

# The workes of edgar allan poe

---

## nonbinary review



NonBinary Review #12  
Edited by Selena Chambers



© Zoetic Press, 2017

All rights reserved

This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, including illustrations, in any form (beyond that copying permitted by 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the contributors

Published by Zoetic Press in Santa Cruz, CA

Cover art and book design ©2017 by Zoetic Press

# NONBINARY REVIEW

Issue Twelve  
The Works of Edgar Allan Poe

Guest Edited by  
Selena Chambers



Zoetic Press

2017

# NONBINARY REVIEW

NonBinary Review  
Issue #12, March 2017  
a publication of Zoetic Press

**Guest Editor**

Selena Chambers

**Editor in Chief**

Lise Quintana

**Associate Editors**

Andrea Blythe

Kolleen Carney

Chauna Craig

Tiegan Dakin

Katelyn Dunne

Diane Glazman

Amelia Gorman

Lauren Harwyn

Maureen Hirthler

Sheila Johnson

Alex Simand

Brian Thomas

Nathan Tompkins

Lani Watt

Cover art by MANDEM

# Contents

The Living Poe Girl .....	iii
Part One .....	1
Alone.....	3
Graveyard of the Pacific .....	4
Lord of the Bones .....	20
Gwendolyn.....	22
Ligeia in the Bridal Chamber.....	33
A. Gordon Pym: A New Ending .....	35
Love in the House of Usher .....	40
Madeline .....	42
The Murders on Morgue Street.....	43
Ronnie Jackson and the Rainbow Lights .....	56
Night of Darkness, Flames of Blood .....	69
The Ebony Clock .....	76
The Plague .....	77
From Horn to Horn .....	78
A Brush With Death.....	79
SoliTaire.....	81
Tell-Tale Voice .....	83
The Case of the Stolen Letter, or The “Procrustean Bed” .....	87
“The Raven” Revisited .....	89
Once Upon a Midnight .....	90

Eddie's Bird .....	94
Lenore .....	97
Lemonade.....	98
A Cask and a Curse.....	106
From Out a Full-Orbed Moon.....	107
Poe .....	114
Death of a Poet.....	115
A Dream.....	127
To My Daughter.....	128
Part Two .....	129
The Ravening.....	131
My Mother's People .....	137
Madmen of a Harmless Nature .....	141
The Imp of the Perverse .....	153
A Girl's Guide to Being Buried Alive.....	154
Silicone Valley .....	157
Living in the House of Usher.....	159
Contributors .....	160



# The Living Poe Girl

Selena Chambers

## GAZING AT THE PROTOTYPE

Edgar Allan Poe is known for many things: his grotesque horror, his flights of fancy, his progenitor detective, and his scientific authenticity. Laced between those tropes is an iconic specter. There's the Lost Lenore, the chilled and killed Annabel Lee, the artless Eleonora, or as I like to collectively call them, the Poe Girls.

Stemming from Poe's aesthetic belief that "... the death... of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" ("The Philosophy of Composition"), her common image is that of an invalid beauty cut down in her prime whose ghost either haunts her lover out of revenge and anger or out of a desire to comfort. Whatever their motives, Poe Girls share one common trait—"that, like the ephemeron, she had been made perfect in loveliness only to die." ("Eleonora").

In poetry, the Poe Girl is a memory, an absent presence. In his prose, the Poe Girl creates a more complex archetype. In theory, she has come to represent many and varied things. Within feminist circles she is symbolic of liberation or of oppression from the male gaze. Within alchemy she is the philosopher's stone—or, with less mysticism, she provides a basic belief for the soul's existence. Some critics dismiss the Poe Girl as a mourning mechanism for the author's wife; however, before Virginia Poe's fatal hemorrhaging in January 1842, Poe had already published "Berenice" (1835), and "Ligeia" (1838), as well as "Morella" (1835) and "Eleanora" (1841). Even so, it isn't entirely unreasonable to look to Virginia as the Poe Girl prototype.

Details are unknown about Mrs. Poe. Her life has been as widely interpreted as her husband's, but vastly unexplored. Married at 13, dying at 19, dead at 23, fragments of her life and personality are scattered throughout Poe scholarship like Sapphic manuscripts. To date, only one resource, a section entitled "The Real Virginia," in Susan A.T. Weiss's *The Home Life of Poe* seems

to be completely dedicated to the poet's wife. However, it is three pages long and only scratches the surface. Unfortunately, here too, must our focus be brief and peripheral.

We know enough to surmise she was the Poe-Girl prototype, whether intentional or not. Born August 15, 1822 to Maria Clemm, sister to Poe's father, Virginia met her first-cousin when he came to live with her family at age 9. Like in "Eleonora," the two doted on each other. She would deliver love letters for him, and he would take on her education. Somewhere, it is unknown why and how, the two became engaged when Poe moved to Richmond in 1835. They were married in Richmond on May 16, 1836, when Virginia was thirteen years old. She was described by friends as dark haired, fair complexioned, and violet-eyed. Friends and enemies, like Thomas Dunn English, remembered her "air of refinement and good breeding." (Quinn, pg. 347).

Her one true interest was music. During better times, Poe indulged her by buying her a harp and a piano, which he would often accompany with his flute. She also sang, and on January 20, 1842, she would perform before a small party at the Poes' Philadelphia residence. What should have been Virginia's greatest moment became her worst. While singing, her lungs hemorrhaged and she collapsed. Virginia would never sing again.

She was diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis, what polite society referred to as "consumption" of the lungs. Consumption in early nineteenth century America was a death sentence. According to Sheila M. Rothman in *Living in the Shadow of Death*, it was the cause of one out of every five deaths in the U.S. Its symptoms were subtle: hollow coughs, intermittent fevers, hoarseness, feverish skin that appeared as a becoming glow. The disease was torturous in that a sufferer would be completely bedridden and on the brink of death only to resurface from the disease and look perfectly healthy. It was this cycle of hope and despair that Poe, like Egaeus in "Ligeia," found most horrible in the disease. He writes in a letter dated January 4, 1848:

"Her life was despaired of. I took leave of her forever & underwent all the agonies of her death. She recovered partially and



I again hoped. At the end of a year... I went through precisely the same scene. Again in about a year afterward. Then again—again—again & even once again at varying intervals. Each time I felt all the agonies of her death—and at each accession of the disorder I loved her more dearly & clung to her life with more desperate pertinacity.” (quoted from Quinn, P. 347).

As the letter shows, Poe was well aware of tuberculosis’ horrors, but he was more intimate than most, having watched it ravage his mother, foster mother, and brother. He knew, in fact had written implicitly, about tuberculosis’s last stages characterized by hallowed cheeks, glowing eyes, and emaciated and gaunt body. He knew from attending his brother the relentless coughing that produced profuse hemorrhaging and waterfalls of blood that made the sufferer feel like he would drown. His narrators mince words when describing their wives’ diseases, as did most Romantic literature. Not even in paintings like Munch’s *The Sick Child* does one get the true sense of the “death rattle’s” devastation.

After Virginia’s singing incident, Poe was heartbroken, often refusing to speak of it. When he did address it, he denied the disease by claiming Virginia had merely ruptured a blood vessel. Perhaps he was riddled with guilt from his women stories that seemed to have predicted this fate. Unlike those women, Virginia would not return.

Virginia suffered through the disease for five years, her suffering heightened by her husband’s inability to cope expressed through drinking binges, and worrying, like Eleonora over her husband’s fate. Towards the end, she reenacted Eleonora’s forgiveness by asking lady friends, like Mary Starr, whom Poe courted when Virginia was a child, to care for him: “I [Mary] had my hand in hers, and she took it and placed it in Mr. Poe’s, saying, ‘Mary, be a friend to Eddie, and don’t forsake him; he always loved you—didn’t you, Eddie?’” (quoted from *The Poe Log*, p. 683). She died on January 30, 1847.

Immediately after Virginia’s diagnosis, his pen took a turn with “The Oval Portrait”, published in April 1842, and focused on the very real fear that Poe was coming to terms with. After “The

Oval Portrait,” Poe turned away from mourning his female characters to focus on their violent murders in his detective tales. Shortly after that, female characters all but dwindled in Poe’s tales, making an occasional appearance as a corpse in transport in “The Oblong Box,” and as a epistolarian in “Mellonta Tauta.” Present as these female characters are in these stories, it is only the eponymous heroines like Ligeia and Berenice that compose the core embodiment and legend of the Poe Girl.

## OBJECTS OF DESIRE

Within feminism, the Poe Girl’s exanimate state is controversial. Death is viewed as “the most passive state occurring,” which affects how women are viewed or not viewed. Women as dead objects are passive, lifeless bodies for the gaze to contemplate and the mind to idealize. It is easy to fetishize something that is no longer there; therefore, the ideal for a woman is to die and become an object.

In “Berenice,” the narrator Egaeus suffers from monomania, a now archaic malady in which those afflicted obsess over ideas. Riddled by this ailment, he is incapable of love, and after rhapsodizing the brilliance and beauty of his wife, states that: “During the brightest days of her unparalleled beauty, most surely I had never loved her. In the strange anomaly of my existence, feelings with me, *had never been* of the heart, and my passions *always were* of the mind.” (Poe’s emphasis).

Berenice suffers from epilepsy, a disease characterized with life-threatening seizures and death-like trances. Unable to come to terms with Berenice’s person, Egaeus is horrified by her illness. His coping mechanism is to focus on her Platonian ideal: “The teeth!—the teeth!—... everywhere, and visibly and palpably before me; long, narrow, and excessively white, with the pale lips writhing about them....”

When Berenice is pronounced dead, Egaeus obsesses over the teeth until, driven insane, he violates her tomb and body to extract them.

“The Oval Portrait” deals with objectivity in less visceral but more explicit terms. Published seven years after “Berenice” in 1842, Poe further explores woman as object by confining her entire person within the ultimate display case—a canvas. While exploring his new lodging, the narrator finds within his room the most life-like portrait he has ever seen. The Lodging has a catalogue of its paintings, and he finds the passage that explains the circumstances of the portrait: “...evil was the hour when she saw, and loved, and wedded the painter. He, passionate, studious, austere, and having already a bride in his Art: she a maiden of rarest beauty, ... loving and cherishing all things; hating only the Art which was her rival; dreading only the pallet and brushes ... which deprived her of the countenance of her lover.” Regardless, she poses for her husband, and confines herself in the studio until she becomes ill and dies of neglect:

“...for the painter had grown wild with the ardor of his work, and turned his eyes from the canvas rarely, even to regard the countenance of his wife. And he *would* not see that the tints which he spread upon the canvas were drawn from the cheeks of her who sat beside him. And when many weeks had passed, and but little remained to do, ...then the brush was given, and then the tint was placed; and for one moment, the painter stood entranced before the work which he had wrought; but in the next, while he yet gazed, he grew tremulous and very pallid, and aghast, and crying with a loud voice, ‘This is indeed *Life* itself!’ turned suddenly to regard his beloved:—*She was dead!*” (Poe’s emphasis).

Poe was not the first to write about dead women. There was the courtly love of Dante and Beatrice, and the love poems of Novalis and Mérimée, not to mention the general Romantic dwelling on premature death as metaphor for sublimity and the ephemeral. Therefore, Poe was working within a “Western tradition of masking the fear of death and dissolution through images of feminine beauty.” (*A Companion to Poe Studies*, p. 392). In her book, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, feminist scholar Elisabeth Bronfen looks at Western aesthetic death culture, and sees within Poe’s work the trope of women as symbols for masking human vulnerability.

Bronfen also sees in Poe's women the muse-artist paradigm where "...death transforms the body of a woman into the source of poetic inspiration precisely because it creates and gives corporality to a loss or absence.... The Poet must choose between a corporally present woman and the muse, a choice of the former precluding the latter." (*Over Her Dead Body*, p. 362). In "The Oval Portrait's" case, "the woman, representative of natural materiality, simultaneously figures as an aesthetic risk, as a presence endangering the artwork, so that as the portrait's double she must be removed." (*Ibid*, p. 112).

Recently, Poe's work has been given a more sympathetic look by feminists. While some, like Beth Ann Bassein, believe Poe was reinforcing oppressing images, others like J. Gerald Kennedy and Cynthia S. Jordan argue "that Poe did, indeed, know better, that he did not simply reinscribe conventional (repressive) attitudes toward women but that he critiqued these attitudes in his tales." (*A Companion to Poe Studies*, p. 388). One of the stronger arguments is that most of Poe's women refuse idealization and objectification by refusing to stay dead. Female characters like Ligeia are wise and powerful, the possessors of esoteric and arcane knowledge and often described in intimidating terms. She is a proactive woman who uses her knowledge to rage against the night, as Thomas would say.

#### ALCHEMICAL MARRIAGE

The basis of alchemy was to transmute "prima materia" (representing the material of creation) by placing it into a furnace until it changed through various phases to come out as the desired product: the philosopher's stone. According to Randall A. Clack's "Strange Alchemy of Brain: Poe and Alchemy"—a chapter in the wonderful *Companion to Poe Studies*—alchemy, on a philosophical level, represents spiritual gold that emerges through the Alchemist's fiery imagination as new life. This was done in stages, beginning with "nigredo" where the dark prima materia is "tortured" and purified until it has achieved albedo, also known as the whitening. With this transmutation completed, the final stage, the

rubedo, can be achieved and is signified by the glowing red heat seen from the still.

At rubedo, which generates the philosopher's stone: "the prima material has reached celestial or spiritual perfection... [and at] "this final stage represented...the freeing of divine Wisdom...imprisoned in the darkness of matter and delivering it to a new life." (*A Companion to Poe Studies*, p. 369). It also yielded a byproduct, the elixir of life, which could grant regenerative and healing powers.

Alchemical mythology begins with the Hellenic Egyptian goddess Isis. While her son Horus battled rival gods abroad, Isis fled to Hermes, where she was accosted by a lustful angel. Unable to fend him off, she cut a deal with him. She promised to sleep with him if he would share with her "life's greatest secret." He agrees, and tells her "the great secret" that everything stems from common matter and therefore can be transmuted. Isis is sworn to secrecy, her only allowance is to enlighten her son. (*Alchemy*, p. 46).

According to Jungian Marie von Franz, who collects her lectures on alchemical symbolism in *Alchemy*, this myth is archetypical and demonstrates woman as the progenitor of all knowledge, but unlike Eve, whose knowledge acquirement brought sin upon man, Isis's education "...is quite changed, for when Isis succeeds in getting the secret from those angels it is seen as a great achievement. So here we have a switch in the feeling judgment, though the event itself seems a very near parallel: the female element, the feminine principle, gets it from deeper layers and then is the mediator who hands it on to mankind." (*Alchemy*, pp. 46-51).

Isis's departing of knowledge to Horus creates a relationship built upon "the great secret," which leads to a required sympathy within Alchemy. Not only present is a feminine respect, but also a marriage of opposites: heaven is wedded to the earth, sun to moon, and body to spirit. It is this last marriage that Poe was most interested in.

In "Ligeia," she is not only distinguished by beauty but by

brain, which is more vast and therefore perhaps threatening to the narrator husband, whose relationship is more pupil than lover:

“... the learning of Ligeia...was immense—I said her knowledge was such as I have never known in woman—but where breathes the man who has traversed, and successfully, all the wide area of moral, physical, and mathematical science?... With how vast a triumph—with how vivid a delight—with how much of all that is ethereal in hope did I *feel*, as she bent over me in studies but little sought—but less known,—that delicious vista by slow degrees expanding before me, down whose long, gorgeous, and all untrodden path, I might at length pass onward to the goal of a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden!”

Ligeia is dark, with fierce black eyes and long, ebon black hair, making her the *prima materia* that undergoes nigredo during her illness. Thrown into a furnace of disease, she is tortured and tormented by the dawning inevitability of her death:

“... Words are impotent to convey any just idea of the fierceness of resistance with which she wrestled with the Shadow. ...but in the intensity of her wild desire for life—for life.... Yet not until the last instance, amid the most convulsive writhing of her fierce spirit, was shaken the external placidity of her demeanor. Her voice grew more gentle...yet I would not wish to dwell upon the wild meaning of the quietly uttered words....to assumptions and aspirations which mortality had never before known.”

Ligeia relates her death's deconstruct through writing the poem “The Conqueror Worm.” According to Clack: “While the images of ‘The Conqueror Worm’ reflect the death (nigredo) of ‘Man’...alchemically, the poem seems to end too soon, for there is no alchemical resurrection (or transmutation).” (*A Companion to Poe Studies*, p. 382). This abrupt end upsets Ligeia who rages against the seeming irreversibility and totality of death. Shortly after this passionate rage, she dies. However, as the story progresses, she is resurrected as the philosopher's stone.

After mourning Ligeia, the narrator marries Rowena, the fair and blue-eyed foil. The marriage was strained from the beginning:

“I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man. My memory flew back...to Ligeia,...”

By the second month, the newlywed Rowena falls ill and undergoes a similar nigredo as Ligeia. Feverish and bedridden, Rowena is hallucinatory and has nightmares of shadows outside her room. She oscillates between recovery and relapse, each cycle more violent and hallucinatory than before. Towards the end of Rowena’s convalescence, she tries to convince her husband that *something* lingers over her. The narrator begins to sense shadows but credits it to his opium intake. However, when Rowena begins to fade, he rushes to restore her with a glass of wine: “...It was then that I became distinctly aware of a gentle foot-fall upon the carpet, and near the couch; and in a second thereafter, as Rowena was in the act of raising the wine to her lips, I saw, or may have dreamed that I saw, fall within the goblet, as if from some invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room, three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby colored fluid. If this I saw—not so Rowena. She swallowed the wine unhesitatingly....” The fluid, Clack writes, is “analogous to the alchemical *elixir vitae*—the elixir of life that is a by-product of the Philosophers’ stone.” (*A Companion to Poe studies*, p. 383). After drinking the wine, Rowena relapses a final time and dies three nights later. On the fourth night, the narrator keeps wake over her bandaged-wrapped corpse to find that Rowena’s funereal looks are deceiving.

The narrator describes a series of reanimations: a sigh, a blush on the cheek, sanguine glow among the forehead (the rubedo). Unknowingly playing his role as partner, the sun to the moon, the narrator tries to revive Rowena but, as she had during her illness, she relapses back into death. This ebb and flow of life continues throughout the night, her corpse seemingly changed with each resurrection. He notices the corpse has grown longer, and when he goes to analyze her feet, the corpse recoils at his touch and jumps up, shaking off the bandages at the head.

“...there streamed forth into the rushing atmosphere of the chamber huge masses of long and disheveled hair; *it was blacker than the raven wings of midnight!* And now slowly opened the



eyes of the figure which stood before me. ‘Here then, at least,’ I shrieked aloud, ‘can I never—can I never be mistaken—these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the Lady—of the LADY LIGEIA.’”

The transmutation alluded to in “The Conqueror Worm” is now complete, as is Ligeia’s role as the philosopher’s stone. Also successfully completed is the alchemical marriage. While the marriage of Ligeia and the narrator was built on love and passion, there was also an implicit spiritual relationship that is realized by Ligeia’s reincarnation through Rowena: “The narrator metaphorically has attained the supernal, for Rowena has been alchemically transmuted into Ligeia—the narrator’s “lost love.” Likewise, Poe has created the philosopher’s stone in the final image of Ligeia’s resurrection, for she represents a symbolic bridge to the unknown—the alchemical marriage of heaven and earth.” (*Ibid*, 384).

While faint echoes of the Poe Girl reappeared in Poe’s poems like “The Raven” and “Annabel Lee,” those women never lived to die like Ligeia, Berenice, and the subject of “The Oval Portrait.” The poems’ shadows exist in a state akin to memorial statuary: static, melancholy, and eternally beautiful. The Poe Girl, however, is something more terrible. She lives and breaths and occupies her husband’s life, be it as an object or a superior in arcane knowledge and passionate love. She is flawed, powerful, and intimidating. While she will meet the same fate as Ulalume or Lenore, she does not die quietly. She inevitably returns, making her death not a sad instance, but a philosophical positioning of what love, the afterlife, identity, and the soul really mean.

# **Part One**

An accompaniment to the works of Edgar Allan Poe



# Alone

Marge Simon

*This piece is paired with "Alone"*



# Graveyard of the Pacific

Dominique Lamssies

*This selection is paired with "The City in the Sea"*

Rachel Cooper's hand tightened around the dead chicken's legs. She took a deep breath. She'd never been that close to such a big house. It was the biggest house on Cape Disappointment; might even be the biggest in the Washington Territory. The Toths had chosen to build it far away from Ilwaco, the nearest town, which everyone disliked. It stood on the edge of the trees, just across the grassy dunes from the beach. The ocean wind would have worn down the pearl gray paint on any other house, but not this one. This one was as pristine as the day it was built. No one was really surprised since the witch lived in it.

The house had a direct line of sight on the tower that peeked out of the ocean off the coast. No one could remember Captains Meares, Gray, or Lewis and Clark having said anything about a tower in the Graveyard of the Pacific, as the ocean off Cape Disappointment was called. It had appeared in the sea just like The Toths had appeared in the area; out of nowhere.

"She ain't gonna do it," a man said behind Rachel, low like she wasn't supposed to hear, but loud enough that it was meant for her to hear.

Rachel looked back and met John Wilson's eye.

He spat on the sand and sneered.

Rachel's eyes swept the group that had gathered behind her. Sailors and their wives, armed and ready if something should happen. All of them had gone out of their way to travel here to watch.

And all of them were standing on the edge of the grass, as if the line in the sand would protect them from the witch.

It wouldn't, if Rachel had any say. She'd blubbered to anyone who would listen that she was coming here today. She knew curiosity would bring some of them out. The desire to see the witch hurt her would draw others.

She marched toward the house. Her back was straight and her body was lean with muscle. She and her husband, Nicolas, had sweated and bled their way across this country on the trail from Missouri to Washington and never once had their backs bent, either from the work or the trouble the white folks gave them. Her face was usually soft and kind and quick to smile, but hadn't been for a few weeks now. Once it was pride that kept her upright. Now the only thing in her dark eyes was desperation.

John's wife stared.

"You think the witch is gonna help her?"

John sneered.

"Course not. That witch ain't never helped nobody that ain't got money. And where's an uppity little black girl like Rachel gonna get money?"

"She ain't been selling her possessions," his wife confirmed.

Rachel mounted the steps to the porch and the on-lookers fell silent.

*They left me no choice*, she told herself as she lifted the ornate brass knocker on the door.

There was a moment of silence in which Rachel almost hoped the owner was out. Then the door opened.

A woman stood in the doorway. Her black hair was arranged elaborately atop her head. Her emerald green dress was obviously silk and large enough that every woman who could see it wondered how she could tend a farm in it. Jewels glittered around her neck, wrists, and fingers. Some of them were familiar; having once belonged to the wives on the other side of the dunes. The witch was thin enough that everyone wondered if she ate, and her skin was so white she barely looked alive. Violet eyes looked straight at Rachel.

"Yes?"

Now Rachel had to say why she was there and her throat closed up. She blinked back tears.

“Mrs. Toth,” she choked out, “my husband was murdered.”

“My condolences.” The witch’s voice was cold, her face impassive. It was the same look Rachel had gotten from everyone after it happened. The townsfolk, the sailors, the sheriff in Ilwaco, even the preacher. It made her gorge rise and her tears fall.

“I want to know who did it but no one will say anything.”

The witch gave an aristocratic little nod of the head. “I can help you with that. What do you have for payment?”

Hesitantly, Rachel offered up the dead chicken.

The witch’s eyes shifted down and her eyebrows twitched. “Thank you, but I’ve already eaten dinner.”

Rachel drooped. That was the best she had to offer. She had no money, no jewelry...

She looked down at her left hand. An ache settled in her chest. She did have one piece of jewelry.

Her life with Nicolas had been hard, but good. They’d been blessed more than most; they had genuinely loved and respected each other. None of the women standing on the beach would risk making a deal with a witch if their husbands were killed. She wanted to keep her wedding ring, the one special thing Nicolas had been able to give her. But if it meant finding his killer, she would part with it.

She worked the gold band off her finger and held it out.

The witch pinched the ring between two fingers of her left hand. She looked over it for a moment and set it back in the other woman’s palm. Her eyes met Rachel’s and her hand went up to adjust the three emeralds set in gold on her collarbone.

“No!” Rachel cried, refusing to be defeated. “You will help me! What do you want? Tell me and I’ll give it to you!”

The witch’s mouth settled into a disdainful line. “I understand you’re in mourning, but there’s no need to make a scene.”

“Me!” Rachel shouted, slapping a hand to her own chest.



“I beg your pardon?” the witch countered, her brow creased in confusion.

