplicably emulsified and smeared across the ceiling of the model-train room in his mansion.

You see, I am sure, that a tiresome pattern has developed. As dreadful as these deaths may be, and in spite of the fact that they provide the gruesome trail of frightful destruction that I promised you, they would have a numbing, not to say paralyzing, not to say coma-inducing effect on you if I were to recount the rest of them in the detail that I have heretofore provided. Consequently, I will convey you through the next half century of tragedy and mayhem in a more expeditious style.

The following people came into possession of Counted Sorrows without the slightest suspicion that the consequence of ownership was considerably more serious than, say, the minimum purchase obligation imposed on members by the Literary Guild, an organization that can be plenty tough when compelling you to purchase the agreed-upon number of books, but that has never forced a recalcitrant member to swallow himself.

1952. Vinnie "The Velociraptor" Taliferio, notorious Mafia pet nanny, was dandling Don Vita Corleone's cherished toy poodle on his knee, at the Don's birthday party, when his head exploded. Other guests, thinking that this was meant to be a hit on the Godfather himself, drew their weapons and killed eight innocent waiters. Well, seven were innocent, actually; the eighth was only moonlighting as a waiter and really wanted to be a film-studio executive.

1954. Dr. Farn Lannaman, highly skilled surgeon and pioneer of nose-hair transplants, dropped his surgical tools and spun himself into butter in the middle of refurbishing the nearly bat d nostrils of the great actor, James Cagney.

1955. The same year that he perished, Nestor Nada, of Tarzana, California, invented the shrub-and-tree blower, which preceded the gasoline-powered leaf blower by about two decades. The shrub-and-tree blower featured an early version of the jet engine, powered by nuclear fusion, and was meant to be a final solution to the annoyance of landscape droppings, tearing out all greenery by the roots and blowing it into the next county. Nestor was found emulsified and smeared on the ceiling of a public restroom in a casino in Las Vegas, Nevada, and it pains me to say that his death was celebrated by the usual environmentalist extremists who think trees are good.

1956. Jimmy Crackcorn, an itinerant gerbil groomer, spun himself into butter, then past butter, finally coming to a halt when he was a soft cheese.

1957. Jack Benimble. University professor and well-regarded Spam sculptor. Head exploded.

1959. Jack Bequick. Buttermaker. Turned to butter. Some irony in this one.

1962. Lars Ferndahl. Advance scout for a large extraterrestrial invasion force of intelligent giant insects from Andromeda, disguised as human. Head exploded, body continued to move for nine minutes.

1965. Dr. Lee Sham. Practiced proctology by acupuncture, with many Hollywood stars on his patient list. Head exploded.

1966. Bob Roberts. Fob fabricator. Head exploded.

1968. Peter Piper. Pickle packer. Ceiling smear.

1969. Peter Peter Pumpkineater. Pumpkin eater. Smeared on the dome of his pumpkin-shell living room.

1971. Bllly-Bob Beauregard Bodeen. Professional Southern eccentric. Swallowed himself, but started with his left hand instead of his tongue, pausing twice to request another double side order of grits.

1973. Unidentified hobo. Panhandler. Spun himself into Ripple marmalade.

1976. J. Chandler Witherspoon. Singularly vicious book critic. Bludgeoned, strangled, stabbed, shot forty-seven times, hacked, and immolated. This is the only Counted Sorrows case of its kind, and none of the scholars in this field knows quite what to make of it.

1977. Moses Posey. Sainly minister. He anticipated his fate and made suitable arrangements for the distribution of his remains: He spun himself into butter and on Thanksgiving, at his church-operated soup kitchen, was served atop 900 mounds of mashed potatoes with 900 turkey dinners for the indigent.

1979. J. Chandler Witherspoon. Singularly vicious book critic. His grave was found excavated, his casket open. His already battered, burned, and thoroughly punctured remains had been scattered on the cemetery grass, saturated with sulfuric acid, mixed with thousands of cloves of garlic, and covered with cow dung. Counted Sorrows scholars agree that this is the only known case in which the book's virulent curse continued to act upon one of its pathetic owners even after he was dead.

