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MANSOUR



Mary M. Cushnie-Mansour is a freelance creative writer living in Brantford, ON. She is the award winning author of the “Night’s Vampire Trilogy.” Mary has also published four collections of poetry, a collection of short stories, and a biography.

Mary is the owner of Cavern of Dreams Publishing, which she founded in 1998 to publish her own works. Since then, Mary has also published several other authors who are pursuing their dreams.

Mary would like to thank you for signing up for her newsletter. Within this package is the free gift promised for you to enjoy. Please appreciate that all the work contained herein is copyrighted and is being gifted to you for your personal enjoyment.

Within these pages you will find some samples of Mary’s writing—prose and poetry. She hopes you enjoy them. All of Mary’s work, plus the work of authors she has published, can be found at:

<http://www.marymcushniemansour.ca> or <http://www.cavernofdreams.com>

Feedback is always appreciated. Thank you, and have a wonderful day.

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WILLOW HOUSE

By

©Mary M. Cushnie-Mansour

It was called Willow House after the original owner's wife. James McAndrews had come to Canada, from Scotland, in 1894 at his brother George's urging. George had written that he had purchased a piece of land just outside a place called Brantford, but he needed help to clear the stone littered fields. George had also suggested a couple of wives would be in proper order, as well. James had laughed heartily, for George was quite large and had a roughness to his appearance that scared the bonniest lassies away! James, on the other hand, was most becoming and had to fight the girls off. Even so, none had ever caught his eye enough for him to wed her—until the voyage to Canada.

She stood on the deck, the wind whipping at her delicate body. Her knuckles were white as they grasped the railing. Her long blond hair danced frantically. Her face was freckled from the salty waves' splashes. She was so beautiful that James could have watched her forever. Suddenly a large wave surged over the side, thrusting the girl across the deck, but James was there to catch her. As she lay shivering in his arms, he looked down into the most heavenly blue eyes he'd ever seen.

"May I take you to your cabin, Miss?" James offered.

"I have none, good sir."

"Then I shall take you to mine," James said. "James McAndrews at your service."

She smiled.

"Well girl, do you have a name?" James laughed softly.

"Willow." Her eyes closed, but James noticed a grimace of pain cross her face.

"Are you hurt?"

"I'll be fine if you could you just help me reach the lifeboat yonder; I have a blanket there."

"You cannot stay out here; a storm is brewing!" James protested. He noticed the gauntness of her face. "When did you last eat, Willow?"

“Before we set sail, but don’t worry; I’ve gone without before.” Willow answered. “Sir, you must go to your cabin before you catch your death.”

James didn’t want to let go of Willow. His heart throbbed; his blood raced hotly through his veins, and there was a stirring in the pit of his stomach unlike any he’d ever experienced. He stood, with Willow in his arms, and headed for his cabin. She tried to protest, but he pulled her closer to his chest.

“Okay,” she whispered, “I’ll just rest a bit and then be on my way.”

He laid her gently on his bunk and covered her frail body.

That was the beginning of their love story. James kept Willow with him for the remainder of the journey. She told him she was fleeing from her stepfather who had made improper demands upon her. She was most grateful to him for giving her shelter. Before the boat sailed into Halifax Harbour, James McAndrews and Willow were wed.

When James presented his bride to his brother, George had stated that she was indeed beautiful, but would she be able to do a hard day’s work? “Brother,” Willow overheard George say, “she seems so frail she will need a maid to see to her!”

“Then I shall get her a maid,” James had returned.

“No sister or cousin for me?” George laughed.

“Sorry brother.”

“What about sons, James? She don’t look strong enough to bear a child.” George raised his eyebrows questioningly.

“If we never have a child, I will still know happiness like no other man—Willow completes me brother.”

“Then so be it.”

Willow determined, at that moment, never to let James down. For the first time in her life, she knew what true love was about.

James and Willow stayed in George’s cabin for the first two years of their marriage. In the spring of 1896, James began constructing Willow House.

