

a Field Researcher Universe Short Story

A.E. Hellstorm

The Civilian Files

ANOTHER WORLD

Maria 1990



COPYRIGHT

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and events are the products of the author's imagination or are used in a fictitious way. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or people, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. This book is loosely inspired by the world created by H. P. Lovecraft. Another World. Copyright 2021 by Anna Eleonora Haglund Hellström. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

Published by: Hellhag Productions

Cover layout by: Hellhag Productions

Poster layout by: Hellhag Productions

Websites: www.thefieldresearchers.com

www.hellhagproductionswdc.com

Patreon: patreon.com/HellhagProductions

Facebook: www.facebook.com/A.E.Hellstorm

Pinterest: www.pinterest.com/ahellstorm

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my characters, who do not always live easy lives.

To my husband, who never fails to cheer me on.

To my children, who make my life so much happier.

To Hades, Artemis, Isis, Einhörjar, Hermes, Poseidon, Oziris, Loke, Python, and all my Missan.

To Lucky, Roxy, Jack, and Paro.

To Raspberry Homestead where I, for once, feel at home.

The Field Researchers series

Published work

Novels

In the Hands of the Unknown	<i>Claire, 2008</i>
Lost	<i>Octavius, 2010</i>
Of Darkness Born	<i>Caesar, 1973</i>
The Living Wall	<i>Caradoc, 1969</i>

Short Stories

The Thin Man	<i>Newton, 1991</i>
Another World	<i>Maria, 1990</i>



The Field Researchers series

Upcoming work

Novels

In the Shadows	<i>Odette, 2011</i>
A Crack in the Door	<i>Team O, 2012</i>
In Deep Waters	<i>Odette, 2014</i>
Not for Your Eyes	<i>André, 2015</i>
Crossing the Line	<i>Claire, 2002</i>
Greece in My Heart	<i>Claire, 2005</i>
The Game is On	<i>Omega, 2006</i>
In Enemy Territory	<i>Cicero, 1944</i>

Short Stories

The House in New Orleans	<i>Minerva, 1986</i>
Down the Rabbit Hole	<i>Lisa, 2003</i>

A Cody Brenner Mystery Series

Today, My Life

A Moon Magdolen Story Series

Dreams of an Old House

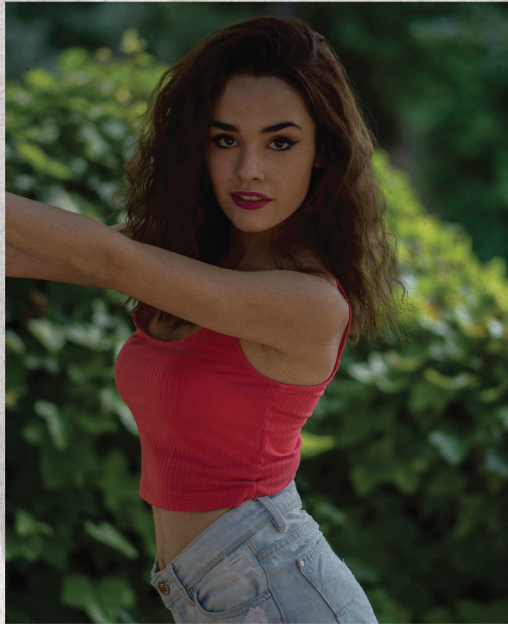
Graphic Stories

Classified Files 1-The Golden Fleece Society	<i>Artemis, 1928</i>
I Am Desi	<i>Daisy, 1921</i>

Drabbles

The Field Researcher Drabbles

MISSING PERSON



Dolores "Dolly" Santiago

18 years old, Hispanic, slim build. Last seen June 23 1990 at Wemberley Arcade wearing blue jeans, white long-sleeved shirt, white sneakers, and blue jeans jacket. If you have seen this girl or know about her whereabouts, please contact us.

If you have any information whatsoever, please call Port Haven police on this number:
733-288-1274.



If you know where Dolly is or have any information about her, please contact Port Haven Incident Room on
733-288-1274.

Another World

a novel about

the Field Researchers of the Golden Fleece Society

The Civilian Files

Maria 1990

inspired by the world of H.P. Lovecraft

by A.E. Hellstorm

Another World

Maria sat on the dirty restroom floor, staring at the poster of her missing sister, and for the first time since the disappearance, she cried. The loud pop music and electronic beeps of the arcade games and pinball machines outside the door drowned the sound of her agonizing sobs.

