

Jessica Amanda Salmonson's  
and Richard H. Fawcett's  
**Fantasy Macabre**  
**#13**

"beauty plus strangeness equals horror"  
-Arthur Machen



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My sweet chums:

I was pondering what to editorialize about and decided that Hate was a good topic. My Bohemian buddy Grant Fjermedal came by last night and we talked until three in the morning. Discussing my misanthropy, abrasiveness, perversity and lack of tact, I observed that there were people who hated me for three very traits the Bohemian-minded found me enjoyable. Grant pshawed the idea that anyone could hate me, not meaning to imply that paranoia be added to my trait list. I searched my memory, and realized the people who've claimed to hate me have never met me! Five or six years ago, I learned a virtual stranger had hated me for ten full years (fifteen by now, if he's still working at it). I had sent a poem to a handsome magazine of the Gothic and Romantic. The poem was accepted with a kind note of praise. A month or so later, the poem was returned by an embarrassed member of an editorial collective, for another collective member had threatened to withdraw his financial assistance if anything of mine were used, as he blamed me for damage to a piece of his artwork submitted in 1973 to the first magazine I ever edited. I searched my memory and could not recall ever having received art from this chap, making me wonder if he had confused me with someone else, though I vaguely recalled he used to send me handwritten letters on which he doodled, and I once published one of those doodles. I've always taken great care with art originals, though it is in fact common in art departments of larger publishing firms to cut, paste, scribble on, or alter artists' work. I was left to speculate that just maybe something was submitted to me along with an itty bitty return envelope which I possibly assumed was to be used for rejected material; and since the chap in question always folded up his doodled-on letters, perhaps, just perhaps, in my youthful ignorance, I too folded up some piece of artwork to return in a ridiculously small envelope. I can only guess, for the chap has never said a thing about it directly to me. The interesting thing is how the unfortunate fellow spent ten years of his life holding a pointless grudge, likely for something he only imagined occurred, awaiting that precious moment when he could get his longed-for revenge by denying a poem of mine three inches of space in a 100-page fanzine. If I wrote comedy instead of horror, I'm sure I could have used this event in a story.

Off hand I can recollect only once experiencing longlasting hatred (as opposed to momentary anger) and that was aimed at a court-appointed guardian who physically and emotionally abused my sister and myself when we were little orphans. I used to imagine it would be fun to dance upon her grave. By the time she got around to dying, she had so faded from my sentiments that it had no emotional impact either way, and I certainly didn't bother to seek out her stoneless grave in order to dance on it. In fiction, hate is a suspenseful device, and can be treated superlatively to enormous effect. But I suspect in real life, as with that unknown artist's grudge, hate is commonly petty and misguided.

Thine, Jessica

AWFUL EXAMPLES  
OF CHILDREN WHO  
PLAYED WITH



miracle, and then we will believe you!"

And those who believed in the one God, threatened him with their fists, and called to him:

"He is blaspheming against the heavens!"

"Kill the false prophet!"

And others shouted:

"He is raving in a fever!"

"To the hospital with him!"

"He has escaped from an asylum!"

"Guard yourselves before him, for he is bringing death!"

But his believers, who were lying at his feet and kissing the hem of his coat, cried out:

"Master! Give us death! Show us how to die today, so that we may live in the stars!"

And he stroked them on their heads and spoke to them:

"Close, already, is the time when every one of you will die. I will die first, for I have drunken of the water of the river which flows behind the camp. Drink of the water of this river, and you too will soon forget this world. For it is the river of forgetfulness."

But those who did not want to die raised up against him voices full of dread and horror:

"Do not drink the water of the river, for it is infected with typhoid! Kill him, the criminal, before he infects the whole camp! He himself is already infected, death is gazing from his eyes!"

And several stones flew at his head. But his disciples surrounded him with their bodies to protect him from the blows. Then they fixed their gaze upon his lips to see what he would utter next, but he was already so weak that he was unable to stand on his own two feet. And he lay down on the dry turf and closed his eyes. Then they covered him with their coats and sat down around him, in order to keep watch. Thus he lay for a long time, without movement, his face toward the extinguishing sky, on which there sparkled the first stars. Those who were nearest to him looked at his eyes to see whether he slept. But he did not sleep. His blue eyes were open wide, and they were darkening like the sky and were full of stars. And his mouth was stirring itself to a quiet twittering. And everyone came and gathered around him, and they laid their heads beside his cheek, and placed their ears to hear his words. And he whispered:

"I have been a butterfly on the star Kololla. Our wings were as enormous as ships' sails, and we had the ability to speak in colors, in the same way that you speak with words. The rainbows we made each had a thousand colors, of which you apprehend seven. Your whole world is built out of just seven colors, for your world is the poorest world of all. On the star Zalalava there live beings like changeable clouds and they communicate by fragrances.

"Do you see the star which burns now ruddily, now blueely, now winking out and now burning again? Those are the signals of the star Malilali, calling out for help. A long time ago, it was besieged by the inhabitants of the pirate star Mavalajola, who dart around like bullets, for their extremities describe an enormous spiral. And that green star beside it, that is Rolakojala. There I was a singing flower. The lightest of breezes carries them

away above the ringing waters, for they are lighter than anything.

"On the star Lalajaka I was a hemorrhaging crystal, sounding in harmony with all the others, and moaning with longing for the secret of the universe. The inhabitants of the planet Vikolajala are larger than mountain with eternal snowy caps. From the start of their world they have been building a tower in an attempt to reach their sun, which is the largest in the universe. I, too, have been a builder of that tower with a tremendous longing for that sun.

"On the bottom of the star Kavalajala, in the sweet liquefaction of the ether, I lived in a flying transparent carapace, knowing nothing of the universe. On the star Volalijala, thin stalks grow high into the sky. On each stalk there bud off two creatures, whose whole life comprises one long cry of love. Even more than this I could describe to you, but I can no longer go on. It is time that I returned to my star. I will bring them a message about this planet, the inhabitants of which mutually devour each other. About humanity, the most rapacious being in the universe, the carnivore of carnivores. For I-- have also--been--a human being."

Still the old man whispered on, but it was no longer words he whispered, just the quiet, colorless murmuring of the dying lips. And slowly there expired the stars in his eyes, and his mouth gave a tremor for the last time. Finally there remained in their arms only his body, stinking, rotten to the core, a body full of pus. They gazed in wonder at his countenance, silent, mysterious, eyes open wide beneath the stars.

"He has departed for the stars," his followers declared. But one of the unbelievers stepped up to his body, opened his coat, and tore open his shirt. The chest was strewn with tiny scarlet blotches, the marks by which blooms typhoid on the human body.

"He was raving in a typhoid fever," said the unbeliever, but the believers shook their head.

"His body may have died, but his soul is flying to the stars."

"He has shown us how we ought to die."

And they buried him by the light of the stars, on the very spot where he died. And then they dispersed to their barracks, so they no longer had to fear the river which rose up from the marshes, and crawled shallowly between the reeds around the camp.

"He who drinks shall die!"

So understood everyone, but now it was no longer a prohibition, but rather an invitation, a sweet promise of death.

And the seed of the infection quickly took hold in their bloodstreams, and burst forth in fiery red blossoms on their breasts, and fever dreams of fiery stars collided with each other in violent contest. And while their bodies burned their last upon this world, their souls flew out to the star Olaliju, so they could clothe themselves in fire in readiness for their new life.



**Carol Reid** of Canada has sent us only a scanty amount of biographical information, which has been passed along to you as headnotes to "Builder of Coffins" and "A Feast of Ashes" in past issues. "The Head of the Hydra Flower" is another of her tales, to be found in *Tales by Moonlight II* (Tor, 1989). The recent birth of a child, I'm lately informed, has put a crimp on the writing. Still, here begins the mysterious author's fourth tale of moody, strange calmness.

## THE RELEASE OF DORIA

**T**here was a woman who lived across the field from where Doria has settled. Youth was no longer her companion, but she carried her burden of years lightly, as a soft padding that plumped the wrinkles of her skin.

This was her country, never Doria's, though both held deeds to pieces of it. On meeting upon the pathway they eyed each other warily, each feeling out the boundaries of her territory. While Doria picked her way around the puddles, the other strode through them. While she swaddled herself against the cold, salt-edged wind that howled off the ocean, the other welcomed it, opening her coat and pulling the old plaid scarf from her head. When warm from the hunt, the steam rose softly from her body, as from the newly killed carcasses Doria sometimes saw her carry home. She remembered her own squeamishness when she was first made to chop the limbs from a plucked chicken, and wondered at the other's courage. So much there was yet to learn!

At first they spoke only in passing, exchanging gruff and careful greetings, then one day the woman called to Doria to help her, for she had cut her hand on the teeth of her trap. Doria trembled, ministering to her, for she did not care for the smell of blood, and the scarf made a poor bandage, but the woman thanked her heartily.

Doria's cottage was near at hand. There was nothing to be done but to invite her in to wash her wounds. Again the woman thanked her, and accepted Doria's own handkerchief as a bandage after the cut had been washed clean.

"Are you alone, then?" the woman asked her boldly, and Doria almost smiled at her impertinence.

"Quite alone," she managed to reply as she took the photograph from its place on the bookcase. "This was my husband. Died young, as you see. We were quite happy together, until then." She sounded ridiculous, playing the widow. The other grinned at her.

"There are worse things," the woman said, and Doria thought, yes, of course there are worse things; everyone lives through her own worst thing, lives to tell of it, again and again.

The little fire in the grate glowed orange as the afternoon light grew dim. Doria pushed the coals around listlessly. The woman knelt by the fire and breathed upon it, then warmed her injured hand.

"When I was young we traded tales around fires like this for our entertainment," she said. "Let me give you a story, a token for your kindness."

"No need..." Doria began, wishing there were some way to rid her house of the other. She was embarrassed by the dust and shabbiness, by the poorness of the fire, by her own

insincerity.

The woman sat crosslegged on the dirty carpet, and behind closed eyes gathered her words and pictures together. Then her eyes opened and she spoke:

"In the darkest hour of a black and wind-tossed night Helene awoke and clutched her lover's hand in her own, both numb with cold.

'Promise me,' she hissed, her stiff fingers pinching his, 'promise me that you will never, never die!'

The boy was afraid, awakened suddenly from a disturbing dream into a tangle of chilly sheets and groping fingers, and readily pledged himself to everlasting life.

'I promise you, Helene,' young Gustav said, 'that we shall be together always, that I will never die.'

Helene bowed her head and repeated the words. For the moment they were soothed by their vows, and fell easily back into the abyss of sleep.

At dawn, when the wagon came to take Gustav, Helene gave him his bread and his flask of tea, and stroked his hair softly as they stood in twilight. Would she ever tire of the soft dark curls that covered her lover's head, of the cheek just beginning to show a shadow of beard beneath the skin? He turned to her and kissed her quickly, then ran and jumped into the wagon with the other men, and she closed the door so as not to be seen by them in her nightdress. She listened to the dull roll of the wagon wheels on the unpaved road, the mumbled greetings of its drowsy cargo.

Helene, too, was strangely somnolent, despite the knowledge that Gustav's destination was a dangerous one. Sometimes she had panicked as he made to leave, begging him to take care, even to stay away from the forest that day.

She gathered up her lover's soiled clothes, frowning as she noticed his cross and medallion still pinned to the vest he had worn a day before. Gustav had always believed in the ornament's power, for when she had cried and clutched his arm in times of sorrow he would reach into his shirt and display it to her as a means of comfort.

Overnight, it was as if everything, and, at once, nothing had changed. Does a room alter when we leave it, or does it remain the room it was, inhabited?

Helene lifted the heavy pot, filled it with water and set it on the stove, and set to washing her lover's clothes. When Gustav returned that night she threw herself into his arms and wept, for she had known that he would return unhurt, even without the protection of the medallion. He held her close to his mud-splattered chest and grieved with her, for he, too, had spent a day apart from her and had felt no fear.

Helene cooked their evening meal without her usual fastidious attention. The meat was under done, the carrots and potatoes badly peeled and tasting unpleasantly of earth, and yet they ate, without pleasure and without distaste, then huddled by the fire as dishes stood unwashed upon the table.

The night was calm and mild, with no wind to howl companionably under the eaves and down the chimney. The fluttering of the lovers' breath was the only movement, the only sound.

At daybreak Gustav rose, blustering and hearty, and noisily prepared himself for work. Helene rose with him and cleared a place in which to make ready his breakfast. His porridge was stirred and salted perfectly, his tea soothing hot and sweet. With many words Gustav took his leave of her and she, too, chattered at him like some odd bird.

When he had gone and all was still Helene scrubbed the table and the cupboards and the floors, took the linen from the bed and washed it. For a time she pinned Gustav's medallion to her apron for comfort, but it came unfastened, and as she gathered vegetables in the garden for their supper, it dropped and was forgotten.

From then on they spent each day so fervidly that the neighbors wondered at their industry and cheerfulness. The cottage was a model of cleanliness and economy, and in the forest Gustav was tireless and ever ready to serve his employer's needs. They lived well and honestly, never prevailing upon others for company or assistance, even on the night Helene bore their only child.

A neighbor woman, reckoning it to be close to Helene's time, visited on the very afternoon and found her sitting up in the hardest kitchen chair, mending her husband's shirts, her face shining wet with tears.

When Gustav arrived the neighbor woman asked him what so troubled her, and he replied that Helene believed the child would be born dead, but that he was certain it would not be so.

Helene would not allow the woman to stay with her through the night, and by morning she was delivered of a daughter whom they named Perdita. The following day they returned to their work, the new mother with her infant slung over one arm, the new father bursting with vigor to his labor in the forest.

The child grew and the parents withered, though always upholding their industry and cheerfulness, seeming unaware of the fading and thinning of their hair, the paling of their skin, and the wilting of their muscle and flesh.

Perdita, now upon the verge of womanhood, wondered at their strength despite their appearance of infirmity, for they became as bleached and tattered as the curtains the veiled the little windows, and the breeze made their wasted bodies tremble like the sere autumn leaves.

And yet they scrubbed and cooked, and blustered and hewed, even as their voices grew fainter and fainter. One morning Perdita noticed a worn spot on her mother's shirt, and realized the extent of the fraying of their bodies, for here and there they had become transparent. The hands were worst, soon becoming like ribbons of well worn cloth, then like tendrils of no earthly substance that could no longer grasp each other's flesh, and Perdita shuddered from the touch of them.

Then, before the last leaves had fallen to the ground, their eyes were gone, and they stumbled blindly from room to room, and out onto the footpath. When they fell they made no more sound than the crumpling of thin paper.

Next their torsos came unraveled, revealing innards like dried butcher's twine, that still beat softly with the remembered rhythm of life. It was terrible to see them grope for each other, blind, in their cottage, in their garden, where their love had bloomed so long before, and Perdita's heart ached to see them suffer so.

She herded them toward the bramble bush that grew along the pathway into the woods. They flayed the tattered remnants of their flesh through the thorns and brush, frenzied and longing for release, yet still grasping at the shreds of one another. When she could bear their torment no longer, Perdita ran back to the cottage and prayed that they should find peace. But when she returned to the place, still she could feel the wisps of

them, soft as spider's web, and still she could sense their yearning to touch each other once again.

Perhaps you too have felt their touch upon your face as you walk upon the path, like a soft sad breath that brushes your cheek, like a hair across your lips that you hasten to wipe away. When next they touch you, remember this and pray that someday the wisps of them will come together and intertwine, remaining so, as they promised, forever."

**H**er story ended, the old woman struggled to her feet. She and Doria walked together toward the wood. Doria left her setting her traps along the borders of the clearing and returned to her little house at the cliff's edge.

Doria's face, reflected in the leaded glass window of the inner door, was grey despite the brisk air of the country. The blush of youth is gone, she told her image, and rubbed her cheeks hard. It was too late to brew coffee. The winter sun was dropping quickly in the white sky. She should begin her supper. With cold, stiff hands she washed vegetables and chopped them into the little pot. Two small eggs she put into a saucepan, and set them on the stove to boil.

She missed her man, suddenly, though for some years she had been alone. She closed her eyes and tried to remember his face, but could not. She tried to remember whether she had loved him enough to wish Helene's wish, to demand from him the vow of endless life. Her bloodless image mocked her in the steel mirror of the toaster. Such passionate entreaties had never been uttered between them. It had been an affair of what? Convenience? Not even that. An affair of convention perhaps, of two bodies sharing a common space, rather uneasily, and not without resentment.

Doria ate her supper and thought of Gustav. She could imagine him chomping heartily on rough bread, shouting for more when his plate was empty. Things would have been different with a man like Gustav, Doria thought, and pulled a cardigan over her vest and shirt. For a time she tried to read, but turned barely a page, and would have made tea, which she much desired, but it had grown late and very dark.

Her flashlight was a sensible one, with a strong steady beam. If she wished, she could walk at night, quite safely and no one would see what she intended to do. She took an earthenware jar down from a shelf and dropped it into the pocket of her coat. Outside the light from the moon was surprisingly bright. She had no need of the torch until she entered the forest, and even then, slips of moonlight flickered through the gaps between the lager trees. When she reached the bramble bush she shone her light upon it, and picked off the bits of down and fur and spider's silk that were caught there. Where there was nothing, she cupped a handful of air, pushing all she could into the jar before sealing it. So she continued throughout the night, gathering what she could from the bare thorns.

At last she grew tired, and her fingers stung and bled. In darkness she returned to her little house, and set the jar next to the books on her bedside table. Finally exhausted, she fell deeply asleep, and was awakened in the morning only by the frantic whispering that came from the earthenware jar.