“You can have me,” Rachel asserted, trembling. “After I die, you can have my body, my soul, whatever you want.”

“I don’t believe we’ve been properly introduced,” the witch said as her face settled into a smile. She curtsied like she was in a European palace. “I am Athenais Toth.”

“Rachel Cooper,” the other woman said as she wiped her eyes with her sleeve.

“May I call you Rachel?”

The weeping woman nodded.

“Call me Athenais.” She pulled a handkerchief out of her sleeve and offered it to the weeping woman. “Now, Rachel, this is not going to be an easy thing to accomplish. If we are to do this, you must trust me completely and do everything I say without question. There will also be a fair amount of discomfort and disgust on your part. Do you understand this?”

Rachel nodded again as she blotted her eyes with the handkerchief.

“Well, then, I will take that chicken. No use wasting it.”

Rachel held out the limp bird. Athenais took it with her right hand. Rachel gasped. The witch’s right hand had no skin on it. It was bone nestled inside exposed muscle. Rachel jerked back to make sure she didn’t touch it.

Athenais had seen the motion too many times to be bothered by it. She excused herself and disappeared into the house.

She returned without the chicken and closed the door behind her. Rachel hesitated, then offered out the palm that still held her wedding ring.

Athenais gave her the smile a parent would give a child holding up a frog for examination. “No, thank you. My taste is a little more extravagant.”

Rachel let out a relieved sigh as she put the ring back on.

“Come,” Athenais said and led Rachel across the dunes.

Rachel was apprehensive as they approached the group watching, but it parted and allowed the pair through.

“Good evening,” Athenais said to them with a polite incline of the head.

“Witch!” one of the on-lookers screeched.

Athenais stopped and rounded on them.

“Witches cure sick pigs and make plants grow. *I* am a necromancer,” she said indignantly.

No one responded. They saw that the sea beyond Athenais had fallen still. There was no tide and there was no wind. The sun was so low that it gleamed red on the water, making the tower in the distance seem even darker.

Athenais and Rachel turned back to the sea and strode to the water line.

Rachel let her eyes linger on the tower to hide her growing misgivings. Was Athenais really going to help her? Rachel had heard the stories. She knew Athenais was capable of terrible things. What was to keep someone with such power from breaking a promise to someone who had no power?

She jumped when she heard Athenais speak.

“This will be the first unpleasant experience. Are you ready?”

Rachel looked the necromancer up and down for a moment before she said “yes.”

Athenais nodded. Her right hand shot toward Rachel’s face. Rachel panicked as the warm, wet muscle clamped over her mouth and plugged her nose.

Athenais glanced at the group near the dunes as they fussed. She let out a scoff at their feigned shock. She knew none of them cared enough to help Rachel. She leaned forward, pressing the other woman back toward the water.

Rachel swung at Athenais with a fist but only hit her arm. Athenais responded by lifting her dress with her free hand to give her foot a clean shot at Rachel's knee. Rachel screamed and fell back when it hit. Athenais leaned down, resting both knees on Rachel's chest and holding her completely under the water. Her hands shifted to Rachel's throat to allow the submerged woman to breathe in seawater.

Rachel fought furiously, arms flailing, legs kicking. For a moment, it looked as if Athenais was trying to tame a horse.

The on-lookers on the beach were so focused on this that none of them saw the tower shudder and sway, or the ocean part.

Rachel's movements began to slow, but Athenais did not relent.

When the water under Athenais was quiet, everyone finally noticed that a path had formed from the tower to the beach, ending where Rachel had fallen still.

The necromancer stood and smoothed out her wet dress as the water drained away and Rachel's lifeless body settled onto the wet sand.

Athenais turned to the cobblestone trail that had emerged. A few steps away, a figure sat on a mound of stones. The sea had worn the stones smooth and round and the woman was cross-legged atop them. She wore a rough, white shift and had no eyes; bits of cloth had been shoved into the sockets. Similar scraps were shoved into her ears. She was emaciated, but her skin was still dark like Rachel's.

"Greetings Athenais," the woman on the stones said, her voice full and commanding.

"Greetings Maman," Athenais said with a curtsy.

"Her breath brought the pathway to you. Does she need it back?"

"Yes, please." Athenais said with another curtsy.

A moment passed and suddenly Rachel gagged. She fought as

if someone were holding her down. After a moment of gasping and coughing up water she realized no one was touching her. She sat up as Athenais approached.

“Did I die?”

“I told you it would be unpleasant,” the necromancer said as she held her left hand out to help the other woman up.

“You killed me!” Rachel scowled as she looked at the necromancer’s hand.

Athenais sighed like she was chastising a child.

“We have to enter the City in the Sea to find out who killed your husband. How else were we supposed to do that? Maman is fair, I knew she would restore you. Now, shall we continue or is this too difficult for you?”

“Don’t you talk to me like that,” Rachel shot to her feet and swung her hand out to slap the necromancer.

Athenais caught her wrist. “Do not threaten me with violence,” she hissed. She shoved Rachel’s hand away and jerked her head at the group on the beach. “Ask them what happens when you do.”

Rachel huffed and turned to the seated woman.

“Why do I even bother with the living?” Athenais muttered.

“What is it you seek?” Maman bellowed.

Rachel squared her shoulders. “Justice.”

“Ho-ho, a pretty word,” the figure said, almost smiling. “What does that mean?”

“My husband was murdered and the person who did it is hiding. I need to find him.”

“And are you willing to tear down the forest to find the tree you seek?”

Rachel glanced back at everyone watching. “Yes.”

“Very well,” Maman said. “Only Death can grant what you

seek. You will have to plead your case to it. Athenais, accompany her. Keep her on the path and see to it that she doesn't disturb our kin unduly. If she does, you will both be punished."

"Yes, Maman," Athenais said with another curtsy.

"Enter!" the emaciated figure barked.

Athenais started down the path, making Rachel rush to catch up with her.

Rachel looked nervously from the water lapping against the edges of the stones ahead to the tower. Impossibly tall black masses stood at the foot of it. She waited for the moment when the water would come crashing in and drown her. She kept her eyes focused on the rounded, sea worn stones to keep her mind off it. A few moments later, a shadow fell over her and she looked up again.

A wall loomed over them. It was dark from moisture, except for a light that seemed to seep up from the base. In that light, Rachel could see that worn carvings of flowers on vines covered the wall. Beyond it, the buildings were taller than they should have been. Rachel wondered how the ocean covered them.

They passed into the City, lit with the same sallow light from below. They passed several houses or shops, until they came to a domed building carved with ivy and roses. Through the open doorway, she saw bowed heads that looked like people praying. Over them, a skeletal man in a cassock rose his hand, his gesture of blessing frozen like the words that should have come out of his slack jaw.

Rachel looked to the other side of the street hoping to see a building, and saw a row of open graves instead. They were full of water. Jeweled and robed bodies floated within.

Rachel gasped and clapped a hand over her mouth.

"Steady," Athenais warned. "Eyes on the path. If you turn back now what happens will be most unpleasant."

Rachel couldn't stop herself from turning and looking back.

Corpses were leaning out of the buildings they had passed.

Some had their flesh, some didn't. All of them were watching her.

"You'll notice," Athenais explained, "that the dead of the City were all manner of people when alive."

Rachel looked to her left and saw a courtyard. A group of carcasses, some in the tatters of gowns, some in the shreds of servant's rags were frozen in their dance. The heads of all of them turned to face her and her gaze snapped down again.

Athenais was still talking. "The dead have no love for the living, and the living's petty prejudices have a great deal to do with that."

"But... but why do they tolerate necromancers?"

Athenais held up a skinless finger that glinted in the sickly light of the town.

"A very good question. Small wonder those people have such a dislike of you. You have a good head on your shoulders. No one knows how the necromancers came to be. It seems the ability just appeared." Athenais stopped. There was a terrible smile on her thin lips. "Some say necromancers have the blood of the dead in their veins rather than the blood of the living. I like to think that's true. The living are such a bother, and to have to claim relation to them..." Athenais shook her shoulders and scoffed in disgust.

"Why have we stopped?" Rachel asked.

"We must wait here."

Rachel looked up. They were at the foot of the tower. She had to arch her back slightly to see its entire length. She thought she saw something move at the top—a shadow flitting across the darkness.

Something black landed in front of her, and she cowered back and gasped.

It was a mass of tattered black cloth hanging from a form she couldn't make out. There was an opening for a head, but nothing was in it except a deeper shade of black. The smell that rolled off it was so strong it almost knocked Rachel off her feet, like she'd

never been so close to so many rotten things at once.

Athenais went down on her knees and lowered her head.

The robes shifted and a skeletal hand emerged. It rested on Athenais's head and stroked her hair lovingly.

“Favored child,” a voice from within the robes said, the sound like stone grinding against stone. “Arise and tell me your pleasure.”

Athenais stood, glowing with pride. “I bring Rachel Cooper and ask that you grant her request.”

Athenais looked at Rachel and gestured for her to speak.

Rachel felt a weight pressing on her back and knew that all the dead in the City were watching her.

She began to tremble and her mouth opened, but she couldn't make the words come out. Her fists opened and closed at her side in time with her mouth.

“My... my husband,” she managed to get out.

The robes moved again and a bony hand gestured for her to stop, then pointed to a row of open graves nearby. One of the corpses sat up and Rachel's legs nearly buckled.

“Nicolas?”

Her husband stood and climbed out of his grave. He was in a better state than most of the dead she'd seen, since he hadn't been there long. Rachel shoved Athenais aside as she ran to her husband. She threw her arms around him.

“Who did this to you?” she begged, her tears already falling. “Tell me who killed you. I have to make this right!” Her voice grew frantic. “Tell me! Please!”

She stared at the corpse and it hit her: her husband was gone. This wasn't Nicolas. This thing in front of her was just the shell he'd lived in once.

Rachel backed away and let out a pained howl, then rounded on Death.



“I want the one who took him from me! I want the one who thinks it’s all right to gun a good man down! Give him to me!” she shrieked and collapsed to the ground sobbing.

Athenais looked at the black figure, which leapt away. Athenais looked back over her shoulder when she heard a chorus of snaps behind her. The corpses watching were snapping their jaws and tapping bony fingers against stone in their excitement. The necromancer smiled. The dead did so enjoy their rare trips outside.

\* \* \*

The crowd was waiting on the beach. But the longer the pair was in the City, the more anxious everyone got. They were all sure the witch would kill Rachel. Why was it taking so long?

Maman interrupted their muttering.

“You have the chance to walk away and remain ignorant of what is to come. Or you may stand and face the consequences of your actions. But know that if you are the one we seek, there is no power in heaven, hell, or earth that can shield you.”

In the distance, the top of the tower gave off a blood red light.

Some of the women screamed. Some of the men ran.

John Wilson took command: “Get the women back to town. It won’t happen again. This time we’ll kill the witch!”

\* \* \*

In the City, the light from the tower was soaking into the damp streets below. The corpses in the open graves scrambled out and rushed down the stone path to the beach. The bodies in the buildings had already taken off, laughing and screeching.

Athenais waited. She said nothing, allowing Rachel to regain her composure.

When the City had fallen silent, Rachel sat up, wiping her face.

“Are you ready to go? I can’t imagine it will take them long to find the murderer.”

Rachel nodded and looked around. They were alone.

“Nicolas. Where is he?”

“He went to the beach with the others.”

Rachel stood and strode down the path. Athenais had to struggle to keep up with her this time

“You truly did love your husband, didn’t you?” the necromancer asked.

“His skull was as thick as a plank of wood but he was good to me. We worked together, and whatever we had we earned. I don’t know what I’m going to do without him.”

“You’ll make it. The living are like any other pest. They’re not so easy to be rid of. But I understand how you feel.” Athenais’s voice got quiet. “I don’t know how I would go on without Deacon.”

Rachel was surprised enough by this that her pace slowed and she looked at the necromancer. “You never see the Captain. He doesn’t come ashore. Everyone knows that.”

The haughtiness returned to Athenais’s face.

“Necromancers have their ways. And I’ll thank you not to assume you know how I live.”

Rachel looked away. They were almost to the beach.

\* \* \*

The people running didn’t get very far before empty laughter sounded over the sand.

Dead people skittered up the path and onto the beach, some on all fours, others on two legs. A few seemed to dance and wave their arms about in joy.

The men with guns fired at the corpses. Some of the cadaverous things were hit and didn’t stop, some danced around the bullets and laughed as if it were a grand game.

Half the dead swarmed into the forest and dragged back

those that had run. The others closed in on the men still firing and disarmed them, but they didn't hurt anyone. The creatures were holding the living in place. Several corpses darted between all the people being held, poking and prodding as if they were looking for something.

An inhuman shriek greeted Rachel and Athenais as they arrived on the beach.

Rachel knew exactly what it meant. She ran to meet them as two things dragged Seth Roberts forward.

Rachel's face was livid. She balled a fist and punched him. "You son of a bitch!" she cried. "I should have known it was you."

"I didn't do anything," he retorted.

"Our friends say otherwise," Athenais cooed.

"Your friends are devils from Hell!"

Rachel grabbed his hair and yanked. "Don't you talk to her. You talk to me. Tell me why you did it."

"Did what, you fucking hag?"

She brought her knee up into his groin. "Tell me why you did it!"

"He killed one of my cows," Seth growled, biting down on the pain.

"You only claim to have lost one cow lately, the one we found in the forest half eaten by a cougar. Did you kill my husband over a cow he didn't even touch?"

"Your husband," Seth spat, "shoulda kept his black mouth shut. Then maybe I wouldn't have lost my temper and shot him."

This time Rachel's knee connected with his face. A corpse came up behind him. It jabbed a finger at Seth, then at Rachel, then dragged its finger across its own throat with an empty laugh. The dead clicked their bones in agreement.

She wanted to kill him. He deserved it. But if she did this, was she any better than he was? Did that really matter when they were

surrounded by the dead? But asking them for help wasn't the same as making someone dead. Something inside told her she couldn't do it. She didn't want to be like them.

A hand settled on her shoulder. She looked back and saw Nicolas.

"You should do it," she whispered. The corpse nodded once. Rachel stepped aside. Seth went pale and began to fight the dead people holding him.

"No!" he shrieked. "I'm not going to Hell with you! I won't let you take me!"

But there was nothing he could do. Nicolas came forward and his arms clamped down on the living man in a bear hug that made him shriek. Nicolas turned and carried the man toward the path.

Rachel began to weep again as she watched him go. She was alone. More so now that she'd turned to the witch and everyone would avoid her.

"The price has been paid," Maman announced. "The balance has been restored."

The dead let go of the living and began to cavort back to the City. The sea crept out again to engulf the path.

A shot rang out and Rachel flinched, fearing she'd been hit, but she didn't feel anything. She looked around. There was a dark spot on Athenais's stomach and Harry Fulton's gun was smoking.

Athenais set her jaw.

The dead rounded back on the living. A corpse that had once been a woman in a rotting Salvation Army dress rushed to the necromancer. The corpse pinched thumb and forefinger together and worked them into the wound. Athenais frowned in discomfort. The corpse yanked its hand out and held up the bullet. With a screech, it rushed at Harry. It slammed into his torso, then settled on top of him. It leaned close and brought the bullet to his eye.

"Stop!" Athenais commanded.

The corpse looked back. Athenais gestured it to her side. When the corpse returned, Athenais whispered a thank you. Then she pointed to the forest.

“That tree there, with the scratches and bullet holes. Do any of you recognize it?”

The crowd shifted uncomfortably, but said nothing.

“Do... you... recognize it?” she repeated.

There were murmurs of ascent.

“Harry Fulton, why do you recognize that tree?”

He looked at the ground and spat before he said, “that was the tree we were gonna string you up on.”

Her extended arm swung toward the water. The tide had settled back into rhythm and in the last hints of the dying red light, they could see a galleon far closer to the shore than it should be.

“Shall I remind you what happened that day or let my husband?” Athenais clasped her hands in front of her. “I forgave you your foolishness once and was even kind enough to offer you my protection. This stretch of ocean is called the Graveyard of the Pacific yet it never claims anyone on Cape Disappointment. Many of you here are sailors who owe me your lives. Do not strain my generosity. Good evening to you.” The necromancer started across the dunes.

Rachel followed her.

“What about me?” she asked as they got to the porch.

Athenais opened the door and faced the other woman.

“Enjoy your days with abandon. For you, there is no heaven, there is no hell. There is only my house.”

Rachel swallowed hard. “I heard you... mark... those who will serve you.”

Athenais frowned. “I’m not Satan. And there’s no need.” Her eyes swept over the shaken crowd making its way to the forest. “All who meet their end on Cape Disappointment pass through my

house. *Your* servitude will be gentle. Good evening, Rachel.”

The necromancer closed the door.

Rachel turned and looked at the ocean. The ship that had been so close a few minutes ago was far out, chasing the dying sun.

Rachel wondered if the townsfolk would wait for her in the forest. A few of them might. She was sure she could avoid them in the dark though.

It didn't really matter. It was at their own peril. If she died, her soul would go to the necromancer's house, and her body would go to the City in the Sea, where it would know the way back.

# Lord of the Bones

Brian Malachy Quinn

*This piece is paired with “The City in the Sea”*



Most of my horror art is in black and white because I believe this extreme contrast gives a more dramatic timeless presentation. I strive to infuse a sense of dread in my work with the use of imagery of death such as the traditional graveyards and bones but also with highly symbolic animals and draped human like figures with hidden faces. This imagery harkens back to the Vincent Price movies, produced in the 1960s that I watched in the 70s in my later grade school years during The Theater of Horror on Saturday afternoons. Enjoyable afternoons spent glued to the television set hoping what happened next would frighten me—with an anticipatory joy—an impetus for me now to write horror stories and create art and to attempt to invoke that same feeling in my readers and observers. The memorable Price movies that depicted interpretations of Poe’s works include “House of Usher,” “Pit and Pendulum,” “The Raven,” “The Masque of the Red Death” and “An Evening of Edgar Allen Poe.” The questions I hope everyone asks, with a sense of tantalizing trepidation upon seeing my art is “What does the face of the shrouded figure look like? And what will happen if it locks its gaze upon me?”



# Gwendolyn

Sam Lauren

*This selection is paired with "Berenice"*

I didn't love my cousin, just her teeth.

They made more noise outside of her body than they ever had in it. It did not matter that I crept down the hallway, they still rattled in their box with every shift in my pace. I tried to remember the sound of Gwen's teeth still embedded in her gums, chattering from cold air and a loose scarf. If it had ever annoyed me I could not recall.

The library was my sanctuary.

Its door closed with better skill than I had at carrying evidence. I paused a moment to celebrate that I had made it this far with no one hearing: A brief sigh, an exultation exhausted with relief. No one would hear Gwen's teeth through walls padded by bookshelves.

I set the box on the table. It was long and narrow, a wooden case that came with a fountain pen inside. My mother gave it to me for my tenth birthday.

The velvet cushion was long gone, as was the pen.

The teeth were dirty, I knew. Some of them had mud from my fingers smeared across their enamel. Others still had blood and strings of tissue reminiscent of Gwen's body.

I had to open the box to clean them.

They had all piled in one corner. I lined them up, 32 gems in perfect order, first the top row then the bottom. I wondered if I could have a cushion made for them, to keep them in place and treasured the way Gwen's gums had failed to do.

I had gotten the first one when we were eleven. A molar that used to sit far back enough that you could not see the gap when Gwen smiled. How fortunate, our parents said. For Gwen smiled a lot.

Back then they still thought I was the sick one.

Gwen didn't interest me. They begged me to pay attention to her, to indulge in her games and learn something from her whimsy. It embarrassed my parents that I was content to sit still and think all day. Hers hoped Gwen would grow on me before I grew on her.

Perfection is dull.

We all follow the same patterns. Gwen's was simple, and common. She did as she was told and when she stepped out of line she was praised for being "normal." Gwen could never step so far from perfect that it changed who she was. Nobody can. We do what we have always done, because that makes us comfortable. We abhor change. When we are not fighting it we are ignoring it.

I could not be bothered to think about concepts like that, things I considered solved. My days were spent puzzling over objects that defied this logic.

It was strange. Even I knew that.

The day Martin, the groundskeeper, moved the bird feeder from one side of the yard to the other, I spent hours staring at the vacated hole in the ground. It felt so wrong. Yet the feeder could not correct itself. If Gwen had been taken from her home and forced to live in a corner with less shade and more shrubbery, the police would be sent to find her. Her spirit would demand an escape or else disintegrate into a depression. The world would be drawn to "the right way" like a magnet. The wrong would be corrected.

Not so with the bird feeder. I wondered how it could stand to be so slighted.

It took a renegade molar for me to give Gwen the same moral contemplation. She assaulted it with her tongue for two days before she could prove it was loose. "See?" she said, and I barely glanced up from the chess board.

"So? We all lose our baby teeth."

"No, father says I already lost this one. He says it must have

been damaged when I fell.”

Gwen had bruised her face falling from a tree she should not have been climbing. I remembered how impressed our parents were of her bravery.

“Look,” she said.

The tooth was shoved aside by her pert pink tongue. It exposed a pair of roots with a string of bloody tissue between them, perpendicular to the gumline. I winced when I saw it, and Gwen grinned. She knew she had me.

“It doesn’t hurt?” I asked.

Gwen shook her head. “Father says it’s dead. It’s just annoying, I keep feeling it move.”

“Then twist it out.” The idea was sudden. Could it fix the problem? No. The roots should be digging further into their foundation, searching for a hold that would keep them implanted in Gwen’s mouth. They could spare her a cosmetic flaw if they would only try.

I could not order the molar to heal. It did not know how.

The odd state of limbo was worse than an absence, it had to be. Gwen’s teeth were not allowed a rebellion. Their pattern was popular, admired. This molar mocked the very nature of my cousin and that, I knew, was the wrong that must be righted.

Gwen was less sure. “It will come out on its own.”

“You are not scared,” I reminded her. No doubt she wanted the problem to resolve in an impossible way, the melding of one runaway tooth to its neighbor.

“Of course not.”

“Then do it.” She hesitated, so I forced a smile for her. “You’ll feel better.”

If I had ever asked Gwen for anything else, she may have denied this request. It was her first chance to impress me. The task loomed before her like a gateway to our friendship, a door she had

always longed for yet been turned away from.

Gwen wedged the molar between two dainty fingers and gave it an awkward spin. It took a few turns, forward and back then around again, before it snapped off.

She beamed at me, furrowing her lips back like a dog in fury so that I might see her fangs. The gums were swollen.

“Let me see it,” I said.

When our parents asked for it later, I told them I had thrown it away. It was the reasonable thing to do. They would have been disgusted if they knew I had studied the tooth for hours, holding it up to the lamp in my room once the sun was too low to illuminate it.

I put it in the box when I ran out of questions.

Two pieces start a collection. Back then the molar was an anomaly, a quirk on an otherwise healthy girl. Seven years between that first tooth and the second eradicated all trace of fascination. It became mundane, like Gwen’s graceful dancing and talent for classical piano.

She was a different girl when she lost that second tooth. A woman, newly minted.

She slept more often. Our parents called it growing up until she lost the energy for afternoon strolls through the park. Then they called it sickness.

Sleeping more darkened Gwen’s eyes the same way less sleep would have. Her mother bought makeup to cover the shadows but Gwen’s skin was too dry for it. Sometimes her lips would crack and bleed for want of moisture.

Other times it was her nose, interrupting the conversations I was forced to have with her. Gwen was a sweet girl but it was hard for me to concentrate on the trivial things she wanted to talk about. Even more so when the inside of her body dripped down the front of her face like water escaping a loose spigot. The blood was thin, not like the crimson bead that bubbled up at the prick of a sewing needle.

That could interest me, if her teeth had not stolen my attention.

They remained the same throughout Gwen's illness. She lost so much weight that you could see the shadow of her bones. Her hair gave away its shine for brittleness. The stench of vomit clung to her no matter how many times her mother bathed her.

Gwen's lips shriveled. Her gums were swollen. But those teeth stayed perfect until the day she died.

Once again they—a team, I now realized—refused to be a part of Gwen's body.

The second tooth escaped the drama of her mouth during my turn to sit with her. The drought that aged my cousin had stemmed the torrential rain of gossip I had shivered under my entire life. In those last few weeks she was confined to her bed, told to rest, but I did not mind spending time with her there. It was quiet. Gwen even refused to cry in front of me.

She could not help coughing though. It was a violent series of hacks and dry heaves that gave me the second tooth.

Gwen curled in on herself to do it, lifting from the fluffed pillows to bow her head between two bony knees. She cupped her claws over her mouth.

A whine I had only ever heard before from a muffling distance interrupted her struggle. Gwen's eyes widened. A few stubborn coughs shook her shoulders but she excused one hand and extended it to me.