“It will be grand, Willow my love,” he’d murmured in her ear as they lay in bed. “On the upper floor, I’ll put four bedrooms, and a fifth room will have a huge copper tub for your baths, and a chamber pot so you won’t have to go outside in the cold and dark.”

Willow laughed and wrapped her arms around James's neck. She kissed him softly on the lips. "And who shall all the bedrooms be for, my love?"

"For our sprouts ... but, if we have none, for our friends' sprouts if they have too many ... and if neither, you may fill the rooms with whatever your heart desires!" James kissed her back.

That was the night James Jr. was conceived.

It was late November before they finished the house. George had carved *WILLOW HOUSE* into a large stone by the front door. James swept Willow into his arms and carried her across the threshold.

"It is beautiful, James! What did I ever do to deserve you?" she cried.

James brushed her tears away with his lips, "Oh, Willow my love, it is I who does not deserve you."

The winter of 1896 was cold and snowy. The drifts made movement difficult between buildings. To save on firewood, George moved in with James and Willow. "Just until winter is over," he said.

George thought Willow looked paler than usual. "Pregnancy is hard on her," he mentioned to James.

James nodded, knowingly.

Willow was taking a day at a time. The baby inside her was constantly moving now. She was tired but still worked hard to make their first Christmas in Willow House as memorable as possible.

January was as cold and blustery as December had been, but with February a touch of warmth blew in from the south. Into the second week, Willow began to feel strange, and the child quieted, barely moving at all.

"I think there is something wrong, James," Willow mentioned one evening. "Isn't Widow Johnson a midwife?"

"Heard tell she was," James replied. "You want me to fetch her in the morning?"

"That would be a good idea, I think," Willow answered.

The next morning George headed out to fetch the Widow Johnson. James stayed with Willow. He stroked her forehead. "We'll not be having any more of these sprouts if this is what you have to go through, Willow."

“Every woman must go through this—it will pass.”

Finally, George returned with the Widow. She was a great husky woman who took over the minute she walked in the door. “Get a pail of water boiling, boy,” she directed at James. “And you,” she ordered George, “Fetch some more wood for the fire. This place must be warm tonight for we are going to be having us a baby!”

“But it is too early!” James protested. He glanced at Willow and saw the fear in her eyes.

“When a child decides to be born, you can’t stop it! Looks like it has no room in there anyway.” She paused. “Where are your linens?”

Willow pointed to a chest sitting in the corner. “You must be strong girl; it’ll be over soon.”

“I fear something amiss,” Willow whispered.

“Let me see, then.” Widow Johnson examined Willow. Her brow furrowed with concern. She called to James. “Got any whiskey—the baby is breach, and I’m goin’ to have to turn it. Yer wife will need something to dull her pain.

The day dragged into evening. Widow Johnson turned the baby, but still it wouldn’t come. The clock was ticking toward midnight. Soon a new day would strike its way in.

James and George sat helplessly outside the room where Willow lay. “Pray with me George; I cannot lose Willow.”

At the moment the clock struck twelve, Willow screamed. “Push, Willow—push,” the men heard the Widow order ... and then, a cry!

They waited for what seemed like an eternity. Finally: “Come, see your son.”

James gazed at the child. He looked frail. “Willow?” he looked questioningly at the Widow.

“Let her sleep. She’s exhausted, but she should pull through. Now, we need to get some food into this baby...”

Widow Johnson took over the household duties. Willow was so fragile that it was three months before she could leave her bed, and another three before she could do even the slightest task. But, little James Valentino McAndrews, born on February 14, 1897, despite his shaky start, thrived under the watchful eyes of Widow Johnson.

When Willow was well enough, James led her outside and showed her the willow trees he had planted around the house. “I got some large branches from Mr. Corning over on Four Ponds Farm. He said if I were to water them well, they would be big in no time.”

Willow swayed and leaned on James. He drew her closer. “Are you cold my love?”

“I am never cold in your arms,” she smiled up at him.

