



The Fourth
Corona Book of

HORROR STORIES

The Best in New Horror Short Stories



Edited by
LEWIS WILLIAMS



**THE FOURTH
CORONA BOOK OF
HORROR
STORIES**

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CONTENTS

Editor's Introduction	7
Here Piggy, Piggy <i>by Florence Ann Marlowe</i>	11
Gloria <i>by Donna L. Greenwood</i>	31
Musica Mortis <i>by Wink Taylor</i>	45
The Doorman <i>by Justin Canthorne</i>	63
Belle <i>by The Secret Submissive</i>	72
Angel Hair <i>by Deborah Sheldon</i>	85
There Is a Man in Edith's Home <i>by Sam Rebelein</i>	100
Darla and the Clown <i>by MM Schreier</i>	111
Up from the Dark <i>by Jon Gauthier</i>	122
The Spaghetti Incident <i>by Lewis Williams</i>	128
John Longmire's Last Day <i>by D.A. Watson</i>	130
The Best Weapons in the World <i>by Wondra Vanian</i>	140
Paradise Modified <i>by Cathy Bryant</i>	152
The Final Straw <i>by Sue Eaton</i>	158
Foolish Pursuit <i>by Suzanne Ross Jones</i>	162
Think Better of It <i>by C.C. Adams</i>	169
Sunday Supper <i>by Vanessa Reid</i>	181

The True and Short Life of a Werewolf <i>by Augustus Stephens</i>	202
A Stopover in Burden <i>by Adena Graham</i>	220
Infestation <i>by Jennifer Jackson</i>	228
Author biographies	239
List of author websites and Twitter accounts	248

INTRODUCTION

Everything was going pretty well for Corona Books back at the beginning of 2020. We'd just published *The Third Corona Book of Horror Stories* which had attracted over 800 submissions from authors wanting their stories to appear in it; and finally after years of trying we'd managed to secure a face-to-face meeting with Waterstones, the UK's largest bookstore chain, who agreed to stock our books in a number of their shops nationwide. And then... well, to paraphrase Bruce Springsteen, there are some things you don't even see coming that can knock you down. Along came a virus that alas shared our name and made it virtually impossible to try and promote ourselves without attracting criticism or ridicule. The nicer of the comments we were getting at the time said things like, 'Do you get a free virus with that book?' and the nastier comments accused us of trying to cash in on the virus that was then in the process of killing people – which of course we weren't, having started publishing in 2015 long before the pandemic became a thing. With heavy hearts we felt had to take the decision to put the publication of any new titles on hold. So, no new Corona Books titles appeared in 2020 or 2021, and our plans to publish *The Second Corona Book of Science Fiction* and *The Fourth Corona Book of Horror Stories* in particular were put on ice.

THE FOURTH CORONA BOOK OF HORROR STORIES

The global pandemic turned out to be awful in so many ways for all of us, I know, and to keep things in perspective we didn't lose anybody at Corona Books to the virus or anything like that, but the cancellation of these titles was a disappointment to me and to the authors we'd had lined up to have their stories included in them. In 2019 I'd been going round happily telling anyone who'd listen that as long as my heart was still beating there'd be a Corona Book of Horror Stories published every year from now on whatever happened. It wasn't to be.

However, now that the Corona name is hopefully going to be a lot less toxic than it was proving to be back in early 2020, we are publishing the book you have before you. Are we picking up exactly as we left off three years ago? Yes and no. Yes, we remain fiercely independent and 100% committed to publishing the best in new horror writing from the genuinely brilliant wealth of talent out there that mainstream publishers are apt to ignore. Nothing has changed there, but *The Fourth Corona Book of Horror Stories* differs from its predecessors (and from the book it probably would have been in 2020) in a couple of ways. Firstly, with a total of 20 entries, it has more stories in it than any of the other anthologies we've published before. Secondly, it includes both some stories that are, I think, darker in tone than anything we've published before and some stories that are, I think, lighter in tone than anything we've published before.

To put things another way, with this volume we're offering more in the way of quantity and more in the way of variety than we've done before, but quality remains an ever-present constant.

INTRODUCTION

So, depending on your choice of metaphor, strap yourself in for a memorable rollercoaster ride or prepare to indulge yourself in a tantalising selection box – and forgive me for having the nerve to include a story of my own within the contents, albeit a very short one indeed.

In this book, as with all our other anthologies, we've chosen to preserve the authors' native version of English spelling, punctuation and grammar. This is out of respect for our authors' creations and to avoid the strangeness that would ensue from Anglicising stories with an American setting or Americanising stories with a British setting were we to insist on everything being in British English or alternatively everything being in American English. So, the stories by the five American authors (MM Schreier, Sam Rebelein, Vanessa Reid, Florence Ann Marlowe and Wondra Vanian) included in this collection appear in American English; the story by the one Canadian author (Jon Gauthier) appears in Canadian English; and the stories by the two Australian authors (Deborah Sheldon and Justin Cawthorne) appear in Australian English.

