

[For your consideration in the Stoker Award category of Short Fiction. This story appeared in the Journals of Horror: Found Fiction anthology published by Pleasant Storm Entertainment, Inc. on 10-31-14]

TURN ME ON, DEAD MAN

By Robin Dover

Case #BF7147741119

Journal transcribed from printed matter on the side of the plastic wrapping around an eighteen pack of toilet tissue, text embossed on a light switch, the symbols on a dollar bill taped to a window, information about food additives on a package of food from the refrigerator, a radio announcement followed by a song, a television news commentary and the numerological significance of a 9 mm handgun.

‘I’m speaking to you with my mouth. Contrary to popular belief, I am not speaking out of my ass. I don’t mean to be crude, but people have had the nerve to tell me this for my entire life. I’d like to say I’m living proof, but then again, don’t listen to me. My wife, Doris, never listened. Oh, she does hear me. I make damned sure of that, especially now. Although she still doesn’t genuinely listen to me. I’m glad we didn’t have children. I doubt if I could have trained them to listen to me, especially with her influence and example. I had a girlfriend once... before Doris. She didn’t listen to me. Maybe it’s something about my voice. Read my story, instead. I know it’ll be everywhere. I wrote it down like a villain as I went. Write that down, write that down. That’s what I always tell myself. It’s become second nature. I wasn’t really thinking about appearances and it wasn’t my plan, but it must have looked like I was hired to leave a trail of poison breadcrumbs to kill Cock Robin... and it all led back to my bedroom. I was premeditation in college. I hope it makes the front page. I definitely want it on television. If I’m lucky, ha, like that’s ever going to happen, maybe they’ll turn it into a movie... at least a short film for Sundance.

‘It rubs off on you. I don’t like to listen, either, now. I don’t even like to listen to myself and I didn’t want to listen to this. It freaked me out. The whole gouging process annoyed me. I don’t like to be pushed. I try to ignore it. Warning! Warning! Danger! Danger! I’m offended when someone gives me a warning. Oh, wow... they’re warning me. First of all, it’s pretentious and I don’t believe them. It always comes across as a threat. Don’t ever threaten me. Are you threatening me? That’s the question in my mind. Get away from me. I can take care of myself. I don’t want it.

‘But, then things started to change. And so it goes...

‘It began earlier today. I was in the bathroom. I was sitting on the toilet in deep meditation, spinning inside myself and reached out for the paper. It was still wrapped inside of the damned plastic. I picked up the entire unopened package. It was a huge thing with eighteen brand new rolls of paper. I started to think: that’s eighteen rolls of toilet paper. That reduces to a nine. That’s the number of death. That scares me. My ass is in jeopardy. My bowels broke open again and I had to wait. I took a deep breath. In confined quarters, without an extractor fan, that was not a pleasant experience.

‘I finally tore open the package. When I did, a flash caught my eye. I had to blink. It actually blinded me for a moment. I rubbed my eye and looked around thinking it might have been a fleck of glitter that caught a bit of sun but, no, it had to be something else. The curtains were pulled closed. It wasn’t exactly dark in the bathroom but it was not a flash of sunlight. I was wearing my strong reading glasses, picked up the package and started to read, ‘Warning... to avoid danger of injury or suffocation...’ and in my periphery it flashed again. I was immediately pulled away from this pseudo-warning into the real warning. It was the numbers... the numbers of the barcode.

‘It wasn’t a normal barcode: 0 2 9183 9 2799 8 1. These thirteen numbers are symbolic of my death. Two times nine is eighteen... eight plus one is nine. Three times nine is twenty-seven... two plus seven is nine. Nine times nine is eighty-one... eight plus one is nine. The number nine is positioned exactly in the center of the demonic secret code that is a total of thirteen unlucky numbers. Six numbers on one side and six numbers on the opposite side of that upside down number six: Six – Six – Six. A damned beast is coming to get me. I know it. Or just turn all of those sixes upside down and there’re three nines, three times death, after me. This central nine is the terrible monarch of the ominous code. It controls everything. It’s a curse. Take any one of these numbers, multiply it by nine and add them together. Reduce it to its simplest form. You come right back to number nine. I’m going to die. You get nine. The number nine has taken over. I’m going to bloody die. It’s black magick.