Finally, in 1980, my Aunt Hortense purchased The Book of Counted Sorrows, intending to present it to me as an Arbor Day gift. Most people know nothing of the history of this volume, but as a novelist, it is part of my job to be well informed about an enormous number of subjects, many of them exotic, some of them arcane, and more than a few of them ridiculous. I was aware of the tome's deadly effect on the many fine and admirable people who'd had the bad luck to come into possession of it. [I'm sure you understand that I do not mean to include J. Chandler Witherspoon as one of the "fine and admirable people," for as everyone who ever knew him will tell you, he was a thorough prick.] I was also aware that although the book had been owned, at times, by women, and that although many of those women had read it cover to cover, and although many of them claimed to have achieved a singular enlightenment from their reading, and although eleven of them had been seen to rise off this earth and ascend in a shaft of golden light into heavens filled with singing

cherubs, not any of these fine women had exploded or been violently emulsified, nor had any of them spun herself into butter or soft cheese, or swallowed herself. Consequently, I requested that Aunt Hortense retain ownership of Counted Sorrows and merely lend it to me for an unspecified length of time.

I was also aware that everyone who read every poem in the book met an explosive, buttery, or strange end, and that everyone who read all but one poem managed to escape violent death but nevertheless went insane. You will recall our esteemed and adored former employee, Thelma Kickmule, who now lives in a chicken coop in Iowa and is known by her coopmates as the "Featherless Hen." With this in mind, and with good reason to believe that I would not have the social skills to be easily accepted in chicken society, I promised myself that I would read the entire collection of verse except for two poems, thus escaping both head explosion and insanity - though, sadly, this meant that I would fail to achieve the glorious enlightenment that had come to those who read the work complete. But, hey, I take solace from that old, wise saying: Glorious enlightenment and two dollars will buy you a latte at Starbucks.

(One more parenthetical aside, infuriating as it may be: Much thought has been given, by me and by other scholars, as to why women are able to read the entire book, achieve enlightenment, and suffer no negative consequences. [Excepting, of course, our Miss Kickmule, who, let's face it, did have an unusually high testosterone level for a woman. She used to wrestle grizzly bears for relaxation and never cried when she saw *The English Patient*.] Is it because women have a greater capacity for truth and enlightenment than do mere men? Many scholars believe this is the answer - although these are primarily female scholars. Is it because men, while possessing a capacity for truth and enlightenment the equal of that possessed by women, simply have a devastating allergic reaction to the chemicals used in the ink or paper in this particular volume, which produces such distressing symptoms as head explosions, emulsification, metamorphosis into butter, and self-swallowing? Other scholars are convinced that this is the explanation - and although these are primarily males and may be biased, I have always read the book while wearing both latex gloves and quilted oven mittens.)

In any event, the verses that follow are the complete text of *The Book of Counted Sorrows*, except that we have withheld two poems in an attempt to spare male readers from the likelihood of madness and messy violent death. No need for any of you men to thank me for that. It is the least I can do.

Finally, a word about the verses themselves. Actually, here are more than a word; here are forty-three words about the verses themselves. But I felt it would sound peculiar to say "here are forty-three words about the verses themselves," though now, through the mechanism of this clarification, I've gone ahead and said it anyway, so I might just as well have said it in the first place. Well, live and learn. So here are those forty-three words: Some of these poems are nothing but doggerel; some are doggerel with a touch of wisdom; others are of a more ambitious nature, and the level of success varies from piece to piece; and a few are perhaps emotionally and intellectually engaging.

You know, however, what my opinion is worth: My opinion and two dollars will buy you a latte at Starbucks.

The thought of that latte was so appetizing, so fully realized with my free and supple imagination, that even though I did not, in fact, consume the beverage, I am now required to floss and proceed to the carriage master's cottage.

Be not afraid for me. The robotic monkeys have been repaired.

And Now the Text of the Cursed Book...

THE BOOK OF COUNTED SORROWS

An Inevitable Doom Press Publication

All rights vigorously reserved and viciously defended.

