

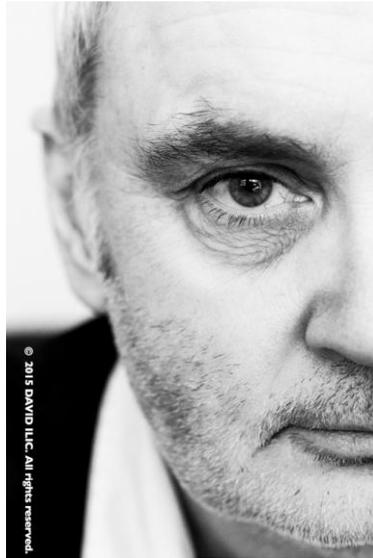
This is a sample—please distribute.
The Collection © Kerry J Donovan May 2016

THE COLLECTION

Dark Stories and Flash Fiction

Kerry J Donovan

This is a sample—please distribute.
The Collection © Kerry J Donovan May 2016



©Kerry J Donovan, April 2016

The right of Kerry J Donovan to be identified as Author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this novel may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system without prior written permission of the Author and without similar condition including this condition being imposed on any subsequent purchaser. Your support for the Author's rights is appreciated.

All characters in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead is purely coincidental.

Published by Human Vertex Publications, France, May 2016
Head shot image, David Ilic ©2015

This is a sample—please distribute.
The Collection © Kerry J Donovan May 2016

Dedication

*To you, dear reader, whomever and wherever you may be.
I hope you enjoy my rambling thoughts.
Where they come from, I know not.*

This is a sample—please distribute.
The Collection © Kerry J Donovan May 2016

Foreword

Within these pages, there are over two dozen stories. They vary in length from 'flash fiction' to near-novelette. I hope you like the way my mind works.

Some of these tales are very dark and for adults only. Do not read them to your kids at bedtime!

That is your one and only warning.

Table of Contents

THE COLLECTION	1
Dedication	3
<i>Foreword</i>	4
<i>Table of Contents</i>	5
Taking Your Life In Your Hands	6
Life on the Tracks	10
“I didn’t mean it, Da.”	18
Cricket on a Summer’s Afternoon	20
<i>CRIME THRILLERS</i>	25
<i>ACTION ADVENTURE</i>	26
<i>FANTASY THRILLER</i>	26
<i>SHORT STORIES</i>	27

Taking Your Life in Your Hands

Sweet, Cold Revenge

Today

It's five minutes to midday and I sit behind the wheel of my taxicab, staring at the imposing black wood and wrought iron gates of Her Majesty's Prison, Garside. Razor wire tops the gates and the twelve-foot high granite walls.

I'm waiting for the bastard, Wilkes, to step out from behind those doors. It's taken every penny I have to make sure I'm the one called to collect him on the day he's released.

It's a grim winter's day, grey and cold, but inside I'm a boiling cauldron of hate.

A howling wind whips eddies of dead leaves and rubbish into drifts against the rough-hewn walls. I'm parked diagonally across the road from the gates and I can see the south face of the jailhouse.

I grip the steering wheel with white-knuckled fists, and I wait.

#

Cyclists take their lives in their hands every time they hit the open road on a bike in England. Every second driver seems to be out for cyclists' blood. An alien visitor would think *Kill the Cyclist* a national spectator sport

In my thirty-odd years as a road-racer, I've been sworn at *ad nauseam*, knocked off three times, and hospitalised once—sideswipe, whiplash. All caused by drivers who thought themselves more deserving of a specific piece of tarmac than my bike and me. Only one of those drivers ended up paying for their actions. But he didn't pay nearly enough, not yet.

#

Eighteen months earlier

Steve 'Stocky' Stock and I were near the end of one of our manic training rides. It was, as I recall, a wonderful spring afternoon. One of those surprisingly warm April days that offer the promise of a long, hot summer to come. With the trees in bud and the days lengthening, it was a beautiful day to be out training. So good was the weather, I'd taken my competition bike out of its winter storage, dusted it off, and gloried in its freewheeling majesty.

Our route meandered through quiet villages and leafy lanes and we finally had the wind at our backs after fighting it for much of the way out. We made great time and had just rolled through the picturesque village of Preston Deanery, on the B562, heading for Northampton and home.

We rode two abreast on the empty road, chatting.

Yeah, yeah, I can hear all you drivers out there shouting, "Bloody cyclists, side-by-side on narrow roads holding up the traffic. You bastards deserve all you get."

In our defence, we were in a 30 mph zone, and my trip computer registered 29.7 mph. So whom were we holding up? Besides, there was no traffic.

About four miles from Northampton, we closed on the village of Wootton. The fields and hedgerows gave way to houses and industrial estates and the road rolled downhill in a gentle anti-clockwise arc.

Our speed slowed when we negotiated a mini-roundabout and a car horn blared at us from behind, angry and impatient.

I glanced back. A silver Mercedes Benz SLK, soft-top lowered, careened towards us at Mach 0.5—half the speed of sound.

Without reducing speed or removing his hand from the horn, the driver swung out to overtake. Once alongside, the driver slowed the car a tad and shouted something unrepeatable. His blonde trophy passenger shot us a double ‘V’ sign with arms waving in the air.

At that same instant—and I still can’t believe he did this—the bugger jerked his steering wheel to the left and sent the SLK veering towards me!

The look of malevolent glee on the animal’s face as he did it will live with me until Alzheimer’s finally takes its toll on my memory.

Blondie squealed with delight.

“Look out!” I screamed.

I twitched my handlebars left to avoid the car. Stocky and I bumped shoulders.

At the speed we were travelling, neither of us stood a chance.

We hit the tarmac in a tangle of broken bikes, broken bones, and scraped to the edge of the road, screaming.

The pain of skin tearing over the cheese-grater road surface is a terrible thing. The mesh scars on my shoulder, back and hip have faded to white, but will never disappear.

With nothing to stop us, we plunged off the edge of the road into a ten-foot deep, storm gully.

Oblivion.

#

I felt nothing for a time until a hatchet smashed into my right kneecap. At least that was what it felt like. When I opened my eyes, I couldn’t see anything. My bike helmet, torn off by the fall and slide, twisted and bent out of shape, covered my face, blinding me. I tried to reach up to move it but my arms wouldn’t obey my instructions.

A low sound, a moan, drifted into my ears, but I couldn’t tell from where.

The axe bit again and I screamed, or at least tried to scream, but no sound came out.

Again, a low moan filtered through the pain. One thought stood out above all the others tangled in my fuzzy mind.

Where’s Stocky?

Each breath caused agony. The broken ends of at least two ribs scraped together and tore at the inside of my chest. The iron-rich taste of blood filled my mouth and I fought against the rising tide of panic.

