

Floating

A smorgasbord of short stories by
the author of *Milijun* and *Saving Paludis*

Silently in the Night

Clayton Graham

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FLOATING a short story from 'Silently in the Night'

Rain poured onto the dark and narrow street. The houses and front gardens were small, crushed against each other as if giant hands had squeezed them together in an attempt to increase their number along the length of the pavement. Glistening tarmac reflected a full moon, which competed with the unnatural glow from the street lamps to illuminate the man-made canyon. The lights had little effect, for the road was lifeless and damp, deep in the clutches of nightfall.

The low rumble of cars hissing along nearby watery highways was the only sound to break the silence of the night. Devoid of activity, the street was an island, surrounded by unseen motion which cared little for its existence.

Suddenly, from a house at the far end, light flickered as a door opened and a shadowy figure stepped into view. Footsteps padded down the small path and paused at the gate, as if uncertain whether to proceed. The gate squeaked and a man stepped into the light of a street lamp. He lit a cigarette and started to walk swiftly. A face, ashen and drawn, watched from the window of the house he had left.

From the car parked in darkness further down the road there was enough light to see the figure was tall and male. With the merest flick of the ignition key the engine started and the vehicle crept slowly along the kerb. The lights remained off. It resembled a huge black slug moving along an old, well-worn slime trail.

The walking man didn't turn as the car approached from behind. Why should he? It was just a car on a suburban street. Only as the engine suddenly roared into life did he abruptly spin around. For a second his eyes widened with terror as the dim shape leapt towards him. Then there came a sickening thud, and his body arched impossibly over the bonnet, hit the windscreen and slammed heavily onto the road.

The car, still without lights, accelerated down the empty street and disappeared into the rain-swept night. The body lay in a pool. Blood seeped from the head to join the rainwater. Silence reclaimed the street. The pale face at the window vanished and the front door of the house opened once more, releasing a feeble yellow glow which momentarily relieved the shadows. Footsteps came again, lighter, hesitant.

A siren split the night asunder like the wail of a banshee heralding an imminent death. Inside the ambulance, the pallid face that had stared from the window looked down at the comatose body as the paramedics worked like demented souls.

"Will he live?" the face asked nervously.

No answer. Just activity, wrestling with death.

The gates of the hospital yawned and swallowed the ambulance. For a while the rain stopped and the siren died with it. Feet came rushing, tense voices invaded the dank air. The

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ambulance was left empty, suddenly a useless thing.

It would be true to say that it was some time before Dave realised he was dead, or at least dying. It finally hit home when he found himself surveying his own prone body, besieged by mysterious gowned figures, from a position just below the ceiling. The trouble was, he didn't feel dead. Quite the opposite, in fact, he felt euphoric. He appeared to be in a dreamlike state with all senses aglow – full of the joys of life! He watched fascinated as intense figures worked feverishly to resuscitate the shell that was his body. He could not recall how he came to be there.

Suddenly there was a light beckoning and a tunnel to travel. He left the operating theatre and found himself in two minds; aching to approach the light but not sure whether he ought. Looking down again he saw he was in an adjacent room, one with seats and toilet signs. Two figures stood there, face to face, arguing. There was something familiar about the woman – Laura, good God! – it was Laura, his wife. She looked terrible, so pale and tired. The other person, the man, he didn't recognize. He could hear the words drifting towards him as though ascending a deep canyon, ethereal and distant.

"He's still alive, you fool," Laura was saying in a fierce whisper. "You only did half the job." She was slim with red hair, sharp featured, wearing a green sweater and blue jeans.

"For Christ's sake," the man responded. "I hit him as hard as I could. Maybe I should have used your car – it's bigger." He gripped her hard, a hand on each shoulder, his eyes staring fiercely into her face. "No need to panic yet. The car's safely home and his injuries are severe."

Laura's eyes suddenly filled with tears. "You're a bastard, you know that?"

Dave felt himself moving towards them, exploring the man's features, searching again for recognition. Unshaven, slightly overweight, the beginning of bags under his eyes. He definitely didn't know him.

"I've had about enough of this place," the man was saying. "I only came to make sure he was dead." His small eyes pierced Laura. "We shouldn't be seen together. I'll phone you when the hoo-ha dies down."

Laura winced at his choice of words and sat down heavily on a bench as the man left. She started to cry, huge, heaving sobs which shook her shoulders and ran from the room to echo along the sterile corridors of the hospital.