© 1928 by " "

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means without permission in writing, in blood, from the publisher. Any violation of this copyright will result in the violator being tracked down by packs of spectacularly well-trained and utterly savage pigs that will find you as easily as they would locate truffles if that happened to be what they were trained to find.

These pigs will bite you on the ankles, kneecaps, and genitals until you have been subdued, whereupon you will be conveyed to the proper authorities to be executed, convicted, and put on trial, in that order.

PUBLISHER'S DISCLAIMER:

Inevitable Doom Press hereby warns all readers of the possibility of insanity or violent death resulting from the reading of these verses. You may also suffer headaches, halitosis, hoof-and-mouth disease, dizziness, failure to achieve dizziness when dizziness is desired, bleeding from hair follicles, the unexplained cancellation of subscriptions that are dear to you, hives, rashes, boils, inflamed earlobes, the sudden growth of a second head, bad weather, colossal flatulence, the compulsion to insist that your name is Igor when you know perfectly well this isn't true, the unwanted romantic attention of cats, blisters, and the growth of eye hair.

Table of Contents

One Door Away From Heaven  
Neither Do They Fade Away  
In the Fields of Life  
The Weight  
The Train Leaves the Station  
A Delicious Walk  
Habit Makes Destiny  
Pedal to the Metal  
Remembering When We Didn't Expect to Live Forever  
A Roundness  
Remembered Dreams  
Academic and Novelist as Abbott and Costello  
The Chain  
Short Story  
The Modern Age  
Wee Wisdom  
This Old Honkytonk of Fools  
Cold Fire  
Whom You Might Trust  
1992  
Men on White Horses  
Crossing Nevada  
Melodrama  
Busy Humanity  
Kiss  
The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette  
Winter Moon  
The Mask  
Reality  
The Answer Comes After the Funeral  
Drummer  
Potboiler  
Saving Graces

Politics

Ten Years Old, Reading in Bed

Fallen Yet Not Lacking in Virtue

February, 1969

We Are All So Modern Here

All Those Snappy Epigrams on the Theme of Night

Anthem

A Thought While Reading Rex Stout

Cry Doom

Dragon Tears

Cold Questions

Mary Shelley, No One Listens

A Job May Not Be Enough

The Root of All Mystery

Haiku

Where God Goes on Vacation

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening with Exploding Heads: A

Tribute in Verse to Robert Frost

About The Author

About This Book (from the scanners)

## Dedication

To the doomed. To the forgotten. To the misunderstood. To the misbegotten.  
To the doomed and forgotten misbegotten who have been frequently  
misunderstood. To the melancholy, the lonely, the lost, the weary, the  
hopelessly anguished, the bitterly distraught, the terminally cranky, the  
ferociously depressed, and the seethingly disinterested.

Also to Uncle Mort and Aunt Clara: Thanks for the homemade muffins.

## One Door Away From Heaven

One door away from Heaven,  
We live each day and hour.  
One door away from Heaven,  
But it lies beyond our power  
To open the door to Heaven,  
And enter when we choose.  
One door away from Heaven,  
And the key is ours to lose.  
One door away from Heaven,  
But, oh, the entry dues.  
One door away from Heaven,  
And yet we sing the blues.  
One door away from Heaven,  
We live each day and night.  
One door away from Heaven  
Is such a perilous height,  
A long fall from the doorstep,  
If we can't tell wrong from right.

## Neither Do They Fade Away

Elvis is dead but spotted in Biloxi,  
In Nashville, Corpus Christi. He's got moxie  
To be dead vet movie-going at the Roxie,  
Still sticking to this world as if epoxied.  
Glimpsed in a pink Caddy there in Biloxi,

Our ageless King, still smilin' and still foxy.  
They say Walt Disney was frozen to live again,  
To once more walk his magic land of mice and men.  
Al Einstein's brain is rumored floating in a jar.  
Until he's got a new body, he won't go far.  
This is America, where failure is decried.  
This is America, and death must be denied.