I slowed my breathing and the pain subsided.

With slow, deliberate movements, I raised my head. The fragmented helmet fell away. I had come to rest on my right side staring at the muddy face of the ditch. My right arm was pinned beneath me. I couldn’t move it.

Turning my head to the left only made the axe fall again and my right kneecap split apart in a searing bolt of agony. Thigh muscles, no longer restrained by the patellar attachment, bunched into a tight knot and I lost control of bladder, bowel, and sanity.

Something howled with the fear and agony of a wild animal caught in a tooth-sprung trap.
Me!

I wanted to lose consciousness again to earn respite for the pain but the little voice in my head kept asking stupid questions.

Where's Stocky?

Why isn't he helping me?

Did I have a puncture?

I'm thirsty, can I have some water?

Where's Stocky?

By clamping my jaws together, I stopped screaming and opened my eyes once more. Tears rolled down my cheeks and the agony flared again.

#

The human brain is a wonderful, protective thing. It has a built-in defence mechanism—adrenaline mixed with a host of other hormones and neurotransmitters—that blocks out pain when necessary. This was one of those times. My friend needed me and I had to help him.

I rolled onto my back to find the deep blue sky stretching above me. The sun, high to the left, bit into my eyes and I discovered the reason for my broken ribs and the grating sensation as I breathed.

The broken crossbar of my bike stuck out of my chest. Its hollow, broken tube stared up at me in an accusatory 'O'. Stuck to the jagged edges of the torn metal were bits of flesh and drops of blood—my flesh, my blood.

I looked at it twice. I would have rocked with stunned, hysterical laughter, but the pain would return so I kept myself in check. Locating Stocky was the only thing holding me together.

Despite the damage caused by the fall-slide-plummet, looking back I can count myself lucky. I had a fractured patella, broken collarbone, broken shoulder blade, crushed ribs, a broken right arm, cuts, and a road rash to rival corned-beef hash, but I was lucky in three ways.

First, the broken bike-tube was no longer attached to the rest of my bike—the other end had snapped clean off. This allowed me to sit upright without tearing the tube out of my chest. I learned later that the only thing stopping me from bleeding to death was the bike-tube, which plugged one end of an arterial bleed. Being downstream, the other end only oozed blood, it didn't pump out.

Second, I'd landed in the soft, muddy part of the ditch. It cushioned my fall and prevented further damage.

Third, I'd avoided a concrete block that stuck out of the side of the gully. I'd missed it by less than three feet.

Yep, I was lucky.

Steve Stock wasn't.

When I extricated myself from broken bicycle parts and half-observed street-furniture, I saw what had happened to my fallen friend and wept.

Stocky had smashed headfirst into the concrete stanchion. A cycle helmet doesn't offer the same level of protection as a motorbike crash-hat. Stocky's had exploded on impact, and so had his head.

When faced with the remains of my best friend, I lost my mind. It took three paramedics to hold me down and strap me on my side on the stretcher. The heavy sedation kicked in and I knew nothing more until I awoke in the hospital the following night with my wife and children lying asleep at the foot of my bed.

In the eight months it took me to recover, I missed two important things.

The first was Stocky's funeral. I saw it on a video link-up, so I attended in spirit if not in body. They interred him in a family plot on a beautiful summer's morning. My family was there to support his family. Joan, my wife, presented Alex, Stocky's fiancé, with a letter from me to place, unopened, in his casket.

It had taken me a dozen tries and many tears to write the seventeen words.

*Sorry, mate. I couldn't save you, but I'll never forget you, and neither will the bastard.
Goodbye.*

The second thing I missed during my convalescence was the trial and conviction of the bastard who ran us off the road. A traffic camera had captured his act of road-rage, so the bloody things do have their uses after all. The police arrested him four hours after the 'incident' and he claimed not to have remembered overtaking any cyclists that day.

When the detectives played the video evidence to him in the station, he is reported to have broken down in tears and apologised for his actions. He blamed a family argument for his loss of control. He pleaded guilty to—and get this—'Driving without due care and attention'!

Not murder, not manslaughter, but a simple lack of concentration.

Fuck him!

He received an eighteen-month jail sentence with a further six months suspended because he didn't have valid motor insurance.

The bastard, Mr Frank Wilkes, received eighteen months in a cushy jail cell, with colour TV, and three square meals a day. Steve Stock received an oak box and a plot in the cemetery.

I still have nightmares and haven't ridden a cycle since that day. Damage to my inner ear means I can no longer hold my balance.

Call that justice?

#

Today

It's one minute to noon and the sun comes out to warm my face through the windscreen. Any minute now, he'll be there. He'll cross the road to my taxi and pop into the back, free as a bird.

What he doesn't know is I've activated the childproof locks so he can get in but not out. I've installed bulletproof glass in the windows and a five-millimetre Perspex sheet between the passenger's cabin and me. Once he's in the back, he's staying there until I let him out.

Under my seat is the two-foot long bike-tube they pulled out of my chest during the operation that saved my life. I've wrapped one end in electrician's insulating tape. I wouldn't want a slippery handle, now would I? I've sharpened the other end to a razor point.

Middy.

The prison gates open and out walks a smiling Mr Frank Wilkes. He shields his eyes from the strong sunlight and steps towards my cab.

My heart is stone and my blood is ice.

Life on the Tracks

Actions and Consequences

“Listen, Danny,” says twelve-year-old Joe Cooper to his twin on the way home from football training, “a dare’s a dare and we ain’t never backed down on a bet. Jimmy Cartwright said a big block of concrete wouldn’t stand a chance against a train. The engine would bunt it forward like a football. Said he saw it on YouTube and it were fucking awesome.”

“Did you see it?” asks Danny. “The video I mean.”

“Nah, Jimmy couldn’t find the link and I called him a liar. Said the train would smash the concrete into a million pieces of gravel.”

“What’d he say?”

“Dared me to prove him a liar.”

“How you gonna do that without us getting into any more trouble?”

Joe, older by twenty-five minutes, overruled his cowardly little brother. “How we getting into trouble making gravel?”

“Dunno. Vandalism that is. What if something goes wrong or someone sees us?”

“We’ll get up early tomorrow morning and do it afore Mum’s awake.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah. I want Jimmy Cartwright’s bike and I ain’t giving ‘im me iPad.”

“You bet your iPad? You moron. But why you dragging me into it?”

“You an’ me’s bruvv, right? We’re in this together. An’ I need your help pushing the trolley.”

Joe knows Danny doesn’t have the bottle to stand up against him. Joe’s the leader. Always has been, always will be.

“I’ll help if you need me,” Danny says, “but I ain’t happy.”

“Don’t you worry ‘bout nothing’, I got a plan.”

