

Author of the *New York Times* Bestseller  
*Heart-Shaped Box*

# JOE HILL



## The Widow's Breakfast

A STORY FROM THE COLLECTION

20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY  
GHOSTS

# **THE WIDOW'S BREAKFAST**

**A Story from the Collection**

## **20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY GHOSTS**

**JOE HILL**

 HarperCollins e-books

*To Leanora:*

WE ARE MY FAVORITE STORY

# CONTENTS

[Begin Reading](#) [The Widow's Breakfast](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Other Books by Joe Hill](#)

[Credits](#)

[Cover](#)

[Copyright](#)

[About the Publisher](#)



## THE WIDOW'S BREAKFAST

**K**illian left the blanket on Gage—didn't want it—and left Gage where he lay on a rise above a little creekbed somewhere in eastern Ohio. He didn't stop moving for the better part of a month after that, spent most of the summer of 1935 riding the freights north and east, as if he was still headed to see Gage's best cousin in New Hampshire. He wasn't, though. Killian would never meet her now. He didn't know where he was headed.

He was in New Haven for a while but didn't stay. One morning, in the early dark, he went to a place he had heard about, where the tracks swept out in a wide arc, and the trains had to slow down almost to nothing going around it. There he waited. A boy in an ill-fitting and dirty suit jacket crouched beside him, at the base of the embankment. When the north-eastern came, Killian jumped up and ran alongside the train, and hauled himself up into a loaded freight car. The boy pulled himself into the car right behind him.

They rode together for a while, in the dark, the cars jolting from side to side and the wheels banging and clattering on the tracks. Killian dozed, came awake with the boy tugging on his belt buckle. The kid said for a quarter, but Killian didn't have a quarter and if he did, he wouldn't have spent it that way.

He grabbed the boy by the arms, and yanked his hands away with some effort, digging his fingernails into the soft undersides

## 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY GHOSTS

of the boy's wrists, and hurting him on purpose. Killian told him to leave be, and shoved him away. He told the boy that he looked like a nice kid and why did he want to be that way. Killian said to the boy to just wake him when the train stopped in Westfield. The kid sat on the other side of the car, one knee drawn up against his chest, and his arms wrapped around the knee, and didn't speak. Sometimes a thin line of gray morning light fell through one of the slats in the boxcar wall, and glided slowly up the boy's face, and across his hating and feverish eyes. Killian fell asleep again with the kid still glaring at him.

When he woke, the boy was gone. It was full light by then, but still early enough and cold enough so when Killian stood in the half-open boxcar door his breath was ripped away from him in clouds of frozen vapor. He held the edge of the door with one hand, and the fingers that were outside were soon burned raw by the sharp and icy current of the air. There was a tear in the armpit of his shirt, and the cold wind blew through that, too. He didn't know if Westfield was still ahead of him or not, but he felt he had slept for a long time—it was probably behind. Probably that was where the boy had jumped out. After Westfield there wouldn't be any other stops until the train dead-ended in Northampton, and Killian didn't want to go there. He stood in the door with the cold wind blasting at him. Sometimes he imagined he had died with Gage, and had wandered since as a ghost. It wasn't true, though. Things kept reminding him it wasn't true, like his neck stiff and achy from how he slept, or the cold air coming through the holes in his shirt.

At a trainyard in Lima, a railroad bull had caught Killian and Gage dozing together under their shared blanket, where they were hid in a shed. He had kicked them awake and told them to get. When they hadn't got fast enough, the bull struck Gage in the back of the head with his billy, driving him to his knees.

The next couple days, when Gage came awake in the mornings, he would say to Killian he was seeing double. Gage thought it was funny. He would sit for a while just where he was, turning his head from side to side, and laugh at the sight of the world multiplied. He had to blink a lot and rub at his

## THE WIDOW'S BREAKFAST

eyes before his vision would clear. Then, three days after what happened in Lima, Gage started falling down. They would be walking together, and then Killian would notice all of a sudden that he was walking alone, and he would look back, and see Gage sitting on the ground, his face waxy and frightened. They stopped in a place where there was nothing, to rest for a day, but they shouldn't have stopped, Killian shouldn't have let them stop. They should have gone where there was a doctor. Killian knew that now. The very next morning Gage was dead with his eyes open and surprised by the creekbed.

