

HORROR

BOOK ONE. 2023

THIN VEIL PRESS

HALLOWEEN EDITION

HOUSE OF MEMORIES AND BONE

ANDREA FITZGERALD

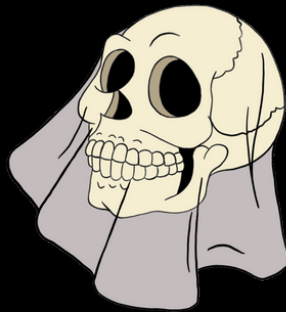


THE CALLER ON THE MOOR

OLIVER NOONDAY



TALES FROM BEYOND THE VEIL



THIN VEIL PRESS

OCT 2023

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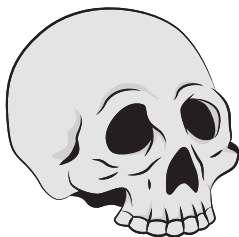
Meg Keane

SKELETON CREW

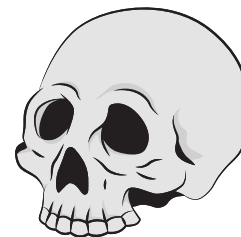
Olivia Brooks, Bronwen Harding, Grace Sparkes, Ebonie Peters
& Stephen Black

CONTENT WARNING

Murder and macabre with artwork
depicting possible infant harm (pg. 27)



EDITORIAL



MEG KEANE

The dark literary community has crawled out from the depths with their quality and creativity. From a small press, thank you for trusting us with your words.

Dear reader,

Thank you for taking the time to read our first issue of Thin Veil Press. Whether you are a contributor, a curious soul or simply a fan of the morbid and macabre, we welcome you to our Halloween Edition.

I dreamt up this press in the midst of a London heatwave while submitting my own work to various literary magazines. During this time, it quickly became apparent to me that there was a gap in the market for the readers and writers of dark fiction. While some literary magazines allow horror and dark literature (often as a “hey we also accept some horror, I guess?”) something was missing. I wanted a magazine that celebrated the spookier months *year round*. A place that welcomes the weird and hones in on the horror of All Hallows’ Eve. A peek through the veil when it’s at its thinnest—when the dead walk among the living.

So, Halloween is the perfect theme for our first issue as a literary press who publishes annually on All Hallows’ Eve. This magazine is something I intend to continue while opening submissions throughout the year for spooky tales to feature on the Dark Reads section of our website.

My aim with this issue is to create a fusion of horror and nostalgia, to frighten and to welcome home. So, this magazine is a homage to the morbid and macabre, the sickening and

the spooky. We are the quiet weird kids with so much to say. And we don’t care about who you know, just the story you have to tell.

In our pieces tonight we see haunting imagery reminiscent of Poe and self-reflective language like that of Dickinson on simplistic pages that allow the words to speak for themselves. But don’t just take my word for it, sink your teeth into our contents page to find something to satisfy your hunger on the darkest night of the year.

A special thank you to my wonderful skeleton crew, from reading to editing—this issue would not be here without you! And to our morbid contributors, we hope you adorn your thin veils tonight with honour as you become immortalised in our crypt.

Now that’s all straightened out, it’s officially midnight on All Hallows’ Eve and so through the veil we must peek...

And remember, even if the sun is shining and the birds are chirping, it’s always Halloween at Thin Veil Press.

Stay spooky,

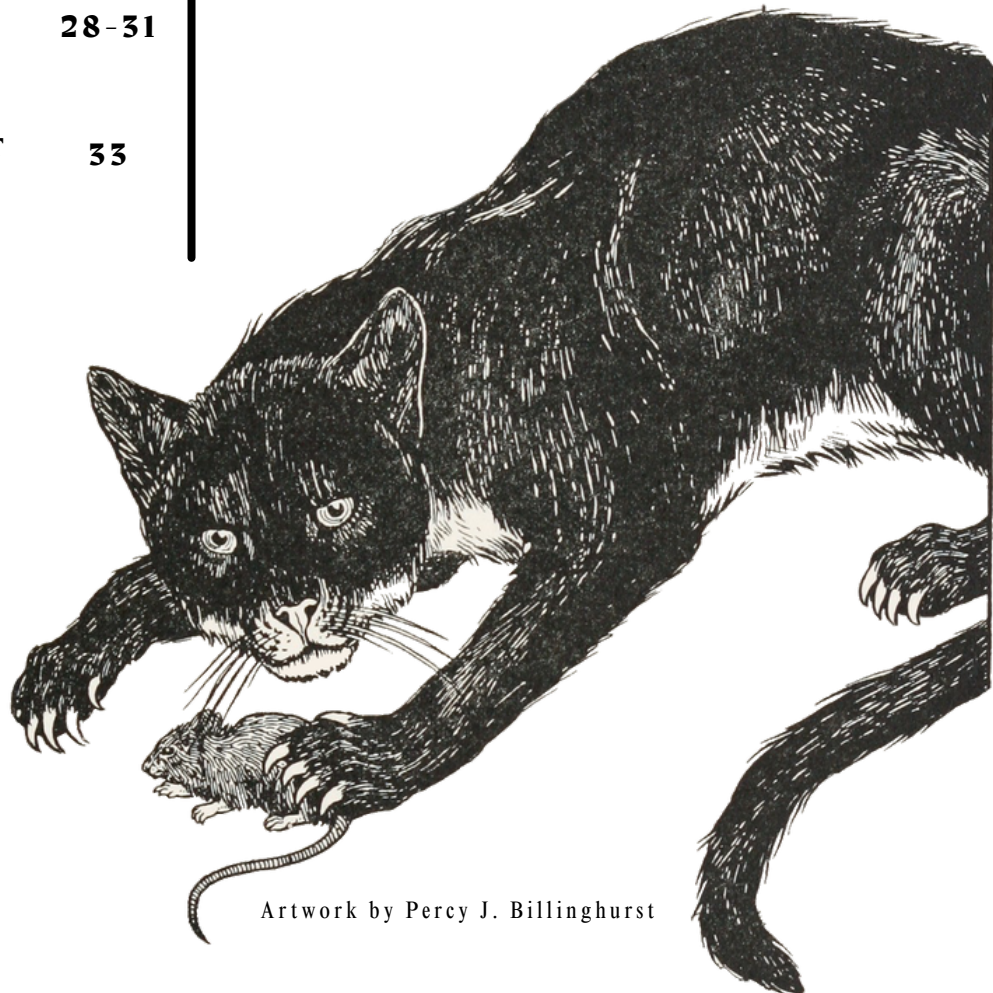
Meg Keane

Editor-in-Chief

DARKNESS AWAITS...

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Artwork by Percy J. Billinghamurst

THE TIME IS UPON US...

AWAKE

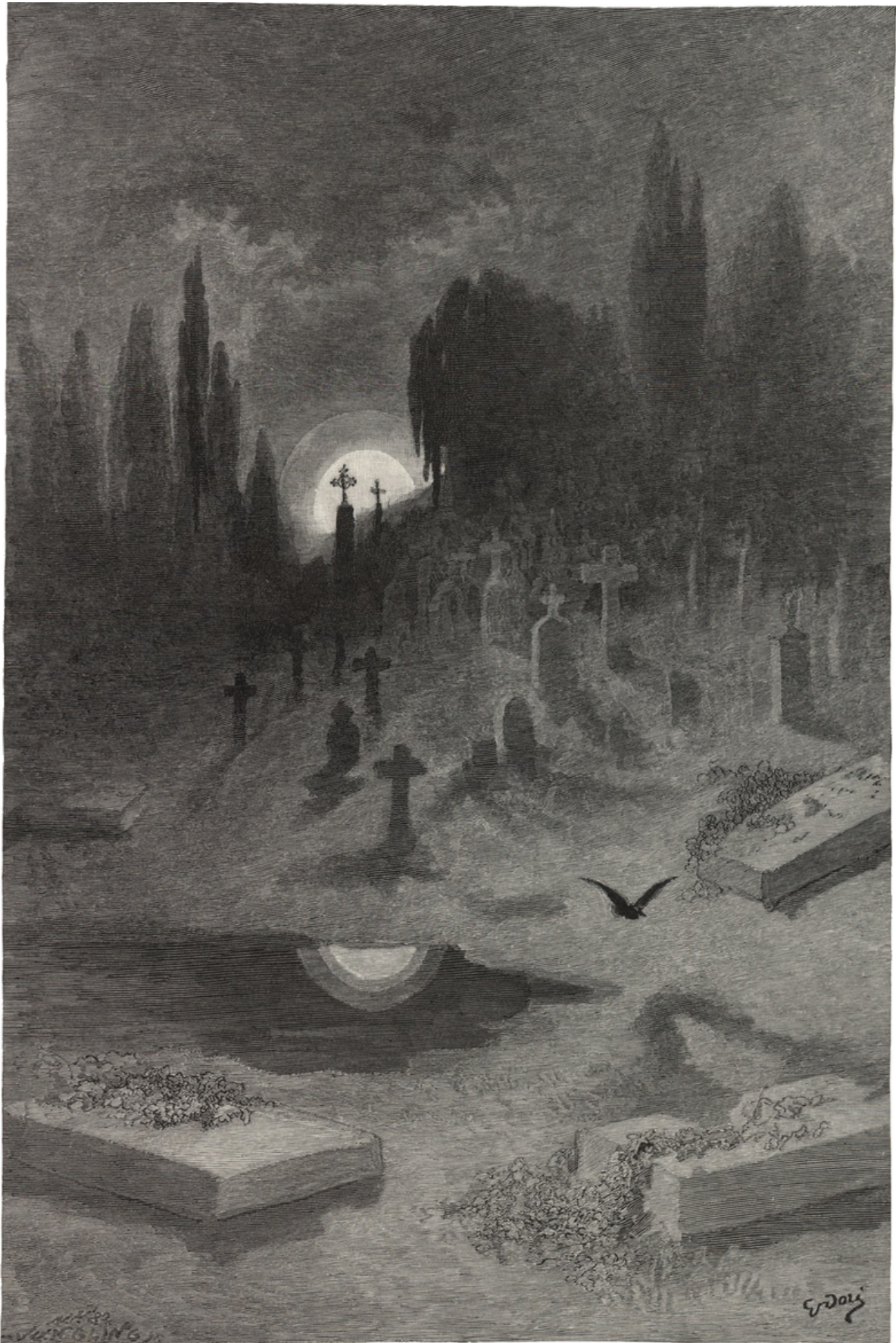
BY KARL JOHNSON

Tonight we blaze the bonfires of satiety.
Our Harvest has ended and we shall see another Winter.
First Fruits fell upon us from abundant Lúnasa,
The Aos Sí our companions as we sip the milk of providence.

Gazing at our world alight with licking tongues of fire,
cipín and bodhrán feverishly thudding the Earth awake,
the songs of our forebears who ploughed the land that feeds us,
reciting verses of mundane heroism that strike the pitch within.

Samhain is here.





THE CALLER ON THE MOOR

BY OLIVER NOONDAY

Beyond the shuttered windowpanes,
across the windy weathered moor,
a naked tree with withered fruit rose high above the tor.

But on that cold All Hallows' Eve, as frost lay heavy, hard and sharp,
a crunch of footsteps echoed bright along our cobbled path.
And huddled by the fireside, alone before its flickering flames,
I heard three knocks upon the door and someone call my name:

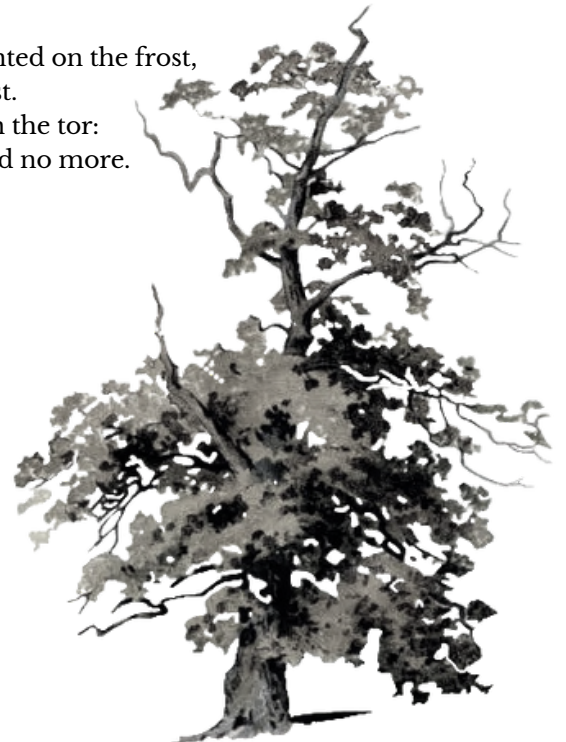
*Oh, Benjamin, dear Benjamin –
Take pity on a wretched soul, and let your father in...*

I rose in fear and disbelief, for father was the withered fruit
that swung upon the gallows tree. He called to me once more:

*Oh, Benjamin, sweet Benjamin –
The night grows old and deathly cold, come, let your father in...*

Who then was this that called my name? My father hale and whole again?
Or but a tarred and weathered shade tormented in its chains?
I dared not let this phantom in (though he entreated me once more)
but waited 'til the knocking ceased, and crept towards the door.