‘Positioned right beside those numbers was the undisputed symbol of my looming reincarnation – the recycle symbol – the dreaded evil Möbius strip that was created by the devil himself and the World Monarch of the Illuminati – and right in the middle of that symbol was the resin identification code. It was a number nine. It confirmed everything. This doesn’t even exist! When I saw that, I just shit.

‘I was immobilized on the toilet for almost another ten minutes before I could get cleaned up. No. Thinking back, it was another nine minutes. It sat on that toilet for another damned nine minutes. My life was getting ready to spin away down the crapper: I’m going to die. Numbers never lie.

‘The confidence I usually have when I clean up the forest at the end of the job was absolutely gone. My life flashed before me. I did the best I could. Then it flushed before

me. I jumped up and crashed into the door facing before I could even get out of the bathroom. It hit me right between the eyes. I broke my glasses in three places. I counted those cracks and multiplied them by themselves. I was right back at nine.

‘It was very difficult, but I could still see through the cracked lenses into that other world delivering the warning. I was afraid to just take them off. I was afraid I’d miss something... and there it was.

‘I froze in my tracks. Staring me dead in the eye was the word, OFF. I hadn’t thought about it, but it was true. The light was not switched on. The light switch was off. I immediately knew what that had to mean. I felt the menace of those numbers. The true meaning was held within that barcode. The number nine in the center of the Möbius strip sealed the meaning upon my head.

‘Blood oozed from my third eye down my forehead. Anxiety had built up so high inside of me that I was just about ready to explode.

‘I ran into the kitchen, pulled up the blinds and stared at the front of the dollar bill I had taped to the window for good luck. My heart fell. For some reason, that dollar bill was turned the wrong way. It should have been turned with the front of the dollar facing out. I should have been staring at the back of that dollar, but I wasn’t. This was not good. And to add insult to serious injury, the moon was in its waning phase. It was bad luck to leave a dollar in the window unless the moon was waxing. But I could not remove it. Instead, I was forced to step in closer and stare at the symbols covering the front of the dollar bill.

‘I saw that damned owl staring at me, quietly but with ill intent. It was perched on the inner sweep on the left side of the outline which framed the number one on the top right hand corner of the dollar.

‘The owl is a bird of death. I felt the bad blood. I knew the owl represented dark and forbidden knowledge but the Egyptian pyramid on that dollar always confused and worried me. It had to be satanic. The eye of Lucifer was staring at me from the capstone of that pyramid. There’s something very Egyptian going on here. Hell, I lived in Memphis named after the place in Egypt. Why did I move to Memphis? I wouldn’t have moved to Egypt. Everyone knows the Egyptians wrote the book on death. An Egyptian pyramid with the eye of Lucifer in the capstone staring at me on an American dollar made this a deadly message. Maybe the Egyptians were in charge of death in America. I was the central target on an ancient Egyptian conspiracy. Today, the Egyptians were in charge of my death. The owl had a message for me. It kept pulling me back in. It was forcing me to listen or to see something important. I leaned in and stared closer. I couldn’t help it. It was so tiny but so powerful. It was actually staring at me... and then I saw more of them. There was one perched at the bottom of the center of the dollar. I had never seen that one before. There was another I had never seen before, too. It was near the left hand side at the bottom of the dollar. There was another, hidden and turned sideways... just above the one on the lower right hand side. The whole thing was very sneaky. They were flying all over that dollar. They were gathering. They were watching me. I felt like an endangered Bohemian. Owls are predators... night predators. They’re monsters... screeching dirty mouthpieces for Lilith.

‘Lilith is an evil, adulterous shit who screwed the demon of death, Samael. She was all over that damned dollar bill. She had possessed the owls. I started to count them and then I shit again. There were nine owls on that damned dollar bill all screeching her name. Then they started to screech my name. I heard them speak to me in unison... ‘I’m here to protect you. But you must follow me to the bitter end if you truly want me to be your guardian.’ I jumped back away from that dollar. You’re a damned liar! There was no way I was going to follow a flock of owls possessed by a demonic bitch. I wasn’t looking for protection. My glasses fell off, hit the floor and the frame snapped in half. I closed my eyes, took in a deep breath and put my hands out in front of me. I had done this before to calm myself. Breathe out – breathe in – breathe out. I’ll do it nine times. What will it be like to breathe out for the last time?

‘I whirled around and switched on the radio. I knew the announcement was symbolic of something really bad getting ready to happen. It was going to end my life. It was signaling to me. It was a message of warning specifically designed to get my attention...