Joe nodded.

“That’s what I’m worried about.”

#

Joe wrestles Danny out of bed as the sun shows itself over the horizon, and they skitter through the back garden, heading towards the railway cuttings. They steal a concrete kerbstone from the building site near their house and heave it into a stolen supermarket trolley. It’s too long for the trolley and overlaps the cage, making steering damn near impossible.

Unable to push, they end up pulling the trolley the five-hundred paces to the railway cuttings. They make it to the arched footbridge in plenty of time to beat the first train to London.

Joe’s precious iPad gives the time as 06:27.

The twins stand in the middle of the bridge and stare down at the tracks. Both breathe heavily and lean against the stone-built wall. Danny’s eyes dart left and right, looking for trouble, but the place—all fields and hedges—is deserted. Nobody to see them this early on a Monday morning.

“Jesus, Joe. How we gonna lift the kerb over this wall? Too bloody high.”

“Easy. Grab hold of your end. Come on, put your back into it.”

They heave, but the concrete finger has lodged in the cage. It refuses to budge.

“Fuck’s sake.” Joe kicks at the trolley wheel and the contraption starts to move.

It rolls down the steep incline of the arched bridge, gathering momentum on the slope.

“Fuck. After it, Danny.”

They chase, but the escaping buggy hits a pothole and crashes to its side in the middle of the path. As it topples, the concrete dislodges and breaks in two.

“You fucking idiot, Danny. Why didn’t ya hold it?”

“Weren’t my fault. You kicked the bloody thing.”

Joe stands over the broken pieces and rests a foot on the longer one. “Easier to lift now though, eh?”

“You’re kidding ain’t ya. We gotta go.”

“Bugger off. We dragged it all the way here, I ain’t giving up now. C’mon. You grab the small bit, I’ll take this one.”

Joe manoeuvres his piece to the wall and heaves it over. Danny follows his brother, moaning the whole time.

“We’re gonna get in so much trouble if they find us.”

“How’s anyone gonna know it’s us? There ain’t no CCTV cameras hereabout. That’s why I chose this place.”

Danny raises his hands and shows Joe the grazes. “Look at your hands.”

Joe studies the scratches on his fingers. Dust and grit mix with the thin tracks of blood, they start to sting.

“So what?”

“Forensics. You know. Fingerprints, DNA. I seen it on telly,” Danny wails and rubs his hands on his trouser legs. “We’re gonna get caught.”

“Don’t be so daft. The kerbstones will be in a million pieces after the train’s gone by. How’s anyone gonna find anything on gravel? Besides, the police don’t have our records, we ain’t on no database. Duh.”

Joe taps Danny’s forehead with his index finger and says, “You can be real thick sometimes, bruv.”

They peer over the bridge wall. Danny’s piece lies in grey chippings a metre outside the track.

“Bloody useless, Dan. Never could throw straight. Look at mine. Perfect.”

Joe grins and points at his half, which rests, point facing up, against the left track. The clean end butts against the rail and the broken, pointed end is jammed against a sleeper.

“That’s gonna be brill,” Joe says, blowing on the cuts stinging his palms.

“How are we gonna prove what happens?” Danny asks, his voice quivering.

Joe drags the precious iPad out of his backpack.

“We’ll be here filming it. I got plenty of spare memory. Jimmy Cartwright ain’t gonna back out of the bet.”

They crawl to the edge of the grassy embankment and hide behind a small bush.

A train’s horn shatters the morning silence.

#

The sun shines low, barely making it through the filthy windows, and bathes the First Class carriage in a foggy lemon light. Despite the haze, it is warm and welcoming in the plush cabin. Paula, my kid sister, shuffles into the seat beside me and rummages through her

handbag. God knows how she finds anything in the near-bottomless sack, but her hand comes out clutching an e-reader.

“You gonna bury your head in a book all the way to London? I thought we were spending the day together. We could chat, you know. Be friendly.”

She turns the screen to face me and shakes a patient head.

“Sheet music, Frankie. Hardly light reading. I thought I’d review my solo while you call Jenny.”

I check the time on my mobile. “Is it too early?”

Paula gives me one of her impatient ‘why are men so daft?’ sighs. She looks so much like Mum when she does that.

“C’mon, Frankie. Don’t be so dense. She’ll be praying for your call after what the two of you got up to last night.”

My neck warms and the temperature in the carriage rises ten degrees. Paula’s always been able to see right through me; she’s almost a psychic in that respect.

“Screech, I don’t know what you mean.”

“You two were all over each other at the party and then disappeared together. We all saw what you were up to. Go on, call her. And call me Screech again and I’ll tell Jenny what you’re really like.”

“What do you mean, kind, considerate, generous, handsome, talente—”

“Yeah, yeah, in your dreams. Now, stop prevaricating. Jenny Bartlett is my best friend in the world and I don’t want you upsetting her. *Use the phone, Frankie.*”

During the last part, she uses her Obi-Wan-Kenobi voice and smiles. Paula has always been a Star Wars freak. Dresses up, goes to conventions—the whole shebang. I dial the number. Jenny picks up before the end of the first ring. My fingers are sweaty, the handset slippery. Why do they keep these carriages so damned hot? Reptile houses in zoos are cooler than this.

“Hi, Frank,” Jenny whispers, her voice soft and warm.

The temperature ramps up a couple of degrees.

“Hi, Jen, did I wake you?”

“No. I’ve been lying here naked, thinking about you.”

“Oh, Jesus, now you’re being cruel.”

Her giggle warms my core, not that it needs any more heat in this damned carriage.

“You could have come to London with us. There are always spare places at one of Paula’s recitals.”

Paula wags her head at me and pretends to read her music.

“I told you,” Jenny says. “Your father needs me to help tidy the office after the party last night. Are you on the train already?”

“Yep. Boarded a couple of minutes ago. Paula’s been nagging me to call you since we left the hotel.”

“So why didn’t you?”

“I ... I didn’t want to wake you.”

“So, you think I need my beauty sleep?”

“Hey, c’mon, I’m not falling for that one again. There’s no one on the planet less in need of beauty sleep than you. You are gorgeous.”

And I mean it. Never said a truer word.

“Good answer, Frank. You’re learning. So, why *did* you call?”

“I wanted to hear your voice. I’ve missed you for the past hour-and-a-half.”

“One hour and forty-seven minutes, but who’s counting?”

It’s my turn to chuckle. I turn my back to Paula and stare through the window at the flashing countryside.

“About last night,” I mumble. “I had a wonderful time. Are you okay about things?”

In the reflection, Paula puts a finger into her open mouth and mimes a gag. I make a backhand grab for her knee, but she slaps away my paw and grins.

