



DARK STAR

OLIVER LANGMEAD

Also available from Unsung Stories

Déjà Vu by Ian Hocking

The Beauty by Aliya Whiteley

The Arrival of Missives by Aliya Whiteley

Winter by Dan Grace

The Bearer of Grievances by Joseph McKinley

Unsung Shorts

Short stories published every two weeks. The best emerging writers, hand-picked by Unsung staff.

www.unsungstories.co.uk/shorts

DARK STAR

OLIVER LANGMEAD



**UNSUNG
STORIES**

Published by Unsung Stories, an imprint of Red Squirrel Publishing
Red Squirrel is a registered trademark of Shoreditch Media Limited

Red Squirrel Publishing
Suite 235, 77 Beak Street, London W1F 9DB, United Kingdom

www.unsungstories.co.uk

First published in 2015 – First impression

© 2015 Oliver Langmead

Oliver Langmead has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs
and Patents Act 1988, to be identified as Author of this Work

This book is a work of fiction. All the events and characters
portrayed in this book are fictional and any similarities
to persons, alive or deceased, is coincidental.

Cover Artwork © 2015 Carolina Rodriguez Fuenmayor
Interior Illustration © 2015 Darren Kerrigan

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-907389-30-6
ePub ISBN: 978-1-907389-31-3

Editor: George Sandison
Editorial Assistant: Suzanne Connelly
Copy Editor: Robert Clark
Proofreader: Jennifer Wade
Designer: Martin Cox
Publisher: Henry Dillon

Printed in the UK by TJ International

PROLOGUE

Time to waste, so I escape the city
At one of those seedy establishments
They call 'Glow Shows' because they fill the girls
So full of Pro' it nearly burns their veins.

Prometheus, resident wonder-drug;
Pro', Promo', 'Theus, liquid-fucking-light;
Prohibited by city law and shot
By yours truly, Virgil Yorke, hero cop.

These moments, liquid light coursing through me,
Trickling across my veins in streams, feeling
Like fluttering fingers under my skin,
Are all that's left holding me together.

The girls move and I start to lose focus,
The needle forgotten in hand. I'm numb,
Forgetting my scar, forgetting it all,
Seeing blurs and shapes and losing myself.

There's a rhythm. It might be the music.
It might be the protesting of my heart
As it pushes light right into my head.
It could be anything for all I care.

The girls are becoming hypnotic whirls,
The only thing here my eyes want to see.
Time stretches and folds and as I sink in
I realise it's not them I'm seeing.

I'm staring at the only bulb in here,
The single hanging light they can afford,
Swinging lazy like a slow pendulum
And leaving lines streaked across my vision.

Here's the high. I rise above the strip bar,
Above the building, above the city,
Past our hell, our nemesis, our dark sun,
Until I'm among the stars, surrounded.

My body waits below, in the city,
Fingers twitching and pupils dilated,
The wrong side of dignified. Just for now,
I am free. Tomorrow can go to hell.

Here, there's no noose around my neck, no scar
Where it bit my flesh, where it nearly killed—
Where it should have killed me. I have no weight
Up here. I can't drag myself down and choke.



Sleep. It feels so long since I last got sleep.
There are eighty-one steps. I count them all,
Treading careful in the dark over trash
And the maybe-dead: Vox's lightless ghosts.

There's a railing made rough by years of rust.
It snags at my fingers and takes me home.
I never bother to lock the front door.
There's nothing inside worth stealing. No light.

Here's my hole in the world. My patch of black.
The pit where I lay down my flesh and bones
And let them rest a while away from work.
There was a bulb once. It broke some time back.

It's quiet. There's a watch in here somewhere
And I can hear it tick, soft as rainfall.
I leave my coat near the door in a heap,
Shuffle out of my boots and feel bare wood.

If I don't keep my eyes open in here,
I'll sleep where I stand. This dark is okay,
Anyway. Full of the smell of whisky,
The smell of my papers, books and damp rot.

I shave around the scar across my throat,
Shower cold to keep awake and listen
To the pipes complain, to my stomach turn.
Last cycle's leftovers will have to do.

By the bottle's weight, I'd say it's half gone,
And the other half follows quick enough,
Swallowed urgent, like medicine; a cure
For the thump of my brain against my skull.

I collapse into a half-broken chair,
Reading by the tips of my fingers all
The news of half-broken Vox, dark city
Getting darker every minute passing.

