

# MISCONCEPTIONS OF HELL

LIFE CAN BE A LIVING HELL



*The Collected Stories of*

**MICHAEL ESSINGTON**

Author of *Last One To Die* and *Life Won't Wait*

## PRAISE FOR MISCONCEPTIONS OF HELL

“When Michael sent me the first chapter (Bo Herne) of ‘Misconceptions Of Hell’ to review, I intended to sift through it quickly and say something good before going to bed. I ended up being sucked into the story and was thoroughly immersed to the end. The characters were instantly familiar, the story short (I always hate when great stories end), yet rich and full. It’s the kind of short story that can easily adapt into a full-length film (wink, wink). I await anxiously to read the remainder of what looks to be Mr. Essington’s finest writing yet. Sonomabitch just gets better and better!”

- Rikk Agnew; musician/vocalist, Adolescents, Christian Death

“Michael Essington is one of my favorite writers. This book is old-school, hard-boiled fun. Characters are awesome, stories great, every page made me laugh. And I learned an important lesson, which is – trust the fucking cards!”

-James Frey, author of *A Million Little Pieces* and *My Friend Leonard*

“Michael Essington’s short stories are contemporary tall tales, new urban legends that might be spun by a guffawing host to attendees at some summer night barbecue in a suburban enclave on the outskirts of any major American city. Sagas that keep the guests laughing until it hurts. But, as the liquor finally takes hold, they realize their genial host is really raising up a mirror to their own miserable lives. These stories are not about someone else, they are about THEM.”

- Chris D., author of *Dragon Wheel Splendor and Other Love Stories of Violence and Dread*

“Michael Essington writes with both fists, burning stogie clenched tightly between his teeth. Words fly like bullets and the pages are bloody and raw. Don’t come around looking for niceties and politeness because you won’t find them here. Pour a drink and brace yourself for the action. Better make it a double.

-Chris Walter, author of *Liquor & Whores* and *SNFU: What No One Else Wanted to Say*



**MISCONCEPTIONS  
OF HELL**

**ALSO BY MICHAEL ESSINGTON**

NONFICTION

*Last One To Die*

*Life Won't Wait*

*Born Frustrated*

FICTION

*Under A Broken Street Lamp (with David Gurz)*

*Misconceptions Of Hell*





# MISCONCEPTIONS OF HELL

*Life Can Be A Living Hell*

MICHAEL ESSINGTON



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*This books is dedicated to those that were  
there and those who heard about it later . . .*

*My children, Breana and Lucas, don't ever do what I've done*

*My parents, Beth and Thomas Essington*

*My brother Erik and my friend*

*My wife Elizabeth*

“Where junkies prowl, where the tigers growl . . .  
in search of that much-needed blow.

Where winos cringe on a canned-heat binge . . .  
and find their graves in the snow.”

- Lawrence Fishburne, *Deep Cover*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Back in the early part of the 1970's, my mother watched a few kids. Babysat. By doing so she was able to be a stay-at-home mother and be around us more. She was able to be room mom for me during one of my elementary years. And, I believe, all of my brother's grammar school years.

During this time, my mother started watching the Millers. Mark, Sharla and Chris. Mark was creative and imaginative. He started us on this type of free-flowing storytelling. Rather than staring at a TV, Mark would start very simply, "OK, Erik and I are in the garage building a time machine, what happens next?" And any of us that had an idea would jump in, "Then we saw dinosaurs." Or "We built a car out of wood and drove it around the world."

I remember talking to Mark about a year and a half ago on Skype. He was about a year or two older than me. That night over the computer Mark was still the guy I admired. An incredible artist and a wonderful storyteller.

In the middle of our conversation, he stops and said, "Hey, do you remember when Erik and I were working on that time machine in the garage?"

"Yeah, from the broken bicycle parts?"

"Yeah. I had Erik convinced it would work."

"That's great."

"Who knows, maybe it did."

Our Skype connection cut out. And I'd read online about a year later, Mark had passed away after a battle with cancer. Upon hearing the news, I was upset that he kept it a secret. But I am equally happy to have known him and had the chance to contribute to many of his story sessions.

Sit down with a friend, sibling or child and tell stories until you fall asleep.