Later Killian heard talk at campfires, heard other men tell about a railroad cop named Lima Slim. From their descriptions he guessed that this was the man who had struck Gage. Lima Slim had often shot at trespassers; once he had forced some men at gunpoint to jump off a train moving fifty miles an hour. Lima Slim was famous for the things he had done. Famous to bums anyway.

There was a bull at the Northampton yard named Arnold Choke some said was as bad as Lima Slim, which was why Killian didn't want to go there. After a long time of standing in the half-open doorway, he felt the train slowing down. Killian didn't know why; there wasn't a town ahead he could see. Maybe they were approaching a switch. He wondered if the train would come to a complete stop, but it didn't stop, and after a few seconds of losing speed, in a series of quick violent jerks, it began to accelerate again. Killian jumped. It wasn't really going that slow, and he hit hard on his left foot, and the gravel slid away under his heel. The foot twisted underneath him, and a sharp pain stabbed through his ankle. He did not shout when he pitched face-first into the wet brush.

It was October or November maybe, Killian didn't know, and in the woods by the train tracks was a carpet of dead leaves in colors of rust and butter. Killian limped across them. The leaves were not all gone from the trees. Here and there was a flare of crimson, streaks of ember-orange. A cold white smoke lay low to the ground in among the trunks of the birch and the spruce. On a wet stump Killian sat for a while, and held his ankle gently in his hands, while the sun rose higher, and the morning mist burned away. His shoes were burst and held together



## 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY GHOSTS

by dirt-caked strips of burlap, and his toes were so cold they were almost numb. Gage had had better shoes, but Killian had left them, just as he left the blanket. He had tried to pray over Gage's body, but had not been able to remember any of the Bible, except a sentence that went *Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart*, and that was from the birth of Jesus and no thing to say over a dead man.

It would be a warm day, although when Killian at last stood, it was still cool in under the shadows of the pines. He followed the tracks until his ankle was throbbing too badly to go on and he had to sit on the embankment and rest again. It was swelling badly now, and when he put weight on it, he felt a bitter, electric pain shoot through the bone. He had always trusted Gage to know when to jump. He had trusted Gage to know everything.

There was a white cottage away through the trees. Killian only glanced at it, and looked back at his ankle, but then he lifted his head and looked into the trees again. On the trunk of a nearby pine, someone had snapped away some bark, and carved an X in the wood, and rubbed coal in the X so it would stand out black. There were no secret hobo marks like some said, or if there were, Killian didn't know what they were and neither had Gage. An X like that, though, sometimes meant you could get something to eat at a place. Killian was strongly aware of the tight emptiness in his stomach.

He walked unsteadily through the trees to the yard behind the cottage and then hesitated at the edge of the woods. The paint was peeling and the windows were obscured by grime. Close against the back of the house was a garden bed, a long rectangle of earth with the rough dimensions of a grave. Nothing was growing in it.

Killian was standing there looking at the house when he noticed the girls. He had not seen them at first because they were so still and quiet. He had come at the cottage from the rear, but the forest extended up and around the side of the house, and the girls were there, kneeling in some ferns with their backs to him. He could not see what they were doing, but they were almost perfectly motionless. There were two of them, kneeling in their Sunday dresses. Each of them had white-blond hair, long

## THE WIDOW'S BREAKFAST

and brushed and clean, and each had in her hair an arrangement of little brassy combs.

He stood and watched them and they knelt and were very still. One of them turned her head and looked back at him. She had a heart-shaped face and her eyes were a glacial shade of blue. She regarded him with no expression. In another moment the other girl turned her head to look at him as well. This other smiling a little. The smiling one was possibly seven. Her expressionless sister was perhaps ten. He lifted his hand in greeting. The unsmiling girl watched him for a moment longer, then turned her head away. He could not see what she was kneeling in front of, but whatever it was held her interest completely. The younger girl did not wave either, but seemed to nod at him before she too went back to looking at whatever was on the ground before them. Their silence and stillness unsettled him.

