

Six Stories Up is a collection of original and entertaining tales that will take you to Paris in the 1920s to find an unlikely muse, to a small bar in Seattle's Georgetown neighborhood for a slightly different Vietnam War story, to a fishing story and the power of believing, to the life and struggling times of a forger of rare books, to a very personal service for women of means, and finally to to a police interview room and a the confession of a thief that shows, at times, crime really does pay.

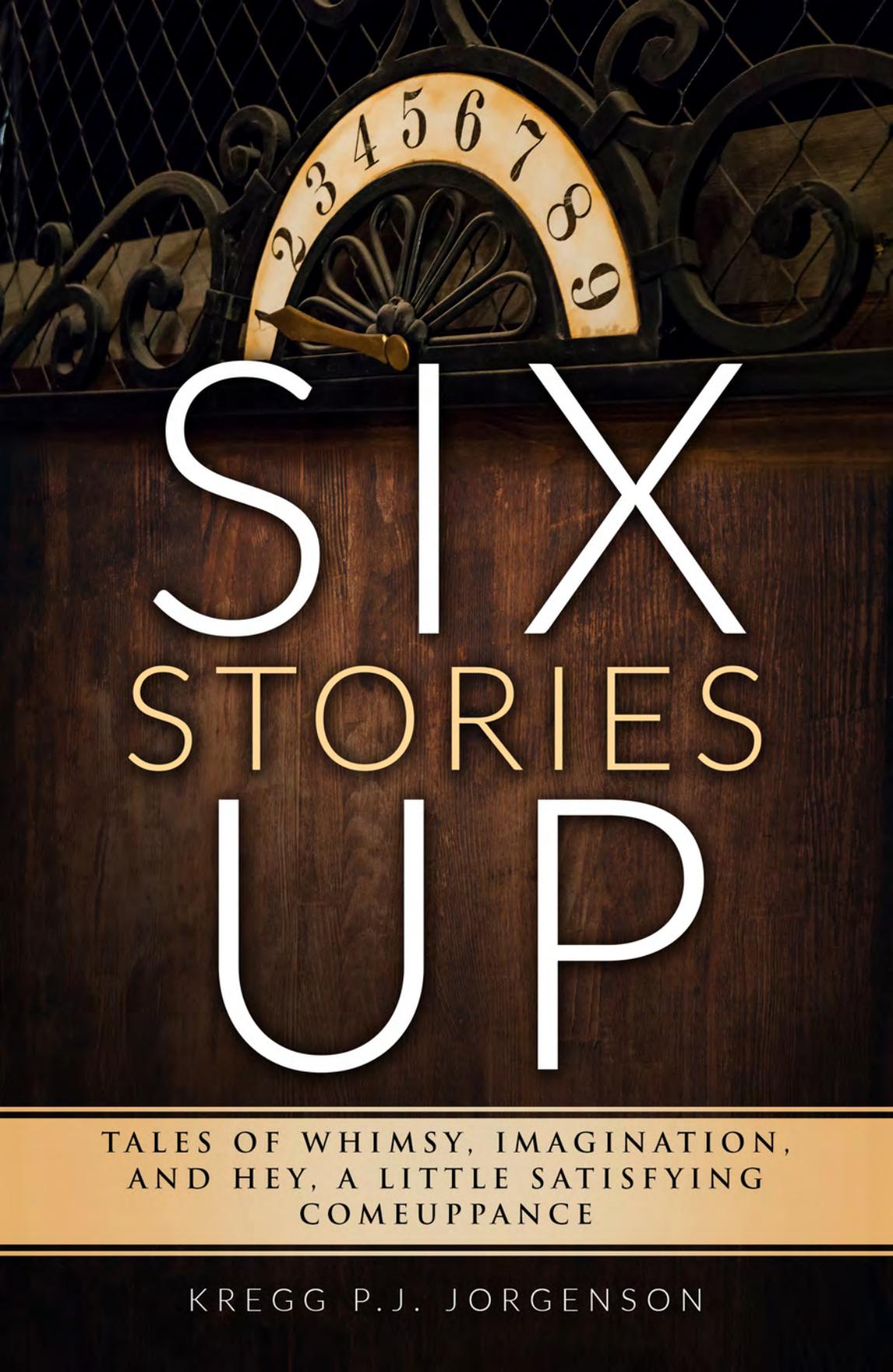
SIX STORIES UP, Tales of Whimsy, Imagination, and Het, a Little Satisfying Comeuppance

By Kregg P.J. Jorgenson

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The background of the cover features a dark, ornate metal archway with a clock face. The clock face is semi-circular and has numbers 2 through 9. A wooden door with a dark wood grain is visible below the archway. The title 'SIX STORIES UP' is centered on the door.

