

# **Death at the Whistling Swan**

John D. Nesbitt

## ***Death at the Whistling Swan***

Presented by *Publishing by Rebecca J. Vickery*

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## ***Death at the Whistling Swan***

A curious fellow by nature and with an interest in a certain young woman, I attended a poetry reading at her invitation. The poet was entertaining, but my attention drifted to Liz and how pretty she looked.

The next morning I learned of the poet's death from a fellow faculty member. Concern for Liz was my first reaction and after speaking with her, I decided to discover what happened.

How could a poet's death be related to the issue of tenure? Join me as I attempt to find out.

## Chapter 1

A movement in the doorway caused me to look up from grading a student paper. The sight of Liz Carpenter standing there had a pleasant effect. She didn't stop at my door very often.

"Sorry to bother you, Mike."

"Not at all." I set aside the paper and pen. "What can I help you with?"

"I just thought I would remind you of the poetry reading tonight."

"Oh, yes. That's right. I've seen the flyers." I took a glance at her. She was wearing a light grey jacket and skirt with an off-white pullover. A ruby pendant matched her earrings, and her dark brown hair was brushed back on the sides and pinned in place. She had the full look of a young, up-and-coming faculty member, and my awareness of her being single didn't detract from it a bit. "You sent out an e-mail earlier in the week, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did."

"Is he pretty good?"

"I think so. He came to a couple of my classes this morning, and the students seemed to be interested."

"He's from the Midwest, isn't he?"

"Iowa State. Actually, he was a professor of mine in grad school, so I knew his work from before. He's got a new book out now, and I'm sure he'll read something from it this evening."

I suppose I was a little jealous. The only reason she was paying me any attention was to promote this chum of hers. "I'll try to make it," I said. "It's at seven, isn't it?"

"That's right." She put on a smile. "I'm sure you'll like it."

"What's his name again?" I realized I was holding her there.

"Brendan Malone. He has three books now. All poetry. And he edits a quarterly. He's getting a wider audience. I think we can expect to hear more of him."

"Sure." I stole another glance at her. "It's good of you to do things like this, bring in writers and all."

"It's good for the students."

As she walked away I thought, *that's how people get somewhere in this racket. They network, they take the initiative to do things, and they know the right thing to say.*

## Chapter 2

I got to the reading a few minutes early. Liz was standing next to a fellow whom I took to be the visiting poet, and the two of them were talking to a biology professor and his wife. I found a seat off to one side and watched as people trickled in. I recognized two other faculty members and a librarian. The rest, about a dozen or so, were young people with notebooks, and I guessed them to be Liz's students who were working on extra credit.

When everyone was seated, Liz introduced Brendan Malone and sat down in the front row. She had changed into a flowing, tobacco-colored dress with loose sleeves, plus a billowy maroon scarf and gold hoop earrings. I caught myself looking at her and directed my attention to the poet.

He was a tall, slender man of about forty-five with a full head of hair and a good tan. He wore a light blue sport coat with a white shirt open at the neck, where a gold chain showed. He raised his eyebrows to good effect, and he had a confident, robust voice.

"When I was in Peru," he began, "I learned a saying that went something like this: 'In the night, all ducks are the same dusky color.' I pondered that idea, or I should say it worked its way into me, and it didn't let me go until I had written this poem." With a change in tone he delivered the title. "Ducks in the Night."

Then he recited his poem, evoking the green head of the mallard, the blue wing of the teal, the red breast of the wood duck, and the white belly of the wigeon. Under cover of night, said the voice in the poem, all of these became dusky brown and grey. Add to that, the hens had less color, and many of them slept with head under wing. "Still," he said, casting a glance at Liz, "even with the smell of tule water and mudbank mud, still, I could find you in the dark."

I thought Liz blushed, but the applause of the students and the smile of the poet held center attention. Malone turned to the table beside the lectern. Next to his leather shoulder bag he had the usual array of books and literary magazines, each one with bits of colored paper sticking out to mark selected poems.