Somewhere between articles the whisky
Grabs me, forces my eyes shut, my head low,
Fingers paused on 'gallant' like it's a word
That might find use outside a newspaper.

Here's oblivion, then. The dark inside
My head. I've half drowned myself in whisky,
But it's still not enough. I dream again.
This cycle's big comedown. Lower than low.

*'Stand on the tips of your toes,' he says soft,
Like he's teaching me how to dance. The noose
Is a coarse loop dividing me from me.
I can't see him, but I hear him. 'Right up.'*

FIRST CYCLE

Dante drives the borrowed squad car direct.
He's an accident of flesh and blunt bones
Shaped human, ugly and mostly scowling,
Made bitter by the job and the city.

The car's engine coughs, groans loud and sounds sick,
Making the noises that mark how I am.
Here's this cycle's comedown, deserved of time
Spent pricked and dissolved into my habits.

Good old Dante pretends not to notice.
He watches the glinting out in the road,
Keeps us on course, wherever we're going.
The radio is coarse static chatter.

We don't talk much, and when we do it's bleak.
'Read the papers?' 'Yeah, more complaints, more strikes.'
'Vox is going to hell.' 'Just like ever.'
Words said between us feel kinda empty.

I wind down a window, let the rain in
And ignite a cigarette, dragging deep.
Dante accepts my offer, bends his head,
Lets me ignite his; nostrils hissing smoke.

‘Like hell I know what this is about, Yorke.’
He grumbles from the corner of his mouth,
Lips tight. ‘I’m sick of cleaning up hookers.’
The window leaks our warmth. It’s refreshing.

I try to watch the city as we pass.
It’s a big black bulk, always out of sight.
Feels like it might come down any cycle;
Collapse under its own overgrown weight.

There’s a glint of something between buildings,
Some source of light left uncovered out there.
We pass and I can see the silhouettes
Of Vox’s ghosts, the light-starved hunting glows.

That gone, there’s only the rain seeping down
To see, lit up by the squad car’s headlight.
The vague shape of the city surrounds us,
Just out of range of sight, hidden away.

Other cars pass, spraying rain in their wakes.
There’s not many out. It’s too hard to see.
We’re only out here from necessity.
Orders from up high; orders to obey.

Dante cuts the car and the rain gets loud.
I meet his eye and he’s glaring at me,
Chewing at the end of his cigarette.
‘To hell with it,’ he growls, pockets the keys.

He runs, hiding underneath a paper,
Raised pictures and text turned unreadable.
I follow, soaked the moment I step out,
Slow behind. No sense trying to fight it.

There's a man waiting, umbrella held high.
He's almost as wide as Dante, but tall,
Suit several sizes too small, seams bursting.
Behind him, there's some floodlights. Strange out here.

There's an exchange between him and Dante.
I'm too busy searching my coat to hear,
Trying to find just one dry cigarette.
Whole pack's gone. Great start to a great cycle.

'Shit, Yorke. You listening?' Dante's voice is loud,
Trying to be heard over the downpour.
'It's a DEA case. Someone's fucked up.'
The floodlights are way too bright. I squint, frown.

Our big friend looks like he's carved out of stone.
He thrusts a hand out at me, engulfs mine.
He's Drug Squad and I'm wary. I'm hoping
There's no Pro' afterglow beneath my skin.

'DC Fife.' 'DI Yorke. Why are we here?'
He raises an eyebrow. 'Yorke? I know you.
Seen you in the newspapers. Real good work.'
Can't escape my own damn reputation.

I shrug his words away. 'Why are we here?'
He takes my subtle hint. Gets to the point.
'We need your help and you're gonna need ours.'
Cross-department case. Hell of a thing, too.'

Past parked cars, rope, a crowd of spectators,
Flaps of canvas keeping the sky's worst back.
There's a lot of men in heavy coats stood,
Taking notes, all unsure how to react.

She's a hell of a thing. Hell of a thing.
'Phos and fire, Yorke.' Dante steams and curses.
It's a dead-end back alley, filled up with
Garbage and, right now, a flood of bright light.

I was wrong to think that there were floodlights.
Nobody's got a torch lit. There's no need.
She's difficult to look at. She's too bright.
She's lighting the whole damn scene with her blood.

