

WILLOWS

LOVE.
LUST.
DEATH.
REVENGE.
SUBURBIA.

HUGH O. SMITH

SWEATERVEST STUDIO



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*For my best girl.
I do it all for you.*

“There is no greater glory than to die for love.”
Love in the Time of Cholera – Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Chapter One

I TAPE THE final box shut and put it on my doorstep for UPS, thinking as I do that this is what our relationship, our life, and our plans have come to. Four sad cardboard boxes with neat labels stuck to them.

As I close the door, I glimpse the UPS truck turning onto my street. I watch for a minute as it slowly cruises down the block then stops in front of my house. I can't bear to watch the stuff be carted away so I close the door and drop wearily onto the couch. All morning I've busied myself with the task of packing the stuff away and now that it's done, I can't help but gaze around the room.

It looks empty.

No, not empty exactly. Lifeless. My furniture is still here and so is the television and stereo. Those were my contributions, the things every home has, things you don't have to think too much about. All the things you have to consider a bit more, the things that make a home, artwork, pictures of family, everything that gave the house personality is packed away and on the doorstep waiting to be taken away. Those were Tami's contributions. Those things gave the house life and personality and made it a home. Soon they'll be on their way back to her, just another set of boxes in a brown truck with bar codes slapped on them. Just...stuff.

The events of the past few weeks run in a loop through my mind. Love. Heartbreak. Sex. Betrayal. Violence. Death. They sound like the recipe for a great Lifetime movie but they're what my life has become. No, it wouldn't be a Lifetime movie. My story is too raw, too horrifying, and too damn scary. It would have to be Showtime, HBO, or Netflix. Somewhere where the audience wouldn't gasp in horror and write in to the network to complain after they experience the depravity. It would be an edgy late night film with minutes' worth of disclaimers before the first credit rolls.

I wish this were a movie, maybe then I would have a chance at a happy ending.

The doorbell rings but I stay glued to the couch, too weary to rise. If this were indeed a movie I would answer the door and Tami would be standing on the doorstep holding one of the boxes I'd put out.

"I think you're... I think we're going to need this," she'd say.

"Are you sure?" I'd reply.

She would hang her head, and then look up at me with eyes filled with regretful tears.

"Yes my love, yes!" She would answer dramatically as we melted into each other's arms.

The credits would roll as I took her in my arms and in the background, the UPS truck drives down the street and away from our home without our boxes. As I pictured the idyllic scene, the doorbell rang again and I cursed myself for a damn fool for even daring to dream about a happy ending. This was real life. There was no Jerry McGuire "you had me at hello moment" in my future.

I open the door to see a trim, brown-uniformed driver standing with electronic clipboard at the ready. The boxes were already stacked neatly on his hand-truck.

"How's it going Mr....Carrington?" The driver said, glancing at his clipboard for my name. "I have your packages ready to load. I just need you to sign here and we'll be good to go."

He points to a spot on his clipboard then hands it to me along with the electronic pen. I run the pen over the spot he points to and my signature shows up black, pixelated and unrecognizable on the tiny screen. I hand it back to him and he presses some buttons and then sticks it in a pouch on his belt.

He smiles and nods goodbye and I watch him wheel the boxes down the driveway to the waiting brown truck. He starts to load the boxes and I close the door, unwilling to watch my former life carted away.

For the rest of the afternoon I haunt the house drifting from room to room like a wandering spirit. I watch television, listen to music, check e-mail, and surf the net. Nothing occupies my mind for very long and I finally give up and lay in bed, knowing there's no way I'll be able to even approach anything resembling sleep but at a loss for what else to do. Once again, my mind turns to the happenings of the last few weeks and I marvel, for the hundred thousandth time at the turn my life has taken.

As I thought about the past, the sleep that I believed was impossible thankfully snuck up on me but was unrestful and filled with dark disturbing dreams. I wake a few hours later and lie still in the dark, trying to put the nightmares out of my head. In time, I manage to purge the images from my mind but I'm unable to shake the haunted feelings of heartbreak and approaching doom. My stomach growls and reluctantly I leave my bed and trudge downstairs to make myself something to eat. I don't have much of an appetite but I hadn't eaten for hours and appetite or not, my body needs sustenance. I make myself a sandwich and sit in front of the television.