Jenny answers, “Of course. Couldn’t be better. It was lovely—”

With a rending squeal of tortured metal, and a clap louder than thunder, the carriage jags to the right, tilts, and bucks me out of my seat. My head smashes against the window and my vision blurs.

Everything happens both lightning fast and in super slow motion. Fractured images mesh with the stray thoughts flashing through my head.

Did I disconnect the call?

Jenny said she was naked, right?

What’s happening?

Paula screams and disappears above me in a tangle of arms, legs, and flapping skirts. I’m suspended weightless, while the world, on washing machine spin cycle, tumbles around me. For the hundredth time in my life, I am preparing to die. I wonder what death will be like.

At least it’ll be quick.

But... Paula. Where’s Paula?

She screams again.

Other sounds, tearing metal, cracking wood, and the booming crunch of collapsing wall panels assault my eardrums. Sparks fly as metal grinds on metal. A tumbling pink suitcase flies past my head. Beneath the floor panels, brake lines, fractured and torn, hiss and cry. Somewhere in my head, I recognize sounds and the smells from my work with the pit crew. The pistol crack of breaking bones brings pain searing through my arm and head. God, it hurts.

Where’s Paula?

A man’s primal howl cuts off mid-breath. To my right, a crimson geyser erupts and splatters on the yellowed ceiling, which is now below me. The gut-wrenching sound of tearing metal rings in my eardrums, deafening.

Tzing.

Fuck. Something hard and sharp drives into my left cheek. It snaps my head back and around to the right, and tries to wrench it from my shoulders. Stabbing, tearing, agonising pain rips into my skull. A blinding orange light detonates behind my left eye.

“Paula? Paula!”

#

The carriage shunts forward again, impelled by a colliding force from behind. At least I think it’s from behind, but my world has been shunted around and what was up is down and ... oh, crap.

What the fucking hell?

Everything’s a blur of moving images, falling luggage, and flailing limbs. My limbs.

Everything is off-kilter, teetering. I try to take in a lungful of air, but a crunching agony in my chest cuts off my efforts, and I resort to shallow, painful breaths.

My left eye is blank, but what I see through the other is something out of a Hieronymus Bosch painting of hell. Mangled, splintered wood, concertinaed metal sheets, and blue upholstered panels are piled on the crumpled ceiling below and to my left. The air is thick with dust and smoke. Daubs of blood decorate the intact surfaces.

Who’s blood?

I'm trapped, pinned against the filthy window, which should have smashed and cut me into shreds. Outside, through the glass, are trees, a grassy bank, gravel, and a buckled railway track—its far end sheared into a jagged point.

"Paula?" I call in a voice feeble against the din of crashing, grinding metal and yelling passengers.

Before each new crunch, a shudder rocks through the crippled carriage and we seesaw wildly. My breath fogs the window and the glass is cool against my face.

A hard, narrow object, it feels like one of the chrome grab rails, presses the back of my head into the glass. It is unyielding. I can't push myself away from the window. Breathing is tough.

I'm suffocating, lungs burning. So much is crushed and broken: head, hip, hand, ribs. A different weight, heavy and flat, presses against my pelvis. I'm pinned—an insect on a specimen board.

With a loud jarring crump, the carriage drops, and the bar pressing against my face shifts downward, ripping away half my cheek. Cold air hits raw tissue that should be covered, not exposed. A piece of torn skin flops against my mouth and nose, smothering.

Oh no.

I puff and the flap moves. Warm liquid dribbles into my nose, and the iron tang of blood hits my tongue. Another drop splashes into my eye. I sneeze. My chest ruptures.

I gag and try to spit out the blood, but more runs into my mouth and I have to swallow or drown. It takes all the strength I have to drive my head forward along the glass. A tuft of trapped hair rips from the roots, but the sharp fleeting pain of a torn scalp is nothing compared with the needles digging into my face and the grinding agony of a shattered pelvis.

Now my hair is free, I can turn my head a couple of inches and see the top of a man's bald head. Neatly trimmed grey hair clings to the temples and below the pale crown. Droplets of sweat on his scalp glisten in the light of a flickering flame.

Oh, God no, we're on fire!

No heat, but where? Moving orange catches my eye.

Thank fuck.

The flames are outside, down the line a little way off. We're safe from the blaze, at least for now. The smell of hot metal, dust, smoke, and something else, something sweet, fills my clogged nostrils.

Everything hurts.

Block the pain. Isolate.

The suffering can wait until later. I turn my head an extra inch, but there's no sign of Paula. Where the fucking hell is she?

"Excuse me, mate," I call to the top of the old man's head. "I'm trapped ... need your help."

He doesn't move.

"Hello? Can you hear me? Can you see my sister?"

More screams outside this twisted broken world tell me some of the passengers in the rear carriages have survived the carnage, but they are too far away to hear my pale cries for help. The bald old man is the only one close enough, but he's not moving.

The wreckage settles again and the old man's head tilts back.

Oh, Christ. Oh Christ!

Milky blue eyes stare at me through wide pupils. The round white thing that used to be attached to a living body, rolls in the broken luggage netting. Another shudder to the carriage vibrates the head around a few degrees. It's as though he's turning to answer my question.

A gaping bloody hole where the mouth should be smiles. There is no jaw. The upper teeth are denture perfect and hang loose, stained with the pink froth of bloody saliva—cherry cola

quenching the thirst of the recently dead. A slab of purple muscle at what used to be a neck oozes blood. The wound looks like the badly butchered wide end of a leg of lamb. Stretched ligaments and tendons dangle through the luggage netting. Strands of white nerve tissue flop through the hole in the centre of the vertebra. Clear liquid trickles along the threads and mixes with the gore from the meat.

I vomit.

Vicious bile sears my throat and nose. I'm choking but can't move my head enough to avoid the splash-back. Acid stings my good eye and blinds me for a moment. Where's Paula and where is the old man's wife, the one in the summer dress?

"Paula. Can you hear me? Where are you, girl?" I call, but my voice barely makes it out over the background noise of crashing hardware and yelling passengers.

A coughing fit takes hold and my ribs and pelvis stab at me with the tips of white-hot pokers. My whole life condenses into a grey and black tunnel of agony.

The carriage lurches again with a metallic shriek as gravity draws the wreckage into a new position. The pink suitcase smashes into my face.

#

Blood drips onto my neck and runs hot down my chest and then cools. I'm nearer horizontal than vertical now, lying on my side, no longer pressed up to the cold glass, but against something warm and soft. I blink a couple of times to clear my eye, but all I see is green fabric close to my face.

I'm now pinned flat by one of the carriage doors. My head and back pressed hard against a warm, pliant material. It smells of dust, burnt oil—and vanilla.

Vanilla?