It was an incisor, roots still intact. She meant merely to show it, I sensed that, but I took it, and held it up with two fingers. It was as white as the day it pierced her gums. My aunt had helped her brush each tooth clean not an hour ago.

My gaping expression was inappropriate. I could not help it. I looked past the tooth, to Gwen, who was watching me with abandoned modesty.

“What is happening to me?” she asked. Another whine transi-

tioned her words into tears.

“You’ll be alright,” I told her, but she wouldn’t be.

The stress triggered the last seizure Gwen would ever have. Her body began to tremble, increasing intensity until she was writhing on her bed in short jerking movements. Saliva spilled down her chin.

I clenched that incisor in my fist.

I watched Gwen toss around on her bed like a fish trying to breath air. I watched her mouth, clamping closed with a sickening crunch then opening again, and I prayed that another piece of her smile would defect.

My aunt and a nurse, never far off, heard the whining and came in time to see the fit. It was a long one. Gwen had had others that were one solid jerk of her body, some that refused to let go. Each left her weaker. They made her forget who she was.

“Oh, Gwendolyn,” my aunt whispered, and sat beside Gwen on the bed. She glanced at me. “Excuse us.”

“I want to stay with her. I’m worried.”

“I know,” she said. Our parents always assumed that I was just an awkward child, unable to show the affection I held, deep down, for my cousin. “But it is not proper.”

I wanted to stay in that room. The sharp edges of Gwen’s incisor pressed against my skin. The rest of her teeth grinned at me from her twisted mouth, glistening with foam and spit.

“Go.”

I took the long wooden box from my bedroom and brought it to the library. The first tooth, the anomaly, had been waiting there for me to uncover its secret. It was not the only rebel. It was not a rebel at all. I placed the incisor beside it.

Two start a collection.

It was not right, I knew, that I held two pieces of a set while the other thirty remained unmined. They belonged together. The

molar was a leader, a hero.

I wondered how I might right this wrong.

They barred me from her room. Gwen was pronounced dead at noon, her body and the teeth trapped inside it promised to a grave before sundown. My father suggested I wait until the funeral to say goodbye, like everyone else was. It was the sort of suggestion you obey without asking why or even compromising.

Instead I paced in the library.

Pacing is unusual for me. It is something people do when action is prevented or unsolved. I am not a man of action, I am a man of thought. My time is spent sitting in a chair accosted by sunlight, centered between two bookshelves, thinking of ways to solve problems that no one cares about.

The teeth demanded I move.

I declined an invite to the funeral, claiming inconsolable grief. My parents were used to my moods. They saw no irregularity in my refusing to conform, nor any use in trying to convince me otherwise.

It was an agonizing wait. I imagined Gwen smiling at the roof of her coffin as each moment put another shovel of dirt between us.

The pacing was even less informative than it was soothing. My epiphany came from sitting back down. The house was silent by then, every mourner tucked into bed and resigned to dozing. I was frustrated with an eight hour walk and no destination.

I would call it giving up but it lacked the self pity, the despair.

The moment my anger sank into the plush velvet cushions of the armchair it produced an idea. I would dig. Why not?

I had cast this notion off a dozen times, deeming it too insane to indulge. The risks were too great, or so I assumed, but impossible loses its meaning after dark. Consequences are indecipherable from shadows.

*They won't hear me, I knew.*

I brought pliers with me to the graveyard. Serendipity left a shovel propped against the shed, its owner's gloves discarded in a heap beside it. They were a bit snug on my hands but they would work.

*No one will know.*

An oak shaded Gwen's grave from the moonlight. Its roots nestled the mound of dirt like a new mother welcoming her child to the world. This was her place now: closest to the tree, surrounded by ancestors that understood her condition.

The teeth are exempt from this. They do not belong in an early grave, no matter how accepting the plot.

I began to dig.

It was the most labor I had ever done in my life. Tomorrow I would feel the strain between my shoulder blades, the tightness of my thighs. It would be hard to lift my arms. My haste stole all sense of preservation and I felt instead a surge of triumph with every glance at my growing discard pile.

Loosened dirt and bits of stone would slump back to the bottom of the widening pit. I ignored their protestations and continued with my work, pausing only when the sound of moaning startled me. I imagined myself caught.

The moans came from below me. Just a foot of dirt, maybe less, separated me from Gwen's smile. I could picture it still, exposed by shriveled lips and half hearted gestures of hope. Both rows bragging of a longer lifespan than Gwen.

It took another hour of digging to uncover enough of Gwen's coffin to open it. It was an awkward process, and involved widening the hole a bit so I could stand without holding down the very lid I wished to raise. The moans had subsided. All I heard now was my heart pounding its excitement in my chest. Victory was upon us.

Her eyes were open.

I pried the lid from its box and propped it against one ragged wall of the grave. Gwen had evidence of tears trailing in long



pink stains down her cheeks. I saw the sudden light, however dim, change the dilation of her pupils.

She murmured my name, though it was barely comprehensible.

A mistake had been made. Her fingertips, raw and bloody from scratching at the roof of her prison, had retreated to the folds of her dress. Gwen was weak, she did not even sit up despite her eagerness to re-enter the world of the living—but she was alive.

I stared. I could not speak. What do I do? How do I explain a girl still breathing, found by accidentally digging a six foot hole others had filled not 12 hours ago?

Then she smiled.

The coffin was broad enough for me to wedge my knees on either side of Gwen's torso. I straddled her chest, applying just enough pressure to shorten her breath. The box that once held a deep blue fountain pen balanced nicely on her collarbones, steadfast in pursuit of its bounty.

Gwen struggled but she could not dislodge it. Her body, if not her mind, thought itself a corpse and had the reflexes of such. I parted her lips and the pliers were already wedging them open by the time she thought to steel her mouth against me.

The steel pliers pinched one lovely bit of ivory between them. It took two solid tugs to free it from the swollen grasp of Gwen's ravaged gums.

She managed a whimper.

The next one came away with more enthusiasm. One hard twist of the pliers and it toppled down the side of her face.

I was not expecting the blood. It gurgled at the back of Gwen's throat between desperate swallows and gulps of air. When it distorted my vision I used a fresh, gloved finger to wipe clear the enamel.

The entire process quickened when Gwen lost consciousness. It was around the fourth tooth, maybe fifth. I could not tell if it was

from a lack of oxygen or an abundance of pain, only that I was relieved. It gave me the time to tidy each tooth the best I could, in the dark and in a hurry.

When I finished I could not stand to look at her. Gwen's face was sunken in, hollowed. Blood stained the skin around her lips like some horrid monster sullied by a wild meal.

I clutched the box of teeth to my chest and nudged the coffin shut with my shoe.

Leaving the hole was difficult. The dirt shifted beneath my feet and slid me back to the solid platform of Gwen's home. I used the shovel to reach the surface.

My intentions were to refill the hole. I was tempted to peek at the reunion inside my precious box but promised myself a more satisfying viewing once my task was done. It needed to be finished before the sun broke the horizon.

Only a few liberal shovel fulls were returned to the grave when the screaming began. Gwen had awoken. It was no broken mumble now but a shrieking that I feared might wake any relative within a mile, dead or alive.

I discarded the shovel and hastened for home.

The teeth rattled like loose coin in a purse. I took the box from my pocket and clasped it tight to my chest once more. Still they echoed in their chamber.

Outside it was fine. Indoors, I crept so that the loudest thing about my movements was the thudding of my threatened heart.

The library has always been my sanctuary.

I cast aside the gravedigger's gloves to pick the teeth up one at a time. The fine cloth usually assigned to cleaning lenses did a fine job polishing Gwen's smile. In short order I had restored them to their stature. The teeth looked as good as they ever had; better, without that dwindling frame insulting their beauty.

I had so many questions. How were these teeth different from the dozens of inanimate objects that just accepted their fate? What

made them independent?

If I had questioned my own situation with such scrutiny I might have heard the running approach of footsteps or the awakening of the house.

Nathaniel the groundskeeper barreled through the library door without knocking. He apologized, panting, and wiped sweat from his brow. "I saw the light on," Nathaniel explained. "It's Miss Gwendolyn, she's alive."

His eyes caught sight of the gloves on the table beside me.

Nathaniel frowned. "She's been assaulted."

He noticed that I clutched the slender wooden box like it was the holy grail. I imagine my eyes were as wide and maddened as his own. We had both seen something that our minds could not quite wrap our heads around.

He asked, voice too quiet, "What have you done?"

I showed him not one proud grin, but two.

"I've freed Gwen's smile," I said. "And you can never put it back."

# Ligeia in the Bridal Chamber

Shannon Connor Winward

*This selection is paired with “Ligeia”*

O!, Yield not, my gentle man, to grief.  
Fret not, for I am near.  
This sundering shall be but brief.  
No obstacle a year,  
Nor so small a thing as a new wife;  
Small mind already wreathed with fear,  
Small heart feeding a small life.  
Death cannot keep what I hold dear.

Glanvill knew the way of it:  
*And the will therein lieth, which dieth not.*  
Your bride lies here, dies here, you sit  
Opium-slow, distraught.  
But I, my forever love, am *proof!*  
Fantastic battles I have fought  
And won, on the periphery of mystery, the truth:  
Only the weak of will must rot.

A simple thing it is to seduce a man  
With youth's soft skin, bewitching tresses.  
Not so when the light begins to wan  
And rigor replaces deft caresses.  
To own his *mind*, to guide his eye,  
To script his choices, only *will* addresses—  
The gulf between flesh and the soul's desire  
moved only by intent once the soul egresses.

*For God is but a great will pervading all things,*  
And I am here, still, moving you  
both as with marionette strings  
because you are mine. I am not through.  
I bid you bring the cup, I manifest

phantasmic blood, I show you true  
*intent* as she drinks, and she dies, and I wrest  
from death a life anew.

Hear me, darling!—oh, be sure  
Love will have its way,  
And I will leave you nevermore,  
And I will not betray  
Your heart's fidelity, your spurns  
Of petty charms, her blue-eyed lure  
See me, dearest! The hour turns  
She is the Worm's, and I am yours!

# A. Gordon Pym: A New Ending

Katelyn Dunne

*This selection is paired with “The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket”*

*March 22<sup>d</sup>.*—The darkness had materially increased, relieved only by the glare of the water thrown back from the white curtain before us. Many gigantic and pallidly white birds flew continuously now from beyond the veil, and their scream was the eternal Tekeli-li! as they retreated from our vision. Hereupon Nu-Nu stirred in the bottom of the boat; but upon touching him, we found his spirit departed.

And now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us. But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow.

The figure was almost phantasmal. Entombed in mist, it loomed ominously in the path of the canoe. The ghost was determined to haunt our souls and create an air of uncertainty about our future. The warm ocean water became frigid, so cold as to not allow unharmed human touch. Peters and I could not redirect the route of our small vessel; we could not see for the fog created a barrier that prevented our vision from finding a trail of escape from this blindingly white creature in front of us.

As Peters and I inescapably approached this shrouded figure, we, particularly I, noticed a strong resemblance to that of an old companion of ours. The mist concealed much of the apparition, but it was quite apparent and undeniably the face of my good and deceased friend Augustus Banard.

However unreasonable this seems, I know it to be true. The sculpted cheekbones thinned from starvation, the ribs that jutted through the rips in his shirt, the arm blackened from innumerable wounds, the missing leg, and the distinctive gashes caused by the sharks lurking in the depths of his watery grave are all indicative

that this shrouded human figure is indeed the phantom of our dearly departed companion, Augustus Banard. Strands of seaweed hung from the ghost of Augustus, cloaking his frail, emaciated body as if he were an Egyptian mummy being lured and beckoned back into his oceanic resting place.

Peters let out a gasp of exclamation at his first recognition of the shrouded figure, and he inquired of me its identity, already aware of the answer I would give. The figure before us terrified us both, scaring us witless and unable to materialize a way to remove this frightful demon from our pathway. Peters spoke directly to the phantom questioning, “Augustus? How can this be? I thought you were dead?” The ghostly Augustus only stared back at us, eyes pitch black and blank, looking at us but through us at the same time, like an abyss that reels you in and does not release you. I thought I saw sadness in his eyes, sadness that we abandoned him, literally throwing him to the sharks, allowing his decrepit body to be devoured as sustenance to those vicious creatures of the depths.

I motioned to Peters to the body of Nu-Nu still lying unresponsive in the bottom of the boat, gesturing that we should throw his body overboard as to appease the terrifying image of a ghostly Augustus in front of us. I had figured that the watery burial of Nu-Nu would replace the unrest of Augustus and allow his weary soul the replenishment it needed to be able to release its hold on the earthly world. Peters agreed with me; reaching for the legs of Nu-Nu, and I the head, we lifted the corpse into the air and swung the body back and forth above the waves accumulating in laps against the side of our vessel, aiming to gather enough momentum to hurl the body into the misty abyss before us. We counted back from three, and we threw the body with all our might into the unforgiving waters, hoping our sacrificial gesture would ward off the demonly spirit of Augustus.

Our plan seemed to have failed, as our sacrifice did not allow the spirit of Augustus to acquit its earthly form and travel to the ethereal realm, which would have calmed the chasm of stormy seas bound to throw us both overboard and into a fate as like Augustus's. However, in the next instant, the ocean ceased to palpitate

erratically, and it seemed that our plan had come into fruition and that Augustus was appeased. Peters and I began crying for joy, as we had feared for our own lives at the hand of our wrathful past companion.

Our joy soon turned to sorrow when we realized that the waters were beginning to supernaturally simmer beneath us. Instead of alleviating the soul of Augustus from its apparent misery, we had only infuriated it. It seemed as if this phantasmal demon was seeking revenge on us shipmates who had watched his tortured body perish and had subsequently, although inadvertently, allowed his remnants to be devoured by the carnivorous sharks that lurked blood-hungry below the depths of the vessel. The waters beneath us began to become increasingly heated, almost to a boil. Peters and I feared that soon the wood of the boat would disintegrate due to the heat, leaving us to perish in the volcanic substance that was forming beneath our very canoe, ready to devour us whole.

\* \* \*

*March 23<sup>d</sup>*.—It seemed to me, and to Peters, also, that the phantom wanted to destroy us both in a revengeful rage. We thought we only had moments left of this life, but, for some reason, Augustus had spared our lives and allowed us to continue to live in a sense of prolonged agony. The waters tumbled and rolled beneath us, and with each movement, cascaded tiny but potent pellets of fiery water upon our bare flesh, licking at us until we were covered in burning welts.

\* \* \*

*March 26<sup>th</sup>*.—A hole appeared in the canoe. The whole was the size of a small pebble, barely noticeable to the unassuming eye. It appeared, at first, to only be a small infringement upon our safety, but the opening allowed a trickle of the agonizing and sweltering water to penetrate the relative security of our vessel. Upon realizing the burning sensation caused by the water pooling shallowly around our toes, we hurriedly ripped off our shirts, as there was nothing else available on our small and ill-provisioned canoe, and stuffed one of them into the small hole in attempts to plug it



up. We switched out shirts from the hole as one became sopping with the water and wrung it out to release the collected water in it, scorching our feeble hands in the process. This attempt seemed to be working quite well to help negate the horrors of our dreary situation.

\* \* \*

*March 28<sup>th</sup>*—Augustus still has yet to relinquish his reign of terror upon us. The boat shakes, the lava laps, the skin stings terribly. The hole has increased in size, allowing more water to pierce the security of our fortress afloat, our only protection from the inhuman hands of Augustus. We were now forced to retreat from the floorboards on the boat and rest ourselves entirely upon the canoe's benches, out of the reach of the boiling water. There was not much left to do that could save our canoe to preserve our lives and keep us from a watery and fiery grave. Peters and I decided that we needed to make amends for death of Augustus, a life for a life.

Peters volunteered himself, as he felt guilty for Augustus' death, stating that he could have worked harder to gather and preserve the food needed to heal Augustus' ailing body and, subsequently, prevent his death. Peters wished me well as he bravely stepped on the side canoe and jumped into the sweltering water, splashing a wave of the scorching water onto my face in the process. I saluted my shipmate and now friend a hearty farewell; I thought I could hear Peters screeching as he sunk downward into the fire.

\* \* \*

*March 31<sup>st</sup>*—With Peters dead, I am all alone to brave this shrouded apparition. I, along with Peters who gave up his life for this cause, had thought that the acquisition of one life would have been enough to satisfy Augustus's yearning for revenge. It, quite obviously, was not, and I still remain stuck in this inferno-destined canoe. I have no provisions, as Peters and I had eaten the three remaining turtles after Augustus's phantom had appeared. The mist in the air blends seamlessly with the steam rising from the waters below, creating a hazy blockade around the canoe, caging me from

the surrounding world. The phantom of Augustus Banard has yet to disappear and the waters are getting worse. My enduring vessel is sinking. I am all alone, starving and terrified. I have no strength left, as I have weakened from the lack of food and water. Tears fall down my cheeks, a subconscious final attempt for my life. The ocean still rattles around me. "Augustus please," I, Arthur Gordon Pym, cry with the little strength I have left, although my words are barely a whisper, drowned out by the roaring waters.

All of a sudden, it stops. The fog clears, restoring my vision; the water ceases to rise about the sides of my boat; the shrouded phantom of August dissipates before my very eyes. The world around me remains calm, isolated, lonely. Without a soul in sight, I timidly reach my hand over the side of the boat and lightly trace the cool blue of the still waters beside me.

# Love in the House of Usher

Marie C Lecrivain

*This selection is paired with "Fall of the House of Usher"*

*& yours in the name I'll say again and again - David St John*

I.

In the womb, we spoke through the watery hush,  
synchronized our breaths and heartbeats until  
the portal opened, and we rode the gush  
of blood and regret into the vast chill  
fissure of our stony crumbling birthright.  
We were the last. With no others to come  
from our sterile loins, we held on tight  
to the promise of light to warm numb  
hands and pale faces. Over the years  
I dared to dream about leaving this tomb  
we called home, of overcoming the fears  
of wide open blue skies, the verdant doom  
of summer grass. Then you'd whisper my name,  
Madeline. Dreams deferred, I blushed with shame.

II.

The time has come, and I lay here alone  
waiting for you to come and see me off  
this mortal coil. All along, I've known  
death would claim me first, and though you scoff  
at my assertion, your fear of being  
left behind is now keeping you away  
from me. What are you afraid of seeing,  
brother mine? Does my pending demise weigh  
too much for you to bear, or do you think  
it a kindness to leave me unattended?  
The cold wraps around me, a gentle link  
between this world and the next. Suspended,

I plead with each fading exhale  
Roderick... come meet me beyond the veil...

III.

Darkness. Foul air, the smell of gunpowder  
and decayed bone fill my nostrils. What is  
happening? My heart beat becomes louder,  
almost a roar as I press against this  
prison in which I've become encased.  
How long have I been here? In vain  
I try to calm my shattered nerves, but faced  
with the worst kind of death, I give free rein  
to my terror, pound hard against the lid  
of my coffin as the madness descends.  
My fury becomes a mantra, Why did  
you do this? Roderick, help me! Make amends  
before it's too late. I thought you loved me!  
Let me out! Now!. Roderick, set me free...

IV.

Lazarus had the Lord's help to uncap  
the stone, and I have the Devil's grace  
to push through iron and rage to map  
my way back to you. The look on your face  
says it all, the regret and relief shine bright  
in your eyes. I know, now, that you heard me,  
and in the grip of mania, the slight  
and sinister voice of Fate that says, See?  
All is as it should be. I heard it too,  
the curse that bound us to this house and land  
which now collapse around us. We two  
are to become one. Roderick, take my hand  
and embrace me. And please, whisper my name,  
Madeline, as we descend into flame.

# Madeline

Brian Malachy Quinn

*This piece is paired with “Fall of the House of Usher”*



# The Murders on Morgue Street

Orrin Grey

*This selection is paired with "Murders in the Rue Morgue"*

It's the middle of the hottest summer on record when they find the body, though there's not really enough of it left to qualify as such. No bones, nor much in the way of blood. Just a rubbery skin and no apparent way to have extracted the insides.

They find it in an apartment up off Seventh, a smallish place, with a metal fan sitting on top of the icebox and faded blue lilies on the wallpaper. The smell of it fills the room up, the dark, damp cellar smell of fresh corpses, and something else, underneath, like wet fur.

It was the smell that triggered the phone call that led the officers here. The woman that once wore the body was a mother, but her ten-year-old daughter is staying with family for the summer. Somewhere out in the country, somewhere cooler. The officers who knocked on the door are still standing nearby, one out in the hallway, one in the kitchen with his head hanging out the open window, but this is homicide's show. Detective Laughton, who most of the beat cops know for his mustache and the smell of his after-shave, and you with him, a criminology student from a cop family. The word is that your uncle is top brass in another precinct, that he got you a ride-along with Laughton for the summer.

You stare at the body, not looking away like the officers do. Detective Laughton squats beside it, shaking his head from side-to-side. "What the hell?" he keeps asking, over and over again, as though somebody will suddenly have the answer. "What the hell?"

\* \* \*

Eventually, they load the body into the wagon. Not on a gurney, though, folded up in a crate, like a blanket.

The morgue is in the basement of the county medical examiner's office. Bodies are brought in through the back door, by way of a brick-paved alley known locally as Morgue Street. That's where

Detective Laughton parks when the call comes in telling him that the body has disappeared. Night has fallen by the time you arrive, but the coming of darkness does nothing to relieve the heat.

“I think it’s going to rain,” Detective Laughton says as he gets out of the car. You look up, at the stars that are like smudges against the night. There isn’t a cloud in the sky.

Inside, the morgue is full of activity. Officers in uniform pace everywhere, taking statements, talking to everyone. The coroner is a short man with a bulging belly who always talks like he has a head cold. He assures Detective Laughton, “just as I told the other officers,” that the body was never delivered, even though a quick check of the logbooks shows the driver’s arrival and the delivery of one body, thereafter unaccounted for.

“Whose initials are these?” Detective Laughton asks, pointing to a dark scribble next to the delivery, but the coroner just shakes his head.

The driver, a man about your age, is sitting in a side room with bare walls, his head held in his hands. He looks like he’s about to cry. “I gave it to Carl,” he says, Carl being one of the coroner’s assistants, who has already sworn that he hasn’t received a delivery all day. “We’ve known each other for years. Why would he say I didn’t? Why would he lie?”

“What’s going to happen to him?” you ask, as you walk back to the car.

Detective Laughton shakes his head. “Not our problem,” he says. “They’re probably in on it,” with a jerk of his head back to include the coroner, his assistant, and the driver all in one vague motion. “Go home. We’ll worry about it in the morning. It’s not like she’s going to get any deader.”

\* \* \*

Home is a fifth-floor apartment that looks out over train tracks and a couple of rooftops, but that’s not where you go. Detective Laughton drops you off and you walk down to a little basement theatre called the Orpheus, one of many such theatres to bear the

name. You're seeing a girl named Deidre who sells tickets there, and most nights you find your way down to the theatre and either flirt with her, if she's not too busy, or else buy a ticket to the show if she is.

There's a new act that started just this week. "The Amazing Dr. Mirakle," a mesmerist. You remember Deidre mentioning it when you round the corner and see the marquee. "He can make a person do just about anything," she said. "Cluck like a chicken, turn a cartwheel, and they don't remember a thing about it afterward."

When you walk up Deidre looks beautiful, but busy, harried, one strand of her blonde hair come loose and dangling in front of her face, where she keeps blowing it aside as she counts out money and tears off tickets. "I'll take one," you say, walking up to the booth.

"The show's already started," she cautions, smiling.

"That's all right. This way I'll be here when you get off," she looks grateful, tears off a ticket and hands it to you.

You push through the curtained doorway and into the auditorium. It's smoky, dim. The stage is small, the setting intimate. More like a big parlor than a theatre. You find a seat near the back, looking down across the backs of peoples' heads to the stage where a striking figure stands before the audience. He wears a coat-and-tails, holds a brass-topped cane in his hand. A top hat sits on a stool behind him as he bows and speaks to the audience, obviously having just completed some feat.

Dr. Mirakle's face is white, his eyes dark and sunken. His hair grows into a natural widow's peak, and is swept away from his face to curl slightly at the back. He speaks with a faint Eastern European accent that he disguises well enough to make it almost impossible to place.

"No doubt you have seen other so-called 'hypnotists' perform their chicanery on stage," he says. "But I assure you that my work is different. I have studied under some of the great minds of Europe, perfecting Herr Mesmer's theories of animal magnetism. You



see no dangling pendulums or spinning boards here, no, but only science!”