The DVD with TAMI written on it in large bold letters was where I'd left it and the sight of it turns the sandwich to cardboard in my mouth. The Tami DVD was only the first in a stack that sat on my coffee table, and like the Tami DVD, each had a name printed on it with a black Sharpie in the same reckless handwriting. I still hadn't decided what to do with them. The decision should have been easy, considering all that had happened but I had some more thinking to do before I figured out my next move, if indeed there was one to make. Next to the DVD's was a stack of books, journals that I should have been reading but I'd neglected and were gathering dust. I wasn't ready to read them yet. To do so would force me to admit my failures, the mistakes that I knew I would never stop regretting. Mistakes made in this house, in this very same room. I swallowed hard and pushed the barely-touched sandwich away. No matter what I did, how I tried to occupy my mind with other things, the memories came to me. I was too tired, too heartbroken, and way too weak to fight them anymore so I sat back and let them have their way.

Chapter Two

I FOLLOWED ANGELA, thinking as I did that only a week ago this scene would have been impossible. A week ago, life was good and my future was mapped out in front of me. A week ago, I was in love. But who was I fooling? I was still in love. Very much in love! But not with the woman who now so eagerly led me to the bed I used to share with my fiancée. So shouldn't there have been something inside me screaming that this was wrong?

Conscience maybe? No? Then love certainly.

Nothing did.

Well, that's not entirely true. There was a still small voice inside telling me to stop but it was too still and much, much too small. It didn't have a chance against the heartbreak. So, when we arrived at the bedroom and Angela began to undress me, kissing my skin as it was exposed, a part of me reveled in her touch and craved more.

It was nighttime but the full moon streaming in through the window provided more than enough light for her to see by. She undressed me slowly, kissing and caressing each exposed body part. Soon, my clothes were in a heap on the floor and I pulled her close to return the favor, but my trembling hands made clumsy work of the buttons and zippers. She stood patiently, and in time her jeans and shirt joined mine on the floor and she stood before me in matching bra and panties. The underwear was lacy blue and beautiful but woefully inadequate for her voluptuousness. Her breasts spilled over the tops of the bra and the cheeks of her ass bullied the sheer material of the panties aside and sat exposed. My hands still shook slightly but I undid her bra on the first try and it dropped to the floor, then I ran my hands over the smooth skin of her ass and up her back. Her honey skin shimmered in the moonlight and I drank in the sight of her large beautiful breasts, took them gently in my hands, and kissed them lightly. I got on my knees and pressed my face into the valley between her legs and inhaling her fresh, clean, scent. I gently worked the panties down her thighs and she lifted her feet to rid herself of them. I pressed my face between her legs again and tasted her. She stiffened, and then arched her back in pleasure as my tongue explored her private places. She motioned for me to stand and I did and she pressed her body to mine, kissing my chest as she caressed across the width of my shoulders then slowly traced the contours of my biceps with a beautifully manicured fingernail. I breathed deeply, closing my eyes as her soft, expert hands moved down my forearms then explored the ridges of my abs and then down my hips and across my ass. For a second I wondered why she was doing this but she must have sensed my reticence and kissed me and I didn't think anymore.

My bed stood waiting and she led me to it and motioned for me to lie on my stomach. I did as she wanted then gasped as she got on her hands and knees over me and used her tongue to trace slow circles up and down the length of my spine. As she kissed and licked her large, full breasts moved down my back, blazing twin trails for her tongue to follow. My skin burned from her tongue and tingled where her perfect nipples touched.

"Turn over mi Amor," she said when she had kissed and licked every inch of skin on my back.

The sound of her voice somehow broke the spell I was under and I found my voice.

"Angela..." I began, some feeble attempt maybe to put the brakes on the situation, but she covered my lips with hers, kissing them one moment then teasing my tongue with her own the next. She tasted sweet, tart, and right and wrong all at once.

"Angela...we should..."

She stopped, looking at me with one raised eyebrow.

“We should what, Marc?”

Our faces were almost touching and I looked into her eyes, trying to be stern and concentrate on not feeling her naked skin burning on mine.

“We should stop. We should stop before this goes any further,” I said.

She sighed in exasperation and lay down next to me. She was silent for a few moments before her restless fingers began to trace lazy circles on my chest.

“Marc. Do you think they stopped before they went any further?” She asked.

“You’re missing the point Angela...”

“No. I think you’re missing the point,” her voice was low and even. “Do you think they stopped?” She asked again.