I'm weakening. The comfortable cloth rises and falls beneath me.

Sleep. I am so tired, need to rest. Things will be better in the morning. Sleep.

A regular, slow double-beat rhythm cuts through my rest and reawakens my agony. The double thump is annoying.

Thump-dump.

Thump-dump.

Why won't it stop? The reverberation rattles through the hollow inside my head behind my sore eye and keeps me awake when I want so much to kip. Why won't it let me rest?

It's dark. As black as the bottom of a ditch, but it's only mid-morning. Something's happened to the sunlight.

Pain.

There is nothing but pain. Searing, screaming agony. Everywhere. So much torture, I can't isolate the source. Each time I twitch or breathe a new spasm vies for top position on the fucking-hell-it-hurts scale. The thumping-pounding inside my head wins though, hands down. The rhythm is incessant. I wish it would stop. Let me go. Let me find some peace.

The thump-dump continues, but it's softer now. Slower. Fading away.

Good. Soon perhaps I can sleep. Peace. At last.

#

A voice in my head, no, outside my head calls, *Don't sleep, Paula needs you.*

Another shift removes the suitcase holding my head and I see Paula. Still and lifeless beneath me. Eyes closed, not breathing. My face is pressed against her shoulder and chest—I'm crushing her. Her skin is pale, her lips blue.

"Paula. Oh no. Wake up," I croak.

Thump-dump, thump-dump ... thump. It's the sound of Paula's faltering heartbeat!

Do something!

I struggle, but my right arm is pinned beneath my body and I can't wriggle it loose. I need to get to Paula. If I ... force down into her, make some room, and tug my left hand ... No, it's trapped, pinched tight in a cutting, scything vice, sharp metal plates. I can't ... Rip, tear ... lever against the thing gripping my fingers. Force down against the wrist and twist. Try again.

Oh, hell.

My hand comes free with whiplash snap and the sound of tearing flesh, like the wet squelch you hear when pulling the drumstick from a roast chicken. I scream. Sweat spurts from every pore, and I lift a trembling left hand to my face.

The pinkie finger and half the ring fingers are missing.

Bloody stumps with dripping threads of red skin and severed tendons dangle in front of my one good eye, and remind me of the old man's severed head. Curiously, there isn't much blood or pain. It maybe masked by all my other injuries. The synaptic firing in my brain must have reached overload.

The smell of iron and vanilla—Paula's perfume combined with my blood—overwhelms everything else. I push my hand forward and touch her chin.

"Paula? Can you hear me?" Panic constricts my throat and makes my voice an octave higher.

The lacerated nubs of my severed fingers ooze blood as I take a firm grip on her blouse and pull. She shifts down one inch, two. Her head lolls but it's closer now. Another heave, and her face touches mine. She's warm. She's still with me. I still have time.

I twist at the waist and ignore the broken bones grating in my pelvis. A wet patch warms the front of my chinos—piss or blood, or both, it doesn't matter. My ribs expand as I stretch towards her mouth, adding to the pain radiating from my groin.

"Screech. Stay with me, girl. Fight this."

Her chin is tucked in tight to her chest. Not good. What did the First Aid training course drum into us?

CPR. Cardio-pulmon— No. Shit. Not that one.

ABC. Airway. Breathing. Circulation.

Open the airway.

I lift Paula's chin and tilt her head back. I stretch, clamp my mouth onto hers, and blow. My ribs scream with the added pressure, but I breathe into her again, less than she needs. There's a rush of air on my cheek, I'm forgetting something.

Chest. Check to see if her chest moves.

I deliver another half-breath, no movement. Air spills through Paula's nose and stings the raw flesh on my cheek.

Pinch the nostrils, block the leak.

She's at the limit of my reach, but I clamp her nostrils together with thumb and forefinger, blood from my wounds smear her cheek. Another breath. Her chest rises, lungs fill.

Yes!

She has a chance.

Blow, relax.

I move my face away to take a breath to the side. Count to three.

Blow, relax. Count. Repeat.

Minutes pass as hours. I'm flagging, weakening and my fingers start to cramp. If the emergency teams don't get here soon she'll be gone.

Blow. Relax. Breathe. Repeat.

I pause and press my ear to Paula's chest.

Thump-dump ... thump-dump.

This is a sample—please distribute.
The Collection © Kerry J Donovan May 2016

It is a glorious, wondrous sound. Faint and fast, but a heartbeat! The noise I wanted to stop a few minutes ago is back and gives me an adrenaline jump-start. Paula is fighting. She's coming back.

"Good girl, Screech. They'll be here soon. The paramedics and the fire-fighters. You've always fancied a man in uniform. Now's your chance to see them in action. C'mon girl, stay with me."

Tears blind me again. I'm so fucking tired.

Blow. Relax. Breathe. Repeat.

"We'll be alright, girl. Not long now. Fight, Screech. Fight."

Even as I speak the words, my voice is failing.

Far off to my right, a woman yells and a baby wails in stereophonic sympathy. The two-tone noise of sirens drowns out the cries. A man close by yells, "Over here. There's blood."

"Help her," I whisper. "Someone help her."

My fingertip hold on Paula's nose weakens.

#

Hours, no, minutes later, a yellow-gloved hand pulls my fingers away. Too weak to fight, I cry, "No ... breathe ... have to keep ... breathing."

Blow. Relax. Breathe. Repeat.

"Easy, sir," a man's calm voice breaks into my inner chant. "I'm Sub-Officer Barry, Midlands Fire and Rescue. We'll have you out of here in a jiffy."

"But my sister—"

"We have her, sir. Don't worry ..."

“I didn’t mean it, Da.”

Hypocrisy in a Wicked World

“Sorry Da, I didn’t do it on purpose. It was an accident. Honest.”

Crack.

His powerful backhand knocks me to the floor. My left ear rings from the blow, but I saw it coming and rolled with it. Doesn’t hurt that much. My cheek burns but I won’t cry. Makes him angry when I cry, makes things worse.

“Please don’t, Da. I’m sorry. Won’t happen again.”

“Won’t happen again?” he bellows, emphasising each word with a punch to my ribs.

I curl into a ball, but it doesn’t help.

“Accident?”

More blows. This time with an open hand, more sound than pain.

“I’ll show you accident, boy.”

A final clap to the back of my head and he’s done—for the moment. Didn’t hurt much. He’s careful to leave no marks.

As long as Lizzie’s safe, I can take any punishment he dishes out.

Da pushes his face up close to mine. Coffee breath warms my face and I’m sprayed with his spittle.

“Who’s gonna pay for the damage, hey?” he screams. “I work all fucking week to keep us in this nice home and what thanks do I get? You fucking ruin everything. Did you forget today’s Sunday?”

