



Pilcrow & Dagger

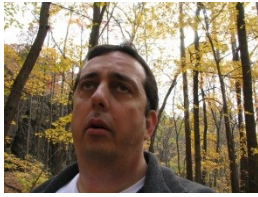
Strange Sounds Coming From Under The Bed

A Haunting Chat
with
Darcy Coates

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Roger Schumacher - Roger's early childhood was consumed by comic books, Creature Feature Presents, Star Trek, and Clint Eastwood films. In 1980 he attended the School of Visual Arts earning a film degree and then spent the rest of the 80's and 90's working on small film projects, screenplays, and other AV projects. Roger has been working with prose since 2003 and has taken some classes in order to better learn the craft. He is currently working as an Inventory Analyst.

The Bridge of Crying Children

Lucas Griffin sat in his twelfth grade English class. His teacher, an elderly man named Mr. Moss, had grey hair and wore a thick sweater that looked the part of a teacher. His guise however concealed from most a sharp mind and an acute sense of reading people. He had assigned each student in class to write an essay about their hometown. The best essays would be displayed in the main hallway of the school until after graduation. Though the rebellious type, Lucas consistently got good grades. Ultimately he liked Mr. Moss but externally he often scoffed at the older man's perceptions.

He being an outcast in school hated his hometown, and most everyone in it. Lucas's slight frame and desponded attitude made him the easy target for ridicule. In a couple of weeks he would graduate and escape this town. Lucas looked forward to leaving it and them behind in the fall as he would attend a college out of state. Dressed in denim jeans and a T-shirt depicting his favorite heavy metal band, he stared out toward the front of the room with steel blue eyes.

Each of his classmates had presented their essay aloud to the rest of the class. The

young girl in front of him had just finished up and sat down as Mr. Moss called on Lucas.

"Very well written Laura, Lucas you're next."

Though Lucas thought the assignment lame, he looked forward to reading his essay to the class. He had chosen a most controversial subject knowing full well the reaction he would receive. Still, it made his heart beat faster knowing this last act would be his epitaph and a one fingered salute to the town and people he despised so much. Standing alongside his desk, he began to read out loud.

"Back in the 1952 South Plainfield had been a much different place. A town comprised of mostly farmland and one small urban center. It also retained a private airport which served the county, a far different look from today's established suburbia. Back then, there weren't many homes away from the main thoroughfares.

The town's council had been in the midst of acquiring land from neighboring towns in



order to build new homes and businesses for its growing infrastructure. One street in particular would gain an infamous reputation; Cedarbrook Avenue.”

At this point, Lucas shot a quick glance at the class around him, some sat bored, but a few began to put the pieces together. The growing shock on their faces pleased him as he read on.

“This street is connected on either end by the main thoroughfares of Maple and Kenyon Avenues. About half way down its length sat a small bridge. The Cedarbrook Avenue Bridge had been built over the expanse of a wide stream. The exact date of its construction points to it being established as far back as the town itself. The bridge remained anonymous until Harvey Butane moved into the area.”

Lucas could feel the stares on his back at from the other students. Mr. Moss however, remained apathetic and simply listened.

“Harvey Butane, a chronic unemployed drifter lived on a dwindling inheritance. An older man in his fifties, he mostly stayed inside his home except when the children, of the neighboring grade school, also located on Cedarbrook Avenue, were in the process of entering or leaving school grounds. Regarded as a loner and outsider, Harvey owned a small home on the same street. Unknown to any at the time, he’d had a criminal record and

had been convicted of child abduction in the past.

Unfortunately, this all too familiar lapse between law enforcement and the communities they served occurred regularly. Back then, the authorities didn’t notify towns of criminals like him and their movements. An oversight which left Harvey unmonitored and free to frequent the school grounds when the children were present.

According to complaints and the police reports published later, he would often tempt the children into coming back to his home with the promise of candy and other sweets. He had been able to avoid any trouble until the disappearance of the children began. The police investigations soon led them to Harvey’s front door. But he managed to avoid detection each time. Claiming the neighbors had it in for him since he’d only been in town a short while. However, the police remained suspicious of him, establishing round the clock surveillance on Harvey’s home. Only then, did the authorities actually learn the fate of the missing children.

