

# miniMAG

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# These Spiders

Emma Laurent

I feel their legs tickle my goose-bumps

I feel their claws dance upon my weak ankles

These spiders glide across my body when I'm not looking

Every eye dissects my lavender pores

Scavenging for used up skin cells

These spiders accost my self worth when I'm not looking

I wake up with fang marks on my inner thighs

An itching hourglass tells me time is irrecoverable

These spiders raze my indulgences when I'm not looking

Their setae rubs rug burn into my saintly knees

Their empty spinnerets fire across my punctured chest

These spiders think they're winning when I'm not looking



# The Girl in the Red Coat

R M Gurnhill

I encountered the girl in the red coat one summer's Saturday morning whilst walking through the woods on the local nature reserve. This was my usual haunt for exercising my dogs; a glorious Cocker-spaniel and a Heinz-57 Collie with a face full of cuteness that melted hearts aplenty.

The first I knew of the girl's presence was a flash of red through the foliage of the leaf-laden trees that separated the numerous paths through the prolific woods we walked within. The sight at first caught my attention as it was such an incongruous sight to behold within the greenery. The striking flash of vibrancy that caught my eye was a mere wisp in the distance. I was intrigued. Most dog walkers wore plain country-style clothes atop Wellingtons or sensible walking boots. Bright displays of gaudery were very few and far between.

Peering through the foliage that separated our paths, I happened to glimpse a small, bouncing dog with a jet-black curly mop of a coat. A Spaniel I thought, a breed as mad as a box of frogs. My dogs were by this time quite aged at ten and twelve years, and my Collie had never been a dog-dog – she much preferred people. After all, dogs don't tend to carry pockets full of dog treats round the park with them.

Disappearing behind a thicket, the girl evaporated from sight, and I turned back to my own path. Looking round for my own dogs, I discovered Sammy the Spaniel had followed her usual *modus operandi* and was fifty yards behind me, concertedly sniffing the bushes on the verge of the path. Tosca the Heinz, meanwhile, had excitedly run ahead, but, timid as ever, had then noticed the distance between us and

was hurtling back to my feet, flustered as ever. I guessed the excitement she evinced was caused by her picking up the scent of the strange Spaniel.

After ensuring that Sammy could still see us, I forged on ahead, Tosca buzzing around my feet as always.

I soon came to the convergence of the two paths: mine and the girl in red's. Looking back up her route past the thicket, I found the path silent and empty. She had obviously passed this junction already, probably while I was distracted by checking for Sammy. Tosca stood expectantly, ears and tail up as she stared at me in her usual hypnotic way. Glancing back once more, I found Sammy meandering her way down the path behind us, nose sniffing constantly on both sides, scents of passing dogs lingering long in the air that only a dog's nose could capture. She wandered distractedly past us, nose still going, and wandered through the junction and into the joined path that led out onto the open ground in the corner of the reserve. The air was so still within the woods that as I passed the great oak that marked the branching of paths, the smell of perfume hung there, tantalising me. I guessed it belonged to the girl.

The brief, sharp scream stopped all three of us in our tracks. Tosca was the first to react, racing towards the source of the sound. Following, Sammy cantering before me, we came to a clearing where we found the girl, prone on the hard earth, the Spaniel sitting shivering and quaking at her feet. Bending down to the girl as I called out, I took hold of her arm and, receiving no response, turned her over. My hand touched metal, and I found myself holding a short, serrated blade as the girl's lifeless frame flopped backwards, clothing in disarray, eyes wide and staring. Shock held me frozen for several moments. Time enough for a newcomer to enter the clearing and, seeing the tableau before her, scream. She fled, the knife fell from my numb fingers, my mind a maelstrom, and fellow walkers began to arrive on the scene.



## There is Nothing to be Done

Reznov Tarkovsky

Noonday brings the grey cloud  
The sky begins to give its rain  
The sign is so plain—so plain  
That i can't laugh of loud—laugh of loud  
Coldness and void run aggressively  
The zest will be wiped quickly  
Of course there is nothing to be done  
The agony quickly fills my soul  
Everything tastes bitter like a coal  
I am alone i am alone i am alone!

