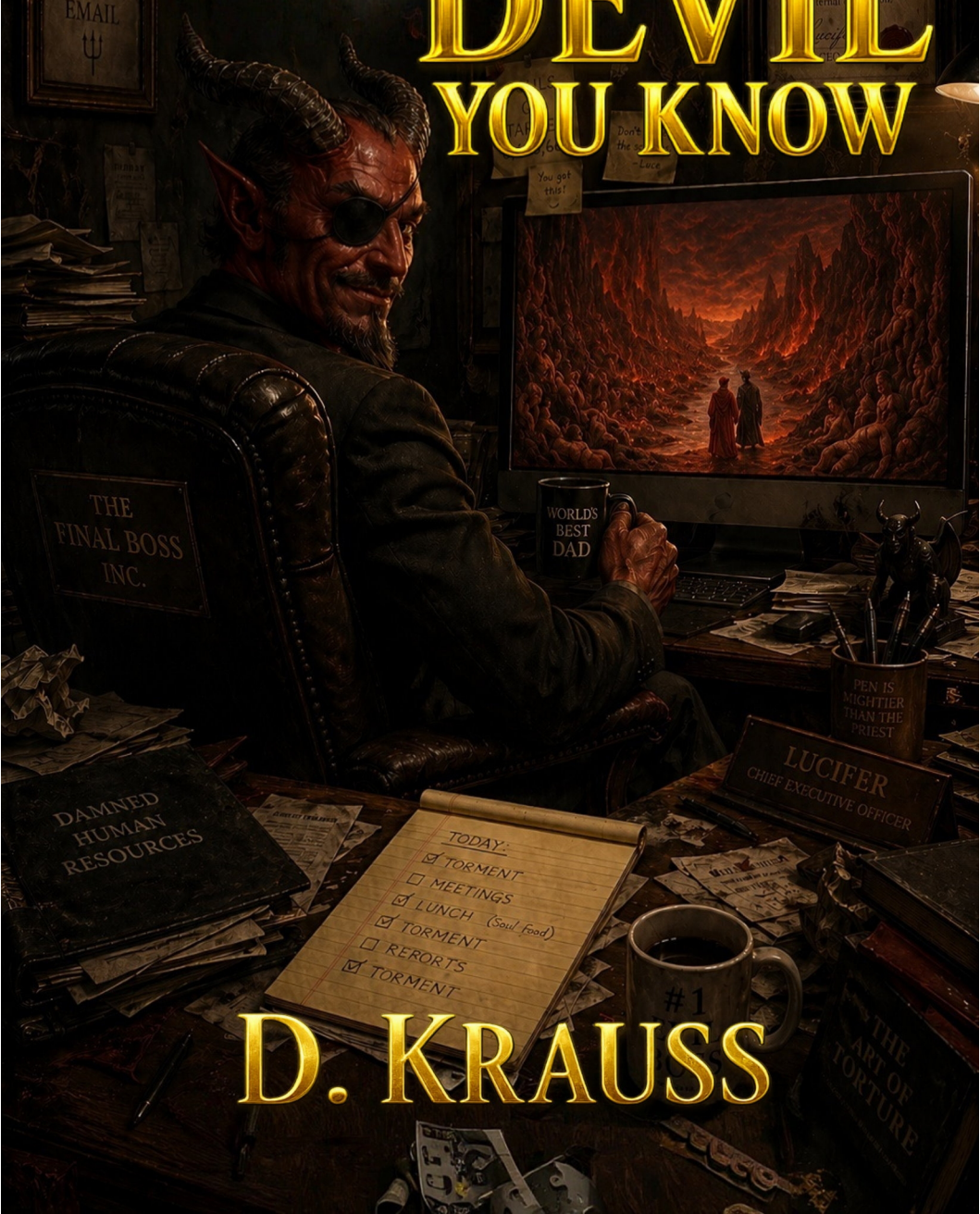


THE DEVIL YOU KNOW



D. KRAUSS

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For Jayne, Lisa, and Jeannette, the printer's imps

*Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil
walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may
devour.*

1 Peter 5:8

*"The devil's finest trick is to persuade you that he does
not exist."*

- Charles Baudelaire

"The devil made me do it."