#### In The Fields Of Life

In the fields of life, a harvest  
Sometimes comes far out of season,  
When we thought the earth was old  
And could see no earthly reason  
To rise for work at break of dawn,  
And put our muscles to the test.  
With winter here and autumn gone,  
It just seems best to rest, to rest.  
But under winter fields so cold,  
Wait the dormant seeds of seasons  
Unborn, and so the heart does hold  
Hope that heals all bitter lesions.  
In the fields of life, a harvest.

#### The Weight

We have a weight to carry  
And a distance we must go.  
We have a weight to carry,  
A destination we can't know.  
We have a weight to carry  
And can put it down nowhere.  
We are the weight we carry  
From there to here to there.

#### The Train Leaves The Station

All of us are travelers lost,  
Our tickets arranged at a cost  
Unknown but beyond our means.  
This odd itinerary of scenes  
- Enigmatic, strange, unreal -  
Leaves us unsure how to feel.  
No postmortem journey is rife  
With more mystery than life.

#### A Delicious Walk

The tired dog lies licking its feet.  
Absorbed, quiet, and so discrete.

You would be wrong in assuming  
It is engaged in mere grooming.

You can tell by the canine smiles,  
It's tasting the mem'ry of miles.

#### Habit Makes Destiny



On the road that I have taken,  
One day, walking, I awaken,  
Amazed to see where I have come,  
Where I'm going, where I'm from.

This is not the path I thought.  
This is not the place I sought.  
This is not the dream I bought,  
Just a fever of fate I've caught.

I'll change highways in a while,  
At the crossroads, one more mile.  
My path is lit by my own fire.  
I'm going only where I desire.

On the road that I have taken,  
One day, walking, I awaken.  
One day, walking, I awaken,  
On the road that I have taken.

#### Pedal To The Metal

Hope is the destination that a seek.  
Love is the road that leads to hope.  
Courage is the motor that drives us.  
We travel out of darkness into faith.

Even on this map of infinite complexity,  
Only one highway is worth following,  
One route worth the time behind the wheel,  
One arrival rewarding to the traveler.

No rest stop can offer rest assured  
To equal the peace at highway's end,  
When you've driven hard and well,  
With purpose, in search of meaning.

#### Remembering When We Didn't Expect To Live Forever

We once ate great half-raw steaks  
And washed them down with martinis.  
Eggs and bacon for breakfast,  
Sweet or sour cream over Minis.  
We drove fast and free of belts.  
We smoked if we wanted to.  
We finished the day with a brandy  
And occasionally even two.

Now we know the folly of those ways,  
The dangers of those innocent days.  
Salad now, and a glass of iced tea.  
We shudder at the mention of Brie.  
Seatbelts, airbags, sugarless gum.  
Count every calorie, know the sum.  
Clogged arteries are not forgiving.  
Clogged or not - this isn't living.

#### A Roundness

Life is a gift that must be given back,  
And joy should arise from its possession.  
It's too damned short, and that's a fact.  
Hard to accept, this earthly procession  
To final darkness is a journey done,  
Circle completed, work of art sublime,  
A sweet melodic rhyme, a battle won.

#### Remembered Dreams

Your face, as no other face,  
Populates remembered dreams.  
Your arms, as no other place:  
Landscape to remembered dreams.  
Your heart, as no other heart.  
Your eyes, as no other eyes,  
In you each dream must start.  
With you the real world dies  
And my life thereafter lies  
Only in remembered dreams.

#### Academic And Novelist As Abbott And Costello

You deconstruct. I'll reconstruct.  
You analyze. I'll catalyze  
New brews from old elixirs.  
You mix it up. I'll fix it up.  
You break it down. I'll play the clown  
At one of your faculty mixers.  
You challenge style. I'll smile awhile.  
You find the theme. I'll soon redeem  
My work from any classroom trickster.

#### The Chair

Tremulous skeins of destiny  
Flutter so ethereally  
Around me - but then I feel  
Its embrace is that of steel.

#### Short Story

A gasp of breath,  
A sudden death:  
The tale begun.

A rustled page  
Passes an age:  
The tale is done.

#### The Modern Age

Living in the modern age,  
Death for virtue is the wage.  
So it seems in darker hours.  
Evil wins, kindness cowers.