I said nothing. I knew the answer all too well. She had a point. Did Tami even think about me for a moment before she broke my heart? I doubt it.

“Angela I don’t know but...”

“But what?”

“But we just...shouldn’t. It’s not right!”

Her hand still rested on my chest and I shrugged off then sat on the edge of the bed and squinted in the dark, trying to find my clothes. My pants were by my feet and I grabbed them and stood up.

“I ask you again. Did they stop? Did they care about anyone else’s feelings but their own?”

“Angela...please...”

“I understand how you feel,” she said.

“How can you, Angela?” I asked. “How can you really understand how I feel right now? My heart is telling me one thing and my body tells me another. A part of me wants to run out of this house and find my fiancée and forgive her anything - another part of me hates her for what she did and wants to stay here and fuck you all night. Please let me know how the hell you can understand that Angela, I’d really love to hear it.”

Her mouth opened as if she wanted to say something but she said nothing, instead she rose from the bed and approached me.

“Trust me Marc, I understand.”

Her voice was a low whisper and her face was a mask of pain equal to my own and hinted at a hidden heartbreak. Before I could ask about it, she moved closer to me took my pants from my hand and dropped them onto the floor once again.

“I understand,” she said again, with her face against my chest.

“I understand,” she said, running her hands down my stomach and between my legs where my erection was growing larger and harder by the second.

“I understand,” she said, as she knelt in front of me and took me in her mouth. I let the bliss wash over me, but a part of me still knew it was wrong. Soon, she rose, led me to the bed, and kissed me deeply. After a moment’s hesitation, I kissed her back. Her tongue teased mine then traveled to my chin, chest, and stomach. The sweet taste of her lingered in my mouth and on my tongue. She straddled me then we kissed again, her long dark hair cascaded down and tickled the sides of my face as we embraced.

Suddenly my BlackBerry rang, alternating between the insipid ring tone and a harsh vibration that sounded like it would shake my small side table to pieces. I reached for the phone but she gently took my hands and brought them to her breasts. As large as my hands are they couldn’t contain the fullness of her breasts and they spilled forth from between my fingers like

water from a leaky bucket and drove all thoughts of the phone from my mind. A moment later, a high-pitched tone told me I had a message waiting.

The ringing began again, from my home phone this time but now I hadn't the slightest inclination to find out who was calling. Angela leaned forward and held my face tight to her chest. I licked and sucked her nipples feeling then growing hard my mouth.

The phone rang again a second, third then fourth time before my answering machine did its job.

"Hello this is Marcus I'm not home right now..."

"Harder baby, harder," she moaned, and I bit and nipped the skin of her breasts until they were spotted with angry red marks.

"So if you leave a message..."

She tensed up and began to moan harder, her breaths labored in my ear. I flipped her onto her back and lay her on the bed. She opened her legs wide and I knelt in front of her and gazed down at her body.

"I'll get back to you as soon as possible..."

I ran my hands down her thighs, caressing her soft skin. She closed her eyes and smiled as my hands ran across her thighs.

I moved between her legs until our bodies were touching. She moved her hips seductively, rubbing herself on me. My body shook with anticipation and I positioned myself, preparing to enter her.

Beep! "Marcus...Marc? It's Tami. Are you there? Marc, honey? Pick up. Please."

At the sounds of Tami's voice, I went cold.

"Marc. I'm so sorry. Please baby, please forgive me! I'm begging you!"

I looked down at the woman in my bed then hung my head, ashamed, as the reality of what we'd almost done sunk in. Angela heard the message too and stared at me as we both listened.

"Marc baby, I don't know why I did what I did. I, I wish I had a good explanation. All I know is...I'm sorry honey, we need to talk."

I was tempted to pick up the phone but I couldn't move, as Tami continued to speak.

"Marc, I asked Angela to come talk to you okay. I know you don't want to see me, but I hope you'll listen to her. Please, just listen, and then call me. Okay? Just...please call me."

The message ended and the machine clicked off. Angela's put her head my chest and soon I felt her body heave with sobs and then wetness as her tears slid down her face and onto my chest. I had nothing to say, so I only held her and tried to be strong. I tried not to think of Tami's voice. I tried not to think about how much I loved and missed her. I tried not to think about how I would go on without her in my life. I tried not to think about being in bed naked with her best friend. I tried to be strong, but my strength failed and soon both our tears flowed silently in the dark.