He said he would start off on a light note, and he did. He read a poem entitled "To the Visiting Poet," which described a poet in rope sandals, light cotton trousers, and a shirt that spread like a sun dress. His handshake was soft as a dove. The voice in the poem went on to praise the visitor for being wise as Confucius, calm as Buddha; then it thanked the poet for eating only fruit and vegetables and for "giving me your portion of chicken cordon bleu." After the applause, Malone told how he had recently read a review of *Howl*, the movie about Allen Ginsberg, and how celebrities are "distracted by the hollow comforts of fame." Malone heaved out a breath and said, "Thank God I've avoided that."

The audience laughed.

Brendan Malone went on with his presentation, thumbing his way from one publication to the next, introducing each poem with an anecdote or a bit of information. He told of sub-nivean mice, a medieval catapult called a *trebuchet*, the prophetic end of the Mayan calendar, and on and on. He plugged his most recent book a few times, letting us know in an incidental way that "Ducks in the Night" was the title poem, and then holding up the book each time he came back to it. He finished with a sequence of three poems from that collection.

When he had given a bow of the head in acknowledgment of the applause, Liz got up and announced that anyone who would like to buy copies of Mr. Malone's work could do so at the Whistling Swan, a bookstore downtown.

Malone smiled. "Not to be confused with the wild swans in Yeats' poem." He raised his hand and said, "I think I have it here." Then he held us for a minute longer as he recited "The Wild Swans at Coole."

All in all I thought he had a pretty good act, but I chose not to go to the book signing.

### Chapter 3

The hallway in our office wing was buzzing the next morning when I got back from my first class. I thought I heard Liz Carpenter's name mentioned as well as Brendan Malone's. I put my books away and came out to see what the hubbub was all about.

Marian Hunt, a folklore professor, was standing in her doorway and talking across the hall to Fred Klaus, who taught linguistics. "Did anyone go to the reading?" she asked.

Klaus shook his head.

"I did," I said. "What's going on?"

Marian raised her eyebrows. "You haven't heard? Well, they found the poet in the parking lot outside the bookstore, stone cold dead."

I felt a thump in the gut. "When did that happen?"

"Last night, at about the time the store closed."

"My God," I said. "That's terrible. Liz was some kind of friends with the guy. Did she come in today?"

"She called in sick. I guess I would be, too. They say she spent half the night in the police station."

"Was she there when it happened?"

"She went home earlier. At least that's the story."

My stomach was starting to go queasy, and I didn't like the conversation as it was going. "That's terrible," I said again. I shook my head and went back into my office.

I made it through the rest of the day without any disruption. While I was in class I didn't think about Liz or the visiting poet, but each time I went to my office and saw her door closed, a sense of dread crept through me.

At four o'clock, when most of the other faculty members had gone home, I closed my door and looked up Liz's number in the personnel directory. She answered on the third ring.



"Liz, this is Mike Stevens. I don't mean to be a nuisance, but if there's anything I can do for you, I'll be glad to."

"It's nice of you to offer, but I don't think so. This thing has knocked a lot out of me."

"I can imagine. Have you had anything to eat? Would you like me to bring you something?"

"No, thanks. I haven't had much of an appetite, but I ate a little bit."

"That's good, I guess. If there's anything else—well, I don't have anything pressing, so if you—"

"I'll tell you, Mike. There might be something. I could use a drink, and I don't feel like going out by myself."

My spirits picked up. "Would you like me to swing by for you, or do you want me to buy something at the store?"

She let out a sigh. "Oh, I don't know. Is there a place to go?"

"The Red Hat Lounge isn't bad."

"I feel as if the whole world is looking at me."

"This place is okay. You can go in the side door, sit at a table. The music isn't loud. People mind their own business."

She breathed again. "I guess we could try it. I don't want to stay out long anyway."

"Neither do I. Would you like me to come by and pick you up?"

"Do you know where my apartment is?"

"Yes. Actually, I lived in the same building when I first came here." When she didn't say anything, I went on. "In about an hour? Around five?"

"That should be all right."

## Chapter 4

Liz asked for a glass of white wine, and I ordered a gin and tonic. When the drinks arrived, Liz raised hers and said, "Well, here's to poor Brendan." Her face was cloudy, and I was reminded of my own first couple of years at this place, when I had to deal with all my problems in solitude.

I said, "I'm really sorry about this. I didn't know him, of course, just what I saw at the reading, but I'm sad to see someone get cut short when he's in the prime of his career."

