

The Everlaster

A Novel by Michael Horne

Copyright © Michael Horne, 2007

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 2.5 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 543 Howard Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

You are free: to copy, distribute, display, and perform this work under the following conditions:

- **Attribution.** You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor.
- **Noncommercial.** You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- **No Derivative Works.** You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work.

**For information and more works by the same author visit
www.everlaster.com**

Chapter 8 **On Leaving**

How, before embarking on their great quest, Merry makes a discovery, and Percy a disturbance.

When Merry woke up on Monday morning she went downstairs and found a living room lamp was still on and her Dad was asleep in his armchair.

The sight of empty beer cans strewn around him gave her a sinking feeling in the stomach. It wasn't like him to drink so much. 'This is cos of Woe', she thought, angrily.

Merry was wondering whether to wake him up when she noticed some photos lying on his lap, and by his side lay a newspaper cutting.

She approached quietly for a closer look and recognised her Mother was in each of the photos. Merry was in some of them, while others were taken before she was born. In all of them her Mother looked happy. One was taken in Blackpool when Merry was four years old. She was sat on a donkey, wearing a pink and white sunhat; her Mother standing beside her. Merry's memories of that time were misty but she now remembered the happiness.

The headline on the newspaper cutting caught Merry's attention: Suicide Verdict on Death of Local Woman. The paper was dated the year her Mum died.

She read the article:

Deputy coroner, Adrian Hade, recorded a verdict of suicide over the death of Jennifer O'Connell, who died when her car drove through crash barriers and fell down a 50ft drop by Friars Pass.

Mrs O'Connell, aged 29 from Tiverton Preedy, had taken a mix of alcohol and antidepressants before driving her car off the road.

Mrs O'Connell was married with a five year old daughter. Friends and family regarded her as a happy and sociable person until one year ago, when she began to suffer from depression.

For the past two years Mrs O'Connell had worked as a junior scientist at the SkweezumGrabaal&Runne science labs in Tiverton Preedy.

My Mum didn't die in an accident, thought Merry. She killed herself... Why... What was wrong... and how come I an't been told yet... I din't know she worked in those labs either... I'd never kill myself there's no point "happy and sociable until one year ago" and she looks happy in the photos maybe she weren't always like I remember I remember... remember shouting and drinking why couldn't she have stayed normal like Esme's mum...

Memories and images swilled around her mind but were eventually broken off when she realised she had to get breakfast and prepare to leave for the train. She left her Dad asleep.

Twenty minutes later she entered the living room again, this time ready to go and with Ayina in her bag. She left a note on the table saying she'd be out all day. She kissed her Dad on his sleeping face and left.

Merry and Esme stood in front of a sign that said Tiverton Preedy, waiting for their train.

The two girls talked barely above a whisper. Doing so because the fifteen adults waiting on the platform stood in total silence and it seemed disrespectful to make a sound. Each person faced the front, many in suits and ties. The expressions on their faces, thought Merry, were like those of school children standing outside the headmaster's office waiting to get done.

The scene on the opposite platform was like a mirror image of this one, with besuited men and women trying to avoid eye contact with the people on Merry's platform. The sky was clear as glass and the air was still. Though low in the sky the Sun was already warm, and from the forehead of the man standing next to Esme it teased gently forth a sparkling bead of sweat.

Esme looked at her watch. “Where’s Percy? Train’s due in five minutes.”

Merry had absolutely no idea.

Percy was half a mile away. He’d been looking out for the men. For the men in their car. Can’t let ‘em see him go to the train station. They’ll know he’s leaving town if they do.

So he’d stop at corners and peek round. Take a good look up and down the roads before crossing.

Any car he saw could have them inside. Anyone on the streets he didn’t recognise could be working for them.

And all the while he never noticed the butterfly that was always close behind, flying from bush to bush and landing on fences.

By the monitor in their car the men could see Percy was up to something. So Driver turned the key in the ignition and set off to intercept.

The words ‘O no’ puffed into Percy’s brain like a genie. Down the road he could see a moss green car coming towards him. Is it them? O God it is.

There was only one thing for it. He was going to have to leg it. And there was only one way to the railway station where a car couldn’t follow. It meant going through people’s back yards.

Casually he opened a garden gate and walked down the side of a house. He knew the car was bearing down on him but didn’t look back. He wanted them to think he was visiting the people who lived here. But instead of knocking on the door he strolled into the back garden. The clockwork butterfly kept him in sight.

Before him was a long row of gardens heading in the direction of the railway station. The line of houses shielded him from the road. Percy glanced at the windows of the homes around him, to see if he was being watched, then jumped over the first fence.

He landed well. Right on top of some pansies. Looking up at the kitchen window he saw the flowers' owner, whose expression was slowly changing from surprise to anger.