He crossed the yard to the back door. The screen door was orange with rust, and bellied outwards, pulling free from the frame in places. He took off his hat and was going to climb the steps to knock, but the inner door opened first and a woman appeared behind the screen. Killian stopped with his hat in his hands and put his begging face on.

The woman could have been thirty or forty or fifty. Her face was so drawn it seemed almost starved and her lips were thin and colorless. A dishrag hung from the waist strap of her apron.

"Hello, ma'am," Killian said. "I'm hungry. I was wonderin' if I could have somethin' to eat. A bite of toast maybe."

"You haven't had any breakfast anywhere?"

"No, ma'am."

"They give away a breakfast at Blessed Heart. Don't you know that?"

"Ma'am, I don't even know where that is."

She nodded briefly. "I'll make you toast. You can have eggs too if you want them. Do you want them?"

"Well. I guess if you made 'em, I wouldn't throw 'em in the road."

That was what Gage always said when he was offered more than he asked for, and it made the housewives laugh, but she didn't laugh, perhaps because he wasn't Gage and it didn't

## 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY GHOSTS

sound the same coming from him. Instead she only nodded once more and said, "All right. Scrape your feet on the—" She looked at his shoes and stopped speaking for a moment. "Look at those shoes. When you come in just take those shoes off and leave them by the door."

"Yes, ma'am."

He looked again at the girls before he climbed the steps, but their backs were to him and they paid him no mind. He entered and removed his shoes and walked across the chilled linoleum in his dirty bare feet. There was an odd stinging sensation in his ankle whenever he stepped on the left foot. By the time he sat there were already eggs sputtering in the pan.

"I know how you wound up at my back door. I know why you stopped at my house. Same reason all the other men stop here," she said, and he thought she was going to say something about the tree with the X on it, but she didn't. "It's because the train runs a little slower going into that switch, quarter a mile back, and all of you jump off so you won't have to see Arnold Choke in Northampton. Isn't that about it? Did you jump off at the switch?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"'Cause of Arnold Choke?"

"Yes, ma'am. I've heard he's one you want to avoid."

"He's just got the reputation he does because of his last name. Arnold Choke isn't a danger to anyone. He's old and he's fat and if any of you ran from him he'd probably pass out trying to get you. Not that he'd ever run. He might run somewhere if he heard they were selling burgers two for a dime," she said. "You listen now. That train is going thirty miles an hour when it hits that switch. It doesn't slow hardly at all. Jumping off there is a lot more dangerous than going into the yard at Northampton."

"Yes, ma'am," he said, and rubbed his left leg.

"There's a pregnant girl tried to get off there last year who jumped into a tree and broke her neck. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"A pregnant girl. Traveling with her husband. You ought to pass that around. Let other people know they're better off to stay on the train until she's good and stopped. Here's your eggs. You like some jam on this toast?"

## THE WIDOW'S BREAKFAST

"If it's no trouble, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. I can't tell you how good this smells."

She leaned against the kitchen counter holding her spatula and watched him eat. He did not speak, but ate quickly, and in all that time she stared at him and said nothing.

"Well," she said when he was done. "I'll put a couple more in the pan for you."

"That's all right. This was plenty."

"You don't want them?"

He hesitated, unsure how to answer. It was a difficult question. "He wants them," she said, and cracked two eggs into her pan.

"Do I look that hungry?"

"Hungry isn't the word. You got a look like a stray dog ready to knock over trash cans for something to eat."

When she set the plate in front of him he said, "If there's somethin I can do to work this off, ma'am, I'd be glad to do it."

"Thank you. But there isn't anything."

"I wish you'd think of somethin. I appreciate you openin your kitchen to me this way. I'm not a no-account. I don't have no fear to work."