For two weeks, she had pretended that she couldn't care less where her annoying sister was. "What about it? She stole my boyfriend. I hope she rots in hell," had been her standard answer whenever someone asked, but during the long, dark nights when sleep evaded her, fantasized images of Dolly's tortured, raped, and dead body, crawling with insects, haunted her mind.

No! Stop it! She has to be alive, somewhere! Maybe she just ran away. Maybe she finally took the Greyhound to New York as she always said she would.

"Leaving me to become a damn dancer," Maria managed through the sobs, but she'd take that option any day if it meant Dolly didn't lay dead and rotting in a park somewhere.

She missed her, dammit! She missed her big sister, who always was there for her when she really needed it, no matter how much they argued in between. She missed her like her soul was going to break.

Maria rested her head against her knees, shutting out the screamingly bright fluorescent light, and tried to compose herself, but the tears kept on falling. It was pathetic, she thought, sitting in a dirty arcade hall restroom that smelled faintly from urine and cheap cleaning products, crying her heart out for someone who might have the time of her life at the moment, not giving a damn thought of anyone else but herself. *Or she's dead.*

"No, I can't take that," she mumbled, choking on the words. "I can't be all without her for the rest of my life. I just can't! She has to come back!"

The little voice in the back of her head whispered, *"She wouldn't have left you if you'd been nicer to her."*

Maria groaned and buried her face deeper in her arms, trying to suppress the thought, but the images came uninvited to her; how she'd walked in on Dolly and Juan kissing as if trying to swallow each other. At that moment, time instantly stopped, and the world came crashing down on her. The betrayal had ripped her apart. It had choked her, pressed the life out of her, and an eternity had passed before she could breathe again.

As soon as she'd managed to get her voice under control, she'd screamed at them, over and over again. In her mind, the words came through like a banshee's shriek, "Go to hell! Go the FUCK to HELL!"

Maria had refused Dolly's halting attempt at explaining the situation by pushing her away so hard that her sister had fallen onto the floor, scraping her left knee. It stood out in her mind now, the tiny trickle of blood down Dolly's leg.

It was the last time she had seen her sister.

"I didn't mean it," she whispered into her arms, feeling the wetness of her tears on her skin. "Please, come back. I love you."

Today, Juan had had the guts to come knocking on the door. When she'd seen him through the peephole, anger flared up, and she refused to open. He could still go to hell, as far as she was concerned. How she could have thought that she loved that despicable piece of meat was beyond her.

She didn't deny that she at first suspected him of having had something to do with her sister's disappearance, but if she knew Juan—and she was pretty sure that she did after a year of dating—he wouldn't physically hurt anyone, at least not intentionally. He just didn't have it in him.

"I'm a lover, not a fighter," he used to phrase Michael Jackson, which she once had thought silly but sweet. The more significant reason was that the police had let him go after only a few hours of questioning. Since he was Hispanic, just like her, it must mean that he had an alibi, and Dolly's disappearance couldn't be pinned on him. In a way, it was a relief. At least she hadn't dated a murderer or rapist.

Maria sniveled and wiped tears and snot from her face. "I still

hate him,” she mumbled, her voice thick and hoarse from all the crying. The sound made Dolly reappear in her mind again. Looking back at her time with Juan had pushed away the thoughts of her sister for a moment. She could barely admit how good it felt to not think of Dolly for once.

New tears welled up, this time from shame. With them came uninvited images of her sister throughout the years; Dolly hugging her, reading to her, standing up for her at school, watching silly TV shows with her, sharing make-up tips with her, laughing with her. Deep, harrowed sobs Maria couldn't stop welled out of her, and her breaths sounded like the whining of a tortured dog. *Dead. She's dead, dead, dead.* The word echoed in her mind, and with it came the agonizing knowledge that her sister never would come back to her. The despair dug its fingers deep into her; it choked her and left her breathless, gulping for air. *I'll never see her again. I might as well die too.*

“Maria.”

Her sobs stopped abruptly, and Maria sat entirely still. Had someone said her name? As she listened, she realized that the music and the electronic beeping had been silenced. It was all quiet, except for her hard-beating heart.

“Maria.”

There it was again! It came from the other side of the door. Who knew that she was in here? On unsteady feet, she stood and went to the door.

Why is it so quiet? It's like the arcade is closed.