I have him, Doria exulted, and crowed her victory to the new morning. For breakfast she ate bread with sugar and cinnamon, and more coffee than was usual, or wise. By mid-day the sounds of the jar had grown frenetic, like bird-wings breaking against a window.

but by evening had calmed to a wail that ebbed and grew like the voice of the wind.

At dusk she heard heavy footsteps on the road, and stepped outside to see the figure of the old woman trudging past. She carried a sack over her shoulder and the plaid scarf in her hand, and she breathed clouds into the blue air of evening. For a moment Doria thought to share her treasure, but realized in time that it was meant to be hers alone.

The moans and whispers continued for many days and evenings, fainter, sadder, and at last, serenely silent.

Doria, in her new confidence, and joyousness and wisdom, never let him out.

## Chasaph

Mary Elizabeth Counselman

(Suggested by Letter II of Sir Walter Scott's "Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft, Addressed to J. G. Lockhart, Esq.")

**T**hey called me WITCH--an ancient epithet  
That means a subtle Poisoner of men.  
*"Chasaph! Chasaph!"* Oh, I can hear them yet--  
The hucksters and the hussifs of the glen,  
Pointing two fingers, with the two held down  
To make the Sign of Horns to warn the town.

*"Chasaph! Chasaph!"* They killed my old black cat,  
Calling it my Familiar. Or myself!  
They broke into my hut, and stripped each shelf  
Laden with simples gathered in my hat  
Only to cure their ailments, if they'd ask  
A lone, lorn lassie to attempt the task.

*"Chasaph! Chasaph!"* They bound me to the stake  
And piled it round with faggots that would burn  
Me slowly, slowly... Would they never learn  
I'd fed that child a toadstool by mistake?

And when "The Devil"--in my lost love's disguise--  
Freed me and flung me on his prancing steed  
And rode away with me... Ah, then indeed  
They screamed *"Chasaph!"* and hid their foolish eyes.



**Michael J. Lotus** presently edits a *fin de siècle* styled magazine entitled *Nocturne*, available from his Post Office Box 1715, Chicago, Illinois 60690. His editorial tastes are exceedingly close to my own so it is hardly surprising that I'm fond of his writings as well. His own work has appeared in numerous small magazines. This is his first short story for Fantasy Macabre.

## A Parlor Game

There is a large, rambling house, set back at the end of its tree-lined driveway, north of town, where for the last several years Ross served as handyman, janitor and gardener. The Old Man, the owner, was scarcely ever there, having retired to his summer home by the ocean. His three adult children now had the run of the place, and they played some very curious games. Ross's menial role gave him, if not a grandstand view, at least an occasional glimpse of the strange activities of these idle and degenerate scions of ancient money. Usually they would drink, eat, dance to jazz bands, and otherwise entertain themselves in a luxurious but not noticeably unusual manner. However, it seemed almost a point of honor among these folk and their set to cultivate at least one unnatural and debilitating vice.

Once a year or so the youngest son of the house's owner and his dissolute friends would play a special game, slumming with some girls who were obviously well below their own social strata. Such fun they had with those awestruck, badly made-up creatures, pathetic in their shoddy finery and uneducated accents. Usually two or three of the gentlemen would arrive with their "dates" in a motorcar. Several more young men would arrive later. Ross never saw the girls leave.

Other than performing his tasks, Ross was required only to be neither seen nor heard. He was discreet, and managed to learn a thing or two by examining the trash and laundry which he collected, which included the occasional tattered, bloody undergarment. His standing instruction was to put any debris of an unusual nature into the furnace immediately. Ross wanted to know more, but was relieved that he didn't.

One evening a habitual weekend house guest, in a drunken stupor, wandered into the servants' basement quarters. His tie was loosened, his shirtfront stained, his breath fuming from the strong drink he'd been putting away for hours. This privileged wastrel sat on the couch, placed an arm around Ross's shoulder, and confided a few incoherencies, with much nudging and lifting of eyebrows.

"One thing I like about this place is all the doorways," he offered. The drunkard peered searchingly at him. "Know the ones I mean? The ones that don't go anyplace? The ones you don't come back out of?" He pounded Ross's back, and laughed.

"I'll tell you something else. If you toss something into one of those doorways, you can get something else to come out, sometimes. That's a right good show, I can tell you. You've got to feed the things, but it is quite a thrill to get a look at what-all is out there in the big old mysterious infinity of things. And, anyway, I suppose it's some kind of universal law that everything living has to eat, no matter what it looks like or where it comes from. And about those girls. You know the ones I mean. Don't pretend you don't.

You must have guessed that we mess about with them before we toss them through. You seem a little uncomfortable, old man. Well, don't worry. You can't get in trouble because we'll never ask you to play."

Then someone came in the basement. It was William, the youngest son, and the seeming ringleader of all these spoiled wretches. He was smoking, his hair was combed and he'd put on his topcoat. Clearly he was very drunk, but still retained his characteristic presence of mind. "Bobby," he said, "get off of Ross. Get yourself in order. We are going out." Frowning exaggeratedly, William straightened Bobby's tie, and dusted him off. He flashed a questioning smirk at Ross, as he led his chum by the arm by the basement stairs.

Things continued as usual for some weeks, and no reference was made to the incident. Ross went about his usual rounds, and the sense of alarm within him gradually subsided. He kept coming back to the idea of leaving this place, but he knew that then he'd never ever find out what was going on here. He wished that he could find out what Bobby had been talking about.

One night, in the wee hours, Ross was wakened from a sound sleep by someone clearing his throat not five feet from his bed. He sat bolt upright, and shouted into the darkness, asking who was there. No one answered immediately, but he saw the glowing red tip of a cigarette. As his eyes adjusted to the dark he saw that a man was sitting in his chair, a few feet from his bed. William began speaking.

"You know, Ross, I must begin by apologizing. You really do a nice job, and mind your own business. But, alas, Bobby has been getting panicky lately. Guilty conscience, maybe. He has been talking to all kinds of people he shouldn't be. Maybe even the police. It is simply not appropriate that he's told you as much as he has. Don't interrupt me. I can only imagine what he said. Yes, yes I know he was drunk. I know that he was making no sense. Anyway, I wanted to apologize first."

Ross felt as if his hair were standing on end, and he was braced to launch himself toward the door. William reached up and turned on the light. The door opened then and several of his companions came in.

Ross did, finally, get at least part of his wish. True, they bound him and gagged him and stripped him and performed some crude surgery accompanied by odd rituals, which under different circumstances he might have found fascinating. And he was still conscious when, propping him up, they brought him up to a blank wall. They released him: He pitched forward. Some lost part of his mind was still functioning, and he was surprised that he fell forward as if off of an enormous cliff, instead of bumping into the wall. On the other side he met something, briefly, quite unlike anything he'd ever seen before, even in books.

**BOBBY G. WARNER** *has contributed to numerous little-magazines of horror, including previous issues of Fantasy Macabre and Fantasy & Terror. He's a retired Airforce man whose South Carolina address makes it possible for us to place him in the wonderful tradition of Southern Gothic writings.*

## THE GARDENER

When I arrived at Gaystone Mansion, shortly before four p.m., somber clouds hung in the sky, blotting out the sunlight and making a most depressing day.

Gaystone was a large, three-story structure of dark stone, weather-worn and time-worn. It looked almost deserted. I had no desire to linger there one second longer than required to present the legal documents I had brought to Mrs. Rainsdale, reclusive owner of the estate. Being the very junior partner of the law firm Hastings, Quency, Darnwell, Smathurs, and Sarifin, it was frequently my duty to personally deliver legal documents my more senior partners deemed too urgent and important to send by mail.

I parked in front of the main entranceway to the building; and as I stepped out of the car, thunder rumbled ominously in the distance. Since I suffered from an extreme fear of thunderstorms, I was anxious to conclude my business as quickly as possible and be on my way back to the city before the storm broke.

The first large drops of rain splatted on the concrete driveway as I hurried toward the entry.

"Sir! One moment, Sir!"

I stopped and turned to see who had addressed me. The rain was falling harder, and I knew the storm would be upon me within minutes.

I found myself looking into the thin, solemn face of an old man who stood only a few feet from me, having appeared, it seemed, out of nowhere. He was quite tall and thin, and dressed in baggy workman's clothes.

"This way, Sir," he said, taking hold of my arm.

Leading me away from the front entranceway, the old man tightened his grip on my arm and hurried me along until we were almost running. Turning the corner, we ran along the east side of the building.

"Hurry, Sir, hurry," urged the old man, pulling me along at breakneck speed. As we rounded another corner, the clouds opened and dumped torrents of rain upon us. The rain was like a dense fog, stinging my eyes and obscuring my vision.

Just ahead I saw the outlines of a small building. The old man released my arm, fumbled for a moment with a door latch. "Do come into my quarters, Sir. You're getting drenched."

Stepping past the old man, I found myself in a small, modestly furnished room. There was a narrow bed against one wall, a small table and two chairs, a metal cabinet with a hotplate on top, and shelves containing cans of food, a few tattered books, and other personal items lined the other wall.

As I stood dropping water onto the floor, I was struck by the ridiculousness of the situation. I had been within a dozen steps of the entranceway to the mansion. Why had

this old man brought me through the rain, all the way to the back of the mansion to his quarters?

"Please have a seat, Sir, and I'll fix some tea. Or perhaps you prefer coffee. I have only instant coffee, if that would be all right."

A loud crack of thunder shook the room. The storm had arrived, and I felt myself begin to tremble, anticipating the next crash of thunder.

"The storms are often violent here this time of year," said the old man, waving me toward one of the chairs. "We're high on a hill, and they come at us full force. You should be safe enough here until it passes, then you can be on your way."

The old man plugged in the hotplate, put an aluminum tea kettle on the burner, then stood with his back to me until the kettle began to whistle.

"I don't usually drink coffee," he said, putting his steaming cups on the table then sitting in the chair opposite me. Another loud clap of thunder shook the room, and I uttered a whimper of fear before I could stop myself. Seeming not to notice my distress, the old man sipped his coffee and said:

"A good rain like this will be good for the vegetation. It's been dry lately and I've worried about the shrubbery. I'm the gardener, you see, and I've been looking forward to a good rain. Of course with the rain must come the thunder and lightning and wind. That's Nature's Way, and not much we can do about it, eh?"

The room seemed so snug, so comforting, with heavy curtains drawn across the windows to shut out the lightning flashes and muffle somewhat the sound of the thunder. Outside the storm continued unabated; but there in the small room, with hot coffee to sip and the old man across the table for company, felt almost safe and secure.

"Had it not been for the approaching storm, Sir, I would have had to ask you to leave right away. The lady of the house has few visitors. I do my best to discourage any, because they upset her. I take care of you, protect her as best I can. I am more than just the gardener, Sir; I am her protector as well."

I was becoming drowsy. Despite the claps of thunder and the howling sound of the wind as it buffeted the building, I had ceased to feel any anxiety over the storm outside. The room was quite warm, and I had begun to perspire. I took off my coat, hung it on the back of the chair, then loosened my tie and unfastened the top button of my shirt. I looked at the old man, with his loose-fitting clothing, and thought for a moment how much more comfortable I would feel if I were similarly attired.

The old man suddenly pushed his chair back and stood. He reached for the cups, causing them to clatter as he picked them up. "The storm is passing, Sir, and I expect you'll very soon want to be on your way."

The strangest feeling came upon me as I sat there in the old gardener's quarters. Strange, but not at all unpleasant. It was quiet there, peaceful and secure feeling. I felt as though this was where I really belonged, where I could really be happy. I seemed held in the chair by some peculiar inertia; I was unwilling to stir from that warm, cozy room. And for all his unusual ways, I was drawn to the old man, admired him, even envied the way he lived--in a plain and uncluttered manner, with no affectation of qualities he did not possess. He seemed such a simple, honest man; an earthy man who worked in the earth. A man who served, and lived to serve, in a wholly unselfish way. A man who was not afraid of the storm's fury, and who kept among his few possessions well-worn books which,

presumably, he had read many times. Nothing in the room--in his life--was there for show, but to be used, to be enjoyed.

"Sir?"

I realized I had been mumbling to myself.

"I was just thinking," I said, "that you have such a cozy place here."

"Thank you, Sir; it suits my needs. Now I really must ask you to go. The rain has stopped and I have much work to do."

The old man went to the door, opened it, and stood waiting for me. Reluctantly I pushed the chair away from the table, stood, and reached for my coat. I felt a lump in my throat, and a heavy sadness in my heart. *I did not want to leave.* Being in the old gardener's quarters had been like being in a pleasant dream, like being enclosed within a microcosm of coziness and security, insulated from the outside world--from the fearsome thunderstorms of life, from the frantic pace of constantly trying to impress others, trying to "get ahead," trying to climb to the top, knowing that the strain--and demands--would be as great, if not greater, once I had attained "the top." How I hated all of it!

"Sir, it's time for you to go."

We stepped outside, and the old man turned to close the door. In silence, we walked back around to the front of the mansion.

Watching the old man close the door to his quarters with such...such *finality* had brought a wave of sadness washing over me; a sudden, almost shockingly tangible link with my other life. I longed to turn from the sight of it and return to the gardener's quarters. I knew that soon--all too soon!--I would have to leave something which, in so brief a time, had a time, had become more important to me than that to which I would soon be returning.

The old man pressed something into my hand. Looking down, I saw it was my briefcase, which I had completely forgotten. "You wouldn't want to forget this, Sir."

Suddenly I realized how foolish I was being. Here I was, preparing to leave the premises without delivering the documents!

"I must see Mrs. Rainsdale," I said. "I have some very important legal documents I must personally give her."

"I can't allow that, Sir," said the old man in a firm tone of voice. "Send the documents by mail. Now, Sir, good day--and goodbye."

Not wishing to make a scene, I got into my car, switched on the engine and prepared to leave. Then, on a sudden impulse, I lowered the window and stuck my head out, intending to ask the old man if it would be all right if I came back and visited with him in his quarters. But he had vanished in the gathering dusk; vanished as quickly as he had appeared earlier that day.

As I drove away from Gaystone Mansion, I felt totally bewildered by what had happened. I cursed the old man, and I cursed myself for letting him push me around. Then I felt so heartsick and lonely, recalling how it had been in the old man's quarters. I felt like one feels upon awakening from a particularly pleasant dream: Sad because the dream has come to an end.

**I** spent a restless night, haunted (but pleasantly so) by recollections of being in the

gardener's quarters during the storm. I tried to focus my thoughts on other things, knowing that I was allowing myself to be possessed by some neurotic fantasy, some overwhelmingly absurd notion that I had found, there at Gaystone Mansion, the kind of life I had always longed for. But I could not push the recollections from my mind; all through the night I lay wide awake, reliving those pleasant moments of sitting with the old man, sipping coffee while the storm raged outside, feeling so safe, so secure, no longer afraid of the thunder and lightning.

Next morning, when I tried to explain to old Hastings, my senior partner, what had taken place at Gaystone Mansion (not all of it, of course; just that I had been stopped by the gardener and told not to see Mrs. Rainsdale), that worthy old gentleman gave me a proper dressing down. He ended his tirade with: "Get back out there and personally deliver those documents! And let *no one* deter you. If you wish to remain a partner in *this* firm, you must learn to properly attend to business!"

As I came within sight of Gaystone Mansion, I wondered whether the events of the day before could have been imagined. But no; I was certain I had talked with the old man, that I had been in his quarters, that everything had happened as I recalled it.

When I stopped the car in front of the mansion to get out, I paused for a moment, half expecting--hoping--to see the old man appear. But there was no one. I walked across the driveway and rang the bell.

I rang the bell several times, and was beginning to think no one was going to answer. Just as I was about to leave, the door swung inward a few inches and a woman's voice said: "Yes, may I help you?"

After I identified myself and the nature of my business, Mrs. Rainsdale ushered me inside, apologizing for taking so long to answer the door. "I live here all alone, you see, and was taking a nap when you rang."

Mrs. Rainsdale was a very tall woman, and very thin. As I sat facing her in the large library-living room, I was struck by her uncanny resemblance to the old gardener. Perhaps, I thought, he was a relative who had fallen on hard times and she had given him employment.

We chatted for a few minutes, speaking in generalities; then I got around to apologizing for not bringing her the documents the day before, explaining that her gardener had been quite firm in his insistence that I not disturb her.

"Gardener?" she asked, leaning forward in her chair. "Did you say *gardener*?"

"Why, yes," I said. "The tall old gentleman who lives in the small building in back. He intercepted me in the driveway and took me around to his quarters to give me shelter until the storm passed."

Mrs. Rainsdale jerked her hand up to her mouth and pressed her fingers against her lips. She seemed very agitated, very distressed; her shoulders began to tremble, as though she had a chill, and she began to cry. "It--it must have been him," she said, looking at me with eyes filled with sadness.

I started to speak, but she raised her hand. "Let me explain," she said. "Since you apparently have seen him, I owe you an explanation."

Tearfully, she began to speak to me of her brother, who had once lived with her. Her brother Jonathon, who had been afflicted with severe mental problems, with delusions that someone was after his money; with the conviction that anyone who visited the mansion did so to steal from the old woman--steal not only her money, but her very soul as well. In the last few years of his life, her brother had donned the clothes of a common laborer and moved into the little cottage out back, fixing it up in a spartan manner and insisting that he was her servant, her protector. When friends, or anyone else, came to visit, he would politely but firmly insist that they leave.