In the fall of 1897 George and Widow Johnson were married, and they moved into Willow House. It became a win, win situation for everyone because it was obvious that Willow would never fully recover from the childbirth.

Willow spent the summer days under the sweeping limbs of the willow trees. James Jr. would crawl up on her lap, and she’d tell him stories. When he was busy playing elsewhere, Willow wrote in her journal. During the cold months, Willow would sit by the fireplace, sometimes doing needlework, sometimes writing.

On James Jr.’s sixth birthday, tragedy struck. James had gone to Brantford to fetch supplies, and on the way home a fierce storm had hit with a vengeance. A passerby thought he heard someone calling for help, but by the time he found James in the gully, he was barely conscious.

Before James drew his final breath, he pulled a package from his coat. “Please make sure my wife, Willow, gets this,” his voice was raspy. “Promise me.”

“I promise.” The man put his ear close to James as he whispered the directions to Willow House.

Willow went silent when she received the news of James’ death. “He asked me to make sure you got this Mrs. McAndrews,” the man said handing her the package.

She took it, turned and walked lifelessly up the stairs to their room. Inside the package was a gold, heart locket with a picture of her and James. She wept, remembering when they had taken that picture—on their first anniversary. Willow put the locket on, lay down on her bed and closed her eyes.

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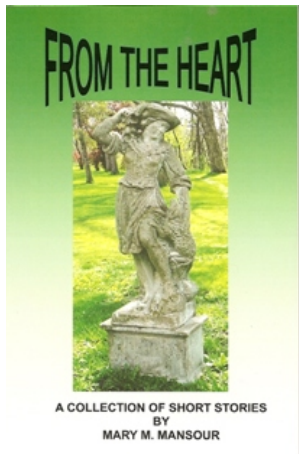
The young woman stood looking down at one of the gravestones in the family plot behind the old farm house. “James and Willow McAndrews—In Death, as in Life—Forever in Love—Into God’s Arms—February 14, 1903.”

“Hello,” a voice called out, “I have the papers for you to sign.”

“Be right with you.” The young woman turned and headed for the house. She fingered the heart shaped locket around her neck, and clutched the tattered journals under her arm. She touched the large carved stone at the door before stepping inside.

“Sign here, please,” the realtor pointed to several spots.

How proud grandpa James Valentino would be to know Willow House was back in the family, the young woman thought as she boldly signed her name—Willow McAndrews.



Willow House can be found, along with several other short stories in “From the Heart.”

Direct link to this collection is:

<http://cavernofdreams.com/short-stories/>

THE DERBY

By

©Mary M. Cushnie-Mansour

Alex had spent hours working on his go-cart for the big race that was coming up on the weekend. He had gathered up some miscellaneous pieces of wood from the barn and had used some old nails he had found to piece the wood together. There had been a tin of old green paint sitting on the shelf in the drive-shed and he had mixed it with some turpentine to get just the right consistency to cover the go-cart. Another tin had just enough red paint in it to write BLAZER on each side. Alex had found an old tractor steering wheel and some old piping that he fashioned into wheel axles. He had stood back and admired his handiwork and was dreaming about crossing the finish line first. Everything was perfect—everything except that Alex had not been able to find a set of wheels.

He had searched the farm high and low for a set of wheels. He had even asked some of his friends, but they were all working on their own go-carts and didn't have any to spare. Harold offered him one wheel, and then he smirked and walked away. Alex couldn't wait to cross the finish line and have Harold eat his dust!

As of Saturday morning, Alex still hadn't found a set of wheels. He got up early and went down to the barn and just sat there staring at his beautiful go-cart. The sun was peeking through the cracks in the haymow and dust was dancing in the beams.

"I wish this were magic fairy dust," Alex mumbled. "And that I could be granted a set of wheels."

"Alex!" a voice called from the porch. "Alex, I need you to take Kenneth for a buggy ride."

Alex stood up and walked back to the house. "Oh well," he thought, "next year."