With trepid hands, I raised the latch, and there imprinted on the frost,
a single set of footprints stood, each ownerless and lost.
And out across that barren land, I spied the gallows on the tor:
where once my father's body hanged, his body hanged no more.



HOUSE OF MEMORIES AND BONE

BY ANDREA FITZGERALD

*Beware the ones beyond the veil for they are not as they appear.
Never let your guard down, child, never relinquish your power or surrender your fear..*

His grandmother had repeated the rhymes and the fairy tales to him from his earliest memory. Long and rambling stories of the ethereal and inhuman creatures that stalked beyond the human realm. She told him of their beauty and their thirst for blood; she reminded him of the power they wielded and their love of both mischief and chaos. She was the one who would bundle him up and carry him on her back through the woods surrounding the house she shared with his family. She would point out wildflowers and their medicinal uses. She could name every tree on their expansive property. And on their walks, she would regale him with more stories.

She was known in the town as the Witch of the Woods. His parents despised the title and begged her to stop filling their son's head with her nonsense. But she did as she liked and her grandson held fast to the one adult who showed him affection, who listened to his ramblings. He took comfort in her presence more than that of his parents and gravitated towards her energy and beliefs over anyone else.

As a toddler, he hung off every word, tiny ears devouring her whispered stories at his bedside. The thin, piercing screech of tree branches dragging across the window made him clutch his beloved teddy bear closer but couldn't break his rapt attention. She would leave small gifts—offerings, she would correct him—on his windowsill on the holidays long forgotten by a modern society. It was her hands, still nimble despite encroaching age, that guided his own and taught him to tie the little twine ribbons on those same offerings.

Time passed and the toddler grew.

The boy had no use for baby toys such as teddy bears. Except, of course, in those dark hours after he had been banished to bed. When the stars glittered like jewels against the inky backdrop of the night sky. When his grandmother, who now walked with the aid of a hand-carved cane, would visit to share her stories.

“Be careful what you wish for, my boy. Be wary of what is offered. For nothing is ever given freely and the price must always be paid.”

“He should be out with the other children asking for candy, ma! Why do you insist on dragging him into those forsaken woods?”

“He is of my blood, girl. Do not forget on whose sufferance you exist!”

Lightning flashed, illuminating the forest and banishing the shadows as thunder rolled over their heads. He dragged the aging and worn teddy bear now missing an eye behind, as his grandmother continued to spin her tales, bouncing with excitement as they neared the clearing to the lake. He placed the tokens that she pressed into his trembling hands, and recited the words she gave him. Then sat and watched as the spirits emerged on this night where the veils between worlds dissolved. Who wanted candy when you could have this?

Time passed and the boy grew.

The boy became a teenager and that teenager soon became a man. In due course, the grandmother passed because time stops for none of us. His grief was immeasurable but for his parents, her death brought relief. It caused a rift between them and in his anger, he left in a storm of curses hurled in the passion of the moment, never to set foot in his childhood home again.

In time his grief faded, and as it receded, his memories of her stories became less certain, less tangible. Less... immediate. Where the youth had clung to the stories and believed deeply in tales woven by his grandmother, the man lost his way and no longer had use for such ‘childish nonsense’. He wished for a new start, to show his parents that he never needed them or their warnings about the ‘batty old woman’ that had been his mother's mother. He turned his back on what was and looked resolutely to what would be.

And so, the man forged his own path,



occasionally giving a passing thought to the tales of his youth before dismissing them to the farthest corner of his mind. In doing so, he forgot the first lesson ever learned at her knee: never relinquish your power or surrender your fear.

*

The house itself had seen better days. He stood at the bottom of the stairs, looking up at the imposing structure that had been the haven of his childhood. Pale grey paint peeled from the wooden siding from ground level to the top of the second storey with all of its magnificent peaks. The tower turret had weathered even worse and he noted a handful of missing shingles, at least two of which he had plucked from the overgrown front lawn.

Window frames that were once a vibrant cerulean, had faded to a dull colour, dingy and touched with grey. In places, the paint flaked off down to the bare wood. He counted three panes of glass in the front windows alone that would need to be replaced. Spiderwebs stretched in thick tangles from the eaves to the porch posts, one of which was beginning to rot.

His childhood swing set was long gone from the front yard. The asphalt driveway was split with thick tangles of weeds spilling out of the broken areas. He grimaced, rubbing the thick layer of dust that came away from the porch railing on his pants before climbing the steps, mindful of the ominous creaking of the boards.

He hadn't been back to his parents' house since those grief-fuelled days following his grandmother's death. Memories stirred, shifting and wriggling within him like a nest of snakes as he unlocked the door with the key provided by the realtor. That same realtor had promised that local law enforcement had swept the place for any remaining squatters and had warned away the teens intending to set up for their Halloween party tomorrow night.

Inside the entryway, his lungs struggled to take in the heavy, stale air. Dust covered every available surface, obscuring the deep colour of the walnut floors and the scar that ran down the hallway to the kitchen. He had created that gouge dragging his hockey skates behind him as a child. The mirror to his right was so obscured by grime that his visage was little more than a shifting mass of shadows and vague colours.

His footsteps echoed as he walked down the hall, the heels of his expensive Italian shoes striking against the wooden floors in staccato

bursts. He paused in the doorway to the kitchen noting the modernization that had been done and then continued on, wandering the lower level before climbing the stairs. Each step caused the house to groan, the stairs to shudder. A bead of sweat slid down his spine and he told himself it was just stifling in the house. It had nothing to do with being uneasy.

It was just a house. A physical structure of wood and nails.

He moved from room to room, hesitating outside of the closed door that had been his for so many years. An eye-roll and a huff of breath proved necessary before he shoved the door open and stepped across that threshold.

Sometimes a house is not just a house. Sometimes memories have more life to them than we can imagine.

His mouth dropped open. His eyes widened as he stumbled across the floor—the gleaming, polished flooring bare of any rugs or adornments. Bare of dust or dirt. Eyes wheeled in his head as he gaped at the ornaments that hung above his head, so close he could brush his fingers over them. But then, he was no longer a lad of under five feet.

A startled scream escaped his lips as the door at his back slammed shut, the knob rattling in its casing. His breath stuttered, lungs seizing as if his body had forgotten how to draw air for a moment. He stumbled backwards and sat down hard on the edge of the bed.

The familiar mattress, complete with the patchwork quilt of his youth. And a one-eyed teddy bear propped up against the pillows, staring at him with that solid black, soulless eye. His head whipped around at the sound of a tree branch scraping over the glass, that keening wail that set his teeth on edge and turned his blood to ice water.

There on the windowsill sat the small, familiar bundle, wrapped so carefully and tied with twine. The offering from his grandmother to those who hailed from the other side.

Did you learn nothing from what I taught you? Were you so bent on throwing it all away that you turned your back on everything?

Her whispered question enveloped him as he spun wildly in the room, searching for her, desperately seeking the source of that voice he once knew so well.

Why would you be so foolish?

“I didn’t do anything!”

Do not play the innocent with me, my boy. I told you to be careful for nothing is ever freely given and the price must always be paid. Your time is up and your marker has come due.

He blinked, aware in that moment that more time had slipped by than he realized. Beyond the windows the sun had set and the sky turned a deep, foreboding indigo. Wind whipped through the trees, setting branches of the great oak out back to slash against the windows. Shadows bathed his childhood bedroom, growing deeper and darker with each passing moment. His entire being seemed to shrivel in on itself as he heard the telltale creak of the old rocking chair that used to sit in the corner.

He forced himself to turn towards it, one painfully slow inch at a time. A cloaked and shrouded figure sat rocking. Her pale bony fingers wrapping around the arms of the chair.

I tried so hard to help you. I taught you everything I knew. But in the end, it was not enough. I could not save you anymore than I could her.

“Her who?”

Your mother. She didn’t believe me either. And look where that got her...

“I don’t understand. What are you talking about? I don’t understand!”

Thump. He spun at the sound; his heart slammed against his breastbone. The noise echoing through the otherwise silent house. It came from downstairs. A scraping sound, like something not quite blunt and not quite sharp being dragged across the walls. And over his own harsh, heaving breaths, fear slithered up his spine.

Thump. Scrape. Inching closer down the entryway, hallway. Moving up one stair tread at a time. While at his back, the rocking chair continued its rhythmic motion, squeaking in counterpoint to the noise beyond the door.

With bile rising in his throat, he bolted to the door. He wrenched on the knob only to find it locked in place, trapping him in the room. He whirled, fleeing in terror to the window to throw it open. Instead, came a blood-curdling scream. Crimson streaks trailed down the glass pane and the horrific screech of tree branches against glass morphed in front of his eyes. Skeletal fingers,

tipped in red liquid that dripped like water from a melting icicle reached for him from beyond the window. Those fingers tapping against the glass pane and imitating the nails on a chalkboard sound he was hearing. Eyes stared back at him from a skull he could just make out in the darkness. And those eyes belonged to this mother.

If bones could dissolve, his certainly did as he dropped to his knees, staring sightlessly at the apparition before him. He had no breath left to scream. No coherent thought left to make sense of this nightmare. Only a small, fading part of his mind was aware of her approach.

IT CAME FROM DOWNSTAIRS. A SCRAPING SOUND, LIKE SOMETHING NOT QUITE BLUNT AND NOT QUITE SHARP BEING DRAGGED ACROSS THE WALLS.

On some level, the scent of lavender and eucalyptus reached him and light trickled into the room, illuminating the little bundle that sat on the windowsill. Her arm around his shoulder was weightless, a feather, and her skin was cool when she leaned in to press a kiss to his cheek.

Ah, my boy. You wished to be free of this, to show them that you could have it all. That you could be ‘better than’ your parents. You made this wish here, on my home, on hallowed and sacred ground. And on All Hallow’s Eve. Just as your mother did before you. In her case, to spite me. And you left my protections.

She rose and as he looked up at her, he recoiled. There was only a skeletal figure, wrapped in a multi-coloured cowl and cape.

I bargained them for her. Because I knew you would exist. I thought I could raise you, could save you. So long as she stayed here with that... thing that she chose to throw her life away on, she would live. And you would be born. I paid my price. And I failed. Now your price must be paid.

Memories, long dammed up in his mind, locked away and hidden to stem the tide of grief were abruptly freed. They poured over him, sweeping him away as all of the stories, the walks, the time and the history came rushing back. And his tears flowed over his cheeks.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, Gran.”

As am I, my boy. As am I.

Thump. Scrape. She turned as the door behind them opened and a figure stepped into the room. His robes are darker than midnight, so devoid of colour and light that they seem to swallow everything they touch, including light and sound. Emotion. There was nothing now. Just a void. He blinked as the figure approached. He could see nothing, hear nothing. Feel nothing. As the skeletal hand reached for him, there was nothing.

*

The house remained. Abandoned. Unsold. Years passed. Paint peeled. Windows cracked and broke. The porch sagged and stairs rotted, giving way to weather and time. The town told stories of the old house in the forest, of the Witch in the Woods and the curse that took her family, one by one. Always in autumn. And if those hardy souls, who visited the homestead on those nights when the veils had thinned, looked up and saw the light gleaming in the second storey window, saw the old woman and the young boy peering out at them through gleaming, pristine glass... they said nothing.







**THE BEDCHAMBER
AND
VIOLET EYES**

BY DAYLE OLSON

The Bedchamber

Deep in the cold and cheerless night
a ghost stole in my room,
and where a single candle burned
replaced the flame with gloom.

The light took with it every hope
of living one more hour,
as shadows closed around my bed
and robbed my limbs of power.

Leave me now, I whispered low,
depart this earthly spot.
There is no haste, it muttered back,
for time is all I've got.

The specter pressed in, closer still,
and hovered overhead.
The empty eyes fixed on my own
conveying mortal dread.

The only thoughts it let me keep
were those of pain and want,
and took its prize that cursed night –
a tortured soul to haunt.

Violet Eyes

A foolish dreamer's bargain made,
to know love's blaze and spark —
but now the debt will be repaid
as I lie in the dark.

Not shy, the violet eyes, so vexed
in heliotropic light,
while mine stare back, confused,
perplexed,
in fearful, failing sight.

Upon the velvet bed, my coat
in which I'll no more walk.
The scarlet blood drains from my throat
like seconds from a clock.

This sorceress recites a chant
to join me to the dead.
Although I wish to rise, I can't:
my will, to hers is wed.

Her piercing blade it seeks my heart,
my soul prepares to fly.
I lose my life to her black art
and wordlessly, I die.





MAN IN THE THORNS
BY LEIGH LOVEDAY

Louisa Doran @LouDoran Oct 17

So, strange question. Just moved up to the Peak District. Rolling hills, dry stone walls, gorgeous. Total change of pace for me and my daughter, desperately needed. But we went for a walk this evening to help with my whole 'new life' anxiety thing, and saw something... weird. 1/3

Louisa Doran @LouDoran Oct 17

The hedges in the field behind the farmhouse are massively overgrown. Blackthorn, I think, vicious, left to go wild. And there was – bear with me – a hazy shape that looked like a figure dragging itself out. Faint, but definitely man-shaped. Branches cutting right through it. 2/3

Louisa Doran @LouDoran Oct 17

Attaching a photo, but you can't see the thing itself. Any ideas? Local phenomenon? Trick of the light? Gave me chills but can't find anything online. Also weird that my daughter (she's 7) couldn't see it, and started crying because she thought I was trying to freak her out. 3/3

Louisa Doran @LouDoran Oct 18

Wow okay, social media is NOT the place for these questions. Appreciate the couple of serious replies. Everyone else, thanks for the memes, no I wasn't fishing for engagement or just high, was genuinely shaken up and hoping for some help. Blocking the worst of you and moving on.