"Oh, I know," she said, "that I should have had him committed, for his own good. But I just didn't have the heart. We had always been close; even though he was quite mad, I could not think of sending him away. He lived plainly and simply, doing all manner of odd jobs. All my friends began to shun me, because of him. I grew accustomed to living without outside contact, and have lived that way for many years. Poor Jonathon died alone there in his little cottage. I went one morning to check on him, and found him dead. You can imagine what a shock that must have been for me. I have never fully recovered."

I could see that Mrs. Rainsdale was visibly ill. While talking, she had turned pale and once or twice pressed her chest with the fingertips of her right hand.

"I kept Jonathon's little room for him, as a memorial, I suppose you would say. I go out there once a week and dust. He was such a good man, such a gentle thoughtful man. But he could become quite--quite forceful when visitors came. I was never in any danger, of course; that was all a product of his deteriorated mind. Poor, poor Jonathon--"

Mrs. Rainsdale winced and clutched at her chest. Her eyes widened and she gasped for breath, her mouth falling open. Even as I leapt up to go to her aid, she slumped back in her chair. Even before I reached her side, I knew she was dead.

As I stood there wondering what to do, still in shock at having witnessed the old woman's sudden death, I became aware that there was someone else in the room and whirled around.

The old man stood just inside the door, looking past me at Mrs. Rainsdale's body.

"I warned you, Sir, that she was not to have visitors. You have upset her greatly. Oh, I knew this would happen!" He shook his head and pursed his lips. "Now there will be so much extra to be done. I shall have to give her a proper washing, then lay her out in her finest dress. I shall have to build her a proper coffin, heavily lined to keep her warm, then dig a grave. And I am so tired, Sir. So very tired after all these years of watching out for her. I don't know whether I shall be up to it."

For a moment I was utterly surprised at the sound of my voice; it was as though someone else were saying to the old man:

"I can help. I want to stay and help."

He fixed his eyes on me, gazed intently at me for a long time. I was afraid he would utter the words I so dreaded hearing again. I was afraid he was going to tell me to leave, and never come back.

Instead, he sighed and covered his face for a moment with his hand. "I would be grateful, Sir, if you could. I am so tired, my soul feels so heavy and burdensome. I must rest. But she needs taking care of, she must be protected from those who would come and steal her money, her soul. If you could, Sir, stay for a while and help out . . ."

Tears of joy welled in my eyes, and I closed them tightly, giving thanks that I had

been asked to stay, instead of being driven away again.

When I opened my eyes, the old man was gone. I rushed to the front door, looked outside. I looked through the entire mansion, in all the rooms--all musty, cluttered--but could not find him.

Then it occurred to me where he must be. Of course! He had looked so tired, so ill; he must have gone to his quarters to lie down, to rest for a while.

I rushed from the mansion, out toward the old man's cottage. The door was open, and I rushed inside, expecting to find him there. I cried bitterly when I saw the room was empty. Adding further to my distress was the sound of distant thunder from another approaching storm.

But I knew I must have faith. He would return soon.

Now, as I sit here at the table, waiting for the water in the kettle to get hot, I know what I shall do. I shall fix us a cup of tea, because that is what he prefers. The kettle is starting to whistle, and the sound of the thunder is getting closer.

But I mustn't be afraid of the storm; not here in this cozy room. The gardener will be back before all the water in the kettle whistles away in steam, before the storm breaks in its full fury. Yes, he'll soon come back, to sit across the table from me, sipping his tea and telling me of all the things we must do--and how we shall rearrange the room so we both can live here comfortably.

I shall go ahead and pour the water and put teabags in the cups. I know he'll be grateful when he finds a nice, steaming cup of tea waiting for him. Oh, that damnable crash of thunder--so near, so *loud*.

There are so many furious, frightening sounds: The raging wind, the awful din of the rain on the roof, the thunder rolling in continuous, deafening waves. The lightning must be striking all around. I can't stand it! Oh, why doesn't he come back!

Something crashes against the window; the heavy curtains and a spray of glass shards fly into the room. A tree has been blown against the cottage; one of its limbs protrudes through the shattered window.

The lightning flashes continuously, bringing crash upon crash of thunder. I can see it even though I close my eyes--it is like looking into the fiery face of some mad, demonic god. I cannot bear to look. Those flashes blind me. The thunder deafens me, the wind howls into the room!

There is so much to be done. I hardly know where to begin. The storms we've been having of late have brought so much rain. That is good for the vegetation; that's Nature's Way of bringing new growth. New growth which, alas, must be trimmed, pruned, mowed.

Such a dreary day. The clouds hang like a dark blanket overhead, and I hear thunder growling in the distance. Another storm so soon! Before it gets here I must check around, see what damage was done by the storm which so recently passed through. Ah, the old oak tree has been felled by the wind. I have been meaning to cut it down; that is one chore I'll no longer have to worry about!

What's that--an automobile parked in the driveway? Visitors! This won't do at all.



Someone slipped passed me during the storm and has gained entrance to the mansion. I'll just call them out, right away, and tell them in no uncertain terms that we do not allow visitors. I shall get rid of whoever it is in no time at all.

Then I shall take a few minutes out to return to my quarters and fix a nice cup of tea.

In the future I must be more vigilant, especially when a storm comes up. I know it isn't the proper thing for me to do, since I am only the gardener; but I think I shall speak to her about it. Perhaps she will not mind if I stay in the mansion, when it storms, just to make sure no one slips past me to bother her.

## All Soul's Day

Rosamund Marriott Watson

Today is theirs--the unforgotten dead--  
For strange and sweet communion set apart,  
When the strong, living heart  
Beats in the dissolute dust, the darkened bed,  
Rebuilds the form beloved, the vanished face,  
Relights the blown-out lamps o' the faded eyes,  
Touches the clay-bound lips to tenderest speech,  
Saying, "Awake--arise!"  
Today the warm hands of the living reach  
To chafe the cold hands of the long-loved dead;  
Once more the lonely head  
Leans on a living breast, and feels the rain  
Of falling tears, and listens yet again  
To the dear voice--the voice that never in vain  
Could sound the old behest.  
Each seeks his own today--but, ah, not I--I enter not  
That sacred shrine beneath the solemn sky;  
I claim no commerce with the unforgot.

My thoughts and prayers must be  
Even where mine own fixed lot hereafter lies,  
With the great company  
For whom no wandering breeze of memory sighs  
Through the dim prisons of imperial Death:  
They in the black, unfathomed oubliette  
For ever and ever set--  
They, the poor dead whom none remember.

[from *TARES: A BOOK OF VERSE*, 1906]

**Jessica Amanda Salmonson's** latest books include the anthology *What Did Miss Darrington See?* from *The Feminist Press at the City University of New York*, and the collection *John Collier and Fredric Brown went Quarreling through my Head* from *W. Paul Ganley in Buffalo*. The present story is reprinted from the feminist little-magazine *Room of One's Own*, Volume Six, Number 1/2, 1981.

## The Piebald Man

She lived upon the shore of an iridescent sea, at the foot of a looming wall of stone devoid of lichen, moss, or tree.

Along the margin she obtained sustenance by no means penurious: mussels in nacre shells, stubborn clams, knobby crabs, slender blue shrimp with visibly pulsing hearts, and ribbons of maroon kelp which streaked the beach like trails of blood. Driftwood, and the planks of broken ships, were the materials of her ill-constructed house, raised in the shadow of the cliffs and the embrace of the jettied cove.

The years she spent alone, awaiting the coming of the Piebald Man, had not been idle. Each day she took herself from the shanty to explore the length of the jetty, to scour the pebbled strand from which the tide receded, leaving all sorts of wondrous flotsam.

She gathered many things; and in the course of time her house became cluttered with colorful glass balls and fishing floats of carved wood or cork, mystical hardwood boxes which could not be opened, skulls of peculiar fish, and the ancient relics of sunken cities, of lost sailing vessels, and of far, forsaken lands. All manner of things were brought to her by the sea's relentless currents.

Her scavenging brought her wealth, though she lived in poverty. Chests of gold had been found along that stretch of coast. Once, beneath barnacles she had chipped away for a feast, she found a gem-encrusted dagger. But whether cork or gold, they were only things and decorations, each with an equal and sentimental value, none more easily relinquished than the rest. One day, she would give her riches to the Piebald Man as dowry; in return, he would give her purpose.

Sailing men, what few there were on that distant sea, called this woman Hag, though her name was Helle. They would mock her as a crone, and deride her for her ugliness, hallooing in jocular reproval from their passing ships. Among them were tales suggesting that the Hag had lived along that shore, and searched for none knew what, since the dawn of time. But sailors' tales do lie in their rough, poetic fashion. She might have been any age but young; no more the sailors knew. They believed her harmless and entirely witless. She ignored their jeers completely, for none was the Piebald Man.

Someday he would come. He would be wondrous to behold, with flesh darkly mottled, a tangled beard, his shoulders broad and strong, a defiant smile and that odor peculiar to fighting men, of blood and sweat and ardor and courage. She had imagined him in his entirety; she would mistake him for no other. He might come on a ship grander than any ever seen. Or he might be washed ashore, helpless and half drowned and in need of gentle hands and care. However it was he came, it would be to this shore; and none but she would find him. Then no longer would she be old and barren. For in her memory she

had never known youth, but had always waited to be reborn. Only by the side of Piebald Man would she be whole and vibrant and alive, for the first time in her weary life.

Within her wooden hut, she sat by a warming fire built in a kettle. A serpent-thread of smoke wound up to a hole in the ceiling. By the fire's light she studied her uneven reflection in a silver mirror, kept polished in spite of the corrosive salt air. She pulled an urchin-spine brush harshly at the snarls in her thin, grey hair; a tear formed in one eye. She tried to sing an old, old ballad about two lovers, but time had filched the words from her mind; and anyway the song made her sad, though it was not supposed to; and her voice was not melodic. So in a moment, she sat in silence inside her rickety house. Even the sea was stilled, and the birds on the cliffs behind.

A large, spiral shell of pale mother-of-pearl rested amid the clutter, near to her hand. She set her brush and mirror aside, and raised the shell to her ear. It whispered a portent of love everlasting, and she replied, "O, slug! Do you lie?" She set the shell aside.

That night, the sickle moon rested on the stone backdrop. A whining gale thrust breakers crashing to the shore. Helle huddled in her dwelling, wind whistling through the walls. The door flew open; there stood a figure in the night. His grey beard and carmine robe were animated by the storm. His colorless eyes were like shards of polished ice. He stepped inside.

Helle shrank into a corner, away from the tall, gaunt man in wizard's garb. He was frightful not only for his eyes, but for a ghost-like aspect: he was partially transparent; the starfish hanging on the wall was visible behind him. This apparition's cold gaze scanned the little house and all its contents, until finally his eyes came to rest upon a certain small box: a box Helle had never managed to open. He approached that object and bent as to pick it up, but his hand passed through it.

He turned those icy eyes upon her then, and in them was such a look of evil and victory that Helle shuddered and shrank deeper into the corner of her hovel. Then the wizard passed again through the open door, vanishing; and with him went the storm.

For a long time Helle sat quivering with fear, longing for the protection of her errant Piebald Man. At length she crept out from her corner on hands and knees, and took up the curious little box which had been the object of the wizard's quest. It would have to be very powerful and important to draw the soul of a questing mage.

She shook it, as she had done many times before, and it rattled. Always before it had defied opening; this time there was a crack signifying a lid. The wizard's touch, even from some other plane, must have partially opened it. She worried at it and pressed the sides for a troublesome length of time until she gasped with surprise as the lid sprang up.

Within was a golden ring, set with a stone brighter than diamond. That it contained the magic of old she could not doubt. As she looked into its cold, hard depths, she saw something of the gross evil of the wizard's eyes. And within its limpid deep was also beauty as old and deadly as the sea.

This, then, was the magic by which a Hag could capture a Piebald Man, to secure his devotion by necromancy. She placed the ring on a brown, bony finger. It should have been too large, but somehow it fit perfectly.

When next a ship passed by, the seamen crowded the deck's port side. Along the shore

a maiden trod, turning over stones in search of ornery crabs, and in general behaving in a manner attributed to someone far less fair. They wondered if she were the Hag's granddaughter, though surely they were no kin. They concluded that the Hag was ill and dying, and the maiden an inland villager come to ease an old one's final day.

A young man on that voyage, who was instantly smitten, rowed a dinghy ashore. He confessed undying love, but she replied sombrely: "You are not the Piebald Man." She dreamed about him once after, how he sailed away to pine at sea for many years and hid his sorrow in many adventures, ultimately to throw himself into shark-infested waters.

A new legend usurped the old and many heroes came to ask the siren's favor. They did not care about the dowry. They did not care that she was melancholy. They did not care if she were deadly. They did not even care if it were true that she was mad. They knew only that her comeliness was supernal; and they would slay sea monsters and fell villains to her honor, and become greater heroes for her love. But each in turn was turned away, for none was the Piebald Man.

Why so many courted her she did not know. Always when she looked into the silver mirror she saw the same grey hair and rheumy eyes. She knew she could not be lovely without her Piebald Man.

One day she found a lantern washed ashore onto the jetty and studied it a long while; for to her amazement it still glowed. But it was no fire that survived the ocean; a glowing cuttlefish lived within. While she solved that seeming miracle, an old man in a carmine robe crept upon her unaware. She started, then fled; for this time the wizard was no specter. He was flesh and bone come across half the world to the place of his spirit's discovery.

The wizard was too decrepit to chase her down, but he tried to frighten her into immobility with all manner of weird sendings. Through a nightmare she fled. Night fell absolute and starless. By the sad, dim light of her newfound lantern, she beheld crab-eating hyenas big as horses blocking her escape. She ran a new direction, the giant hyenas yapping and giggling at her heels, breathing putrescence upon her spine.

She would have fled into the sea, but the head of a giant serpent rose from waters she knew were shallow. Sword-beaked auks dove out of the black sky, like flaming meteors. At last she stumbled, and lay exhausted, waiting for the auks to pierce her through, or the hyenas to rend her flesh, or the serpent to slide over her body, crushing her with its constricting power.

But all she felt was a feeble hand grasping her wrist. All she heard was an old man wheezing in the necromantic night. Anger flamed inside her when she realized her ring was being painfully wrested from her finger. She clenched her fist to foil the thief and rolled over on her back to see the bright, cold eyes glowering at her from a face grim and wizened. But there was less fear in her than anger and hatred. As though responding to some unspoken command, her ring began to shine with the brilliance of the morning star; and a beam of light shot up into the wizard's left eye, making a hissing sound as when fire touches ice.

He bellowed. He fell back. Blood trickled from a burnt socket. Mad with pain, he lost control of his own wizardry: one of his conjurations, a huge hyena, appeared from nowhere and took the wizard in its jaws and bore him away through the ocean mist to an

unknown place.

**B**eyond this time, Helle trusted no one, and a third legend usurped the second. Unremembered dreams whispered to her nights, saying how the eldest and greatest of the world's wizards had been defeated in sorcerous combat, and such a happening could not pass unnoticed.

There were no further challengers; for all knew the power of the ring, and she was indestructible. Her place along the sands was shunned by ship and sailor. Many years passed and Helle's loneliness increased tenfold. She was alienated even from herself, so much so that her image in the mirror had become a blur; and she was in no way certain of her own existence.

She had found a ship's masthead washed ashore; it was a merman. She propped it outside her hut's door, and told it of her dreams and single aspiration, of her undying, long-lamenting love of the Piebald Man. But the merman never sprang to life, never spoke to her in return; and she ached for some other sound than the crying of the gulls or the blowing of the dolphins and whales.

Then came the day of despair when a seabird blundered into her hut while she was away. It upturned the kettle in which were buried her fire coals. She fled back from the jetty's farthest tip too late to end the resultant conflagration. She sat beside the merman and wept, for now she had no dowry for the Piebald Man.

Yet soon she forgot the loss, for property had become a burden. Now she could wander the beach on her endless vigil, beneath sun and moon alike, ever in search of the one who would complete her beingness.

Many years passed, but Helle grew no older. Her remarkable ring kept her unchanging and, on moonless or clouded nights, served as a beacon for her quest. She never slept. She seemed a specter to those few who saw her, beauteous and strange and frightening in her mien. With dreamy nostalgia, she recalled the men who called her Hag, and then the men who called her siren, and lastly those who ran from her presence in fear. In all her memory she could find no one who might have been the Piebald Man; surely he had not yet come.

Guilt and sorrow were beyond her. She had given up her soul by denying that she ever had one; she had refused responsibility for her fate. She was finally nothing, and nobody, nor would she ever be anything or anyone without the Piebald Man. Until he took her into his arms, she would not exist; locked in innocence and ignorance, she could not die.

And by some unfathomable, corrupt line of logic, death came to represent fulfillment. Death was the Piebald Man. Until she existed, there could be no opportunity for rest. Until the Piebald Man restored to her her soul, her completeness, she was indeed the wraith who many believed her to be.

And so she haunted that shore, wandering morosely in search of death and peace and togetherness with the one man who could be her salvation.

Centuries may have passed, or days; time stood still for the ageless Helle. But at last her Piebald Man came to her, as she had never doubted he would do. He was younger than she had imagined, but familiar in every other aspect. He lay unmoving in the tide's wake:

a mottled green corpse. She refused to recognize he bore no life. He was gangrenous and bloodless and swollen, his eyes eaten away by crabs. Something chitonous hid beneath his blackened tongue. Tears of joy sprang from Helle's eyes; and she hugged him, and kissed him, and forgave him his tardiness in coming. She proclaimed herself his wife, and sealed the covenant with her last remaining dowry: she removed her ring and placed it on the finger of the Piebald Man.