"Where are you from?"

"Missouri."

"I thought you were southern. You got a funny way of sounding. Where are you going to?"

"I don't know," he said.

She didn't ask him anything else, and stood against the counter with her spatula and again watched him eat. Then she went out and left him by himself in the kitchen.

When he was finished, he sat at the table unsure of what to do, or if he should go. While he was trying to decide, she came back, holding a pair of low black boots in one hand, a pair of black socks in the other.

"Put these on and see if they fit," she said.

"No, ma'am. I can't."

"You can and you will. Put them on. Your feet look about the right size for them."

He put on the socks and pulled the boots on over them. He was tender about sliding his left foot in, but still there was a

## 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY GHOSTS

sharp stab of pain through the ankle. He sucked in a harsh breath.

“Is there something wrong with that foot?” she asked.

“I twisted it.”

“Getting off that train at the switch?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She shook her head at him. “Others will die. All for fear of a fat old man with six teeth in his head.”

The boots were a little loose, perhaps a size too big. A zipper ran up the inside of each boot. The leather was black and clean and only a little scuffed at the tips. They looked as if they had hardly been worn.

“How do they fit you?”

“Good. I can’t have them, though. These are just new.”

“Well. They aren’t doing me any good and my husband doesn’t need them. He died in July.”

“I’m sorry.”

“So am I,” she said with no change in her face. “Would you like some coffee? I didn’t offer you coffee.”

He did not answer so she poured him a cup, and herself a cup, and she sat down at the table.

“He died in a truck accident,” she said. “It was a WPA truck. It rolled over. He wasn’t the only one who died. Five other men were killed with him. Maybe you read about it. It was in lots of papers.”

He didn’t reply. He hadn’t heard of it.

“He was driving—my husband. Some say it was his fault, that he was careless at the wheel. They investigated it. I guess maybe it was his fault.” She was quiet for a while and then said, “The only good thing about his death is he doesn’t have to walk around with that guilt on him. Living with having it his fault. That would have spoiled him inside.”

Killian wished he was Gage. Gage would have known what to say. Gage would have reached across the table then and touched her hand. Killian sat in the dead man’s boots and struggled for something. At last he blurted: “The most terrible things happen to the best people. The kindest people. Most of the time it isn’t for any reason at all. It’s just stupid luck. If you don’t know for sure it was his fault, why make yourself feel

## THE WIDOW'S BREAKFAST

sick thinkin it was? It's hard enough just to lose someone that means to you, without all that."

"Well. I try not to think about it," she said. "I do miss him. But I thank God every night for the twelve years we got to have together. I thank God for his daughters. I see his eyes in theirs."

"Yes," he said.

"They don't know what to do. They've never been so confused."

"Yes," he said.

They sat at the table for a little while, and then the woman said, "You look about his size all around. I can let you have one of his shirts and a pair of trousers as well as the boots."

"No, ma'am. I wouldn't feel right. Takin things from you I can't pay for."

"Stop that now. We won't talk about pay. I look for every small bit of good that can come out of such a bad thing. I'd like to give them to you. That would make me feel better," she said and smiled. He had took her hair for gray, wrapped up in a bun behind her head, but where she sat now she was in some watery sunlight from one of the windows, and he saw for the first time that her hair was blond-white just like her daughters'.

She got up and went out again. While she was away, he cleaned the dishes. The woman returned in a short time with a pair of khaki trousers and suspenders, a heavy plaid shirt, an undershirt. She directed him to a back bedroom off the kitchen, and left him while he dressed. The shirt was big and loose and had a faint male smell on it, not disagreeable; also a pipe-smoke smell. Killian had seen a corncob pipe on the mantel over the stove.

He came out with his dirty and ripped clothes under his arm, feeling clean and fresh and ordinary, a pleasant fullness in his stomach. She sat at the table holding one of his old shoes. She was smiling faintly, and peeling off the mud-caked wrap of bur-lap around it.

"Them shoes have earned their rest," Killian said. "I'm almost ashamed of the way I've treated 'em."