Harvey had convinced, over a two week period, six ill-fated children to come back to his home. Once there, the children were bound, gagged, and locked in the basement. They were then systematically abused. Once Harvey had gotten tired of his captured prey, he disposed of them by strangulation and buried the bodies at the base of

the stream under the Cedarbrook Bridge.

It had been on one of these occasions that Harvey got caught. The detectives observed him digging a shallow grave on the bank of the stream. He had a large burlap sack containing the remains of Sara Jones; the most recently abducted child next to him. After his arrest Harvey had his house searched and evidence seized. The remains of those he'd buried under the bridge were recovered.

The subsequent quick trial and the conviction of Harvey Butane surprised no one. Harvey then began his incarceration at the State Penitentiary in Rahway New Jersey. His sentence of death via electrocution occurred a short time later. The town immediately hushed up the scandal. The name of Harvey Butane became blasphemy to any that spoke it and most in the town denied all events attached to his name.

As the decades wore on, Harvey and his crimes faded from the collective memory of most of the townsfolk. But others had spoke of strange occurrences happening at the Cedarbrook Bridge in the years following. Some witnesses claim to have heard the cries of children in pain as they passed over the bridge. Other reports stated shrill voices coming up from the stream bank. The calls of, "Mommy, Daddy, and Help us" echoed up from the stream and came over the bridge.

These events always occurred at night and most frequently during the period of the weeks during the children's disappearance. The authorities dismissed these complaints as nonsense. They had no way to verify eyewitness accounts.

To spite the attempts to squash the reports, the local legend grew over time and it's widely believed that the "screams" are the ghosts of Harvey Butane's victims who can find no rest.

His spirit is said to reside there watching over them. As the ghosts of the dead children try to escape their earthy bonds by rising up out of the ground, Harvey's spirit stands over them laughing and forcefully thumps their exposed limbs back under the earth with a shovel."

Lucas looked up at Mr. Moss. The class sat in stunned silence. Some faces still held the shock while others festered in anger at Lucas. Lucas smiled slightly and sat down. Mr. Moss looked over his class as the bell rang ending the period.

"Mr. Griffin, I will see you after class."

Some students began to rise and walk out without a word. While two of the town's football team walked toward Lucas.

Mr. Moss seeing this, acted quickly to defuse any confrontation.

"That will be all students. Remember the final is in two weeks and counts as forty percent of your grade." Moss looked toward the football players as they approached Lucas's desk. "Tommy Lanky and Bruce Mason," The two looked up at Mr. Moss.

"Gentlemen, I hope you have your essays ready for tomorrow. Football season is over and Coach Clarence and I will be looking

forward to both of you passing my final and not repeating the twelfth grade.”

Tommy and Bruce got the message and changed direction. They headed out of class but not before giving Lucas the death stare. Lucas remained seated as Mr. Moss walked to the door of the classroom and closed it. He then made his way back to Lucas. He stood over the boy staring down at him with a sour grin.

“You’ve delivered quite an essay Mr. Griffin. Can I assume you have a constructive reason for it or can I attribute this as just another example of your ever growing disdain for human decency?”

Lucas looked up at Mr. Moss but said nothing.

“Your silence speaks volumes young man.”

Mr. Moss turned away from Lucas and went to his desk located at the front of the room. Reaching into a draw, he drew out a small piece of paper. He began to write something on it as Lucas stared at him.

“Another note for my parents,” He blurted.

Moss smiled stoically at the boy and approached him.

“No nothing like that. I know aside from your usual benign outlook you are an intelligent student. Your grades don’t reflect the persona you try to project. I think your true self is far more compassionate.”

He handed Lucas the piece of paper he’d written on. Lucas stared at the script.

“This looks like an internet link.”

“Glad to see you can still comprehend. There is a YouTube video I think you’ll find very interesting.”

Lucas dropped the paper on his desk and looked up at Mr. Moss.

“Why should I?”

“Because you’re curious and because it counts as part of your final grade.” Moss responded.

“Hell with that, I can still graduate without this.”

“Maybe, but it could affect that transcript you sent to college. Not to mention my recommendation letter. I would hate to see you lose your first choice in schools over such an incident like this.”

Lucas glared at the paper and then at Mr. Moss. His resolve crumbled. Lucas took the paper and shoved it in his pocket.

“The library has internet, I suggest you head there now.”

“But my next class…”

Lucas stood up from the desk and considered at Mr. Moss. For the first time, he felt he didn’t know the man staring back at him. Moss’s eyes drew dark, his body posture stiffened.