Rapidly growing old, Helle knew only that she was finally whole, and beautiful; and she died happily on the bosom of the Piebald Man. Crabs and gulls disposed of the corpses so that the only things remaining were their skeletons, and a ring. Then there came along the beach a creature like a man, but dry and swathed in bandages, with a frayed remnant of a wizard's carmine robe, and one good eye that shone like a crystal of glistening ice.

In the purple dawn, upon the iridescent sea, along that pebbled margin, the mummy bent to reclaim the ring from the bones.

## The Ways of Death

W. E. Henley

(1849-1903)

**T**he ways of Death are soothing and serene,  
And all the words of Death are grave and sweet.  
From camp and church, the fireside and the street,  
She beckons forth, and strife and song have been.

A summer night descending, cool and green  
And dark, on daytime's dust and stress and heat,  
The ways of Death are soothing and serene,  
And all the words of Death are grave and sweet.

O glad and sorrowful, with triumphant mien  
And radiant faces look upon and greet  
This last of all your lovers, and to meet  
Her kiss, the Comforter's, your spirit lean...  
The ways of Death are soothing and serene.



**Jonathon Thomas** of Providence, Rhode Island, sent along the present odd tale "on the heels of finishing, and during the throes of marketing, a long and elaborate science fantasy horror novel." This was my first exposure to his work; we may all hope not our last.

## An Office Nymph

Warner alone in the office. Same as many other nights. Phony constellations take and lose shape on surrounding highrise walls. Second-to-second configurations fill in to make overachiever nightlight pegboards.

Warner derives sweet melancholy from being alone together with all other night toilers. His world feels whole. Full and stoppered like a bottle. Comfortably snug. Held tight by sex surrogate of career.

Something missing craves appeasement. Something missing in his idea of the world. In what he gives the world. Something with no respect for the pure liquid medium of his contentment. Invisibly fruitful within it like bacteria. Uncompromising, unabsorbent in it like a gallstone.

Hours later. Warner's body has assumed the topography forgotten below cityscape. Back stiff as a hill. Eyes, lagoons clogged with sand. Between his legs, estuarine ebb and flow. Subject to something unapprehended and remote as a moon.

He goes to the window. Searches all other lit windows for a woman's silhouette. Imagines her facing him. Becoming aware of him. Establishing a symmetry. Generating a field, charging the air between them with romance and sex urge.

No luck. He turns from the window. More mindful of the emptiness he has reached into. Standing at the edge of it. No bridge across. He paces back across the office. Scented pages from a glossy magazine catch him in passing. Warner flips pages. Pauses at pictures of temptresses. Throat suddenly dry.

He goes to the water cooler. Drinks one cup. Then another. Eyes idly probe waters of the blue-tinted tank. A water nymph swims in them. Naked body the length of an open jackknife. Temptress eyes meeting Warner's, sizing him up. His eyes, open portals to the void left by unfulfilled carnality. The circumference of this void intersects the circumference of the void in his idea of the order of things. The water nymph has entered and fills the common gap.

Warner naively thinks: cities today blot out topography. Mythic creatures have lost all secluded haunts. Are forced to find new ones in after-hours offices and bank vaults.

The nymph treads water. Shrugs at him. As if at his theorizing. He is tired. Overridingly horny as only minds in isolation can get. Vulnerable. He wants her. State of mind overshoots her size. Her miniscule gills. The shock of her sudden manifestation. She presses up to the blue-tinted glass. Flattens and rubs her body up and down up and down it like a climber up and down netting.

Warner thinks fast. But only along trajectory of desire. Realizes: his schematics of reality incomplete since she had no place in them. Maybe way to bring him and her together also exists. Only waiting for ripe time to enter his awareness.

He plants fingertips on glass. A circuit closes. Weight, size and barriers lose

meaning. He leaves his gravitational field. Enters hers.

Next day Warner's co-workers arrive. Find lights on. But no Warner. Until one of them goes to the water cooler. There Warner's body drifts. The size of a candy bar wrapper. Without even his tie loosened or fly open. After corrective measures, in balance at last. Between the x-axis of the physics he knew and the y-axis of the physics he didn't. Meanwhile a water nymph explores bay waters. \*

## Oreste's Last Song

Elizabeth Hillman

If I smear myself with magic and soot  
And rattle the graveyard-bone dice,  
What portents will be revealed?  
The flat, silver-platter moon  
Spins across the sky, a slow discus  
Hurled by some odd creature.  
Maybe I'll roll thirteen and see  
The end of the world portrayed  
In green fire on the stone wall  
Of my ancient hidden asylum.  
I pad around, shedding the soot,  
Growing more pibald by the minute.  
My Feet stumble on the dice,  
And one skitters away to roll  
Under the sarcophagus prepared for me.  
With a shrug, I climb inside to wait.





**Simon MacCulloch** of Middlesex, England, is in my opinion the only critic currently writing for the British Fantasy Society whose perspective is interesting and reliable, and whose presentation is stylish, pleasant reading. It's nice to discover that he's also first-rate in poetic prose, as the following Lovecraftian homage proves.

## Oneric Moon

I close my eyes.

First the oyster in sand-burrowed shell. The shell is a submerged cave where fronds undulate. The cavern becomes the ocean with its sunken cargos overgrown and shifting stealthily, stealthily towards tideless trenches deeper still, where thought swims "new and oddly bodied" as the poet write, sublimely misshapen, anomalous and aglow. Do the depths deform or disenthral? Might the soul that walks prefer to crawl?

I dream.

At the rotten core of the jungle, a man I knew once lies in verdant darkness. They have dug out his eyes and replaced them with worms. They have planted a fecund plague within his flesh. From his belly a thousand maggots blossom, and his mind writhes with the tree roots. He drools magma. In ash to ash we hope, in dust to dust--while dead dreams' seething mud afflicts earth's crust.

I stir but do not wake.

From mud to sand to glass, a quicksilver transition. A cracked and baking highway divides the fused plain which mirrors the empty sky. Darkness has shrunk to the cindery guide who awaits me where the road's boundaries converge, and I have shed my shadow to don the crackling vestments of the apostles of the flayed god. Masked in others' sin I go to celebrate the sacrament of self-loathing, under the faceless sun. Scarab's carapace or mummy's ichor-stiffened wraps become the soul, embracing all that guilt's slow charring warps.

Sheets rasp my skin.

Outside my window, stars hint at the depth of the dark. A wind suggests the foamy symphony of distant seas. I plunge from the sill, but the star-net catches me, the star-web sticks to me, starry wisdom traps me in its pattern like a bug. Pendant high in vast shining silences, I see too far along the filaments. The whirring of wings which occlude constellations may yet be the fluttering of fear. And which the thought that holds most to appall: webweaver come, or found nowhere at all?

I awaken.

Hollow merciless moon-face who lights my home, I invoke your blessing. The name no lips dare speak aloud is written in your grin. You tell me that somewhere at the heart of creation a great beast is dreaming of carnage and desolation, all life the eidolon of its slumbering malignancy. It is the spellbound demiourgos, its somnolence fitful with the guttering of galaxies, and out here where the shadows of its sickliest desires crawl lost amid the slimy grit of the stars' offspring, and the cast-off dirt-bubbles bloat with the residue of its nightmares, we swim the sluggish tides of the festering dream-womb. Blind idiot Mother, will you intercede for us? Dead dreamer of the blighted night, would your

lesser delirium interpret us more plainly?

No, we do not swim the waves, but are the waves; the waves that lap the sunken stone of R'lyeh.

## What of the Darkness?

**Richard Le Gallienne**

(1866-1947)

**W**hat of the darkness? Is it very fair?  
Are there great calms and find ye silence there?  
Like soft-shut lilies all your faces glow  
With some strange peace our faces never know,  
With some great faith our faces never dare.  
Dwells it in Darkness? Do you find it there?

Is it a Bosom where tired heads may lie?  
Is it a Mouth to kiss our weeping dry?  
Is it a Hand to still the pulse's leap?  
Is it a Voice that holds the runes of sleep?  
Day shows us not such comfort anywhere.  
Dwells it in Darkness? Do you find it there?

Out of the Day's deceiving light we call,  
Day that shows man so great and God so small,  
That hides the stars and magnifies the grass;  
O is the Darkness too a lying glass,  
Or, undistracted, do you find truth there?  
What of the Darkness? Is it very fair?



**DENNIS POST** presently of Hanley Hills, Missouri, was born and grew up in Kenosha, Wisconsin, which he calls "an eerie and peculiar place. The first literary magazine in Wisconsin was published in Kenosha. It is a city of grimy factories and beautiful parks; it is filled with strange people who are often at the same time vulgar and sublime. It was a center of bootlegging in the thirties. It once had the highest murder rate of any city in America. As a child I remember peering through the chain link fence that surrounded Sunnyside Elementary School as the wife of the chief of police tried to murder the chief and his lover outside their trysting place." In his stories Dennis tries "to embody my conviction that what we call everyday life is fantastic beyond belief" and takes as his models such diverse authors as Faulkner, Borges, Gabriel Marquez, and Lovecraft.

## A HOUSE OCCUPIED

"Wanna free cigar?" asked Tomlisch with a smile.

Oh dear God, here we go, thought Wilson Fox. Tomlisch, with his unerring instinct for maximum hassle, had picked the biggest motorcyclist in the bar for his act. He tugged at the beast's cut-off denim jacket and insisted he have a smoke, just as the enormous anthropoid attempted a particularly tricky bank shot at the pool table.

Slowly, carefully, the offended brute laid down his cue and reached for the long, expensive Jamaican stogie Tomlisch offered. He peeled the cellophane off like a banana skin. Then he broke the stogie in half, stuffed both halves in his mouth, and mashed them up between his square yellow teeth. He smiled. He picked up the pool cue by its narrow end and held it about an inch from Tomlisch's face.

"Wanna free pool cue?" he inquired.

Total elapsed bar time: 47 seconds. A new record, Wilson Fox observed, feeling for the roll of quarters. They were gone. Earlier in the evening Tomlisch had demanded they finish the tequila, go down to the X-rated book store, and watch every foot of 8mm perversion in the place. Wilson Fox's emergency bludgeon was now in the gullet of skin-flick nickleodeons. The main event of the evening was going to be bare knuckles against motorcycle chains. They hadn't even been in the bar long enough to order a bottle of beer.

Tomlisch leaned forward, opened his mouth, and bit into the pool cue. He chewed off the rubber rest at the base of the cue, munched, and swallowed. Then he started gnawing on the wooden handle.

The motorcyclists were greatly amused. Wilson Fox was greatly relieved. Drinks were ordered all around.

"I feel an emptiness in my lower GI. Time for a pizza-quest," commanded Tomlisch.

Tomlisch picked a restaurant on a little-used lane off State Street. The shops were far apart, separated by dark alleys. The restaurant's tough owner always sat by the door, to keep transients and students and other lower life forms from putting into practice a system called gym-shoeing. Fleeing without paying. Gym-shoeing was usually done in large restaurants with several exits. To foil gym-shoers, Garramone, the restaurenteur, had welded even the fire exits shut. He sat by the door with a Louisville slugger under his

chair. He was leaning back in it with one hand on the baseball bat when Wilson Fox and Tomlisch sat down. Wilson tried not to think about him while Tomlisch ordered the Giant Deluxe with Everything, a bottle of Chianti, and told the waitress: "Keep two full glasses of Special Export on the table at all times."

"How much money do you have, Wilson?" Tomlisch was patting his lips with a napkin like a movie dandy.

"Without counting, I think I can raise seventy-five cents."

"Wilson, I thought you were treating. Fortunately, I have two dollars. Place all your money on the table. I must repair to the bathroom."

"Hold on, Tomlisch. We just ran up a thirty dollar tab. I don't think they're going to take two-seventy-five and a promise."

"The two-seventy-five is a tip. We can't stiff the waitress. I have a plan. Keep alert."

Wilson Fox tried to remember what an innocent diner looked like as he finished his meal and called for the check. He was a total failure. He leaped out of his chair when the waitress asked how everything had been. She looked at him narrowly. Garramone started to hoist his bulk out of the chair by the doorway. Then the hostess, who was staring dreamily out of the window, screamed. In the window was the most depraved, terrifying face Wilson had ever seen. A fist shattered the glass. Garramone was racing for the door, brandishing his bat. Wilson Fox was right behind. They parted ways when they got out the door: Wilson running up the nearest alley, and Garramone in hot pursuit of the gargoyle who smashed his window.

Down the alley, over the fence, through an apartment house parking lot, then back to State Street. Not even out of breath, Wilson Fox congratulated himself. He walked up State to Lake Street, took a right to the lake, and sat on a pier, swinging his legs and whistling, watching the lights wavering and flickering in the lake where Otis Redding died.

"I see you escaped." Tomlisch hadn't taken off his mask. He had to grab Wilson by the elbow to keep him from total immersion.

"Where the hell did you get that thing?" asked Wilson, wringing out his socks.

"I had it in my pocket, waiting for an auspicious moment to employ it. Effective, no? It rolls into a packet small enough to be inserted in your wallet. Here, a present." Tomlisch peeled it off and dropped the mask into Wilson Fox's lap. His own face was hardly an improvement. His nose was big enough to throw a shadow. All the other features of his face had to make their separate peace with his nose; the mouth curved carefully around it, the eyes rolled beadily around it, peering out at the world through its influence and interpreting events independently of each other because of it. Everything Tomlisch must see, Wilson Fox mused, must have a little nose in it. Even his hair seemed to be fleeing the omnipresent nose, standing up in a crest on top of his head. Tomlisch was as thin as a window pane, but tall enough to brush his head on doorsills. The net effect was as if Abraham Lincoln was given the head of a cockatoo.

Wilson Fox always wondered if Tomlisch's nose got caught in elevator doors and other appliances.

Tomlisch peered at his pocket watch. "Time we were off, Wilson. If we hurry, we'll be in time for breakfast."

Earlier in the evening, Tomlisch had insisted that his wife, Katrina, was pining for a visit from Wilson. There were relatives and home cooked meals in Kenosha, and about halfway through a bottle of Cuervo Gold, Wilson had given his solemn word to ride home with Tomlisch, and help keep him awake. A promise he regretted as sobriety returned.

Wilson Fox knew Tomlisch thought of himself as a twentieth-century Cyrano. He would have worn a plumed hat, a cape, and a rapier if those encumbrances hadn't been such a problem in things like laundromats and revolving doors. So Tomlisch buckled his swash with other materials. Like the automobile, Wilson remembered. Wilson was trying to create a good excuse for staying in Madison right up to the minute he fastened his seat belt. Tomlisch wasn't happy unless he spent a third of his driving time going sideways.

"I always feel the speedometer is mocking me," Tomlisch once told his helpless passengers. "Why should a station wagon's speedometer have numbers all the way up to 120, unless it is a challenge from Detroit?"

Tomlisch had strange tastes in automobiles. Given his driving habits, thought Wilson Fox, you'd think he'd be strapped into a Porsch, a Jag, a high-speed Dodge muscle car with the seat covers about the only thing they might recognize back on the assembly line. Instead, they were headed out on Highway 12 in an American Motors Ambassador.

When Wilson got his teeth unclenched, he asked Tomlisch about this.

"Simple economics. If I were sitting in a Shelby Cobra instead of this lovely old beast, I would be sitting in my driveway. I would have to hold a part-time job to make the insurance payments, and that would put a serious crimp in my drinking." Tomlisch was momentarily drowned out by the sound of rubber on pavement. A road sign burned itself into Wilson Fox's retinas, like a flash cube at a family reunion: Dangerous Curve, 25 mph.

"You've heard of the Zen archer who aims by not aiming? No, don't look at me and nod! Just watch the road, please. Well Tomlisch, I think you may be the Zen driver. Driving by not driving is tough stuff, Tomlisch. It must have been a bear explaining your methods to the driving examiner."

"He was terrified. He never wanted to go out on the road with me again. He passed me, and joined an Amish community in Iowa, where the automobile is out of his life forever." Tomlisch reached down to find the radio. The car drifted toward the shoulder. Wilson Fox considered crawling below the dash, bracing himself into an impact-absorbing ball until they reached Kenosha.

The car left the road. Wilson Fox yelled. He bit his tongue as the car smashed heavily into the earth. They bounced a couple of times on the shocks, then the car leveled out. Corn stalks whipped by.

"What the hell are you doing?" shrieked Wilson.

"Calm down. Can't stand passengers yelling at me. Breaks my concentration. I saw this old dirt road, and it looks like a short cut. Zen driver, remember? Silly to follow maps."

Tomlisch refused to accommodate his driving style to mere annoyances like the conditions of the back roads and fire lanes they were on. After near misses on wild and domesticated creatures ranging from squirrels to beef cattle, Tomlisch skidded to a halt, spraying gravel.

"We've arrived," he proclaimed, pulling himself out through the car window.

"Already?" Wilson Fox straightened his legs with his hands. He'd been pressed against the floor boards, doing crash isometrics ever since they had left the road.

"Come along then, Wilson, don't dawdle. I want to show off my new domicile to someone who can appreciate it."