Michael Essington, 2016



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**1**  
**BO HERNE**





## BO HERNE

### PART ONE

One afternoon this lob comes banging through my door. I was resting, sleeping or fighting the nods. I wish, now, that I locked the fucking door. Anyhow, it's a business and I need the dope money.

My name is Bo Herne. I'm a private detective. As if there are public detectives. I had an office in Downtown New Orleans. About ten years ago, I shuttered that office and headed west to Los Angeles. Anyway, this broad plops down in the chair in front of my desk and says, "I have a big fucking problem."

"Don't we all."

"Do you want my case or not?"

I opened my desk drawer and shake my bottle of Oxys. There were three or four left in the bottle. "Yeah, I want your case." "So listen, my husband came home from work the other night. Put his paycheck in the dresser. We ate dinner, watched some TV and then went to bed . . . Hey, are you going to sleep?"

The fucking nods. "No, I tend to visualize the case. Visualizing your home, your husband, the dresser he keeps his money. Everything."

"Um, OK. I thought you were snoring."

"Nope, go on."

"Well, fifteen minutes after we went to bed there was a knock at the door . . ."

"Who was it?"

"I'm getting there. So, there was a knock at the door. My husband goes to see who's there. It's some guy; they seem to whisper back and forth. My husband comes back to the room and says that he has

to leave. He gets dressed and goes. I peek out the window and see he's getting into a car with some black man I've never seen before."

"Go on."

"Two days later, my husband stumbles into the house. I asked him where he had been and he said he didn't want to talk about it. I want some answers."

"Give me a second." I opened the bottom drawer of my desk and pulled out my mother's old tarot deck. My mother, Aishe Herne, read the cards back in the Southern part of France before coming to America. It may just be a superstition, but I read the cards before every case. I lay down three cards.

"Jesus, what are you doing?"

"Madam, let's not bring our Savior into this. I am merely trying to get a feel for your case."

I turn over the first card, The Four of Cups: the 'sod off and leave me alone' card. I turn over the second card, The Ten of Swords: the 'oh shit!' card. And finally, I turn over the third card, The Ten of Pentacles: the 'we're all right, Jack' card. Had all three cards been bad omens, I would've thrown this broad out, the last was cool, so I'll take the case.

"All right, madam, I'll take the case. Let's start with the basics: where do you live? Where do you and your husband work? What times are you home? And . . . I charge \$50.00 an hour plus expenses."

"What expenses?"

"Gas mileage. Hotel fees if the case takes me out of town. And miscellaneous movie charges in the hotel."

"And why do you have to know where we are?"

“Madam, as of right now, according to my cards, this case is two-thirds shit. I need to know where everybody is and where they’re supposed to be.”

By the questions this woman is asking I can tell she grew up poor and is now middle-class. Most of my clientele are upper middle-class to rich. How do I know this? They don’t ask so many fucking questions. I say, “\$50.00 an hour,” they say, “Fine, hurry up and solve my case.”

I put my tarot cards back in their box and the box in the desk drawer.

I take out a form from the middle drawer in my desk. I paid \$10.00 to have this broad at Kinko’s type it up for me. Front side all the client stuff, job, home address, etc. Back side is about the person I’m investigating, job, home address, etc. It’s real high-end looking shit. Another \$4.00 and I had a hundred copies made. I still have ninety-five left.

While the client filled the stuff out, I excused myself. Went to the can and took my rig out of the towel cabinet. Tied off and shot up.

## **PART TWO**

For a second there I didn’t think I was going to be able to get up. Walked out to the hall to the vending machine, pulled the screwdriver out of my back pocket, and jimmed the lock, the door popped open. I grabbed a Red Bull. Shut the door, locked it with the screwdriver. Downed the Red Bull, threw the can behind the machine.

Walked back in the office with firecrackers popping in my head. The client was finished with the form and tapping her foot impatiently. Uppity bitch.

“I see you filled everything out. Very nice. OK, now I’ll need a deposit from you.”

“A deposit?”

“Yes, you want me to take your case for free? We kind of discussed

this already, did we not?”

“Fine. How much?”

“\$500.00 upfront and we settle the balance when I’m done.”