*

Posted in /UKUnexplained by LouDoran, Oct 21:

Hi all. Trying this forum on a tip from social media, with a link to the thread for some background.

Very keen to hear experiences of anything similar. I've read up on things like fear frequencies and Brocken spectres but nothing fits – definitely not just a shadow. It moves independently, just so slowly you can't see it.

It also freed itself from the blackthorn overnight. It hasn't come far, but enough for me to see it's coming this way.

Edited by LouDoran, Oct 22:

Thanks for the responses, all. Some of you wanted more detail. Can't say I wanted to go and look more closely, but I did ask for help...

You can't focus on its face, there's just a shading of features. The outlines of the blackthorn are clearer. Those dark spiny branches stabbing through ribs, armpits, eye sockets. It's horrible..

I can see it even when there's no sunlight. All my theories are falling apart and nothing else makes sense. Getting a bit desperate here, people.

Edited by LouDoran, Oct 23:

Went out briefly with Brian, one of the neighbours. Didn't mention anything, just walked through the field – even though being near that thing feels awful, threatening, like thorns pressed tight against my own skin. Makes me feel frantic and sick.

Brian didn't react at all. Nothing. So it's just me.

Every night, my daughter asks if I've seen 'the Man in the Thorns' again today. I only mentioned it once, that first time, but it's on her mind. I hate it.

*

To: ttc1234@safefreemail.com
Date: Oct 24, 20:39
Subject: RE: Sighting

Who is this and how do you know the house address? Look, even if I can't go to the police about something I can't prove, I can use this email to show harassment. It's sick.

You need to stop.

To: ttc1234@safefreemail.com
Date: Oct 26, 17:07
Subject: RE: Sighting

Still not sure what to believe, but from the things you asked, I did some digging into previous owners. Before the house was left empty, there was a couple called Kellen and Tess Cranston. Both moved in. Only Tess moved back out. I saw a lot of speculation. That's you, right? Is Kellen the Man in the Thorns? Tess, is that fucking thing your dead husband?

To: ttc1234@safefreemail.com
Date: Oct 31, 23:58
Subject: RE: Sighting

Are you still there? We had to run. Gracie was acting up, and on top of all the stress and lack of sleep it sent my anxiety through the roof. I shut myself in the bathroom.

Gracie started stomping around, singing too loud, trying to get my attention. Next thing, she was screaming. I found her curled up at the bottom of the stairs– cuts all over her arms and face. The Man in the Thorns was in the hallway.

It shouldn't have been anywhere near the house yet. We should have had time to pack and leave. But I felt that sharp, slicing sickness before I even saw it. And Gracie must have run right through it.

I grabbed her and we left everything. We're at the hospital but I don't know how long we can stay. I'm still lying to everyone. I don't know what I'm expecting you to do. But I'm fucking terrified and I think that thing knows it.

To: ttc1234@safefreemail.com
Date: Nov 1, 05:13
Subject: PLEASE READ

What did you do once before? What do you mean? Tess, do not fucking go back there. You said he was a nightmare when you knew him so you absolutely do not want to be anywhere near him now. Please, for Christ's sake, stay away.

To: ttc1234@safefreemail.com
Date: Nov 2, 18:37
Subject: FW: PLEASE READ

I saw the fire on the news. They're saying it started in the fields but spread to the house. I don't care about our stuff. We didn't have much. I don't care about not having a house to go back to. I don't think that was an option anyway. Please just tell me you got out of there.

To: ttc1234@safefreemail.com
Date: Nov 13, 00:44
Subject: FW: PLEASE READ

Tess,

I know I'll get the same undelivered message again. Just leaving an update.

We're staying with friends, and daring to think we might be safe. I haven't seen anything coming. It doesn't feel like I'm losing my mind any more.

What the hell else can I say? I'm sorry this happened, to both of us.

I hope you got some closure. I hope... well, I don't know if I should say it. Is it appropriate?

Fuck it.

I hope you watched him burn.







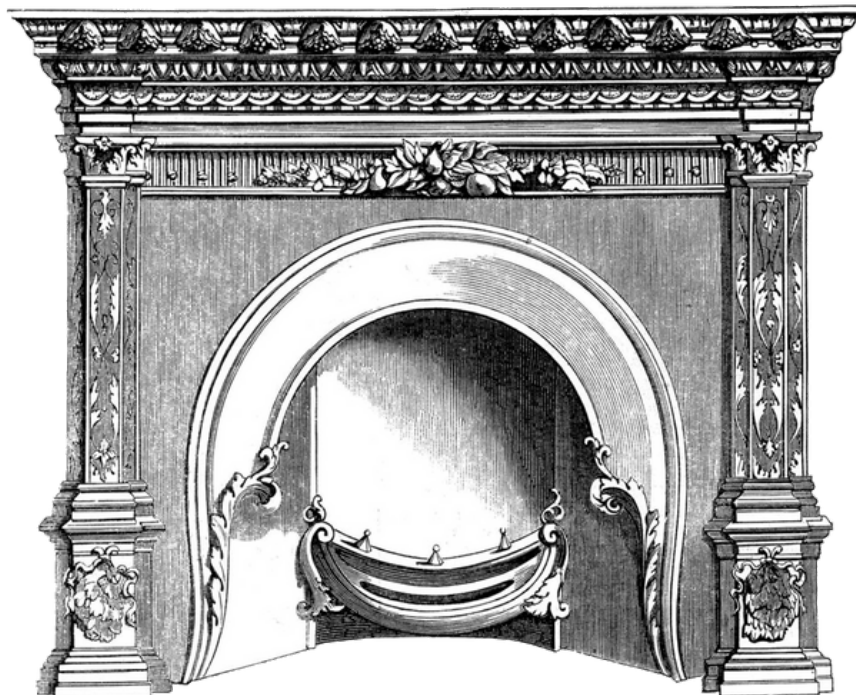
SKULL UPON THE MANTLE

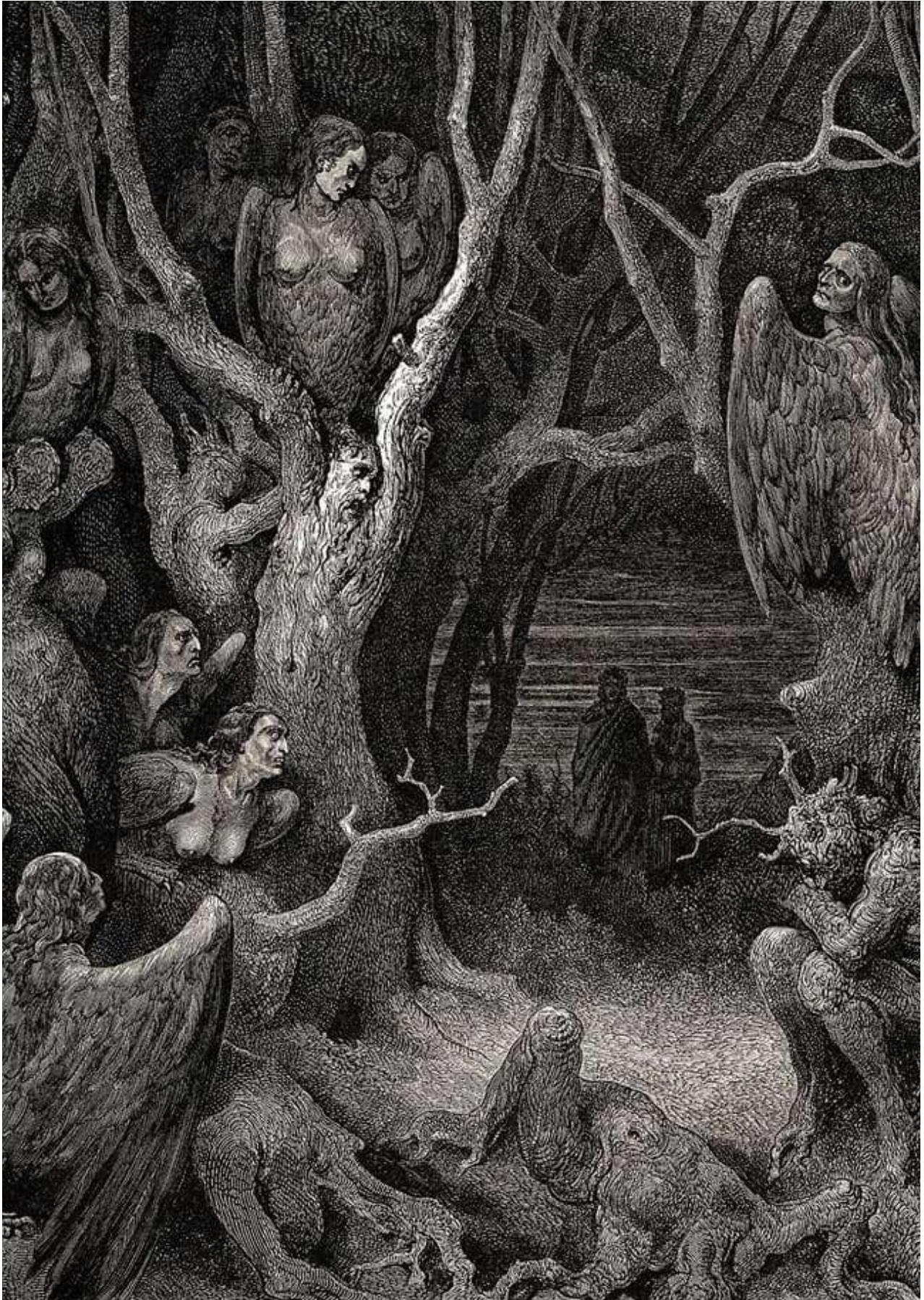
BY EÓIN HAMILL

Oh, skull upon the mantle,
With sockets cracked,
Body ransacked,
Tell me, do those eyes still see?
Does the shell that housed the mind,
Still think your thoughts,
Upon your cross,
I wonder, how long you've hanged?
Branching growths sprout from your head,
A fierce display
Now in disarray
Would you still bear them with pride?

Perhaps, already, you haunt these halls,
And wander the woods at dusk,
Both servant and lord to your own puppet's chords,
Bearing your bleak hollowed husk.

Oh, skull upon the mantle,
I pray stay still,
Leave not your sill,
As I fearfully douse your candle.





THANATOS

BY ANDREW DOBSON

I felt it there, in the darkness, watching me. A vein of fear ran through my tender body as I pulled the woven blanket closer to my face. As if this meagre cloth could offer some protection from the apparition that stood at the foot of my bed. The air grew unnaturally cool, even for the waning months of this sorrowful Athenian winter. My breath began to crystalise as the chill of the grave descended on the empty household. I trembled like branches in the sea wind; my grief-stricken body summoning but the smallest ounce of strength to crack open my tired eyes. What I saw under the veil of obsidian night brought forth petrified tears that welled in the dark hollows of my face.

Black wings, like those of the crows that pick clean the diseased corpses scattered in the streets. Though they were folded back, their span dwarfed even the cedars that grew on the hillside. The figure that stood between them was taller than any man, back hunched to fit beneath the oaken beams of the ceiling. His body was narrow as he loomed above me, limbs hanging long at his sides. The face, though obscured by darkness, was gaunt. His skin a solemn grey like the mournful burial stones that sat above the fresh graves of my parents.

The creature slowly reached out a slender arm, moving like a shadow across my bed until fingers like talons rested but a breath away from my face. I gasped as they drew near, not a sound leaving my lips. The fingers touched my cheek, skin colder than a mountain stream and smooth like the scales of a viper. A single tear ran from my eye and, quick as a spider, it was caught upon the monstrous nail where the beast studied it.

“Your fear,” he said in a voice that seemed to transcend the living world. “It ferments like wine in your eyes.”

I said nothing, my breath snatched away by his petrifying glance.

“Every mortal that I visit cowers at my coming, even in the knowledge that I am inevitable, and I have visited so many in your city these last few

weeks.” He spoke with such authority, as if his words were carved into mountains. Each syllable shook the air, tone ancient and primordial.

“Come closer,” he demanded, “I would see you better.”

I wished to fall deeper beneath my covers and pretend this was some nightmarish fantasy, yet I did not dare disobey him. I let the blanket fall and rose to my knees, my tunic doing little to protect from the cold bite of the air.

“You need not tremble so,” he said, “I have not come for you as I did the others.”

I tried to swallow my fright and spoke back, my voice feeble. “What are you?”

“Your priests call me Thanatos,” he breathed. “Divine son of Nyx and Erebus. I am the Wings of Death, on which mortal souls leave this life.”

“If you have not come for me like you did the rest of this city,” I dared to question, “then why do you stand before me?”