His mom had his baby brother wrapped in a blanket in the big buggy. "Kenneth won't settle down and I need to get my baking done or we won't have any bread. Take him down along the lake road until he falls asleep and when you bring him back set the buggy under the oak tree behind the house. Then you can get about your other chores. I'll hear him if he wakes up."

Alex was sullen as he pushed the buggy down the lane. What he should do is just push it over the edge, into the lake. He hadn't asked for another brother, especially one he had to push around on the day of the big race. And his mom didn't even realize that—she didn't care about what his plans were for the day!

The sound of the wheels had calmed Kenneth. He had stopped crying and was looking up at his big brother. Soon his eyes began to droop and then closed completely. Alex wheeled the buggy back home and placed it under the oak tree. As he pushed his foot on the wheel-brake, he smiled. If Kenneth was asleep in the buggy, there was no real need for it to have wheels!

Just then, Jimmy came around the corner of the house. "Jimmy, come here," Alex called out. Alex explained to his younger brother what he was about to do and what part he was to play. Jimmy was shaking his head, but then Alex drove home the words that closed the deal for him. "You owe me, Jimmy. Remember the time I covered for you when you skipped school—actually more than one time, I did! This is really important to me!" Alex got busy with what he had to do. It was a good thing that Kenneth, once he fell asleep, was a deep sleeper.

~

It was a great race. Alex was beside Harold in the starting line. They had glared at each other. Alex could tell that Harold was not happy, especially when he saw the size of the wheels on his go-cart. It had been a tight race, too. Harold was bigger and stronger than Alex, but in the end, it was the large buggy wheels that had given Alex the edge and pushed the nose of his go-cart over the finish line, just ahead of the rest of the pack. Harold had grudgingly shook Alex's hand on the podium.

~

The first thing Alex saw as he was pedaling the go-cart up his laneway was his mom standing on the front steps, her hands placed firmly on one of her hips. His little brother, Kenneth, was perched on the other hip. And the look on his mom's face indicated that all was not well!

"Alex! You have some explaining to do, young man!"

Alex looked up at the second story window where the bedroom he shared with Jimmy was. Jimmy was standing in the window—anguish was written all over his face.

NOTE: "The Derby" is a short story that was written after the publication of "From the Heart," and it will be published in the next anthology.

OLD JOHN

By

©Mary M. Cushnie-Mansour

Old John stood in the shadows of the boxcars, watching warily for those who would shoo him away before he could climb into one of the empty boxes. He had this down to a science now, but it had taken years of practice.

His clothes were ragged, patched together with twine and pins and needles. His shoes were holier than a sieve, and the feet inside them were bare and leathery. His grey hair was tied back into a ratted ponytail that straggled half-way down his back. A battered and dusty hat shadowed his weathered, dirt-streaked face. He chewed on a piece of straw—his meagre stash of cigarette stubs was to be saved for later, when no one would notice the smoke.

Old John was going nowhere in particular. He had come from nowhere in particular. He just followed the tracks wherever they led ... to new towns ... temporary towns that provided transitory jobs—sometimes. And then it was back into another boxcar ... on the move again ... along the lines ... seeing the countryside through the open boxcar door.

The resolute rhythm of the wheels upon the steel rails would lull him into dreams, and he would dream of the times that used to be, and then of what might be around the next bend— perhaps a better world. He never dreamed of the present because he was living that.

There were many others, just like himself that Old John had met over the years. Some were still around. However, many had just disappeared. A couple of them he truly missed because they had travelled numerous rails together. But that was the nature of the life he was destined to live—the way of the rails.

Old John heard the familiar far-away whistle. He could feel the pulse of the railway lines through the soles of his shoes. His body tensed. His eyes were vigilant. He chewed harder on the straw and then spit the broken pieces on the ground. He knew that the train would only slow down at this station today because there was nothing to pick up or drop off—he had heard the station people talking. The whistle was ear-splitting,

warning people to get off the track as the engine chugged slowly through the station. Old John finally saw what he was looking for—an open door. He checked the platform—the workers were joking around—what Old John would have given to have a job like that right now.