He does a trick or two, and he isn't lying about the paraphernalia. There's not a pocket watch or a multi-hued lantern to be found. He simply locks eyes with his volunteer, speaks to them softly, evenly, too quietly to be heard in the audience, then he passes his hands in front of their eyes, down their chests, along their arms, his fingertips barely brushing the fabric of their clothes, and the next thing you know they're performing according to his commands, answering questions in monotone voices that make their wives or husbands, brothers or sisters gasp.

To close his act, he calls a man up onto the stage. He looks somber as he makes the passes with his hands. “Herr Mesmer's work has been relegated to the trade of hypnotists and showmen,” he says, as though talking to himself, but loudly enough that the audience can hear. “But he was more than a hypnotist, yes? He was a scientist. He saw in men the animal essence, and he sought to affect it, to control it. But who can say that he fully understands man?”

He steps way from his volunteer, a big, broad-shouldered man with sandy hair and beard. “Now you,” he says, obviously speaking to the volunteer now. “What are you?”

In answer, the man drops to all fours, standing on his feet with the palms of his hands on the stage. He swings his head back and forth, snuffling at the air in a manner you've seen before, at the zoo downtown.

“Ah,” Dr. Mirakle says, “this man, he has some Norse ancestry, perhaps, yes? The Norse, they believe that by wearing an animal's skin, they can channel that animal's spirit. They wear the bear's skin to become fierce like a bear. *Barsark*, yes? But this man here, he wears no skin, but he is *barsark* all the same, is he not?”

At this the man rises back to his full height, his arms extended out and up, and roars out across the auditorium, a terrible, animal sound that no human throat should ever make.

Deidre said that he could make people quack like a duck, but

this isn't a man being made to roar like a bear. From where you sit you can see the man's eyes, see the way they gleam when the light strikes them. This man is lost completely. For all intents and purposes, it is a bear who stands up on the stage before you.

Then Dr. Mirakle snaps his fingers and the illusion—if it was an illusion—is dispersed. The man is just a man again, and slowly, sheepishly he folds his arms back to his sides, his eyes already searching in the crowd for the woman he was sitting beside, the question visible in his gaze, “What did I do?”

After the show, as the other audience members file out, you think to approach Dr. Mirakle, to ask him a question. He hasn't retreated back stage like most showmen, but is walking to and fro, picking up items with the help of a big thuggish assistant who looks like he'd be more at home on the docks than on a stage, even a shabby one like the Orpheus.

You introduce yourself, and Dr. Mirakle smiles, bows slightly, shakes your hand. “A pleasure,” he says. “And what can I do for you?”

You make yourself meet his gaze, to see if you feel anything unusual. His eyes are dark, surprisingly deeply-set, but up close you can see that they're just brown. You feel no shiver, no clouding of your mind.

“I had a question,” you say. “Could a person be...” You stop, searching for the word.

“Hypnotized is fine,” Dr. Mirakle says. “It is a name used by parlor tricksters, but in reality, it is as good as any.”

“Hypnotized, then,” you say with a nod, “so that they didn't remember what they had done, to whom they had spoken, or given an item? Or so that they remembered it falsely?”

“Certainly,” he says. “I believe that the untapped potential of the human mind is greater than anyone imagines, and that if the mind can be brought into agreement with itself, almost anything can be achieved using only its power.”

“How could someone find out what had happened during such

a period?" you ask.

Dr. Mirakle shakes his head. "Without finding the one who hypnotized them? It would be impossible."

\* \* \*

Detective Laughton turns out to be right, and the next day the heat wave finally breaks and a storm rolls in with driving rain. It's your day off from the ride-along, and so you sit in your apartment in your old armchair. It's pleasantly cool, like the underside of a pillow that you flip over in the middle of the night, and there's a kettle of water on the stove for tea.

You're dozing in your chair when the lock on your door rattles. It takes you a moment to rouse yourself, and by then the first blow has already fallen against the door. It's followed by another, and then the door is crashing open, leaning drunkenly on hinges half-pulled from the wall. In the doorway stands something that you think, for one bleary-eyed second, might be a big man, but no, it's something else. A beast, its limbs long, its face brutish and square, with thick brows and jutting yellow teeth. Tucked under one of its arms is a folded, rubbery parcel, like a raincoat, that drips water onto the floor as the ape advances on you.

It covers the ground fast, and you're still drowsy, but fortunately the shock galvanizes you and you throw yourself aside as its paw tears the stuffing from your chair. Your first thought is, of course, the door, which still hangs half-open, but the ape is between you and your exit, and its limbs are long and powerful, so you lunge for the kitchenette instead.

The kettle of water is still on the stove, steam now whistling from its spout. You grab the handle and dash its contents into the ape's face. It roars and stumbles backward, clawing at its eyes, dropping the rubbery parcel which you can just see beginning to unfold.

That's when you run.

\* \* \*

You call Detective Laughton from a payphone. He meets you

outside your building—you wait for him under the grocer’s awning across the street—and you go in together. The rain is still coming down, and your hair is soaked and dripping, your shirt clinging to your shoulders.

Detective Laughton has his gun out as you climb the stairs, which reassures you. Not because you think the ape will still be there, not by now, but because it means he’s taking you seriously, not just humoring you.

The door to your apartment hangs open, and beyond it your room has been torn apart. Not ransacked, as a thief might, but absolutely destroyed, as if by an enraged animal.

The mattress and springs have been hurled from the bed and lay on the floor, wire coils poking out like broken bones. Your chair is snapped in two, your table overturned and split down the middle. One of your kitchen drawers has been hurled at the wall, leaving behind a trail of cutlery.

The ape, however, is long gone, and you’re not surprised when Detective Laughton questions your neighbors and finds that nobody saw it come or go.

\* \* \*

You go to stay with Deidre while Detective Laughton attempts to fill out reports, and while you’re there you begin to formulate your theories. You’re still thinking, your mind absent, when Deidre leaves, kissing you on the cheek on her way out the door to work. It’s not until after she’s gone that you recall your night in the theatre, the performance you saw there, and the connections come crashing into place. You rush, hatless, out into the night, hailing a taxi to take you to the theatre, but when you get there the lights are already dim. You see a man in a bowtie who you recognize as the owner closing down the ticket booth. “Deidre didn’t show up tonight,” he says, when you ask him about her, breathless. “And neither did our main attraction. I had to refund tickets, which I haven’t done in fifteen years!”

But you’re no longer listening. You run down the street, and at another payphone you call Detective Laughton. You tell him to find

out where Dr. Mirakle lives, and to pick you up on the way.

\* \* \*

Though the address of Dr. Mirakle's basement apartment is 212 1/2 Twelfth, the steps that lead down to it are actually in the brick paved alleyway called Morgue Street, not four blocks from the medical examiner's office.

Dr. Mirakle's real name, as Detective Laughton informs you when he pulls up, is Edward Mirkoval, and he isn't really a doctor. Detective Laughton also tells you to stay behind him as he knocks on the door.

You recognize the man who opens it as Dr. Mirakle's assistant from the show, but you're taken off guard by the recognition you see in his face. One of his eyes is filmed over, milky white and obviously useless—a detail you don't remember from the theatre—but the other stares past Detective Laughton and straight at you with a look of such immediate hatred that you stumble back, as if from a palpable blow.

"Erik," a familiar voice calls from inside, "who is it? Show them in."

Grudgingly, the man who must be Erik steps aside. Detective Laughton steps in past him, and you follow, though for a moment you keep your gaze on Erik's, as he seems to barely be able to restrain his desire to attack you.

The one-room apartment looks like it was once a restaurant or a small pub. There are bunk beds like on a sailing ship, a kitchenette, and a heavy wooden table with two chairs. There's also nothing to support any of your suspicions, except for a heavy trapdoor in the back corner.

Dr. Mirakle stands in the kitchenette, his white shirtsleeves rolled up past his elbows, drying his hands on a kitchen towel. "Ah, my young friend from the theatre," he says, smiling. If he has something to hide, he's doing a good job of hiding it. "The one who wished to know about hypnotism, yes? Is there something more I can do for you?"

“I hope so,” you reply. “May I introduce Detective Laughton?”

Dr. Mirakle steps forward, reaching out to clasp the detective’s hand, the warm smile never faltering from his lips. “Detective,” he says, as though trying the word out.

Detective Laughton meets the other man’s gaze and gives his hand a firm shake. “A pleasure,” he says reflexively, taken off guard by the warm greeting.

“Indeed,” Dr. Mirakle replies, not releasing his hand. “Would you like anything to drink, Detective?”

“No.”

“Is your friend here armed, Detective?”

“No.”

“Good, then please, give me your gun.”

You curse yourself, as you feel the vice-like grip of Erik’s arms wrapping around you, pinning your own arms to your sides, forcing you to watch helplessly as Detective Laughton silently, unblinkingly pulls his gun from its holster and hands it to Dr. Mirakle, who in turn trains the barrel on you.

“Why not just hypnotize me too?” you ask.

“I tried,” Dr. Mirakle says, his voice regretful. “Some people, they prove resistant. So other measures become necessary.”

“Where’s Deidre?” you ask, teeth clenched.

“She’s safe,” Dr. Mirakle says, pacing in front of you, his eyes downcast, his face thoughtful, “but I can see you still don’t comprehend. You think me a killer, perhaps?”

“And aren’t you?”

He shakes his head, almost sadly, as though he’s disappointed in you. “To be a killer I must first have killed, and I have harmed no one. Indeed, everything that I have done has been for the good of others. But it will be easier for you, I think, if I show you. Detective, if you would get the door for us?”

Silently, Detective Laughton obeys, walking robotically across the room and hauling up the trapdoor. Erik lifts you as if you weigh nothing and carries you over to the dank steps that lead down into the sub-basement of the building.

The room below is enormous, with great stone arches that, you imagine, must once have held barrels of liquor. Now they hold cages with thick iron bars, like the ones used in the circus, all but one of them occupied by pacing beasts; a wolf, a bear, and a sleek black panther.

You scan the room, looking for Deidre. You've seen the serial pictures, you expect to find her chained up to an operating table, or drugged on some altar. Instead, you see a series of wooden racks hung with human skins, their limbs splayed out as if left there to dry. And on the farthest end, identifiable only by the blue dress that still hangs loosely on it, the blonde hair that now dangles like a discarded wig, you recognize Deidre.

You shriek, spit, strain as hard as you can against Erik's iron grip. "Please," Dr. Mirakle says, as your struggles finally cease, as you hang there spent and sweating. "Do not resist further. I would hate to have to shoot you before you can be made to understand. You believe the girl you love is dead now, yes? But I tell you she is not. She is free, freer than she has ever been."

"Liar," you shout, struggling again, kicking your feet against Erik's shins until he squeezes tighter, until you see lights bursting in front of your vision, and finally darkness claims you.

\* \* \*

You wake manacled, one wrist encased in a metal clasp, a length of chain connecting you to the wall. Instantly you test it, and Dr. Mirakle stands imperturbably by until you have quieted. "Now," he says, "if you are quite finished, I will explain to you, in a way that even you must comprehend. Erik, please, a demonstration?"

Erik steps forward, directly in front of you, and involuntarily you flinch back. But he doesn't advance. Instead, his head tips back and his mouth yawns open, inhumanly wide, the skin around

his lips stretching and splitting. And then a dark head pokes out, followed by thick, hairy hands and then a hulking, shaggy body. When it has stepped completely free from its cast-off skin, you recognize the ape from your apartment, its face scarred with burns, one eye milky and useless.

You feel your mind become suddenly slippery. The sight of Deidre's skin hung there on the rack was only prelude to this, now, as you realize that all your suppositions were insufficient. You had connected Dr. Mirakle to the ape, yes, to the murders, to the theft of the body, to the mysterious gaps in everyone's memory. You had imagined him hypnotizing the men to forget, the ape to do his bidding. You had guessed that, by questioning him, you strayed too near the truth. But you had not imagined, *could not* have imagined, this.

"Erik was my first success," Dr. Mirakle is saying. "He has been with me since the beginning. The others are more recent successes."

"Successes?" the word seems to catch in your throat, barely manages to leave your mouth as you struggle, feeling the very edges of what it must be like to just give up, to go mad.

"Man is an impure, contradictory creature," Dr. Mirakle replies. "The 'highest animal,' yes? But he tries at all turns to suppress his animal side, and instead he turns to drugs, to drink. Animals do not suffer from angst. They are not vengeful, spiteful, cruel. Only men are. Only men kill each other to no purpose, and drug themselves to dull the pain of living. And yet, within each man lives a beast, an animal essence, pure and unencumbered by man's miseries and yearnings. You believe I have killed these people, but I have set them free!"

As he speaks, you're struggling with your bonds, working your wrist back and forth almost mechanically, your mind desperately scrabbling to process what you now know. Is it possible? Is one of the animals in those cages really Deidre? Your eyes slide across them, and your gaze catches the glance of the panther, and do you see, in those yellow eyes, some vestige, some spark of the



woman you think you might have loved?

You have no plan, as you pull your hand free of the manacle. No idea what you'll do with your liberty, with the next few seconds, with the rest of your life. Just as your hand slips its bond, you hear Detective Laughton's tread on the stairs, his trance apparently broken during Dr. Mirakle's soliloquy.

Surprised, Dr. Mirakle turns and fires before he has even seen. The bullet strikes Detective Laughton in the stomach, and you hear him make a sound like a bleating sheep. Without thinking, without time to think, you rush toward him and Dr. Mirakle, seeing your movement, turns to fire on you. But Erik is faster, is already moving to intercept you, and Dr. Mirakle's bullet strikes him instead. He stumbles and collapses at your feet with a whimpering, deflating sound.

Dr. Mirakle stares, at Erik and then at the gun in his hand. "What have you done?" he asks. You're already running as the gun raises again to follow you, already going to do the only thing you can think of to do as you throw the lever that opens the big iron cages.

The gun roars again, and you feel a blast of heat in your leg and you fall, but your work is already done.

Dr. Mirakle is right, animals aren't vengeful. But the animals in the cages lack Erik's loyalty to their maker, and as soon as their prisons are open they all rush for the stairs. Dr. Mirakle is terrified now, mad, and he fires wildly at them as they charge. The bear, ignoring his desperate shots, brushes him aside with a blow that lays him open and smashes him against the basement wall like a broken toy.

Erik, wounded but not yet dead, throws himself in the way of his master's killers. He catches the front legs of the wolf as it pounces, and they go down together in a frenzy of blood and fur, but the fight cannot last. Erik is wounded, and in seconds the wolf raises its bloody muzzle and follows the others to the stairs. Only the panther stops at the foot and turns back, looks once at you where you lay on the floor. Then she too, is gone.

The rest becomes a blur. Dimly, you remember crawling to Detective Laughton's side and finding him alive but unconscious. You remember the police arriving, though you don't remember what you tell them. It doesn't really matter. As far as they're concerned, Dr. Mirakle's collection of human skins and his now-absent menagerie are simply two different halves of his clearly fractured psyche, the unrelated eccentricities of a lunatic.

Detective Laughton must suspect that something more than murder went on there that night, but he never asks you about it. You give up criminology, and though your family is obviously disappointed and confused, Detective Laughton rests his hand on your shoulder and nods, as though he understands.

Throughout it all, and for the rest of your days, it's the backward glance of those yellow eyes that haunts you. You keep in touch with Deidre's family, and they move on, and they never see her again, and you never tell them what you know, or think you know. You think about it every day, though you try to forget. It's there in every crowd, in every handshake. Even when you're an old man, retired and with a bad heart, you still can't help but wonder, when you look at yourself in the mirror every night, what sort of beast is staring back at you, waiting.

# Ronnie Jackson and the Rainbow Lights

Evan Morgan Williams

*This selection is paired with “Masque of the Red Death”*

The stone walls of St. Peter’s Academy enclosed no sanctuary. When you crossed from gritty street to gleaming flagstone—the iron gate clanging behind you—you merely swapped one hell for another. None of us growing up outside those walls aspired to get in, and when the Monsignor’s charity did lure a few of us punks through the gate—ham dinners, winter coats, sewing classes for girls, boxing for boys—we only aspired to get out again. Discipline of the mind, body, and soul was the curriculum: stern, austere, edifying discipline. I remember doing time on a cold marble bench before a stained-glass window of red, thick, lightless glass. I had been sent to the bench to contemplate contrition, but I only wondered what lay beyond the window, and I clenched my twitching fists and imagined punching through. Maybe that was the point: in four years, I grew from guttersnipe to full-ride scholar bound for Notre Dame. I had delved the deepest halls, plumbed the deepest truths, and I emerged into the light with the confidence to thrive—I could still throw a wicked hook if I had to—and an ambition to put the mean streets behind me.

Years later, I wanted the same for my daughter, and I got it. I met her at the gate every day, my towncar idling at the curb, Elizabeth crossing the dirty sidewalk in patent leather flats that clicked with each determined step; she carried herself with a graceful, erect walk, her gaze serene with a secret that I called joy. I was grateful. During the fundraising campaign, I opened my wallet wide. Let them etch my name on a plaque on a marble bench!

There had always been a graduation party; the Monsignor honored four years of labor with cake and watery punch in the cafeteria. Platitudes were toasted with dixie cups that you tossed back, then crumpled, then threw away. It was Steve Tucci who beckoned me from my folding chair and pointed me toward an exclusive gathering, a festive one, he promised, down a corridor through an unmarked door. My generosity apparently had bought me a ticket

into a fold I had not known about before. Forget the watery punch, he whispered. At this party, liquor flowed. Men in suits eyed women over the rim of a martini glass. Dresses fit tighter, the hems higher too. What passed for truth was a buzz of voices, a swirl of cologne and sweet perfume. The party wanted me, he said. It needed me.

I glanced around the cafeteria. My daughter, Elizabeth, was lost in the dixie-cup crowd. Good. I let Steve Tucci lead me down the hall into the unloving labyrinth of stone.

Tucci was everybody's pal, the captain who called the blitz, the first guy to get his license, the first guy to nail a girl, the first guy to earn six figures. He wore a sport-jacket over an open-collared shirt. He put an arm around my shoulder as we walked, and he reeled off stories from the streets whose names still triggered a tightness in my jaw, a clench in my fists, an alertness in my eyes. I did not mark the route down those dark and vaulted halls, did not count the twists and turns, noting only the doors thundering shut behind us. If I had walked these exact halls as a student, it was on the way to a lonely bench, my head down. I had had to fight for everything.

I said, "Forget the old days, Tucci."

"Dude. You got to remember before you can forget. That's what I say."

A pair of oak doors groaned open, and Steve Tucci waved me into a courtyard I had never seen. It was walled by the rectory, the church, the parish center, and the school. Steve Tucci took a position on the lawn, his arms wide. I followed.

Ginkgo trees quivered above a gurgling fountain. Iron lamps cast a flickering glow. The lamps invited us down a path whose every turn revealed a novelty: a birdbath, a sculpture, a shrub molded into a topiary pose. Crickets protested our presence by going silent, but I reminded myself that I belonged: cake and lemonade had not paid for themselves. We came to a low, wrought-iron archway, laden with ivy, bearing the school motto, which I knew by heart, and which I whispered as I stooped to clear the words, *Ascend to grace*.

The pathway contorted into a maze. The Stations of the Cross marked the way, and at each station, beneath a bronze figurine of Jesus in the progress of his pain, a table set with white linen offered a new elixir, sweet on the tongue, dizzying to the mind. A wisp of frankincense tugged us along, truth on the fickle wind.

We passed a plot of fresh-clipped grass. Marble headstones bore forgotten names. Now it was rosebushes scenting the air. At an iron gate, Steve Tucci fished a key from his pocket and ushered us through. He closed the gate behind us, blocking the path of return, the click of tumblers plain to hear. He faced me and said, "We are in while the world is out."

My hands clenched.

A crowd emerged from the shadows. They cheered for me. Steve gripped my shoulder and handed me a brimming martini. I clutched the glass. He bellowed a toast, but his words beyond "To us!" were lost in a chorus of clinking.

Spilling from the crowd, a black-haired woman pressed her glass, lipstick on its rim, to mine. I smiled at her. She melted into the crowd, a crow into a swirling flock. Steve nodded at me. Forget four years at St. Peter's: tonight another truth would be spoken, a deeper initiation, words whispered on the skin. *Agape and Eros*, the Monsignor had intoned so long ago. Good and evil, light and dark. Memory and forgetting. Gin and vermouth. Which was which, I could not distinguish anymore.

Beyond the walls, a siren rushed by, wailing on its way to a dirty crisis in a dirty world. Red light flashed in the branches of the ginkgo trees, then faded away. Farther off, gunfire popcorned. I did not care. I was a St. Peter man. I was successful. I had done my time. I had come straight from the office in a towncar, still idling at the curb; I wore gold cufflinks and a Swiss watch; I had not loosened my tie, but I loosened it now. From the nearest Station of the Cross, I grabbed a fresh cocktail that smelled of amaretto. Treasury bonds at six percent could take care of themselves.

The Gnostics had been burned at the stake for saying the spirit lay within. On this night the spirit surely lay within this crowd.

First to greet me was Darcy Castagna, my high-school girl, lovely in a purple cocktail dress, teasing me that I had forgotten her married name and that she hadn't been Castagna for twenty years. Like hell, I had forgotten. Her kiss lingered on my cheek, her lips sticky with liqueur. Then Jeff Di Carlo, a realtor, gave me his fat handshake, smoothed his tie, fidgeted with his pinky ring, and told me that the 'hood was going to townhouses; I asked for a piece of the action, but he nudged me and said that the real action was within these walls. I met my ex-wife Patrice (in the cemetery!) She wore a white dress, red belt, red lipstick and red nails; I allowed myself to look her up and down, then settled on her eyes. She nodded at my glass. "How much?"

I replied, "Enough."

She spotted my wedding ring and took my hand. "You're still wearing that thing?"

I made a fist and said, "I might need it someday." We laughed, although I suppose we laughed at different things.

A clatter of voices made me turn: the new graduates had tailed us into the garden. They seemed to have their own key. The girls wore spring dresses, the boys wore Sunday suits and ties. They threaded among tombstones in a game of tag. The game led deeper into the garden, and now it was the adults who followed their lead, laughing down the path. Try skipping and prancing while holding a martini glass! It can be done!

Don't let me forget my little girl. I had come to the farthest quadrant of the garden, breathless and dizzy, when Elizabeth scooted up and kissed my cheek. She seemed taller, but that was just the heels. I smiled at her. The one person in life who made me happy smelled like soda-pop. She had twisted her hair in a chignon, she had shiny lipstick, she had 800 on the math portion of the SAT, and she had admission to a college far away. I took her hand. Elizabeth giggled. This part of the garden was too deep for street noise; no sirens flashed in the canopy of gingko trees. One wall featured a single window of blood-red stained glass; maybe a bench of contrition lay within. I didn't want to remember; this wasn't a night to

wonder what lay in darkness. I marveled at the light on Elizabeth's skin. I touched her cheek. Obediently she smiled, and I marveled at her smile as well.

Elizabeth's necklace held a gold cross. What was the source of the light that sparkled off that gold? I hooked the necklace with my finger and pulled it over her collarbone. I let go.

Elizabeth brought her hands to her necklace and fixed the cross. "It's just jewelry. All the girls..." She stared at me and said, "If you have to ask..."

I said, "Very well. And easy on the lipstick."

"Dad!" her voice twisted, but she smiled.

Thus I found happiness in the secret garden in the heart of the hardest place I had ever known. I remembered walking past the walls of St. Peter as child, dragging my mittenless fingers along the cold mortar; if you were jumped by a gang for the bottle you were bringing home to your dad, no door in these walls would open to take you in. In the winter, you huddled close to the walls and begged for change from passersby, but the walls only caused the wind to double back on you. And when you were hungry, what could you scrape from stone? You struck the walls in anger, and mute indifference was your reply. Then, one day, you were taken in, but only to a world just as chilling, the interior walls as hard against your fists as those outside. To think that this garden had been thriving all along, sheltered from malice and hunger and pain! At each new Station of the Cross, I received good tidings, handshakes from the men, kisses from the women. The garden of St. Peter's Academy was a place of unassailable joy, and I was within, and my baby was too. Her pretty dress. Her pretty face. Happiness could not have been so easy, but I, downing another glass, so wanted it to be. Steve Tucci could have whispered in my ear with every elixir he placed in my twitching hands, "Forget."

I cried out, "But you just told me to remember!"

"Remember what, Dad?" Elizabeth tilted her head and frowned.

I blinked. I said, “Nothing. Off you go.” I set her free.