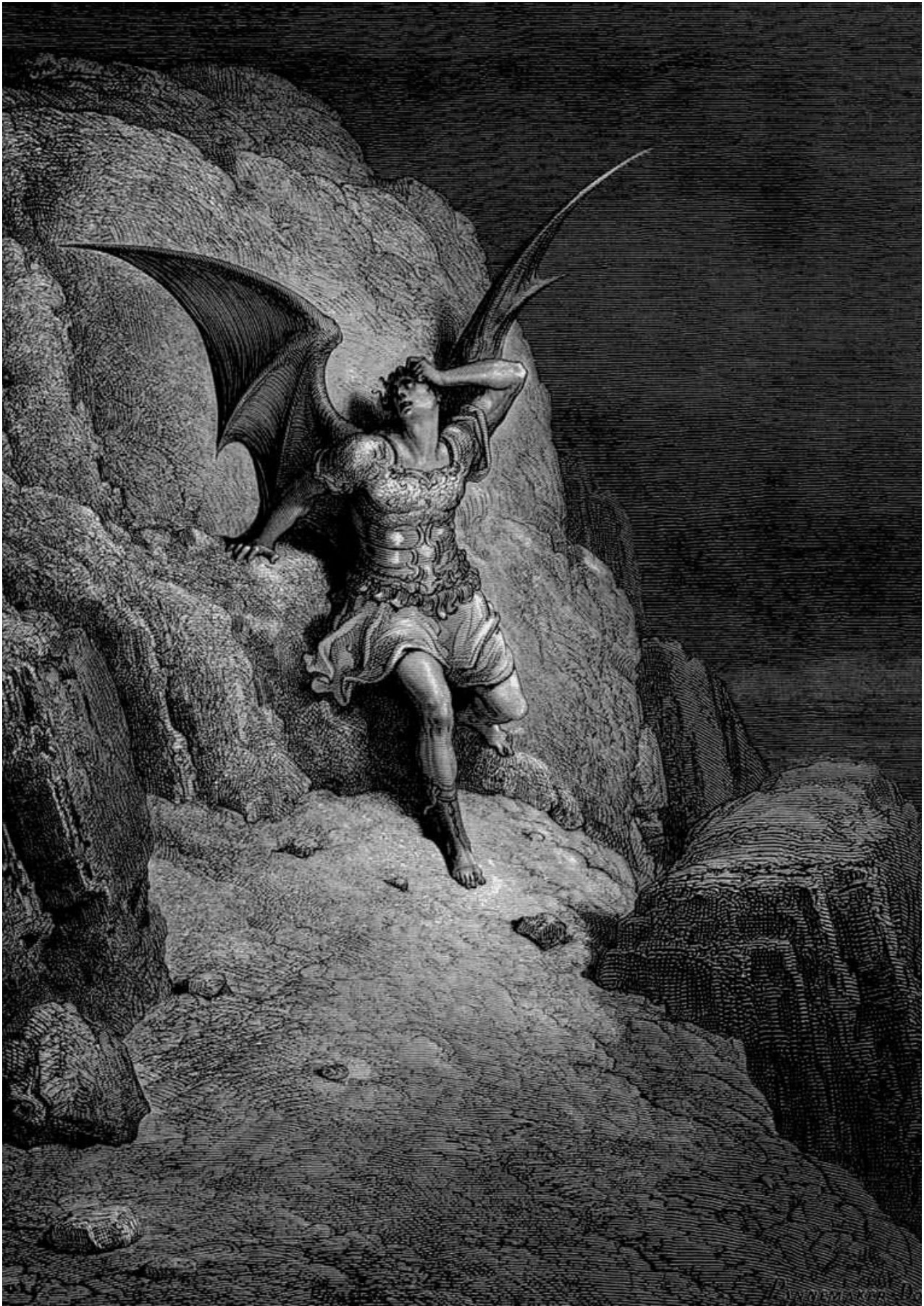
“Do you know what day it is?” he responded with reverence.

I tried to think of the time before this grief, when I had adhered to routine and marked the days as they passed. Yet I had been swallowed, lost for what seemed like so long in this fog of misery. I could not answer him.

“It is the third day of the Anthesteria,” Thanatos instructed.

“Chytroi,” I muttered in recognition.

It was a religious festival celebrated here in Athens, to honour the god Dionysus. A joyous time filled with wine, gatherings and comical costumes. The sounds of such frivolities would sail into the sky long through the night, but this year I heard nothing. The third day of the festival,



known as Chytroi, was dedicated to the dead.

“You have poured no libations nor spoke the hallowed words of any prayers,” said Thanatos, a hint of disapproval in his voice.

“My lord,” I answered, not even able to feign shame. “This grief that I feel consumes me, I have thought of nothing else, I fear my body is no longer capable of rejoicing.”

“The plague,” spoke the god with understanding.

I nodded with my head down and closed my eyes. From afar, I had lived a normal life. A boy born to parents in this great city state of Athens. My father was a carpenter and so I had learnt from him those same skills of carving and shaping wood. We were not rich but still were well regarded and respected; we helped build ships for Pericles. In my youth I would spend much of my time with Neoptolemus. He was the son of my father’s colleague, a neighbour and close in age to myself. We would play together, hunt, explore, laugh, and as the years went on, grow into manhood by each other’s side. For as long as I could remember, we had loved one another. We craved each other’s companionship, delighted in making the other smile, shared secrets and lusted for the touch of our skin. Our parents would laugh at our closeness, saying it was a folly of youth, that it would fade when we met our wives. Yet as time marched on, like the mighty oak trees in the hills of Attica, our love only grew stronger. Though my life may have been normal, Neoptolemus made it feel extraordinary.

Then the plague came. It seemingly spread like a malignant mist from the sea. It leapt from person to person, weaving its fatal path through the city until no corner of humanity was spared the horror of its infection. My parents died days apart from one another. The sky grew a muddy orange, filled with the smoke of funeral pyres that soon became pits where bodies lay in mass graves. I watched helplessly as Athens was decimated.

When Neoptolemus’ eyes grew red and his breathing laboured, I did not want to believe it. As sweat rolled from his burning skin and the smell of pestilence hung in the air, I held him like a child in my lap. The look of his beautiful face contorted with pain was like a searing metal brand into my heart. When he passed to death, there in my arms, I cried rivers of tears that only the sea nymphs might replicate with their divine mastery of water. I prayed that I would get the

sickness too, that I might follow him, for being left behind was surely worse. Fate was cruel however and I was sentenced to go on living in an empty world.

“You lost so much,” the god of death said to me, knowing full well the trajectory of my life.

“I lost everything,” I whispered back, the lump within my throat too great to speak with any force. “I have nothing and no one left.”

“It is for this reason, mortal, that I have come to you.” The dark god smiled through the shadows, his shining black wings rustling in anticipation. “On this night of Chytroi, when the veil between life and death is at its thinnest, I offer you an opportunity.”

He gestured a pale claw to the doorway of my room which was lit from beyond by flickering torches. However, as I observed the familiar portal, I realised it did not look familiar at all. Where once it exited to the courtyard, now it was enclosed by smooth grey rock. I saw within a small stone tunnel with a staircase that twisted downwards out of sight.

“So many have died these last few weeks,” said Thanatos, their shades are left wandering my halls as they teeter on the edge of that empty oblivion. Neoptolemus is one such spirit caught in this place between. If you wish, you may pass below to retrieve him. You prayed for this after all, for you could not live without him.”

I looked at the hallowed doorway and then back again at the dread god who stood before me. I felt such fear as I cowered beneath his visage, yet the question took not a single moment of thought to answer. “I will go!” I burst out, barely believing this situation could be true, but wanting it so much that I could not entertain any doubt.

“Then follow the passage down,” he said, “but beware, my dominion is not hospitable to the living.”

I trod through that enchanted doorway, the rough chill of the stone under my bare feet. Slowly, I descended deeper into the depths of that infernal tunnel. As I left the light of the burning braziers behind me, a strange silence haunted the path, only broken by my footsteps. At last, I saw in the misty darkness a grand hall lined with columns to either side.

It had the look of a temple yet greater in size than even the mighty Acropolis. I paused for a moment, hearing only my wavering breath as my chest heaved with apprehension.

Something moved in the distance. Even the beat of my heart froze at the sight, causing a shudder through me as the bolts of Lord Zeus in a fractured sky. I brought forth in my mind the image of Neoptolemus, it is for him I must brave this terrible place.

As I ventured further, I saw debris littered all around. Here a pile of discarded clothing, there an empty cot, bowls without food and tools forsaken by their masters; it was as if I walked among a vast encampment that had been abandoned in urgent haste.

“My son,” a voice moaned in the blackness.

The wail echoed through the hall like a desperate lament. The figure of my mother shuffling towards me. I ought to have run to greet her but what I looked upon shocked me to stillness. She was pale and silvery, almost transparent as the last smoke of a dying hearth. Her face drooped with the grey skin of the deceased and the whites of her eyes were fissured with the same clawing blood vessels I had seen at the moment of her death.

“Where is your father?” she cried desperately. “I do not know where I am. It is so cold!”

She sounded confused. I was not even sure that she truly saw me, but still, I did not move save for the tears in my eyes.

“Help me,” she pleaded as she lurched closer, “Save me from this place!”

“I cannot,” I whimpered, feeling such shame. “I’m sorry mother.”

When she heard the sound of my voice, she lurched forwards, grabbing my forearms with her ghostly hands. As our skin connected, I felt a surge of pain. I looked down to see the area that she touched began to blacken with necrosis, as if she drew the very vitality from my body. In a frenzy of panic, I wrenched my arms free and her shade was knocked to the floor with a scream.

As bitter tears erupted to sting my face, I began to run. I could not bear to look at her wretched soul a second longer. I sprinted into the darkness now seeing more silver spirits emerging all around, drawn by the sound of our meeting. They



moved slowly but reached for me as I passed, thirsting for the life that flowed through my veins. I ran for what seemed like ages, though perhaps it was only a moment in those subterranean halls.

Eventually I found myself in a grove of cypress trees, their leaves black as they grew under a sunless sky. To their end was a cliff edge and stood at its pinnacle was a silhouette that my heart knew instantly.

“Neoptolemus!” I gasped with such want in my voice I felt it might drain the air from my lungs.

His eyes seemed to rest on me for a second then slide back and forth as if blind to my image. He appeared so fragile and frightened.

“My love, is that you?”

“It is,” I breathed. “I have come to save you.”

“I have longed for you so.” He spoke with such sorrow my heart could have shattered. “I have been so alone in this endless darkness. I cannot rest for the thought that I have left you behind. Please, let me hold you.”

He reached for me but I recoiled, remembering the icy burn of my mother’s touch.

“Soon” I said, “but for now you must follow me, so we can escape this place together.”

In that instant I felt a great gust of wind, of such strength that it threw both myself and

Neoptolemus to the ground. He shrieked in horror as he looked to the sky, but I knew the sound of those black wings. Thanatos emerged above us, with fatal glory in his eyes.

“You wish to both escape my dominion?” he laughed. “You have gravely misunderstood my bargain.”

“You said if I fetched him that we could return to life,” I argued back with perplexity.

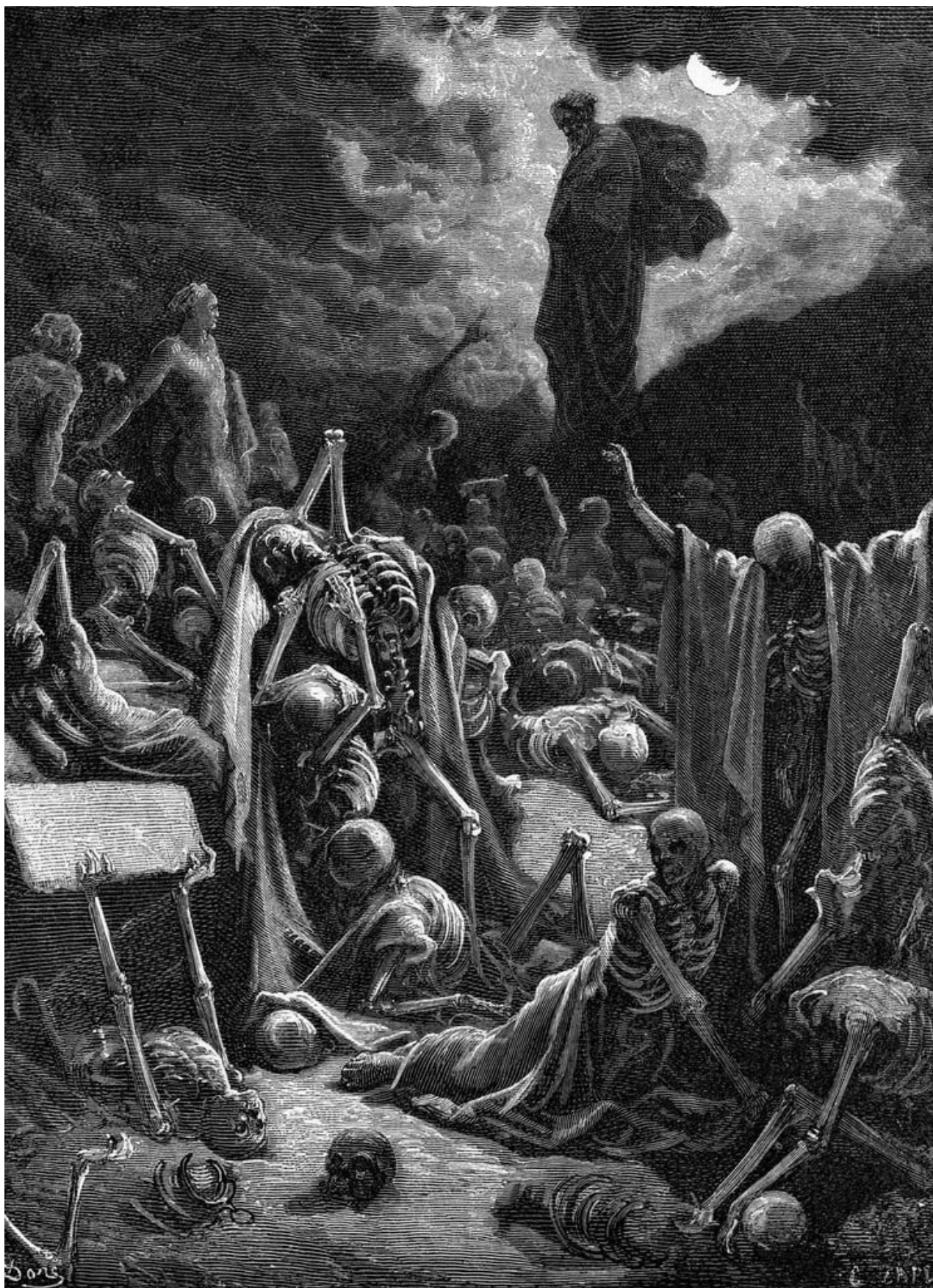
“I said that he could return to life,” the nefarious god instructed. “The angel of death must always have his due mortal, and I am owed a life. You may return without him or you may stay here in his stead.”