He moved quickly, nimbly, for a man of his age, and leapt into the boxcar, settling himself in a shadowy corner—that was best until the train was well out of the station. Then he could come out and sit nearer the window of his world—even swing his feet out into the summer breezes.

“Howdy there, Old John,” a voice from the opposite corner whispered gruffly.

Old John adjusted his eyes to the darkness. He smiled. Hank. It was going to be a pleasant trip. He hadn’t seen Hank for a long time. “Hey there, Hank, how you been you old buzzard?”

“Gettin’ too old fer this ... almost couldn’t get m’self up here this time ... maybe I’ll just stay here, till they finds me ... hopefully not till we’re on the open prairie though ... that’s where I was born, ya know ... that’s where I wants to be buried.”

“Didn’t know that.” Old John hunkered down. “Better be quiet till we get out of here.”

As the train left the city and headed into the open countryside, Old John and Hank came out of their corners. Old John handed Hank a cigarette stub. “Got a match.”

Hank dug around in his pockets. The two old chaps sat on the edge of the boxcar, their feet dangling over the edge, the wind whipping at their flimsy clothing. They waved to some children in a field. The children ran along beside the tracks as fast as they could, for as far as they could, before disappearing view.

“Hope they will never have to ride the train like us; hope they will be able to pay for their tickets,” Old John said.

“Heck, they’ll miss half the world stuck in one of those fancy cars,” Hank snorted.

“Guess you’re right, but it’s a tough world we live in.”

“Tough, but I wouldn’t have it no other way, Old John. Been the best years of my life, despite the hardships.” Hank drew heavily on the last dregs of his smoke.

There was a silence between the two men as the world sped past them. Night crept in around them, and they curled up in opposite corners. As the sun came creeping into the boxcar, Old John stretched his legs and then stood up. “Hank, it’s morning ... wake up ... we should be pulling into another station soon.” He walked over to the doorway. “Hey there, Hank ... look at this ... the Prairie ... Hank ... you lazy old so and so ... wake up!”

Old John walked over to his friend, knelt down and touched him on the shoulder. It was cold—colder than would be normal after a cool night in a boxcar. He placed a finger under Hank’s nostrils. Not a flutter. “Well, Hank,” Old John stood up. “I guess you got yer wish.”

The sun burst into the boxcar just as the whistle blew its announcement that the train was entering the station. The engines began to slow down. Old John knew the train would stop here. He took one last look at his friend. “I guess you’re home, Hank,” he mumbled, and then jumped from the train and walked toward the station. This didn’t seem like too big of a town—probably no jobs here, especially for someone his age. Old John would just hang around in the shadows for a while until he decided where he wanted to go next. The rails would tell him—they always did.

NOTE: “Old John” is a short story that was written after the publication of “From the Heart,” and it will be published in the next anthology.

WHO?

©Mary M. Cushnie-Mansour

We call them

bag people

tramps

bums

vermin

filth

vagrants

drunks...

But,

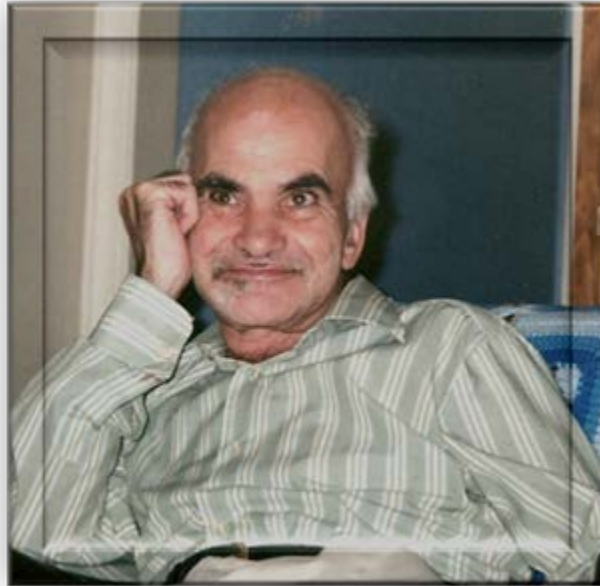
we never –

call their

NAMES!