SIX STORIES UP

TALES OF WHIMSY, IMAGINATION,
AND HEY, A LITTLE SATISFYING
COMEUPPANCE

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Comeuppance

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In For a Penny

A light rain was falling as I came out of the restaurant in Long Island and was making my way around to the side parking lot towards my car, but I didn't mind. Even with my head down I was in a great mood. The business meeting over dinner had gone well, and life, well at least this kind of life I was enjoying at the moment, was very, very good.

Fortune doesn't just favor the bold. It favors those who get off their butts and make things happen.

"Excuse me," the stranger said, coming up behind me. "Do you *half* the time?"

"Sure, no problem," I said, looking at the face of my watch as I started to turn around to tell him. "It's nine twent..."

The sucker punch caught me in the left kidney and almost doubled me over. The second punch, a just as vicious right hook in the same exact spot, did.

His *have* that came out *half* should've been a clue. If I hadn't been thinking about the pile of money I was going to rake in from the pending sale I had just lined up over dinner, then maybe I might've caught the accent in time, and maybe I might've been able to make a run for it instead.

It was one too many maybe's and I was so lost in my soon-to-be good fortune that I hadn't immediately recognized the familiar voice. I hadn't placed it until it was regrettably too late. That regret also came with a bruised kidney that would have me pissing blood for a day or two.

I hadn't counted on them tracking me down way out here on Long Island, and certainly not this soon. That costly mistake left me sucking air and hurting.

The Cossack, who had hit me, stepped in and braced me against my car door to keep me on my feet. He was tall, heavily muscled, and brooding. With his tracksuit, gold chain over a wife-beater tee shirt, close-cropped hair, and assorted cheap tattoos, he had the look of someone who spent considerable time in a piss-smelling gym or prison exercise yard, or quite probably, both.

He was holding me upright so as not to draw any unneeded attention from passersby or anyone coming out of the restaurant, not that it was a worry this time of night. The valet stand and well-lighted main lot were around the corner in front of the restaurant. I'd parked in the overflow lot next to the ocean dunes to save myself a \$10 tip.

Most people in the Hamptons didn't park their own cars at exclusive restaurants, but then I wasn't from the Hamptons. I lived in the city, so I parked in the overflow lot to keep from having to tip some smug, pimply-faced Frat boy who'd most likely rifle through my glove box, pocket some of my best CDs, or make copies of my house keys to rob me blind when, oh, I don't know, I'm out trying to hustle up some business. The ten bucks could've saved me a lot of pain and trouble.

The overflow lot was out of view from the restaurant's ocean facing plate glass windows. Besides selling an expensive menu, the restaurant was also selling ambiance, so the dim light and placement of the reserve parking lot was purposely overshadowed by ocean views that were designed to present a more tranquil setting.

The late October storm that was moving in obscured the attack as well, all of which a second, slightly smaller man who accompanied him, had taken into consideration. Both the hitter and the second man with his shaved and polished baldhead, ugly smile, and distinctive voice were all too painfully familiar.

“And do you *half* Mister Bodolev’s fucking money, Mister Rayne?” said the bald man that I only knew as Dimitri.

Dimitri’s accent was an odd sounding mix of street cred New York and Slavic bent English, thick with elongated syllables and distinctive cadence that was nowhere near as thick as the other Russian who had sucker punched me.

Even in the thin light I could make out the faded blue and black ink prison gang tattoos of daggers and religious crosses that were peeking out of the big thug’s tracksuit collar. If the dagger tattoos that were meant to show that he had murdered someone, or a few someones, with a knife for his gang weren’t enough to frighten me, then the man’s cold disposition did. That I clearly meant nothing to him was evident in his eyes and indifference on his face, but fortunately for me, I meant something to his boss.