Wilson shivered as he looked at the house. It was huge and black. Its dark hulk blotted out the stars for a quarter of the horizon. It rose higher than anything else on the rolling Wisconsin countryside, but in places Wilson saw that it must have been less than six feet high; the rear entrance Tomlisch led him toward appeared to have been a chicken coop at one time. The house had spread until it absorbed that humble building. Although it must have been a hundred years old, judging from the number of different styles of architecture Wilson observed in it, the house had a temporary, expedient quality to it. Wilson thought the ramshackle building might turn out to be constructed of cardboard and balsa wood, erected by Tomlisch overnight for some purpose known only to him. At the same time, the house seemed to breathe with a life of its own, quite independent of its creators or temporary occupants.

"No electricity?" Wilson asked Tomlisch as they made their way through the dark, chicken coop-hallway to the main body of the house.

"I refuse to allow Katy to use electrical appliances. We have kerosene lamps and candles enough to light a rock concert. She didn't care for it at first, but I hid all the circuit breakers. She's come to enjoy our lifestyle. We aren't slaves to the Wisconsin Power and Gas swine this way." Tomlisch pulled off his boots with a bootjack at the back door, and lit a kerosene lamp. "The house is more interesting by lamplight, too. You'll see." He opened the back door, and they passed into the house.

The kitchen smelled nice, cinnamon and apples, with a touch of cedar. They trekked through huge rooms connected by short passageways, where the scents of lemon and mildew took over their noses. The walls were covered with cherry and oak panelling, elaborately worked and glowing in the lantern light. As they passed the carvings the light flickered, and the dead wood figures seemed to change expression, to move and sway as they passed. The grain in the wood paneling writhed in the lantern light as if it were alive. Wilson thought of photographs he had seen once, taken by a miniature camera in someone's digestive tract. He tried to walk directly behind Tomlisch, without touching the walls at all, but the lantern Tomlisch held in front of him threw back two dark shadows, like black wings, that made walking without stumbling over something unseen even more difficult.

It's like Christmas in reverse, thought Wilson, shivering with anxious anticipation.

Kate Tomlisch popped out of a doorway. Wilson Fox yelled, jumped backward, and fell over an old rocking chair.

From the floor he looked up at her, her long white robe making it seem as though she were floating. Wilson didn't recognize her. He was thinking of the duppys--Jamaican spirits who took the form of women and haunted crossroads, seducing passersby into the spirit-land. The way to tell duppys, Wilson remembered, was to check their feet. Duppys wore their feet backwards. He was looking for her feet when she spoke. He had known Katrina Tomlisch since the second grade, and didn't recognize her until he heard her voice. He wouldn't have believed anyone could change so much, and so completely for the worse, in a year and a half--the year and a half she had been married to Tomlisch.

"Wilson! You scared the breath out of me!" Katrina clutched at her bosom with one hand. In the other she held the largest butcher knife Chicago cutlery makes. "I'm used to Ernie sneaking around the place, but I heard two footsteps this time. Why didn't you call, Ernie? Why are you always doing this to me?" She turned to Wilson. "He's made me into a hag, hasn't he?"

Wilson Fox shook his head reluctantly. She was a hag. It looked like someone had been strip mining her face. There were deep hollows gouged under her cheeks, and smudges like soot under her eyes. The eyes themselves popped out, as though she were permanently startled.

Tomlisch made no move to reassure his wife about her beauty. He seemed oblivious to her concerns. He yawned, then said: "We have a guest, woman. What is there to eat?"

"I'm sorry, Wilson. Let's go down to the kitchen. Can you stay over?" Tomlisch slipped an arm around her shoulder in absent-minded affection. "You wouldn't get the cheese out of the mousetraps if Wilson wasn't here," she told him. "I'm not your vassal."

They started back toward the kitchen, single file, like a patrol into enemy territory. Katy still had her butcher knife. Wilson Fox uneasily brought up the rear.

"I bet Krupskya and Domino are crazy about this place. Where are they, anyhow?" Wilson prattled nervously. He remembered Domino particularly well. He had once startled the huge Borzoi in Tomlisch's bathroom at another home. The evil tempered wolfhound tore one of his pantlegs completely off. Since then Wilson liked to keep track of the animal's location.

Tomlisch frequently assured Wilson that the dog loved him passionately. Otherwise, he claimed, the dog would have ripped Wilson's throat out, instead of merely assaulting his wardrobe.

"Well, here's Domino." Katrina pointed to the kitchen tablecloth. A black nose and long snout were visible. "Krupskya has one room she likes. We can hardly get her to come out of it to go for a walk. How about an omelet?"

Katy dove into a domestic frenzy, lighting lanterns, chopping onions, grating cheese. Wilson tried to make friends with Domino, but the big dog left ear scratching in favor of patrolling the kitchen. The animal looked out one entrance, crossed the kitchen to peer down the pantry stairs, then paced back to the entrance again, never stepping out of an imaginary boundary. He seemed caged, instead of having fifteen-odd rooms to ramble in. Wilson thought of sentries on their posts, cops walking their beat.

"How do you afford this palace?" he asked Tomlisch, who had been describing his art collection.

"My father is probating the will of a retired farm couple that died about the same time I got out of the air force. They were just about to sell this place and move to Florida, at the urging of their son. Amy, the old woman, died in the car on the way to closing the deal. Henry, the old farmer, died a week later. It was a marriage of the temperate zone, and they refused to leave it in the end, or each other. The son lives in Florida, and everything is being done through the mail. So, in the meantime, my father is renting us the place for ninety a month. It's always better to have a house occupied. Keep the cobwebs out of the corners and the kids from shooting out the windows."

"Where's the butter?" Katy demanded. "Did you two sit there and let Domino steal

it?"

"I've been watching him, Kate, and he wasn't anywhere near the counter. What's wrong with him, anyway? He acts like he's never been out of this house."

Tomlisch and his wife looked at each other, then both looked back at Wilson. "He's been like that sine we moved here," Katrina said.

The three of them started looking for the missing butter.

"I don't see how you could misplace a pound of butter," complained Tomlisch. "A paring knife, a part of an onion, a strawberry, yes, a pound of butter, no. Where did you have it last?" Tomlisch was smiling strangely as he said this. Katy's only response was a long stare.

They searched the countertop, the sink, the kitchen table, and the floor. Wilson Fox watched as Tomlisch and Katrina widened their search to include the window sills and inside the stove. He had the distinct impression of being the audience at a performance, a comedy routine for his benefit. He commented when Tomlisch stood on a chair to check the wide sills above the windows.

"Listen, Tomlisch, I didn't see Kate involved in any chairtop acrobatics. If she couldn't have put the butter somewhere without a chair, why do you need a chair to look at such places? Maybe we could go watch the sunrise at the lake or something." Wilson went to the sink, picked up a glass, and drew water from the tap. He started to drink, then stopped. In the middle of the sink was a pound of butter.

"I just found it. Listen, Katrina, I was positive I looked here. I'm sorry. I must be drunker than I thought."

"It's okay, Wilson. Happens all the time." Kate turned away and proceeded with her omelet.

No one said a word until the eggs were ready to eat. It was not a comfortable silence for Wilson. He caught himself listening, straining to hear something, without knowing exactly what it was he listened for. Domino continued to pace the kitchen. His nails tapping constantly on the linoleum reminded Wilson of a drum roll at the circus. He wondered what death defying feat Tomlisch would perform next.

"Well, Ernie," demanded Kate as she put the eggs on the table. "Is Madison still a city, or did you and Wilson reduce it to smoking rubble? I need to know if I'm going to have to give you an alibi again. Or do I just continue to tell the police that you aren't here?"

"When was this?" Wilson wanted to know.

"Katy has secret yearnings for a more conventional life," Tomlisch accused, through a mouthful of eggs.

"I want to hear more about the police."

Katy looked at Wilson, her eyes almost popping out of her head. "Which time, Wilson?" Her fork stabbed at her plate in time with her sentences. "The time someone took his license number when he took a short cut through the 16th green of the Kenosha Country Club? During the summer tournament, of course. Or the great peacock breeding scheme? He stole three peacocks from the Racine Zoo and kept them in our apartment for a month. They were all males. Males scream, you know, to attract mates. I had to clean up after three peacocks, and explain the noise to the other tenants."

Wilson couldn't meet Katy's eyes as she spoke. He offered a piece of toast to



Domino and asked: "What did you tell them?"

"She said I was downstairs, learning to sing." Tomlisch was scraping the last of the eggs onto his plate.

"I did not. I said the building was settling, and the pipes were making noises, rubbing together."

"Did they believe you?"

"They threw us out."

"The police?"

"Couldn't prove a thing. Anyone could have been in that basement. Just because we had the only entrance didn't prove a thing. I have enemies who could have planted those peacocks to..."

"Ernie told me it was impossible to get good fingerprints from a peacock."

"Actually, Wilson, we ate the evidence. The dogs and I discovered why peacocks have never been bred commercially for their flesh."

Kate stopped between the sink and the kitchen table, a load of dishes in her arms. Her pop eyes squinted wistfully into the distance. "I named them Caruso, Pavrotti, and Melchior. They'd eat corn out of my hand, and follow me around the basement when I did the wash. I used to go down there and keep them company when Ernie was out on the town or at work. And he ATE them."

Her gaze shifted from the far away to Tomlisch. "Couldn't we have lights?" She pleaded. "We have a guest. I'm sure Wilson would enjoy his stay a lot more if we provided enough light for him to find his way to the bathroom and back."

"What say, Wilson? Shall we give in and be hostages to the power consortium? Prisoners of the age of electricity?"

"I think I'll be going to sleep pretty quick. Don't do anything special for me. If you've got a couch or an air mattress or just a thick rug somewhere, I'd be grateful if you'd show me the way."

"I can show you some of my paintings. There's one on the landing I'd especially like you to see." Tomlisch picked up a kerosene lantern from the table.

"How about me?" asked Katy, in a wee voice.

"Leave the dishes and come along," grunted Tomlisch. "I'll do them tomorrow."

"No thanks. You always break the dirtiest ones, so you don't have to scrub anything."

Tomlisch shrugged and started back through the gloomy rooms. The stairs they mounted on the way to the guest room were uneven, and Wilson stumbled. The lantern had something wrong with its wick, and flickered madly.

"That thing is like trying to read in a strobe light, Tomlisch. Did I ever tell you about my cousin Don? He used to claim if you blinked your eyes fast enough in a movie, you'd see everybody sitting in the dark looking at a blank screen. That was okay, but he also claimed that was when you could see the people who lived in dimension zero or something, and that they used movie houses to monkey around with people's heads, putting in spare parts. I don't know. They had to put him away when he attacked an usher." Wilson realized that talking might make him feel a little safer in the dark house, but that he'd better make some wiser choices about subject matter. He glanced back

fearfully, wondering if his cousin had been right about dimension zero, and ran into Tomlisch, who had stopped abruptly on a landing.

"This is my favorite," Tomlisch gushed. It was an oil painting of two naked women holding common household objects. Between them, in the foreground, sat a painter with his back to the viewer, working at his canvas. "My friend Golando calls it his self-portrait."

"How'd he see the back of his head?"

"Golando says the mark of a great artist is his ability to make you see things that aren't really there. To do that, the artist himself must see things that aren't there."

Tomlisch started up the next flight of stairs. He went two steps when the glass shade leaped off the base of the kerosene lantern. Tomlisch grabbed at it. For a minute, Wilson thought he struggled with an unseen opponent, something that was trying to snatch the burning lamp from his hand. The shade bounced down an entire flight of wooden, uncarpeted stairs. Tomlisch vanquished his invisible adversary and went to retrieve the shade.

It was uncracked, unchipped, unmarred by its fall.

"You could fall into a manure pile and come up holding a diamond," admired Wilson.

"That is why I gamble at every opportunity. Besides, they never break anything."

"What do you mean 'they'? What's the deal, Tomlisch?"

"Long story. Discuss it tomorrow. I'll show you the room. You won't have to sleep on a rug, by the way. I've arranged a unique experience for you. Tonight you'll sleep on an eighty year old featherbed, the very bed the masters of this house have been sleeping on for two generations, at least.

"You'll have to share the room, though. Krupskya won't leave. We feed her up here. I have to literally carry her out to go for a walk. She's pleasant company on a dark night."

Krupskya was as sweet tempered as her mate was evil. She said hello to Wilson like a countess asking for a waltz, front paws on his shoulders, dog face laughing in his. Wilson stroked her silky, comically cocked ears, and got into bed.

A three-quarter moon hung over the black farm fields Wilson could see from his bed. He looked at his watch: 4:10. He'd gotten an hour's sleep, anyway. In the moonlight, Krupskya sat by the door to the room. She was whining.

"Have to go out, lady?" The wolfhound glanced at him, whined, and looked back into the hallway. Her head moved slowly from left to right. It stayed bent for a moment, then tracked back to the left, as if the dog was watching the progress of slow moving traffic in the hallway. The whine turned into a growl.

Wilson left the bed silently. He was holding his breath. He reached for his jeans. He stripped the belt out of the loops, and wrapped it carefully around his fist, buckle over his knuckles. He tugged on the jeans, not wanting to confront the unknown unclothed. They were just a little big, and he had to hold them up with one hand.

The door to the room was only a quarter open. Krupskya had her head through the crack. He had to push the dog out of the way with his hip. She grumbled, but gave way.

If this is one of Tomlisch's pranks, I'm going to rupture his spleen, Wilson promised himself.

Fist cocked, he jerked the door open and jumped into the hallway. It was empty. The three-quarter moon hung framed by a window at the end of the hall. The passageway

formed an L; from around the corner, Wilson thought he could hear a low moaning. He crept toward it on tiptoe, still holding his breath.

The moon made the passageway look like a photographic negative, everything silver and black. Wilson started to feel giddy from lack of oxygen. He held up his fingers in the moonlight. They looked transparent for a moment, frightening him. He let out his breath.

"I'm beginning to feel like a ghost," he said out loud. The words echoed in his sinuses, buzzing like a wasp. They were no sooner out of his mouth than Wilson had a strange conviction that someone else had said them, that he could no longer speak. He let go of his jeans and felt along the wrist of his belt-wrapped hand. He panicked when he could not find a pulse.

Another low moan issued from the passageway.

Wilson was mad. He rushed around the corner. A door barred his way. He jerked it open.

There was Tomlisch and Katrina, locked in connubial bliss. Katy was naked; Tomlisch was wearing another of his masks. This one was the painstakingly realistic head of an insect. The head turned toward Wilson, the eye-facets winking and glistening.

"How thoughtless of us, Katrina. We neglected to invite Wilson. Wilson, would you care to join us?" the insect buzzed.

"Uh, whoops, huh, huh. I, um, got lonesome. Could I have a drink of water? I had a bad dream. Well, carry on." Wilson was now certain he had a pulse; he could feel blood rushing pall-mall to his face. He started to back into the hall, staring fascinated at the strange tableau despite his better manners.

Something grabbed him by the seat of his jeans. He was yanked backward. He opened his mouth to yell, but was too terrified to make a sound.

Then a slight tug at the seat of his jeans, a rip and a growl gave him a clue to his assailant's identity. Domino had left the kitchen. Now he was playfully defending the sanctity of his master's bedroom.

Wilson spun around. The dog knocked him to the ground, half in and half out of the bedroom. He worried the trousers off Wilson, and bounded down the hallway with them, shaking the blue jeans like a rat and growling.

Katy and Tomlisch started to laugh. Wilson crawled out of the bedroom. "Don't worry, Wilson," called Katy. "I'll find the pants in the morning and fix them up. I'll hang them on your door."

Back in his room, Krupskya continued to watch invisible Ping-Pong. Wilson dropped off to sleep.

By the time he got up, his jeans were neatly repaired and hanging on the door, as promised. He found Katy humming in the kitchen, preparing an elaborate lunch. Wilson begged a banana for breakfast.

"Tomlisch went out to buy some kind of car part," she told Wilson diffidently, as if he would find nothing of interest in her company or conversation.

Maybe she's shy about last night, thought Wilson. "I'm awfully embarrassed this morning. I suppose you find it pretty bizarre to deal with a house guest the morning after he bursts into your room in the middle of the night."

"After two years with Tomlisch, I'm almost immune to strange nocturnal occurrences, Wilson. The only one who seems to still be able to shock me is Ernie. He's

really hitting some all-time, record setting lows in human behavior."

"You mean eating the peacocks?"

"That's one of his more innocent numbers. SOme of his relatives won't speak to him anymore. His father asked him not to visit the law office anymore."

"What'd he do?"

Katy uncovered kettles, looking scared at what she might find. She covered them like she was burying a dog, gently, then pressed the pot holder she was using to her face, still warm from the pans, and held it there while she spoke. "It's the way he's been doing things. He's trying on personalities like a fat lady in Sears looking for a bathing suit. None of them seem to fit. He's using himself up, with drinking and late nights and drugs, and I think other women, too. He's using up everything."

"He was always a risk taker. You must have known that, Katy."

"I understood that part. I can handle the girls and the drugs and the crazy driving. But none of it seems to be enough for him anymore, Wilson, especially me. He wants to take other people's risks for them. Sometimes when we're alone, he won't talk to me for hours. He'll leave the room and talk to them."

"Them? Katy, what's going on here?" He told her about the strange interlude with Krupskya.

"Didn't Ernie explain? I thought he'd told you all about it. He says we have ghosts. According to Ernie, Hank and Amy have decided to stay around a while. They really aren't much trouble, as long as you treat them like you would a person. At first I thought it was crazy, talking to the air, but I sort of like having them around, now. Ernie is the only one they talk back to, though. They hate to be ignored, and they don't like having strangers in the house, because then Ernie doesn't talk to them as much."

"Isn't living here dangerous?" Katy squinted unhappily when she heard about the lamp.