CAVERN OF DREAMS
©Mary M. Cushnie-Mansour



They sadden my heart as I behold
What has become of them...
The old man with his chin resting on his chest...
The old woman with her head sleeping on her
shoulder...
I wish I could enter the caverns of their minds
And brush away the cobwebs of time –
What would I find?

I see the old man
Who toiled forty years in a factory,
And when I brush away the webs,
I behold a concert pianist
Entertaining royalty.

I see the old woman
Scrubbing pots in the back of a greasy kitchen,
And when I brush away the webs
I behold a young artist
Painting nature on pure, white canvases.

I see the old farmer
With a face wrinkled from a thousand suns,
And when I brush away the webs

I behold a writer
Cultivating his words on the page.

I see a corporate business woman
Ruthless and aggressive in her arena,
And when I brush away the webs,
I behold a mother,
Gentle, loving and devoted to her family.

I see the old man
Buried beneath his books of figures,
And when I brush away the webs,
I behold a runner
Carrying the flame of glory for his country.

I wonder –
Do these people
I now gaze upon
Hold such secrets
Within the caverns of their minds?

How many artists, doctors, musicians...
How many executives, mothers, lawyers...
How many writers, fathers, athletes...
Sit here with me today?

How many of us will fulfill our dreams
Before the cobwebs of time
Cover
The caverns of our minds?

SERPENTINE ACCORDION

©Mary M. Cushnie-Mansour

Dedicated to: Jordan Abraham & his Serpentine Accordion

Serpentine accordion
detonating notes through the air
squeezing life from the man
whose fingers caress the keys
giving hope to the souls
who listen and watch
with bated breaths

Serpentine accordion
demon unleashed
pace quickening
jolting the solitude
resonating joy
instigating feet to dance upon
the old wooden floors
where once
men and women laboured along
pearly white rows
tapping their feet
to the ticking time-clock

Serpentine accordion
meandering across the continents
drifting through the
notes of nations
lulling them into submission
possessing them
then caressing the listeners
with the lullabies of
the universal language of notes
tearing down barriers of
hatred and war
reassuring the audience of a
reconciliation that no weapon
could ever accomplish

Serpentine accordion
possessed persona
madly struggling
controlled contortions
spirit un-broken

Serpentine accordion
resting on notes
softly scaled
whilst the couple
dances of love
chronicling a story to the crowd
one they themselves
had almost forgotten
and the ladies dance
with their skirts and scarves
unashamed
as they glide across the
pearly wooden slats

Serpentine accordion
comes to rest
the night hushes
humbly bowing
its companion
wipes the sweat from his brow

STOP – AND SEE HIS EYES

©Mary M. Cushnie-Mansour

The little boy in tattered clothes
Lays curled beside the fire escape
In a dank back alley.
A scrawny dog
Stretched out at his feet,
Keeps vigil.
The alley stinks of yesterdays' excrement –
Yesterday's garbage.
Mice and rats scurry about –
In the dark, desolate space.

Yards away
The sun shines down on busy city streets.
Cars buzz by,
Business people rush past the little boy's alley.
Shoppers crowd the department stores.
Everyone in the sunlight
Looks so important –
So concerned...

STOP!
Look around you!
You who are all so busy,
So concerned!
Can't you see his eyes?
They are watching you.
He is praying
Someone will notice him
And toss a scrap his way!

STOP!
Look around you!
Gaze into this child's eyes –

Behold another world.