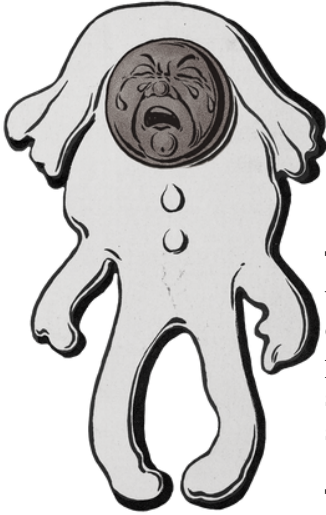
“Why?” I asked with impunity. “Why would you make this grim deal if you knew that neither me nor Neoptolemus could find a happy outcome.”

“Your happiness did not factor into it,” he said plainly. “I have lived many eternities and seen your kind live and die a million times over. You are in some ways fascinating in your smallness; the things that you will do to prolong relationships that are already but specks of dust in the vast space of infinity. It amuses me.”

Our lives and our love were just a game to him. This divine being of endless power thought there was no meaning or purpose to the short years we spent together, yet I knew better. I looked to Neoptolemus. Even though his face was marred by the sorrow of death he was still beautiful to me. For I could see the soul beneath.

“Send him home,” I spoke with surety, “I shall stay so that he might live.”





CRYBABY

BY DANNY SHAW

The babies learned to cry in the night-time, their eyes blinking, mouths wailing. The bawling kept whole wards awake. Harried nurses and exhausted mothers tried to comfort them, but milk and swaddling provided only momentary comfort. Most often, the children would simply peer into the dead space, refusing to connect with their mothers' sunken eyes. Gazing at ghosts.

They wandered the cold crumbling corridors at night, as the antiseptic light of the daytime gave way to shadows in the matron-enforced twilight of the wards. The doctors and nurses hurried by with eyes downcast, focused on their never-ending list of tasks. Any stray feeling of unease was pushed down, obliterated by more prosaic concerns, or attributed to the outdated building's unsettling ambience. Cold and entirely inappropriate for giving care to the sick, people often said the building should be torn down and replaced with a modern, fit-for-purpose hospital. Property developers eyed the land hungrily, but had little desire to deal with the Victorian edifice, or the even older foundation. More romantic observers thought that it should be preserved, made into a museum of some kind. It certainly had the history.

Every spirit in the place displayed that history, each personal and terrible. Jagged limbs shattered by the crashing of cabs or handsome sports cars. Ragged grins elongated by broken bottles, sunken skulls and puncture wounds. Some had faces pockmarked by long extinct diseases, with sad or kindly eyes. Some crawled on bloody stumps, others limped on mangled bow legs. Violence, malnutrition and disease had brought them all together, and kept them here forever.

It wasn't these sights that brought the tears, but the whispers. They poured their pain and hate and fears into new-born ears, filling malleable minds with unwanted truths. Each ghost would rasp a different story, each beyond the comprehension of any child. But the unknown words could still worm their way inside, coiling themselves around the sinews of the mind. Disease, misery, jealousy, poverty. Each idea buried, to be excavated at a later date.

Old age, lost youth. Failure, fear. Some inevitable, some sudden and inexplicable. Destruction. Death.

The children would grow-up to forget the ghosts, the cold nights in that hospital buried far beyond memory. But they would still hold onto those whispers, and still know them in their bones.



GHOST IN THE GLASS

BY MICHAEL DAVIOT

Alan was incredulous. "Every night?"

David shrugged it off with a smile. "Yup, every single night. In the summer, when the curtains are open. There it is, staring at me from the darkness of the garden. Makes me jump every time, gives me a chill. Then I remember it's my reflection in the window. Ridiculous, but strangely exciting."

"Exciting? Almost sounds like you want there to be someone there."

"Well, you have to wonder who, or what, it would be..."

"You read too much of that supernatural stuff."

"No such thing as too much."

"Hm. How long's this been happening?"

"Years! For a reasonably intelligent person, I can be incredibly stupid."

"Not stupid, really. Surprising, though. Bit young for dotage. Why do you think it is?"

"I dunno. I suppose when I come downstairs, I'm thinking about whatever I've been watching or reading. And when I go into the front room, I always see the ghost out of the corner of my eye – then I turn to look properly at the window and see me there. I'm just not expecting to see it. I'm busy with my thoughts. That's probably it."

"Are you maybe still afraid of the dark?"

"No maybe about it. Absolutely definitely. I have been known to look under the bed before getting in. Shadows can take on very strange shapes, especially when you're blind as a mole."

"And a bit pissed?"

"As if!"

"But you know logically, there's nothing there?"

"Logically, yes. But these things go deeper than logic. It's primal stuff. It's easy for the rational mind to be caught off guard. The world is brightly lit nowadays, but maybe that makes the few remaining shadows even darker?"

"I guess. There's definitely more interest in mystical and supernatural stuff again. People discovering technology can't answer all their needs. Plus, perhaps, the more we know, the more we know we don't know. If that makes sense. There's certainly still plenty of unknown and not yet understood to be afraid of."

"Strange that we so often assume things we don't understand must be threatening, if not downright malevolent."

"Atavistic response. Instinct. The ancient bit of the brain assuming it's something that wants to eat you, and the body going into alert mode. Fight or flight and all that."

"So many things could be ghosts or goblins if you didn't know what they really were. I've got quite a lot of floaters now in my eyes. Sometimes, especially at night, if the light catches them from a certain angle, I'll see one drifting across the pupil or slipping past the edge of my peripheral vision. And if I'm a bit sleepy, it takes me by surprise and spooks me – then I remember. But, if I didn't know better, it would be easy to see that as some kind of supernatural presence."

"It's just the brain doing its job, trying to make sense of what it sees. But it is odd that it so often chooses the irrational option."

"Only irrational to our barren modern minds. For the vast majority of human history, for many people still, the existence of the soul was a fact. The reality of an afterlife wasn't questioned. There were heavens and hells and restless spirits of all sorts. Angels and devils were real – again, still are to some. The world and the world hereafter was a much busier place."

"Fair point, I guess I just don't have much of an imagination and I don't believe in the soul or any kind of disembodied spirit, or stolen shadows. Nice ideas for stories, but nothing to do with real life."

"Nightcap?"

"Thanks."

David went to fetch another bottle.

What he hadn't told Alan, he thought to himself the following day, was that sometimes...But no, that was ridiculous. And yet, a handful of times, when he'd stayed up very late, till three or four in the morning...Of course, he may have been a little drunk and consequently feeling a bit maudlin and fanciful. Besides, they had been windy nights, when the rose bushes in the garden were trembling and swaying visibly in the spilled light of a nearby streetlamp. But he had been convinced, at the time, that the figure in the window, the other him, had moved. *Independently*. However, it was late autumn now, when winter was poking the nights with her cold fingers in readiness, and after dinner the curtains were

drawn. There would be no more 'ghosts in the glass' for a few months. Life settled into its winter rhythm; the conversation and the strange thoughts it had stimulated were replaced in his mind by more day-to-day matters.

A good heavy snowfall built up a thick layer of crystalline sound-proofing on the pavements and streets of the city, so thick and deep that in many parts there was no traffic moving at all. Streets and roads lay spotless and silent. The quietest of noises sounded with bell-like clarity in the cold, still air. It was a joy to walk alone, hearing the satisfying whispery scrunch of deep, fresh snow under foot and tasting the clean air as it iced its way down into his lungs. The droll cawing of a crow or the chattering complaint of a jackdaw occasionally intruded, and very rarely another walker would appear, usually in tow to a vaporous panting dog. The pervasive silence was nearly tangible. Every day he went for a long, solitary walk and came back pink, refreshed, and exhilarated.

After a hard overnight frost, he was walking along a completely deserted pathway in some nearby woodland. Even the hardest birds were too cold to sing, and the only sound was the occasional crack of ice breaking underfoot. His breath steamed the air and droplets froze on his moustache and beard. All of nature hid from the oppressive cold; not even a distant dog bark disturbed the gelid silence. He stopped at the top of a rise to absorb the uncanny stillness. One second, he was alone – the next, he wasn't.

He felt a coolness spread over his back and neck, like a breeze brushing against sweaty skin. There was someone behind him. Immobilised by fear, he remained still and yet, what followed was the unmistakable crack of ice being stepped on. He took a deep breath, braced himself, and turned around. There was no one there. But, as he turned, he had seen something out of the corner of his eye. A shape, a person? Just slipping from view, going behind him again. This time he turned a full 360 degrees, so quickly that he made himself dizzy, but there was still no one. And nothing to be seen.

The fright had spoiled his walk, so he decided to go home. All the way back he felt there was someone else keeping close to him, but he never turned to look; he knew there was no point. There would be nobody there; he had spooked himself. If something had stepped on the ice behind him, it must have been a fox or some other small animal that had slipped away into the undergrowth. Perhaps a thin layer of ice had cracked when a



dead twig had fallen onto it; something of that sort. Maybe he has caused the noise himself, and it had only sounded as though it were behind him. That seemed most likely. Perhaps he should lay off the weird stories for a few days. Alan might be right after all. The sleep of reason and all that. When he got back, he would pick out something grimily human and down to earth to read; a Simenon would do the trick, clear away the cobwebs and ghosts. But no matter what track he steered his thoughts onto as he walked back, he couldn't shake off the feeling of being shadowed. The idea stole into his mind that the shadow was someone who knew him.

As he hung his coat in the cupboard that passed for a wardrobe in his tiny house, he realised that he was on his own again. David made himself something to eat, then went upstairs with a bottle of wine to his loft to listen to some music and spend the evening reading. Ruffling through the bookshelves he came to his small collection of Simenon novels. Some he had read quite recently, but 'The Widow' had either been read so long ago that he'd completely forgotten it or had never read it at all. Soon, David was deep in the French countryside on a run-down farm, where a young widow kept house for her lecherous father-in-law and where they would soon be joined by a newly released murderer looking for a place to start a new life. The evening flew by and, come midnight

both book and bottle were finished. David was so gripped by the tale of ordinary folk blundering their way into tragedy that he'd remained in his chair the entire time. That and the wine meant that he got up more than a little unsteadily and went downstairs a tad bumpily.

He rather urgently got rid of most of the wine he had drunk and felt along the dark hall to the front room. Rather than put on the main light in there – a habit from childhood, when putting on 'the big light' was a rare indulgence – as usual he went into the kitchen to put on the hood light of the cooker, which gave enough light to potter about in. When he returned to the front room, he stopped dead in his tracks. *There was someone there.*

The curtains were drawn so, tipsy though he was, he wasn't seeing things in the window. A cold sweat prickling his skin, he backed along the wall until he could reach the switch for the main light. It wasn't a very big room and every corner was immediately lit up when he nervously flipped the switch. Nothing. In truth, there was nowhere to hide. Most of the wall space was filled up with bookcases; he could see under the table in the corner by the window. The only place he couldn't see from where he stood was the space between the end of the sofa and the far wall. There wasn't enough space there for a person to hide, but he checked anyway. All he found was a dead moth, flat on its back on the floor. He turned back and looked into the kitchen, just in case. Nothing there either. He felt foolish. And yet, the fear wouldn't leave him – there *was* another presence in the room.

Then he did a thing he hadn't done since being left alone in the family flat when he was a child. He went into every room and turned on all the lights in each of them. Then, when every single light was on, he went slowly through the whole house again, checking every corner, every nook, no matter how small, and looking behind and under every piece of furniture, saving the bed for last. He was completely alone in the house. That was beyond question now. But still he went back to the front room for one final reassurance. He could feel it as soon as he stepped into the room, there was somebody there.