- Geraldine

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Introduction

A blazingly handsome man, erudite, charismatic, and charming, in whose presence you could not stand for five seconds without falling to your knees in adoration. Such intellect, such reason, a voice like a pipe organ, and perfect answers to all of humanity's problems, all of *your* problems, and you would give him all you have and all your allegiance and your mind and body and soul if he simply asked for it.

That's the Devil you don't know.

The Devil you do know is the red-skinned, big-horned horrifying monster who delights in your torment and pain and seeks your suffering, your soul, your agony. For all of eternity.

He wants you afraid of him, watching for him ... so you'll miss the real him. The real monster.

Here, then, are ten stories of the one you know.





From You Shall Arise

Original in Bewildering Stories Issue 322, 2009

“And just what are you doing here?”

Serpent raised a head from the dust: an unflickering eye, a flickering tongue. “Adam,” he said, “good to see you.”

“Good to see—” The man stared down at Serpent, incredulous. He hefted a tree limb he’d fashioned into a club. “You won’t think so, in about two seconds.”

“Wait, wait, wait!” The woman dashed over and placed hands on Adam’s gripped ones. “Don’t be so quick.”

“Ach!” He threw her off, pitching the club in one direction and stalking away. “You taking his side. There’s a surprise.”

“Eve,” Serpent said, and his head danced and his tongue quivered, tasting her in the air.

“What do you want?” She spoke softly and moved the same way he did, the motion a tremor along Serpent’s tongue. He turned himself sideways, chasing it. “I want,” he said, “just to see.”



No Truck with the Devil

“Going my way?”

The Devil, leaning from the driver’s side across a seat of crushed beige leather that was probably human skin, smiled down at Eddie while holding open the passenger door. The big shifter next to the wheel had a diamond gleaming on the knob; the small shifter beside it looked suspiciously like an arm bone.

“Yep,” Eddie said and scrambled up the runner, pulling himself into the cab by a grab handle that looked suspiciously like a wrist bone. He levered into place. The leather caressed him. Eddie eyed it.

The Devil laughed, “It won’t bite you. Yet,” and grinned evilly, but how else should the Devil grin? He settled back into the driver’s seat, but not before Eddie had seen a nice sheepskin covering it, *Bound for Glory*, in lovely green script embroidered across the back. That was amusing.

As the leather molded comfortably to Eddie, inflating in the proper places, something whispered “Flee!” in his ear. He ignored it. “Nice truck,” he said.

“That it is.” The Devil shifted and the engine purred, just purred, or were those distant screams? “It’s fueled by sorrow, oiled by envy, rides on roads of endless pain. It shifts up forever, because that is the length of eternity, idles on the mutter of demons, roars its defiance of God with speeds beyond anything your pitiful science can deduce.”



The Forest In Between

“I’m seeing things not there.”

Donn balanced the teacup carefully on the delicate, bone-white saucer. Japanese, early 20th century, worth a fortune now. “What kinds of things?”

“People,” William, sitting, across from him, paused. “Other things.”

“People? Who?”

No response.

Donn waited. No need to rush the old man; he’d explain, eventually. Besides, there was much to savor here, and savoring was a patient business. Top grade loose-leaf Earl Grey, for instance, steeped in a pot matching the lucent saucer and cup and waiting on the walnut server. Belizean mahogany paneling the room, lovingly dovetailed and wainscoted, flush with the sunken chestnut bookshelves and framing the Marie-Therese chandelier, a spiderweb of crystal and lead, perfectly centered at the room’s pivot, unlit because the properly placed floor-to-ceiling windows and French doors caught the rising sun just so, glowing the service, glowing the mahogany, even glowing the old man. And the books. So many. Leather and cloth, of course, mostly first editions, many a hundred years old or more. Much to admire.

“Alma,” William said quietly.

Ah. Donn tapped a sympathetic finger on the cup. “How often?”



The System of the World

Oh, you people, you people, you come to me in waves.
I rise to blue and gold and ice, your strains and
miseries my updrafts. I soar, I soar.