She glanced at her wristwatch with Minnie Mouse. As always, she was slightly embarrassed to wear it, but Dolly had given it to her when she turned ten and wearing it now felt like a good luck charm. She watched Minnie's black arms ending in large, white gloves pointing at the time.

It's only six—five more hours until closing time.

Maria put her ear toward the door but couldn't hear anything.

“Hello?” Even though she tried to control it, her voice sounded like she was afraid it would, shaky and hoarse as if she had been crying for hours. She glanced at the watch once more.

Not hours, just twenty minutes, she thought with some surprise.

“Maria,” came the voice again.

Surprised, she jerked away from the door. “Juan?” she asked, not at all sure it was him. “I told you I don’t want to see you!”

“But someone wants to see you,” the voice said in a reasonable, somewhat pleading tone.

It didn’t sound like Juan, but the realization drowned in the impossible hope that Dolly had come back to her. Numb of fingers, she fiddled with the cold doorknob for several seconds before it finally clicked, and the door opened.

At first, she didn’t understand what she saw, expecting as she was Juan and Dolly in the mint green corridor outside the washrooms. Instead, she stood on a high hill with a view over a small town at its foot and a large body of water that glittered quietly in the starlight. Not a living being was in sight. It was eerily silent.

“What?” she whispered, renounce of any other words. “What?” A chill spread over her body, so fierce that the goosebumps made her skin hurt.

I must be dreaming. I must have fallen asleep without noticing. How wacko am I really? Sleeping on the dirty floor of a washroom?

The thought struck her that she’d stepped into the world of Nightmare on Elm Street, but she immediately shook her head in ridicule.

Nightmare on Elm Street isn’t real, and it doesn’t look like this. I’m dreaming, alright. I’ll just go back into the washroom, and I’ll wake up and go home.

Slowly, she backed into the washroom again and closed the huge and heavy dark wooden door behind her. Maria stared at it as if frozen and her heart thumped violently in her throat. She knew that technically, she should be inside the washroom now—she hadn’t closed the door behind her when she stepped out—but she wasn’t. She knew that she wasn’t. The light was all wrong, dark, dusky, and menacing, instead of the cold fluorescence light, and the door should be a regular white commercial door, not this... this medieval monstrosity.

I’m dreaming, she thought again, but everything felt so real. The large ornamental brass handle was cold underneath her hands, and

the wood was smooth and glossy. The chilly and damp air that clung to her bare skin gave her goosebumps and made her shiver. Thinking about it, she realized that the air smelled of incense, not urine and cheap cleaning products.

At first, she didn't want to turn around to face whatever was behind her back, but she decided that she couldn't allow herself to be such a coward.

Dolly would have told her she was being ridiculous. She could hear her sister's mildly teasing voice, full of laughter, "*It's just a door, Maria.*"

Maria swallowed and tightly shut her eyes. What if it wasn't just a door? What if...A heartbeat came and went, and then, she pressed her lips together.

"Dolly?" The name barely left her mouth.

No answer. She scoffed at herself. *Of course not.* But the silence felt...expectant. She shivered.

"It's not real," she said aloud. A moment passed by before she continued more certainly, "It can't be." The words and the sound of her voice comforted her.

With a quick glance at her watch, she calculated that she'd been dreaming for a whole hour already.

"See, it's not real. Time doesn't pass that quickly."

Slightly less scared, she turned around. To her surprise, an old, worn-out church room lay before her.

"I didn't expect that," she whispered, even though she wasn't sure what she had expected.

For a few minutes, she looked around the church and its decorative architecture. A memory rose of her as a nine-year-old visiting Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York with her aunt and uncle, but this church wasn't even near the magnificence of the cathedral.

In the middle of the atrium, a giant ball made from filigree iron hung from the ceiling in a thick chain. It's as thick as my arm, Maria thought in awe and looked up, but the chain disappeared in the darkness. Hundreds of slim, deep-orange prayer candles in the filigree ball spread an uneven light over the floor as if desperately trying to chase away the shadows. Her eyes kept returning to them

time and again. It felt like they called out to her.

I can light one for Dolly, she thought and began to walk toward them.

In front of the fligree ball, a metal box, cold to her fingers, contained several unused candles, and Maria took one of them. She lit it on another of the already burning candles in the ball and placed it in an empty socket. It burned steadily, and she stood in silence, watching the flame while thinking of Dolly.