He was seriously shaken now; all thoughts of going to bed abandoned him. In the kitchen he discovered one more bottle of wine. Pouring himself a mug full, he made himself stand in the middle of the front room, where he gulped down wine and tried to think. Focusing, with both mind and eyes, was becoming difficult. He found himself staring blearily at the curtains. Something

penetrated his mental fog. Of course. The window. But, why now? In the middle of winter. That was a summertime folly. He'd imagined that it moved. Hadn't he? The mug was emptied and refilled. He was very drunk now and very afraid. Another slug of wine and he found just enough courage to open the curtains.

There he was. The other him. His vision was blurred now, but he could see that it was a cruel face, like his own but hard and cold. For a long while they stared uncomprehendingly into each other's eyes. David was frozen to the spot. Then a terrible thing happened. The one in the window threw back his head and laughed. A joyless, sneering laugh. In a moment of engulfing panic, David grabbed the curtains and pulled them tightly together. He fumbled for the mug and gulped down the rest of the wine.

THERE HE WAS. THE OTHER HIM.

What was happening? Was he losing his mind? What could he do? Even though he'd shut the curtains, he could tell that the other man was still there. Waiting. He had to talk to someone. Get help. Get a grip. It was late, but he had to hear another voice. Alan.

"Hello?" A groggy voice answered.

David slurred a reply. "Hi, Alan."

"Who is this?"

"S'me. Dave."

"God, you sound pissed."

"Am. Sorry."

"What time is it? I was asleep."

"Sorry. Dunno. Late. Sorry."

"Stop apologising! What is it?"

"Something's wrong. I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what? What's wrong?"

"The window."

"Oh, for fuck's sake, Dave!"

"Listen. He's there and something's wrong."

"Dave, you're pissed. I've just seen my clock. It's one in the morning. I've got work tomorrow. Goodbye!"

"But, Al—"

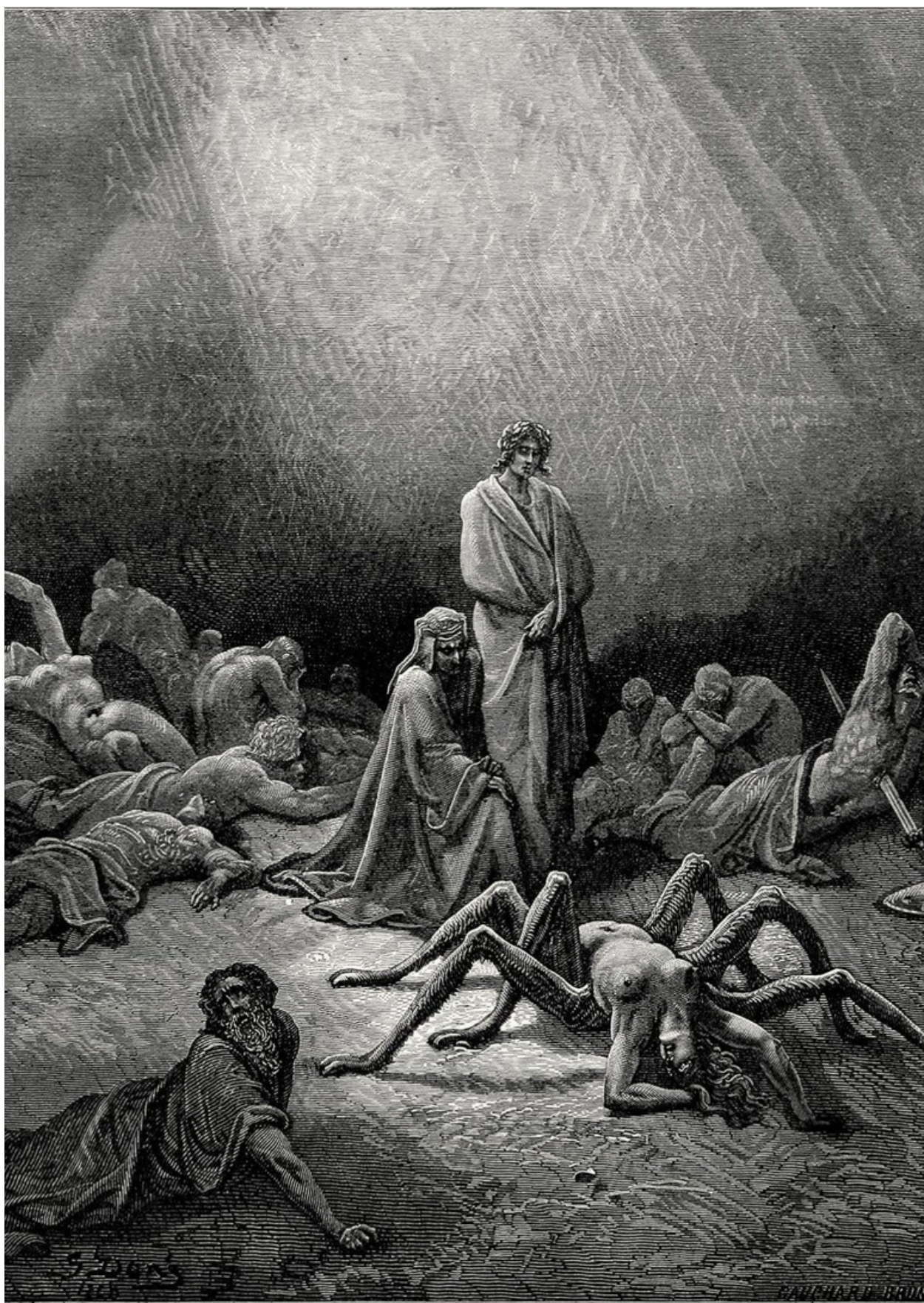
Angrily, Alan switched off his mobile. Still, something nagged at him. David had sounded really frightened. Probably just the booze, but he'd go round tomorrow after work. David swayed slightly, let the phone drop from his hand, then lurched into the kitchen. In one great swallow he emptied the wine bottle. His fear rapidly turned to resentment – of the intrusion, the embarrassment of disturbing Alan, being made to look like a fool.

And the thought of all that made him angry, muderously angry. A surge of adrenalin sent him heavy- limbed but ferociously eager for a fight, back to the window. He pulled the curtains so violently that he tore them off the rail.

There he was. Still laughing. Still vile and dead-eyed lying mockingly in wait. Angered to the point of derangement by the sight of the other, David thrust out his arms and grabbed his tormentor by the throat. He squeezed so hard that the effort made him gasp for breath. He felt his face swell and redden. Then, with a surge of crazed energy, he lifted his choking enemy into the air...

*

When Alan went round the next evening, the police were already there. An officer explained that David's body had been found in the garden; he had been thrown through the window. The bruising and lacerations to his body and face made that clear. Further bruising on his neck showed that he had been strangled to death. When the police arrived, the front door was locked with the key in the lock on the inside. All the lights in the house were on. Every window was shut. The only fingerprints found at the scene belonged to the victim.



EXPLORATION OF WOMAN AS A HORROR ANTAGONIST

BY ARUSHI (AERA) REGE

you are six eyes / you are three mouths / you are consuming me slowly / woman's body
horror / mouth-focused / because the worst thing a woman could be / is consuming / taking
up space / you are ten legs / you are seven noses / you are terrified / you are going to die at
the end / you know this / it does not take a genius to know / the monster is the villain / you
are the monster / you are taking up space / you are six eyes / you are consuming / you are
three mouths / you are angry / you are ten legs / you refuse to sit still and look pretty / you
are seven noses / you are terrified / you are alone / you are going to die in pain / you are
going to die / you are woman





IN MY BACKGROUND

BY MOTH HICKFORD

I must have been about six the first time I remember noticing him.

The man who stood at the end of our garden. Later, I found out I had talked about him even earlier than that. Every time I looked out of my bedroom window, he was there. A dark figure in a long trench coat, hands in pockets, hood up and head bowed. He was always there, day and night, stood amongst the low bushes and shrubberies. At first my parents dismissed it as an overactive imagination, but as my insistence didn't waver, they slowly became increasingly concerned. My mother, being of a superstitious predisposition, thought perhaps we shared our home with a lost spirit, and that my childhood purity allowed me to see him. My father, a rational and pragmatic man, thought that he was far more likely to be a symptom of an undiagnosed condition I surely suffered from.

At age eight we moved house and the man followed us. In the new home my bedroom was at the front rather than the back. Now he stood on the pavement on the other side of the road, facing our front door.

HE WAS ALWAYS THERE, DAY AND NIGHT, STOOD AMONGST THE LOW BUSHES AND SHRUBBERIES.

By the time I was nine I was in therapy. By ten, I was medicated—but he never left. In fact, later in childhood I noticed that he didn't just stand outside my house, he also followed me wherever I went. At school he would be at the gate. On holidays I would see him standing further down the beach, in the wash. On day trips to the city I would see him on the opposite train platform. When we went to the cinema or theatre he would be standing at the back of the auditorium, obscured in the gloom.

By twelve, I had worked out that life was a lot easier if I didn't talk about him. He made people uncomfortable. They thought I was mad, seeing him everywhere I went. So it was best just to

ignore him.

In my teenage years I even managed to convince myself he wasn't real—just a quirk of my brain. I almost trained myself to not see him too. Almost. But still in moments of lapsed concentration, he would return into my periphery.

Aged seventeen I went camping with a group of friends. We sat around the campfire and drank cider merrily. He stood in the darkness outside of the circle, under an old hawthorn. Later in the night, drunk and irrational, I ran for him. Screaming profanity and raging, damning his existence, cursing my curse. Yet every time I got to him, he wasn't there. He was now further on, under the next tree, even though I never saw him move. I charged for hours, hysterical in my fury until I collapsed in exhaustion. I wasn't invited camping again.

He persisted through my prime years. He stood under a streetlight in the lay-by as I lost my virginity in the backseat of a car, stood motionless on the dance floor of the nightclub where I worked on the bar. He lurked in the shadows off stage at my graduation, watched from the back of the church on my wedding day and waited patiently in the hospital hallway each time our children were born. I no longer denied him. Instead, I accepted his presence without acknowledgement. There was no other choice. He was always there and would always be there.

Now I am old and sick. Time has worn me to my expected end and I lie in wait. The last time I spoke of him to anyone was nearly seventy years ago. A few months ago, I stood, gazing out my bedroom window for the final time and he was still there, unchanged, amongst the low bushes and shrubberies.

The kind nurse tending to my needs has just gone down the hall to fetch my medication. Now she is gone, I notice my bedroom door has been left open. The hallway beyond the threshold is dark and still. As I peer out into the black, I can just make out the faint shape of a darker form. A figure standing just beyond the fall of light.



ECHO

BY C.M. FINCH



There was a raven outside her window.

Perhaps it was a crow, Ida could not be certain as she knew little about birds save for the fact that this one was large and black and perched on a branch that curved upwards to meet the night sky.

She would watch it and bid it goodnight, though she feared her foolishness would be overheard. By whom, she did not know as she lived alone in the tiny apartment above the bakery. Watching is how Ida noticed little details, like the way its dark eyes reflected the moon, or how the glint of the feathers in the flickering gas lights were not purely black, but the precise shade of periwinkle that Mrs. Lachlan had worn to the Spring ball. She had seen the dress a handful of times since, usually peering out beneath the heavy dark cloak she favored in the cooler months. The shawl though, that gorgeous woven piece highlighted with beads in an intricate pattern she recognized but could not quite put her finger on, the shawl had disappeared to the depths of history it would seem.

Her mind wandered. It did so after stressful days no matter how hard she tried to contain it. She craved an outlet, yet had none at her disposal. Sleep would assist, both her focus and her need to perform the next morning, but it was so difficult to obtain on nights like these.

Maybe she should knit. A shawl of her own would be useful as the nights grew longer and cooler. Ida did not have a beautiful periwinkle, but she did have a nice mauve in a midgrade wool that she knew would soften with age and wear. It would be an outlet of sorts, but she would insist on each and every stitch being perfect should she wear it in public. It was hubris of a sort, yet still expected.

When she came to this ash and smog bedecked place, she had little coin in her pockets and little experience to earn more. She had talked her way into a job at a factory and carefully stitched line after line of cloth in perfectly identical rows for hours upon hours a day. It was enough to live by, should she be careful. And then one day Mr. Johnson paced just outside her building in a tizzy. His wife was away and he had torn the hem on his trousers right before he needed to make a

presentation to the prosperous Mr. and Mrs. Ellingston. He begged her to please fix them. She did as requested and he was quite appreciative, enough to recommend her services to his cousin that owned a small dress shop. Next thing she knew, the factory was in the past and she worked to tailor custom pieces to those who could afford such services.

Ida glanced at the tiny wooden jewelry box beside her bed. Another month, maybe two, and there would be enough coin in it to purchase the fine strands to create herself a shawl to be proud of, one of a specific shade of blue even. It would take longer to afford the beads, but she could wait. She was good at waiting.

So was the raven.

It waited outside her window while she fretted about within. Usually, it would peer in as though watching her, head cocked to the side in its curiosity. She swore she locked eyes with it despite the darkness and the candle's reflection in the glass, and it let out an unholy squawk. It was enough to make her jump and step closer to see what had caused it to erupt into such a ruckus.