“Premiering at the Alexandrian Theater today in downtown Memphis is the new dystopian inspired computer animated film entitled ‘9’. I think it’s pretty creepy and has some numerological impact that this premier happening today in Memphis just happens to be on the 9th day of the 9th month in ‘09. I understand every human being in the film dies. Possessed homunculus ragdolls are running with scissors, knives and machetes. I’m not sure I want any of that doom and gloom. I’d probably kill myself if I watched it. I’m tired of hearing about the death of humanity. I don’t want to know. But I do know this: It’s time for some music on DOAT...”

‘The secret message of my death continued to evolve. ‘Revolution 9’ by The Beatles from The White Album began to play. ‘Number Nine, number nine, number nine...’ It was one of my favorite songs. I hated it and loved it at the same time. It was lulling me into a trancelike state that made me feel like I was already dead. It was preparing me for the downward spiral into the jaws of death. I used to put it on and get lost in the sometime melodic pandemonium. I spoke of it often in my life. I told my wife over and over again that I want this played at my funeral, or at least just before I die. I stood there for a moment, lost in the discordant chaos. I felt the warm, wet fluid running down my face and thought I was dreaming. It was the number of death... that final single numerical digit representative of the end.

‘The electronic feedback and the screaming and the car horns blaring and the sounds of the ambulance and ‘you become naked’ and ‘number nine’ washed over me and I began to drown. I heard it playing backwards in my mind, ‘Turn me on, dead man... turn me on, dead man... turn me on, dead man.’ I had heard it before. The images and words battered around inside my head, tugging my soul, echoing and telling me I was going to die. Suddenly, I saw the streets of Cairo in my mind. I was choking on the stench of the Mississippi River seeping through the walls of my house. It was worse than the Nile. I started blacking out, grabbed the edge of the kitchen sink and lowered myself to my knees, fighting to breathe. I saw the eagle fly off that dollar bill cracking, picking and sucking the marrow from my bones. I heard howling and screeching and felt the owls pecking my eyes and started to feel like Dylan’s Mr. Jones. I was lonely and depressed.

My eyes filled with tears as much from the desolation I was feeling as from the pain and the stench of the river. The wound on my head throbbed. I grabbed my eyes and squeezed. It was the fifth track on the fourth side of the album... that's a nine again. Add it up! 'Can you take me back where I came from...' faded in and out and it was like an attack of déjà vu. That's nine words! I keep screwing up. I can't get things right. I'm doing this horrible thing called life over and over and it's just about to end again. I can't seem to learn how to live or stay alive. I'm failing, constantly failing. It'll all just end and the pain will begin once more. It has to be some kind of hell that I'm repeating again and again. This convoluted series of sounds – they all appear after ninety minutes of music on that album. It was sucking my bones dry. My energy and will to live were crying like a mother giving birth to a stillborn child. My life was rapidly flying into a worthless past defined by a meaningless moment in eternity. I was quickly dissolving nine months in reverse – I'm going to be a dead baby – nine seconds in reverse – and I started speaking to myself and saying, "I'm already dead." I started repeating that over and over to myself. I knew that when it ended, I would cease to exist. I would be swallowed up by a rancid black horrible stench. I wouldn't be here anymore. I was slipping into the final darkness of a dirty black hole. I could hear that screeching bitch calling me to follow her into the abyss.

'I began a strange fight against ambivalence. To be or not to be... fear stalked me. It was sitting on my back, pushing me down onto my face. Maybe life was meant to be lived in both directions at the same time. Maybe, instead of starting to live the day I was born, maybe that was the day I started to die. I always feel like I'm dying. This acute awareness was combining with the fear that I was now being consumed by a confused lust and simultaneous loathing for the taste of blood. I was growing tired of the taste of my blood. It had run down my face and into my mouth. I wanted it to dry up like a potsherd. I wanted to feel my heart melt like wax and pour into my bowels. I was searching for the dust of my soul and wanted it to blow back into the face of my destiny. I wanted to end my capacity to speak. I wanted to be filled and surrounded by silence and to hear that final resonating note of this painful song fade away. Please. When my desire reached critical mass, the song resolved. I wiped away the bad blood that was still flowing from my third eye blind.