Ruled by violence and vice.  
We all stand upon thin ice.

Are we brave or are we mice,  
Here upon such thin, thin ice?

Dare we linger, dare we sate?  
Dare we laugh or celebrate?  
Knowing we may strain the ice?  
Preserve the ice at any price?

Wee Wisdom

When tempest-tossed,  
Embrace chaos.

This Old Honkytonk Of Fools

Rush headlong and hard at life  
Or just sit at home and wait.  
All things right and all the wrong  
Will come straight to you: It's fate.

Hear the music, dance if you can.  
Dress in rags or wear your jewels.  
Drink your choice, nurse your fear  
In this old honkytonk of fools.

Cold Fire

Vibrations in a wire.  
Ice crystals  
In a beating heart.  
Cold fire.

A mind's frigidity:  
Frozen steel,  
Dark rage, morbidity.  
Cold fire.

Defense against  
A cruel life,  
Death and strife:  
Cold fire.

Whom You Might Trust

Nowhere can a secret keep  
Always secret, dark and deep,  
Half so well as in the past,  
Buried deep to last, to last.

Keep it in your own dark heart.  
Otherwise the rumors start.

After many years have buried  
Secrets over which you worried,  
No confidant can then betray  
All the words you didn't say.

Only you can then exhume  
Secrets safe within the tomb  
Of memory, of memory,

Within the tomb of memory.

1992

Winter that year was strange and gray.  
The damp wind smelled of Apocalypse,  
And morning skies had a peculiar way  
Of slipping cat-quick into midnight.

Men On White Horses

Those who would banish the sin of greed  
Embrace the sin of envy as their creed.  
Those who seek to banish envy as well  
Only draw elaborate new maps of Hell.

Those with passion to change the world  
Look on themselves as saints, as pearls,  
And by the launching of noble endeavor,  
Flee dreaded introspection forever.

Crossing Nevada

Las Vegas far behind  
The highway flat  
And straight  
The Mojave dark  
Where this small town  
At 2 a.m.  
Holds hot eternity at bay  
With service-station lights  
And a humming Coke machine  
Though neither can lay to rest  
The uneasy suspicion  
That a power failure  
Would release not only  
The dammed-up night  
But also the ancient sea  
Withdrawn eons ago  
And waiting to return  
In a massive tide  
When the cola logo  
Blinks off.

Melodrama

A rain of shadow, a squall!  
Daylight retreats. Night swallows all!  
If good is bright, if evil be gloom,  
High evil walls the world entombs.  
Now comes the end, the drear, Darkfall.

Busy Humanity

Pestilence, disease, and war  
Haunt this sorry place.  
And nothing lasts forever.  
That's a truth we have to face.

We spend vast energy and time  
Plotting death for one another.  
No one, nowhere, is ever safe.  
Not father, child - or mother.

#### Kiss

Night can be sweet as a kiss,  
Though not a night like this.

She's traveled on from me,  
Across that uncharted sea.

I stand on this dark shore  
And of the stars implore.

Give me that same cold kiss.  
I'll join her then in bliss.

#### The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Where eerie figures caper  
To some midnight music  
That only they can hear.

#### Winter Moon

Under the winter moon's pale light,  
Across the cold and starry night,  
From snowy mountains soaring high  
To ocean shores echoes the cry.  
From barren sands to verdant fields,  
From city streets to lonely wealds,  
Cries the tortured human heart,  
Seeking solace, wisdom, a chart  
By which to understand its plight  
Under the winter moon's pale light.  
Dawn is unable to fade the night.  
Must we live ever in the blight  
Under the winter moon's cold light,  
Lost in loneliness, hate, and fright,  
Last night, tonight, tomorrow night,  
Under the winter moon's bleak light?

#### The Mask

Evil is no faceless stranger  
Living in a distant neighborhood.  
Evil has a wholesome, hometown face  
With merry eyes and an open smile.  
Evil walks among us, wearing a mask  
That looks like all our faces.

#### Reality

In the real world  
As in dreams,  
Nothing is quite

What it seems.