He’s so close I don’t see his fist coming this time. Feel it though, as it drives into my stomach and knocks the wind right out of me. As I struggle for breath, the thought of Lizzie, resting safe in her room, gives me heart. Still I don’t cry.

Ma, thin and frail, framed in the kitchen doorway, wrings a dishcloth with water-reddened hands.

“John. The boy’s had enough. Stop now.”

“Had enough you say?”

Without warning and without looking, Da throws his cup and saucer at Ma. They miss and smash against the kitchen wall. Pieces scatter to the floor. Coffee dregs spread wide across the flower-print wallpaper, making a drip pattern. I think Miss Pugh, my English teacher, would call it irony. It’s a spill Da’s punishing me for.

I told him I spilled my drink on the carpet in the lounge. It wasn’t me who dropped the glass of milk, it was Lizzie, but I can’t tell Da ‘cause Lizzie’s too small to take the beating. So I take it for her again, like I do when I cry out at night to mask the noise from her nightmares. Or when I pretend it’s me who didn’t tidy our room when it’s Lizzie’s turn. How can he expect her to make her own bed when she’s only three?

Ma snuffles and starts clearing the pieces of crockery. Da’s having none of it.

“What do you think you’re doing, woman? Let the boy do it. You need to change for church. I can’t have you turning up at service looking like the dog’s vomit. People will think I don’t take care of my family. You—” He kicks me with the side of his foot. “Clean that up, and get your sister ready. You have ten minutes. Understand?”

I’m too winded to speak, so I nod and head for the dustpan and brush in the kitchen cupboard. Ma’s lower lip trembles as she rests a hand on my shoulder. The sadness and apology in her eyes is clear.

It isn't her fault. Can't blame her for his actions even though she blames herself.

Broken crockery cleared and wall sponged clean, I rush upstairs, sidestepping Da as he stands in front of the hall mirror, checking his hair, his tie, and his public smile.

Our bedroom door is still closed. Maybe Lizzie didn't hear the blows or the shouting. I can't afford the time to calm her if she's fretting.

"Lizzie? Are you awake?"

"Donnie?" She still can't wrap her tongue around my real name. "Is Da mad at me again?" She snuffles.

"No sis, it's okay. Really. Everything's peachy."

Fear forms behind her big blue eyes. I scoop her up and give her a squeeze before the terror can take hold.

"It's nothing, Lizzie, but we've gotta get ready for church now."

"I got ready. Look." She sniffs and points to her pink blouse.

"That's wonderful, Lizzie. You've done a great job."

Her smile flips my heart.

"Did I, Donnie?"

"You certainly did, but let's get those buttons fastened up right, shall we? They're all mixed up. You need to be perfect for church."

"Where's Da?"

The fear is back, along with a chin tremble. She looks so much like Ma when she's frightened.

"He's downstairs waiting, but we're okay for now," I say, tucking the blouse into her skirt and kissing her frown-wrinkled forehead. "We'll be safe in public."

A quiet knock.

Ma opens the bedroom door.

"Johnny, Elizabeth, it's time to go. Mustn't keep your father waiting."

Lizzie bleats, jumps into Ma's arms, and buries her head in the crook of Ma's neck. I follow them down the stairs. Da's waiting at the open front door.

"Ready my darlings?" he asks, smiling, quiet and calm. "Off we go. And remember. Best behaviour in Church. The Lord will be watching."

One day, when I'm bigger, I'll stop him. Until then, I'll protect Lizzie. Until then, I'll take the punishment.

#

Half way through the service, my little sister starts to fidget.

"Stay still, Lizzie," I whisper. "Da's watching, look." I nod my head to the front of the church.

We stare in silence as Da climbs the wooden stairs to the pulpit. He makes a big show of beaming down at us all, his congregation. There aren't many here today, a few dozen, but he puffs out his chest as though he's addressing a huge crowd. He reaches under his purple cassock, and draws out three sheets of paper.

"Dearly beloved," he starts as usual, "thank you for joining me on this beautiful day in the house of the Lord our God, who looks down on us all with His benign love." He pauses to give us all a pleasant smile. "My sermon today ..."

Cricket on a Summer's Afternoon

A Part-Remembered Scene from My Childhood

The old Ford Escort belched acrid blue smoke. Not for the first time that day, the children moved the makeshift wicket from the middle of the road to allow the car to pass. They waited on the pavement, waving their hand and shouting ‘hurry-ups’ at the hapless driver. Their dirty faces wrinkled against the fumes. Upon reaching a downhill stretch, the car gathered speed and turned left into Broad Avenue, which was neither broad nor lined with trees. They could still hear the car long after it had disappeared from view, the engine grumbling loud in the early evening quiet.

With the cricket pitch restored, their T20 World Cup final resumed.

Sharan, the right-handed batter, prepared to face the wrath of the Indian and Pakistani pace men once more. She took a leg stump guard and squinted. The setting sun only partially obscured by the bowler’s left shoulder.

She nodded, and shouted, “C’mon then, five to win off the last over, let’s see what you got!”

The bowler, Wasim, wiped the back of his hand with his nose and returned to his bowling mark, fifteen paces back. He gripped the tennis ball firmly in a grubby fist, kicked an empty crisp packet out of his path, and turned to face his tormentor. How many more runs was she gonna score?

Wasim moved into his run-up, increasing pace as he approached the point of delivery. His bowling arm flew in a big circle, elbow locked and extended, brushing close to his left ear, the way his big brother had taught him. He released the ball and called out, “Cop that!”

The tennis ball flew fast and true on a perfect line and heading straight for the cardboard box wicket. It pitched full of length and leapt forward. Wasim’s exaggerated follow through allowed him a perfect view of the ball’s flight. He could see it. He could feel it. This would get her!

A smile broadened the bowler’s young face, but the bat swung straight, and connected with the ball, which immediately reversed course and sailed back over Wasim’s head in a fuzzy yellow arc. It all but laughed at him as it flew past. The boy’s premature smile faded and changed into a deep frown as he turned to follow the missile’s trajectory.

The seven players of the East Indian All-Stars shouted and cheered as one; the Bengal Tigers fell silent. Onward it flew, over the road, over Mr Jenkins-at-Number-23’s failed attempt at topiary, before dropping into the front garden of Number 25.

“Six!” the All-Stars shouted in unison. “Six! We win. We win!”

With her bat raised high, Sharan danced around the unhappy bowler who looked ready to cry; hopes of fame and glory gone forever. When would he be able to look his five teammates in the eye again?

The bell in St Mary’s clock tower struck six times.

Soon be time for tea, Wasim thought, despair forgotten in anticipation of food.

The cheering continued from the East Indian quarter, then as suddenly as it had started, the cheering stopped as the realisation dawned.