Chapter Three

I CAME AWAKE by degrees, my senses awakening one by one. I felt Angela's body on mine, breasts flat against my chest and her body heat warming me. I smelled her hair. The exotic mixture of shampoo and hair products, perfume, and deodorant, familiar and strange all at once. Then, music. Loud, thumping music. Down the street, a loud party was going full blast. I opened my eyes wishing with all my heart it was Tami lying next to me but knowing it wasn't so. Angela was still naked and I gazed at the outline of her voluptuousness in the dark. With difficulty, I tore my eyes away from her sleeping form and glanced over at my alarm clock, groaning when I saw that it was only minutes away from midnight.

Outside, the song ended and a new one began, 50 Cent announcing to the neighborhood he was a P.I.M.P. Despite the events of the evening I smiled when I pictured the bland neighbors in my gated community bumping and grinding to Fifty's hard beats and trying unsuccessfully to rhyme along with his raw lyrics.

Tami and I were invited to that party, and we'd planned to attend. Just like we'd planned to get married in a few months or planned for her to move into my house in a week or planned to have babies and live happily ever after. The pain began to claw its way back up through my guts and I pushed it back down and tried to turn my thoughts elsewhere.

Angela was still asleep on my chest and I gently untangled myself from her and rose from the bed. She stirred but didn't wake and I found my eyes drawn to her naked body again as I got dressed. I couldn't help but be aroused at her curves, the shape of her ass, her long hair falling wildly down her back and across her shoulders, the full breasts crushed underneath her sleeping form. I'd always thought she was gorgeous but never allowed myself to even fantasize about her. She was my fiancée's best friend after all and I wouldn't let myself go there even in the privacy of my innermost thoughts. Truth be told, I'd always had the impression she thought I was nice enough but boring. Tami and I had double dated with her and her past few boyfriends. The last boyfriend was a wide receiver for the Jets. The one before that was head of Blah & Blah for some hip-hop record label, and the one before that was a professional mixed martial arts fighter. Narcissistic assholes every one, but you could never call them boring. Personally, I didn't consider myself a boring person but I had to admit my life was not what you could call exciting. I was a normal guy, I was doing well in my career, but I certainly couldn't compare my life to a professional cage fighter or a football player. Angela stirred in her sleep and I wondered again why she was here.

Angela and Tami had been best friends since their freshman year in college. Didn't that friendship mean anything to her? What a hypocrite I am, I thought, talk about the pot calling the kettle black. Tami and I were more than friends. Much, much more. Didn't that mean anything to me? If I hadn't heard Tami's voice on the answering machine Angela and I would have made love for sure. No. not made love. I made love to Tami. I would have fucked Angela. I would have fucked her like a whore and I know it would have been great but what of the aftermath? As much as my body wanted her, even now, I was thankful that we hadn't gone past the point of no return.

My cell phone lay on my nightstand, dark and lifeless. The phone calls and text messages from Tami had kept coming, steady, and unrelenting and soon I'd turned it off. I powered it on again as I left the bedroom and made my way down the stairs. The phone lit up and took a moment to find a signal before it informed me that I had nineteen voice mail messages and twenty-five text messages. I ignored the voice mails and began to read the texts.

They were from Tami and all basically the same, sorry, forgive me, I love you, blah fucking blah. Each was more pleading than the last and they broke my heart. Tami sounded truly remorseful and I wanted so much to call and hear her voice. Her number was the first one on my speed dial, all I had to do was press the button, and she would tell me how sorry she was. I would do the same, and we could bring in the New Year together and go on with our lives and our plans as if this had never happened. But, even with my finger poised above the speed dial button I knew this was only a fantasy. There was no forgetting, much less forgiving. At least for now. The image of what she'd done was permanently tattooed into my mind. It would be a very long time before I could begin to forget. I deleted the text messages one by one, wishing as I did that it was that simple to delete her from my heart.

"She sent me a million text messages too."

Startled, I turned to see Angela, still naked, standing behind me, pink iPhone glowing in her hand.

"It's almost midnight, shouldn't we be drinking a toast to the New Year?" She asked, sitting next to me.

I turned my head and sidled away trying not to see or feel her naked body.

"Get dressed Angela."

"I want to drink a toast."

"Get dressed Angela," I said again, moving across the couch and away from her.

She slid across the couch and put her hand on my knee.

"Get dressed Angela."