“\$500.00?!”

“You know what? I think it’s time for you to take your ass out of my office. You don’t want a detective, you need a boy scout. I don’t have the time or patience to fuck around with you.”

“OK, I’ll pay, but you better give me results quickly. Do you take checks?”

“Absolutely not.”

As Mrs. Garvey walked out the door, I thought to myself “I’d watch Netflix and chill with her,” or whatever the kids are saying nowadays.

I picked up her information sheet, Mr. Garvey is a pharmacist. He’s been one for about twenty years. Some little pharmacy near the Beverly Center. These guys, if they’re good, can pull down 100k a year. Why was she so cheap? Is Mr. Garvey hiding money or are they just cheap? Time to turn on the answering machine, put the “Out to Lunch” sign in the window and check out the Garvey residence.

### **PART THREE**

I walked down three flights of stairs to get to the street. Once there, my buddy, the neighborhood wino, Hank is sleeping just a few feet from the door. I gently nudge him with my foot.

“Hank. Hank, it’s time to go to work.”

“Uh, what the fuck? Son of a bitch.”

“Hank, it’s me Bo. Time to work.”

“OK, boss.”

“Same rates?”

“Yes. Bottle of Night Train and \$5.00 an hour. Don’t try to talk me down.”

“Deal. Let’s get the car from around back.”

Hank has more or less been my partner for the last two years. He handles stakeouts and subpoenas for me. I pay for his monthly gym membership, that takes care of his showers and I pay him five bucks an hour plus his booze when he takes an assignment.

I stop by the grocery store a block away from the Garvey residence.

We steal a cart. Hank starts strolling down the street, rummaging through trash cans looking for recyclables. Hank starts at the end of the block, the Garvey home is within eyeshot. I leave Hank one of my \$30.00 burner phones. My cell is programmed as his only number.

## **PART FOUR**

One hour and half a cart full of plastic Pepsi bottles later, Hank calls:

“Hey, this Gravy guy . . . “

“Garvey.”

“Yeah, him. He just came speeding into his driveway. Jumped out, went into the house. A second later, another car pulled into the driveway. Gravy came outside . . .”

“Garvey.”

“Yeah, him. The two guys start arguing. Then the second guy leaves.”

“Was the second guy black?”

“Fuck man, I’m a drunk not a fuckin’ racist. I don’t know.”

“Look, Hank, Mrs. Garvey said a black guy showed up at the house one night and took Mr. Garvey with him. I need to know if that’s him.”

“I’ll find out.”

Hank headed for the Garvey place. Mr. Garvey stepped outside as he heard the squeaking of the shopping cart in his driveway.

“Hey, why the fuck did you let that fuckin’ black guy talk shit to you? He ain’t from around here!”

“Get off my property.”

“Ah fuck man, he your god damn boyfriend? Some kinda lovers spat?”

“You son-of-bitch!”

Mr. Garvey slammed the screen door. He went inside to either call the cops or get a gun. Hank knocked over his cart and hightailed it outta there.

Once Hank was a block or two from Loehmann’s he called me.

“Hello?”

“Yeah, listen – it was a black guy and they might be lovers.”

“What the hell, Hank? I asked you to find out if the other guy was black, not where his dick has been.”

“Hey man, I’m a detective, you know. I have ways of getting people to react.”

“Hank, you’re not a detective. You do my grunt work. Not homosexuality confirmations.”

“Look Bo, don’t talk shit, I’ll fuck you up.”

“All right, Hank. Where am I picking you up from?”

“Across the street from the Beverly Center.”

Once I have Hank safe and in the passenger seat, I ask questions.

“So what happened?”

“Listen, I couldn’t just go up and ask if he knew a black guy. So, I acted drunk, I mean drunker and racist and homophobic. He didn’t seem to care when I asked if a black guy was there, but once I made the comment about them being gay – he lost it.”

## **PART FIVE**

I wanted to make one more check on the house. Before going back to the office.

“Duck down, I’m going to drive by the Garvey place.”

As we cruise by Garvey runs out of his house, jumps into his Mercedes S-Class Sedan. Peels out, slamming into Hank’s shopping cart, knocking bottles and cans everywhere.