He was still there.

In the shadows beneath the tree was the dark outline of one Mr. Namen. Richard, he had asked her to call him as though they were on familiar terms. They were not, as she had politely reminded him. He had visited the shop to purchase something for his fiancé and did not understand that tailoring meant she would need to be present for the best results. He also did not understand the refuting of his obvious advances.

For three weeks now, he had found a reason to stop by, cornering her whilst she was alone to press and press about how she ought to give him a chance. He did not like to be told that his fiancé was surely waiting for his return. He would offer her the rose from his lapel and she would decline as was right and proper. At first, her employer had chided her to be polite. By the second week, her boss claimed she clearly must be leading him on. Today, he had remained after feigning leaving, witnessed the attempts, and drove off the good Mr. Namen himself.



Mr. Namen's response was to feign his own leaving, and then to follow Ida home. Followed her from the shop to the market where she picked up a cold dinner to have away from the troubles of the day. She had closed the gate to the stairway that led above the bakery very pointedly when he approached, and did some feigning of her own when she did not hear his pleas.

Mrs. Lachlan stood in the hallway between their rooms when she arrived. She commiserated with her troubles and invited her to dine with her instead, maybe a tippie of something determinedly not healthy should the mood call for it. She declined politely, tired, flustered, and frustrated, but Mrs. Lachlan did not seem to mind. They made plans for tea instead, the weekend looming with promise.

The raven cawed again and she glanced up from her own tepid cup of chamomile to see if perhaps something was wrong. If something troubled it, or if it simply fed off her own feelings of the day. She caught only a glimpse of feathers against the circle of the moon as it flew off. It was just as well. It likely did not need her melancholy when there was a night of adventure ahead of it.

There was movement in the courtyard and she steeled herself to glance down. It was only Mrs. Lachlan, the beads of her beautiful shawl glinting in the flickering gaslight. She raised her head to nod in Ida's direction before heading back to her room.

When Ida did eventually fall asleep, she dreamt of pursuit. A chase, darting in and out of alleyways and hiding in the shadows. She dreamt of talons ripping into the perfectly tailored coat Mr. Namen always wore. She dreamt of him closing his eyes in resolve and fading away, leaving only cobblestones and a single petal of the red rose he wore in the moonlight.

In the morning, she readied herself for the day. Client after client passed with pleasant smiles and whispered gossip. Mrs. Clarison tipped her a fine amount should she promise not to tell Mr. Clarison about yet another purchase, and also rewarded her with the best tales of high society. Apparently, her cousin's daughter, Ms. Elise, was in a rightful fit that morning as her fiancé had promised to meet her and never appeared.

There were rumors that he was a bit of a drunkard, and even that he had mistresses across the city. Troubling though, was that it appeared he had never even made it home the night before.

"You know how young men can get distracted though," Mrs. Clarison giggled. "Do not trust



**SHE WAS GOOD AT WAITING.
SO WAS THE RAVEN.**

them, miss. If you question their virtue, let me know and I will inquire, discreetly, of course."

Ida smiled and thanked her, but had to ask, "What was the name was of this man? The one your poor cousin's child is bereft of?"

"Mr. Namen. Wealthy enough, but I do not believe he is worth the trouble," Mrs. Clarison replied before she bid her departure.

Ida left that evening with a mind heavy with thought. The chances of two cheating and conniving Mr. Namens were small. She did wonder if he had sulked home, gotten lost in the drink and would be found in an alley in a day's time, or if he had fallen victim to some of the darker corners of the city nights.

Despite her desire to avoid that particular topic of conversation the next day with Mrs. Lachlan, the matter did arise. Ida had purchased biscuits from the baker and Mrs. Lachlan had brewed the tea. It was a vibrant, earthy one she had not had before that painted the older woman's lips red with each sip and she assumed the same could be said for herself.

“Do you see yourself ever falling for a suitor?” Mrs. Lachlan asked. There was a gleam to her dark eyes that let her know she already knew the answer.

She cocked her head to the side as she replied, “No, not of the options presented thus far. Perhaps there is someone out there, somewhere, like there was for you.”

She earned a hearty chuckle for her troubles. “Oh, my dear, you are quite mistaken,” Mrs. Lachlan assured her. “I will let you in on a little secret. Should you move to a new town with a comfortable security of finances and wear black for some time, many will simply assume that you have been widowed. Be sure not to correct the nomenclature and assumptions, and you are quite well set to spend your life as you please.”

Her eyes widened and she set her cup down carefully. “Surely you jest? How is this possible and how have you kept such wonders from me for so long?”

Mrs. Lachlan licked her lips, and the red spread like fine paint. “I felt the same some decades past now, when a kind woman took me under her wing and told me the same. She told me she saw a bit of herself in me and, should I choose this path, I would see myself in another someday.” She grinned, the tips of her teeth dyed crimson with the tea, “I believe I have.”

She walked Mrs. Lachlan back to her room and tucked the leftover sweets in her hand to enjoy as a sign of her gratitude. In return, the older woman insisted upon obtaining something from within. The door was open, and she saw the brilliant jewelled tones against rich black, bits of crystal and stone and shiny tidbits as signs of the life that she had lived. On a small table next to the door was a small silver dish with a handful of rose petals within, the scent fading but familiar.

When Mrs. Lachlan returned, she handed her a bundle wrapped in paper. Curious, she opened it to find a skein of fine rich wool in a bright shade of periwinkle. “I cannot!” she protested.

“Nonsense,” the other woman said. “Now you can make a shawl of your own. We are, after all, so much alike.”

Later, as Ida carefully wound the skein around her hands, she gazed out the window and listened to Mrs. Lachlan’s door open and close as she left

for her nightly stroll. She peered out to silently wish her well and perhaps hope for her safety on streets that had proven to be anything but. There was no sign of her though, not the swish of her cloak or the glint of her shawl. Instead, she watched as the raven soared up through the moonlight, so much brilliance hidden in its dark wings.

Before she returned to her task, something caught her eye and she glanced down. There, on the window ledge, was a single red rose, trimmed as though to fit through a buttonhole, the tip of its stem damp and glistening like the tea they had sipped mere hours ago.

“Yes,” Ida agreed to the vastness of night before her. “We are very much alike, aren’t we?”

The echo of a caw off the cobblestones was her only answer.



**RAG DOLL
AND
CYANIDE**

BY LUCE JONES

Rag Doll

The remnants of powdered nostalgia rests on her right nostril
diluted pupils and transparent tears
her insides disappear
and it may burn the inside of her nose
but eventually she will feel nothing
all she will smell is empty laughter
mixed with a sudden, bitter anger
oh, how she missed the sounds of giggles and screams
living outside of her own threadbare skin
so as her mind rips apart at the seams
and her body is a pile of torn thread and teeth
she dreams
she dreams
she dreams



Cyanide

I hope you floss until your gums bleed
but pieces of my skin stay stuck between your teeth
I hope you taste rotten flesh and every lover you try to kiss
turns away in disgust as they smell me still in your mouth
I hope it keeps you awake to know I am the apple seed
lodged between your right incisor and canine
I hope your silver tongue turns red raw in an effort to dislodge it
I hope you pull your teeth out one by one in a delirious rage
Then I hope you smile at her with empty gums
and realise you are nothing but a pretty face



RED RIBBON
A PENNY DISTRICT DREADFUL
 BY TOBY CRABBE



Sunday became Monday.

Miss Brandie's purse had run dry. The weight had gone from the leather, and all that remained in her mouth was the bitter burn of her evening's mistakes. Rum's burden was not one lightly managed. A new wobble embedded itself in her legs, weighing them down with ache. Darkness gathered, and an eclipse delighted the night sky with all the oily shades of premature dusk. Loose, black clouds circled above, obscuring the non-moon and its non-light.

The hot months had passed, and autumn made its bed. Come winter, blue ice floes would close off the mercantile waterfront, and a chilling fog would eat its way through the cobbled wharf.

Miss Brandie hauled herself down Penny District; passing by a number of taverns and bed sheds, she noted that the buildings still bore memories of Old Hallow Night. Very few such hostels denoted any vacancy in the dim light of their windows, but for carved vegetable faces and cobwebs. She'd assumed as much. She'd struggled to decipher any residential notice pinned up against the broad boards or lamplights. Some broken bottles were removed from where she hunched, and the portrait of an individual had been pinned against a pyramid of mildewed barrels. Sloppy ink-work had been scribbled all over the parchment, leaving only the boldest words to be made out for both the illiterate, and intoxicated.

If pressed, Miss Brandie would never admit to which she aligned.

To herself, she mumble-mimicked several key descriptions: 'dead', 'murder', 'prize', 'Predator', and the like. Most boldly, however: 'BLOOD'. Plenty of blood had been spilt during Old Hallow Night. Murderous deeds could be passed off as decoration and theatre during the celebration. No one had been alarmed to discover that the night had given birth to numerous macabre murders once the celebrations had concluded.

Besides the empty barrels, leaning and smoking something spiced, a snub-nosed drinker eyed her up and down. He was wrapped up in a crimson oilskin, and raindrops pattered off of his shoulders like ball bearings. He eyed Miss Brandie like a bullish gundog, it's attention brought to a

meaty rib.

'Go home, Miss', he pleaded. 'Bad folk about, don't need more blood in Penny District.'

Miss Brandie didn't humour him. She merely cursed in his general direction and moseyed around the building into the shade of a dank alley. That her blood had been deemed too invaluable to decorate the cobbles was insult enough for her to take his hint, and leave. And so, she did.

An autumn blow, cold enough to kill, burrowed through her cloak and chilled her bodice. The red cloth did nothing to battle the serrated edge on the breeze. Miss Brandie hadn't a basic idea as to where she'd sleep. Perhaps, some autumns previous, she'd have been able to earn bedding by scrubbing tankards, or sweeping shattered porcelain in one of these very buildings. But she'd been adamant not to stoop so low in what she considered her prime. Besides, she'd have only made a pocket's worth of copper, and that'd likely not even sorted breakfast the morning after. Nowadays, younger and more "well-equipped" people worked those jobs.

Miss Brandie might have presented a pretty twenty (and some change) but hadn't the heart to accept that the better portion of her childhood had pranced passed like frames from a fever dream. She'd wake up next week — somewhere, and in who-knows-what condition — and have turned fifty (and some change). She knew her life would go by in a blink, and lamented that she'd not spent her girlhood up with a degree more prudence.

Despite herself, she'd once praised the embroidery of her cloak, and embraced the warmth it offered. A gentleman admirer named Conrad Murnau — who she'd considered to be quite the bachelor — had presented it with hopes of warming her heart. The previous two years hadn't been kind on the rosy material, and she'd come to question the legitimacy of its worth, and his true intentions. Presently, it was no more than a frayed, red ribbon.

In the beginning, many of her admirer's gifts had been given to her in hopes of one thing; of this she had no doubts. Beautiful necklaces,

bracelets, jewels and exotic perfumes had become so numerous, that she hadn't felt guilty pawning them off. What coin they had fetched was spent long ago. Unfortunately, none of them had been worth much. She'd filed off their previous owner's markings with her roughest nail files, and no enjoyable degree of drudgery.

Her expenses dwindling, Miss Brandie had come to blast through boots, none of which had ever been comfortable. They'd either been too narrow, too wide, too gaudy, or too bland. Her feet had carried her through nearly every alleyway and backstreet the city possessed, and through their use and ruin, she felt a similar effect on her heart. She'd romanced a better life. But the committal clanking across the bendy roads and bridges of Penny District for the better part of her womanhood remained most primary among her gripes. Now, Brandie's purse was empty, and the hole in her heart had been left unsatisfied.

In the distance, Miss Brandie heard music. She'd always loved music. She noted a grandiose blend of an organ, stringed instruments, and a harmonized children's choir. It seasoned the Penny District air with the deluxe flavours of luxury, and dignity, and emphasised the quiet around her. Brandie looked up. Belgrove Bank rose above the highest of businesses and bed sheds in Penny District, whose peak was lost about the black clouds, and the amber impression of desk candles flickered in the darkness. There was warmth behind the brickwork. Of course, Belgrove was too far from Miss Brandie to be the origin of the music, but there were many noble establishments which indulged in such opulence.

The orchestra dragged her back.

Miss Brandie had attended masquerades and balls in her better years, albeit commonly as an extension of her gentleman's pride and pomp. Brandie shuddered as if embraced by the phantom memory. In the direction she'd been heading however, no music played. Nothing sounded but the pitter-patter of autumn rain on rooftop canvases, crammed rookeries, and through the narrow lanes. Her only accomplice through Penny District was the bending image of her shadow, cast against the path ahead like some skulking street beast.

Evenings such as this were often polluted by sooty, chimney smoke. The metallic tang of new blood spoiled Penny District's low-hanging runnels. Brandie always assumed that someone somewhere was either dead or dying. She made it her business to never question, and never provoke. It struck her as poetic that the Penny

District was where the most coin was garnered, and the most lost. It was a pit of debt, deceit, and drunkenness. Perhaps, it had been inevitable that the Penny District Predator would conduct their bloody murders here.