“I’ll handle that, just go.”

Lucas sat in front of a computer screen. He typed in the internet link which brought him to the YouTube website. The video started to play as Lucas watched. The old videotape had white lines running through it and appeared to break up in certain sections. The date stamped in the lower right hand corner of the screen read, “10-01-1985.”

Two men sat in an unkempt living room with recording equipment. One of them held a microphone and faced the camera. The man wore a cheap but well pressed blue suit and had short blond hair combed back and held in place by hair jell. The graphic that appeared under his name read, “Jack Cannigan Paranormal Researcher.” The man running the video equipment and had dark hair and wore jeans and a red T-shirt. Jack Cannigan spoke into the camera.

“Mrs. Nancy Stoneheart is the last living jury member who presided over the case of Harvey

Butane. Mrs. Stoneheart has many health problems which now restrict her to remain inside her home. She's attended to by a full time nurse and uses oxygen to help with her most severe symptom; emphysema. Finch and I are only being allowed a few minutes."

Lucas watched as Nancy entered into the living room of her home by her nurse which Cannigan identified as Gabby; a large overweight woman with a bad disposition.

Mrs. Stoneheart, a plump woman, had a tangle of gray hair on her head. She sat confined in a wheel chair due of her various medical conditions. Nancy wore a sweater over her shoulders and had a blanket cast over her lap. She took deep labored breaths from a nose hose attached to an oxygen tank strapped to the side of the chair.

Gabby eyed their guests suspiciously as the interview began. "Mrs. Stoneheart is very ill. I can't say I agree with her doing this. It undoubtedly will put unnecessary strain on her. Her health is very fragile."

"I'm dying Gabby." Mrs. Stoneheart said through labored breaths. "This needs to be said and the ledger cleared once and for all."

"Thank you Mrs. Stoneheart for granting us this interview." Jack began.

"Please call me Nancy. (Cough) You fellas are with the police?" She asked.

"No Ma'am we're paranormal investigators." He

said looking to his cohort running the video equipment. "We examine myths, legends, and the science behind them. We also attempt to explain with science and faith what up until now could be explained by folklore and superstition." Jack replied.

"You see," Gabby leaned over and spoke in Nancy's ear. "They're just a couple of wackos."

"You would be wrong there Ma'am." Jack interrupted. "We've assisted the authorities on many occasions and have helped solve crimes and other mysteries where common practices didn't apply."

Jack handed Gabby his card. It had his name, phone number, address, and logo on it.

"Check us out with your local police if you like; I would even encourage you to seek out the better business bureau while you're at it. We are as advertised."

Gabby took the card and looked at it. Nancy pulled on her wrist so she could see it as well.

"It's fine Gabby. They are just what I'm looking for; someone who will listen."

Jack looked to his cohort. "Finch is everything ready to go?" The man with the red T-shirt nodded. With the distractions put aside, Jack got on with the interview.

"Now Nancy what is it that you have to tell us?"

Nancy shifted her weight in the wheelchair; and then followed with several coughs and

gasps as she struggled to get more air into her lungs. Gabby patted her back as Nancy calmed down. She looked at Jack with tired eyes.

"I'm the last one left. The last one who knew the real Harvey Butane and what he did."

Nancy coughed once and steadied herself.

"Back in the early 50's when Harvey came into town. At first no one knew, how we could have known of such, (cough) evil. But when those kids started disappearin' all hell broke loose." Nancy gasped for more air so she could continue. "During the trial that we (cough) well I at least saw him; the real him."

Jack and Finch turned to each other and then to Nancy.

"The real him Nancy, what do you mean?" Jack led her to continue.

"He's evil I said. I saw it in his eyes. He had dark eyes that looked through you (cough) not at you. There were even times he would smirk as evidence against him had been brought out for us to examine."

At this point Nancy started coughing again. It took longer for her to regain control of herself and her emotions.

"I'm sorry but rememberin' all this," She said.

"Take your time Nancy," Jack comforted her.

Finch monitored the equipment and nodded to Jack. Nancy smiled under her pain and took a large gulp of air into her lungs before continuing.