S-Class, Mr. Garvey is pulling down much more money than his wife is aware of.

We circled around the block. I parked five houses down.

I popped the trunk, pulled out a flattened cardboard box. Taped it up to look like a package, but left the bottom folded, not taped. Also in the trunk I had a UPS uniform that I bought from the Goodwill. I changed, and took the “Package” to the door. In the



rush, Mr. Garvey forgot to lock his door. I knock, and in case of any nosy neighbors, I say aloud, "Sure, Mr. Garvey, I'll bring your shipment in for you."

Once inside I film the layout of the house with my phone. I check for suspicious stuff in the usual places, closets, garage, etc. Nothing out of the ordinary. Then I decide to check under the bed in Mr. Garvey's love nest. B-I-N-G-O, Bingo was his name-o. A suitcase full of Oxycotin.

I bring my box in from the living room, and I start filling it with my brand new favorite pills.

Just as I was about to drop the last bottle when I heard a click and some asshole shot a hole in my fuckin' box.

Well, just in time for the show. Our elusive friend, Mr. Black-Chap. And his friend Colt 45, Gold Cup Series. Yeah, I've seen a few of these.

Mr. Chap has his Colt aimed between my eyes. Not sure if I'm afraid or slightly pissed that those Oxys on the floor are going to waste. Just over Chap's shoulder I see Hank with a wine bottle over his head. Hank is wobbly, not quite steady enough to lay the bottle down on Chap's head.

## **PART SIX**

Chap must have seen me looking at Hank, he turns around and Hank lands the bottle, full-force into his mouth. A muffled scream and three flying teeth later. Mr. Chap is tied to a dining room chair. Hank saved my ass. Hope he doesn't ask for a raise.

While I did the tying, Hank found that the two nightstands in the master bedroom had safes built into them. Instead of heavy-duty safe-drilling or trying to use a stethoscope, Hank simply pulled the safes away from the wall, and using a combination of an ax and sledgehammer he peeled the backs off of them.

The first safe had \$250,000.00 in cash. The second safe had a video machine that recorded from two hidden cameras in the bedroom. And two videos tapes. One was a very humdrum performance of the Garvey's bumping uglies. The second tape was of Mr. Garvey drilling Mr. Black-Chap as if his life depended on it.

I have many puzzle pieces, excess money, lots of Oxy, infidelity,

but I don't know what the whole story is. What's the fuckin' crime?

I take the money, pills and both videos and tape everything up in my box. I give Hank some money and a key to my storage unit on Beverly. I took the storage unit out in Hank's name. I hide odd things there, and they'll never traced back to me. Hank isn't aware of owning a storage unit.

So, now I'm standing here wondering what to do next. Mr. Garvey may or may not be coming back soon. Mr. Chap here in the dining room needs to wake up and tell me something. And after the gunshot in the living room there is a good chance the friendly neighborhood police might swing by very soon.

What to do, what to do?

While I waited for Hank, I scrubbed the place down, vacuumed and pushed the safes back against the wall. The only thing out of place is Mr. Black-Chap. I heard a car pull up, I looked through the peephole – the cops. Through the kitchen there is a door to the garage – I go. Once in the garage, I see a skylight with a handle. I shimmy up the shelves, reach for the handle and climb up to the roof.

I know I can make a jump from here, but there's a cop in the front yard. I see Hank stumbling up the sidewalk. By the "stumble" I can see he used the money I gave him to buy some booze. He sees me, I signal to be quiet and point to the cops. He nods. He real loudly yells:

"Hey, is this where those gay dudes live?"

The cops come out and tell him to leave or they'll arrest him. While he has them distracted, I jump to the neighbor's roof. Run across and climb down the other side.

I meet Hank back at the car. I pop the car in reverse and get off the street, any second they will discover Mr. Black-Chap.

## **PART SEVEN**

Hank and I wait in the Loehmann's parking lot. The police scanner is on.

“African-American suspect cuffed and put in car. Officers doing a last inspection of property.”

That’s when it hit me, the “African-American suspect” is the answer to this case. We raced out of the parking structure. We returned to the Garvey house, Hank jumped out of the car and into the police car and floored it. I drove the opposite direction. We’d meet up at the Beverly Center, and move our suspect to my car and go back to the alley behind my office.

