

# THE CHANCE TO SAY GOODBYE

by Barry J. House



There's just one more thing before your mum picks you up, Sam. Something I've been meaning to say to you. Sit down a moment, it won't take long.

Now, I know you're a bit young for all of this but I'm going to explain it to you, anyway. I guess I wasn't all that much older, myself, when my own dad told me, God bless him. It's a secret, so don't you go telling your mum or anybody else. They wouldn't understand. And you won't understand either, not now, not for a while, but that doesn't matter. What *does* matter, though, is that you remember every word I say. It's simply the most important thing I'll ever tell you. One day, when you're old enough to grasp the significance, you'll know I spoke the truth.

Sam, there's nothing more valuable in the world than your family. And your

friends, too. Good friends, I mean, not passing acquaintances or frivolous one-night-stands, or the vast majority of backstabbers you'll meet as you travel through life. No, Sam, it's the people you love that really matter. Nothing else. What use is fame and fortune without the loved ones to share it with? What use are strong emotions without support from someone meaningful? Beauty—or even intelligence—is worthless without someone to appreciate it. Your loved ones are part of you as you are part of them.

You must place these people above all others, Sam, and treasure them. Never take them for granted, as they won't always be there. One day, the father who never, quite, got visited as often as he should have—or the brother that isn't spoken to because of some long-forgotten argument—or the

spouse that got walked out on because of some paltry misunderstanding—will suddenly be torn from this earthly existence. And then, the people who didn't visit, the people who didn't forgive—they will never forgive *themselves*; their loved ones will be gone forever; nobody would back down while the opportunity was still there. Mark my words, Sam; those people will *never* forgive themselves.

Oh, Sam, I'm so sorry to have to bore you with all of this. Your mum will be here in a minute but don't worry I'll soon be finished. There is a god, Sam. And that god has sown reality with clues as to the nature of everything; little secrets, carefully tucked away beneath the layers of customary understanding. Mankind has stumbled upon many of them but a greater number remain undetected. We'll eventually discover them all, I have no doubt, and the universe will be laid bare.

However, there are certain arcane facts that are presently shared only by a chosen few. Sometimes, when circumstances allow, certain secrets may be gifted to others. The secret that I want to tell you is this: God gives everybody the chance to say goodbye before they are taken from this Earth. Everybody. Even those who are destined to be taken suddenly and apparently without warning. Simple, eh? But how many people know of it?

If you learn how to recognize the signs you can prepare yourself for the passing over of your family and friends. You can help to ease their pain. You can visit them, forgive them, do whatever is necessary to make your peace with them before they die. There will be times, initially, when you fail

to spot the signs. But, when you look back, it will be all too obvious to you; unenlightened individuals do this all the time. The actual skill, of course, lies in identifying the signs *before* the occurrence. Your loved one's goodbye will come during a period of up to seven days before the tragic event. Look for it. But, remember this: you cannot halt or even delay the assigned moment of death—not even for one second—because *that* is a secret yet to be discovered.

Most people will be totally ignorant of the fact that they are soon to die, but there will sometimes be those who know without knowing, if you understand me. Goodbye might come as a single word cried out in the dead of night. Or it could be much subtler than that, showing only in inflections of speech, or in a person's very actions—the man, for example, who has an overpowering urge to clear out his wardrobe the very day before being hit and killed by a car. Goodbye might even be concealed within a protracted monologue, delivered from the confines of a hospital bed, days before a patient takes his final breath. The signals will be as diverse as human nature can make them, but they are always there. Within the final week of life. *Always*. And you must teach yourself how to find and recognize them.

And, who knows? If you master this secret it might inspire you to find others.

Oh, but look, there's your mum's car pulling up outside. Hang on a second. Here's some pocket money and some sweets to take with you. And don't forget your new toy. Sorry about rambling on but try to remember what I've just told you. Yes, I'll see you the same time next week.



**BARRY J. HOUSE** lives in Southern England, with his wife, two children, and three cats. His work has been published in *Black Petals*, *Trail of Indiscretion*, *The Horror Express*, *Hub Magazine*, *Whispers of Wickedness*, and elsewhere. Barry's first collection of short fiction, *Obsidian Dreams*, is scheduled for publication in 2009 by Screaming Dreams Press..