In the dream world  
Or the real,  
We can't know what  
We can't feel.

The Answer Comes After The Funeral

The sky is deep, the sky is dark.  
The light of stars is so damn stark.  
When I look up, I fill with fear.  
If all we have is what lies here,  
This lonely world, this troubled place,  
Then cold dead stars and empty space...  
Well, I see no reason to persevere,  
No reason to laugh or shed a tear,  
No reason to sleep or ever to wake,  
No promises to keep, and none to make.  
And so at night I still raise my eyes  
To study the clear but mysterious skies  
That arch above us, as cold as stone.  
Are you there, God? Are we alone?

Drummer

Darkness devours every shining day.  
Darkness demands and always has its way.  
Darkness listens, watches, waits.  
Darkness claims the day and celebrates.  
Sometimes in silence darkness comes.  
Sometimes with a gleeful banging of drums.

Potboiler

There's no escape  
From Death's embrace,  
Though you lead it on  
A merry chase.

The dogs of Death  
Enjoy the chase.  
Just see the smile  
On each hound's face.

The chase can't last  
The dogs must feed.  
It Will come to pass  
With terrifying speed.

The hounds, the hounds  
Come baying at his heels.  
The hounds, the hounds!  
The breath of Death he feels.

Saving Graces

Courage, love, friendship,  
Compassion, and empathy

Lift us above the simple beasts  
And define humanity.

#### Politics

At the point where hope and reason part,  
Lies that spot where madness gets a start.  
Hope to make the world kinder and free -  
But flowers of hope root in reality.

No peaceful bed exists for lamb or lion,  
Unless on some world out beyond Orion.  
Do not instruct the owls to spare the mice.  
Owls acting as owls must is not a vice.

Storms do not respond to heartfelt pleas.  
All the words of men can't calm the seas.  
Nature - always beneficent and cruel -  
Won't change for a wise man or a fool.

Humanity shares Nature's imperfections,  
Clearly visible to casual inspections.  
Resisting betterment is the human trait.  
The ideal of utopia is our tragic fate.

#### Ten Years Old, Reading In Bed

From a blanket, the boy built a palace  
With a flashlight for a chandelier.  
Down a rabbit hole, he followed Alice,  
Where the cursing and shouting weren't clear.  
He lived stories of courage and malice,  
While the old man chased bourbon with beer.  
Riding with horsemen north out of Dallas:  
Thunderous hoofbeats would not let him hear  
The plotless rage and the whiskey diction  
And the chaos always conquered in fiction.

#### Fallen Yet Not Lacking In Virtue

Every eye sees its own special vision.  
Every ear hears a most different song.  
In each man's troubled heart, an incision  
Would reveal a unique, shameful wrong.  
Stranger fiends hide here in human guise  
Than reside in the valleys of Hell.  
Yet goodness, kindness, and love arise  
In the heart of the poor beast as well.

#### February, 7969

She died wondering  
If she were loved  
She died with her hands  
Ungloved  
By the hands of a sister  
Or her son  
Neither one

Neither one  
We were on the highway  
In the night  
Speeding to Pittsburgh  
Stars not right  
We arrived in the crisis  
She couldn't wait  
We reached her bedside  
Too late  
My father entered  
Whiskey on his breath  
More than my lost mother  
He smelled of death  
As useless as usual  
Self-involved  
Into tearless grief  
His face dissolved  
Had I not stopped  
To eat a slice of toast  
I might have gained  
Two minutes at the most  
Had I not changed my socks  
And then my shoes  
Before responding  
To that urgent news  
Had I driven  
Even more recklessly  
Mother might yet have been alive  
For me  
Still only aching flesh  
And weary bone  
But spared the burden of dying alone

#### We Are All So Modern Here

Peaches, surfers, California girls.  
Wind scented with fabulous dreams.  
Bougainvillea, groves of oranges.  
Stars are born, everything gleams.  
A weather change. Shadows fall.  
New scent upon the wind: decay.  
Cocaine, Uzis, drive-by shootings.  
Death is a banker. Everyone pays.

#### All Those Snappy Epigrams On The Theme Of Night

The whisper of the dusk  
Is night shedding its husk.