Over the police scanner we heard:

“Police vehicle stolen. Car 121. Be on the lookout.”

Hank sat in the passenger seat with his bottle of Night Train and I sat in the driver’s seat. I started our interrogation.

## **PART EIGHT**

It started slow:

“Fuck you, I got nothing to tell you.”

“All right, Hank, let’s wrap him in plastic and get ready to dump him off the pier.”

“What the fuck? Wait, what do you want to know?”

“The basics. You, Garvey, the money, the drugs, anything I might have missed in the middle.”

“And who’s gay?”

“Fuck, Hank, give it a rest.”

“OK, OK, it’s like this – I met Garvey six or seven months ago at a party in Brentwood. This old guy throws these swinger parties about once a month for gay guys or guys that are secretly gay. I met Garvey. All night he followed me around, saying shit like he was rich

and he could be my sugar-daddy. We hooked up.”

“Does that mean you fucked?”

“Fuck, Hank, give it a rest.”

“Yeah, we fucked. Anyway, a month or so later I lost my job and was on the verge of being flat-broke. I tracked Garvey down and went to his house to ask for some of that sugar-daddy help. Anyway, once I ask for the help, he leaves with me. We shack-up at the Beverly Hills Hotel for a few days. Then he rents me an apartment down the street from his place.”

“OK, that’s how you know him. Great, we’re missing the information about money and drugs.”

“After a month Garvey comes clean and says he isn’t really rich, but he had a plan.”

“Go on – “

“He is the head pharmacist at his job. His idea was to get me a delivery job at his distributor. He would order huge quantities Oxycontin. I’d get the delivery, bring it as I was pulling up, he’d enter into the computer that the order was cancelled. I’d give him the stuff, and then shred the invoice. The distributor bills twice a year. After hours we’d, sometimes, take the Oxy bottles fill them with aspirin and put them on the shelves in the warehouse. The order is cancelled, no paperwork, and the bottles get taken to a different pharmacy. We’d keep the Oxy and sell it at the “Once a month” parties in Brentwood.”

## **PART NINE**

Before our suspect says anymore, the police scanner squawks again:

“Shots fired. 324 Westbourne Dr.”

Without saying a word, we knew what that meant. Our suspect started to cry. I opened the back door and uncuffed him.

The scanner spoke again:

“Male Caucasian. Possible suicide. Ambulance en route.”

Our suspect started to walk down the alley and stopped.

“Are you guys going to tell the cops about me?”

“No, old chap. You’ve been through enough. We don’t know you, you don’t know us. Right?”

“Right.”

That’s the last I saw of our suspect. Now, I had to figure out a way to break the news to Mrs. Garvey.”

## **PART TEN**

“Mrs. Garvey?”

“Yes?”

“Bo Herne.”

“Yes?”

“I have some bad news.”

“Yes?”

“Mr. Garvey was found dead at your home about twenty minutes ago.”

Sobbing. “No, oh god no. What happened?”

“I’m not certain. I wasn’t able to crack your case. I’m going to give

a phone number, ready?"

"Yes."

"This is the Beverly Hills Homicide Department. Ask for Detective Parker, he'll fill you in on the details. I'm sorry for your loss."

"So, how do I pay you."

"Mrs. Garvey, you owe me nothing. I didn't solve your case."

"Thank you, Mr. Herne. God bless."

## **PART ELEVEN**

I fished out fifty bucks and gave it to Hank. I stumbled down the alley. Got to the end, turned around and waved. Am I a dirt-bag for keeping the money and dope? Yeah, I'm a junkie, pure and simple.

I did a little poking around, you know, pay this guy to talk to this guy and this guy asks this guy. Anyway, turns out Mr. Garvey took out a million dollar life insurance policy two years and a day before his suicide, somehow it was payable. Mrs. Garvey sold the house, took the money and moved to New York.

I took half of the money Hank and I pulled from the house and put it aside for him. One day when he's tired of the streets, he'll use it.

I really should have known when I flipped the Ten of Swords card that this case would turn out to be a pile of shit.

Mom always said:

"Boy, listen to the cards."





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