"It's hard to believe he's gone. He was so full of—well, his work. You saw him. Dynamic. Full of energy. And the next minute he's gone."

I took a breath and went on. "I'm sorry for the toll it's taking on you, what with his being your friend and you arranging to have him brought here."

She looked at her glass. "I suppose there was a lot of talk on campus."

"There was some buzz. I didn't hear particulars."

"I'm sure the worst will come out."

"Oh?" I wished I hadn't said it that way, but she didn't seem to notice. She went on with her own line.

"It's hard to control what people say about you, and I'm sure some people thrive on others' misfortunes. Not to mention any names."

"I've never even had a class in folklore."

"Really." Liz turned down the corners of her mouth. "They say that with damage control, one thing to do is get your story out there, and then respond as little as possible. Don't feed the rumors."

"I don't know what kind there might be."

"Well, his wife has said some unkind things."

"Oh." Not liking the sound of that syllable, I added, "You mean since the investigation started."

"Yes. She's making it seem as if I'm responsible, though I don't know how I could have had anything to do with it. I certainly didn't sneak up behind him in the parking lot."

"Is that how it was done?"

"Apparently."

"Did you go to the book signing?" I asked.

"Just for a little while. I think I bought the only copy that was sold." She waggled her eyebrows. "It was a pretty quiet place."

I wondered at Malone not giving her a copy in appreciation of her hosting his visit, but I kept my thought to myself. "It wasn't a robbery, was it?"

"No, he still had his wallet in his pocket, with money in it, and his book bag was lying nearby."

"Then what reason would someone have?"

She shook her head. "I have no idea. Even his wife doesn't. Just a general accusation."

"Oh." I'd said it again. "Some kind of jealousy, then," I added.

"On her part." Liz took a sip of wine. "Not that it was unfounded, at one time at least." She drew her eyebrows down, then relaxed them. "He was my thesis director, and generally my mentor through the program. We became close for a little while, but then his wife found out, and he dropped me flat. It was all business after that. But when his latest book came out, I was on his list of colleagues and former students who could help him with his promo. I didn't have any hard feelings, so I set up this visit for him. When he showed up at my class yesterday morning, it was the first time I'd seen him in over two years."

"But his wife thinks he was out to re-ignite—"

"I suppose. But it's the type of thing that happens at that point in your life, and then you move on. I was over it, and he knew it. Not that he would have rejected the opportunity, but he was on business. You know how poets are—and really, memoirists and fiction writers as well. Getting their name out, trying to sell a few copies, picking up an honorarium, on the lookout for workshop gigs." She took another sip of her wine. "Brendan was the type of person some people resented. A little too high on himself,

maybe, and condescending to others. But I just can't imagine someone wanting to kill him. Not for love, not for money. I heard a story one time about a math professor who was killed by a grad student who had his dissertation strung along for ten years. But that wouldn't be Brendan, either. I feel bad saying this about him, but I can't picture him as being important enough in someone else's life to get killed over it."

"Not even a jealous husband?"

"I think he went for younger, single women. But even if he did get involved with a married woman, he would have gotten out as soon as things became complicated. And he would have had the philosophical part taken care of ahead of time."

"But this wouldn't have been a bad place for someone to follow him to—a small provincial college town."

She shrugged. "I guess. But I just don't see him going so far in an affair as to provoke either a woman or a man. And then to die in the parking lot of the Whistling Swan. It's almost as bad as dying in the street. He would have hated to know that about himself."

## Chapter 5

Like other independent bookstores trying to stay alive, the Whistling Swan had a coffee bar and a few tables. I expected to see some of the laptop, pod, and pad clientele when I stopped there after leaving Liz at her apartment house, but the place was empty except for the proprietor. He was a mellow person with a ponytail and a bushy mustache, both light brown and going to grey, plus a pair of wire-rimmed glasses. His name was Gary, and although I ordered most of my books online, I went into his store often enough for him to know me.

I ordered a tall cappuccino and glanced around the store as Gary ran the machine. When he set the cup in front of me I gave him a five, which he creased lengthwise before he punched the keys and made the old cash register ring. He set my change on the counter and stood back, lingering.