Number 25!

Silence fell.

“I ain’t getting it!” Sharan’s pre-emptive strike was strong and firm—unshakeable.

The anticipated tea now forgotten, Wasim shook his head violently. “I ain’t gettin’ it neither. You hit it, you got to fetch it!”

“I ain’t goin’ in there. Peter saw huge rats in the garden Wednesday,” one of the smaller All-Stars nodded vigorously. “Besides, everyone knows it’s haunted. And anyway, I’m a girl and we won. So one o’ you’ll ‘ave to go get it!”

Her big brown eyes filled with tears. She sniffed twice and looked around for a saviour. The bat fell from her hand, cracked onto the tarmac, rocked slightly, and then fell still.

Wasim Patel stood his ground, head still shaking firmly. Eight-year-old boys don’t show chivalry towards nine-year-old girls, especially when one of them had thumped his best bowling into the sky and made him look like a right divvy. He shook his head again.

“Not me, I ain’t goin’ nowhere near the place,” he said and crossed his arms over his chest.

The seven boys and six girls, shifted uneasily. They waited, wondering who would retrieve the only tennis ball left on the street. Delroy, a ten-year-old giant, five feet six inches tall, recognised his chance to impress. “Babies!” he taunted. “What’s to be scared of? I’ll go get it.”

“I’ve heard noises comin’ from there at night!” piped up one small fielder, lower lip quivering. “An’ my Gran says it’s haunted, too.”

“Rubbish. When have you ever been out late at night?” Delroy said, standing tall, challenging. “Everyone knows it’s been empty since Ol’ Eadie Jenkins died, and she wouldn’t haunt nobody. She was nice. Used to bake cakes for the street parties. Remember?”

The little fielder muttered something under his breath. Delroy turned and moved forward, but more timidly than he’d intended. The rest looked at each other in sideways darting glances, and then fell in behind him.

The old Escort’s exhaust fumes hung in the still evening air and added to the sense of menace. Delroy moved closer to the house, his companions allowed the gap between themselves and their leader to grow a little. In the distance, a mother shouted something at an errant child. An electric lawnmower buzzed. A bird in a tree chirruped happily.

Delroy began to wish he hadn’t been so brave, or stupid. He pushed at the broken wooden gate defending the house. The rusty handle squealed in protest when Delroy twisted it downwards. The gate opened but canted down drunkenly. One of the hinges had long since given way.

Delroy moved slowly along the weed-strewn, brick-paved path towards the front door of Ol’ Eadie’s place. He stopped after stepping on something squidgy that cracked under the weight of his shoe. He looked down and grimaced as he moved his foot aside to see the creamy white slime and pieces of shell that had recently been a garden snail. He wiped the sole of his shoe on the edge of the path and continued searching for the elusive ball.

He turned and beckoned to the others. “C’mon, you lot can help too! Dad’ll kill me if I lose another ball.”

None of them moved.

The damp smell increased as Delroy moved closer to the house. Tall conifers and a large beech tree cast deep shadows over the matted tangle where a lawn had once grown. Tall grass, turned to seed and specked with buttercups and other weeds, swished in the light breeze. Brambles, growing out from a once well-tended herbaceous border, reached out to snag Delroy’s socks and scratch his bare legs.

The gang behind him waited at the gate in silence. One girl, the smallest of the group, called out quietly, “Knock the door, see if anyone’s in!”

Delroy turned. “Don’t be stupid, nobody’s lived here since Ol’ Eadie left and no-one’s seen nobody near this place for months.”

He shook his head at her foolishness but stayed well away from the front door, just in case.

“You get lookin’ for the ball over there, and I’ll look by the house,” he said, trying for firmness, but sounding feeble.

The others finally crossed the threshold of the gate and searched in the undergrowth, keeping as far away from the gloomy house as they could.

Delroy scuffed at the weeds with his foot. He found himself close to a broken ground floor window. Curiosity beat fear and he craned his neck to peer through the filthy glass. Pebbles crunched together under the weight of his trainers. His eyes attempted to pierce the gloom. He thought he saw something at the back of the room. He leaned in closer and cupped hands around his eyes.

His body tensed. He gulped. A millisecond later, he let out an involuntary scream, turned sharply on his heels, and shouted, “Run! Oh God, run!”

The gang fled in a melee of shouts, screams, and waving arms.

Adult heads in nearby gardens turned towards the source of the noise. Delroy overtook the smaller members of the group and raced towards the safety of his home.

He burst through the front door and slammed it behind him. Still shouting, he collapsed backwards against the door and slid down to the floor. Shaking badly, he hugged his knees to his chest and started rocking just as he did when little and scared by a nightmare. He bawled loudly for his mother.

Big wet tears streamed down his dark cheeks. He cried in huge sobs.

“Mum ... mum!”

#

It took a while for Delroy’s mother, a large black woman dressed in a tartan housecoat, to reach her little boy. At first, she couldn’t understand his rushed and faltering words. It took longer still to believe him.

“It’s true.” He took in great gulps of air between the sobs. “Horrible it was.”

Delroy’s mother deciphered the garbled message and gasped in shock. She screamed to her husband. He appeared at the head of the stairs, a huge, heavily muscled forty-something, scratching unkempt hair and blinking away sleep.

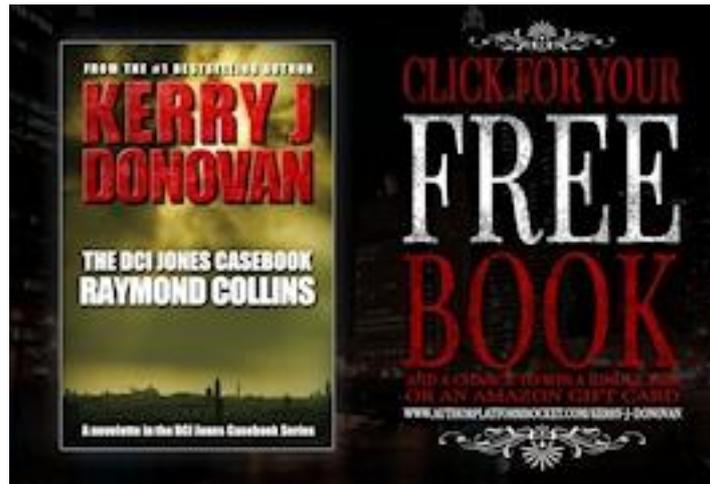
Delroy, still sobbing uncontrollably, refused to return to the house and stayed close to his mother. He held her hand tight, something he hadn’t done for ages, and watched as his father, now dressed, went to confirm his son’s wild ramblings.

Mother and son stood by their gate and watched as the long-striding, powerful man entered the garden and disappeared behind the vegetation. Other adults moved towards the house, drawn by the commotion and the agitated children.