All that you are radiates to the Universe and we
want it. You are soothing, a true pleasure.

I dip into one of your surges and there, the crying of
a child who has not eaten since morning, a man
lusting through the sheer windows at a neighbor
dressing, the young one knifing the old one and taking
a wallet. I savor and fly, upward, up to the limits of the
air, touching the eternal dark on the other side, and I
scream my pleasure, my proof, to the Courts of
Heaven.

You make it so easy.

Down, now, a plunging, ice-cold fall that thrills and
stimulates so when I step into the alley I am tingling
and my breath is frosty. An addled man, dressed in old
military clothes, unshaven for years, mutters and
moves away and I send him fear and uncertainty, not
too much, and he runs. I laugh.

I move to the street, and savor. The cold wind of y



Never Ends

Bradley's wife was screaming at him from the attic window. He couldn't hear her because the window was closed, but no doubt she was taking umbrage with something he was doing or planning to do in the backyard, as usual. The fuck of it; she'd died six days ago.

Not a trick of the light, not shadow play brought on by sunlight reflecting off passing car windshields and tree limbs swishing in the wind, but her, actually her, his recently deceased wife, slaving at the glass in full rage-face, her eyes so wild and bugged that Bradley was certain an aneurysm would kick in any moment. This time. He'd been sure that was the cause of her sudden keel-over-and-face-plant on the kitchen floor last Sunday. Heart attack, as it turned out, which, given her constant anger, was his second choice of causes.





Satan in his Cups

“Here you go!”

The glass of Dragon's Blood spun its way down the bar top, stopping dead perfect in front of Satan, the flames soaring from the top and curling about the bottom. Satan looked at it. “Is this supposed to be funny?”

The bartender shrugged. “Thought it’d make you feel at home.”

“Hilarious.” Satan scooped it with one talon and drank half, first quenching the fire with his lizard tongue. “Now, how ’bout a beer?”

“Comin’ right up, Luce.” The bartender flipped a pewter stein with a skull embossed on the handle off the rack, the skull opening red eyes and screaming, and topped it off with Bud Light.

“Don’t call me that,” Satan belched what was left of the fire across the bar, scorching a missionary tied into the missionary position.

“What? Luce?”

Satan pointed a ‘bingo’ finger at him. The bartender blinked. “Why not?”

“I prefer the later title.”

“Really.” The bartender clucked. “So, instead of ‘Day Star Son of the Morning’, you prefer ‘Liar’?”

“I’m not a liar, I just have a different take. But using it reminds me of my purposes which, these days, are getting harder to remember.”



The Room of Dreams

“Oh, Mark, I have found the most perfect apartment for you!”

Mom’s gush at the other end of the phone was a little more deafening than usual, and Mark pulled the cell away from his ear. “But, Mom,” he said, “I’m not looking for an apartm—”

“Oh, pish posh!”—Mark had to smile at that—“everyone can use a new apartment. Clarice will just love it!”

Clarice? “Who’s Clarice?”

“You’re so silly,” Mom chuckled, “Anyway, I’m going over there now, so why don’t you come take a look, okay?” She rattled off an address in an unfamiliar part of town and hung up, never letting Mark get a word in edgewise. Or sidewise, or any wise. Blinking, Mark slipped the phone into his pocket, then called out, “My mom has officially lost her mind.”

“Again?” a voice responded from the kitchen, and Mark chuckled. He moved to the doorway and watched Clark washing dishes. *How quaint.* The man simply would not use the dishwasher Mark bought him, a little quirk Mark found endearing, despite the cost. Everything about the man was endearing. Markandclark. No one separated the names anymore.

“This time,” Mark said, “I think it’s real. She’s found an apartment. For me and Clarice.”

“Who’s Clarice?”



The Playground Angel

“Wheeeee!” Rob clung one-handed to the merry-go-round, the rest of him precariously balanced just centimeters above the dirt. Tommy was on the other side as counterweight. Sanderson kneeled on the metal floor and pushed with a free leg while Kelly ran alongside, shoving the handlebars with all his might.