Numberless paths of night  
Wind away from twilight.

To know the darkness is to love the light,  
To welcome dawn and fear the coming night.

Night has patterns that can be read  
Less by the living than by the dead.

Something moves within the night



That is not good and is not right.

When I'm in the night,  
I feel the night in me.

The night speaks with a human voice.  
To commune with it remains our choice.

Brother night, sister moon.  
Together sing a tuneless tune.

#### Anthem

To see what we have never seen,  
To be what we have never been,  
To shed the chrysalis and fly,  
Depart the earth, kiss the sky,  
To be reborn, be someone new:  
Is this a dream or is it true?

Can our future be cleanly shorn  
From a life to which we're born?  
Is each of us a creature free -  
Or trapped at birth by destiny?  
Pity those who believe the latter.  
Without freedom, nothing matters.

#### A Thought While Reading Rex Stout

Holy men tell us life is a mystery.  
They embrace that concept happily.  
But some mysteries bite and bark  
And come to get you in the dark.

#### Cry Doom

Is that the end of the world a-coming?  
Is that the devil they hear humming?  
Are those doomsday bells a-ringing?  
Is that the devil they hear singing?

Or are their dark fears exaggerated?  
Are these doom-criers addlepatated?

Those who fear the coming of all Hells  
Are those who should be feared themselves.

#### Dragon Tears

Far away in China,  
The people sometimes say,  
Life is often bitter  
And all too seldom gay.  
Bitter as dragon tears,  
Great cascades of sorrow  
Flood down all the years,  
Drowning our tomorrows.

Far away in China,  
The people also say,

Life is sometimes joyous  
If all too often gray.  
Although life is seasoned  
With bitter dragon tears,

Seasoning is but one spice  
Within our brew of years.  
Bad times are merely rice;  
Tears are one more flavor  
That gives us sustenance,  
Something we can savor.

#### Cold Questions

Is there some meaning to this life?  
What purpose lies behind the strife?  
Whence do we come, where are we bound?  
These cold questions echo and resound  
Trough each day, each lonely night.  
We long to find the splendid light  
That will cast a revelatory beam  
Upon the meaning of the human dream.

#### Mary Shelley, No One Listens

Humanity yearns  
Desperately  
To equal God's creativity  
In some creations  
How we shine  
Music dance storytelling  
Wine  
Then thunderstorms of madness  
Rain upon us  
A flooding sadness  
Sweeps us into anguish  
Grief  
Into despair  
Without relief  
We're drawn to high castles  
Where old hunchbacked vassals  
Glare wall-eyed  
As lightning  
Flares  
Without brightening  
Laboratories in high towers  
Keen scientists  
With sharp powers  
Create new life  
In dark hours  
In the belfries of high towers

#### A Job May Not Be Enough

Life without meaning  
Cannot be borne.  
We find a mission  
To which we're sworn  
Or answer the call

Of Death's bleak horn.  
Without a gleaning  
Of purpose in life,  
We have no vision,  
We live in strife  
Or let blood fall  
On a suicide knife.

### The Root Of All Mystery

Death is no fearsome mystery.  
He is well known to thee and me.  
He hath no secrets he can keep  
To trouble any good man's sleep.  
Turn not thy face from Death away.  
Care not he takes thy breath away.  
Fear him not, he's not thy master,  
Rushing at thee faster, faster.  
Not thy master but servant to  
The Maker of thee, what Who  
Created Death, created thee,  
And is the only Mystery.

### Haiku

Whiskers of the cat,  
webbed toes on my swimming dog:  
God is in details.

Sinuous shadow,  
she moved like hot tears,  
clear and bitter.

Tear-damp flush of face,  
white cotton so sweetly curved,  
bare knees together.

Moonlight on water,  
eyes brimming ponds of spring rain:  
dark fish in the mind.

Rare albino bats:  
Calligraphy on the sky,  
sealed by the full moon.

High looping white wings,  
faint buzz of fleeing insects:  
the killing is quiet.

The soft shush of surf,  
conspiratorial fog  
cover his return.