Dave couldn't feel any hate, although a vague instinct told him he had a right to do so. He watched her, full of tender love and pity, wondering how long the deception had been going on. Then he was back in the tunnel and approaching the light. The feeling was sweet as he moved along and peaceful fulfilment swamped his soul. Growing ever closer to the brightness he perceived an uncertain shape at the far end and his heart sang. But suddenly he stopped. How could he give up the fight after what he had just witnessed? He floated in the

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tunnel, undecided as to which way to go.

Someone in the group around his body whispered, *"Yes."* Frantic hands flitted between various machines. Dave felt the light diminish to a pinpoint and then vanish. He was back home, soul and body together once more.

The room swam into focus through slitted eyelids and, as the entire spectrum of human senses invade his body, he felt suddenly confined by the jungle of apparatus surrounding him. He opened his eyes wide and saw people smiling around his bed.

"Welcome back, Dave," a voice said.

"Well done, mate," came another.

Dave closed his eyes feeling suddenly very tired. Several of the gowned figures left the room. Others fussed around his bed, still fiddling with equipment. He dozed, intermittently waking; a strange, alien sleep pattern. Time passed.

Abruptly, it seemed, Laura was at his bedside, tears still in her eyes, perhaps the same ones as before. It didn't matter. She bent over to kiss his forehead. Dave summoned all his strength, grasped her slender neck with both his hands and squeezed as hard as he could.

Laura hovered just below the ceiling.

[Get the complete novel 'Silently in the Night' here](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



As a youngster growing up in the cobbled streets of Stockport, UK, Clayton Graham read a lot of Science Fiction. He loved the ‘old school’ masters such as HG Wells, Jules Verne, Isaac Asimov and John Wyndham. As he left those formative years behind, he penned short stories when he could find a rare quiet moment amidst life’s usual distractions.

He settled in Victoria, Australia, in 1982. A retired aerospace engineer who worked in structural design and research, Clayton has always had an interest in Science Fiction and where it places humankind within a universe we are only just starting to understand.

Clayton loves animals, including well behaved pets, and all the natural world, and is a member of Australian Geographic.

Combining future science with the paranormal is his passion. ‘Milijun’, his first novel, was published in 2016. Second novel, ‘Saving Paludis’, was published in 2018. They are light years from each other, but share the future adventures of mankind in an expansive universe as a common theme.

In between the two novels Clayton has published ‘Silently in the Night’, a collection of short stories where, among many other adventures, you can sympathize with a doomed husband, connect with an altruistic robot, explore an isolated Scottish isle and touch down on a far-flung asteroid.

He hopes you can share the journeys.

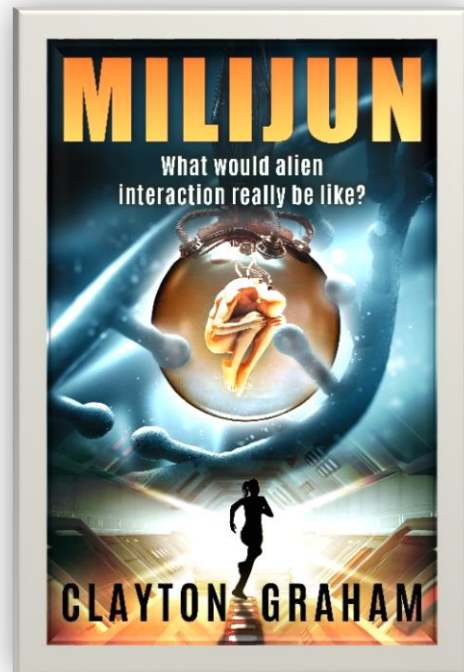
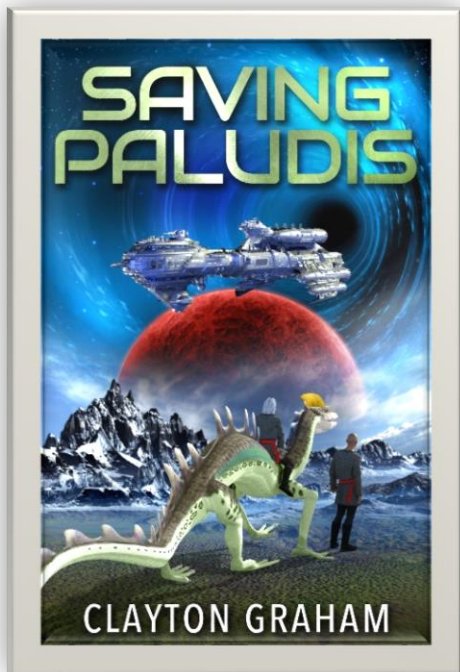
Clayton’s web site is: <https://claytongraham.com.au/>

You can follow Clayton on Twitter [@CGrahamSciFi](https://twitter.com/CGrahamSciFi)

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