She lifted her head and contemplated him quietly. Looked at his trousers. He had rolled the trouser cuffs up over his ankles.

## 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY GHOSTS

“I wasn’t sure if he was your size or not,” she said. “I thought he was bigger, but I didn’t know. I thought it might only be my memory making him bigger.”

“Well. He was just as big as you recall.”

“He gets to seeming bigger,” she said. “The further I get away from him.”

There was nothing he could do for her to pay back what he owed for the clothes and the food. She told him Northampton was three miles and he ought to go now, because he would probably be hungry again by the time he got there, and there was a lunch at the Blessed Heart of the Virgin Mary where he could get a bowl of beans and a slice of bread. She told him there was a Hooverville on the east side of the Connecticut River, but if he went she advised him not to stay long, because it was often raided and men frequently arrested for squatting. At the door, she said it was better to get arrested at the trainyard than try to jump off early of the yard on a freight that was going too fast. She said she didn’t want him to jump off any more trains, except ones that were stopped, or just inching along; it might be worse than a twisted ankle next time. He nodded and asked again if there was anything he could do for her. She said she had just told him something he could do for her.

He wanted to take her hand. Gage would have taken her hand and promised to pray for her and the husband she had lost. He wished he could tell her about Gage. Killian found, though, that he could not reach to touch her hand, or lift his arms in any way, and he didn’t trust his voice to speak. He was often crushed by the decency of other people who had almost nothing themselves; at times he felt their kindnesses so powerfully he thought it would destroy some delicate inner part of him.

As he was crossing the yard to the road, in his new outfit, he glanced into the trees and saw the two girls in amongst the ferns. They were standing now, and each of them held a bouquet of wilted-looking old flowers, and they were staring at the ground. He stopped and watched them, wondering what they were doing, what was on the ground beyond the ferns that he couldn’t see. As he stood there, both turned their heads—first

## THE WIDOW'S BREAKFAST

the oldest girl, and then her younger sister, just as before—and looked back at him.

Killian smiled uncertainly and walked limping across the yard to them. He waded through the dew damp ferns to stand behind them. Just past where the girls stood was a patch of cleared ground, and on the ground a piece of black sacking. On the sack lay a third girl, the youngest yet, in a white dress with lace stitching at the collar and sleeves. Her bone-china white hands were folded across her breastbone, and a small bouquet was beneath them. Her eyes were closed. The muscles in her face trembled as she struggled not to smile. She was no more than five. A wreath of dried daisies around her blond hair. A heap of dead wilted flowers at her feet. A Bible opened at her side.

“Our sister Kate is dead,” said the oldest girl.

“This is where we’re having the wake,” said the middle daughter.

Kate lay very still on top of the sacking. Her eyes remained shut, but she had to bite her lips not to grin.

“Do you want to play?” asked the middle daughter. “Do you want to play the game? You could lie down. You could be the dead person and we could cover you with flowers and read out of the Bible and sing ‘Nearer My God to Thee.’ ”

“I’ll cry,” said the oldest girl. “I can make myself cry whenever I want.”

Killian stood there. He looked at the girl on the ground, and then at the two mourners. He said at last, “I don’t believe this is my kind of game. I don’t want to be the dead person.”

The oldest girl flicked her gaze across him, then stared into his face.

“Why not?” she asked. “You’re dressed the part.”



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was originally released by PS Publishing in England, two years ago. Thanks are owed to those who gave so much of themselves to make that first edition happen: Christopher Golden, Vincent Chong, and Nicholas Gevers. Most of all, though, I want to express my gratitude and love to publisher Peter Crowther, who took a chance on *20th Century Ghosts* without knowing anything about me except that he liked my stories.

I'm grateful to all the editors who have supported my work over the years, including but not limited to Richard Chizmar, Bill Schafer, Andy Cox, Stephen Jones, Dan Jaffe, Jeanne Cavelos, Tim Schell, Mark Apelman, Robert O. Greer Jr., Adrienne Brodeur, Wayne Edwards, Frank Smith, and Teresa Focarile. Apologies to those I might have left out. And here's a special holler of thanks to Jennifer Brehl and Jo Fletcher, my editors at William Morrow and Gollancz, respectively; two better editors a guy could not wish for.