"Why? You didn't have any problems with my body a couple of hours ago. As a matter of fact you seemed to be enjoying it. Anyway, we should be drinking a toast."

"A toast to what? The huge mistake we almost made?"

"Don't you have any champagne here?" She asked, ignoring my question. She rose and walked over to the bar.

"Didn't you hear what I said?" I asked.

"Ah here we go," she ducked behind the bar and emerged with a bottle of Veuve Clicquot.

"No. Leave that alone. I was saving that."

I grabbed the bottle from her and put it back behind the bar.

"Saving it for what?"

I didn't answer. The sight of her body was a distraction and I removed my t-shirt and handed it to her.

"Here put this on," I said.

She took the shirt from me reluctantly and put it on. The thin fabric of the shirt was no match for the swell of her breasts and her large nipples. They pushed against it straining the material. If anything it made the sight of her even more erotic and I looked away.

"You didn't answer me Marc. Why are you saving the champagne? For you and Tami to bring in the New Year? Maybe for your wedding? Look around, is she here? Do you think she still wants to marry you?"

Up the street, the party slipped into third gear as Beyoncé began to call for all the single ladies.

"Well?" Angela said.

I gave her a nasty look then turned away so she wouldn't see the emotion on my face.

"That was cruel of me. I shouldn't have said that, I apologize," she said with a sigh. She moved closer and put her arms around me.

“Forget it.”

“Marc, I know I’m not the one you want to be with right now. Believe me, I’m fully aware of that. This isn’t the way I thought I would be bringing in the New Year either you know, almost screwing my best friend’s fiancé.”

“Former fiancé,” I said quickly.

“Former best friend,” she corrected herself.

“In a few minutes it’ll be 2010. Why don’t we get that champagne, pour it all over our bodies, and bring it in right?” She said, kissing my back to punctuate her words.

I said nothing, but I didn’t stop her from kissing me and I didn’t stop her when her hands snaked around from behind and reached under the thin elastic of my boxers.

As Angela’s hands worked, I looked around the room. Tami was everywhere. There were pictures of her on the walls and in frames on just about every surface. Tami at work functions, Tami on vacation, Tami at her parents’, Tami with my niece and nephews. She was in the décor, in the color of the walls, in the furniture she’d picked out.

I don’t know if Angela somehow sensed my thoughts because she came around to face me.

“Marc,” she says, gently turning my head toward her. “Relax! It’s all right. You deserve this.”

She raised my hands from where they hung limp at my sides and put them on her breasts and I left them there, unmoving. Then, as if of their own volition, my hands began to move, caressing her softly.

“That’s it baby. I know I’m not the one you love, but tonight, just for tonight, maybe you can pretend I am. Tonight, I’ll be anyone you want,” she said.

“Why are you here Angela? Why are you doing this?” I asked suddenly, removing my hands from her breasts.

“She betrayed you Marc. I always thought you were a good man, the kind of man I wished I had. She doesn’t deserve you.”

This explanation doesn’t ring true to me but before I could say anything, she raised my hands, put them back on her breasts, and moved them in circles on her chest.

“You deserve this,” she said again. “We deserve this.”

She kissed me and I hesitated for a moment then returned the kiss passionately.

I felt her smile as we kissed. “That’s it baby, I know you want me.”

Down the street, the DJ slowed the party down and Janet Jackson began to sing in a low and breathy voice about needing some discipline. Angela’s hair partially covered her face and I gently moved it then wound it around my hand and pull it roughly, jerking her head back while my other hand rubbed and caressed her breast. I used thumb and forefinger to squeeze her nipple, applying greater and greater pressure until she gasped in pain.

“That’s it baby, that’s the way I like it!” She said, smiling. Taking her by the arm, I pulled her over to an armchair and bent her over the back of it, then slapped her ass hard, one two three times, until it was red and welted.

The pictures of Tami on the wall seemed to mock me. An incredible anger overcame me causing me to slap Angela’s ass again, much harder this time and she squirmed in pain.

I positioned myself behind her and she opened her legs wider to receive me. A framed photo of Tami sat on a small side table in front of us and I looked into Tami’s smiling face as I drove myself roughly all the way inside Angela. Outside, the music stopped for the countdown to the New Year and I could suddenly hear the voices of my neighbors laughing and enjoying

themselves. I wondered if they could hear Angela's screams of pleasure as I continued to ram myself into her without mercy, and decided I wouldn't care even if they could.