'I pulled myself up from the floor, took a deep breath and although I was nauseous, decided I would put something into my body. I would eat. This would help. I wouldn't allow this disturbance to turn me away from sustenance. I decided to take my mind off this bizarre and ridiculous crazy thinking, right this very minute, and do something good for myself. I would feed my body. I would nurture my temple. I opened the refrigerator and took out the package. My eyes were immediately drawn to the nutritional information printed on the side and I was compelled to read: E180 – Latol Rubine, Pigment Rubine; 436 – Polysorbate; 954 and E954 – Saccharine and Insoluble Polyvinylpyrrolidone... I dropped the package to the floor. I had been taking these things into my body for years. Everything I was reading and eating and chewing that was becoming me was giving me cancer. It was all in reverse. I wasn't really eating anything. It was an illusion. I was being eaten. I stared at the package lying on the floor. I had cancer. I was going to die. These numbers were all cancerous nines. They were killing me.

‘I was not going to be eaten alive by some grotesque, carnivorous, rampaging malignant growth manifesting as arcane numbers bent on taking over my mind, body and spirit. I would use the power of my mind. I would heal myself. I would turn away from all negative thoughts that had potential to poison my spirit. I knew what to do to turn things around. I walked into the living room and I switched on the television.

‘The room filled with shadows and the temperature dropped...

“It was his time to go. There was nothing we could do. How do you stop fate? How do you interfere with destiny? He was definitely impaired... he was a very sick man. When your number’s up, it’s up...”

‘Number Nine – number nine – number nine...

“We found his body lying on the floor of his bedroom. When we arrived at the scene, the body was still warm. He hadn’t been dead long. There was vomit on the floor beside the body. The bed had been flipped over and was leaning against a wall. The coroner estimated the time of death at nine pm Central Daylight Time. There were notes all over the place. Strange scribbles about numerology, eighteen rolls of toilet paper, bar codes, being recycled, hearing voices, strange symbols on money, waning on and waxing off moons, an elongated song predicting his death from a radio station called Dead On Arrival Today, deadly food additives, and dying of cancer. There was even a note regarding some childish cryptic significance of the word OFF embossed on a light switch. There were also references to hybrid Egyptian/American owls, an eagle and the fairytales of Lilith. It all seemed very disjointed in one sense but in another extremely methodic and planned. Everything was arranged chronologically, from the initial encounter on the toilet seat until he finally pulled the trigger.”

‘I turned off the television and walked into my bedroom. There she was... the 9 mm sitting on my bedside table. It was a nine, again. And M is the 13th letter of the alphabet. M was there twice. That had to mean double the pleasure, double the pain and double the bad luck. I was meant to be killed twice. That’s exactly what it meant. How do you do that? How do you murder yourself twice before you go down? I wasn’t sure how that was going to happen. I thought that if the trigger could be pulled twice, maybe if it was pulled quickly enough, just maybe it could happen that way. Maybe I would meet that point that intersects living and dying, get tangled up on myself and die twice.

‘Maybe Lilith was telling me the truth through those owls and she was my guardian angel. Maybe she was here to protect me from the agony of living such a painful and wasted poor excuse for an existence and was showing me that my number was up. Maybe she was showing me that my number was nine. That I was ready for some time OFF. Maybe she was telling me that my life was nothing but cancer. The only way to cure the malignancy of my life was to end it. Start all over again somewhere in the shadows. Maybe I caught the stink from Doris. I could feel a dirty déjà vu spreading through me, all over again.

‘I felt its presence. And then I saw it; a mass of rotted darkness. It was possessed of something so powerful that the room itself was immobilized and struck dumb. I was petrified.

‘It was under my bed.

‘I could hear it breathing. It stank like cancerous flesh. It was a sickly, sweet and sour, nauseating aroma that always caused my stomach to churn. It made me think of the blended scents rising from a sick woman.

‘It gave me a warning. It jammed the message into my mind like flecks of glitter and shards of broken glass, ripping, tearing and carving out my sanity, splattering it across my consciousness. It told me this was exactly what I wanted to happen. I didn’t need to be asked. The beast was here to give me what I needed... right now.

‘It raised itself up. The bed – my deathbed – crashed to the side while this thing filled the entire room. It was here to kill me. It moved in close and breathed directly into my face. It stank so bad I vomited. It smelled just like my wife. The being was covered with an irregular black and red glittery flesh that appeared to be Merkel cell carcinoma... the same cancer that had been killing my wife.