Thanks also to my Webmaster, Shane Leonard. I appreciate, too, all the work my agent, Mickey Choate, has performed on my behalf. My thanks to my parents, my brother and sister, and of course my tribe, whom I love dearly: Leanora and the boys.

And how about a little thanks for you, the reader, for picking up this book and giving me the chance to whisper in your ear for a few hours?

Gene Wolfe and Neil Gaiman have both hidden stories in introductions, but I don't think anyone has ever buried one in

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

their acknowledgments page. I could be the first. The only way I can think to repay you for your interest is with the offer of one more story:

### SCHEHERAZADE'S TYPEWRITER

Elena's father had gone into the basement every night, after work, for as far back as she could remember, and did not come up until he had written three pages on the humming IBM electric typewriter he had bought in college, when he still believed he would someday be a famous novelist. He had been dead for three days before his daughter heard the typewriter in the basement, at the usual time: a burst of rapid bang-bang-banging, followed by a waiting silence, filled out only by the idiot hum of the machine.

Elena descended the steps, into darkness, her legs weak. The drone of his IBM filled the musty-smelling dark, so the gloom itself seemed to vibrate with electrical current, as before a thunderstorm. She reached the lamp beside her father's typewriter, and flipped it on just as the Selectric burst into another bang-bang flurry of noise. She screamed, and then screamed again when she saw the keys moving on their own, the chrome typeball lunging against the bare black platen.

That first time Elena saw the typewriter working on its own, she thought she might faint from the shock of it. Her mother almost did faint when Elena showed her, the very next night. When the typewriter jumped to life and began to write, Elena's mother threw her hands up and shrieked and her legs wobbled under her, and Elena had to grab her by the arm to keep her from going down.

But in a few days they got used to it, and then it was exciting. Her mother had the idea to roll a sheet of paper in, just before the typewriter switched itself on at 8 P.M. Elena's mother wanted to see what it was writing, if it was a message for them from beyond. *My grave is cold. I love you and I miss you.*

But it was only another of his short stories. It didn't even start at the beginning. The page began midway, right in the middle of a sentence.

It was Elena's mother who thought to call the local news.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A producer from channel five came to see the typewriter. The producer stayed until the machine turned itself on and wrote a few sentences, then she got up and briskly climbed the stairs. Elena's mother hurried after her, full of anxious questions.

"Remote control," the producer said, her tone curt. She looked back over her shoulder with an expression of distaste. "When did you bury your husband, ma'am? A week ago? What's wrong with you?"

None of the other television stations were interested. The man at the newspaper said it didn't sound like their kind of thing. Even some of their relatives suspected it was a prank in bad taste. Elena's mother went to bed and stayed there for several weeks, flattened by a terrific migraine, despondent and confused. And in the basement, every night, the typewriter worked on, flinging words onto paper in noisy chattering bursts.

The dead man's daughter attended to the Selectric. She learned just when to roll a fresh sheet of paper in, so that each night the machine produced three new pages of story, just as it had when her father was alive. In fact, the machine seemed to wait for her, humming in a jovial sort of way, until it had a fresh sheet to stain with ink.

Long after no one else wanted to think about the typewriter anymore, Elena continued to go into the basement at night, to listen to the radio, and fold laundry, and roll a new sheet of paper into the IBM when it was necessary. It was a simple enough way to pass the time, mindless and sweet, rather like visiting her father's grave each day to leave fresh flowers.

Also, she had come to like reading the stories when they were finished. Stories about masks and baseball and fathers and their children . . . and ghosts. Some of them were ghost stories. She liked those the best. Wasn't that the first thing you learned in every fiction course everywhere? Write what you know? The ghost in the machine wrote about the dead with great authority.