Her right hand made the cross sign, and with her eyes closed, she mumbled, "Dear God, please let me know what happened to Dolly. I can't stand the uncertainty. Oh, God, I miss her so." She paused for a moment, not knowing what else to ask for, before adding, "Thank you, God. Amen."

The serene feeling that she usually got while in church didn't appear, but she wasn't surprised. After all, this church only existed in her dream. The spirit of God couldn't be expected to fill it. Maria opened her eyes with a sigh, hoping that He could hear her prayer anyway. She checked her pocket for change but couldn't see any donation box anywhere.

"Thank you for lighting a candle, my child," a low voice said behind her.

With a sharp gasp, Maria swirled around and peered into the dark shadows of the vestibule. Someone stood at the side of the door just where the edge between dark and less dark met.

"Don't be afraid," the other person continued. The voice was deep and clearly masculine.

Maria gave a nervous laugh and tried to make out his features, but it was impossible. The shadows clung to him like a cloak.

"You startled me," she said. "I thought I was alone."

She didn't like that he stood so close to the door. If she needed to run away, she wouldn't be able to get by him.

Run away? From a priest? That's new. The thought should have made her chuckle, but this dream had taken on an ominous feeling and was clearly turning into a nightmare. At this point, she was certain that anything could happen.

"Something troublin' you?" the priest asked, and Maria looked

tentatively at him. His accent was different now, more like Scottish than soft Midland, if she wasn't mistaken.

"No, not really," she lied when the silence drew out, and he obviously waited for an answer. "I really should go." On a whim, she continued, "I came here from a game arcade. Do you know the way back, by any chance?"

"I'm afraid there's no way out of here." His voice was back to the Midland accent, and he sounded amused. In the darkness, his teeth flashed white when he smiled. It wasn't a friendly smile.

Beside her, the candle flames in the filigree ball flickered as if a wind had gusted through the church. The shadows danced on the floor, and the strong scent of incense wafted over her.

Run! The thought wasn't hers. It came from somewhere else, and for a moment, it sounded just like Dolly.

Goosebumps covered Maria's arms, and she swallowed hard. She really wanted to wake up now. This dream was way more realistic than she liked. Without daring to look away from the priest, Maria pinched herself so hard that the pain made her eyes water, but nothing happened. She was still trapped in the dream.

What if it's not a dream? a sudden, panicky thought rushed through her mind, but the next rapidly replaced the first, *Don't be a wacko. 'Course it's a dream. It's too zany to be anything else.*

Dolly's voice whined in her head, making it hard to think. With a test of will, Maria tried her best to sound cheerful.

"Well then," she said. "I'll leave you to it."

"Most likely a good decision," came the answer, now in a Caribbean accent.

Maria blinked, and the false cheerfulness faded away. Suspiciousness clawed its way into her brain. Maybe he wasn't a priest at all. After all, the only thing she could discern was a darker shadow in the shadows. She might have jumped to conclusions because she encountered him in a church.

Was this how Dolly disappeared? She met a stranger, talked to him, and trusted him? She was always more trusting than me.

Again, she became aware of her sister's whines in her mind. It made her want to cry, to scream, to run.

She glanced at the large exit doors beside the man to figure out how to walk past him without looking like she wanted to avoid him.

Doesn't seem to be possible. I have to be on the lookout if he tries something. If it's a dream, I'll wake up whatever happens, and if it's not, there must be a way back home, and I know I'll find it, no matter what that man says. He probably just wants to scare me.

Hesitantly, Maria took a few steps forward. When nothing happened, she took a few more. The man in the shadows didn't move. It was strange, though, she thought. No matter how close she got, she still couldn't make out any features other than dark on dark. The church wasn't that unlit. She should be able to see the white of his eyes if nothing else.

When she was about ten feet away from the man, the air around him suddenly seemed to tingle, as if small electrical pulses surrounded his body like an aura. At the sight, Maria gasped. She almost believed what she had seen was real for half a second, and she wanted to laugh at how easily spooked she was. Then, the tingling air became more vibrant and began to ripple around him.

"What...?" she gasped.

Without moving his arms, the cloak seemed to spread out on its own around the man's body. In mere seconds, it became bigger, soaring out in a flowing motion, covering the large doors.

"You are too late," the man said in a voice so low that it resembled a growl. "Too indecisive...Maria."