“No...not all...not all of it,” I said to Dimitri, still wincing in pain and trying to steady my breathing. “\$200,000 is not easy to come up with all at once. That’s... that’s why I’m here. I’m getting it. I’m getting it! Jesus, there’s no need for this.”

“Is reminder, yes? You should not play this *Hiding Seek*.”

“I’m not running or playing *Hide and Seek*. I swear to God, you’ll get your money.”

“That is good,” Dimitri said, gently patting my face and smiling. “This restaurant,” he said, turning to admire the chateau-like setting, “it is very nice, yes? French, I think?”

“Yes.”

“And expensive too.”

“It’s not all that expen...” I was saying when Dimitri’s smile disappeared and the friendly pat was replaced with a hard slap that cut me off and immediately shut me up.

“Is expensive,” he said correcting me, emphasizing the point for my purpose. This time I remained quiet and instead, nodded.

“I like Costco hot dog meal,” he said, changing the subject as he turned to his partner. “And you, Alexi? You like Costco hot dog meal?”

“*Da*. Polish hot dog meal was good meal,” said the big man still holding me in place. “Good price.”

“Yes, is good price,” echoed Dimitri. “But no more Polish hot dog meal. Is shame.”

“*Da*, is shame,” agreed the shorter man. Back to me he said, “So, tell me, Mister Rayne, how can it be that you can you afford to eat at expensive French restaurant like this when you owe Mister Bodolev so much money?”

His ‘so’ came out ‘*zo*.’

“I was just meeting someone arranging to get the rest of the money!”

“Is coincidence, then, so are we,” laughed the bald man. “So, you *half* this money, yes?”

"No, not yet," I said. "Soon."

"Then yes, to next Saturday, the money?"

"I'm not sure I'll have it all by..."

A third punch from the big man to my left kidney cut off the rest of my excuse. I let out a painful groan.

"The answer is *yes, yes? Da* in Russian. Say *Da*."

"Yes, *Da*," I wheezed. "Jesus, *Da*..."

"That is good also," said Dimitri. "Because if you do not have in *seffen* days then we will find you again. You understand?"

"*Da, da, yes, fucking da!* You don't have to hit me again."

"Do not be so foolish as to make us have to pay you a surprise visit wherever you are. Long drive from city in bad traffic, no good. Puts Alexi in bad mood."

Dimitri turned and said something in Russian to the muscled mobster, who produced a slithering smile as he pulled out a folding knife and thumbed it open with practiced proficiency.

Christ! I was panicking as Alexi bunched up my shirt and tie in his left hand and pulled my face into his. He smelled of too much cheap cologne, stale tobacco, and what I suspected were a few shots of Stoli as he brought the three-inch serrated blade up to my eyes and slowly tapped the small scar on my left eyebrow where he'd cut me the last time.

This time, though, he refolded the knife back into its handle, chuckled, and then thumped me three times in the proximity of my liver in rapid succession with the closed knife to make sure I got the message. He didn't need the blade to make his point. I was nearly pissing myself.

"The next time you run from us and we have to find you, yes?"

"I won't run...I didn't run. I only came out to Long Island to raise the rest of the money, that's all. You'll have it soon. I swear."

"And *soon* means you will be back in the city with the money next Saturday, *da*?"

"Yes, *da*, yes..."

"That is good," replied Dimitri.

"I'll...I'll have the money."

"Of course you will." Dimitri's 'will' came out '*vill*.'

Back to his buddy he said something in their common tongue that had Alexi straightening out my bunched up coat, shirt, and tie, before he too, playfully slapped me on the right side of my face. Alexi's smile was more like that of a pit bull daring you to take away his favorite Michael Vick chew toy.

"Oh, and car keys, please." Dimitri said, holding out right hand and wiggling his fingers.

"My, my keys?"

"Yes, to your car. To help pay down your debt."

“How...how will I get home?”

Dimitri shrugged. “If you can afford to eat at expensive restaurant, you can afford to call Uber.”

“Uber, is German?” asked a perplexed Alexi.

“Cheap taxi,” said Dimitri and then back to me added, “Keys?”