"There have been a couple of incidents...they're always teasing the dogs, of course. Ernie fell down the cellar stairs two weeks ago. I just thought he had too much to drink. Maybe Hank pushed him."

Domino began to growl. He advanced three stiff legged steps into the living room, and stood there, menacing the unseen.

Wilson had turned to watch him. He felt a cold hand on the back of his neck. He jerked away.

Katy was standing behind him. "You always liked me, didn't you? You liked everyone, but I was a little special, wasn't I?"

Wilson didn't want to hear any requests. "You have a special place in your heart for the people you grow up with. I wish good things at you from long distances. I celebrate your success. I don't think anyone could have survived Tomlisch."

"I've learned a lot," said Katy. "And most of it I'd rather not know."

"Hey, what time is it? Wow, I really have to go. Got some relatives who will disown me if they find out I was in town and didn't go see them. I'll be around."

"I don't think Ernie wants you to go. I think he had something planned for this afternoon."

"Well, we don't always get what we want."

"I think Ernie might."

Wilson grinned, nodded his head, opened the door to the chicken coop hallway and started down the passage.

He felt the hair stand on his legs and the nape of his neck. There was a bad smell he hadn't noticed the night before, like rotting nuts. His hands shook. The chicken coop hallway had no windows. If the kitchen door was shut, it would be totally black. Domino watched him leaving, now growling as loud as a chain saw. Katy stood silently with the dog. Wilson tripped over something. A cobweb broke across his forehead, and he gasped.

The old fashioned bolt on the door was stiff and hard to work. Wilson tore the nail off his thumb and bared his knuckles, wiggling it this way and that. It shot open, and Wilson fell out into the sunshine.

He ran to the road and held out his thumb. A farmer in a pick-up stopped. Wilson climbed into the cab.

Tomlisch pulled into the long drive of the old house as the pick-up lurched into gear. Wilson Fox waved.

For a month afterward Wilson had a recurring dream. He was lying in the old farmhouse, on the dead owner's featherbed. Tomlisch came into the room, wearing his insect mask. "It's stuck," he'd say. He would bend over the bed, and Wilson would take hold, but no matter how they tugged, the mask would never come off.

He woke from the dreams with an urge to call Ernie and Kate Tomlisch, but it was an easy urge to fight. He so dreaded that old house that he found himself sneaking around, avoiding places that Ernie liked to go when he was in town, ducking down alleys at the sight of a tall thin man with a big nose. Wilson had nothing to sustain him in contacts with the supernatural but a head full of old horror movies.

It was Katrina that he finally bumped into.

She was coming out of a small rooming house. They locked eyes. There was no way to avoid her. "Ah, hi Katy, where's Tomlisch?"

"Haven't you heard? We're separated."

"I haven't heard from him at all. Is everything all right? I guess not, huh, since you split up? I was worried about you both, in that house. The night I spent there still scares me. The worst thing I could think of is having to go back."

"Oh, the ghosts? That wasn't really the problem."

"No? What about their hiding things, throwing lanterns around, pestering the dogs? The next step is burning up in the ghost-started fire, or both of you becoming more and more like the old couple, taking on their little quirks and aging unnaturally fast, or, you know, the usual Edgar Allan Poe House of Usher routine."

Katy stared at Wilson. Her eyes protruded less, he noticed, since dumping Tomlisch. "The ghosts were no match for him. They left about a week after your visit. I sort of missed them, actually. You know how Tomlisch is.

"Or maybe you don't. We never see ourselves as we really are, except by accident. Like when we catch sight of ourselves in a store window, or a mirror we didn't know was there, and wonder: 'Who's that?' Don't you think so, Wilson? So how can we know each other?"

"You probably don't realize this, Wilson, but you're a lot meaner and less tolerant than you really are, when you're around Ernie. It's a feedback loop, too. Tomlisch is

worse in his ways around you."

She put her hand on his jacket sleeve and leaned forward. For a second, Wilson thought he was going to be kissed. In a whisper, Katy said: "Ghosts are nothing, Emie. It's people that haunt you."

She gave his arm a squeeze and a pat, then walked away. She went around a corner and disappeared.

## The Blood Drench'd Shadow

W. H. Pugmire

The blood drench'd shadow flows beneath my feet  
And leads me to a realm of death and doom.  
The early evening air is soft and sweet,  
Kiss'd subtly by earth's marvelous perfume.

The crimson shadow leads me to a room  
Of ling'ring darkness by the waterside.  
The salty air chokes sweetness from the gloom,  
And all the wonder in the world has died.

The wet red shadow slowly starts to glide  
Across the floor to where the dull knife sits.  
Devoted as I am to suicide  
I shiver slightly, shaken by mad fits.

Then kneeling to the scarlet shadow's form  
I blend with it and find my way back home.



**CAPPY KOTZ**, a past contributor to our magazines, is also author of a collection of erotic tales *The First Stroke* (Lace Publications, 1988). She is a well known Seattle playwright whose plays incorporate elements of the fantastic. She's tall, handsome, strong, and a motorcycle accident hasn't convinced her to get a truck instead.

## A TRIM

I had made a hair appointment four days before my big performance so that my hair would be over scissor shock by the time I walked onstage. I'm very conscious of how I look; not only is the audience there to listen to me, but they look at nothing but me for several hours. I pride myself on being well coiffed; my clothes are stylish, freshly cleaned and ironed, my shoes polished, and on the morning of each performance I take a long steam before my masseuse smooths out all my kinks.

The afternoon of my hair appointment I drove across town to my hairdresser's shop. I enjoy going there; it's intimate, and for the hour or so I'm there Marta catches me up on the community gossip. When I entered the shop, the little bell over the door tinkled pleasantly and I breathed in the familiar smell of lotions and bleach, hairspray and the coffee she keeps hot in the corner for her clients. She was alone, which is unusual; generally one of her assistants works on someone else at the same time, which I like because I tend to see so very few people.

Marta greeted me, and, while I hung up my coat and purse, she stood waiting by her black hydraulic chair, holding up the nylon bib she puts around my neck. I thought she was staring at me and that she held the bib as if it were some kind of trap. I smiled at my foolish notions and settled down into the leather cushions. Perhaps the bib was a little tighter than usual, but I didn't mention it, thinking it must be my imagination and the fact that I was overly jittery because my upcoming performance was an especially important one.

"The usual?" Marta asked. "Cut it short on the sides, let the top and back flow up off your head like a mane?"

I laughed nervously, certain she was joking with me. Flow off my head like a mane? She'd never used words like that before and, I thought, she'd said them with unnatural vigor; there also seemed to be a yellowish tint to her eyes.

I closed mine momentarily, convinced that stress was playing tricks with my mind.

Marta laid a gentle hand on my shoulder and said kindly, "You've been working too much, haven't you? Now, you just relax; I'll have your hair cut before you know it, as chic as ever, and then you can go home and take a long, soothing nap."

I nodded thankfully, deliciously reassured. I relaxed into her nearness and sighed contentedly when I heard the scissors busily clip away my shaggy locks. Marta began humming; I listened with my highly skilled ear but didn't recognize it. It was a light tune though strangely chilling around the edges. Just as I was about to open my eyes and ask her what it was I distinctly felt her trim off a bit of my ear.

My hand flew to the side of my head, my eyes widened with disbelief. I looked at her in the mirror, aghast, certain I would witness embarrassed horror in her face. But her face

was calm, matter of fact; she brushed my hand aside as if I had no need to be upset and yet there was blood trickling down the rim of my ear!

"Marta!" I gasped.

"It's all right, Honey," she crooned soothingly. "I'm just going to trim your ears a bit."

I was stunned. Surely she hadn't said what I thought she said, but she must have, because she calmly and neatly cut all around my left ear so there was no more lobe and most of the cartilage fell to the floor. Then she began shaving the hair above the bloody mess, cocking her head to get a perspective on the overall effect. I tried to get out of the chair but she firmly, gently pressed me back down.

"I'm not finished," she gayly admonished me. "Now, don't worry," she assured me in her most dearest of voices, "this might seem a little extreme but it is the latest fashion, to trim the flesh so the overall shape is perfect."

She trimmed my other ear so I had blood flowing down both sides of my face. It dripped and splattered onto the bib.

"Are you sure?" I asked shakily. She shaved the other side of my head so the resulting shape was a stuff upright mane on top. The blood kept flowing down.

"Marta?"

I knew I was pleading. I hate to plead, but I needed to be reassured again.

"Honey, would I lie to you?"

I couldn't understand why her eyes looked so yellowish but I had to trust her; she should know, I argued with myself, she's up on all the fashions. It had been a year since I'd done a performance, and I'd ventured so little into society; perhaps styles had drastically changed.

She took a rasp to my forehead. "I have to shape your face a little," she informed me. "It's an astounding new technique."

It hurt. I knew it hurt, but she kept shushing me and assuring me that it didn't. Blood got into my mouth. She told me it would be over very quickly, not to worry, everything was fine, and I wanted to believe her, trust her. There was blood running down inside the bib neck, down under my new silk blouse, down between my breasts. It tickled. To keep from laughing I asked Marta if there was any new gossip she'd like to tell me. \*





**S[amuel] R[utherford] Crockett** was a well known adventure novelist around the turn of the century, often compared to Robert Louis Stevenson. Several of his books are supernatural though only *The Black Douglas*, a classic tale of werewolves in medieval Scotland, is widely known today. In his short story collection *Bog-Myrtle and Peat: Being Tales, Chiefly of Galloway* (1895) can be found two tales of supernatural horror, "A Cry Across the Black Water" and the shorter "The Seven Dead Men," this latter worked into the text of the novelette "Saint Lucy of the Eyes."

## THE SEVEN DEAD MEN

There were once six men that went fishing on the lagoons. They brought a little boy, the son of one of them, to remain and cook the polenta. In the night-time he was alone in the cabin, but in the morning the fishermen came in. And if they found that aught was not to their taste, they beat him. But if all was well, they only bade him to wash up the dishes, yet gave him nothing to eat, knowing that he would steal for himself, as the custom of boys is.

But one morning they brought with them from their fishing the body of a dead man-- a man of the mainland whom they had found tumbling about in the current of the Brenta. For he had looked out suddenly upon them where the sea and the river strive together, and the water boils up in great smooth, oily dimples that are not wholesome for men to meddle with.

Now, whether these six men had not gone to confession or had not confessed truly, so that the priest's absolution did them no good, the tale ventures not to say. But this at least is sure, that for their sins they set this dead thing that had been a man in the prow of the boat, all in his wet clothes. And for a jest on the little boy they put his hand on his brow, as though the dead man were in deep cogitation.

So as the boat came near in the morning light, the boy stood to greet them on the little wooden pier where the men landed their fish to clean, and he called out to the men in the boat--

"Come quickly," he cried; "breakfast is ready--all but the fish to fry."

He saw that one of the men was asleep in the prow; yet, being but a lad, he was only able to count as many as the crows--that is, four. So he did not notice that in the boat there was a man too many. Nor would he have wondered, he he been told of it. For it was not his place to wonder. He was only sleepy, and desired to lie down after the long night alone. Also he hoped that they had had a good catch of fish, so that he would escape being beaten. For indeed he had taken the best of the polenta for himself before the men came-- which was as well, for if he had waited till they were finished, there had been but dog's leavings for him. He wasn't a wise boy, this, when it came to eating. Now, eating and philosophy come by nature, as doth also a hungry stomach; but arithmetic and Greek do not come by nature.

The men went in with a good appetite to their breakfast, and left the dead man sitting alone in the prow with his hand on his brow.

So when they sat down, the boy said--

"Why does not the other man come in? I see him sitting there. Are you not going to bring him in to breakfast also?" (For he wished to show that he had not eaten any of the polenta.)

Then, for a jest upon him, one of the men answered--

"Why, is the man not here? He is indeed a heavy sleeper. You had better go and wake him."

So the little boy went to the door and called, shouting loud, "Why cannot you come to breakfast? It has been ready this hour, and is going cold!"

And when the men within heard that, they thought it the best jest in a month of Sundays, and they laughed loud and strong.

So the boy came in and said, "What ails the man? He will not answer though I have called my best."

"O," said they, "he is but a deaf old fool, and has had too much to drink over night. Go thou and swear bad words at him, and call him beast and fool!"

So the men put wicked words into the boy's mouth, and laughed the more to hear them come from the clean and innocent lips of a lad that knew not their meaning. And perhaps that is the reason of what followed.

So the boy ran in again.

"Come out quickly, one of you," said the lad, "and wake him, for he does not heed me, and I am sure that there is something the matter with him. Mayhap he hath a headache or evil in his stomach."

So they laughed again, hardly being able to eat for laughing, and said--

"It must be cramp of the stomach that is the matter with him. But go out again, and shake him by the leg, and ask him if he means to keep us waiting here till doomsday."

So the boy went out and shook the man as he was bidden.

Then the dead man turned to him, sitting up in the prow as natural as life, and said--

"What do you want with me?"

"Why in the name of the saints do you not come?" said the boy; "the men want to know if they are to wait till doomsday for you."

"Tell them," said the man, "that I am coming as fast as I can. For this is Doomsday!" he said.

The boy ran back into the hut, well pleased. For a moment his voice could not be heard, because of the noisy laughter of the men. Then he said--

"It is all right. He says he is coming."

Then the men thought that the boy was trying in his turn to put a jest on them, and would have beaten him. In a moment, however, they heard something coming slowly up the ladder, so they laughed no more, but all turned very pale and sat still and listened. And only the boy remembered to cross himself.

The footsteps came nearer. The door was pushed stumblingly open, as by one that fumbles and is not sure of his way. Then the man that had been dead and drowned, of whom they had made their sport, came in and sat down at the boy's place, the seventh at the table. Whereupon there was a great silence. None spoke, but all looked; for none, save the boy only, could withdraw his eyes from those of the dead man. Colder and chiller flowed the blood in their veins, till it ceased to flow at all, and froze about their hearts.

Whereat the boy flung himself shrieking into a boat and rowed away by the power of

his own saint, Santa Caterina of Sienna. He met some fishermen in a sailing boat, but it was the third day before any dared to row the lonely Casa on the mudbank. When they did so, three men climbed up the posts at different sides, for the ladder had fallen away. They went not in, but only looked through the window. They saw indeed six men, who sat round the platter of cold polenta. But the seventh, who sat at the bottom in the boy's place, shone as though he had been on fire, leaning back in his chair as one that laughed and made merry at jest. But the six were fallen silent and very sober.

So the three men that looked fell back from off their platform into the water as dead men; and had not their companions been active men of Malamocco, they too had been drowned. So there to this day in the lonely Casa of the Seven Dead Men the six are sitting, and the fiery seventh at the table-foot, in the boy's place--until the Day comes that is Doomsday, which is the last day of all.

## The Moon

Camilla Doyle

How like a beckoning finger shows  
The fair young moon that lately rose--  
As though she called her thirty days  
With bright deluding promises.

The answering waves at night, that took  
Her silver livery, leap to crook  
Themselves into her form as well,  
And sink in tears because they fail.

Who'd think her beckoning finger were  
A skeleton's, all white and bare?  
For all her loveliness the moon  
Is but a long-dead skeleton.

And if you doubt, all that are  
Fonder than waves of this bright star--  
Wait but a little, at the full  
We'll see her as a fleshless skull.

*[from POEMS, Appleton & Co, 1924]*

**Peni R. Griffin** (b. Harlingen, Texas, 11 July 1961) has published poems and stories in Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone Magazine*, 2AM, Space & Time, Pandora, Isaac Asimov's *Science Fiction Magazine*, The Leading Edge, and The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction. "In July 1987 I married and now live with two Michaels and two cats. My reading is voracious, with Louisa May Alcott probably my greatest influence. This story is was written under the influence of numerous folk tale collections, particularly those of J. Frank Dobie and the Texas Folklore Society." There is a resemblance between Peni's story and such tales as Baudelaire's "The Generous Gambler"

## DEATH AND SARDO THE GAMBLER

Sardo the Gambler met Death out walking, and Death said: "Come. Let's play a game of King's All."

So Sardo said: "All right."

They played King's All by the highway, and Sardo won. Death asked: "What stake shall I give?"

"Grant that I always know the best horse in a race," said Sardo.

"All right," said Death. "Let's have another game."

They played King's All by the highway, and Sardo won again. "What stake shall I give?" asked Death.

"Grant that I always know when a man is bluffing."

"All right," said Death. "Let's have another game."

They played King's All by the highway, and Sardo won again. "What stakes shall I give?" asked Death.

"Grant that I always have the means for one more bet."

"All right," said Death. "Let's have another game."

They played King's All by the highway, and this time Sardo lost. "What stake shall I give?" he asked.

"You must come along with me," said Death.

"What, before I get a chance to use my winnings?"

"Life is hard, and Death harder."

"I've got a neighbor, has been crippled up and moaning to die these past three years. Why not take him?"

"I don't want him," said Death. "He's not a gambling man. It's a poor time I have down in the Deadlands, with my horses all outclassed, and so few willing to play King's All with me."

"Then take my horse Fogbottom," said Sardo. "He's never been outclassed since he was weaned."

Death thought about that, and thought about that. "All right," he said. "But I'll come along later, and we'll play King's All again."

Sardo went home, and found his wife Moll with tears on her face. "Fogbottom's

keeled over dead," she said, "and nothing we could do about it!"

"Be thankful for that, if you love me," said Sardo. "It could as well have been me."