But remembering and forgetting are tricky foes. Beneath the red murky window, I had a vantage from which to scan the entire garden, and I noticed the absence of one. A boy, a bully, a dumb punk: Ronnie Jackson. I knew what prompted the thought: a party that walled in joy also walled out everything that wasn’t joy. By barricading against your fears, you named them. Ronnie Jackson: I saw his absent shape in outline. I felt deflated. Honestly, I wished he were here so I could drag him to a corner of the garden and mash his face with my fist, toast my vengeance with a fresh martini, and so conclude a story of pain. But while the fountains babbled and the perfumed crowd floated through the garden and Elizabeth hooked arms with Steve Tucci’s girls and skipped as well as high heels would allow, I recalled that midway through our junior year, Ronnie Jackson had vanished. He was never mentioned again. What had happened to him? Had everyone else forgotten? I had seemed to resurrect him every time I roamed the halls and reflected with relief that he was gone. Ronnie Jackson. What did you do with a truth you knew so well? Did you never utter it again? Did you wander another path, reach for another glass? Relief was small, my fingers clenched around the stem of my glass, the surface of my cocktail shimmering.

Scanning the garden, I realized that my gaze, like my thoughts, had become twisted: the murky red of the stained-glass window flickered and flashed as a siren passed; the window therefore marked not an inner chamber but an outside wall. And against that murky red glass, a shape began to play. Flickers of light revealed a silhouette, clawing the wall of St. Peter as though seeking a way in. The form was too faint to make out—Plato’s shadows upon the wall of the cave. I hated it. I had paid my dues to be on this side of the wall. I was a fighter, god damn it. No one crashes my party. I drew back my fist and aimed my trademark right hook for the figure in the window.

Before I could punch through, a hand on my shoulder guided me back into the happy throng. Steve Tucci. I flinched from the touch, and my hand clenched so tight that it broke the stem of my



martini glass.

Tucci gripped more firmly.

“There’s nothing out there. Nothing we need.”

“Tucci, do you remember Ronnie Jackson?”

“Never heard of him.”

At the nearest bar, set beneath an arbor, the parents made a tight crowd, laughing and clinking glasses. Steve and I wove in, and he gave me a new colored drink and a smile. If I did not pursue my question, it was because the babble of the crowd blotted out one truth with another one more balming. What were they talking about now? The playoffs? Pretty women? The way it used to be? The way they wanted it to be.

Along the wall, four young men in black leather jackets were plugging cables into guitars and microphones. They had rigged a machine for casting rainbows of light upon the lawn. They moved slow and sullen around their equipment, and they did not look up. Their cigarette smoke was the one acrid note in a perfume sea. I might have complained that they did not belong, but I knew they couldn’t have been the first interlopers, nor would they be the last; a janitor would have to pick up trash after this party, a gardener would have to manicure the trampled lawns. When I was a child, my mom had scrubbed floors in a high-rise that never let her through the front door, just the back, the mop in her hand being her only pass. Now a young man in t-shirt and jeans paced with a microphone before the band. His eyes took in the teenage girls who had gathered there. He sucked down water from a plastic bottle, his head tipped back, his neck pulsing. He dropped the bottle and picked up a tambourine and tapped it against his hip, the band easing into *Baby Please Don’t Go*. Smooth and low, a whisper over bass and snare. The kids edged nearer. Steve led me to a stool at the end of the bar where I got a good view. The band burst loudly, full guitar and cymbals. My drink tasted like apple and pear.

Steve pointed to the band, and I had to lean in to hear his words. “Believe it or not, they went to St. Peter’s five years ago. I got them for free. The dude owes me.”

I said, “Owes for what?”

Steve said, “It’s nothing,” but of course it was something, and I did not ask again. I gulped my cocktail and congratulated myself for knowing when something and nothing were one and the same.

The music played, and the stone walls of St. Peter’s Academy enclosed the sounds. Could anyone trudging down the mean streets hear? Did they desire the joy we had? Who cares! I was inside, my baby was inside, and the only thing that had ever hurt me was lost beyond the walls. Where was goddamned Ronnie Jackson? What gross figure had paced beyond the red stained glass window and cast the murky silhouette? It should not have mattered. But my senses were dulled, and I was doomed to dwell on fear and pain. If you showed me a statue chiseled from stone, I would imagine every mallet blow, and I would see not the final form but the shards that had been chipped away.

I remembered a fight in a murky corridor. Ronnie Jackson had me backed against a wall, swinging his algebra book like a cudgel, but my fists flew just as hard. One of us said—or maybe it was Steve Tucci who said it, watching with smug satisfaction, or maybe it was the Monsignor, pulling us apart and marching us to the benches—“There can’t be two punks in the world.”

The kids drifted in front of the band. They swayed and shuffled, calling out to the lead singer, who paced at their edge, eyes closed, smacking his tambourine with his palm. Sweat soured the cool air. Steve Tucci’s girls were in front of the singer, and Elizabeth was between them, laughing, sipping soda-pop, holding her plastic cup away from her flowered dress, rubbing bare shoulders with the Tucci girls. Little gold crosses flew. With her free hand she loosened her hair from the chignon and let it fall.

In the middle of a throbbing song, the band held a sudden resting beat, and the colored lights died. Silence soldiered on, and the party was suspended in darkness. Joy was suspended too. I stood to find my girl, but I stumbled from my stool. The light from the blood red window held sway. The flickering shape clawed at the glass. If anyone saw it, they did not show, just whooped with

glee when the lights burst on and the band struck a loud note that prodded everyone to dance again. Eyes were wide from darkness.

I did not dance. I wove through the crowd, adults and children condensed around the band. Di Carlo nudged my ribs with his fat elbow. I put my face to his ear and asked him about Ronnie Jackson, and he shrugged and fidgeted with his pinky ring. Darcy Castagna kissed my cheek and said she loved me so. I asked her about Ronnie Jackson, and she said, “Who?” I chased down Tucci and asked him again. He said something about a MILF and slipped away. I tried to grab Patrice’s arm, but she bobbed with the crowd. I leaned closer and said, “Where’s Ronnie Jackson?” She made a sour face and said, “Arriving is not asking.” I said, “And who takes care of this beautiful garden?” Patrice closed her eyes and swayed to the music. She said, “You can bring Elizabeth over on Sunday. I have a date, and I want her to meet him.” I yelled over the band, “My mom scrubbed floors for a living, you know...” Patrice swayed. When I came upon the black-haired woman, lipstick on the rim of her glass, I pointed to the stained glass window. I leaned close. “Did you see that shape?” She put her arm around my waist and slid it down. She pressed close. I could feel her heat. Her lips grazed my ear, and she said, “I see the wind in the tops of the trees.”

Elizabeth and the Tucci girls were dancing barefoot, bumping their hips and clapping their hands. Their hair swung in their faces. The singer jumped out and bumped his hips with theirs.

My feeling about the night turned to disgust. I wanted to leave with my girl. Grab her hand and leave. The shape that paced beyond the blood-red window: better we should face it than stay within these walls. Maybe I had drunk too much, and maybe the shape had been my own pathetic reflection all along, an inner demon seeking not the way in, but rather the way out, and not a demon but my better nature. I had a town car waiting at the curb. I could pay the driver extra to drive Elizabeth and me around the city, and we’d talk of truth that was never uttered here.

Elizabeth slid over to me. Her sticky hands took my arm, and she asked to dance with me. What did you say to the girl with

fruity perfume and shiny hair you used to comb with your hands? You said, “No.” You said, “Find your shoes. We’re going to leave.” Elizabeth’s face was still and solid. She shuffled off, as if find her shoes, but she did not come back. The crowd enveloped her and turned its back to me. I knew the crowd had been listening to us—the ear is drawn to truth as the eye is drawn to a flickering light. The glares I got over shoulders! Fools! I had enough money to pay for this masquerade, and the will to choose not to, and I had enough raw fight in my arms to push through the crowd and yank my girl away. I bellowed, “No!” and my voice cracked with a mix of courage and fear called damn recklessness, but I felt as though I had spoken truth for the first time.

The band stopped. The lights went up. The stained glass window became a flat, thick, reddish brown. Nothing flickered on the other side of the window, but on this side of the window prevailed a dull quiet that amounted to as little. A candle’s light, when it reaches into darkness, dies.

Steve Tucci stomped toward me. The crowd made room for his wide arms, which were raised into dukes. “I could outbox you then, and I’ll outbox you now.” He glared.

I circled around him. “Where is that punk? Where is he?”

Steve Tucci said, “I’m looking at him.”

“What happened to Ronnie Jackson?”

He said, “Those things just have a way of working out on their own.” He stepped close and clenched my arm. He said, “On the other hand, sometimes the way out needs to be shown.”

I shook him off. “You need someone to be the punk with something to prove.”

Steve blinked. “Come to think of it, I do remember Ronnie Jackson. I remember him kicking your ass. The point is that he was gone, and you were glad enough not to ask at the time. Let it be so again.”

I tossed down my glass and raised my fists. I bent into a stance.

Tucci said, “You drive out a nail with another nail.”

The first punch was mine. A solid right to his eye. But Steve got me worse in the jaw. My head spun. He always could take me. I went to my knees. Steve’s voice was low and close, and his hands yanked the lapels of my suit. “Fuck is wrong with you, ingrate? You move on. Happy? Good. Now, how about a drink?”

My last clear thought was to weigh which might be worse, to make a punk disappear, or to ask about it later. I mumbled through swollen lips, “The shape in the window?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. God damn you. Some people just want to have a good time.” He dropped me, and I staggered to one knee. Everyone in the crowd was watching. Di Carlo. Patrice. Castagna. Forget about the punk who had never shown his face; the one person plainly not belonging to this crowd was I. Even Elizabeth belonged. Steve’s girls were leading her toward the band. She was not serene, as I had hoped, just placidly empty-headed, and St. Peter’s Academy had taken her in, not as shelter but rather in the sense of duping her. Not me. Someone had to stand out in the cold, right? Someone had to be forgotten, never spoken of again. Here was my mistake: the only qualification to get inside was to be offered a hand, but, more importantly, to take it, to let oneself be shown graciously the way, the simple, easy, thoughtless way. My fists were always clenched, and my thoughts clenched too.

I staggered back to the bar, found one water bottle floating in a trough of ice that had melted hours ago. I drank it all and waited for my head to clear. The band thinned down to the singer with an acoustic guitar and the drummer with a sleepy brush on snare. The rest of the band was smoking cigarettes down a garden path, showing the kids how to hold those things and blow the smoke away. Steve and Jeff and the guys were sitting on tombstones, tipping back beers. The women were walking the maze, calling out each other’s dreamy names and laughing like children. I sat on a garden bench away from the colored lights, away from the arbor, away from everything to which I did not belong. The singer was singing “Lilac Wine.” His head was down. Was this singer a good

man? Was he a leech? He had ground his hips with the girls'. Was he just another punk who owed Tucci a favor? The rainbow light was blue, then red, then green.

The Monsignor appeared! He paraded down the pathway, a lilt to his step, swinging incense, blessing everyone he passed. He bumped fists with Steve Tucci. He poured himself a goblet of wine at a bar and lilted on.

The Monsignor came to me. "I remember you. Sitting on a bench again, right where you belong. You want the real truth, sonny? Go trade some bonds. One is as good as another, right?" The Monsignor drifted on. When he came to what remained of the band—the singer was alone—the Monsignor stood in the space where the crowd had gathered to dance in joy, and he spun around, his censer swinging wide. The coals of frankincense glowed and burst into flame.

The beautiful woman with dark hair came beside me. She smiled. She swayed her hips, tilting her head to the music and mouthing the words to the singer's song. I stood and shuffled close to her. Her hands slid around my hips, and she swayed. Then she walked away, down a path I had not seen before.

I said, "Where are you going?"

She giggled and said, "Silly, there's always more. This isn't even the real party. That hasn't even begun. But don't expect an invitation." She walked beneath an archway. *Ascend to grace*. She had not offered me her hand. She was gone.

The route out of the garden was easy! It was direct. As a maze unfolds to a straight line, the innermost twists and turns of the path seemed to lead me directly outside. A simple iron side gate squeaked open and I passed through. Forty towncars idled along the curb. Bored drivers stood alongside, sharing cigarettes and arguing with girlfriends on company phones. The wind blew. The cigarettes glowed.

The gate clanged shut behind me.

My home was across the city, but I decided to walk. Ronnie

Jackson was out here. I knew I would never find him, but I would breathe the same desolate air as he. Even if I did cross his path, though, I would find no joy in striking him down. No settling of a score. I needed him as he was, someone to be more of a punk than I.

Taking a guess at which towncar was mine, I told the driver he was free to go. I reached for my wallet to pay the man and realized it was gone. The beautiful woman must have lifted it from me. Who was the punk now?

I had no choice but to go back in, where they were already forgetting my name. Perhaps, when you were humiliated, the only sensible thing was to go back for more. I stood before the murky red stained glass window, and I saw darkness, and then the woman's shape, dancing, or was it Elizabeth's shape, or was it my eager reflection all over again? I have said I could make a good fist: I pulled it back. Let one truth mix with another. The wall between two worlds was thin, and I drove my fist into the glass, my knuckles charging through, and if truth existed at all, it was swallowed in the noise that echoed against the stone walls, the beautiful crash, and then the rush of beautiful perfume.

# Night of Darkness, Flames of Blood

Josh Gauthier

*This selection is paired with “Masque of the Red Death”*

After all I have seen, it remains strange that the sole difference between an eccentric and a lunatic is the amount of money possessed by each. Having made his fortune in banking before making another fortune in chemical waste disposal, Prospero Quast is of the first category.

Five months ago, after noting what he called the “unrest” growing in our city, Quast secluded himself in his ninety-storied monstrosity named the Imperial Tower. Among the upper class, Quast is known to offer an open hand to anyone he considers a friend. As such, Imperial Tower has become something of a refuge for the rich and famous—a place for them to revel in their status and escape the concerns of the world outside.

But admittance to the Imperial does not come easily, and it does not come cheap. With time, Quast’s parties have grown longer. They began as a way to pass an evening. Then a day. Then a week. It is expected that the next will last ten days.

And this time, I secured my invitation.

Even with what I have heard, the sight of Quast’s revelry suite surprises me. It ranges over seven levels of the Imperial. Each floor offers its own decorative theme, its own amusements. They are connected in a way that threatens to turn the mind in circles. Staircases run from the fourth level of the suite to the second, from the second to the fifth. One elevator does not stop on the sixth level. Another elevator only reaches the first and the fifth. It is a maze of diversions, and Quast’s friends throw themselves into it with glee.

No one asks my name as I linger at the edge of the first level. Quast has declared this party a masquerade. It is a game these luminaries enjoy playing. I smooth the creases of the white suit I had tailored specially for this event. My mask as well is white, simple. The perception of anonymity has strange effects on people. It is a



fact I see playing out around me.

An aging actress straddles a state senator on a couch in the corner. She is married. He is separated. No one looks their way. At the bar, the District Attorney swallows a handful of pills. No one acknowledges who he is. They play the game. As do I.

The District Attorney shuffles away as I sit on one of the barstools. The bartender has black hair gathered in a ponytail that hangs halfway down his back. The tattoo of Imperial Incorporated on his forehead marks him as an employee with a lifetime contract.

“What’ll you have?” he asks.

“Do you know how to make a bloody vengeance?”

A frown flickers at the corners of his mouth. His eyes meet mine. He hesitates.

“I do,” he answers finally.

“Then I will have one.”

He turns around to mix tomato juice and five types of liquor in a glass. When it is ready, he slides the drink toward me with a napkin beside it. He leaves immediately to talk with patrons at the far end of the bar.

I lift the napkin to find a memory stick beneath. I slip the stick into my pocket. I taste the drink. It is vile. I leave it on the bar.

The nearest staircase leads from the electric blue glare of the first level into the dim purple glow of the second. Purple lasers slash designs through the gloom. Black lights illuminate everything, casting the scene into obscure silhouettes and lurid phantasms. Black pits stare from shimmering masks. Grotesque performers writhe on elevated platforms. Two conjoined, mostly-human forms dance beside the bar, their internal wiring exposed in clumps. Near them, an animatronic half-goat, half-woman offers assorted drugs to guests. It is not always clear which performers are human, which are machine, which are both. Near me, a young woman with a deformed face and no arms hangs from a loop of broad ribbon attached to the ceiling. Her eyes are closed. People

throw money that she cannot catch. They leave the money on the floor where it falls. I recognize the type of burns that have deformed her.

“Doesn’t she look hideous?” a voice asks in delight.

I turn to the speaker. The man is thin, skeletal, with sunken cheeks and hair so thick it could only be artificial. His suit is an orange color that glows far too brightly under these lights. His half-mask is that of a young girl—exaggerated with large eyes and full cheeks.

“There are many terrible things in this world,” I tell him. “Only some of them are on display here tonight.”

He has been watching the woman. “Sorry, what was that?”

“Nothing of consequence.”

“Here, let me get you a drink.” He waves at a mechanical waitress who glides across the carpet. “What’ll you have? Tequila? Whisky?”

“Nothing,” I tell him.

From within her chest, the waitress produces a glass. She opens the tip of her left index finger and, from it, fills the glass with scotch.

“I looked out the window earlier,” I tell the man as he drains his glass. He chokes a little on the drink.

“How’s that?”

“The window. I peeled back the covering to look outside.”

“Why would you go and do something like that?”

“To see what is happening,” I tell him. “Would you like to know what I saw?”

“That sounds lovely. But I think I need another drink.” He walks away.

I turn back to the girl on the ribbon. Her eyes are open now. They are milky white. She cannot see me, but she can sense when I

stand beside her. “The hour is nearly struck,” I tell her.

“May it strike true,” she answers. Her voice is a rasp, as damaged as her face, as her dancer’s body. She twists in the ribbons, twirls, elicits a few cheers from crowd. Her bare foot brushes down my arm. I turn my hand, open it, and receive a computer chip between my fingers. No one recognizes the exchange.

“Make them pay,” she tells me.

“For all their sins,” I answer.

She wraps herself in the ribbon, rising up, away from the crowd.

The next staircase takes me to the fifth level which is decorated all in white and illuminated with such violence that the people within wear mirrored shades over their eyes. I do not linger, but take the next staircase. This goes only to the third level which is dimly lit and decorated entirely in shades of green. This is wrong. The blueprints provided to me were inaccurate. The mistake is an inconvenience.

The servers on this level are human. They are clothed only in scraps of leather. The leather appears real, but the illegality of this fact goes unacknowledged by the present company. The electric tattoos of the servers illuminate patterns of vines across their arms, their stomachs, their legs. Lights ripple along the designs—ripple, shimmer, fade.

“A cheer for our host,” calls a voice. That is when I see Quast on the far side of the room. The crowd cheers.

He gives a wave. His thin voice barely carries over the chanting coming from the speakers. “Good people,” he says. “Eat and drink your fill. Embrace your fantasies, for today is all we have. Make the most of it.”

The crowd obeys with gusto as Quast disappears into an elevator. I brush a hand against the arm of a passing girl. When she turns to me, I see she is young, maybe eighteen. And the birthmark on her forehead—she is the popstar—the newest one-hit-wonder.

“What do you want?” she asks.

“Your name is Cyrilla, correct?”

She frowns at my breach of decorum. “I don’t know who that is.”

“If you insist. Do you know the quickest way to the seventh level?”

“Why do you want to go there?”

“Do you know or not?”

She sways a little as she tries to focus her eyes on my face. “That elevator.” She points. “I don’t like it up there.”

“I am not going for my amusement.”

“Then why go?”

I leave her behind.

I do not like elevators. They are too contained, too restrictive. But this one opens at the press of a button, and it does connect to the seventh level. I step inside. I roll back my sleeve. The display in my arm tells me it is five minutes to midnight.

The door opens on the seventh level.

The room is deserted, and it is not hard to see why. The ceiling is painted black. The floor is black tile. Black curtains cover every section of wall. There are no lights, no lasers. Instead, iron sculptures hold bowls of projected fire. These bowls shine red—red as blood, red as death. As the light flickers across the walls, it casts everything in shades of violence.

At the far side of the room, I see my prize. The great grandfather clock, black as its surroundings, towers from floor to ceiling. I cross the empty floor to reach it. There is no music here, and every footstep is like a cry of pain. The front panel of the clock is sealed but slides open when I insert the memory stick specially programmed with overrides for every lock in the building. Behind the panel is a computer console. The console connects to the clock, the clock to the building. It is my first goal. *Password*, it prompts. I slide the computer chip into the console. *Accepted*, says the screen.

*Override enabled.*

The program on the chip runs automatically. As the clock hands swing to midnight, the chip does the work it was programmed to do. Below me, I know the music has fallen silent. The lights of the party have been replaced with the red glare of emergency lighting. The security doors at every exit from the revelry suite have locked, providing the seclusion the rich and famous played at possessing.

The iron knell of the clock strikes midnight.

I am halfway across the room when the elevator door slides open. It is Quast with four members of his security team. They hold stun batons as they rush me.

I slip the bone knife from my sleeve. The security forces and I dance together. They are poorly trained, clumsy. I am not. I twirl, lunge, glide. The four men fall to the tile. The elevator door has closed. Frantic, Quast enters his override code into the panel. He is not fast enough. I seize his shoulder and pin him to the wall.

“What do you want?” he asks.

“Justice.” He does not understand. “I have inserted an override that will open your system to the outside world. Your jury has been provided evidence of your crimes.”

“What jury?”

With my free hand, I pull the mask from my face. In the light of the fires it is scarlet; it is the color of blood. Quast’s eyes widen and I smile. I know what he sees—the scars, the chemical burns that twist my face into a nightmare visage.

“You see now?” I ask him. “The chemicals you mishandled have become our burden to bear. But you cannot outrun your sins.”

I fling him to the floor. As he lands, I grip the nearest curtain and tear it from the ceiling. Behind the curtain is a window. The window looks out on our city. Maybe half the buildings have power. Fires burn unchecked. Crowds flood the streets, carrying torches, carrying weapons—the scarred, the dispossessed, the mighty.

“Look on your work, Prospero.”

Quast rises to his knees and looks on the scene before him. I want him to weep. I want him to feel our pain.

His face is pale, washed red in the glow of the fire. He turns wide eyes to me—eyes that hold anger, hold terror.

“I—” He starts to object to my charges.

“Look outside!” I advance on him. He turns back to the window—to the fires and the mob. Watching, he tries to speak. “I didn’t—”

I bury my knife in his spinal column and he is dead as he falls.

I insert the memory stick into the console beside the elevator. The door opens and I descend to the next level. The elevator is mirrored inside. In the emergency lights, my suit is red. It is spattered with blood. The spots are nearly black against the scarlet hue. My face, scarred, wild, might scare even me—if I was still capable of fear.

I draw another bone knife as the door opens onto the sixth level. The violet furnishings are dull under the red lights that now illuminate all seven levels of the suite. People stand unmoving—afraid and perhaps confused. They draw back from me but do not flee. Like animals, they are unsure how to respond to an unknown threat. I look on my prey and smile. Here in the red darkness, I am death, and I hold dominion over all.

# The Ebony Clock

E. M. Eastick

*This selection is paired with “Masque of the Red Death”*

Share with me now the pleasure of dreams,  
Of decadent deeds and shameful extremes.  
Celebrate lustfulness, drink through the fear.  
Shadows will guide you through labyrinths here.

Come with me now: the fires are burning,  
Evil is preying on empathy churning.  
Pass through the rooms of magical hue.  
Reflect in the light that reflects onto you.

See in the window: your eyes open wide,  
Flat and abhorrent and rotten with pride.  
Drown out the music that comes from within.  
Fill up the void with scandal and sin.

Walk with me now to the chamber of black,  
Where memories lurk and morals attack.  
Dance in the flame light, revel in red,  
Laughing and singing and mocking the dead.

Pause for a moment, the clock mourns the hour.  
It warbles and warns of its treacherous power.  
But Time and apologies never can save,  
The flawed and the damned from an odious grave.

Go with me now, the fire is dead,  
The guests have retreated back into your head.  
Lie down to slumber and bury your past,  
Now the ebony clock is quiet at last.

# The Plague

Brian Malachy Quinn

*This piece is paired with “Masque of the Red Death”*





# From Horn to Horn

Alexandra Renwick

*This selection is paired with “The Pit and the Pendulum”*

Edgar Allan, with  
your narration unreliable  
your cryptographs secret  
your Rowena reworked  
your spectacles green  
your cat black  
your bug gold  
your Death red  
your portrait oval  
your palace haunted  
your burial premature  
your letters purloined and  
your city in the sea—

maybe we’ll just call it mesmerism,  
a Valdemarian sort of hypnagogia,  
knowing whoever slayeth  
the dragon shall win, shall win  
or die penniless, alone  
and in a stranger’s clothes

# A Brush With Death

Adam Knight

*This selection has been paired with “The Oval Portrait”*

It has been my life’s goal—nay, my life’s very purpose—to create a work of art so grand, so perfect, so richly infused with the breath of life, that it transcends the mere scribblings of lesser artists. From a young age I painted, never content with my work, never satisfied. Oh, I could create a likeness of an image. Any fool could create a likeness; a dog with a pencil could do so much, with proper training. But I was going to create art that had the essence of its subject, that was more real than the original. So when I met my lovely Victoria, whose auburn tresses framed a rosy countenance, full of life, I knew I had found the perfect subject for my perfect art. Her better could not be found elsewhere in this world, or indeed even in the heavens, and so I wed her, that she might remain under my control for the duration of my work in the recesses of the remotest tower in my home.