He seemed to sense that I had come to gossip, so I went at it directly. "Sorry to hear about the mishap last night," I said.

"It's not good for anybody."

"I thought maybe it would sell a few copies."

"Not yet. He wasn't John Lennon, you know."

"I suppose you've had the police in here."

"Oh, yeah. And that doesn't help. Of course, they want the whole story."

"How much can there be? I heard that practically nobody showed up."

"Well, that's true. But he dropped in earlier in the day, which is typical, to see if I had his book in stock. He browsed around for a few minutes and left."

"And then he came back in the evening?"

"Yes, and except for the woman who set things up, no one else even came in. It was as if everyone stayed away. So he signed what I had in stock, bought a couple of books himself, and that was the last I saw of him."

"Is that typical, too, to buy more books than a person sells?"

Gary shrugged. "Some writers buy other people's books, and some don't."

"What did he buy, or do you remember?"

"Actually I do. He bought two books by local authors. One was about the woman who ran the brothel in the 1940's, and the other was a book of poems by Tim Strawn."

"Oh. I haven't read either of those."

"Neither have I. I expected better photographs in the one about the madam."

"I should have come to the signing," I said. "I went to the reading, but I didn't feel like buying another book. I've got a whole shelf of books that I haven't read."

"Oh, yeah. Everybody does. Well, not everybody, I guess. Lots of people don't read."

"Too bad, especially for this poor guy. His last book signing on earth, and he sells one copy."

"Oh, they're used to it. Especially poets. They're not all good sports, but he was. He thanked me for the opportunity and said he was glad he didn't get skunked."

"I should look at his books. I liked some of the poems he read."

"I've got just the latest one. The others are out of print. But it's over there. Signed, of course."

I wandered toward the book racks with my coffee cup in my hand. Face-out on the top shelf of the poetry section was a book I recognized—*Ducks in the Night* by Brendan Malone. I recognized the sepia colors, and now up close I saw that the cover had a photo of sleeping ducks. I set my coffee cup on a nearby table and took the book in my hand. I thumbed past the signed title page, the contents, and the opening poem. Farther in, I came across other poems he had read the night before. I closed the book and turned it over in my hands. It was published by a prestigious small press in Minneapolis, and I felt it must have been a nice physical item in the trophy case of Brendan Malone.

With the book in my hand, I moved to the bookcase of local authors and regional interest. There I saw the book about the 1940's madam and the

collection of poems by Tim Strawn. He was in the same department as I was, but I had never looked at his poetry. I wouldn't have now either, except that Brendan Malone had bought a copy of it.

The book was entitled *Season of Destiny*, and the cover had a photo of a farmhouse porch, an expanse of prairie, and a gathering of clouds. It looked rather innocuous, which was what I would have expected of Tim Strawn.

The first poem I turned to, however, woke me up. It was entitled "To the Visiting Poet," and it had the same lines I had heard the night before:

*Serene in rope sandals and cotton trousers,*

*A shirt spreading out like a sun dress,*

*Your handshake soft as a dove—*

I scanned to the bottom of the poem, and there it was:

*And for giving me your portion*

*Of chicken cordon bleu.*

I felt a strange tingling, as if I myself had been caught at something heinous.

I turned to other pages. I found the poem about sub-nivean mice, the poem about love catapulting the speaker as if from a *trebuchet*, the poem about the end of the Mayan calendar. I turned back to the title and copyright pages, where I saw that the book was published by a press I had never heard of in Minot, North Dakota.

I felt as if I had the wind knocked out of me. Here was a Milquetoast of a faculty member who had the nerve or the lack of shame or whatever it took to plagiarize a poet who had worked for his own recognition. All in a moment I despised the plagiarist and rather appreciated Brendan Malone for having made it several rungs higher than Tim Strawn could ever begin to reach.

I finished my coffee, paid for *Season of Destiny* and *Ducks in the Night*, and walked out to my car. I was halfway to my office when I realized that the parking lot had been dark and I hadn't even looked around.