A few days later Sardo went to play glovden at the tavern. He had a run of bad luck, and soon all he had was lost or in the pot; but he had his first good hand of the evening, and wanted to stay in for one bet more. He reached in his pocket, and where had been nothing but lint and his handkerchief, he found a silver piece, so he bet it. Soon came time to show the cards, and Sardo was high. "Death is one-third honest," he thought.

A few rounds later he had a fair-to-middling hand, and the others were dropping out like flies in a cold spell, except for one who held out like a sure winner. Sardo had a feeling--he couldn't say what it was, but it seemed to him the man was bluffing, so he stayed in. Sure enough, when they laid down their cards, Sardo was high. "Death is two-thirds honest," he thought.

A couple of weeks after this came the first race of the season, and Sardo and Moll went down to the track. They were looking over the two-year-olds for the first race, when Sardo got a feeling--he couldn't say what it was, but it seemed to him he was looking at the best horse in the race. She was a bony brown filly with two white feet, a long ewe neck, and a mean look in her eye. Sardo turned to Moll and said: "I've a feeling that's the best horse in the race, but if it was up to my judgement I wouldn't back her against a broomstick."

"Death was one-third honest, and two-thirds honest," said Moll. "Three-thirds isn't too much to hope for. You test him out on the first two races, and then we can decide on this one."

So Sardo got his feelings and made his bets on the first two races. One of his picks came in first, and one fourth; which was fine, since it's not always the best horse in a race that wins. "Looks like he's three-thirds honest," said Sardo, and put money on the bony filly, who was the longest shot on the track.

She didn't come in first, she didn't come in second, she didn't come in third. She acted up and trailed the pack the whole way. Sardo just couldn't believe Death had cheated him that way, and Moll was sure he hadn't.

"He took Fogbottom," she said. "It seems just fair you get a replacement."

"There's since in that," said Sardo. After the last race was won he found the bony filly's owner and bought her up cheap. It was Moll gave her the name Three-Thirds.

Home they went with Three-Thirds, and for a while they looked like regretting it. She was mean as a goblin with a toothache, and didn't no more care about running with a man on her back than she cared about silks and diamonds. Yet there was never a horse so mean it couldn't be gentled, and she gradually got to where she'd let Sardo and Moll around her.

Along came Little Brown Crispin one day, looked her over, and fell right smack in love, for all she put a bruise on him the shape of her foot. I reckon you know Little Brown Crispin was the biggest little runner that ever smelled sweat, and there were owners around Tribble Creek would've traded their grandmothers to have him ride for him. Once Three-Thirds would let him in her saddle, Sardo figured it was time to put her back in the races.

The first time Crispin rode her, she was in the middle of the pack. Next time he rode her, she was sixth in a field of eight. Next time she was fourth, then second, then third,

then fourth; then finally she came in by seven lengths. It was like she'd suddenly realized what all this was about, laughed for joy, and fed the others dust. That was a great day, and Moll thought her husband would never leave off drinking Death's very good health, for she'd run them so expensive, he was down to the bet in his pocket.

After that only the best horses and riders ever saw more of her than the wisp of her tail. She ran three seasons like that, and then no one would go up against her; but then it wasn't so easy to find a horse that could match her colts. By that time he and Moll didn't mind losing Fogbottom at all.

Three-Thirds died at last, and Moll and Sardo buried her upright under a tall stone, all saddled and ready to ride. You can go by and see the grave yet, over near Tribble Creek--Three-Thirds Meadow, they call it. She stayed quiet there about three years, but then Little Brown Crispin died, and since then more than one jockey's tried to match his horse against them.

All this time Sardo hadn't been wasting his other gifts, and he was the richest man in the country. That's including the king. There's stories about that, too, but I'm telling you about Sardo and Death here.

After Three-Thirds and Crispin died, Sardo started feeling old. One day he came down from seeing the weanlings, and there was Death. "Hello there, Sardo," said Death. "Hope you ain't too proud to play King's All with an old friend."

"Not at all," said Sardo. So they sat on the grass and played King's All, and Sardo won.

"What stake shall I give?" asked Death.

"Give Moll and me five more years apiece."

"It's no use playing anymore after that," said Death, and went away.

Moll and Sardo lived on another five years, hale and happy as fleas. They kept on running their horses, and Sardo won at glodven as much as ever, but they didn't need money much anymore, so they gave most of it away. In five years, Sardo went down to Three-Thirds Meadow, and there was Death, perched on a rock.

"Hello there, Sardo," said Death. "Hope you ain't too proud to play King's All with an old friend."

"Not at all," said Sardo. So they played King's All over Three-Thirds's grave.

All the world knows Death can bluff like nobody's business. That didn't worry Sardo, on account of his gifts, but Death bluffed him all right, and you know how serious that can be in a game of King's All. When Sardo saw what a hand he held, he said: "What happened to my old stake?"

"You can tell if a man's bluffing," grinned Death. "I ain't a man."

"All right," said Sardo. "What stake shall I give?"

"You come along with me."

There was no putting it off any longer, so Sardo went with Death. Three-Thirds's rock split open for them, closing up again after they went through. Three-Thirds was gone from where they had buried her.

On they went through long passages a living tongue couldn't describe nor a living mind remember, and then they came to a racetrack. There was Little Brown Crispin and Three-Thirds, and Sardo's uncle on Fogbottom. There were others in the race, some of

them legends around Tribble Creek, but Sardo didn't care anything about them. He hardly knew who to root for, but Three-Thirds was the best horse, and she won by a length.

"Best horse living, and best horse dead!" crowed Little Brown "Crispin. "And I'll wager the best one yet unborn!"

"Best living, and best dead," said Death, "but a better's still unborn, and that's another Tribble Creek horse'll be along someday."

After a couple of days Sardo and Death played King's All, and Sardo won. "What stake shall I give?" asked Death.

"Let me go visit Moll," said Sardo.

So Death took him up through Three-Thirds's grave again, and Sardo spent a day with Moll. He told her all that had happened, and she saw the rock split open and the empty grave beyond when he went back that night. She told her friends and the children and grandchildren, and they told everyone else, and I'm telling you today. I reckon Death didn't like gossip about him, because if Sardo ever came again, word never got out.

But the horsemen at Tribble Creek are still looking for the horse that can beat Three-Thirds.

## The Apparition

Stephen Phillips

(1864-1915)

My dead Love came to me, and said:

"God gives me one hour's rest

To spend upon the earth with thee:

How shall we spend it best?"

"Why, as of old," I said; and so

We quarrelled as of old.

But when I turned to make my peace

That one short hour was told.



**William H. Green** describes the following as a "fugue of death-symbolism, with ghosts. The history, geography, and sociology are correct." His stories have appeared in numerous literary magazines, a previous *Fantasy Macabre*, and in *Tales by Moonlight* volume 1.

## THE MAN FROM SANDFORT

I was raised in Sandfort Community, a smudge of ancient ocean beach that surfaces inland in East Alabama, where farmers plow up fossil shells. General Floyd's men took shovels and made a fort of sand against the Indians there in 1813, sand walls and trenches reinforced with perishable timber. In the seventy years since, the work of man has melted like a sandcastle under wind and rain, obeying orders known only to the ageless sea, until the fort where I played as a boy is now soft inland dune unnatural only in its great "O" shape.

There are many communities like Sandfort, I believe: a log store that had been an Indian trading post, scattered houses and barns like daffodils in a field, wild along a muddy highway and under tall yardtrees off scrub-hedged lanes. And there are many men like me in communities like Sandfort--born in the lower end of the planter class, educated before Fort Sumpter at county academies, lieutenants under Lee in Pennsylvania and Virginia, returning to farm with colored families scraps of inherited land left by Reconstruction tax-collectors. At cotton-picking time black children fill my fields. I never married. Neighbors say I drink. I do, but no more than my father before the War, when the vice was a honorable badge of idleness. In the evenings, with whisky, I read the remains of his library, a wagon load of which I saved before the house burned.

Since the War, I have lived as a human relic with more past than future, more rank than power, more education than use for it. In name a gentleman, I was in fact no more than a slave to the exhausted land, like the black hands I worked beside, the freedmen re-enslaved by poverty. Fenced in by the horizon, lashed by the sun, we labored for shares of a poor cotton crop. Only solitude distinguished me, and a larger cut of the cotton money, but after taxes, tithes, and Christmas gifts, and staples for the family of a drunken tenant--the obligations of noblesse--little remained. I was chief only among the poor.

But even as a boy I held in my mind's recesses the loud sea, the salt wind. And in my thirty-seventh year, I coughed blood. Not much blood. A clot smaller than a pea trailed by a hair-fine filament, it floated in phlegm like a fertilized egg in a skillet. I stared at the deadly egg, oily in my spittoon, and fear washed me like winter waves.

I had lived plainly since the War, first to pay the tax collector, later out of habit. I ate collards, black-eyed peas, and cornbread cooked by a tenant woman, shared with her children. I dressed like the blacks I sweated beside. My furniture and my house were inherited, and I repaired them with tools in a box my grandfather made. Whisky was my only luxury. So, a dollar here, two bits there, I had saved a sum--it is ungentlemanly to specify numbers--which I counted at my writing table.

It had been March when the deadly egg broke in my spittoon. As spring warmed, the spotting remained rare, but I had seen consumption before and knew better than to be



hopeful. Springs blooming with promise of immortality are the natural course of dying. Still, I thanked God, or whatever invisible hand had reached into my lungs, and I planned a trip for late May, as soon as the chill was out of the year. My parting instructions to Jake, my chief tenant, were an empty ritual. I understood how little I would be missed.

There was a fort, I had heard, on a fingertip of land into Mobile Bay. On the seaside beaches (a veteran passing through Sandfort said) the waves curled and broke over white sand--so the confederate garrison might have felt on holiday, not at war, until Farragut came with his ironclads and mortars, and waves of fire and explosion washed the fort, crumbling the brick walls of the barracks within. And, with the yankees advancing over land, Fort Morgan raised a white flag over its rubble. Soon Union troops enjoyed a holiday, not a war, on that fingertip of land. Now, only a lighthouse keeper enjoys the waves that curl and break over white sand.

So I had heard, and, though there were closer beaches to the south, I chose to take the steamboat down from Montgomery to the sea. Jake drove the wagon to the depot, where I took the train to Montgomery and stayed overnight in a hotel below the white-domed capitol on the hill. The room was better furnished than any I slept in since the War--but no better than the room in which I was born. Corpse-like on the bed, I considered what cloth should line my coffin, in what luxury I should lie.

The weather was fair all the trip down river, and from my chair on the upper deck, I watched the shoreline drift. To my fellow passengers, all strangers, I paid little attention, but instead watched the passing land for changes in flora and fauna, flattening lines of distant hills when the banks shallowed. I studied the strata of the banks, hungry for antediluvian sand.

Finally, the banks fell low, the water wide and sluggish, and on the land were fields (I will not call them forests, though they were covered with trees) of spindly pines like bottle-brushes, the stems unearthly slender and wind-twisted, the high tufts of needles a sparse gray-green. And below them, along the marshy edge, thickets of gray bushes and flat evergreens were thriving where the pines sickened. There was salt or other poison in the earth, deep around the taproots of trees. The sea had been here, and rejoiced at its touch.

At Mobile I was first at the ramp for the Pensacola boat. I coughed in the heat, but waved off help and settled on a hard deck bench. I breathed thirstily, soothed by my pocket flask. On my lap a carpet bag held a change of clothes, tins of food, bottles of whisky.

Later, my fellow passengers gathered at the rails, feeling the steamboat churn and pound--vast labors to set one man on the Fort Morgan wharf. They stared at me in rows along the rail as the ramp grated back, as the steamboat shuddered and sloshed from that dead place. I watched it smoke into deeper waters, turn alongshore, and shrink behind the haze of its stacks.

Except for the lighthouse and the cottage beneath it, the land was desolate, white sand and gray scrub. A man with a long, black beard waited by the yard-gate, two faces at second-floor windows. They studied what marvel the steamboat had disgorged. An inebriate farmer from Sandfort was the last thing they expected.

"Morning, sir," I smiled.

He stared a while before replying in a dark accent, "Morning."

I set down my bag and smiled, but the keeper neither softened nor raised his hand

from the gate. His black brows thickened.

"Sir," I said, "could you tell me where the fort is? I've come to see it." I did not mention the sea.

His eyes cut inland.

Suddenly, like Ulysses knowing Ithica, I saw the flat-topped dune--larger, broader, more regular than natural--that rose and scrawled in all directions, the sand-banked countercarp of Fort Morgan.

Beyond the sandy rise, and below it, spread a great pentagonal star of masonry, humanly geometric--a hard mind-shape hidden from the sea by sand embankments. General Floyd's fort at home and all the earth-and-plank emplacements of my Virginia campaigns had not prepared me for its hugeness. Here was a bone indeed in the craw of nature, a shape that wind and rain would not soon swallow.

I dropped into the dry moat around the fort. Gun ports stared empty from massive brickwork. Finally, rounding a diamond-shaped bastion, a corner of the great star, I saw ahead the main gate, its rotten doors ajar. Inside, a tunnel was flanked by vaulted chambers--beyond, the glare of the yard. All of this hugeness, these great arched rooms circling the yard with musical regularity, lay bare and detested under the sun. My footsteps ground in the sand, echoed off the walls.

For hours I wandered through the domed crypts, the giant-tall steps to the battlements, the gap-toothed yard, until one bottle was empty, then another. Finally, as the long shadows joined to become one shadow, I settled the carpetbag under my head in one catacomb-like room.

At first, the sound might have been my own heart, but it clarified and congealed into the thunder of bombardment, a sound familiar in my months with Lee. In the first decade of peace I had dreamed that sound, sitting up in darkness and sweat. But this was no dream. I was awake. I remembered where I lay and when. I felt the carpetbag under my neck.

Then there were other sounds in my waking ears: scraping concussions of footsteps, voices clarifying from the din, shouts, mutterings, distant screams, a rifle shot. Two yards from my shoulder, a marine stepped back from the smoking port, bit off a cartridge, and rammed it into his weapon as another took his place, sighting into the dry moat around the fort, where a shell burst like lightning. I saw their shapes, not vaguely as in a dream, but shaded and palpable: halos of two-day beards, fear-crawled faces, wrinkled jackets, sagging belts, scuffed boots, all the grained reality of their bodies. I breathed battle-stench of sweat and sulfur.

But they did not see me with my carpet bag and Sunday suit, crawling out of their way as another shell flashed. A rain of mortar salted the room, shocked from the bricks overhead. The second marine leaned into the port again but held his fire. From the parapets above us, Confederate cannon answered Farragut's gunboats. I knew that I was seeing the battle for Mobile. Somehow the past had fallen like a curtain around me. At first I was vaguely pleased that I might die in battle here, not of blood-streaked lungs, a body traitor to itself. With oriental detachment, I watched the violence around me. Vulnerable flesh still cloaked my soul like a Sunday suit, yet I felt no fear.

It was an illusion, I soon discovered--my body's reality. I do not mean my body's

materiality. I still wore everyday arms and legs, still breathed with diseased lungs. I felt the weight and ache of them. But raising fingers to my face, I understood why the marines had not seen me. Even to my own eyes, the fingers were so vague that the shapes of battle showed through them. My clothes, too, my carpet bag, all I had brought with me, were of the same smoky stuff. I was a ghost.

Not that I could sink through the floor or pass through walls. I had touched those. Nor did I feel safe from injury. I understood that Farragut's shells could as easily maim the smoke-body I stood in, my ephemeral living flesh, as the dark external bodies of the dead marines at the rifle-port.

I saw *dead* even though, as I watched, they moved, loaded, fired. I believe I know what they were. They were the ghosts of this place, real and palpable, fighting in the eternal flesh of death; and I, the thing dying of consumption, was visibly less real in my body of matter, which the light of dying showed through. I was the ghost, the unreal body soon to vanish and dissolve into earth, and these changeless inhabitants of the place (or of every place if we but saw them) were the realities. While my own life since the war had passed like water, they had remained here in battle. And if the battle should end, the fort in ruins, it would be rebuilt again and again, until its rebuildings were grains of sands. And eternally chasmed at my feet, swallowing not only my life, but all historic and geologic time, multiplying it, annihilating its multiples, their multiples, until it swallowed itself.

I awoke, though I do not remember sleeping, to the roar of water, not guns. I had found the sea. It washed my fee. I sat up, coughing, and batted at damp sand on my clothes. The fort had vanished. Dead marines and arches of brick had melted before the crash of surf. The sky was cloudless, the sun hot. I hauled my carpetbag to a ridge of dry grains, folded my coat, and rolled my trousers. Sea-wind breathed exhalation only.

The sky was tall, taller than inland skies can be, from the line where waves hid behind the curving earth, the horizon wider to the left and right than eyes could know--a vastness ruled by one light. Below it, the ridges of the sea converged where I stood and, unrolling, crashed over my ankles.

I sat like a child on the first dry ridge, feet outstretched into quicksandishness and scooped up a double hand of grains. I piled up sand and shaped it over the line where the sea had dropped small shells. I shaped a fort of towers, moats, and walls.

But soon the farthest sliding edges of the waves touched and gleamed the outer walls, filled and abolished the moat in sliding grains, and the walls slumped to dune-shapes which waves soon washed over, making a pool of the inner fort. I saw and watched. Damp to the waist, I saw my fort dissolve to a blurred ring covered by incoming tide, and still I watched where I knew it had been under the sliding foam.

If I had looked up, I would have seen the black shape, or heard him had it not been for the surf. The dissolution of my fort filled me, so I started when he spoke.