## The Rain Still Hitting the Forest

Reznov Tarkovsky

I can't sleep tonight i can't get relaxed  
Everything fills me with solitary  
Everything brings me a misery  
Oh and my mind is perplexed  
I see through the nearest window  
The rain still hitting this forest  
The thunder bringing unwanted noise  
And i can't take a rest i can't take a rest  
And i have no choice no choice no choice.



## innokenty annensky

Hark Herald

dear Innokenty,  
will you bend your ear to me now?  
no, i won't speak wet-cheeked. grown boy,  
i can pretend i was not humiliated. listen:  
time dogged me across the sea  
i know enough now to tell you  
it was not a dream, it was not Verlaine  
something else, some calloused symbol,  
reached over us while we slept,  
and drew the curtain open.



# The Cat

Connor Rogers

**Twenty years ago he was taken. His name was Owen Kern and he was ten years old. His brother John wished he had been taken too.**

John stood next to his mother's bed, deep within the Bluevalley Hospice. He clasped her frigid hand and smiled, despite the anxiety chipping away in his chest. How much longer did she have? Months? Days?

Her hand pulled away, beyond his desperate reach. Sunken, tired eyes heightened her stern and disappointed expression.

He asked her if she received the new goose down pillows he'd sent her. She had. He asked her if the staff had fixed the air conditioner like he asked. They had. He asked her if there was anything else she needed, or wanted, but her gaze wandered away.

Eventually she sighed. "Johnny, what is the point of all these small comforts? I'll be dead soon with or without fancy pillows."

He crossed his arms and felt the soft wool of his forest green sweater. "To make you feel good momma, to ease your...your suffering."

"There's only one thing that would ease my suffering Johnny, and



He crossed his arms and felt the soft wool of his forest green sweater. “To make you feel good momma, to ease your...your suffering.”

“There’s only one thing that would ease my suffering Johnny, and it isn’t the duck pillows or the air conditioning. It isn’t your new sweater or your constant visits.”

“What is it momma?”

Her gaze wandered to the ceiling. “I just want to see him again.” Her words were light and fluffy, eclipsed with joy.

“I know you do.”

“This morning, before you interrupted me, I had a beautiful dream. We were at the farm before it happened. Oh Johnny, I could smell the apples in the air, hear the chickens in the distance in their coop. And he was there. Golden hair, beautiful eyes. Such a wondrous child. My poor boy.” She choked and began to sob.

John tightened his eyes and prepared himself. He knew her dream well. It would eventually end with her wishing she still had the locket that Owen wore, which contained the ‘most beautiful picture of any mother and son to ever exist’. Her memory had depreciated greatly in the last few months, yet somehow she still held onto that one devastating image of the locket, and her lost son.

As she retold the dream, the memory of that morning materialized. John and Owen sat beside a corn field, over the edge of the property line half a mile from the house. The corn field was well maintained, with healthy bright yellows and forest greens. It was strictly out of bounds. Not too far away a blue stream winded down a lazy slope, and multicoloured fish swam the currents. That was their favourite spot.

That morning they played separately with their action figures, a stone’s throw away from each other. A crimson fish caught John’s attention, he turned to the stream, deep in concentration but also too lazy to stroll over to the stream for a closer look. As he gazed, an unusually icy wind flowed through the air and the corn behind him swayed. Cold dread crept up John’s neck. The air had shifted somehow. He turned to Owen, finding only a pile of abandoned toys. That was all they ever found of his brother.

“...and it was such a beautiful locket, pure silver.” His mother continued, pulling John back to reality. “I just wish that you had watched him like I told you to. He was your little brother, he was your-”

“Responsibility. I know momma, I know.”

She pursed her lips and engulfed him in a fiery gaze. He could feel himself becoming smaller, as if melting under the heat. She must have seen it too, because she sighed and let him go. The fire subsided, but the embers reminded behind her eyes.

John hated that look. He hated the implications. He hated the whispers around every corner, and the raised eyebrows when he told people his side of the story. He hated the police who never found Owen’s trail. He hated the kids at recess who called him a brother killer. And he hated the countless therapists he’d spoken to for the last twenty years. Mostly though, hated himself for not protecting his little brother.