During those first days of composing, how urgently and deftly I worked! How my feverish hands shook as the pencil scraped the canvas. Once the sketch showed the suggestion of form, I graced the surface with the first blushes of color. Though I had, in my life, painted many thousands of subjects, never before had I captured one so perfectly, so completely, as I did my Victoria. With every brushstroke, the painting came closer to the reality of that vibrant woman I saw before me. I must confess, as time wore on, I found my affections for the painting increasing, and for my wife decreasing. And why should they not, for Victoria arrived in my life already perfect, whereas my painting was perfect by my doing alone.

In that artistic rapture, the icicles of time melted before the hot sun of my genius. The minutes and hours dripped away into days and weeks. I cannot recall how many meals I missed, how many late nights became early mornings. My Victoria was saintly, moving not an eyelash as I worked. Her love for me was profound, for she knew that her obedience was essential for me to capture that inner essence. Even when her harpy sister Elsa came to call, Victoria neither moved nor even twitched, for fear of disrupting my concentration. Elsa, as usual, crossed her arms, pursed her lips, and criticized Victoria’s con-

dition, stating that she looked unwell and needed rest. But she did not criticize my art, for she could not deny its exceeding quality.

Thus you must comprehend my reaction when Victoria began acting strangely, complaining of being tired, of feeling unloved. How could she feel unloved? Was the painting not the expression of my love? She accused me of loving the painting more than her, which would be mad indeed, had it not also been true. I flew into a rage, calling her every obscene name I knew in every language I knew, using my words to tear her spirit down and degrade her soul. Of course, I dared not harm her physically, for I needed that visage still unblemished for my painting. But as for her inner strength, her vitality, I knew that I had stolen the last of it. Elsa wept bitterly, proclaiming me a monster and a tyrant. I am no monster, for my soul is too sensitive, but from my tyranny has sprung things of genius.

But no matter. From then Victoria sat silently, neither speaking nor breathing as I finished my work. She never spoke because, I assumed, she was stinging from my reprobation. Days passed by as her countenance grew paler, her eyes dimmer. Finally, late one night after countless other days and nights had melted into one, the work was complete. Though my limbs were weak with hunger and my fingers ached with exhaustion, my mind surged with elation. A perfect painting! Indeed, the life that once filled Victoria seemed to glow instead inside the painting.

“This is indeed Life itself!” I thought, though now upon deeper reflection, as I sit in this dank dungeon, waiting for trial, I must’ve cried the words aloud. For when the neighbors ran over to inquire about the outcry, they gasped with horror upon seeing my Victoria sitting in her chair, stone dead. They summoned the constable, who placed me under arrest, as was his duty. The coroner declared that the cause of Victoria’s death was malnutrition due to neglect, but I, ah, only I, know the truth! That through the irrefutable magnificence of my art, I whisked Victoria’s soul from her mortal body and housed it for all eternity in the oval portrait!

# SoliTaire

Jamal H. Iqbal

*This selection is paired with “The Oval Portrait”*

She had halos for hats, his muse did. The top of her hands slightly matted, patent leather, with stars at the point her slim fingers joined the rest of her body, roped in lace. Down like soft transparent fur drooped gently to one side as she brought up her fanned cards just before she'd say, “*Gin.*” At the back, just over her shoulders were elephants—trunks curled, ivory teeth gleaming, rot all around—feasting on what appeared to be chunks of a feather boa round her neck.

“All right my dear, time for bed” Soli heard Matron Maneckshaw call out. “Now be a good man and brush your teeth ji” she said, sounding more and more like his mother as days passed by. Giving the fading portrait one final look of appraisal, Sohrabjee ‘Soli’ Modi, started to inch his way towards Room 23, Jasmine Wing, *Sir Jamshetji Bhabha Parsi Temperarium for the Golden Yeared*. Or simply ‘Bhabha Old Age Home’ (as the *coolies* that portered an inmate’s luggage on what was a one-way trip until that one final bundle of white was loaded into the municipal hearse) referred to it as.

He carefully put down his deck of vintage French playing cards; in front of the same portrait he'd been sneaking his monthly ration of Godiva on for a few years now. The chocolate treats sent by his niece Yasmeen, along with 450 rupees from his monthly ex-civil servant’s pension, sent by kind Mr. A P J Abdul Kalam, Hon. President of India.

The lady in the oval frame waved and kissed him good night before singing him three verses from *Que Sera Sera*, as the elephants magically formed the brass, strings and horns section. She “reminds me of mother too,” he mumbled as Matron’s tiny tear drop slid down the corner of her own cataracted eyes, keeping pace

with the drop of drool sliding down her patient's gaunt jawlines.

As Matron Maneckshaw wiped the saliva off his dentures, she couldn't help but wonder what 93 year-old Sohrabjee looked for in the torn, dusty lithograph of *Marilyn in Persia* one of the orderlies had stuck to the wall of the corridor outside Jasmine Wing decades ago. "17 years in this very armchair, five hours before morning prayers to one hour after sunset kasti," she reminded herself, "and still you wait for that fickle kiss, maro gentle Soli ji."

That night, as the *ghee* lamp illuminated Zarathustra's shrine in the Fire Temple nearby, Sohrabjee 'Soli' Modi lay still, watching her freckled face through myopic eyes. Shadows danced long into the night, as she held him on to her bosom, drawing him into the light.

\* \* \*

\**Kasti*—Persian Zoroastrian prayer thread

\**Ji/Jee*—A form of address in Gujarati akin to *Sir*

\**Maro*—Gujarati term of endearment meaning *Mine*

\**Coolie*—Porters that hauled luggage, ironically, not considered the least bit racist in parts of India still!

\**Gin*—Gin Rummy, a card game

# Tell-Tale Voice

Patricia N. Coleman

*This selection is paired with “The Tell-Tale Heart”*

I was born with acute hearing, to voices, mostly, that produced in me hyper-sensitivity. Who knows what I heard as a child. Those early sounds are buried, I suppose, in pillows stitched for small skulls. My ears made me fragile. Consequently I grew ill in the first days of my existence. I have remained so, though mentally fit. Adulthood introduced me to means for managing my illness: long brisk walks up the Hudson, followed by long brews of Chinese teas. I learned to repeat words silently and thus soothe my physiognomy. The original reaction deposited, however, a propensity in me, such that from the time I was aware, a voice addressed *to* me from the barrels of a chest could make me fall instantly in love; a voice from another region in the speaker’s body would, without fail, ruin my concentration.

Pretty faces are not to blame. High voices have—some of them—friendly eyes.

The faces of solicitous humans with the sounds of their high pitched and nasal voices!

When I tell you, you’ll think I am a liar. Writing words takes what is impossible but real and turns it into what is bearable, speaking them makes them sound like lies.

So, here, an unembellished description:

Face and body: symmetrical.

Hair: blue black flat, some days long draping curls.

Lips: caked red or pale and blistered when tired or worried.

Body: lithe, with gangly elbows and hands that moved as if connected by wires that ran through the neck and the head like a marionette.

Overall physical impression was that neither face nor body disrupted, except I suspect in those whom her form produced ex-

citement. Not in me, however.

The affect, judging by an a priori bent head: warm, feeling, compassionate. Solicitous even of one's troubles.

The smell: without import.

The footfalls: they alerted me to her approach.

It was the sounds that she squeezed through her larynx, nasal cavities and vocal cords, and let escape without breathing through her red or pasty lips.

When we first met I thought I could stare at her and secretly block out the sound.

She offered advice and short cuts, comforted newcomers when they entered shivering. Like them, I turned to her. She shared her secrets and vulnerabilities with me. She employed me when I was without prospects. She was a kind woman and I had nothing against her. I loved her, in fact.

Talk yourself down.

Look away at an angle.

Turn your ear in the direction of that blasting machine out the window.

let the mind wander,

wander further,

and still it is going going and her face still pretty.

Plug little objects in my ears.

The noise escaping, the lips churning.

Finally there is no other choice.

I leave the room and walk through the building.

But the voice...

and she is not done yet.

She continues as if it had never been to anyone in particular that she was speaking.

You think that I resented the beautiful woman that spoke.

No

maybe.

I don't know.

No matter what she looked like, if she had spoken from her chest she would have become beautiful.

But she spoke as she did and her voice came from I cannot say where, it seemed to come

all at once

from everywhere in her,

from all the places in the body.

It followed me out the door

It pursued the nerves in my brain, followed me wherever I went. I reached the top floor, I heard it droning and whining.

I fought what instantly I recognized inside me at the first sound of her voice. The need for total silence, hers or my own. The sickness of my childhood was back and vehement, more vehement than ever.

Her voice battled against the threads of concentration, the mantras, I counted on to lead me through my tedious days and make me a largely un-offending, peaceable human. It flattened those threads, turned my mantras threatening. The threads were lost forever. It was not her intention, I know. She would not ask for war. It was the fault of the poison inside her that could not be the fault of that same woman who owned such blue black hair.

You see, don't you, or you will, I am not bad, I did not hate. A lovely woman with good intentions, a person with a heart and warmth and damage.

What experiment could I perform to relieve her of the accident of her voice?

Keep her living and detach her voice from her body, the body



from the woman? Return the voice to a box from which it could never escape? Pursue the problem. Invent a solution, my mantra became.

Day after day I returned to the room to my desk beside her. Without a moment's breath, she began a monologue, endless ones. I listened, I fell into my chair or stood still, I gave in to her. I even luxuriated in the pain her voice produced in me, let it fuel my resolve. Listening to her and feeling my nerves fire and break would produce, I was certain, an answer to the problem. A solution that may be bloody but not deathly or perhaps deathly but not bloody. One of the two.

There are we know, though we do not fully understand how, scores of people involved in creating extrinsic intelligence. Why then, considering the known impending destruction of the earth and its creatures, is there no reverse engineering that might remove the parts that wear away at intelligence in/of the world? We add when we must subtract. I do not mean killing, of course, unless no other answer can be found. Oh we kill too many individuals and groups but in so doing we add, we do not subtract to a mountain of human culpability.

On the floor in the office. body, no voice. Yes. This I saw in my dreams.

# The Case of the Stolen Letter, or The “Procrustean Bed”

Sandy Feinstein

*This selection is paired with “The Purloined Letter”*

Assemblage required.

1. Character profile(s). Preliminary.

“Jug ears,” see Lombroso.

But, sir, Parisians do not have such *oreilles*.

Substitute, then, “enormous jaws, high cheek bones, prominent superciliary arches, solitary lines in the palms.”

*Monsieur*, Lombroso’s model describes the most depraved murderers.

Where a lady’s honor is at stake, no quarter should be given.

2. Probability. Preparatory

$A + B = C$ .

(Variables.  $A = ?$   $B = ?$  Then  $C =$ )

Determine variable to ascertain mathematical probabilities of x  
(letter *in situ*).

Secure code

3. Article the 6<sup>th</sup>: Search and Seizure

Blueprint. Licit.

Advanced Analytics. Licit.

Three dimensional print reconstruction. Gray area.

Remote entry and surveillance? Unaccounted.

*Pardon moi*, is this a criminal investigation or recovery project?

Ducks in order, ducks in order, cannot be too careful.

4. Process.

Complete Forms a01-10: objective, methods, implementation time line, accounting of resource costs in play, chain of command approvals, witness list, experts to be consulted, attestations, signatories.

Advisory: Contact Dupin. Insufferable but proficient.

5. Case closed.

# “The Raven” Revisited

Alan Meyrowitz

*This selection is paired with “The Raven”*

What purpose to a dangling branch  
bereft of leaves in fall?

Fragile for the sparrow’s perch,  
more so for the raven’s stay

no haven for a bird to share  
the ways of love and loss

to offer song of hope, or not,  
as one may choose to hear

In its way, a thing forlorn—

once had borne alighting,  
likely nevermore

# Once Upon a Midnight

James Flanagan

*This selection is paired with "The Raven"*

Once upon a Midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,  
Over many a warm and soothing glass of darkest red Merlot  
While I spoke there, likely slurring, suddenly there came a purring  
As of someone softly stirring, stirring from their sleep next door  
"Tis' someone strumming," I muttered, "strumming a guitar next door—  
Only this and nothing more."

Ah, distinctly I recall, it was in her house along the hall;  
I leant against the pale green wall, a shadow crept across the floor.  
Eagerly I wished her here, if only to allay my fear  
Despite the evil kept so near, despite my wounds still deep and raw  
Even so, the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore  
Shall be loved for evermore.

And in the dark, the silken flick of every candle lighted wick  
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before  
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating  
"Tis some guitar gently weeping, strumming in the room next door  
Some guitarist only strumming, strumming in the room next door  
This it is and nothing more."

Presently my heart grew bolder; in few short moments I was older,  
"Sir," said I, "Or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore  
But the fact is I was slurring, and so gently you were stirring  
And so faintly I heard you strumming, strumming in the room next door  
That I barely, surely heard you...."—here I entered the room next door—  
Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering fearing  
Doubting, dreaming. Was my hearing playing tricks upon me more?  
But the silence was unending, and the darkness darkened blending  
Into sights and sounds and rending all my fears upon the floor  
Let my heart not see the thing and all my fears upon the floor.  
Darkness there and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning  
Soon again I heard the purring, purring louder than before.  
“Surely,” said I, “there is a creature purring in the darkness there  
Let me see then, if I dare, to see where purring creature be.”  
Then beneath the darkness there, the creature sitting I could see  
Quoth the Demon “Play with Me.”

But the demon, sitting lonely on that boarded floor, spoke only  
Those few words, as if its soul in those few words he had outpoured.  
Nothing else from he I heard, not a whisker twitched or claw had pawed  
Till I scarcely more than muttered “Other cats have meowed before  
This it was and nothing more. Other cats had played with me.”  
The Demon then spoke “Play with Me.”

Surely what I’d heard just now, was from any other cat “Meow”  
In all my fears, was all I heard, the beasts invite to play with he  
Had I just listened and not feared, all of my Nightmares appeared  
Was it truly words I heard, from the little cat in front of me?  
Or just a figment, surely yes, the cat could not have spoke to me.  
Quoth the Demon “Play with Me.”

And then as if from light or dream, into the room Lenore did lean  
And graced the room, Oh what a scene, and from her lips unlocked the  
key  
“You play with him at your own peril”, spoke as if he was the devil  
With all my strength I brought to bear, I could resist the tempter there!  
But all I see, as evil be, his underside upturned at me  
Quoth the Demon “Play with Me.”

But the demon still beguiling all my sad soul into smiling  
All my random thoughts compiling, I sat upon the floor beside him  
The fear and care within me there, resigned myself to play without  
Why was this creature spoke about with fear and all the warnings?  
I’d still not seen this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt and beastly demon  
For why he chose to play with me.

This I sat engaged in guessing, true intent he was repressing  
Through the cold and fiery eyes now deep down in my memory lies  
This and more I sat divining, the demon stretched at ease reclining.  
Upturned and playful he was lying, surely he meant no harm toward me  
Upon the demon my hands admiring, soft and gentle he seemed to be

How could I resist his “Play with Me.”

Then methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer  
As my hands got closer still, his purpose changed, he broke my will  
A glint of candle light I saw, he bared his teeth and flashed his claw  
With pain that echoes even more, but in his eyes he played with me  
With every single tooth and claw, he only thought he played with me  
Quoth the Demon “Play with Me.”

And there we stuck in love's embrace, his teeth my arm, his claws my  
face  
And moving with undending pace, he cut and hew, he sliced debris  
Bloodied on the floor I sprawled, with hopes to flee away I crawled  
“Wretch,” I cried, “thy master lent thee demon strength and demon glee  
Respite, Respite and nepenthe, return the soul that God hath lent thee”  
Quoth the Demon “Play with Me.”

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if cat or devil.  
Why must I be in such peril, by that God that I decree!  
By the strength that thou hath flaunted, tell me why thou slowly sauntered,  
On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I must see  
Were you sent to leave me daunted—tell me, tell me, I must see!”  
Quoth the Demon “Play with Me.”

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil—prophet still, if cat or devil  
Whether sent here on the level, or tossed here by the tempest sea  
Tell me why I did displease, leave me be, I'm on my knees  
Leave your claws, unbite me please—I'll leave you be, you'll see, you'll  
see  
Let me go with no more fees—I'll leave you be, trust me, you'll see  
Quoth the Demon “Play with Me.”

“Be that our sign of parting, cat or fiend!” I shrieked, upstarting  
“Get thee back into the tempest or the darkest hell that held thee  
Leave no black hair, claw or token—leave those words remained unspoken  
Leave my poor pale flesh unbroken—quit this game upon this floor  
Take thy claws from out my arm and take thy form from where I see  
Quoth the Demon “Play with Me.”

And still the demon, unperturbed, is still upturned, is still upturned  
On the boards as if to say, "Surely you can play some more."  
And this scratch remains all broken, left as if a friendly token  
A token of the game we played, we played upon the cold hard floor  
"Surely" said I, "I've learnt my lesson, I'll not reach down to the floor.  
I shall play with thee...Nevermore!"



# Eddie's Bird

David Anderson

*This selection is paired with "The Raven"*

I'll eat damn near anything. Like tonight, for example, that dead dog with its paws in the air down on Eddie's front door. It's swelling up nicely and is about ready for me to stick a beak in. I don't know what it is about Eddie, but dying animals always go belly up on his doorstep, and the number of rats I see scuttling in the shadows around his place is a wonder. Oh, and I see them all. My eyes are the best. To me the world is crisp and clear. I see every rat whisker and every vein of the ivy leaves that creep up the brick walls. I can see into shadows; I can see in the dark. I wait at the top of the hemlock tree and when a rat creeps out, I swoop down and pop it, pop! with my beak.

I see the soft tossing of a Luna moth's antennae on Eddie's door. The bug thinks it's hidden, the fool, but I see it and, tilting my head left and right, take a bead on it. I unfold my magnificent black wings to the night and leap from the branch. The buoyant air rushes up, it loves me, it holds me safe as I glide down through the dark. At the last moment, I angle my wings back to brake my descent, and bang! I hammer the fat, dumb moth so hard with my beak, it's flattened, and I have to bang the door again to unstick it. Then I push my wings down on the thick air, feeling the lovely muscle strain, and power up to the treetop.

The wind torments the trees tonight, but I clench my talons around a branch and ride easy. The wind ruffles my feathers, yes, but I laugh, haw! because I am not in the least ruffled by the up-roar.

Down below, the front door cracks open and Eddie peers out. He vocalizes and it carries on the wind. I have to laugh, haw! because he mews like a seagull. I mimic his sorry cry. Those creatures chitter constantly. It signifies nothing, of course, and I laugh again, haw! Eddie slams the door. He's an odd one, and I want to know what he's up to. How does he lure all those rats in there?

Does *he* eat them, too? I float down to his window, and, to my surprise, Eddie flings it open. He steps aside and waves his arm for me to enter. Before I can even think, I fly in past him. The wood-paneled room is cramped as a walnut shell, a tight fit for a bird of my heft. I land on his desk, just missing the oil lamp. Quill pens, some fresh, some with crushed and stained feathers, are scattered on the desk. The sight makes me queasy. Where does he get those feathers? Black-scratched papers litter his desktop and fall to the floor among the peanut shells. I'm a bit overexcited and let slip a guano bomb. It's no big deal, but Eddie squeals like a sow and advances on me waving his arms in a threatening way. What's his problem? But you can't let these creatures sense fear or you'll end up in a cage, so I strut across his desk and fix him with the bold stinkeye. I fluff my dark wings and clack my killer's beak and look pretty damn impressive, if I do say so. Eddie is a small fry for his kind, but bigger than me, so I pump my guns and lift off, fanning Eddie back and land on a stone head above the door. I glare and give him a withering laugh of contempt, haw!

Eddie looks up at me wide-eyed and pale as a skinned turnip. Wind gusts through the open window making the lamp flame jitter and the shadows jump. His papers flutter and shuffle. Eddie walks backward, one hand groping behind him until he finds the window, which he slams shut with a bang that makes me flinch. I have sensitive ears and I want to tell him there's no call for abuse, but I let it go. The papers on his desk settle, the lamp calms and the room grows still. Eddie stands rigid as stone, and the whites of his eyes gleam like eggs. I realize that he's been holding his breath, and as he begins to breathe again, I hear the whisper of air through his nose and the hiss fills the room. The feathers rise on the back of my neck. I want to plug his wheezy nostrils, and I sound off, haw! and clack my beak. I sound tougher than I feel. I look around the room for an exit.

You don't give creatures like Eddie eye contact, but he sidesteps into my line of sight. I look away and he steps in front again and my stomach churns. He makes keening, whimpering noises, like you hear when you eat a baby squirrel. I try to ignore him, but Eddie croaks and squawks like a grackle, tossing his head and

rolling his eyes. I've really got to get out of here. I fan my wings tentatively, but there is nowhere to fly. I'm at the highest point in the room. Eddie can't reach me without standing on a chair, and if he tries, I'll give him a beaking he'll never forget. My nerves are jumping, but it only makes me stronger and more alert. I loft my feathers so I look bigger. Eddie sidles closer. His cheeks are sunken beneath his whiskers, and foam bubbles at the corners of his mouth. Is he hungry? Please don't let him be hungry. He scrapes a chair across the wooden floor, and I almost jump out of my plumage. I bet he wants my flight feathers for his pens. The thought makes my down crawl. He does. I just know it. *My* feathers. Eddie sits down below my perch and stares at me. He doesn't blink, ever. I watch for a long time. A rat scrambles over his left foot, and he doesn't notice. He's slack-jawed and cries like a gull again. I laugh nervously, haw, haw! He starts to tremble. Can I smash the window with my beak? Do I have time to get through? I need to move, I *must* move, but I can't. He watches me like a snake, like a mesmerist. I'm terrified, but I back Eddie off with a gust of bravado. Haw! And I wait.

# Lenore

Brian Malachy Quinn

*This piece is paired with “The Raven”*



# Lemonade

Jennie MacDonald

*This selection is paired with “The Cask of Amontillado”*

“Greed is sticky stuff.”

It took me a minute to pick the words out of Brandon’s scrawl on the pink message pad. Phones were ringing. The light bulb in the corner of the ceiling hadn’t been fixed yet, and it blinked in time with my pulsing headache.

“Trying to tell me something?” I mouthed at him in his glassed-in office. Younger than me, and already a manager, he bounded out, my daily reminder that nepotism is alive and well in the real estate brokerages of America. His persistent upbeat attitude didn’t hurt his prospects, either.

“I knew that would get your attention,” he said, leaning on the desk I shared with two other people on a rotating schedule. “Most clients say good-bye when they hang up—but not this lady. She insisted I write it down.”

“What lady?”

He reached for the message pad. I handed it over. Flipping several pages back, he read, “A Mrs. Belham. Going to live with her daughter in California and selling the family home in Lincoln Park. Asked for you personally.”

“Really? Why?”

“Something in your bio on the company website. She liked it.”

The bio had started off as a joke. With no sales experience—apart from the gallery that displayed some of my paintings—I’d had to fill the 150-word space with something. So I wrote about my art history major, my love of beautiful objects and spaces, and my desire to match buyers with the perfect home—this last one to accommodate a job that six months ago had looked promising.

“This one’s a prize, Ophelia,” Brandon said. “1890s Victo-

rian on a triple lot. You make it a good deal, and you'll compete with the best in the most valuable market in the city. Beats Aurora, doesn't it?" He saluted me with the notepad and held it out. "Make the call."

"Aurora," I said. "A name like that makes it sound so promising." His quizzical look confirmed my early doubt as to his knowledge of classic mythology. I suppose Mount Olympus rarely comes up for sale.

I tugged out the rolling desk chair with its reluctant back wheel and sat, turning the pink pages. Dust from suburban Aurora with its depressing 1950s track housing and gang graffiti covered my shoes. Today's first-time buyers, so eager at 8 a.m. and so defeated by noon, had given up for the day, leaving my afternoon open.

I pushed the shoes off and picked up the phone.

\* \* \*

Lincoln Park glowed in any light. It was an old neighborhood—desirable, as they say. Judges and lawyers lived there, civic leaders, a governor or two, alongside artists and actors who had made it. The parkways and gardens were designed and looked after, and the streetlights in working order, always. The houses ranged from colonials to Tudors to Neoclassical and Art Moderne, and yet they harmonized; some even had names like Rose Cottage and Castleton House. Except for one—an infamous house—so inexplicably out of character, hideous, and disproportionate.