"Evening." It was the keeper, his brows arched this time, amused but not hostile at the sand-caked fool I must have seemed. Indeed I was, perhaps, in the only second childhood my disease will allow. "You find the fort all right?" He teased me, his beard blowing.

"Thank you, sir. I did." I stood. My legs felt cold. I pressed my ribs and coughed.

His forehead creased. "You spent the night in that damned place, didn't you?" And a vast, flat dune resolved behind him. Fort Morgan was still there, of course. More years

must pass before it melted.

"Yes, sir." I still clutched my chest, lungs streaked with pain. Sea-wind chilled my wet clothes. I coughed again.

"I reckon you've seen enough." Maybe charity was behind his frown, or maybe he saw my condition and wished to be spared the trouble of burying me. "Boat comes in about an hour," he said.

I held my breath, holding in the tickle until he was well down the beach, then coughed and spat as if to turn inside out. It lay bright on the beach, the streak of red, the deadly egg that sliding sea-foam touched and dissolved. Breathing settled, its rattle subsumed in an oceanic roar.

## Shadwell Stair

Wilfred Owen

(1893-1918)



I am the ghost of Shadwell Stair.

Along the wharves by the water-house,  
And through the dripping slaughterhouse,  
I am the shadow that walks there.

Yet I have flesh both firm and cool,  
And eyes tumultuous as the gems  
Of moons and lamps in the lapping Thames  
When dusk sails wavering down the pool.

Shuddering the purple street are burns  
Where I watch always; from the banks  
Dolorously the shipping clanks,  
And after me a strange tide turns.

I walk till the stars of London wane  
And dawn creeps up the Shadwell Stair.  
But when the crowing sirens blare  
I with another ghost am lain.

**K. Huebner** has contributed to our pages previously, sophisticated little nastinesses that capture the horror of simply attempting to survive in the inordinantly creepy world we've built for ourselves. She returns with a little something for the tummy.

## Potatoes

A coworker from the Institute invites me to have dinner at his house: we have been flirting lately, so I agree.

To my surprise, his wife, a grey-faced older woman, looks sullenly and disdainfully away from me and pretends to continue watching tv. I sit down, nonplussed, and glance at my friend. He sits across the table from me, smiling in a complacent, unintelligent way quite alien to his normal demeanor, and says nothing.

Surreptitiously, I examine the room. It is dim and unattractive, with dingy printed curtains. The table seems to be of greasy boomerang-formica, with matching grimy vinyl-and-chrome chairs; my host's wife sits in an overstuffed rocker patterned with fleshy brown flowers. The television displays no recognizable program, but merely a noisy blur of black and white dots in which faces resembling Rorschach blots can occasionally be discerned.

I wait for someone to start a conversation, but no one does. Instead, my coworker's wife drones monotonously to herself about driving: "And then I turned to the right, and I drove along for two blocks, and then I came to a stop light, and then it turned green, and then I turned to the right again, and then I drove four blocks behind a van, and then I turned left..." It is clear that this bores her and that she wants to make sure it bores me too.

Finally she slaps down some plates which appear to contain mashed potatoes and gravy. I am not altogether certain that this is really what they hold; still, I reason, what else could it be? We feed slowly and listlessly under the fluorescent light; my coworker grins mutely, like a village idiot, while his wife glares malevolently at me. Evidently she hates me because I'm not Jewish, but in that case I can't understand why I was invited. I didn't even know he was married. I became more and more angry as the mashed potatoes drag on and this ugly, hostile woman continues to silently revile me; she looks so disgusted that I wonder if she's going to spit at me. It all seems so unfair: sure, I've flirted with her husband now and then, but I never intended to take him away from her!

In a flash I look at my watch and leap up announcing that I'm terribly sorry, but it's time for me to go. Before I even realize what I'm saying, I claim that I'm expected at a friend's seder at 8:00. As soon as I say this, I wonder what possessed me to say such a thing when I can't even remember if it's the right time of year for seders; her lip curls and I can tell she doesn't believe a word of what I'm saying.

Facing my hostess uncomfortably but intentionally close, I thank her profusely. "It was very kind of you to have me," I say. "It was a pleasure to meet you."

"Why?" she asks coldly. "Why should you want to meet *me*?"

"Why shouldn't I want to meet you?" I have to restrain myself from hugging her since I can tell that she's not the type to be melted by demonstrations of sisterhood.

Instead, I say, equally coldly, "No one has ever treated me as you have; your hospitality is nonexistent and your behavior is abysmal."

My host, still looking uncharacteristically vacuous, accompanies me out of the house. He is ostensibly going to see me to the car or perhaps home, but I know that we are going to spend the rest of the evening together, because I am certainly not going to any seder.

It is dark out, and our feet crunch the gravel of the driveway as we walk toward the street. We can get into a car, but it turns out to be one of those huge American cars in which everyone sits vast distances apart. I stare out of the window at his house and consider crying all over his shoulder, but I'm not going to let myself even look at him until we're at least away from his house; his wife is probably peering through the kitchen curtains to see what we're doing.

In front of us, another big car starts up, its tail lights little red blobs on the points of its fins. I recognize it as belonging to a neighbor of mine, a fat banal man who always wants to ply me with wine so that he can tell me boring stories.

"Maybe we should have accepted *his* invitation and gone out on his boat instead," I mutter. "Even that would've been better than this."

My coworker still says nothing.

When I talk to him at work the next day, he bursts out laughing and assures me with considerable glee that "You're having those erotic fantasies about me again!" I threaten to pour my coffee on his head, but he dances out of my reach.

"You're blushing, you're blushing," he exclaims happily. "We'll just keep this a little secret between the two of us," he adds in a mock-confidential tone as he waltzes out of my office, repeating, "You're blushing!" as the door swings closed. I tell myself that it is madness ever to confess anything to a shrink.

A few weeks later he invites me to a party. This time he lives in a beautiful apartment with white enameled Victorian woodwork, oriental rugs, and two fireplaces. His girlfriend, a woman with long dark hair, doesn't speak to me, but his boss and I tell everyone obnoxious stories about Kwell, and throw potato latkes across the table at one another. •



**Denis Tiani** returns to our pages with another macabre excursion across demented, cool, intense, fabulous and surreal landscapes. Fantasy Macabre and Fantasy & Terror readers are by now familiar with him as a stunning prose stylist. To the majority of the world that cares about things weird, he is best known as an illustrator for Arkham House, Silver Scarab Press, and other of the top presses.

## Brain Static

Beings from another dimension invaded Mrs. Frazor's dreams, discovered that her brain contained a large, highly refined, pearl of rupa and wanted to remove it. Mrs. Frazor became aware of this shortly after her husband committed suicide. After that she refused to leave the house. That was five years ago. Her daughter, Sally, was her only link with the outside world. Now Sally has gone too, kidnapped by the Invaders. There was no one Mrs. Frazor could trust. Not even God. God had sent the Invaders to find her in the first place. Mrs. Frazor could only hide and wait and hope things would improve.

Sally was found in the cellar of Professor Mingus's house two weeks after Mrs. Frazor was committed to the Keller Mental Institute.

The doctors did not tell Mrs. Frazor her daughter had been found alive. They were afraid it would upset her more. Mrs. Frazor believed the Keller Institute had been taken over by the Invaders, first as patients, then interns, nurses, and finally doctors and administrators. They wanted the rupa. Mrs. Frazor had also figured out by this time that Sally was not really her daughter but a spy substituted by the Invaders eleven years earlier while she and Sally were still in the maternity ward at the Barrymore Hospital. Her real daughter was being kept alive; imprisoned somewhere in the other dimension where her life forces were used to power the mental institute. Mrs. Frazor could sense her daughter's presence in all the electrical appliances. The real Sally spoke to her mother through the night light in her room--explaining things to her.

Sally told her mother not to trust her eyes. "They take the shape of familiar objects," she said. "They camouflage themselves in light. They can't hide in the dark though. You have to close the lights to see," Sally explained. "That's why they keep the lights on all the time. But you can see them if you look out of the corner of your eyes.

"Be careful," Sally warned her mother. "They can get into your brain through the corner of your eyes."

"I may be crazy," Mrs. Frazor would tell the doctors, "but I'm not stupid. I know who you are and what you want."

Mrs. Frazor never let on where she was getting her information. She didn't want to get Sally in trouble. She just laughed when the doctors asked her about it. She and Sally both laughed.

Professor Mingus lived in the same neighborhood as the Frazors. Mrs. Frazor warned the authorities that Mingus was the leader of the Invaders, but nobody would listen to her--even when she told them she had seen him walk through walls.

Mingus used to walk into her house when the doors were closed, moving through the spaces between the walls so as not to be seen. But Mrs. Frazor could hear him. He was

building something in the walls. She pretended not to notice, then when he left she tore holes in the plaster and destroyed his work. She didn't know for sure, but suspected he was trying to convert her house into a receiving station that would allow the invaders to transmit themselves directly into her living room.

Eventually Mrs. Frazor was forced to coat the entire inside of her house with aluminum foil. Mingus could not walk through aluminum foil.

By wrapping her head in aluminum foil when she slept Mrs. Frazor was, to some extent, able to foil the Invader's ability to enter her dreams.

Alcohol also helped confuse them.

Professor Mingus wasn't really a professor, that's just what he called himself. He was well read, however--at least he had a lot of books around the house, including a lot of notebooks. His notes didn't make much sense unless you know what to look for. He developed his own language based on patterns made by tv static. He claimed this new language was necessary because his ideas were so revolutionary they could not be expressed in normal English. He also claimed he didn't make up this language but discovered it through a lot of hard work.

Experts are still trying to figure it out.

Smatterings of this new language are scattered throughout even his earliest writing, gradually increasing in frequency until in the last year of his life he used it almost exclusively.

Professor Mingus was working on an experiment. For years he had been kidnapping kids, wrapping them in string, and lining them up in rows on a shelf in his fruit cellar. They also found some cats and dogs down there, in the cellar. And a few babies too.

One theory is that the Professor thought he was a spider. He had a lot of spider books in his library and quite a few spiders living in his house. He never destroyed a spider's web if he could help it, claiming they were instructions.

He kept his kidnapped victims alive as long as he could; cut their vocal cords so they couldn't scream, but the tendons of their arms and legs so they couldn't get away, and fed them soup through a straw. The kids were connected together by copper wires attached to their teeth--like batteries in series. It's not clear what the purpose of all this was.

One kid lived to tell the story. His name was Dean Slater. He was twelve years old and had a dog named Crowbar--a big dog.

One night, late October, Dean and Crowbar were out garbage picking. It happened fast. One minute Dean was looking through garbage, then he was waking up in flickering darkness, wrapped in string and groggy as hell.

The flickering light was coming from a small tv set on the floor. It was tuned in to static. It produced a strobe-like effect and an annoying hiss which Dean first mistook for a crowd roaring, then for rain.

Dean managed to unwrap himself by burning the strings with an old Bic lighter he always carried with him. He carried the cigarette lighter the way some kids carry radios. He liked fire. He liked looking at it and listening to it. He liked holding his hand over the flame. It was better than alcohol or marijuana some of the kids used. He held his hand over the flame now, trying to wake up. He was on a shelf in someone's basement. He was surprised to find Sally Frazor there too. Sally used to sit next to Dean in school, before she mysteriously disappeared. Now she was next to him on the shelf.



Dean liked Sally.

Sally was pale and thin and ants were crawling over her face. She was talking in her sleep.

Dean shut the lighter off and the flickering darkness snapped around him; a darkness alive with the fear that was going on inside his mind--a fear fuelled by the images the cigarette lighter had uncovered: A row of wooden shelves with kids and animals lined up on them, wrapped in string like cocoons.

Sally's voice snaked through the hypnotic darkness.

The darkness was drawing Dean's mind out, distorting it. His brain was playing tricks on him. He tried to put things in order, going over the events that ended here.

It was Tuesday night. Tomorrow was garbage day. Dean was out garbage picking in the alley behind Professor Mingus's run-down house. The Professor had baited his garbage with an old portable tv set. Dean was checking it out while Crowbar was straggling behind, tearing open a plastic garbage bag to get at some some chicken bones.

Dean remembered hearing the bushes move, and Crowbar running toward him, barking. He remembered turning as something sharp stung him in the neck.

He remembered hearing voices.

"During the day they take the shape of familiar objects," the voices said. "But at night their true forms extend into the darkness."

The darkness was talking to Dean. The words became a dream and the dream woke up into more darkness.

Where were Dave and Jim?

While Dean was wandering into Mingus's trap, Dave and Jim, Dean's two best friends, were farther down the alley arguing about a lawn mower engine. They heard Crowbar barking then "yip," and silence. They found Crowbar stashed behind a row of garbage cans against the back of the garage, with a length of steel pipe next to him. He was out cold. Dean's flashlight was there too--broken.

The tv set was scattering darkness around the fruit cellar. A small voice was saying: "Help me, Mommy."

Dean snicked the lighter back on. The flame was weak; there wasn't much fuel left. The light was like a small window through which Dean could look into the darkness. Sally's eyes were open, bloodshot. Her mouth was moving. She was calling for her mother. She might as well have been talking to a roll of masking tape for all the good it would do.

A CAT scan had indicated a large tumor in Mrs. Frazor's brain. An operation was performed. Sally's mother was remembering things differently now. The tumor would have killed her but the Doctors got there first.

Dean shut off the lighter and backed away. Backed into darkness, looking for a way out.

The only door to the fruit cellar was locked, there were no windows. But there was something. Before the oil furnace had been installed the house was heated by coal. The fruit cellar used to be a coalbin. The coal chute doors were set under the basement ceiling. They consisted of two small steel doors, one on the inside, one on the outside, with a hole in the wall between them. They hadn't been used in over thirty years.

Dean managed to slide the rusty latch back, got the inside door open. The outside door wouldn't budge. Dean could hear Dave and Jim calling him. He could hear them through the shoot door. He started pounding and yelling back.

Crowbar was on his feet now, wobbling and smoothing down the lump on his head with his fore paw. He started barking when he heard Dean.

Hearing Crowbar, Dean redoubled his efforts, making enough noise to alert Professor Mingus who was upstairs attending to his arm--the one Crowbar sank his teeth into. Professor Mingus grabbed a straight razor and started for the basement.

Crowbar led Dave and Jim to the back of the Mingus's house. The coal chute door was at ground level, hidden behind a lot of weeds. Crowbar was barking like crazy, trying to dig his way to Dean.

Professor Mingus was at the fruit cellar door by this time, with the keys, trying to get in, but having trouble because Dean had taken the precaution of barricading the door with some barrels he found stacked against the wall.

The barrels were later found to be filled with broken glass and magnets. No one knows why.

Using the same steel pipe that Professor Mingus had used on Crowbar, Dave and Jim battered and pried until the latch on the outside shoot door broke off.

At the same time a foot came through the splintered cellar door, followed by the rest of Professor Mingus, and was he pissed off--screaming and holding the straight razor like he was going to do some serious shaving.

They say people respond to danger at a higher level of efficiency, achieving feats of speed, strength, endurance, imagination, and intellectual clarity that they never thought possible. Maybe that's what happened to Dean. Although the way Professor Mingus was screaming and carrying on--Dean probably just wanted to shut him up as much as anything. He was having enough trouble without some maniac yelling at him.

Dave and Jim cracked the shoot door open and wedged the pipe in. Dean grabbed the pipe, pulled it through and started swinging.

By the time the police arrived they had to pick up the Professor with a mop and putty knife.

When asked why he pulverized the Professor, Dean replied, "I just wanted to make sure he was dead."

Sally Frazor was admitted to the Barrymore Hospital suffering from acute trauma. Her condition was listed as critical but stable. She was put on a life support system for the first six months, lived thirteen more years in a state nursing home, and died at the age of twenty-four. The three months she spent on the shelf in Professor Mingus's fruit cellar left her in a comatose state the remaining years of her life. An autopsy revealed a small pearl-like growth inside her brain. Similar growths were found in three of the other nine victim taken from the cellar. The nature of the growth is unknown, although references to something called rupa are scattered throughout Professor Mingus's notes. His description and drawings of rupa match those in the autopsy reports of the unknown brain-growths.

Mingus's notes indicate a connection between rupa and tv static.

Besides Sally and Dean, only one other kid was found alive. Ralph Wilbur. He never regained consciousness and was dead within a month. His was one of the brains in which the pearl-like growth was found.

Crowbar died three weeks after the incident as a result of a blood clot on the brain from the head injury he received.

There was much concern about the psychological damage Dean may have suffered from the terrible shock.

Those concerned were worried about the wrong thing.

The incident appeared to have little effect on Dean. But appearances can be deceiving.

The brain static had run deeper than anyone suspected. A pearl of rupa had formed around the dark spot of fear Professor Mingus had planted in Dean's brain, and around the rupa a new level of consciousness was evolving; a synthetic consciousness that would, in time, begin to understand what was happening.

## The Dead Poet

Lord Alfred Douglas

(1867-1945)

I dreamed of him last night, I saw his face  
All radiant and unshadowed of distress,  
And as of old, in music measureless,  
I heard his golden voice and marked him trace  
Under the common thing the hidden grace,  
And conjure wonder out of emptiness,  
Till mean things put on beauty like a dress  
And all the world was an enchanted place.

And then methought outside a fast locked gate  
I mourned the loss of unrecorded words,  
Forgotten tales and mysteries half said,  
Wonders that might have been articulate,  
And voiceless thoughts like murdered singing birds.  
And so I woke and knew that he was dead.



