



LegumeMan

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About the author

Bryce Stevens creates horror and fantasy fiction and art, having had around forty stories published in Australia, New Zealand, Britain & America. He has been an editor, illustrator and book reviewer for horror magazines including *Terror Australis* and *Bloodsongs* and was for two years president of the original Australian Horror Writers. From 2006 through 2009 he completed large horror illustrations using his own blood with ink and wash. He brutalises the English language with novels and short fiction. He has a fantasy/horror novel 'The Malign Comedy' ready for submission to a publisher. Currently he lurks amid bushland on the NSW mid north coast of Australia.



TRUST
ME BRYCE STEVENS



Here's a thought: You are on public transport on your way to work. You are tired and you are not fully aware of what is going on around you. Perhaps you have a newspaper on your lap or you are playing with your mobile. You *are* aware that there is someone next to you and you *are* aware and a little annoyed that they are too close for comfort. This you acknowledge, but you are too timid to do anything about it, you just suffer the inconvenience. With your thoughts centred on family matters and your precarious employment situation you give no thought to the fact that you are in danger. The person next to you has plans for you and the rest of the cattle-car travellers. Look up from your mobile. Look at the face smiling at you. You won't will you? You're not interested. If you took the time to look you would see that the smile was not friendly. That person is wearing a suit jacket and the jacket is brushing against your own. On the inside of your neighbour's jacket is a pocket and inside that pocket is a glass syringe with a needle attached, a glass stopper covers the needle ensuring that the contents doesn't leak. You are too busy with your newspaper or your mobile to notice that your fellow passenger is reaching inside his jacket pocket. His smile widens. What is in the syringe? Is it a virus? Is it sulphuric acid? It does not matter; either way you are about to die. If the contents of the syringe were acid then a quick

stab in your heart would go unnoticed by others in the cattle-car. All your fellow passenger then has to do is pocket the syringe and show the appropriate amount of concern before disembarking at the next stop. What happens then? If there was acid in the syringe, well, there you are, screaming and your blood boiling. The doors of the train slide quietly open. The other tired commuters stare down at you and think you are a psycho. With haste they step around you and hurry off to their workplaces. Meanwhile your murderer is lost in the crowd on the exit ramp. He slots his ticket into the turnstile and walks out of the station into the light of a new day. He is a pest control officer. He is me.

Have you ever read a story and remembered years later, that part of that tale, say the middle, wasn't that memorable? The crazy thing is that you'll remember the story for that very reason. Maybe you have re-read the story and found that the middle was the best part. How do you explain that? My life is like that. I forget parts. I have blackouts and can't remember anything afterwards. The worst part is when I wake up on my bed in the room wherever I'm staying. It's not the blood that bothers me, it's the worry that someone may have seen me while I was making for home. I do remember the events leading up to how I got smeared, the set-up 'n' all, but total recollection of my acts is a bit hazy. It's usually morning when I find myself back in a shabby rooming house with a half-finished beer or vodka on the nightstand; and there is the nagging thought that maybe somebody else did those things to those people, maybe it wasn't me at all, at least not part of me that I know very well. It's just like the forgotten middle of a story; I knew one-day I would remember certain bits and think they were the best parts. Well, now I remember everything.

With most people it usually only takes one act of kindness for them to put their personal safety in

your hands. Once someone has decided they can trust you there is not a person in the world, not even their parents who can change their mind. Men are really stupid. All you have to do is shout them a drink in a bar or hand them a beer at a barbecue and they are your pals. If you play a friendly game of pool in a pub with a total stranger and buy him a drink he'll be your friend. Several hours and a few more drinks later your new friend is inviting you to a party with his mates.

I'm a big person, some would say physically imposing. I haven't always been big. In fact when I was a kid growing up in New Zealand, I was a runt. My family never seemed to notice this; they hardly ever noticed me at all. I just got on as best I could, going to school and the rest of that shit. I guess that was when I started to hate society.

I stopped hanging about with the local lads from school, and one day I was out by myself. I walked down the gravel road leading to the local abattoirs. I saw a sheep in one of the holding paddocks. I climbed the barbed wire fence at the meat works and picked up some sharp rocks. The first one I threw landed on the side of the sheep's head. It bleated in fright and ran away. Right then I felt a stirring in my stomach. It felt good. Looking around I made sure there was no one watching and I stalked the animal. When I got closer I took better aim with another rock. It bounced off its back. I picked up another handful of sharp rocks. As the sheep ran around the pen my aim got better and most of the rocks struck home. Soon the animal was bleeding from wounds all over its head. The sheep was snorting loudly and gasping for breath, with snot and saliva and blood spewing out. I hit it with whatever rocks I could find. Then it fell. I watched it kick its way to death. I felt powerful. Things changed. I began to realise that everything dies and rots and all things experience pain, more the better when I'm dishing it out.

I was eighteen when I began in-house training as a psychiatric nurse for the Auckland Hospital Board. I guess I was trying to find myself. After several years I resigned to seek a more adventurous life. Then I discovered a hidden talent. I found that I was good at hurting people. With my psychiatric training I was able to harm them emotionally and with my violent streak the physical stuff was easy. What changed me? I still don't know. Perhaps suppressed childhood memories can account for that.

I travel a lot. I need to on account of what my hobby is. Don't get me wrong, no Kiwis are like me, although I know a few fellows back home that would make your average citizen have a heart attack. I have a friend in South Auckland called Sniffer. He sort of took me under his wing when I was in my late teens; taught me a lot. Now I prefer to stick to myself, that way you don't rely on anyone and there's less chance of someone talking.