Hideous because it was the architectural equivalent of Marcel Duchamp's urinal plopped down in the courtyard of a great museum of houses. Infamous because the developer had dealt so badly with the neighbors, had demolished a charming cottage to build a huge monstrosity, and had gone bankrupt when it hadn't sold. He was said to have been chased out of town by the contractors demanding their money. Some bank had held it in foreclosure for over ten years.

But that was not the house I had come to see.

Willowdown House stood at the north end of the street, a Victorian triumph of stone and brick, complete with a tower, chimneys, and porches. Named for the ancient willow trees that presided over the walled garden, it seemed the only destination possible, even in a realm of inviting homes.

Pink roses clouded the railings of the airy wrap-around porch and climbed the pillars, giving the impression of a house sailing on a flowering sea. Its captain waved to me from the steps, her silver-gray hair in a loose bun, eyes aglow, a wide smile beckoning. Her blue dress was tailored and trim, her heeled shoes daring.

The gate was unlatched. Tangles of blooming sweet peas lined the walkway, and humming bees scoured them for nectar.

“Departure,” this sailing creature said, beaming as she shook my hand.

I defaulted to the language of my mother’s etiquette lessons: “I beg your pardon?”

“Sweet peas. They signify departure. That’s why I planted them there. For the going.”

“But I just arrived.” How foolish I felt pointing this out.

“True, but you depart your previous life when you come here.”

I suspected she would have an answer for everything, the kind of answer that could be wrong but sounded right, and in this place could only be right. So I nodded and then smiled. She had that effect. Even on me.

“We’ll go through the house first, then, shall we?”

She led the way, like a tour guide hopped up on something sweet and indulgent—Turkish Delight or divinity or something. But it was a joy of a house: solid, with all of the original woodwork and brass fittings; crystal doorknobs and chandeliers; stained glass in the transoms and at the ends of the upstairs hallways; the sweeping staircase waiting for John Singer Sargent to pose a lady in white on its steps; arched doorways that made you want to enter

rooms; built-in bookcases and tiled fireplaces; the kitchen and the several bathrooms had been tastefully modernized; and the closets had been installed and fitted out with shelves and rods.

It was a house you wanted to live in—that I wanted to live in. That was impossible, of course, and I had to push the thought aside as if it were a gorgeous, insistent, monster of mansion-sized proportions. The very air pulled at me.

I took photographs and notes while she fiddled with sofa cushions, curtain tassels, and bone china figures. Vases and bowls of flowers were quietly attended to and lights switched off as we left each room. At some point a small white cat darted at our heels and then vanished.

“No ghosts?” I asked. Mrs. Belham had been humming softly as we returned down the steps to the front parlor (there was a back parlor, too).

“That is a good question.” I had the sense she knew good questions from stupid ones. “I would never say no.”

“It is an old house,” I said.

“That,” she pushed open the door to the garden, “is why I would never say no.”

A pair of wrought-iron chairs flanking a little table waited for us in the gazebo. Mrs. Belham gestured at the cut-glass pitcher and two tumblers on the table.

“Lemonade?” She said something after that, but I couldn’t hear her. She—I—seemed very far away. As I hesitated, she poured and handed me a glass. For an instant the light went flat, a cloud passing before the fading sun. It was late.

She touched my glass with her own and drank. I sipped mine—sour, sweet, a memory. A long time ago I had loved lemonade.

“My dear,” she said, “I understand that when a house is sold one may need to make—certain disclosures—.”

It was too good to be true after all. There must be rot in the



cellars, or asbestos, or any one of a thousand things that can make a house difficult, even impossible, to sell.

“Come with me.”

It was a spell—I could only follow her. Through the draping branches of the willow trees, down the path of white stones, past the still pond planted with rushes. John Philip Waterhouse’s painting of *The Lady of Shalott* might have inspired just such a place. At the far end of the garden—nearly smothered by heaps of blooming hydrangea, foxglove spears, and rugosa roses with their grasping thorns—stood the ruins of a child-sized castle.

The words found their way out: “Is it a playhouse?”

“It was,” she said. “Now that my daughter has grown up, and since the fire, I’ve come to think of it as a folly.”

“A folly in Lincoln Park. It’s a first.”

“And a last, I hope. It’s not a very nice folly.”

No, it wasn’t. I’d thought of follies—those silly, romantic, picturesque additions to great houses of the past—as places to paint in, to make secret assignations in. Surrounded by what my mother had taught me were poisonous flowers, the crumbling and blackened walls, the pitted stone steps, the iron bars over the door and windows—it all added up to a place I very much wanted to get away from.

“Do you think it should come down?” Mrs. Belham asked suddenly. “Will it affect the sale of the house?”

I realized I’d been holding my breath.

“I don’t think so. At any rate, you can leave that up to the new owners.”

We started back up the path, but she had one more thing to show me.

The greenhouse, a confection of Victorian glass and steel with a stamped concrete floor, was filled with pots of lily of the valley and other spring-blooming flowers. A small framed painting hung

on the wall at the end. It showed a pale figure dancing among the roses. I recognized it immediately.

“It’s Lily in the Garden,” I said, turning to her. “You bought it?” The gallery had sold only three of my paintings so far, but I had not asked who the purchasers were. I never imagined this one hanging in a greenhouse, but I was glad, and it was strange.

She smiled. “Yes, I do love it. I believe Lily is the name of the young woman?”

“My mother. She loved roses.”

“As I thought.” She busied herself dividing a pot of lily of the valley, carefully spooning soil and pushing it in around the roots.

“It’s too late,” she said.

“Too late?” I inhaled the heady perfume.

“Too late in the year for them. The heat, you know.”

“Oh.”

“A man came here years ago. He must have climbed over the wall so none of the neighbors could see what he was doing. I found him in the garden and followed him in here.”

“What was he doing?”

“Measuring! He had one of those laser devices. Oh, I asked him about that, you can be sure.”

“‘I want to buy your house,’ he said. ‘The house and all this. I’ll make you a good offer, the only offer, what with the recession going on. No one else can afford this.’”

“‘And how can you afford it?’ I asked him.

“‘Oh, I’ve got a nice place going up a few blocks from here that I’ll make a pile of money on. I can fit at least four houses in here, divide up the main house into condos, and bingo!’”

Her bright eyes held mine, and she lifted up the new pot of flowers to me like an offering:

“That’s when I pushed him in.”

“Pushed him in?” I took the flowers.

“Into the cement floor. We had just filled in the old root cellar, and the cement was not yet dry at all.” She nodded at my feet and lowered her voice conspiratorially. “His left ear should be just about there. Of course, he won’t be listening to anyone now.”

My fingers tightened on the pot. I didn’t want to drop it.

“He built the house on Birch Street?” I asked. She nodded and tapped the floor with her toe.

“The cement is deep, very deep, indeed, and full of secrets.”

“I see what you mean.”

“And you will keep them?”

I smiled and took her hand and was glad that Lily in the Garden presided in this place.

“These secrets are a gift.”

She walked me to the gate.

I started for my car, but stopped, remembering.

“Return of happiness,” I said. She paused in the midst of the sweet peas. “That’s what lily of the valley symbolize.”

I drove the several blocks to Birch Street, and it felt like moving through geological time. The house at the corner still loomed, its disproportionate angles and rooflines appalling to anyone with a sense of design, taste, and basic appreciation for the neat harmony of the neighborhood. But it was the small and exquisite Cape Cod home next door that I came to see.

The building of the monstrosity had been too much for my mother. The day the walls went up, all the southern sunshine that had filled our house and nurtured her beloved rose garden was blotted out. It broke her heart. We soon after moved away.

Before we left, I put up my lemonade stand one more time. Some kids came, and even the construction workers. I couldn’t blame them—for them it was just a job, and I understood that. But then he came, as I knew he would, patronizing the little neighbor

girl.

“I’ll make it special,” I said, going into the house.

“You do that,” I heard him call.

I squeezed the lemons and mixed in salt and baking soda instead of sugar. We didn’t keep poison; my mother would never kill mice on purpose. But I knew that certain flowers could be dangerous; she had taught me that. So I chopped up hellebore stems and put the whole thing into the blender with ice and mint leaves.

I had to carry the glass carefully, just below the rim, because of the honey and toilet cleaner I had dipped it in.

“Took you long enough,” he said, grabbing it and drinking it straight down. It was a hot July day.

Maybe it made him sick later, even though he tried to spit it out and flung the glass away. It broke on the sidewalk, and he stared at his honey-and-toilet-cleaner-covered hand.

“What the hell?” he yelled at me.

I felt full of heat. My voice graveled out, and the old lady on the corner heard what I said, as did her little white cat, which always followed her.

I took a step toward him.

“Greed is sticky stuff.”

# A Cask and a Curse

Nancy Ellis Taylor

*This selection is paired with “The Cask of Amontillado”*

I give you a moment  
a glass backlit  
blood and stars  
the hills have bled for you  
hold history on your tongue

Worlds ripe with visions  
relish the new blend  
become suffused with  
expanding possibilities  
and then remember

Good fortune does not last

# From Out a Full-Orbed Moon

Laurence Raphael Brothers

*This selection is paired with “To Helen”*

A pale elongated rectangle of silvery light shone through the window, illuminating the foot of a four-poster bed. I moved silently through the open casement, bodiless, drifting downwards on a slanting shaft of moonlight.

I had been sleeping somewhere very cold and dark. It had been a profound slumber, a torpor disturbed by reptilian dreams too primitive even to develop form or subject, recalled only as slow tides of ineffable sensation.

But where was I now? Something had awoken me, called me here, of that I was certain. But that was all I knew.

As I floated toward the bed I felt myself to be an animal-culum, a tiny mote of a creature dwarfed by the vast scale of the room. The illuminated portion of the mattress ranged for leagues before me, a cream-colored satin sheet shining in the moonlight like something geological. The folds and ridges in the fabric were soft-edged mountains seen from a balloonist’s aerial vantage.

The rectangle of moonlight expanded, gradually revealing new vistas as it stretched across the bed. After a time I saw that the satin sheet covered the lower portion of a woman’s sleeping body, the edge of the sheet a terminator line drawn across the small of her back. The moonlight crept gently up the smooth dark skin of the woman’s torso, and at last I was able to see the sleeper in her entirety. The woman was interesting, but more compelling still was a small night-table by the head of the bed, upon which rested an unlabeled bottle of what could only be whiskey. The bottle was open and half-full, and even though I knew I wouldn’t even be able to touch the bottle nevertheless I ached for a sip of the stuff. I felt the urge to cork the bottle, to prevent the precious spirits within from escaping, but I knew there was nothing I could do about that, either.

I turned my attention back to the sleeping woman. She was three-quarters prone, her head tucked into the pillow and covered by such luxuriant waves of jet black hair that I couldn't make out most of her face at all, just the lines of her jaw, the corner of her mouth, and the base of one ear. I could see the dimple of a piercing in the lobe. A single thread of silver hair was woven into her black locks, and it shone like a distant river in the moonlight. I saw a fine silver chain around her neck, but I couldn't tell what sort of pendant or locket she might be wearing, as her breast was turned to the mattress. One of her bare arms was wrapped around the pillow and the other was down by her side, atop the sheet. The woman's body moved slowly, almost imperceptibly with her breathing. I had the sense that each glacial exhalation required a geological age to transpire, but I felt no impatience; indeed the scene filled me with a quiet calmness, almost a feeling of holiness, as if I was privileged to be present for some sort of sacred observance or ritual.

As I hovered there, a mere mote of consciousness suspended in a shaft of moonlight, I heard the soft melodic chime of a clock. I heard—a sound! When was the last time I'd heard anything at all? I couldn't remember, but still I knew that I had dreamed in silence for ages. The chime drew my attention. I had no need to turn a physical head to see in any direction, but even so I felt myself gazing across the room, at a columnar pedestal on which an intricate ormolu clock was set. Some constraint on my vision had just been lifted, as now I could see the room at large—dark compared to the moonlit expanse of the four-poster, but visible nonetheless. The bed was set in the precise center of the room, with several pieces of furniture around the walls.

An unseen force hurled me in a dizzy rush toward the clock, and now I was hovering just before it. The white enamel clock face was overlaid with a lapis lazuli crescent moon. A writhing mass of entwined creatures was carved in gleaming golden relief over the entire body of the clock. Fish of all kinds and whole congeries of eels, along with scorpions, snails, and frogs were tangled together all around the base. Higher up, hares, moths, wolves, and owls disported, and above the clock face two large cats sat sejant across from one another, heads tilted upward with paws raised in salute.

Both clock hands pointed upward. It was midnight. I heard a second chime.

I was distracted by something, attention drawn away from the clock. To the right, not far from the pedestal, I had a glimpse of a bookcase. I wanted to look at the books, read the titles—and yet I couldn't focus on them. Instead, I was pulled past it as if by some etheric riptide, carried around the room further to the right. The tide brought me to a black lacquer bureau polished to a glossy sheen. Resting on its immaculate surface a white onyx vase bore five ghostly white roses, and in the center of the arrangement one black bloom. I paused to admire the flowers. Symbolic of something, I was sure.

The clock chimed. I heard the soft resonant note distinctly from across the room. Once more I became aware of something as yet unseen. A desk, with something strange I couldn't identify atop it. Was that it? No, I was propelled further to the right, almost all the way around the room back to the clock. A standing wardrobe. A garment was hanging from the knob, a gown of ecru charmeuse. I wanted to run the fabric through my fingers but I knew that was beyond my power. And what was that mounted on the wall beside the wardrobe? A giant ammonite fossil, its intricate spiral shimmering with a faint nacreous glow in the reflected moonlight.

Another chime. Again I was pulled around the room, this time past the lacquered bureau to the bookcase. A low free-standing ebony affair, two shelves full of leather-bound volumes, all so old that their embossed titles couldn't be read in the dim illumination. One of the books lay open on top of the case. Most of the text was illegible in the poor light, but I could just puzzle out the words at the top of the left-hand page, a title printed in a larger font: "The Tell-Tale Heart." Strange, I felt like I knew those words, that title, but from where? I couldn't recall. A silver candelabrum stood next to the book bearing three heavy white candles, but I had no way to light them.

Another chime and another whirling transit across the room, this time careening past the wardrobe to stop at the desk I'd noticed before, a small secretaire. A curious and intricate machine



was centered on the desktop by a neat stack of pristine white bond paper, and beside it a tumbler glass, in which I could make out the dried dregs of a thin brown fluid—perhaps the whiskey I’d seen earlier. Yes, there was the bottle’s cork, left carelessly beside the tumbler, and the faint scent was definitely whiskey. But wait! That aroma! When had I last smelled any scent whatsoever? Surely never before in this phantom existence.

I glanced at the machine: a shell of some kind of grey metal, embossed with the name “Underwood”. At the front a tray of levers each bearing a letter of the alphabet on a small pad or plate. A black cylinder in a recess set behind the levers, a sheet of bond paper wrapped partly around it.... Ah! A machine for putting words to paper, a typesetting press in miniature, but with mobile keys instead of movable type. What a brilliant idea! If only I’d had one. I looked at the sheet of paper, unnaturally smooth, white and glossy. The black imprint of the type keys on the page was clearly visible. It was a fragment of a poem.

*...from out*

*A full-orbed moon, that, like thine own soul, soaring,  
Sought a precipitate pathway up through heaven,  
There fell a silvery-silken veil of light*

The devil! I knew those words! I wrote them! With a nib pen to be sure, not a type machine. What was going on here? Once again I wondered why I was here. This unprecedented moonlight awakening, the compulsion to appear in this room, then the sound of that clock, the smell of the whiskey, these strange yet commonplace shrines set up like stations of the cross around the room. There must be some meaning, some purpose behind it all.

The clock chimed, and I was swept back to it willy-nilly. I was caught up in some sort of intangible whirlpool or maelstrom, an ethereal vortex maybe, and at its center—I looked back toward the bed. The sleeping woman hadn’t moved or shifted her position.

The clock chimed again. Once more I was carried off to the black lacquer bureau with its curious vase. Five pallid roses and a sixth, ominous and dark in the center of the arrangement. Five sta-

tions around the room, and the sixth... the woman herself? Everything here was significant, pregnant with meaning, but just beyond my grasp.

It occurred to me that having regained my senses of hearing and smell, perhaps touch might be possible again. Touch. I looked back at the sleeping woman, the satin sheet, the smooth dark skin of her back. I wanted to try touching her but—

The clock chimed. Was it sounding faster now? Less time between the chimes? At the wardrobe again. I reached out for the silk gown. By God! I could feel it! I had no physical sense of my arm or of an outstretched hand, but still I felt the smooth sheer fabric beneath my fingertips.

I turned my gaze to the sleeping woman. The clock chimed. Pulled back to the bookcase. The one with my book on it. I remembered writing the story now. Not my best work, but I was fond of the title. I tried to move towards the woman, but the clock chimed again, and the unseen force whisked me off to the desk. I reached out to the whiskey tumbler, felt the cool glassy slickness of it, but couldn't lift it. Damn! I turned back towards the bed, the woman, and the bottle. Struggled to move and failed.

Another chime, and I was pulled back to the clock. I looked at the clock face, the ornate hands both pointing straight up at the 12. How many chimes so far? I felt a sudden horrible premonition. Something about this room, this place, it had given me a chance, a chance to do something. But after the twelfth chime, it would be over. I'd be back asleep somewhere, deep in the darkness. And the chance might never come again. How many chimes was it now? The tenth? No! The eleventh! I had to act.

With a vast effort of will I fought against the compulsion pulling me off to what I feared would be the final station, the black lacquer bureau with its strange bouquet. I thought to focus on the woman, but I was distracted by the whiskey bottle beside her head. I wanted that more than anything else in the world right now. It seemed so unfair to be called out of a deathly sleep into this strange place and not allowed even to take a single drink. I imag-

ined I had a body, imagined raising my hand, imagined taking a step, then another, coming closer, forcing my way forward—but it seemed my way was blocked.

The final chime! I felt myself paralyzed, anguished. I had to break through to the bottle! I'd been right there earlier before the chimes started, but had disdained even to try to touch it, thinking it was impossible. But now—now I was desperate. And as the reverberation of that final chime faded, I broke through the resistance, rushed toward the goal. I felt a dying surge of energy propelling me, and knew I only had moments, mere seconds before I would be pulled away from her, drawn back into darkness, into slumber, into death.

Oh! the scent of the whiskey! No mere dregs, an entire pint of the stuff. The heady bouquet was all around me. One last movement of will, and I descended through the neck of the bottle, a mote of consciousness going down, down.... Down into the depths of the welcoming brown elixir, down into sweet slumber, dissolving gratefully into welcoming oblivion....

\* \* \*

As the last chime from the clock faded, the sleeping woman stirred. She sat up, stretching, sweeping the hair from before her eyes. She yawned. She cast off the sheet and stood up from the bed, nude except for the lunula around her neck, a silver crescent almost as thin as foil. The ornament lay flat at the clavicle, just above her breasts. She blinked twice, rubbed her eyes.

She picked up the bottle, took a sniff at the neck.

“I do believe it worked,” she said. Carrying the bottle, she traced a pentagram path around the room, stopping at each station.

First to the clock, pressing a knob to disable the chimes, and then over to the bureau where she opened a drawer and retrieved a plain steel Zippo lighter. Next across to the wardrobe, where she shrugged on the ecru gown, pausing for a moment to gaze at the spiral swirl of the ammonite. Then to the bookcase, where she used the lighter on the candles of the candelabrum. From there she returned to the desk, where she poured out a full glass of whiskey.

She put the bottle down, corking it securely. Next she raised the glass, toasting the moon, still visible across the room through the open window. With her hand on the lunula at her neck, she took a sip of whiskey.

The woman pulled out a chair from before the desk and sat down. She unrolled the sheet of paper from the typewriter, looked at it and chuckled softly before crumpling the paper and throwing it to the floor. She inserted a fresh sheet and aligned it carefully with the platen. After taking a second sip of whiskey she contemplated the blank page for a time and then began to type. Behind her, still shining through the open window, the moon watched silently.

# Poe

John C. Mannone

*This selection is paired with “Eureka”*

*Because Nothing was, therefore All Things are*

—Edgar Allan Poe

He said a poem shouldn't be any longer than a page. Then, in his usual virtuoso style of writing, he wrote a 150-page essay-poem called “Eureka,” while laughing at Longfellow's poems—often filled with words of night.

Henry confessed he didn't write from the halls of science, but from the hill of song when he spoke of the moon eclipsing Orion. How ironic that Poe's science would be more poetic than his poetry would just after attending an astronomy lecture on The Universe. He pondered the stars, their light, the speed they would star-shine this world, and of Kepler's dilemma that some called Olbers' paradox: Why should the night sky be so dark when so many stars spin their light in the heavens?

That rogue poet, Poe, solved the mystery seventy years before Einstein spoke of it, his relativity answering it. The universe did not exist forever, it simply is not old enough, light hadn't arrived yet, and that which had from the Big Bang, stretched to the darker side of red into that cosmic microwave hue—black to our eyes.

# Death of a Poet

Guy Prevost

*This selection is paired with "Hop Frog"*

Edgar arrives in Baltimore by steamship on October 1, 1849. In the bright cold morning, he walks down the gangway on Pier 17 and settles on the dock to watch the passing scene. He wears the blue gray cadet coat that he's kept since West Point, now quite frayed. His trousers are similarly tattered, but Edgar's ramrod posture and lean physique still communicate a noble bearing. He puts down his valise.

Edgar wonders what to do in the six hours he has to spend before catching the train to Philadelphia. He looks across the peninsula to the bay, where the tall masts of the clipper ships on the harbor side remind him of life at sea, and how they carry huge cargoes of tobacco to the Old World. He estimates the distance to the far lighthouse, wondering if he could swim to it, as he had crossed the west lake in Richmond many years ago. Despite his forty years, Edgar figured yes, he could manage it. Across the cobbled road, a black slave waits for his master outside a shipping house. There is bunting hanging from the second story window and a poster of a man in a beard. There is much clamor in the street below. Apparently today is the day of an election. Raymond T. Billington is running for mayor. James Thayer is his opponent.

It's not easy for Edgar to appreciate the lively beauty of the city: the sparkling bay, the to-and-fro of carriages and horses, the parade of fashionable ladies coming out of the dress shop at the end of the street. And he wonders, as he often has, why this lustrous vista evokes only *gloom*. He hasn't had a drink in 41 days, he's been counting, and he's held up well. He has even joined the Temperance Society in Richmond, hardly his cup of tea, but a brew he is willing to drink (though he'd prefer a julep), in deference to his fiancé Elmira. Shouldn't he feel glad at their engagement? After all these years, when she spurned him as a teenager, and now she was eager to have him? Or so it seemed. And she came with a tidy fortune. So onerous errands like the one he was currently embarked

upon would no longer be necessary.

Edgar had a strange premonition when he left Elmira in Richmond the day before on the veranda. Some hesitation or coolness in her, even in himself. It was the way he often felt, without a drink, that things were not going to work out, that the final stroke of the blade was nearer than ever, that the moldy *odeur* of the tomb was close at hand. The persistent melancholy that he'd never been able to understand...it weighed on him like a heavy suit of armor, or like a dense fog, like the tightly wrapped shroud of an entombed Egyptian, in spite of the inspired sun.

The Hop Frog tavern across the street beckons, offering relief.

Courage, he tells himself. He sees the tavern, but resists the temptation, thinking better of it. Instead, he hefts his valise and he moves into the stream of people heading toward the opposite wharf. There, he knows, is the Dorsey Hotel on the far dock, with a nice view of the water. The train station is only ten city blocks away. A decent lunch, with coffee, could lift his spirits. It might cost more than he could afford, but he thinks of the business to be done in Philadelphia, the princely sum he would be paid. That would offset the expense, though at the moment he has only ten dollars and the train ticket in his pocket. Buy now and be paid later. And how bad could the errand be? The matron had apparently written 45 poems and had hired Edgar to edit them for a volume to be financed by her doting husband. He had agreed without even reading a sample.

He crosses the cobbled streets to the harbor side of the Peninsula and examines the bill of fare at the Dorsey Hotel. He remembers dining there years ago with his foster father John Allan, when he was in Allan's favor—before Allan stopped returning his letters or heeding his desperate pleas for assistance. The she-crab casse-rolle looks appealing, but a sting of conscience passes through him. He sets down the valise once more.

Presently he is aware of another man standing beside him.

“Excuse me sir. I couldn't help but notice that you seem to be contemplating a meal at the Dorsey—certainly a pleasure, and

indication of good taste, but perhaps a bit expensive.”