I suddenly need to smoke real urgent.
Dante offers up one of his, still dry;
Ignites it for me. I inhale and hold.
Neither of us can keep our eyes off her.

Her veins are alight, webbed under her skin;
Glowing eyes wide open, mouth leaking light.
She's something else. Like one of those cheap girls
Downtown, but intensified. Much brighter.

'Promo'?' Dante's glaring across at me.
I'm meant to be the expert between us,
But this is stupid. 'Only if someone
Took out all her blood first, filled her back up.'

Hard to tell what she looked like normally.
She's a mess of light, could be anyone.
It takes me a while to notice the warmth.
Girl's blood is giving off a lot of heat.

It's pooled all around her, thick and still wet.
My eyes slowly adjust to see better
How she's been killed. Looks like a gunshot wound
Punctured her heart, or somewhere near enough.

Our friend Fife steps in front, is an eclipse.
'Look,' he says. 'Cause of death could be the blood,
Could be the shot. We don't know. Hard to tell.
But 'til we do, we're all on this. Okay?'

I realise I haven't exhaled. 'Sure.'
Everyone's looking at me like I know
What to do next. How to deal with all this.
'Got an ID?' 'Yeah.' Fife fumbles around.

Dante reads through, gives me the short and sweet
While I get closer, look her up and down.
Her hands are clenched tight, arms still tense, rigid.
Looks like she might have died of fright alone.

'Vivian North,' grunts Dante. 'Girl can drive.
Owns a car. Ah Phos, Yorke. She's a student.'
The case just got important. Girl's wealthy;
It's hard to afford an education.

Hard to imagine her not full of light.
Fife's been here longer, I ask what he knows.
'Got a weapon?' 'No weapon. No nothing.'
Dead ends are fine. Less questions that need asked.

'How'd she get here?' My eyes begin to ache.
'No car parked up. We've asked around and found
Six witnesses that'll swear to a van,
But no one we'd like to pay for details.'

Vivian, tell me, how'd you end up here?
An uptown girl like you all the way down
With me, halfway between dark and darker,
Filled up with fright and blood so bright it burns;
 So bright you've been burned into my vision.
I turn away and can still see you there.
Even when I close my eyes, there you are.
I must have pupils like pinheads right now.
 'Who's in charge here?' Nobody meets my eye.
They all look like shades, like hunched-up shadows.
Fife is igniting a cigar, watching.
 'Looks like you are,' grunts Dante, damn his hide.
 Fife inhales deep, rolls the cigar around,
Leaking smoke. 'How do you want to do this?'
 'I don't want to do this.' 'You're the hero.'
I stare at him straight. 'I'm no damn hero.'
 Can't get the girl out of my vision now.
Can't blink her away. She's a white scarring.
I leave the tent, back out into the dark
And the rain, chewing on my cigarette.
 Choosing to interpret my defiance
As acceptance, Dante gives some orders.
I can hear him shouting over the rain,
Can hear people moving with a purpose.
 The dark is pleasant. The girl starts to fade.
 'You're a fucking mess, Yorke.' Dante joins me.
I don't disagree, but I take off fast.
 'Where are you going?' he calls. 'Straight to hell.'

'You can't walk out. This is your fucking case.'
We spread damp across the car seats, dry off.
I take a break, smoke some more and calm down.
We talk it through. Dante says what he's done.

'I got people looking for the girl's car.
Gave Fife the scene to babysit; wait up
For the coroner to go over it.
Which leaves us two things left to do, both bad.'

He's right. 'Both bad' doesn't cut it, either.
I sit and think and there's no easy way.
'We'll tell her folks first.' It's only polite.
'Then we'll check out the University.'

Leafing through papers, Dante finds a map,
Finds the place we gotta go. Way uptown.
'You drive,' I tell him. Can't keep my hands still.
Great time for tremors. I clench my fists tight.

We pull away and I can still see her.
She's only an outline now, barely there,
Like a backwards silhouette; white on black.
I close my eyes and try to keep them closed.



Want to know what happens next?