Elsewhere the book is presented in British English (where we have fibres, colours and centres rather than fibers, colors and centers etc.) Although sometimes subtle, the differences in the different versions of English extend to punctuation too. For example, in American English the use of double quotes is favoured for speech, whereas we Brits, it seems, prefer single quotes when it comes to fiction in print. And in American English certain punctuation marks appear inside quotes that it wouldn't be correct for them to do so in British English. These differences are not mistakes!

THE FOURTH CORONA BOOK OF HORROR STORIES

Also as with all our other anthologies, in case of interest and to aid readers who might want to check out other writing from the authors of their favourite stories in the book, at the end of the book we've included brief biographies of all the contributors along with a listing of Twitter accounts and author websites for those that have them.

Now without further ado, on with the (horror) show!

Lewis Williams
Withernsea, Summer 2022

HERE PIGGY, PIGGY

Florence Ann Marlowe

The road leading up to the witch's house was a dark and lonely one. Cody kicked at a can lying in the gravel as he and the other two young men trudged through the brush. Vinnie jumped a foot and hissed at him, "What the fuck's the matter with you? We're trying to keep a low profile here!"

"Aw, shut the fuck up," Cody muttered. "Nobody's around. Nobody can hear us."

"That's not the fucking point, Cody." Vinnie trotted up to Cody's side. "We're trying to take advantage of the element of surprise here."

Cody grinned. Vinnie could be such an asshole: twenty-three and still playing video games in his head. "The surprise comes from what we're not going to do, Vinnie, not what we're gonna do."

"What the fuck does that mean?" A dog barked somewhere in the distance and Vinnie jumped again.

"It means we're not going to pay her." Cody took another swipe at the can with his foot and missed. "The witch expects to get paid, but we ain't got the cash, so we got to keep that our little secret."

Jonah gave the can a kick as he caught up with Vinnie and Cody. "Yeah, but what if she figures us out?" He

glanced around at the fields, heavy with produce so late in the summer. “What kind of witch is she anyway? What kind of witch lives on a farm?”

Cody expelled an exasperated sigh. It was difficult being the only intellect in his circle of friends. He felt he had been carrying both Vinnie and Jonah since high school. He was always the brains, always the leader. He was the one who had to get them into trouble and to figure a way to get them out of it again.

“The bitch is an honest-to-God witch, like the old lady in the Harry Potter movies. Since I was a kid I’ve seen assholes pay her for love potions and candles and shit like that,” Cody said. “All the other farms in Morgan County are going under, but she manages to keep going. How you figure she’s done that?”

Vinnie shrugged. “Maybe she comes from a farming family.”

“Yeah, like the Mulhaneys? Look what happened to them,” Cody snickered.

“Does the old lady have a dog, Cody?” Jonah asked as they rounded the path and saw the old A-frame farm house.

Cody shook his head. “She’s no old lady. She’s my mom’s age. They actually went to school together.”

The three young men stopped in front of the picket fence surrounding the property. Sunflowers bobbed on their six-foot stems from the front yard. There was a stone lying in front of a small patch of grass by the gate. The name “Jo-jo” was painted on the stone in faded blue letters. Years ago, the witch had had a dog. Cody remembered killing it with his pellet gun after she had caught him teasing her pigs. His father had beat him with

HERE PIGGY, PIGGY

his belt for that. Willie Patterson always had a soft spot for the witch, for some odd reason.

“Okay, let me do all the talking here. We’re going to explain what we want without letting on that we haven’t got any money, you dig?”

Vinnie nodded and Jonah sighed before silently agreeing. They stepped up the wooden porch and Cody rapped on the door.

Cora Lee Sullivan had lived in the old farm house since she was born. Her family had raised pigs and chickens and planted corn and other crops for over a hundred years. She had carried on when her father died in ’89 and had lived alone save for animal companionship, tending her fields and selling produce to the local grocers. She was also known as the local witch. She answered the door and looked back at the three boys with some surprise.

“Cody? Cody Patterson, what are you doing here so late? It’s nine PM.”

Cody had to think for a moment what the appropriate response might be. Cody didn’t remember her being so attractive. When he was in high school she’d been heavier, draped in baggy muumuus, chasing him and his brother Roy with a rake when they rode their bikes through her watermelon patch. The dark-haired woman peering back at him from behind her front door looked younger than her mid-forties, her eyes a deep indigo blue that seemed shocking in the bright hallway light. He’d expected a pale, pasty-looking thing, but her skin was tawny from working in the sun and her lips were full and red, like ripe fruit.

A smile spread across Cody’s face. “Relax, Cora, this is

END OF SAMPLE PAGES

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Amazon UK link: <https://amzn.to/3AGzpAA>

International link: <https://mybook.to/CoronaHorror4>

(The Kindle edition is priced at only £1.99 or equivalent low amount in other currencies.)

Praise for previous Corona Books horror and ghost anthologies:

“The quality is extremely high ... If this collection isn't nominated for a Stoker award in the 'Anthologies' category this year, then the whole nominating process should be called into question ... This is the finest short story collection to come out in a long time.”

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“It has been a while since I've enjoyed an anthology so much ... a very satisfying collection ... Definitely recommended.”

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“A superb anthology! Each story brings something different ... there is not a single dud.”

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