The shock of hearing her name hit her hard in the stomach. There was no possibility that he knew it, no possibility at all.

"The predator has awoken."

It took a second before she realized that he moved toward her, floating inches above the well-worn, gray stone tiles. Wormlike feelers unfurled from the darkness inside the hood, long, thin, and shifting in the air.

A scream choked in Maria's throat as she swirled around, running for her life. She darted past the fligree ball toward the nave, desperately looking for an exit. The lights flickered wildly as she rushed by, and another scream tried to force itself out of her throat

when all the flames bore anguished faces, screaming with her. Her eyes bulged, but she didn't have time to stay, and she rushed into the nave in between the old wooden pews. Dark shadows moved in the aisles, and Maria ran faster than she ever thought she could.

Ahead of her, the transepts came up, one on each side of the nave. Both lay in shadows, preventing her from seeing a door at the end. For a moment indecisive, she lingered, trying to choose which to dart into. Which one could have an exit? Which one wasn't a death trap? A crushing heaviness in the air coming up behind her made her choose the left transept on a whim. As soon as she came into the shadows, she realized she had made a mistake. Only a narrow spiral stone staircase leading up to a tower lay before her. No exit. Maria whimpered and chanced a look behind her.

The floating feelers were almost upon her, and behind them, the dark shape of the man, the monster. With a sobbing wet breath, she forced her legs to move. She ran toward the staircase; her feet smattered on the stone tiles, and her heavy, panicked breathing blocked all other sounds.

There must be a window somewhere! There must be! I'll smash it and jump out! I don't care if I die as long as that...that THING doesn't get me!

The stairs led her up into the darkness, and the faint, gray light that had lit up the church from the windows disappeared.

Sobbing in the terror that clawed her body, that made her weak from despair, she forced herself to keep the same pace, even though she couldn't see anything. Suddenly, the staircase disappeared from under her feet, and she fell onto a chilly stone floor. Without stopping, she crawled forward, but the crushing heaviness followed her, and just as her hand touched a cold and damp stone wall in front of her, soft, moist palps slithered around her ankle.

Maria screamed and the grip of her ankle tightened. It dug into her flesh, crushing her very bone. Raw pain exploded in her head, and anguished tears wet her face. She writhed and kicked in a panic, desperately trying to get her hands around the feelers to force them off her legs. Instead, other feelers slit around her hands, crushing them. Slowly, she was lifted from the floor and moved into a large, warm, and moist space. As it shut her inside

it, a muscular but spongy, wet, and fleshy object forced her toward a smooth ceiling. It crushed her while pushing her down a narrow, undulating passage. The pain searing through her whole body was unbearable. It shut out all thoughts, all other feelings than the bare, primal fight for survival. Then, Dolly was with her in the darkness, holding her, soothing the agony for a second. *I'm sorry...I should've—I'm so sorry.* Maria didn't know if it was her own thought or Dolly's, and the next second it didn't matter. The torturous blackness of her death, so close now, filled up all her being, and she welcomed it as if a mother.

Silence.

The prey's intense pain sent a shock through Many-Name's nerve endings. It could feel the screams pulsating in its own body as the food's world imploded and crushed through its way down Many-Name's throat. Many-Names screamed too, experiencing the pain as its own. The church rumbled from the screams, shaking and moaning in the shared anguish. The only way to end it all was to follow the meat. The feelers went in first. They brought the food even further down the throat and made way for Many-Names to crawl into their own mouth after the prey.

On its way, it crushed its own bones and meat, pushed the still living food through its body, down the intestines, and finally out through the small hole between its legs.

For a short while, Many-Names lay on the floor, enjoying a life without pain. From the merging of Many-Names and its food, a small tower had been born at the back of the church. It smiled at the knowledge before standing up and brushing the dirt from its robe. With a flick of its hand, light ensued. On the damp stone wall, a mirror revealed its reflection. It had a new shell, a new face again. This cover was tinier than usual, but appearance and strength mattered not.

"Invincible," it thought before turning around, walking down the stairs. It had a church to guard and unaware travelers to catch.

*Many-Names will be back
in
'Lost'*



THE DAY Maria decided to visit the arcade hall where her sister was last seen, she didn't expect to disappear herself.

ANOTHER WORLD is the first Civilian Files in the Field Researcher Universe, a rich world full of complicated characters, mysterious crimes, other dimensions, and cosmic beings



Fellhag Productions