"That trial lasted over a week. The prosecutor had the kids' school pictures posted on easels (cough) so the whole courtroom could see them. He passed around the crime scene photos of those kids (cough) after they wuz dug up from the stream. I'll never forget seeing 'em in the dirt. They were horrible. Passing those pictures (cough) around the jury box was the hardest thing I ever did. Those images made an impression that's lasted a lifetime."

"We have a trial transcript." Jack said looking to move forward with the story. "We know what happened in the courtroom."

"But you didn't see," (cough) Nancy interrupted. "There's more to this than him being convicted of those killings. He's different then us. Nothing affected him. Not even when the prosecutor (cough) made Harvey look at the photos in the courtroom and then at the police pictures later on."

At this point Nancy went into a fit of coughing. It took her several moments for her to work through it before she could continue.

Lucas stared at the screen uncomfortably as he continued to watch.

"He came off to me as proud of what he'd done. But his stone face had no reaction; like he looked (cough) at nothing at all. But his eyes were alive." Nancy struggled with her air intake.

"Everyone on the jury felt it every time he turned around and looked at us. It felt like (cough) he said you're gonna be next. Always he had that wry smile on his face when he looked at us."

Jack and Finch observed Nancy intently. Jack proceeded further in his questioning.

"So after the trial and sentencing, were there any more murders?"

"Murders," Nancy looked at them like they weren't involved in the same conversation.

"Nah, it's not about murders. It's about Harvey." She paused to take a deep inhale of oxygen. "He kept that wry smile on his face right up until the execution. His eyes were black as pitch (cough) but alive like flame. I'm trying to tell you that Harvey or at least part of him is still alive! Here and now in this town!"

Nancy began coughing again sucking hard on the oxygen hose trying to get more air into her lungs. Gabby checked the tank and opened the nozzle on the top so more air would flow out into the hose. Nancy leaned back in her wheelchair exhausted; still determined to get out whatever story still inside of her.

"That's what all the screamin' is about going on out at the bridge. Harvey's down there (cough) keepin' those kids from gettin' into heaven. He's got them tied down there somehow and won't let 'em go."

"Nancy you think the spirit of Harvey Butane is responsible for

the events going on at the bridge?"

"I know he is, (cough) its why those kids are always screaming. They can't get away from him; even in death."

"Nancy do you have any evidence to this affect?" Jack asked.

"My eyes; I saw, I was there! Even after they executed him, he knew we could do nothing to stop him."

Jack and Finch exchanged glances. Gabby leaned over Nancy's shoulder.

"I think that's enough now Nancy. The strain of this is too much for you."

Nancy shifted in her wheelchair again. She fought against the illness stealing the breath from her lungs. She coughed some more and then finally relaxed.

"No, I'm not done yet. There's still more. Years after the killin's (cough) I wouldn't go near that bridge. But before I ended up in this chair, I worked up the nerve to go across it one night."

She looked to the investigators in earnest. Her voice got quiet, she looked afraid as if someone other than those in the room would hear her.

"I remember that summer's eve in June. The air filled with humidity, even after the sun went down. I walked there that night (cough) unable to sleep. It felt like something pulled me there telling me I wouldn't find any rest until I had crossed over that bridge. As I neared the top of

the bridge (cough) I could hear the screamin'. Those kid's creepy voices, but once I looked over the edge, I knew true evil."

"You saw someone?" Jack interjected.

"I saw some-thing!" Nancy corrected. "I came over the crown in the bridge and looked over. The screamin 'got louder but what I saw..."

Nancy became consumed with another fit of coughing. Gabby attempted to adjust the hose from the tank and comfort her as Nancy struggled in the wheelchair. Finally, Nancy shooed Gabby away and got her breathing under control.

"I saw a form down there on the bank of the stream. It glowed like a firefly (cough) against the darkness of the woods and water down there. I froze; my hands gripped the rails of the bridge as I stared at it. Slowly it turned toward me. As it did I (cough) recognized his face. No doubt about it, I saw Harvey Butane! He just stood there among the screamin' with that wry smile on his face. Our eyes locked (cough) for a moment. I could feel the fire in 'em. He told me he still had those kids. I ran from the bridge and never returned. I wouldn't even near Cedarbrook Avenue after that."

"Has anyone else ever seen Harvey?" Jack questioned.

"Yes, he appeared to everyone on that jury. And they're all dead now, 'cept me."

"How do you know?" Jack wondered.