After a while, the ribbons for the typewriter were only available by special order. Then even IBM stopped making them. The typeball wore down. She replaced it, but then the carriage started sticking. One night, it locked up, wouldn't move forward, and oily smoke began to trickle from under the iron

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

hood of the machine. The typewriter hammered letter after letter, one right on top of the other, with a kind of mad fury, until Elena managed to scramble over and shut it off.

She brought it to a man who repaired old typewriters and other appliances. He returned it in perfect operating condition, but it never wrote on its own again. In the three weeks it was at the shop, it lost the habit.

As a little girl, Elena had asked her father why he went into the basement each night to make things up, and he had said it was because he couldn't sleep until he had written. Writing things warmed his imagination up for the work of creating an evening full of sweet dreams. Now she was unsettled by the idea that his death might be a restless, sleepless thing. But there was no help for it.

She was by then in her twenties and when her mother died—an unhappy old woman, estranged not just from her family but the entire world—she decided to move out, which meant selling the house and all that was in it. She had hardly started to sort the clutter in the basement, when she found herself sitting on the steps, rereading the stories her father had written after he died. In his life, he had given up the practice of submitting his work to publishers, had wearied of rejection. But his post-mortem work seemed to the girl to be much—livelier—than his earlier work, and his stories of hauntings and the unnatural seemed especially arresting. Over the next few weeks, she collected his best into a single book, and began to send it to publishers. Most said there was no market in collections by writers of no reputation, but in time she heard from an editor at a small press who said he liked it, that her father had a fine feel for the supernatural.

“Didn't he?” she said.

Now this is the story as I first heard it myself from a friend in the publishing business. He was maddeningly ignorant of the all-important details, so I can't tell you where the book was finally published or when or, really, anything more regarding this curious collection. I wish I knew more. As a man who is fascinated with the occult, I would like to obtain a copy.

Unfortunately, the title and author of the unlikely book are not common knowledge.

# About the Author

**Joe Hill** is the author of the critically acclaimed *New York Times* bestseller *Heart-Shaped Box*, a two-time winner of the Bram Stoker Award, and a past recipient of the World Fantasy Award. His stories have appeared in a variety of journals and Year's Best collections. He calls New England home.

**[www.joehillfiction.com](http://www.joehillfiction.com)**

Visit [www.AuthorTracker.com](http://www.AuthorTracker.com) for exclusive information on your favorite HarperCollins author.

**ALSO BY JOE HILL**

*Heart-Shaped Box*

# Credits

Designed by Renato Stanisic

Cover design by Ervin Serrano

Cover photographs: theater by Mike Powell/Getty  
Images; woman by Vincent Chong; man by Kristin  
Gerbert/age fotostock/Superstock

# Copyright

This book is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, and dialogue are drawn from the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

THE WIDOW'S BREAKFAST. Copyright © 2005, 2007 by Joe Hill. All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the non-exclusive, nontransferable right to access and read the text of this e-book on-screen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, down-loaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of HarperCollins e-books.

Adobe Acrobat eBook Reader January 2009  
ISBN 978-0-06-184528-4

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1





## **About the Publisher**

### **Australia**

HarperCollins Publishers (Australia) Pty. Ltd.  
25 Ryde Road (PO Box 321)  
Pymble, NSW 2073, Australia  
<http://www.harpercollinsebooks.com.au>

### **Canada**

HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.  
55 Avenue Road, Suite 2900  
Toronto, ON, M5R, 3L2, Canada  
<http://www.harpercollinsebooks.ca>

### **New Zealand**

HarperCollins Publishers (New Zealand) Limited  
P.O. Box 1  
Auckland, New Zealand  
<http://www.harpercollinsebooks.co.nz>

### **United Kingdom**

HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.  
77-85 Fulham Palace Road  
London, W6 8JB, UK  
<http://www.uk.harpercollinsebooks.com>

### **United States**

HarperCollins Publishers Inc.  
10 East 53rd Street  
New York, NY 10022  
<http://www.harpercollinsebooks.com>