DOWN...DOWN
©Mary M. Cushnie-Mansour

the child
dancing
on the old plank floor
feet bare
arms swinging
hips swaying
dress billowing
rhythmic steps
voice humming
melodies thought forgotten
sisters joining
frolicking
pillows flying
bedsprings squeaking
delight abounding
mother hollering
time for chores
falling
down
down
down
into the chair
with large wheels
still smiling
sacred memories

my mother's lines
(dedicated to my mom – 2007)
©Mary M. Cushnie-Mansour

before me stands a woman
who has witnessed countless years
yet if you were to set eyes upon her
you would not distinguish how many
for her facial skin is unlined
her eyes are bright with curiosities
her arms are strong and firm
as they peek from
the sleeves of her blouse
her hair is only speckled with grey
figments of a brunette beauty
peeking through
laughing at time
her walk is sure and steady
her talk of things to come
things she's looking forward to doing
events she is going to witness
all lead me to believe
this woman will live forever –
that age is stayed at her door by
the brightness of her smile
the innocence of her heart
I sigh in relief
knowing she will be
eternally by my side

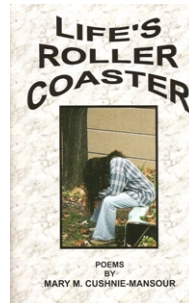
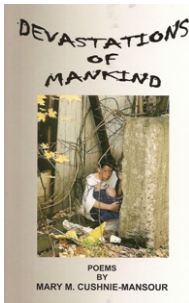
suddenly she lifts her arm
pointing
to something beautiful in her garden
it was then I saw it –
time's destruction upon her skin
had I seen this before – perhaps
how often had I turned a blind eye

time
was hiding on the inside of her arm
waiting for its moment to emerge –
to show me my mother's
laughter, joys, celebrations
hardships, sorrows, pain
lines
etched upon her skin

meandering
shaping the road map of her life
at that moment I understood
how fragile and precious was her life to me
how this sequence of lines
detailed her every
breath and deed
my mother will celebrate another birthday soon
I shall savour each one she bestows to me
love you mom –
yesterday, today, and forever...

The above poems can be found in these poetry books. If you like poetry, visit Mary's website and read more about her poetry.

Direct link: <http://cavernofdreams.com/poetry/>





A CLOSING NOTE FROM MARY

Thank you for taking the time to read my short stories and poetry. Take a moment, now, and let me know how you enjoyed them. Comments can be sent through my website in the “Feel Free to Contact Me” section at the bottom of my home page ...

<http://www.marycushniemansour.ca>

While you are there, please check out my award winning vampire trilogy “The Night’s Vampire Trilogy.” I guarantee that once you have finished it, it will leave you thirsting for more! <http://cavernofdreams.com/books/> The trilogy is available in book and Ebook formats directly from the Cavern of Dreams site - <http://shop.cavernofdreams.com/>

NIGHT’S GIFT

Awakening inside a mysterious mansion, Virginia comes face to face with its dark secrets. When she realizes she is the prisoner of Count Basarab Musat, a Transylvanian vampire, she is forced into playing a dangerous game. Will she ever be free from this evil world—where the undead are so alive! *Night’s Gift* is the beginning of Virginia’s story...

NIGHT’S CHILDREN

Night’s Children continues Virginia’s story ... even though she has escaped the fangs of the Count Basarab, taking his son, Santan, with her, Virginia knows she is living on borrowed time—the count will return one day for his son. Also, Virginia finds she is pregnant again—a gift from the count on their final night together. Virginia dreams of dark forces pursuing her ... will the count be the only one able to save her?

NIGHT’S RETURN

Night’s Return is the riveting conclusion of the Night’s Vampire Trilogy... With nowhere left to run, Virginia prays for a saviour—will that saviour be the vampire she fled from? Basarab has returned to Brantford, trying to reach his children before the dark forces attempting to usurp his throne do. Virginia and Basarab become embroiled in their previous game playing; however, this time they are not the only players! Will love for their children, and possibly each other, be enough to bring them together at last?’

All of Mary’s books, plus the books she has published for others, can be found here: <http://shop.cavernofdreams.com/>