"Every one of us on the jury had been back to that damn bridge since the trial. (Cough) We'd all seen the same thing. He wuz callin' us there to let us know he'd been right. We couldn't stop him; no one could."

"You spoke with the other jurors after your experience?"

"Yeah, that's how I know. We'd all gotten together after each of us made their trip up there. We knew back then (cough) he's evil. Not human; but pure evil."

Gabby held Nancy's right hand monitoring her pulse. She nodded and looked to Nancy.

"This has to stop now or else you're not going to see the five o'clock news tonight."

Nancy relented; she sat back in the chair collapsed from exhaustion. She had told her story.

"It doesn't matter now. I got my story out. He'll have his pound of flesh before too long."

Gabby turned her attention to the investigators. Her mood dictated she would not negotiate.

"This ends now." She pointed at Jack with an accusing finger. "You're gonna kill this woman if you don't stop this and leave here."

Jack nodded to Finch.

"Nancy has given us what we came for. We'll leave now."

Jack stood and walked over to the wheelchair. He leaned over and whispered in Nancy's ear so Gabby couldn't hear.

"Thank you Nancy for your story. If it's of any consolation to

you, I believe you and we will do everything in our power to see this resolved. Harvey Butane's malevolence will claim no more victims."

Nancy smiled at Jack. A single tear rolled down her cheek from one eye.

"I think you should be leaving now." Gabby ordered.

Gabby wheeled Nancy toward the television located in the next room. The video camera then shut off suddenly ending the video.

Lucas sat looking at the blank screen consumed by guilt.

"Now do you understand Lucas? The story of Harvey Butane is not something to be taken lightly. Many families suffered at the hands of that killer."

Lucas sat across from Mr. Moss in his empty classroom. He noticed his teacher looked much older and tired.

"Including my own, Sara Jones was my half-sister."

Lucas sat stunned by the revelation. He felt bad about what he'd done. Though he and Mr. Moss often had their disagreements, he did genuinely like and respect his teacher.

"Mr. Moss, I'm sorry."

"My family suffered more than most realize." The older man sat and reflected for a moment.

"But I don't understand," Lucas thought of Nancy Stoneheart, the sympathy coming through in his voice. "I did a lot of research for my paper and never came across that video."

"Some things come when they are needed." Before Lucas could interrupt, Moss held up his hand. "And some things go when it's their time. Tell me, do you believe what

happened is much more than some local folklore?"

Lucas thought for a moment before answering. "Yes, I have made a grievous mistake. I'll never make light of such heartbreak again."

Moss leaned back in his chair and stared wistfully at the boy.

The full moon rose over a hazy sky as Lucas stood on the Cedarbrook Bridge. Lucas waited on the north bound side which faced a small park with cut grass and walking paths. The stream flowed quietly among the sounds of the insects that filled the night air. He held a small flashlight in one hand. His eyes watched as a lone car's headlights came toward him and then passed him by on the bridge. He observed the red tail lights fade into the night. Suddenly a voice came from behind him making him jump.

"I knew you'd come." Mr. Moss said placing a heavy hand on the boy's shoulder. "You had to see for yourself."

Without another word his teacher stepped ahead of Lucas and led them to the opposite side of the bridge. This side had nothing but woods and a ragged path which led down from the bridge to the stream below. The older man stopped once directly under the bridge and studied the graffiti spray painted on the concrete supports.

"Stay away or Harvey will get you."

"Beware Harvey Butane child killer." Mr. Moss read the scribble with distaste and turned toward Lucas.

"You see what time has made of this tragedy? It's been reduced to stories designed to scare young people like you. It's now been diminished into a simple dare to test the mettle of some frightened kid. Who can go under the bridge and see Harvey Butane."

Lucas shone his light on the writing as Mr. Moss turned away. They strode toward the rugged path that cut in the woods and ran alongside the stream. Lucas followed keeping

his light fixed on Mr. Moss. His skin soon goose pimpled even in the thick humid air. He had never before been down there. It didn't take him long to realize he didn't much care for it.

"Mr. Moss where are we going," Lucas called after his teacher as they came upon a wide bank of sand and mud between the water and the woods.

Mr. Moss stopped at the sound of Lucas's voice. He stood on the muddy bank next to the stream and turned toward the boy.

"This is where Harvey Butane buried the six children he tortured and killed."

Lucas panned the flashlight all around the area. One spot looked much the same as any other to him.