## Chapter 6

Checking the online bookstores, I found three titles by Brendan Malone. The first, entitled *Surcease of Destiny*, was described as a collection of poems "tracing the inner journey of the self." The second, *Anvils from the Sky*, was "an encomium on things of the world, varying in tone from playful to morbid." The third was *Ducks in the Night*, which I had in my possession and which did not have any poems in common with Tim Strawn's volume. I guessed that he had altered the title of the first book and swiped some if not all of the poems from the second. As Gary had said, neither book was in print, so I had to order them through used book dealers. I paid for express delivery on both.

As soon as I finished my orders I had a hunch. I called up Liz Carpenter and asked if she had copies of either of Brendan Malone's first two books.

"Just the second one," she said. "He always said the first one was horrible, and he didn't want anyone to read it. What's your interest?"

"I wanted to do some comparing. Do you think I could borrow that book this evening?"

"It's in my office. But I'm planning to go in tomorrow. I can give it to you first thing in the morning."

I had gotten pretty excited with my search, and now I felt things sinking. "I guess that would be all right."

"If it's urgent I could go there now, but I'm—"

"No, that's all right. Thanks, though, and I'll see you in the morning."

\* \* \* \* \*

She gave me her copy of *Anvils from the Sky* at a few minutes before eight, but I had classes back to back until eleven. When I finally got a breather, I closed my office door and took the two books out of the drawer. The main text of *Anvils from the Sky*, poem by poem and in the same order, was identical to the contents of *Season of Destiny*. In the front matter of *Anvils from the Sky*, as I expected, *Surcease of Destiny* was listed by itself on a page under the heading "Also by Brendan Malone." I



imagined the plagiarist in his office down the hall. He must have used the stolen work to get tenure.

## Chapter 7

I found Tim Strawn in his office at a little past twelve, eating his lunch of carrots and celery and apple slices out of a plastic container with a snap-top lid. He motioned me in, then put his hand back on the computer mouse and squinted at the screen. He clicked again, and the screen went to desktop icons.

He turned in his chair and gave a perfunctory smile. From behind a pair of dark-rimmed glasses, his beady brown eyes settled on me. "What can I do for you?"

He was a plain-looking guy, average height and average build, with brown hair receding. He wore an un-ironed long-sleeve white shirt with the cuffs folded up, and his hands and wrists were pale.

"Do you mind if I sit down?" I asked.

"No, not at all. Close the door if you'd like."

I closed the door and took a seat. "Did you get a chance to talk to the visiting poet?" I asked.

"Um, no. Did you?" He looked at his fingernails. "That was a terrible thing that happened."

"I thought you might have talked to him."

"Oh, why?"

"Both of you being poets." After a couple of seconds I added, "I understand he bought your book of poems at the Whistling Swan."

"I doubt that it would interest him. He's a little more high-gearred than I am." Strawn was making an effort at nonchalance, but his face was stiff and pale.

"Quite a bit of similarity," I said. "I've had the chance to compare your book with one of his, and I think that once he looked into yours, he would have been interested in talking to you."

Strawn closed his eyes and shook his head.

I went on. "You weren't at the reading. I wouldn't expect you to be, but I thought you might like to know he didn't say a thing about you. But I have a hunch he talked to you."

Without any warning, Strawn broke down. Tears started in his eyes, and he raised his hands to his face. "I never expected to meet him, not even when I knew he was coming to campus. But as it turned out, he came for me."

I acted as if nothing had slipped a link. "Did he go to your house?"

"No, he came here. Late in the afternoon. He said he was going to expose me. I begged him not to. I told him it would ruin me, cost me my job, finish my career." Strawn looked at me as if I had some obligation to him. "I've got a wife and two small children to support, and my wife's had medical problems and a long series of tests. Just losing the benefits alone would be a disaster."

I put the conversation back on him. "And so he took pity on you?"

Strawn's voice went bitter. "No. He said he was going to buy a copy of my book, and when he got home he was going to mail it along with his own book to the dean."

"So he had no mercy."

"No, he laughed at me. He said writers were supposed to believe in the truth, and if I had to go to work in food service, maybe that was what I needed."

I almost laughed. I could imagine Malone lording it over this wimp and then leaving him to fret and worry. But I had the presence of mind to remember that Malone was dead. "And he left it at that?" I said.

"Yes. And I was desperate. I hated myself for it, but I parked in front of the bookstore last night and watched him. When he was getting ready to go, I went to the window and peeked in. When I saw him buying my book, I knew I was sunk."