My home phone rang and the machine turned on at the same moment my neighbors began the countdown to the New Year. My message played then the beep sounded and I heard Tami's voice.

"Marc baby, I don't know where you are..."

"10!"

I look deep into the eyes of the picture of Tami and I pull out of Angela and drive myself back into her.

"I just want you to know..."

"9!"

Angela is moaning and screaming my name and I smack her ass.

"I love you more than anything..."

"8!"

My mind begins to play tricks on me because when I look down suddenly it's Tami bent over my chair with me deep inside her.

"I don't know what to tell you Marc. I...I just want a chance to talk to you...to tell you my side of the story."

"7!"

I grab her hair and I pull her head back, hard.

"We were so good together..."

"6!"

I grit my teeth and try to fight my anguish and slap Angela/Tami's ass hard in frustration. A tear slips out and I wipe it away quickly.

"Maybe we can be again...I don't know."

"5!"

Angela writhes and bucks and I use one hand to hold her by the back of her neck while the other keeps the firm grip on her hair. More tears join the first and they fall onto Angela's back.

"I don't know baby, I'm so confused...If you just, just please..."

"4!"

I smack her ass even harder and she screams as I keep up my frenzied pumping, trying in vain to shut out Tami's voice.

"Forgive me...talk to me...give me a chance to explain."

"3!"

Angela moans in pleasure and her body stiffens up. She backs up to meet my thrusts and I can tell she's close.

"Don't stop baby please oh my God please don't stop!"

"Marcus..."

"2!"

Her body shakes violently and I feel the climax building deep inside her and coming at her fast.

"Happy New Year. I love you."

"1!"

Angela's orgasm hits her violently, causing her body to buck and spasm.

"OHGODMARC MARC MARC FUCK MARC JESU SSSSSSS."

"HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!" My neighbors scream.

The neighbors go wild singing *Auld Lang Syne* at the top of their drunken lungs. I look down at Angela, still breathing hard, completely spent from her enormous orgasm. I wipe my tear-stained face, pull out of her then go over to the answering machine, and press the delete button. I don't know if Angela heard Tami's message, if she did she gave no sign. I decide I don't care. The champagne is still behind the bar where I left it, I get it then take the still-spent Angela's hand, and now it's my turn to lead her to the bedroom.

End of Excerpt

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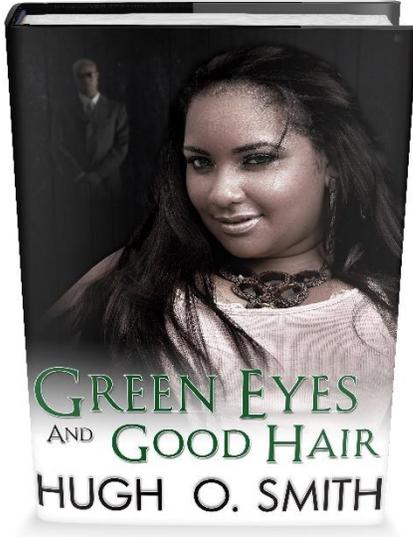
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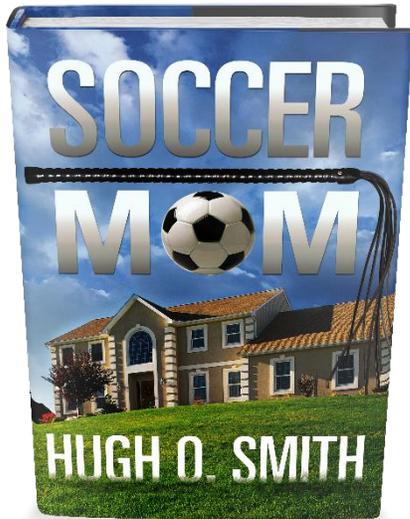
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Hugh O. Smith is the author of *WILLOWS*, *GREEN EYES AND GOOD HAIR* and the novella *SOCCER MOM*. His short fiction story *SOUTH SOUTH BRONX* appeared in the Zane anthology *Caramel Flava II*. Hugh is a contributor to the writing site TheWriteLife.com. Originally from Jamaica, Hugh credits his Jamaican upbringing and its rich storytelling tradition for his writing inspiration. His website is www.hughosmith.com

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E-mail: hugh@hughosmith.com

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Sweatervest Studio

hugh@sweaterveststudio.com

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