“Faster! Faster!” Rob shouted, the joy of speed underscoring his tone, and the two pushers bore into it, panting as they doubled their efforts. A whirling world of grass and scuffed dirt and blue, blue sky upended as Rob tilted his head back over the rushing ground and felt the blood pile to the top of his skull and his arms stretch with the effort of holding on. “Wheeee!”

Someone started to cry and Rob, fighting centrifugal force, pulled his eyes out of the blur and looked across the spinning platform. Tommy, of course. The little dweeb was clinging to the handlebar as if his life depended on it, which, given their velocity, probably did. His mouth was wide open to let out those big, wet Tommy sobs, eyes tight shut, but that didn’t stop the tears and—holy moly—he was white as a sheet! *Probably going to throw up.* Rob grinned in anticipation.

“Rooooob!” screamed in about ten syllables and tones from somewhere behind, no, in front, no, beside. “Let him OFF!”



The Happy and Successful Life of Harold Laney

Everyone came to Harold Laney's funeral, the mourners overflowing the chancel and the chapel and even most of the front lawn of Opp's Funeral Home. Mr. Opp, in anticipation of this, had set out lawn chairs and arranged for loudspeakers, and a few scattered screens, so the outside viewers could participate. Although it was cloudy, there was no rain because the weather wouldn't dare. This was Harold Laney, too beloved for anything like bad weather to spoil his send-off, although I thought a cool drizzle would lend the proper atmosphere. But, no, not even that, because we were here to celebrate.



The Power of Love

“Take a look at this guy!”

Lilies o’ the Field glanced over from the pile of fingernails he was sorting. “What?”

Astrid jabbed a claw at the screen. “He’s doing an incantation!”

“Pffht.” Lilies let himher know how much interest that inspired and then returned to the piles. In which he suddenly lost all interest. He stifled a yawn.

“With Albert Magnus’ book!”

“What!” Lilies rose from the stool, almost forgetting to place his stump carefully before shifting weight. After this much time, it should be second nature, but the body remembers. It remembers. “You sure?” he said as he pulled up to the desk, resting on the good wing.

Astrid tapped the screen impatiently, almost scouring the glass with the sharp end of the talon, and Lilies scrutinized the hazy image. It was getting harder and harder to find a good connection these days. The price of unbelief. He studied the tome open on the wooden desktop, the human’s bent form leaning over it and intent on the page. Certainly looked like it ... “Must be a copy,” Lilies dismissed the scene.

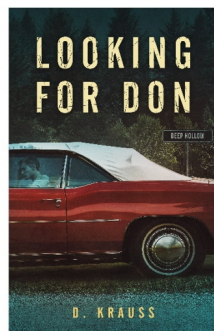
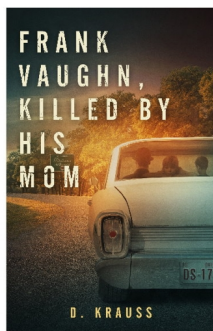
About the Author

D. Krauss was born in Germany, adopted by a military family, and so became a US citizen in a roundabout way. He lived in Oklahoma and Alabama, somehow ending up in New Jersey where he lived every single Bruce Springsteen song. He joined the USAF, staying twenty years longer than intended. He has been a cotton picker, sod buster, painter of roads, surgical orderly, weatherman, librarian, special agent, analyst, and a bus driver. D's been married over 50 years (yep, same woman) and has a wildman bass guitarist for a son. You can reach him at

<http://www.dustyskull.com>.

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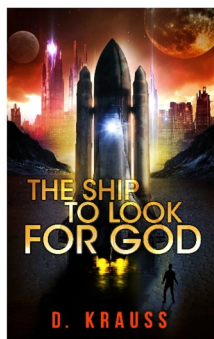
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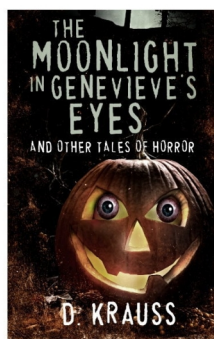
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