"So you laid in wait for him, and you clobbered him. And then you took the book from him."

Strawn's teary eyes were red. It seemed unreal that he ever had the fortitude to strike another man, even from behind, but I made myself remember it. I had to. The wretch was sobbing.

"He drove me to it. He had no feeling for me whatsoever."

"Jesus," I said. "What do you expect?"

"Please don't tell," he said, moving his head back and forth. "Please don't. I'll lose everything." He waved his hand at his office. "*I need this.*"

I took a deep breath and couldn't think of a good thing to say.

Tears were streaming down his cheeks. "Please. I beg you. Show me the mercy that he wouldn't."

I was appalled, embarrassed as if I was watching a bad movie. I had come prepared for denial or abject apology, but not this. I had heard stories about plagiarism cases in other departments. Some faculty were draconian, while some didn't have the stomach to punish an offender. The culprit, meanwhile, would play on their sympathy and hope not to be held accountable. But this wasn't just plagiarism, and the guy was pathetic.

I took another breath and said, "I don't know if I would have turned you in for stealing his poems, but if it had come to a departmental vote, I wouldn't have voted for leniency. And as for this, even if I wanted to, I couldn't conceal what I know. Not given these circumstances." For a fleeting moment I wondered how far I would go to protect Liz if she was in hot water, but she wasn't, so I could dismiss that idea. I folded my arms and sat there. "Take your medicine," I said. "Malone was right."

The words seemed to fill him with rage. He rose from his chair and hollered, "*I need this.*" Then he lunged at his coat rack, where he laid his hand on the black crook of an umbrella.

I rushed him, got my arms around him, and slammed him into a metal filing cabinet.

The office door opened, and Fred Klaus, the linguistics professor, leaned on the handle, panting. "My God, fellows. What's going on?"

"Get campus security," I said. "And have them call the police."

"Has there been a crime?"

"Oh, yes." Tim Strawn had given up all resistance, so I let him settle into his chair. I stepped back to block the doorway. "Go ahead and call," I said. "I don't think he's going anywhere."

## Chapter 8

That night, Liz Carpenter and I went to the Red Hat Lounge for drinks and dinner. Her face was still puffy, but she seemed to have improved quite a bit over the evening before.

"It's still hard to believe that Brendan is gone just like that," she said.

"And I'm sorry that he was killed for provoking this creep when he was just sticking up for his own work."

"And the larger integrity of the profession," I said, "if we want to be generous about it. But I don't think he was very nice to Strawn. Of course, some people aren't always nice anyway."

"I'll go along with that. He was a bit of a cad when he dropped me, but I was willing to give him the benefit of the doubt there. He had to look out for himself." Liz took a drink from her wine. "Besides, it was a two-way street. I have to admit I had my own self-gratification. After all, I was on close terms with a prestigious poet, and it allowed me to socialize and meet people on a higher level than I was at the time."

She sounded as if she, too, had the philosophical part worked out. I took a drink from my highball and thought I might as well accept it. I could imagine her being a visiting poet herself some day. "I guess we all have to look out for ourselves," I said.

"He told me once that when a person is an artist, sometimes he has to sell other people short in order to pursue his art."

"Or to protect his own interests."

"Well, yes, he was rather unabashed about putting himself first, but there are some things we can forgive. I'm sure he would have forgiven the plagiarist, once he had the satisfaction of blowing the whistle on him." She tossed her head and smiled. "And feeling superior." After a pause she added, "He wasn't all bad."

"No," I said, "and he wrote his own poems."

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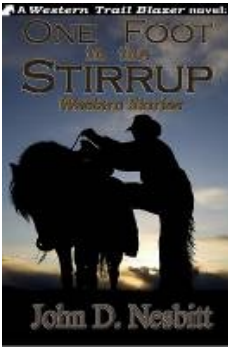
## About the Author:

John D. Nesbitt lives in the plains country of Wyoming, where he teaches English and Spanish at Eastern Wyoming College. His articles, reviews, fiction, and poetry have appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies. He has had more than twenty books published, including short story collections, contemporary novels, and traditional westerns, as well as textbooks for his courses.