Dew on the gray steps.  
Snail on the second wet tread,  
crushed hard underfoot.

Hanging in the fog,  
cascades of dead-still palm fronds  
like cold dark fireworks.

Green eys growing gray.  
Rosy skin borrows color  
from the razor blade.

Black hair, black attire.  
Blue eyes shine like Tiffany.  
Her light, too, a lamp.

Wrapped up all in black.  
Odd color to wrap a toy -  
one not yet broken.

Girl's face shiny damp.  
All the sorrow of the world  
- yet such bright beauty.

From black sky, black wind.  
Black, the windows of the house.  
Does wind live within?

Busy blue-eyed girl.  
Busy making Hobbit games.  
Death waits in Mordor.

Cold stars, moon of ice,  
and the silhouette of wings:  
night bird seeking prey.

Moonglow on the sand.  
Black shoes wear pale glowing scuffs.  
Should I blame the moon?

Star, moon, and gunshots:  
two deaths here where life began,  
the sea and the surf.

Marshals and gunmen.  
Shootouts in the western sun.  
Vultures always eat.

Where God Goes on Vacation

(Dear Reader: This is the first of two poems deleted with the hope of preventing you from going insane from too much knowledge and to guard against the possibility of your head exploding. I myself have not read this poem, either, though I would very much like to know where God goes on vacation, because I would assume the accommodations are magnificent.)

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening with Exploding Heads:  
A Tribute in Verse to Robert Frost

(Dear Reader: This is the second of two poems deleted with the hope of preventing you from grinding up as sags of disgusting emulsified tissue on the ceiling of your library, or [if you haven't got a library] on the ceiling of your model train room, or [if you haven't got a model train room] on the ceiling of your neighbor's model train room, or [if you haven't got a neighbor] on the ceiling of the room where your Aunt Bertha keeps her collections of stuffed alligators and bronzed jackboots.)

## About the Author

When he was a senior in college, Dean Koontz won an Atlantic Monthly fiction competition and has been writing ever since. His books are published in 32 languages; worldwide sales are over 215 million copies.

Seven of his novels have risen to number one on The New York Times' hardcover best-seller list (Lightning, Midnight, Cold Fire, Hideaway, Dragon Tears, Intensity, and Sole Survivor), and eleven of his books have risen to number one in paperback.

The New York Times has called his writing "psychologically complex, masterly and satisfying." The New Orleans Times-Picayune said Koontz is, "at times lyrical without ever being naive or romantic. [He creates] a grotesque world, much like that of Flannery O'Conner or Walker Percy ... scary, worthwhile reading." Of Cold Fire, a worldwide #1 bestseller, the United Press International said, "an extraordinary piece of fiction. It will be a classic."

Dean Koontz was born and raised in Pennsylvania. He graduated from Shippensburg State College (now Shippensburg University), and his first job after graduation was in the Appalachian Poverty Program, where he was expected to counsel and tutor underprivileged children on a one-to-one basis. His first day at work, he discovered that the previous occupant of his position had been beaten up by the very kids he'd been trying to help and had landed in the hospital for several weeks. The following year was filled with challenge but also tension, and Koontz was more highly motivated than ever to build a career as a writer.

He wrote nights and weekends, which he continued to do after leaving the poverty program and going to work as an English teacher in a suburban school district outside of Harrisburg. After he had been a year and a half in that position, his wife, Gerda, made him an offer he couldn't refuse: "I'll support you for five years," she said, "and if you can't make it as a writer in that time, you'll never make it." By the end of those five years, Gerda had quit her job to run the business end of her husband's writing career.

Dean and Gerda live in Newport Beach, California.

## About This Book (from the scanners)

This book is about the best poetry you could ever hope to read. It was our pleasure to convert this book, and we hope that you enjoy it as much as we have.

We ask that if you've enjoyed the book, you'll buy it. The author has spent many years in compiling this work, and it is certainly worth the few dollars to pay for it.

This book was converted from its encrypted digital format by CallerX and Luc.

No profit should be made by this copy. Share, and enjoy.

~ CallerX & Luc ~