She'd heard plenty about them. Nobody could live in Penny District as long as she had without hearing the stories. Only up until recently, she'd pushed them aside as nothing more. But with a cast of ladies disappearing from Penny District, only for their shredded wardrobes to be discovered days later with what remained, Brandie had given over to the grim reality.

Penny District had a killer, and nobody knew when or where they'd strike.

Black portraits depicted the Predator with a bestial grimace and claws like meat hooks. He'd been a devilish street demon with eyes of ruby fire, and a black cloak that enveloped Penny District's lamplight like a wide slice of night. The more sensible amongst the commonfolk had determined him — if he were male — to be a tall and lithe gentleman with a bloody streak behind him and too many knives to boot. Miss Brandie prayed that she'd never chance the misfortune of being the one to end the debate.

Miss Brandie's head squeezed with the post-partum pressure of cheap booze. Her preferences had been usurped by her budget, and where once she'd drunk only the most aged red wines, she now exclusively drank dirty rum — often in a downtrodden locale. Her leg's wobble hadn't placated. Pain wove its way up her back and pinched her nape. The drink had burrowed into her brain, and buzzed like a disturbed beehive. Nonetheless, she paid a pretty penny to numb her pain. It'd been a shame that each dawn saw a new pain dawn in its place. Brandie endeavoured to remember when last she'd eaten anything other than damp, brown bread or undesirable giblets. The few pennies she'd mustered from night work she'd given over to the barkeep to please her addiction, not her belly. When neither promised escape, she'd slip a Queen's Bead onto her pink tongue, anxiously awaiting the pull of dreams. When — and if — morning came for her, it did so with vengeance of a distressed parent.

Where Brandie's parents were now was anyone's guess.

Old Man Jacque, the barkeep at the Burning Brew, had described the murders as a 'dreadful business'. Business in Penny District had dwindled in light of such evil. Vessels still visited the docks, but never lingered, and the merchants rarely stepped ashore. Most men and women had

decided that a blurry night life hadn't been worth their heads. Miss Brandie hadn't received the memo. Those found bumbling about Penny District after dark — those who hadn't been ripped up and drained — were guaranteed a visit by didactic law keepers. Brandie had heard that whoever had been visited hadn't been seen again. One exception had been Melanie Mace, a distinguished harlot who'd claimed to have seen the killer once before. He'd been creeping over rain-swept rooftops, hunting a child heading home from her paper delivery.



Melanie had claimed his eyes 'burned like hot coals', and that he'd leap extraordinarily far between rooftops 'like some an animal'. Melanie, however, was no newcomer to the images conjured up by a bad batch of Queen's Bead. Her claims had been met with mixed reception. Desperate for information, the law keepers had taken her words as gospel.

Miss Brandie didn't divide predator and prince. Most men she'd known had been beastly in a manner of speaking. She deplored that she'd ever believed otherwise. Coincidentally, the Penny District Predator wasn't alone with his "tools". Brandie had a blade of her own. But for now, it hugged her bare thigh, waiting. She'd half mind to unleash it on a number of passers-by, those that thought it fair game to mock her bedraggled appearance.

Brandie needed a bed, a Queen's Bead even. An unacceptable number of nights had been passed huddled beneath a lamplight. It'd been a miracle

she hadn't been bothered by drunkards, law keepers, or a more unpleasant individual. Brandie slumped down into the mouth of a back-alley archway. Her body deflated from use. The stones above her circled with languid motion. Beneath her cloak, she began to run her nail down the edge of her blade. It was maybe her only possession she hadn't considered pawning off for copper. She carried it everywhere, and hadn't yet used it. Brandie may have been bottle-worn and bumbling, but she polished the blade with rainwater each night, maintaining its silver gleam.

Maybe, that was it. Maybe, that was her move. Tonight would be the night she unsheathed the blade, and buried it in somebody's organs. She'd collect what pennies her prize dropped — perhaps enough for a bed — and leave the blame for the Predator to digest.

An hour on, when the numb buzz of rum had begun to fade, Miss Brandie waddled down Penny District's Plinth Street where she'd been haunting for an oblivious prospect. Prospect sounded better to her than victim. Victim elicited more than one death. One murder was hardly unusual. She'd merely be joining the league of a darker breed of drunk.

Besides a decrepit money lender's hole, two drunken pinch-pockets locked knuckles and butted heads over their pilfered belongings. An audience of drunks encircled the pair, punching the air and inciting more blood, and more rum. An hour previous, Miss Brandie may have joined in. There were too many people down Plinth Street. She'd expected quiet. She didn't linger. Any longer and it was inevitable that one drunk bloodied his knuckles on the nose of another. Soon, the law keepers would arrive and break the rabble, and her game would meet a premature end.

When they came, leathers creaking and oilskins glistening in the downpour, Miss Brandie heard the audience complaining about the spoiled brawl, before commencing one of their own. Fists flew, teeth were chipped, and hair was pulled.

Backing up from the upheaval, Brandie slipped down the shadow of an adjacent avenue towards Hack Alley. It was draughty, and the drains were overflowing nearby. Goosebumps pricked her skin. She wrapped herself tighter in her cloak, and clutched her blade. Brandie veered, a black cat knocking down a potted plant from a balcony above. It shattered beside her, and worms wriggled out from the dirt. She noticed a grimy stream pouring from the backdoors of a lodging house. Many such establishments littered Penny

District, dens for deviants. The water was pungent, and bodily.

Miss Brandie wasn't alone.

She rubbed the remainder of rum-daze from her eyes, and squinted up and down the alley. Lamplight didn't reach here. Someone breathed in the darkness. A man. Brandie made out an over cloak, gliding from one pocket of shade to another. He put his head up to a similar flow of brown and white water in the wall, and began to drink. Perhaps, this was Miss Brandie's betting prospect. She only hoped now that the brawl would manage the law keepers long enough. She donned an innocent pout, covering her breath. Beneath her breast, her blade was drawn, naked. Miss Brandie approached.

'Evening, Darling,' Brandie managed. There was pretence in her voice feigning innocence and vulnerability. 'I'm looking for a bed. Perhaps you could point me in the right direction?'

He turned. Miss Brandie couldn't see what he looked like. But she heard him drinking, scoffing, and groaning. Brandie pulled the cloak from her chest, hoping the skin about her collar and shoulders appeared soft and alluring. She held the blade behind her back.

He heard. His head snapped up like a startled beast. He moved, and Miss Brandie noted the jingle of his deep pockets — a heavy purse. She licked her lips with the guarantee of Queen's Bead and a hearty meal.

He was close now.

Brandie could feel intimate warmth brewing in the metres separating them. She drew her blade. The man's breathing had become heavy, becoming a pant. He'd been interested in the heat her body radiated. He came in close, and she jabbed out with the neck of her blade to slice his throat and be done with it. Claws closed around her wrist. The bones snapped. Miss Brandie moved to scream in agony, but with a lash, he plucked the cherry from her throat. Night air escaped through the wound, along with pints of thin blood. All she could see, all that she'd remember if she awoke on another side, was two eyes, aflame like boiled rubies. Her colour drained, and she died.

The Penny District Predator dragged her into the darkness, and ripped her up.

When Miss Brandie was discovered, it was as a decoration, a bundle of red ribbons.





VAMPIRE CATS

BY LINDAANN LOSCHIAVO

TEN WORD HORROR STORIES

READ OUR WINNING COMPETITION ENTRIES BELOW

Halloween supper can be found,
In mortuary or burial ground.

Luke Hannon

Back'n forth
Rattle, clatter, drip
Bones strung out without the ladder.

Elizabeth Kaida

Your side of the bed is cold.
Your body's colder.

Sydney Correia



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X @THINVEILPRESS.

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IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

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Karl Johnson is an occasional poet and permanent Primary School Teacher from the South West of Ireland. He writes poetry spanning multiple genres, but usually focused on life, love and loss. In 2022, he won the Macra na Feirme creative writing short story section with his story "Convalescence". You can find more of his work on <https://allpoetry.com/KJ90> or follow john_karlson_ on Instagram.

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Oliver Noonday is a charity bookseller based in Surrey, he is a writer and poet whose work has been featured in the Global Poetry Showcase. He has a particular interest in middle-grade literature and illustration, both classic and modern.

Andrea Fitzgerald

Andrea Fitzgerald originally planned on becoming a graphic novelist. She built her illustration portfolio and then decided to study Arts & Science, and Biotechnology. When she isn't writing fantasy/dark fantasy novels or horror stories, you'll find her at home with her artist husband and their cats, probably watching horror movies.

Dayle Olson

Dayle Olson's poetry is published in Haunted Words Press Anthology, Timber Ghost Press, Salal Review, RAIN Magazine, Dirigible Balloon, HipFish, and Humanities Washington Poetic Routes. She presented her highly commended poem, "Descartes", at the Angry Ghosts Poetry Competition in Suffolk, England and has taught zine workshops for Willamette Writers and Raymond Carver Writing Festival.

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Leigh Loveday (he/him) grew up in industrial south Wales and now lives in the English Midlands, squatting in a house co-owned by a dozen neighbourhood cats. He edits videogame marketing blurb by day and writes fiction aggressively slowly by night. Find him on Twitter/X (while it still draws wheezing breath) @MrLovelyday.

Eóin Hamill

Eóin Hamill is a 24 year-old aspiring poet from County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, who works in a bookshop, selling literature during work hours and writing it on his time off. Though new to the world of publishing, he has been writing since childhood and wants nothing more than to share his art through the lense of poetry.

Andrew Dobson

Andrew Dobson has written several novels and hopes one day to see one or more on the shelves! He graduated in 2012 from Royal Holloway university with a BA in Classical Studies. He has always been fascinated with ancient history and his writing style is loosely inspired by classical epic poems such as the Aeneid and the Odyssey.

Danny Shaw

Danny Shaw spends his days researching and teaching about political violence and writes horror in his spare time. But honestly, he isn't as grim as that makes him sound. Coming from the dreich, rain-drenched streets of central Scotland gave him plenty of time to ruminate on the darker side of life (please visit). He writes folk, cosmic and body horror, taking influence from Junji Ito, Hailey Piper, Nathan Ballingrud, John Darnielle and Kathe Koja. You can find him on Twitter (until something better comes along) @WeirdandFearty

Michael Daviot

Michael (he/him) has been a professional actor/writer for 40 years and has written half dozen plays and ten solo shows. During lockdown and after, he wrote a novel and a collection of short stories. He recently had his first short story - 'Softly and Suddenly' - accepted for publication, by Loft Books, and is now actively pursuing publication for his other work.



Arushi (Aera) Rege

Arushi (Aera) Rege is a queer, Indian-American poet who simultaneously attends junior year in high school. In their free time, they can be found reading good books, listening to R&B, and stressing over college. They tweet occasionally @academic_core and face the perils of instagram @aeranem_26. Their works have been published in Stone of Madness Press, Full House Literary Magazine, The Afterpast Review, and more.

Moth Hickford

Moth lives in the Chilterns, where he enjoys wandering through the woods and pondering on the macabre. He is a lifelong horror fan, who spent his seventh birthday money on a film-quality latex zombie mask, and now spends his evenings reading Poe by the fire. He has always been creative, but only recently started putting pen to paper to try and exorcise his own stories.

C.M. Finch

C. M. Finch (she/they) is an author, occasional artist, and a parental figure to both humans and fur babies. Outside of the paying gig, you will find them taking too many pictures of state forests, collecting too many books, and volunteering with the CONvergence Science Fiction convention.

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Luce Jones is a student writer currently in her third year of university studying Creative Writing and English Literature. Her main writing form is poetry, which you can read more of on her Instagram: @myluceморals.

Toby Crabbe

A graduate of Creative & Professional Writing at the University of Wolverhampton, Toby Crabbe (He / Him) is an internationally published British writer of dark fantasy and horror from the quiet dells of Shropshire, England. Never distracted from his childhood dream, Toby has devoutly pursued publication for his many enticing quick-reads and short stories. He can be found on Instagram @toby_crabbe and Twitter @CrabbeToby.

LindaAnn LoSchiavo

Native New Yorker LindaAnn LoSchiavo (she/her), a four time nominee for The Pushcart Prize, is a member of SFPA, British Fantasy Society, and Dramatists Guild. Her books include: "Women Who Were Warned," "Messengers of the Macabre," "Apprenticed to the Night," and "Vampire Ventures" (Alien Buddha Press). Forthcoming in 2024: "Cancer Courts My Mother."

Our Competition Winners:

Luke Hannon X: @lukehannonpoet

Elizabeth Kaida X: @ElizabethKaida

Sydney Correia X: @sydandthePEN



CLASSIC ARTWORK

Percy J. Billinghamurst, 1871-1933

Gustave Doré, 1832-1883

John Henry Fuseli, 1741-1825

F.S. Coburn, 1871-1960

Hein von Essen, 1886-1947

Louis Apol, 1850-1936

William Wallace Denslow, 1856-1915

Odilon Redon, 1840-1916

Will R. Barnes, ?-1939

Letterio Calapai, 1902-1993

Hermann Paul, 1864-1940

Henri van der Stok, 1870-1946

Anny Dollschein, 1893-1946

Francisco de Goya, 1746-1828

Gustave Doré, 1832-1883

Henry Justice Ford, 1860-1940





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