

**Excerpt from “A Canadian Werewolf in New York”  
by Mark Leslie**

**Scene: Meeting With Mack, Michael’s Literary Agent**

“You look like a bag of shit!”

I couldn’t help but smile at Mack. Being greeted in such a way -- as fodder for ridicule -- immediately told me that I wasn’t in his bad books.

Mack had a wry smile on his face as he looked up at me, his thin lips pressed tightly together beneath an even thinner dark moustache that looked more like it was drawn on than grown. I’d always thought that with his thick brush-cut, dark around the ears, but blending into a soft grey at the top, he’d look better in a fuller, thicker moustache. But I kept telling myself that would make him look more like the comic-book version of J. Jonah Jamieson from the Spider-Man comic books.

I felt a huge knot of tension suddenly release in my shoulders and I let the glorious smells of various breakfast foods being cooked in the open-kitchen restaurant wash over me.

“What did you do?” Mack said, still sitting at the table and grinning at me as I approached. “Sleep on the street last night?”

“G’morning Mack. So, can we order food now?”

But he wasn’t finished. “You decide to roll naked in a garbage dumpster on 34th street before meeting me this morning?”

"Mack, I'm a little peckish this morning."

"What, you couldn't find something good to eat in the dumpster? Man, but you artistic types -- you never cease to surprise me with the way you dress out in public." He clasped his hands together while I sat, revealing that he was finished with his fun and ready to get down to business. "I already ordered for both of us. They're cooking it now."

Of course he would have. He'd never expect one of his clients to be late, or this was the last meeting he'd have with them. Smiling again, I pulled out the chair across from him and sat down.

"Promise me something," Mack said.

I nodded. "Sure,"

"Promise me you've got something else to wear for tonight's spot on Letterman."

I just looked at him.

"You heard me, didn't you?"

I nodded again.

"I got the call last night. They'd had another writer scheduled to appear on the show. One of those self-help guru types, Andy Robinson, I think. It was a last minute cancellation. So, a phone call or two later and voila, Michael Andrews is on.

"I'd been trying to get you on the show for promotion of the upcoming short fiction collection. The timing couldn't be better."

My last novel, Print of the Predator had been released about 4 months ago, but a collection of my previously published short fiction was due out in a few weeks time. Mack and my publisher had been pushing me for the past couple of years to release something to keep my fans sated between the standard annual spring releases of my novels (and something to bring them in a substantial amount of cash). A popular trend with many popular authors -- authors much more popular than I -- was the release of a novella length work around Christmas time. But I didn't want to do that to my fans. It seemed like an obvious money grab, taking a single long short story and charging full price for it.

Sure, I'm glad that I'm making enough money with my writing to keep me comfortably supported -- oh, who am I kidding, I'm well more than comfortably supported -- but I've never done this for the money. It's all about telling stories and having people read them. I was thus eager to see the reaction to a collection of the more morbid writings of my early years -- stories that had originally appeared in small press magazines years before my name became known throughout the mystery field.

Thus, the short story collection was born. I'd fancied it would be as good as Jeffery Deaver's incredible short story collection Twisted. Hey, a man can dream, can't he?

And I'd be appearing on the Letterman show, just weeks before the release of my own collection. Is there any wonder why I was desperate to hang onto Mack as my agent?

"Letterman?" I said, as our breakfast arrived, two steaming plates of eggs, hash browns, ham, bacon and sausage. A plate with a single stack of half a dozen pieces of toast sat in the middle of the tray beside two tall glasses of orange juice, two glass of milk and a large coffee for me. Another thing about hanging around with Mack -- known in literary circles as "Mack the Knife" for his ability to get what he desired, no matter how difficult it might at first seem -- were the fringe benefits of being in his presence. This Metro Market didn't serve food to tables. Despite their ability to cook virtually anything your heart desired it was standard counter service. You ordered at the cash, paid up front, and carried the food on trays to your table. But not with Mack. No matter where he was or what he wanted, I've yet to see him be denied a request. Gotta love him.

Gotta love that he's my agent.

While I worked at adding ketchup to my plate, Mack immediately started shaking salt onto his plate, engaging in the act as if he were trying to bleed the shaker dry. "You'll be appearing," he said, "alongside the hot new shock rock dude. Knell. I'm rather fond of that concept, because it might open you up to a whole new audience. Given the likely attention span of his fans, it's perfect that you'll be there promoting your book of short stories." He turned his attention to the pepper now, shaking as vigorously as he had with the salt. "You should try to work in a mention of the story about the serial killer who takes out concert groupies -- that oughta get their attention."

I nodded enthusiastically at that point, because in the time it'd taken Mack to say that, I'd already stuffed several mouthfuls of food into my mouth.

Knell was definitely the latest hot commodity with young folks lately. A young blonde rock star with a perpetual Billy Idol sneer, he came off like a cross between Eminem and Ozzy Osbourne. His music was raunchy and hard hitting, with a definite rock beat, and his lyrics rolled off his tongue like he'd just chugged a cocktail of laxatives and hard liquor.

His lyrics were controversial, his back-up band a group of talented musicians, and he was splashed all over the media, pushing Paris Hilton from the top spot of those celebrities the average person just loved to hate. If it wasn't a story about one or more of his songs being banned from play at school dances, it was a tale about his raunchy night club escapades. Yet, his albums were an interesting compilation, because each of them (there's only been two albums -- like most "stars" nowadays, he'd skyrocketed to success without a lot of preamble, and would likely tumble to obscurity within a few years, a fast dying ember) contained not only the hard-hitting raunchy songs with lyrics that pushed the envelope of taste and decency -- the kind of things that kids just loved to sing, shouting out their rebellion at the world -- but there were also at least two tracks that were clean enough for standard radio airplay. That's how I'd heard most of his music. I'd also overheard some of the more raunchy songs from personal mp3 players while on public transit -- and you wouldn't need my heightened sense of sound to pick up on those, let me tell you. I started

reminding myself of my father lately, thinking that the hearing-aid industry would likely be booming due to the volume with which young people blasted tunes into their heads.

Mack was right. It would be interesting to see if my appearance with Knell could capture a new type of audience.

“Woah, slow down, there, Chester,” Mack said, taking a mouthful of coffee. “I don’t plan on taking any of that food away from you. I’ve got my own.”

I just glared at him, shoveling another couple of mouthfuls in; now that I’d gotten a taste of the food, I was almost not able to meet the demands of my stomach and bring the food in fast enough.

“Oh wait,” he said, pointing at my plate. “I think I know what it is. You’ve got so much ketchup piled on the plate, that you can’t even see the food.” He took another chug of his coffee and grinned. “That’s why you’re panicked -- you’re just trying to ensure that there is food under all that ketchup.”

I thought it was funny that he’d make so much fun of me after he’d almost depleted the salt and pepper shakers of their contents for his own plate. But Mack was like that. If we were both sitting there with bird-shit in our hair, he’d be laughing his ass off at my predicament, completely unaware that he looked just as silly.

Gotta love something about a man like that.

"Okay," the tone in his voice took on a seriousness that I could almost smell. "One more business item to discuss so I can properly claim this meal as a business expense.

"Your publisher called yesterday and they want to see progress on the next 'Maxwell Bronte' novel. They want to see the first 5000 words or so to ensure it's coming along. I've held them off as long as possible, but you gotta start producing."