"How do you know Mr. Moss?"

"Because he got both Sara and I. We're still here-help us Lucas!"

Before Lucas could bring his flashlight to bear, the form of Mr. Moss began to change. His body morphed into that of small child dressed in 1950's style clothing. He then became translucent and waivered in the air. His face filled with terror as he threw up his arms and faded from view with a blood curling scream. Lucas then experienced the event that would forever change his life.

His flashlight flickered and went out. The space of mud and sand along the stream bank began to change. Slowly, tiny luminous fingers began to dig their way up through the sand and mud. Lucas stood paralyzed with fear as the fingers became small hands and then arms pushing up through the muck of the stream bank. All the while, the pitiful crying of small children cascaded down all around him. A concert of misery filled his ears. The weeping and pouting of small children overwhelmed the air filling every space of Lucas's soul with their suffering.

Lucas could tell that each pair of the hands and arms represented a different child. Soon a dozen arms with flailing hands and grasping fingers pushed upward through the ground. Lucas dropped the flashlight and covered his ears trying to blot out the wailing.

His eyes filled with tears as his own screams competed with the chorus of tears.

The next thing Lucas saw stopped his heart cold. A dark form began to materialize behind the picket of children's limbs. It quickly formed into the shape of a man. Though completely opaque within, its outline had a luminous glow. Lucas could see the details of his clothing and body. He wore a fedora with a dirty work shirt and pants. Muddy boots stood in the muck just over the children as his red eyes stared out at Lucas.

His mouth opened exposing bleached white teeth as a low laughter slipped forth. His hands held a spade shovel which he now put to work. Harvey began to bang down on the children's arms with the tool pushing them back into the earth. His amusement rose over the suffering cries of the children as their limbs were driven back underground. The vision began to fade as the children's limbs were covered over with dirt from Harvey's shovel. With the completion of his work, Harvey's form then faded away. Seconds afterward, the stream and muddy banks returned to their former guise. The insect sounds filled the air as the water flowed quietly by.

Lucas fell to his knees crying uncontrollably his soul forever changed.

Lucas, a man now in his thirties, turned toward Jack Cannigan, now in his sixties, but still vital and alive. The night air had a chill as the two men along with Finch stood outside a dilapidated house with hi-tech detection and recording equipment. Jack led them toward the front door of the house.

"I remember the day you found us and wanted to join in our quest Lucas. Though we don't always find the answers, we continue to learn more about the unexplained." Jack placed a gentle hand on his shoulder.

Lucas smiled at the older man who still had some remnant of blond in his mostly grey hair.

“I’m convinced there are things we don’t understand in the universe.” Lucas replied. “I look forward to proving that with science and faith we can find a way to understand them.”

The three men then stepped inside the house disappearing within the darkness.



Themes for 2016

January – Fantasy, Fairy Tales, Sci-Fi

February/March – Leprechauns and Love/Romance (no erotica please!)

April – April Fools Stories

May/June – New Beginnings

July – Action and Adventure

August/September – Comedy and Humor

October – Urban Legends

November/December – Murder and Crime and Mystery Stories

Australian & New Zealand

November

Literary Festivals & Conferences

November 1 – 11, 2016 Digital Writers Festival
Melbourne, VIC
<http://www.emergingwritersfestival.org.au/digital/>

November 3 – 4, 2016 Storylines Literary Festival
Perth, WA
<http://www.allsaints.wa.edu.au/community/storylines-literature-festival/>

November 4 – 6, 2016 Scone Long Literary Weekend
Scone, NSW
<http://www.sconewritersfestival.com.au/>

November 9 – 12, 2016 Independent Publishing Conference
Melbourne, VIC
<http://smallpressnetwork.com.au/independent-publishing-conference/>

November 11 – 13, 2016 Supanova
Brisbane, QLD
<http://www.supanova.com.au/>

November 12, 2016 Quantum Words Festival
Sydney, NSW
<http://www.nswwc.org.au/whats-on/festivals-2/quantum-words-festival-2016/>

November 16 – 23, 2016 untitled Literary Festival
Stonnington, VIC
<http://www.stonnington.vic.gov.au/library/Whats-on/%5Buntitled%5D-Literary-Festival>

† Information gathered from
<http://jasonnahrung.com/2016-australian-literary-festival-calendar>

Pilcrow & Dagger



The Shorts

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