Percy walked across the garden as the face at the window leaned out and shouted. "What do you think you're doing?"

Percy looked behind him and shouted back, "I'm going for a jog, missus, what's it look like?"

"Why, you cheeky little slug-spit! Get out o' my garden!"

"I were about to 'til you interrupted me!"

Percy hopped over the fence and ran across the next garden. The clockwork butterfly kept up constantly, flying circles around him as he ran.

Percy ignored the woman's continuing oaths, but they were attracting the attention of the rest of the street.

He legged it across another garden and vaulted the next fence. As he landed in a new garden its owner emerged from the house: a tall thin man in a black suit. At the same time, another man, short and podgy with long blonde hair, emerged from the door of the next house along.

As the tall man stepped outside, shouting, "stop right there!" Percy reached the fence that divided the two gardens. It was a rickety wooden thing that came almost to Percy's neck, so he could not simply vault over it.

Percy put both hands on the fence and tried to heave himself over, but instead of his body going upwards the fence went downwards. Percy and the fence toppled into the next garden.

"MmYy F/EeNnCcEe!" shouted the two men in unison.

"My strawberries!" shouted the blonde man's wife, who had just popped her head over his shoulder.

Whoops. Boy and fence had indeed landed in a patch of strawberries. She could do with some strawberry jam, I bet, thought Percy.

"You wicked boy!" shouted the woman. "Get him, Dad," she shrieked in her husbands ear.

Both men walked towards Percy, their fingers flexing, ready to wring the boy's neck.

As he got to his feet he saw them coming. "O God." He ran across the garden and jumped the next fence successfully. The men followed him over it.

He didn't look behind him, he just heard the woman egging her husband on. "Don't let him get away, Dad!"

There was one garden left after this and then a very tall wall. He had to clamber and roll over a hedge to get into this final garden. One of the men almost caught Percy's foot as he disappeared over the top.

Percy flopped to the ground, landing awkwardly. When he got to his feet again he looked at the final obstacle in dismay. The wall was too high for him. He moved to the centre of the garden and looked up and down it for an escape route. But there was none. He was trapped.

He turned around just in time to see the triumphant grin of the tall man, right as he tackled the boy to the ground.

Percy landed on his back and was pinned down. The blonde man's face slotted into view beside his neighbour's. "Now, you're gonna tell us where you live so we can talk to your parents," he said, with spit going everywhere. "I'm gonna give thi a right clout," said the tall man, "and if tha tell's thi dad I'll clout him too."

They smirked with pleasure that Percy looked so scared of their threat. But it wasn't the men that made Percy's face go white. His whirling eyeball had locked onto something in the periphery of his vision. Galloping from the side of the house came a huge dog: a snarling and slathering Rottweiler.

The men looked round and their faces went white too.

The dog pounced, toppling both men away from Percy. It started tearing at the tall man's suit, while the other made screeching sounds and tried desperately to scramble back over the hedge.

“Oi! Gladiator! Get back ‘ere!” came a shout from the house. A big man with tattooed arms stood commandingly at the back door. The dog ignored him.

Percy scrambled away from the dog and its victim, to a tree with branches that stretched over the final wall.

He grabbed a low branch and began to haul himself up.

“Get off my tree!” shouted the tattooed man. At the sound of his master’s voice the dog finally stopped mauling the man beneath him and saw Percy at the tree. With three barks as loud as any by that dog Cerberus, and which trembled the soul of every person within half a mile, the dog bounded towards Percy.

At the sound of the barks Percy made the mistake of turning to look, and lost his grip. He fell on the ground, to lay at the mercy of the Rottweiler. At a metre away the Rottweiler pounced with its jaws wide open. But as the dog leapt through the air its attention was distracted by the clockwork butterfly, which was flying over Percy at that very moment. It caught the butterfly and continued its leap, right over Percy’s head.

Instead of landing on its paws the dog collapsed to the ground, yelping and whining. The animal had bitten and crunched the clockwork butterfly in its mouth, smashing it into sharp jagged pieces of metal that cut into the dog’s gums and tongue.

Seeing the dog rolling in agony Percy got straight to his feet and started to climb the tree again.

The dog’s owner came running over and knelt down beside his pet, which was now whining in agony. “Gladiator? Gladiator?” Through teary eyes he looked up at Percy, now high in the tree, and cried, “what have you done to my Gladiator?”

Percy ignored him and crawled along a thick branch that hung over the wall. He hung off and dropped down onto the wasteland that lay beyond.

Percy then ran, leaving behind the street with its moaning, crying, bleeding, writhing residents.

Just as the train pulled in Percy arrived beside Esme and Merry.

“I’m glad you could join us,” Merry said to him.
Percy was too busy panting for breath to reply.

So Ends Part I