I moved to Sydney while I was still young. I did some bad things there. I'd had to sort a couple of people out in a tough way. They'd piped a mate of mine over the skull for the drugs he was carrying. Well, I caught up with one of them. I gaffa-taped a homemade explosive to his stomach and triggered it with a mobile phone. Flesh went flying and he lost part of his bowel. He's still alive, but now he has to sit on metal plates.

I moved across Australia. Wollongong, Melbourne, Adelaide (that's a sick place after dark), then on to Perth where I moved into a West Perth youth hostel. I never use my real name in these places; a laminated YHA card is good enough for them. The false ID is the easy part.

There were a group of us in the hostel kitchen talking up a storm, when this fellow hits the tile floor and goes into an epileptic seizure. From the psychiatric training I know a little about how to fix these things. This guy on the floor is jerking around the

feet of the group and frothing at the mouth and suddenly there's a wide circle of people doing a crazy dance trying to get away from him; like he's got rabies or something. One traveller starts panicking and shouting,

"Give him room. He needs room."

The guy having the seizure is kicking his legs and giving himself room enough. I kneel down and begin explaining to the group, who have suddenly gone quiet, what I'm doing and what to expect from the guy fitting on the floor. I'm speaking calmly to them.

"It's a minor one, a Petit Mal. He'll go rigid soon." He did.

"He'll relax now." and he did, "and if you remember to keep him on his side so he doesn't swallow his tongue, he'll come out all right." He did that too.

Well, you should have seen the looks on the faces of these travellers. Next thing there's this great-looking woman artist who was staying at the hostel, and she wants to make a sketch of me. Although I'm not much of a looker for any artist to sketch — one ear is a fraction lower than the other and I have an overbite that would make a dentist cringe. I'm not what you'd call ugly. I'm not too good in the limelight. My place is in the poorly lit pubs or in the backstreets where nobody can really get a good look at my face. With travellers from all round the world, people coming and going, and not really getting to know anyone well I feel at home in hostels and rooming houses.

I played the epilepsy incident down — got a chuckle out of the whole affair though. I must have been struck by this woman's beauty because I let her sketch me. The woman's travelling companion was also an artist of sorts. He used watercolour pencils to put some colour into the sketch. While I had been sitting for the drawing all I could think about was getting them into an abandoned warehouse.

The epileptic I was telling you about went to rest, and once recovered, came looking for me and

thanked me. He was real appreciative. Although it hadn't crossed my mind beforehand, his smiling face gave me the go-ahead. That's when I began setting him up.

The hard work was already done. He brought me beers and we played pool and darts with some locals. Already I hated his smiling face and his fawning over me. While we were knocking back some cold ones I was planning to off the guy. I'm kind of complex I guess, just like the next person.

Once I get the urge in my head, it's like a drug that I can't say no to. Anyway, he's grinning and I'm scheming and soon he's getting drunk. I pace myself and wave some cash to push the fellow closer to vomiting. Now he was set up. I really wanted to get the job done.

Closing time. I checked out the bar's drunken population and saw that even the counter staff looked as if they'd had some sneaky nips from the boss' stock. My motto is act normal in a group and nobody remembers who you are or what you look like.

I told the epileptic that I was leaving to head downtown to an all-night pot tosser. I could see that he was weighing up the situation. He was so drunk that his stupidity took over. He asked me to wait for him. There wasn't anyone from the hostel in the bar, so I made no big deal about leaving with the set-up in tow; and I don't reckon anyone took a bit of notice. Mr Epileptic followed me with a weaving stagger, calling all the time for me to wait up. In an alleyway I did.

All up I have a good memory of the set-up, but every time I go to work the main event is a bit blurry. This set-up started out unintentional and was the better for it. Mr Epileptic staggered along behind after taking a piss and reeled up to me with his hands on the dirty alley wall. All the while he's slurring out shit about how I'm a great bloke for helping him. That's when I thought: Okay, time for you to shut up.

I pulled my slicer out from inside my boot and frenzied up a bit before going for the grind with the blade bedding in and shaving flakes from his ribs. He coughed and sucked in his breath. I had to get real close to see those glazed eyes of his blink stupidly and begin to film over. He clutched at me and I pushed him away against the wall. He coughed a few more times looking startled — no pain just disbelief. He slid down the wall and I went to work all the while glancing at each end of the alley and like always I was real calm.

You ever hear of a Colombian necktie? It's when South American gangsters cut a person's throat and pull the tongue out through the slit, so that it sits on the victim's chest. I did that. Then I decided to go further. I sliced the idiot's tongue clean off. Then I put the slicer back into my boot while holding onto the dead man's tongue. I was going to throw the lump of meat away, but then I got this crazy idea. I searched around for some old newspaper to plonk the tongue into. Meanwhile I'm slapping the bloody tongue into my palm like a wet strap. All the while I'm thinking of that artist woman and her travelling companion back at the hostel; thinking of her and of what I had just done had got me riled. I aimed to get that portrait they did of me, just so as there would be no facial evidence of my having been there. If the couple did not want to hand over the portrait, well, I was going to have to really tell them off, scold them, give them a damned good tongue-lashing.

Think carefully next time someone says to you: "Oh, come on, you can trust me." The only advice I can give you is, don't think for a moment that they could be buying you drinks because they like you.