“I’ll find it for you,” he blurted out. His own grief caught him by surprise. Had he really just said that?

“You’ll find what?” His mother asked.

“Owen’s locket,” he said, doubling down. “You said he wasn’t wearing it that day and that he lost it in the house before going out to play. So it’s still somewhere in the farm house. I’ll find it for you.”

For the first time in years, his mother’s face lightened. “Really?”

John nodded, relief flooding through his tense body. It wouldn’t be easy, but maybe he could do this. Maybe he could reclaim the locket and prove to her that he was worthy of her love too.

“I’ll find it for you, momma.”

He reached for her hand. She hesitated, but didn’t pull away. “Thank you, Johnny.”

John floated away from his mother’s room as if he was weightless. Plans materialized in his mind about getting in his car, calling in a sick day at work, and driving five hours out to Baskerville where they used to live. He’d find the locket, bring it back the next day and his mother would finally be able to rest. He was so focused on these plans that he didn’t hear his mother’s nurse calling to him and jogging down the white hallway.

“John,” she said finally reaching him. Her curled black hair tumbled down her warm face.

“Oh Nancy, I was just leaving.”

“Listen,” she put her soft hand on his shoulder. “It’s going to be soon.”

“What is?” His heart lowered in his chest. No, he needed time to find it. Please, just a few days.

She leaned in closer. "John..."

He closed his eyes and felt like a heavy rock.

"...you should stay with her in her final moments."

"When will those be?"

She shook her head. "We can't know for sure. Maybe a day, maybe a few. But you should be here, it's Christmas eve."

So that's how much time he had to find the locket and make it back. A day, two, maybe three if he was lucky. He could do it, he just had to leave as soon as he could.

He anxiously took her hand off his shoulder. "I have to go. I need to find the locket."

Nancy shot him a concerned look. "John...you told me that it's gone. Spend this last day or two with her."

"I'll be back tomorrow, call me if there are any problems."

Her shoulders stiffened. She put her hand back on his shoulder sympathetically. "John, you can't make her love you."

He turned his back and rushed out of the Hospice. If he hurried he could make it before sunset.

The black car sped across the old streets of Baskerville, as John hurried towards the farm he once called home. Soft snow fluttered down and transformed the vehicle into a splinter of black and white static piercing through the wide country. Short, grassy fields hugged the winding road, dotted occasionally by worn-out farmhouses and dried up ravines. Eventually the vast expanse was broken by swaying gold in the distance, shining under the bright afternoon sun.

That can't be the same corn field, can it?

It was. John had always remembered the sturdy, healthy corn field that his family's land had sat next to, and the last place that his brother had been seen. He thought it was just glittering childhood memories that crystallized the field as golden, verdant and beautiful, yet after so many years it appeared more vibrant than he recalled. The sheer sight of its colour stunned him, its soft sway and uniformity. Someone had taken great care to preserve the corn field, but it couldn't possibly be the same neighbor they once had so many decades ago. Anyone would have surely passed at this point.

The old farmhouse rose into view beyond the shining field. If the field could be described as beautiful, then the farmhouse could be described as anything but, as if the field itself had stolen any vitality from the land. Overgrown weeds covered John's old estate, leading up

to a crumbling, weather-beaten door. Two stories of broken wood and crumbling walls leaned before him like an old man. Musty dryness and the taste of cobwebs awaited him inside, as he pushed open the heavy, lumbering door.

John covered his mouth with his wool sleeve and mumbled, “If we couldn’t find the locket when this place was in good standing, I don’t know how I’m going to find it now.” He shook his head, expecting no reply aside from the creaking of the old estate. Yet something had heard him.

John wandered aimlessly through the foyer, opening every dusty drawer in sight. He spotted the old dining room table, which reminded him of what felt like a lifetime of cold dinners and silent exchanges. At night he used to stare out at the corn field at the border of the land, wondering if his brother was out there, taken by someone. The phrase “kidnapper” had been thrown around almost as much as “drowned”. Rumours like this had haunted the estate long before John and his family moved in. People said that Owen wasn’t the first child to disappear, and John couldn’t help but wonder when his turn would come, when the nightmares would take him. Sometimes he wished for it.