‘And then it was everywhere. It filled every crack in that room, if you know what I mean. I was totally enclosed by it. I could feel the gun was now in my hand. I don’t know how it got there. I felt my finger on the trigger. I felt a gradual pressure building on the trigger and suddenly it was like lightning struck. She pulled the trigger nine times and she pulled it fast. My mistake, again... I wasn’t killed twice. But it was twice as painful. I was humiliated. I felt like Dale Evans had just kicked Roy Rogers off his horse. I barely felt myself hit the floor and within nine minutes, the police were swarming over me.

‘I was comfortable. Happiness is a warm gun. The horrible black stinking thing was gone. Then I grew very cold...

‘Suddenly, I wasn’t in the room any longer. I wasn’t alone. It wasn’t Lilith like I thought it was going to be. I was wrong, again. She was right there beside me. I’m still pissed off.

‘It was my damned wife, Doris... and man, did she stink. That horrible black stinking thing was right there, rubbing up against me with that nasty cancerous irregular glittering flesh-like plasma substance that can only manifest when you’re dead and gone on the other side.

‘Doris had cancer. I killed her the year before. I was sure that’s what she wanted. I didn’t need to ask. I could see it in her eyes when she was going down for the count.

‘I knew she was going to screw things up. Dammit!

‘Go down deep into the pain and experience some real hell. Break out that cursed concrete slab on the north side of the basement. That’s where you’ll find her putrid body. No. I’m sorry... you’ll need to tear up the whole damned floor. I buried her in nine different places. I promise you’ll be tormented for the rest of your lives.

‘She was a smart woman and very sneaky. She also had a mean, vengeful streak.

‘She liked to put bits of glitter in her makeup and some in her hair, too. I used to get it in my mouth. I didn’t like that at all. But she did it anyway.

‘She was good with numbers. I thought she was a little obsessed and complicated things way too much. She really knew how to get my attention. She annoyed the shit out of me.

‘And dammit... she knew I was all about conspiracy theory, symbolic dreams, esoteric numerology and all that kind of thing. She knew she’d get to me that way and she did just that; bless her sadistic, black heart. I didn’t have cancer. But she damned well made me think I was going to die of cancer. Sneaky shit. She shook my ass up. I’m proud of her. Good strategy. Kiss my ass. I didn’t like being around her cancer. I don’t like that disease. It makes me gag.

‘If you must know the truth, I was sick of my miserable life. I didn’t miss her at all. But I’ll be damned. We’re back together, for better or for worse... definitely for worse. There’s no rest for the wicked. We never argued much, really. There is that. We got along, for the most part. We hardly spoke. I tried to stay away from her as much as possible.

‘As soon as I crossed over and our eyes met, she told me to turn her on and she called me a dead man. She repeated it over and over again, kind of quiet like. She was rubbing it in my face. Now, that is some twisted shit. She was good like that. Not only was she riddled with cancer, she was sick in her mind, too. She was constantly repeating things over and over again. She’d go on and on and on...

‘And the other woman, the one sitting in the trance who’s filled with my unholy inspiration, she runs her mouth and thinks she has a special handle on me. She isn’t really listening either because she’s a dumbass. She isn’t doing much more than kissing a rabbit between the ears. I’m the one with the handle on her. She thinks I have nothing left to offer but what I’ve already given and what I’ve physically left behind because I’ve crossed over to the other side. Bla bla bla bla bla...

‘She says she feels a peculiar inner peace in me, but thinks it’s colored with a deranged and a malevolent undertone. Do you think?

‘She also feels a grating disturbance from another tormented, tortured soul. The trance for hire says it isn’t over. She then vomits a little into her hand.

‘But now she’s losing her grip on me. I’m fading in and out. She can’t hold Bill any longer. That’s all she has to offer. She thinks I’m gone.

‘She stares at the Chief of Police and has the audacity to suggest that it’s time to do what I swore would never happen: to stir open the wounds in the basement.

‘Good luck...’

Author bio: Robin Dover, like everyone else, has a compassionate side as well as a dark side. In Robin’s case, this is a very dark side. He lives in the New Mexico desert, pumps iron, plays guitar and keeps himself locked away in the shadows of unnatural circumstances so he can write. This is Robin’s gift: Millions of scabrous black shards

impatiently wait to deeply embed themselves into the tender flesh of your susceptible mind. They lay concealed like bloodthirsty parasites. Wearing unnatural faces of the evil in your long forgotten, worst nightmares. Preparing to reveal to your conscious mind the horrors your subconscious mind never want you to know. About your true self. About your disease. If you but dare look... www.robindover.com