Seconds later Delroy’s father came back into view. He said something to one of the neighbours who took up a position of guard at the broken gate, and then hurried back home. The shocked but determined expression on his face confirmed the boy’s story. His mother pulled Delroy closer and hugged him to her as her husband rushed past them into the house. He made straight for the telephone and picked up the handset. His large calloused hands trembled as he dialled the emergency number.

After a short wait, he responded, “Police please,” and then slumped into the hall chair to wait.

This is a sample—please distribute.
The Collection © Kerry J Donovan May 2016



If you enjoyed reading this novel and would like to receive a **FREE COPY** of *THE DCI JONES CASEBOOK: RAYMOND COLLINS*—one of the books in Kerry’s crime thriller series—read on:

Kerry is running a **GIVEAWAY** and **PRIZE DRAW**. To enter the contest all you need to do is [CLICK HERE](#).

Every verified entry will receive an exclusive link to download *THE DCI JONES CASEBOOK: RAYMOND COLLINS* for **FREE, AND** entrants from the continental US will be part of the PRIZE DRAW to win one of these prizes:

- 1 x Kindle Fire (RRP: \$49.99)
- 2 x \$10 Amazon gift vouchers

This is a sample—please distribute.
The Collection © Kerry J Donovan May 2016

Kerry's Newsletter

Sign up to Kerry's Newsletter [here](#) to receive notifications of future releases, and special offers (such as subscriber-only price reductions, free novels, prize draws, and free additional content). Never fear, he will not inundate you with mail.

Biography

Kerry J Donovan was born in Dublin. He spent most of his life in the UK, and now lives in the heart of rural Brittany with his wonderful and patient wife, Jan. They have three children and four grandchildren (so far), all of whom live in England. An absentee granddad, Kerry is hugely thankful for the advent of video calling.

The cottage is a pet free zone (apart from the field mice, moles, and red squirrels).

Kerry earned a first class honours degree in Human Biology, and has a PhD in Sport and Exercise Sciences. A former scientific advisor to The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, he helped UK emergency first-responders prepare for chemical attacks in the wake of 9/11. This background adds a scientific edge to his writing. He is also a former furniture designer/maker.

Contact him:

Website: <http://kerryjdonovan.com/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/KerryJDonovan>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/KerryJDonovan>

Other Works

CRIME THRILLERS

[The DCI Jones Casebook: Sean Freeman](#)

Veteran cop, DCI David Jones, is tough and uncompromising. His Serious Crime Unit has the best arrest record the Midlands Police Service has ever seen and Jones wants to keep it that way.

Locksmith turned jewel thief, Sean Freeman, is the best cracksmith in the UK. He's never been caught—the police have never even come close. When Freeman's boss forces him to break into the Stafford Museum, the UK's most secure premises outside of the Bank of England he's in trouble—the Stafford is in the heart of David Jones' jurisdiction. Someone's record is going to suffer.

[The DCI Jones Casebook: Raymond Collins](#)

A 70-page novelette to introduce Detective Chief Inspector David Jones: Birmingham, England, a sunny day in the city park. Children play, adults walk—and a man lies dead in a pool of blood. His terrified fiancé screams for help.

The assailant smiles, waves goodbye, and strolls away into the city.

DCI David Jones and his protégé, Detective Sergeant Phil Cryer, are called to investigate the most difficult of crimes—an apparently motiveless and random attack. Hampered by a lack of resources, Jones and Cryer have to act quickly to prevent a murder spree.

[The DCI Jones Casebook: Ellis Flynn](#)

When fourteen-year-old Hollie Jardine fails to return home from school, her terrified parents call the police.

It doesn't take DCI David Jones, head of the Midlands Police Serious Crime Unit, long to discover a link between Hollie and convicted sex-offender, Ellis Flynn.

With Hollie's chances of survival fading, Jones and his colleague Alex Olganski risk their careers when they ignore protocol to follow Flynn's trail across the Channel into France.

What they discover in an idyllic backwater will stretch Jones' detection skills to the limit, and Alex's loyalty to heartbreak.

This is a sample—please distribute.
The Collection © Kerry J Donovan May 2016

ACTION ADVENTURE

On Lucky Shores

In an action-packed tale of secrets and lies in small town America, Chet Walker is a man forced to make decisions that will affect his future and the life of the woman he loves.

Witness to a car crash and in receipt of a cryptic message from a dying man, traveling musician, Chet Walker, reaches the picturesque lakeside town of Lucky Shores. He faces hostility and suspicion from the locals and learns that the information he carries could unlock an eight-year-old mystery—it could also get him killed.

Josephine Dolan, owner of the Lucky Shores diner, wants to bury her past. When Walker arrives with a message from her father, she doesn't want to hear it. She cuts him cold.

When his life is threatened, Chet Walker learns the truth behind the saying, “no good deed goes unpunished.”

FANTASY THRILLER

The Transition of Johnny Swift

Before the accident ...

Frank Brazier has the perfect life. A contract to drive for a Formula 1 team. A supportive family. A stunning girlfriend.

On the surface, everything is great, but Frank keeps a secret. On race days, Shadow-man visits. He sits on the nose cone of Frank's racing car, or floats above the grandstand, waving, taunting, distracting, eating away at his concentration. An accident in the making.

After the accident ...

Frank starts hearing voices. Strange voices. Impossible voices. He's losing his grip on reality and Paula, his sister, is dying. Doctors say she is brain dead. They want to pull the plug, but Frank knows she's still in there, fighting. He can hear her calls.

One day later...

Shadow-man speaks. He says Frank can save Paula, but can Frank pay the price?

This is a sample—please distribute.
The Collection © Kerry J Donovan May 2016

SHORT STORIES

The Collection

The Collection includes over two dozen stories ranging in length from fifty word micro shorts to a full-blown novelette. Comedy, drama, crime thrillers, romance, true-life tales, gory horror, historical epic—you'll find samples of each.

The hauntingly evocative semi-autobiographical tale, *Sweet William*, and the poignant, *The Phone Call*, are stories to tug the heart and bring tears to the eye.

In *The Long Wait*, Ryan Chisholm has spent seventeen years waiting to avenge the death of his father.

A Father's Tale is a heart-warming story of family life told in short vignettes.

At over 7,000 words, *The Chamber* is the longest in the book, and perhaps Kerry's most gruesome tale. Psychopath Porter Robinson holds Robert Forbes captive in a cellar and tells him a tale from Porter's childhood. Will Forbes survive, or will he go the way of countless other victims? This is definitely not for the people of a timid disposition.

If you enjoy your fiction in short bites and read across many genres, *The Collection* is certain to delight.