He searched through the kitchen in many forlorn and neglected spots; cabinet holes, under the fridge, behind the stove, in the highest cupboards. He even checked in the lifeless fridge, but was greeted with nothing but a pile of slush. Something clanged onto the ground, startling him. John spun around and spotted a butter knife wobbling on the tiled floor, recently dropped. He glanced up and saw a white tail whisk away behind the kitchen island and out of the room.

“Hey!” He shouted in surprise. He heard the patter of small feet race away into the dense shadows, until silence filled the house once more.

“I really hope that wasn’t a rat. I don’t want to get bitten by whatever took up residency here after us. It was probably a cat or something, since when are rats that big with long white tails? Yeah, it was a cat. That makes more sense.

Hesitantly, he trailed off from the kitchen and searched the rest of the ground floor.

By four he found himself upstairs, searching the bedrooms. His own room proved useless, with the bed and desk slightly ajar as he’d left it. Yet his brother’s room was pristine, still with the chest in the corner and old toys wasting away inside. Owen’s bed was still pressed

against the wall, next to the old, moth-eaten clothing in the closet. A lump sat square in the middle of the twin bed, likely the sheet underneath that had been rolled up into a ball. John figured he might as well check there too, as the sun was starting to set and he was growing desperate. He took the comforter off the bed in one quick tug and immediately a low moan filled the air. He stumbled back as the shock took him, and he realized that the lump was not a sheet at all.

Another low moan filled the air as the white lump before him stood awoken out of its slumber. A lithe, white cat stood to its full height and stared at him with pale blue eyes. Its prickly hair stood on edge, then quickly receded as the cat stared at him, sizing him up. The cat did not run, and instead peered at him curiously. It hopped off the bed, stretching and arching its back, before circling around his legs.

Once his wits returned, John stared down at the cat that now trailed between his ankles.

“Hello, little kitty. Do you live here now? You shouldn’t, this isn’t a good place, there’s isn’t much to eat. Okay maybe for you there are things to eat. Not for me though.” He stumbled, suddenly aware of his awkwardness.

A memory surfaced, long forgotten, of seeing a brown and black tabby cat occasionally on the property. The cat wouldn’t come close to the house, usually hovering the border and trying to catch the rainbow fish that inhabited the ravine. Sometimes he and his brother would toss it scraps of meat, which the cat would snatch up and scurry away. Could they be related somehow?

“Do you want to help me search my parent’s room?”

The cat purred in response. John headed down to the end of the hall.

Floorboards creaked in the dark room as John searched. He found an old picture of his father underneath a shoe box in the closet, smiling and carrying his mother. That was how he liked to remember them, instead of wondering where his father was now. He also found a dead mouse, slashed with sharp, jagged claws. But there was no locket.

A cold shiver ran up the back of his neck. It must be the cold weather.

He pushed open the old, thick curtains to the window and stared out over the farm. A sheet of cold, white powder had buried the estate. His car’s headlights peered out in the distance, like a rabbit cowering in a trap.

Still, he had yet to find the locket. Luckily his phone had a

flashlight, he could still search the attic despite the dying light. He turned to leave the bedroom and immediately felt something hot and painful tear at his wrist. He reeled back, hearing a guttural moan that almost sounded like a chuckle. Something white raced out of the room. John peered down and spotted a line of ruby red dripping from his wrist.

“Fucking hell!” He exclaimed, gripping the wound. A drop of blood slipped out from his hand and fed the dirty floor.

“Damn cat,” he muttered, as he used some tissues in his pocket to cover the slash. It wasn’t deep enough for stitches, or the hospital, but who knows what kind of diseases stray animals could carry.

**Part II of *The Cat* will be featured in Issue23**



# The Dead Trying Hard

Richard LeDue

The ghosts are too stubborn to stop  
and ask for directions,  
as if the mowed twice a summer grass  
in a cemetery was a wrong turn,  
while flowers are placed atop gravestones  
just to be removed  
because wilted petals might remind us  
how quiet it is there,  
among the dead,  
trying hard not to be lost.





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