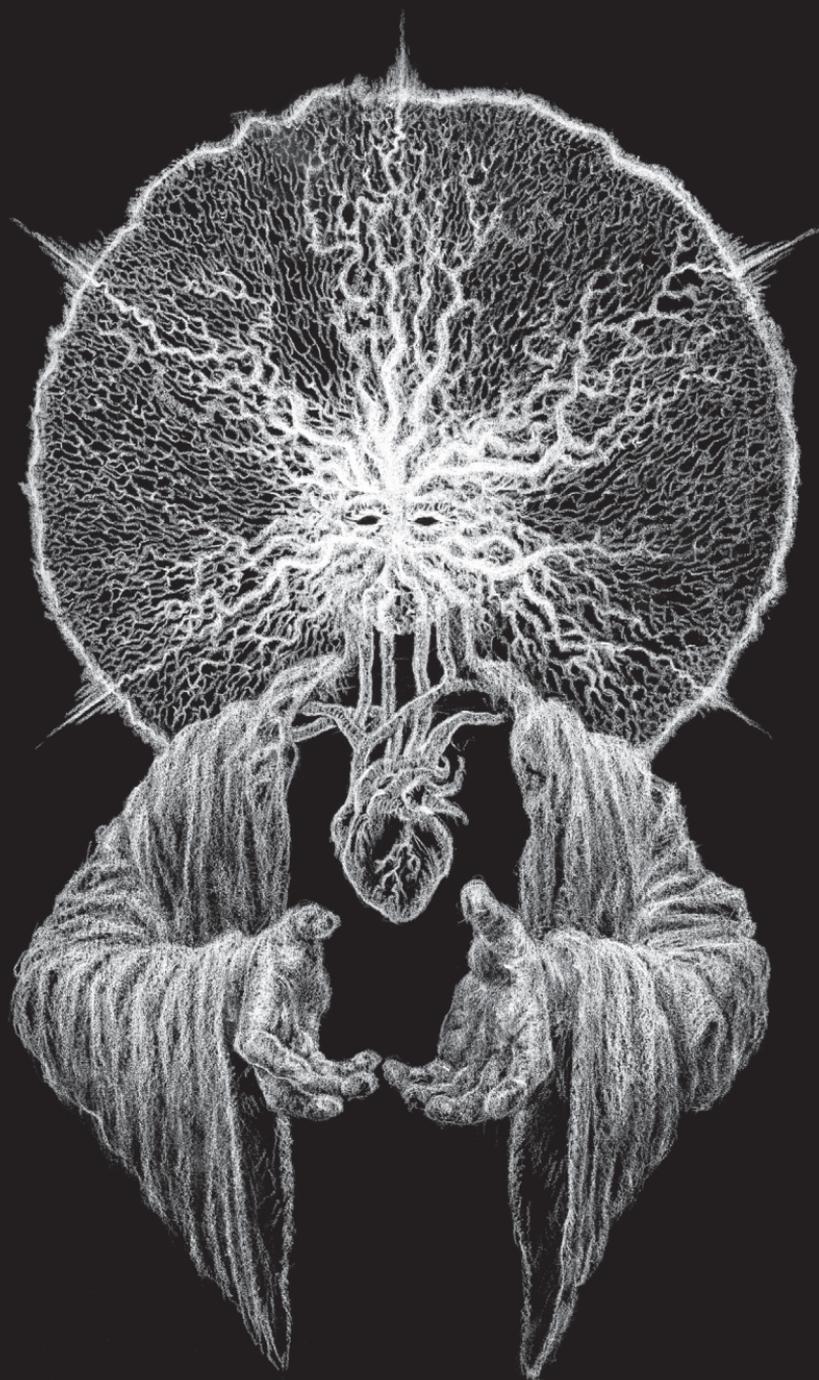
Buy *Dark Star* now
Kindle edition
Apple Bookstore

Unsung Shorts

Short stories published every two weeks. The best emerging writers, hand-picked by Unsung staff.

www.unsungstories.co.uk/shorts

May Phos shine upon you
Illustration by Darren Kerrigan



UNSUNGSTORIES.CO.UK

THE MAKING OF DARK STAR

THE SUN HAS SET ON VOX, BUT THE STORY DOESN'T HAVE TO END THERE. NOW DELVE DEEPER INTO DARK STAR'S WORLD WITH UNSUNG.

Read interviews with Oliver Langmead and get insights into his creative process.



Find out more about epic verse and how the classics influenced his work.



Delve into the real-life effects of living without light, and their use in Dark Star.



Explore the pieces that influenced the author and this work.



Follow the creative journey that inspired the book's cover artwork.

Discover more online

www.ungstories.co.uk/darkstar