He was holding out his hand, palm up, and wiggling his fingers.

I dug my key ring out of my coat pocket, removed the key to my condo, and then handed the car keys over to the Russian thug.

“Please to move?” he said, motioning me away from the car door. Dimitri unlocked and opened the car door, climbed in behind the steering wheel, adjusted the rear view mirror, and then fired up the engine.

The driver’s side tinted window opened with an electric whirr. “*Seffen* days and no more *Hiding Seek*,” Dimitri said, reminding me one more time before closing the window.

The car tires kicked up loose, wet gravel as he sped out of the parking lot and out onto the street. Alexi followed in a large, black Chevy Tahoe with darkened windows, big rims, and an unnerving reminder of my fate if I didn't comply. The red taillights of both vehicles soon faded to a blur in the distance with the now drizzling rain.

“Seven days,” I said, hunched and holding my bruised side. "Great...just fucking great."

I glanced at my wristwatch. It was 9:40, the train station was a half-mile away, and the clock was ticking.

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There was time to do the situational math on the long train ride back to the city. I had \$20,000 and change in my checking account and another \$50,000 in cash stashed away in my wall safe.

The 50K was non-bankable money I'd made under the table and had hidden from the IRS. It was hidden because I knew that banking anything over ten grand would set off electronic bells and whistles that would trigger the Feds taking a closer look at me, and that money that I hadn't declared as income. I hadn't declared that 50K and more at times, as income to the IRS because in my line of work I occasionally skirted a few laws, let alone declaring to anyone how I'd actually made that money. In theory, I'm an honest broker of fine, rare books, while in fact my skirting a few laws looks more like a fan dance. I'd made some money and I spent some money trying to make a whole hell of a lot more.

The trouble was I was a little short on funds at the moment so the 50K wasn't enough.

Worse still, my condo was leased, so there was no way for me to get a bank loan against it. I could maybe max out my credit card for another 15K, and could come up with another three to four thousand by selling my Jaquet Droz- *Grande Seconde* wristwatch with the Crocodile band at a substantial loss, or back to the shop where I'd purchased it the year before, where the dealer, I'm sure, would point out every scratch and flaw to get a better deal.

Other books by Kregg P.J. Jorgenson

Acceptable Loss: An Infantry Soldier's Perspective

M.I.A. Rescue

LRRP Company Command

Very Crazy, GI

Stalking the Dragon- 10th Anniversary Edition

Clubs are Trumps- the Road from Plum Run

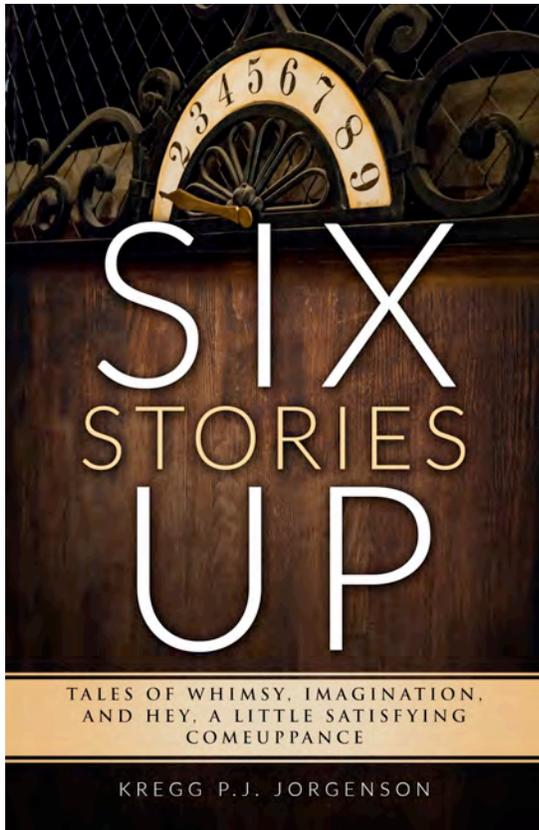
The Next Mirage

Don't Mind Me, I'm Just Passing Through

1886- The Last Campaign

Do Bomb Dogs Dream of Chasing Butterflies

Chasing Romeo- The Jungle War



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