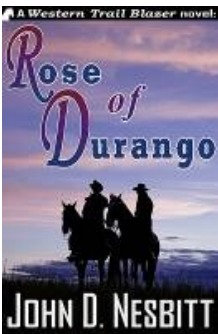
John has won many awards for his work including two awards from the Wyoming State Historical Society (for fiction); two awards from Wyoming Writers for the encouragement of other writers and service to the organization; two Wyoming Arts Council literary fellowships (one for fiction, one for non-fiction); a Western Writers of America Spur Finalist Award for mass-market paperback original novel for *Raven Springs*; and the Spur Award itself for his short story "At the End of the Orchard" and for his novels *Trouble at the Redstone* and *Stranger in Thunder Basin*."

To learn more about John and his work visit his website at:  
[www.johndnesbitt.com](http://www.johndnesbitt.com)

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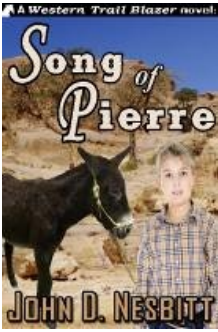
This is a collection of nine western stories, ranging from gunfights to romance. Men and women alike have enjoyed these selections. Each story has the features of good western writing—a clearly etched setting, memorable characterization, an original storyline, and a lively writing style. These are selections to read more than once.



*A Dime Novel selection (99 cents)*

Good-natured Jimmy Clevis has a knack for finding people. Magdalena, his girlfriend, has a cousin who disappeared after seeking work at a ranch farther north. Jimmy travels north and pokes around under the guise of looking for work. Will he find Magdalena's cousin, the one they call Rose of Durango, or will he only find trouble?

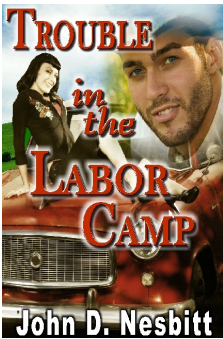




*A Dime Novel selection (99 cents)*

Cactus Pete hired me to do a job—a secret sort of job for good eatin' and two bits a day, he promised. It didn't sound too bad, at first. Then he brought out this black, smelly beast he called a burro. Pierre and I took an instant dislike to each other, but we came to an uneasy understanding.

Later on, out in the desert when strange things began to happen, I'd be glad I had made the acquaintance of smelly old Pierre.



*A 99 cent Gallery selection*

To find work in the early 1960s, Morgan Cross follows the crops. Temporary jobs, temporary housing, and temporary acquaintances are part of the life, along with trying to stay out of trouble.

But there's something different about this labor camp. Could it be Morgan wants something better, or is meeting a girl named Rosa Maria just making him restless?

During a lull in picking, tension fills the camp. Drinking increases, fights break out, and a man is murdered. Will Morgan find himself in more trouble than he can handle?

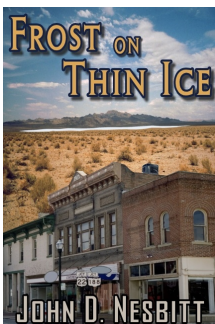


*A full-length novel*

Clay Westbrook, a cowhand on a Wyoming ranch in the 1890s, runs into trouble when he sticks up for a Mexican sheepherder. Tony Campos is being bullied by a rancher named Sutton, who tells Clay he has just bought himself a good bunch of trouble. Clay maintains his friendship with the Mexicans, much to the dislike of Sutton and others, and he develops a romantic interest in Tony's niece, Guadalupe.

Before long, Clay finds himself without a job and is harassed by Sutton and his men, who burn down his homesteader's shack and sabotage his outfitting camp. Clay then discovers that Sutton has designs on Clay's homestead and plans to cut a ditch project across the land.

It is up to Clay to thwart the plan and stop the retribution at the same time that he pursues his courtship of the lovely Guadalupe.



*A 99 cent Gallery selection*

Why would one country neighbor run down another on Main Street in front of the post office? It happened in early November... Keith Harriman was crossing the street when Jerry Frost bore down on him in a big pickup truck. Jerry refused to tell anyone anything.

Good at investigating insurance claims, I decided I would nose around a bit and see if I could find out why it happened.

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