

## YOU WILL NEVER BE FREE OF ME

By Henry Corrigan & Charlie Cole

Trigger Warning: This article addresses mental health

In the last year, I have leveled up in a number of ways. I saw my first novel, *A Man in Pieces*, a book that began with my nightmares and ended with catharsis, finally published by Darkstroke Books. I became an admin for a small but growing collaborative of horror writers on Facebook and I came out as bisexual to quite literally everyone I know.

Every single one of these steps was hard. There were many times when I didn't know if I would make it, or if it would even be worth it if I did. I still don't know how they're all going to play out. In the months since those milestones, some people have cheered for me, others ignored my efforts, and some took the time to say what I was doing was shameful and that I was endangering my family. (I will let you guess which reaction belongs to which accomplishment.)

And this, I think, is one of the most basic, and essential, elements of horror. Uncertainty. Not the monsters who roar at us from the dark, but the soft, sweet, even kind voice that whispers, 'You'll never know if what you're doing is right. So stop. Just stop and leave it all behind.'

That voice terrifies me and it's only by writing about it that I keep myself together.

Living with mental health problems (in my case, depression) means I get overwhelmed easily, even on those days when I get a good night's sleep. It means never knowing when I'm doing too much or not enough, especially when I already have a hellish full-time job, a writing career to get off the ground and a wife and daughter I'd actually like to see sometimes.

It means constantly dividing my attention, sacrificing one thing for another because no matter how late I stay up or how early I rise, I can never get to everything.

Right now, looking back, I know I've done a lot. In the last few weeks alone, I've queried almost a hundred agents for the children's books I have to offer. I've built word of mouth for *A Man in Pieces* and added ten thousand new words to my Work in Progress, an LGBTQ science fiction epic I've been writing for the last six years. I've crafted new posts of encouragement and inspiration for horror writers on Facebook, appeared on a number of podcasts, and set up interviews with other, more established writers so we can encourage each other to keep going.

Yes, all told, I've done a lot.

But none of this has stopped me from struggling to come up with an ending to this article.

In *A Man in Pieces*, I wrote about a stoic father-to-be and his abusive boss, who were risking their lives, sanity, and families in a game they were never meant to win. In the Horror Writers Collaborative, I've asked writers to tell me about the fight they can't survive, or the villain they can't escape.

I've done all of this not because I think depression is insurmountable, although it may feel that way at times. But because even in living and surviving, we are never free of it. It is, perversely, the one thing we can be certain of. And it's only by reconciling with it that we get to the end of each day and the beginning of the next one.

It is, what I call, a gallows' hope. The ability to keep trying even though you will likely fail. It's also the reason that I return to horror and continue to travel up and down in it. Because while it may be dark and can be *bleak*, staring at this strange uncertainty is deeply comforting for me. It reminds me that while I may not know how to bring things to a close, others might, and it

is okay to them ask for help. To step aside and let someone like Charlie Cole put out the lights because maybe, just maybe, we can shine a little more brightly on our way through the door. Charlie, take it away.

I used to hate horror. That scurry in the middle of the night was probably me running out of yet another room where a film was playing that I refused to see any more of. Now, I relish the genre even if it still gives me nightmares from time to time. Growing up, for me, also meant growing into mental illness. The more I understood of my depression and anxiety the more I appreciated scary stories, they helped me make sense of my own creeping shadows. Maybe I wasn't fighting off any demons or conjuring the dead, but within my mind it often felt like it. A chorus of unrelenting dialogues that slashed and tore away at my sense of self, suddenly crystallized all the violence I was seeing on screen or within books. Horror has a knack for turning fear into therapy and then turning that into enjoyment. That is its great magic trick.

Now, my tastes align with the darker and weirder the better, so obviously I have leaned all the way in. I have never been afraid to confront my own inner turmoil and neither has horror. It exists to force us to process, manage, and be honest about our worst fears, but in a safe way and someone who is mentally ill can appreciate the cathartic space that provides. Dark narratives are necessary to heal both individual and collective psychic wounds of existence, and nothing accomplishes that more than horror. I now run into all the rooms I used to flee from.

### **Henry Corrigan**

Henry Corrigan is a bestselling author, husband, father, and bisexual creative who loves to write every kind of story. His debut horror novel, [A Man in Pieces](#), won the Silver Medal from Literary Titan and went to #1 in U.S. Horror Fiction on Amazon. Always an avid reader, Henry started writing poetry in middle school, but it wasn't until he started writing erotica in high school that he really learned the mechanics of writing. What started out as private stories and love letters, soon became publications in anthologies. As a member of the LGBTQ community and an obsessive, overly anxious person living with depression, he has dedicated himself to providing readers with the diverse, flawed characters that he desperately needed when he was growing up. Above all, he wants to be known for not staying where he's been put. To always surprise people, especially himself. Because that's what makes it fun. The feeling that even he doesn't know what he's going to do next.

### **Charlie Cole**

Charlie Cole (She/Her) is an emerging writer, photographer, and editor who loves exploring all the dark and strange corners of humanity. Although she loathes to admit it she would definitely be killed first in a slasher movie. If you're interested in more from her she can be found on Medium( <https://medium.com/@charliecole> ), Instagram ( @charliecolepresents ), and Twitter ( @CharlieTheCole ).