Edgar resents the intrusion and the interlocutor’s seeming telepathic powers. He is portly, dressed in a white tailed coat, has a full handlebar mustache graying at the ends, a high topped black hat, and a fist full of advertisements.

“Allow me to suggest the provender at the Hop Frog, a special discount today because of the election. The owner is none other than the brother-in-law of Raymond P. Billington, our candidate much beloved and right thinking. So half price off a meal and—a free flagon of ale.”

Edgar wonders at the person making this offer. He obviously has the gift of gab, and Edgar suspects that is why he was chosen for this task. To pull in business for the tavern, owned by a relative of the candidate. All right then.

Moments later John L. Bonadies, as the huckster introduced himself, escorts Edgar into the Hop Frog Tavern. The place is alive with activity and boisterous patrons. Flagons of ale are being hoisted by men at the bar and full bosomed waitresses sweep by with trays of food and drink. Edgar is at first overwhelmed by the cacophony, and feels he is definitely sinking to a lower rung of discourse and station, just by being here. But this is not new to him. How familiar, how unfair. And yet, the prospect of a cheap meal *and* a free ale to pass the time before his train to Philadelphia—hard to say no.

Bonadies nods to the bartender and proprietor, the Billington brother-in-law, a hulking figure in an apron. He acknowledges the signal and quickly snaps his fingers to the waitress.

“Mary, to the new gentleman who just walked in, if you please.”

Bonadies clears a path through the drinkers at the bar to a favorable table by the window. Mary appears, almost by magic, expertly setting the wooden table and holding back the chair for Edgar to sit.

“Thank you, Mary, this is—didn’t catch your name, sir?”



“Edgar.”

“The daily special and a flagon of Five Rivers for Edgar, recently arrived on the steamship from Richmond.”

Edgar wonders how the man knows this. He reckons he must have spotted him coming off the ship, and then followed him. He admires Mary’s clear white skin and large brown eyes.

“I can see that you’re an educated man,” says Bonadies. “Rather I can hear it in your voice. Have you studied abroad?”

Edgar hears bells, suddenly, the bells of the church outside his grammar school in London. At three, just as Latin class was ending. The tintinnabulation of the bells, bells, bells....

“When I was young, yes. A schoolboy, merely.”

“And what do you do for a living, if I might ask?”

The man is too curious, thinks Edgar. He waits for the other shoe to drop. What does he want? Certainly he isn’t recognized?

“A man of letters, and a poet.”

“A poet. Isn’t that grand? The man is a poet, Mary.” And so Mary brings a tray with a fine spread of turkey and potatoes, and most tempting of all, a finely topped flagon of ale.

Edgar stares at the drink, thinking of the Temperance Society, the ludicrous chairwoman Mrs. Hidegarde and his promises to Elmira. But he realizes that she has no idea what he goes through every day, and that to enjoy a meal without a splash of beer is going a bit far. Edgar takes a long draught.

Bonadies watches him drink and eat.

“Enjoy, enjoy,” he says. Edgar takes another full gulp of ale and it goes down well.

Half a pint later, Edgar feels the mummy’s shroud unwind, the armor fall, the fog lift, allowing the sunlight of giddiness or good cheer. It puts him in a talkative mood.

“Are you a political man, sir?”

“I’d have to think about that.”

“Well, as I said, there’s an election in town. We’re all for Billington. Anyone who knows anything is for Billington. Thayer, on the other hand, is a mountebank, a charlatan, and some even say an abolitionist.”

Edgar shudders. And he notices many comings and goings through a door to a room at the rear of the tavern. Most strangely a man walked into the room dressed as a priest, and emerged some minutes later dressed as a sailor. The men loitering nearby clapped him on the back as he marched to the front door of the tavern, waved to their approval, and ceremoniously left. Others enter and emerge in different costumes as well. Edgar thinks it is some kind of theatrical event.

He observes the chandelier: a crude affair made of elk horns, hanging from the center of the room. Mary slaps the grasping hand of a lewd patron as she passes underneath the chandelier, and he thinks of Tripetta. It was a royal court in the story, not a tavern! The king’s ministers, not these ravenous boors! Why not dress them as the perverse beasts they were? Orangutans! He would persuade them to do so as an election day joke; they seemed so fond of putting on costumes. Then he would have them do tricks on the chandelier and he would light them on fire. They would end up as a sticky mass of burnt flesh, dripping black blood and ooze. Yes, that would be nice while he and Tripetta hurried out to the Dorsey Hotel.

Edgar has finished his flagon. He holds it up for a re-fill from Mary.

“Not so fast,” says Bonadies. “You have enjoyed our hospitality, and it has been our privilege, and we’d like to continue to serve and to please. That is our business, that is our pleasure.”

Who is this gasbag? Thinks Edgar. But still...

“A small favor we might ask in return perhaps...”

Just then a drunken merchant walks clumsily by.

“A poet you say?”

“Yes.”

“I too am a poet, let me recite:

*‘There was a man from Degrass*

*Whose balls were made out of brass*

*In stormy weather he clicked them together*

*And Lightning came out of his ass.’”*

“Shut up Montgomery,” says Bonadies. “This is a man of letters. He doesn’t appreciate such vulgarity. I was saying, I told you we had an election going on...”

Edgar always likes a good joke and here he sees no harm. The opponent is an abolitionist, isn’t that what Bonadies said? He had led him through that back door to another room. Here there is a clothes rack with assorted topcoats and costumes and a short little fellow hunched over some kind of ledger. He looks up at Edgar and says what he is wearing was fine. His new name is to be Walter P. Mooney, a farmer on the south side of Ellicot. Can you remember that? Asks the man. Of course, says Edgar. He knows how to act. He is the son of actors.

Moments later Edgar presents himself to the polling station outside the Post Office. He announces himself as the farmer Walter P. Mooney, is checked off the roll by the election official, and signs the register. He proceeds to mark his ballot for Billington and drop it in the box.

Later he is greeted at the Hop Frog like a war hero. He had forgotten the valise, which Mary stored for safekeeping behind the bar. Bonadies squeezes his shoulder and winks at the bartender.

“What’s your pleasure, Edgar?”

“How about—a julep.”

“Coming right up.”

Edgar looks to Mary and thinks of his mother. His memories of her were few but intense. The same wide eyes and pale unblemished skin. So beautiful, and he remembered the musky smell of

her makeup, and the stuffiness of the dressing room that she shared with the other players. Edgar would sit in the corner, in a sailor suit, playing with her fake pearls, while she prepared, applying lipstick and rouge, putting on spangled costumes, practicing her funny speeches. And then a man would take him to the front row and let him watch the performance. She took on a magic aspect, captivating the audience. In one play she always died, every night, killing herself while another actor, her lover, apparently, also committed suicide. A smudge of blood. That had taken her away when he was three, blood coughed into her handkerchief. The memory of the dressing room lingers, and perhaps that's why he feels this impromptu costume parlor so familiar. I can be a soldier, I can be a priest, I can be gentleman educated in the east... bells, the bells from Christo's square in London, and mourning bells for his brother Henry, died of drink at the age of twenty-three.

Yes he had beaten the rest of the boys in the swimming race across the west lake at UVA. The first university of the republic started by Thomas Jefferson. These boors, these vulgarians, who had no conception of poetry or Europe, who had not been previously educated in Europe, used to give him a rough time. "Reading Cervantes, Edgar?" They'd say. "What a bore! How about a pistol duel?" And then laugh, and invite him into the poker game, which he accepted to be part of the crew.

Lost badly and had to borrow from his foster father to pay the debts. Soon he knew it was not a crew worth being part of. So he beat them in swimming. He had that over them, though he refused to fight the duel.

Mary brings the julep and Edgar savors its sweetness. Through the window he can see the lighthouse across the bay.

"Ah, the lighthouse," he whispers, raising his glass. That is the title of the unfinished story in his valise. But they say it may have been built on clay and would certainly topple in a gale, leaving the seasick sailors lost and ready for wrecking and death. Everyone is headed for the rocky shore in their own time... as he used to think that everyone's neck is already locked in his own guillotine. The blades were released long ago. They were on their way.

“But this man is a real poet.”

“No drunken limericks... please.”

By five in the afternoon Edgar had been to the polling place six times. Now he arrives in the sailor's uniform, laughing, jaunty, many mint juleps later. He adjusts the glasses they gave him to enhance his disguise. Just in on leave from the frigate *Ulalume*. Another vote for Billington.

But one official, a man representing Thayer, is suspicious.

“Wait, sir. You say you are a sailor?”

“Yes. From the *Ulalume*. We're in port loading tobacco. I live here when not at sea.”

“So, could you tell me, if you are a sailor, what the word ‘aft’ means on a ship?”

“Hah... of course. It means the stern of the ship, toward the back. Any sailor knows that.”

The official is annoyed at this correct reply. He looks down at the signature and reluctantly nods his head.

Edgar had thought about going to sea as a youth. Later he even told people that he had worked on a whaler. He liked to make up the stories. One time he did cross the Atlantic with his foster father and mother and returned, in diminished circumstances. But his foster father, John Allan, eventually disowned him. Hated his penchant for literature. Had no love. Never had love. Only took him in because his wife was a theatre-goer who pitied the orphaned boy, the son of the actress who played Juliet so movingly and then died. But Mrs. Allan also died of consumption when Edgar was twenty, just like his mother. Red stain, red blood on lace, the consumption. You are cordially invited to the Masque of the Red Death. And then Mr. Allan kicked him down the road like an old empty flagon: “I did not send you to UVA to read Cervantes.”

*A bladed pendulum, swinging, closer and closer to his neck like the telltale heart of a black cat.*

At midnight he sat in the corner of the bar in the clothes of a

railroad man. His shirt was unbuttoned and his speech was slurred.

“Ann, or Mary...perhaps. My Tripetta. Come here.”

She is cleaning up the tables, putting away the chairs. He looks up at the chandelier, hoping to see the cremated bodies of the boors and libertines, the charred rags of their orangutan costumes from the royal court. When he removes his glasses, the chandelier begins to whirl like a merry-go round. The men hang on, suspended in their furry costumes, hands clutching the antlers, waving, giggling with delight. One of them is Bonadies. Another is Billington, the bartender, and John Allan, may his soul rot in a lice infested sepulcher for all eternity and his guts be devoured by ravenous cats.

A wonderful game—the royal Court of the Hop Frog King.

Edgar lights the match and the flames leap in a glorious conflagration. The spinning men catch fire, morph into burnt flesh.

“The evil that men do.” Like the time he had to dispose of his aunt Muddy’s slave. She’d inherited the man from an uncle. He was a strong young Negro who ate like a horse and Muddy couldn’t afford to feed and clothe him. She could barely afford to do for herself or Edgar, and they needed money badly. It was up to Edgar to sell him. So he found a blacksmith in South Charlotte who gave him forty dollars. Muddy was pleased.

“Tripetta.”

“My name is Mary.”

“Let me call you Tripetta. I missed my train. Was it three days ago?” He clutches the ticket, now creased and useless. “Do you know that I am a poet?”

“So they say...like that Longfellow fellow?”

“Longfellow is a fool. He is a plagiarist. He is not a poet. He is a wag and a cad and a charlatan of letters. A Charlemagne of letters.”

“But he is our most famous poet, except for that one who wrote ‘The Raven.’”

“Ah. You are too sweet. I want to marry you. I want you to be my wife. You know ‘The Raven’ don’t you? A few lines I may have taken from Barrett Browning...just borrowed a bit from Barrett Browning. It’s all one great poem, one great epic.”

“Nevermore,” she said.

Some weeks earlier, he had been invited to speak and present a new poem to an assembly in Rhode Island. He had nothing new in him, so pawned off an old verse he’d written when he was fourteen. Unable to maintain the lie, he confessed at the reception afterwards. The councilmen were appalled and insisted he return half the fee.

He refused.

If only John Allan had given him the assistance he needed.

“It’s okay to borrow now and then,” said Tripetta.

“Will you take me home with you?”

“But what about Elmira?”

“Somehow, that will never... And she must give up more than half her fortune to marry me, because of the codicil in her deceased husband’s will. The lighthouse at the end of the island, do you know it is built on clay? They didn’t tell the lighthouse keeper. They said he could live there for as long as he liked, and write, and simply... Yes, you will go there with me. Virginia is dead. So now... You come with me to the lighthouse. We will weather every storm. You will help me to do so.”

“You are crazy mister, you need sleep. You have deep blue circles under your eyes.”

“It was many and many a year ago in a kingdom by the sea... Bells, bells, bells. They wanted to publish my verse when I was fourteen, but thought it would go to my head...Hah! I was nearly three when she died, but I remember her eyes, and the musk of her makeup, and the small white cameo she wore around her neck, which somehow I lost though it was one of the few objects I truly cherished. Her tenderness, I’ll never forget. We always lose what

we value, somehow... That's why the alternative.... it's near... I can feel it...the pendulum and the guillotine. And if not those blades, the maelstrom."

"Here's your valise. No more to drink for you."

"Another julep?"

"The bartender's gone home."

"Then can you mix it? I liked the election game. I don't give a damn about Billington but abolition is not a good idea. I always like pretending to be someone else, because... I never felt bottom. But now I will feel bottom soon enough. The lighthouse is built on clay! The storm is on its way. The blade released... Tick tock. I will be famous after I die. I will be the most celebrated American author on the continent, where I am understood."

"I'm going home."

\* \* \*

That evening Edgar leaves the Hop Frog, clutching his valise. He walks unsteadily through the fog that has settled on the waterfront. His clothes seem even more tattered than before. He stops to adjust his cravat. But it's not there. He is still in the outfit of the railroad man, but can't remember exactly how he got that way. He can see only twenty feet ahead. The faint wail of a distant foghorn.

Four men emerge from the gloom. One of them is the Election Official. He is flanked by three goons, off-duty policemen.

"Ah, the sailor!" says the Election Official. He smiles. "Not on shipboard right now, eh? Let me see, now he works for the railroad. A man of many talents!"

Edgar stares back through the fog. Who are these men? Am I back in the royal court of the King in Hop Frog? The Official nods to his mates.

"Voted more than once, I reckon, and for that scoundrel Billington. That's a criminal offense. But we'll handle it right now."

The policemen draw their clubs as they approach.



\* \* \*

A white tie affair. The walls are white, the bedding is white, the people around me wear white. They speak, but I cannot understand what they are saying. They murmur, and then disappear like ghosts.

The white curtains billow. I sit up in my shroud. It's very close now. A step away. Through the curtains, the lighthouse. Tripetta is already there. She dabs her face with a bit of rouge. I go forth.

# A Dream

Marge Simon

*This piece is paired with "A Dream Within a Dream"*



# To My Daughter

Nathan Tompkins

*This selection is paired with "Annabelle Lee"*

I wonder if you ever stare  
at the Southern Cross as its  
light of ancient dying suns  
float across the summer ocean

while I watch my withered reflection  
in the waning winter moon,  
dreaming of sitting beside you  
on a Gold Coast beach

as we eat fish and chips,  
digging our bare toes  
into the cooling night sand,

while I read to you Poe's Annabelle Lee,  
your namesake poem, in the dwindling twilight,  
and the whitecaps roll between our ankles  
as we languish in your own  
kingdom by the sea.

Or do you just cross out my name  
wherever you see it written?

## **Part Two**

The Alphanumeric Selections



# The Ravening

Meadhbh Hamrick

THE RAVEN : Copyright (c) 1845 By E. Poe  
<edgar@l33tp0ets.com>

Release 17 / Serial Number 821022

## The Study

You wake at your desk in the study, weak and weary. You must have dozed off there for a few moments. Pictures adorn every wall of your study. On the plinth above the massive door on the south wall is a bust of Pallas. Behind it is your secret stash of laudanum. The door itself is grand and stately; the kind of door you read about rich folks having. Through the small exterior windows, you see storm clouds roiling and the beginnings of a rain-storm.

A faint tapping can be heard at the door.

## EXAMINE DESK

On the desk a forgotten volume of unknown lore, looking quaint and curious, is opened to a page about birds. A desk calendar shows it is in the month of "Bleak December," which comes after the month of "Razor-burn November" in the new revised calendar. The desk contains a panoply of drawers containing pens, loose-leaf paper and the detritus of a writer's life (including bottles of Whiskey and Absinthe.)

## OPEN DOOR

You reach for the gilded handle of the large oaken door, but ennui engulfs you in a cloud of indecision. You shrug and sink back into your comfortable leather armchair to contemplate the dark void of despair which is your life.

### **DRINK LAUDANUM**

What do you mean, the Laudanum behind the Bust of Pallas or the Laudanum hidden behind the Absinthe bottle in the desk drawer?

### **DRINK LAUDANUM BEHIND THE BUST OF PALLAS**

\*GULP\* Yikes! That stuff is bitter! The self-rationalization of your addiction distracts you briefly, yet you still feel bland and bitter. After a few moments the pangs of life and loss pass you by.

### **OPEN DOOR**

You reach for the gilded handle of the large oaken door, but melancholy envelops you.

### **DRINK LAUDANUM IN DESK**

\*GULP\* Okay. The second bottle is MUCH nicer than the first.

Hey! Do you hear rapping? rapping at your chamber door?

## **OPEN DOOR**

Your drunken hand manhandles the oaken door; outside you see a gathering storm, a dark garden and a forgettable river beyond. You see nothing that would have produced a rapping noise. (Perhaps it's the neighbor kids playing a prank?)

## **GO SOUTH**

### Dark Garden

You are in the garden to the south of your abode. To the north is an open door leading to your chamber. To the south is a path leading to the less than memorable river. It is dark here. If you continue you are likely to be eaten by a Grue. A lamp sits on the ground nearby.

## **GET LAMP. TURN ON LAMP.**

Got Lamp.

Lamp is now on.

## **GO SOUTH**

### Plutonian Shores

You have reached the plutonian shores of the River Lethe. Dare you wade in its surprisingly warm waters? To the north a path leads to a garden, shrouded in inky blackness. To the south you may wade in the perfumed river. A nearby sign alerts you that no life-guard is on duty.



A tapping can be heard to the north.

## **GO SOUTH**

Nepenthe Waters

Into the waters you daintily tip-toe. The perfumed waters of the River Lethe are rumored to relieve weary travellers of painful memories. Maybe it takes a while? You still remember tubercular Richmond and whats-her-name, your old girlfriend. Heck. What WAS her name!?

## **SAY “LENORE”**

In the distance a bird can be heard.

## **GO NORTH**

Plutonian Shores

## **GO NORTH**

Dark Garden

## **GO NORTH**

The Study

A large black bird is here. (This is what happens when you leave the door open.) The bird is holding a note in its beak and is mumbling something that sounds like “EVER-SMORP.” (Perhaps the bird is from

the north where all accents are queer and wondrous.)

**TAKE NOTE. READ NOTE.**

The bird is at first reluctant to give you the note. You eventually hit on the idea of tempting the bird with a shiny coin. The bird drops the note to grab coin and flies up to the bust of Pallas.

Addressed to you, the note is writ in the fine penmanship of respectable society, but much of it made unreadable with the stain of tears. What little you can make out is "...I miss you so; the months since your passing have been difficult... Love, Lenore"

**YOU HAVE DIED OF TUBERCULOSIS.**

Your score is 5 of 150 points which ranks you as "BULWER-LYTTON"

Do you want to try again? (Y/N)

Y

The Study

You wake at your desk in the study, weak and weary. You must have dozed off there for a few moments. Pictures adorn every wall of your study. On the plinth above the massive door on the south wall is a bust of Pallas. Behind it is your secret stash of laudanum. The door itself is grand and stately; the kind of door you read about rich folks having. Through the small exterior windows, you see storm clouds roiling and the beginnings of a rain-storm.

## DRINK LAUDANUM BEHIND THE BUST OF PALLAS

\*GULP\* Yikes! That stuff is bitter! The self-rationalization of your addiction distracts you briefly, yet you still feel bland and bitter. After a few moments the pangs of life and loss pass you by.

# My Mother's People

Samantha Stiers

*I was sick—sick unto death with that long agony; and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me.*

Reading in the backseat while my mother drove up the canyon always made me a little *sick unto death*, but I could not resist cracking that midnight-blue, luscious-thick, brand-new book that smelled so sweet and was all mine.

The cover was a painting of a tiny blond girl, white-gowned, curled in the corner of a blood-red chair, shelves of books looming above her. She held a dripping candle to illuminate the book she had chosen. In the night library, it was the only light. The child's eyes were wide, astonished and blue.

I thought it was the most beautiful picture in the world.

*Impia tortorum longos hic turba furores  
Sanguinis innocui, non satiata, aluit.  
Sospite nunc patria, fracto nunc funeris antro,  
Mors ubi dira fuit vita salusque patent.*

*Tortorum.* I was pretending to teach myself Latin from the workbooks my mother ordered me, because I loved words, and to keep up my reputation as a *gifted child*. But I did not need middle school Latin workbooks to pick that one word from the meaningless quatrain.

*...all at once, there came a most deadly nausea over my spirit, and I felt every fibre in my frame thrill as if I had touched the wire of a galvanic battery.*

My mother said her people had been tortured. I knew they were killed, but not tortured. How they were tortured, I wanted to know, but could not ask. I knew I was evil, for wanting, for needing to know.

I confided my confusion in my fifth-grade teacher, and she said the moment where I needed to know how my mother's people had been tortured was called *morbid curiosity*, and it was normal.

At home I pulled my OED from under my bed, and looked up *morbid*. Sick. *Morbid* meant sick. It was as I suspected, that I was evil and bad for feeling my mother's people's torture as my own. I began to think of myself as *sick*. Although somehow I knew my need had more heart than *morbid curiosity*. It was not the car wreck of strangers I was craning to see.

I knew I must stop thinking of *torture*. I saw the word printed where it was not, heard people speak it when they had not. I had to get a grip. But I could not. The more I tried the more virulent the twisted roller coaster in my stomach became. There had to be a way to stop this, but I did not know it, and again I blamed myself.

*We stand upon the brink of a precipice. We peer into the abyss—we grow sick and dizzy. Our first impulse is to shrink from the danger. Unaccountably we remain. By slow degrees our sickness and dizziness and horror become merged in a cloud of unnamable feeling. By gradations, still more imperceptible, this cloud assumes shape, as did the vapor from the bottle out of which arose the genius in the Arabian Nights. But out of this our cloud upon the precipice's edge, there grows into palpability, a shape, far more terrible than any genius or any demon of a tale, and yet it is but a thought, although a fearful one, and one which chills the very marrow of our bones with the fierceness of the delight of its horror. It is merely the idea of what would be our sensations during the sweeping precipitancy of a fall from such a height. And this fall—this rushing annihilation—for the very reason that it involves that one most ghastly and loathsome of all the most ghastly and loathsome images of death and suffering which have ever presented themselves to our imagination—for this very cause do we now the most vividly desire it. And because our reason violently deters us from the brink, therefore do we the most impetuously approach it. There is no passion in nature so demoniacally impatient, as that of him who, shuddering upon the edge of a precipice, thus meditates a Plunge. To*

*indulge, for a moment, in any attempt at thought, is to be inevitably lost; for reflection but urges us to forbear, and therefore it is, I say, that we cannot. If there be no friendly arm to check us, or if we fail in a sudden effort to prostrate ourselves backward from the abyss, we plunge, and are destroyed.*

I knew if I could not pull my mind free from the precipice, something bad would happen. I would fall somehow, die somehow. Emotionally or mentally or spiritually. When I thought of my mother's people's torture, I could not move my body, and my classmates would ask me if I was ok. I did not answer them because I was not there. I was not drinking chocolate milk in the cafeteria of Nederland Elementary. I stood on a precipice, sick, dizzy, hypnotized, staring.

My classmates whispered about my strangeness. My teacher called me in to discuss my *depression*.

But couldn't she see? I was not depressed at all. I was on fire, bad fire and good fire. It was spring, and the leaves of the aspens shivered sensually. The sky ached a glorious blue, the rocks were ancient and covered in beards of lichen. Death had stripped my nerves raw, now every caress of life shocked them into ecstasy.

I was alive. I was alive and I was so happy and I was so guilty. There was a good part of me, the child part, the wholesome part, and then there was the dark part. I wanted to remove my darkness but everything was intertwined.

*I could not love except where Death  
was mingling his with Beauty's breath*

The thoughts of my mother's people in their torture could not stay in my slender body. I squirmed constantly, I whispered to myself. I paced on the playground to release the terrible energy, and at night I rocked back and forth on my child's bed in the moonlight, that I might sleep.

Poe knew of the constant movement needed to lance thought. He

knew that thought must be killed.

*At first, I made an effort to shake off this nightmare of the soul. I walked vigorously—faster—still faster—at length I ran. I felt a maddening desire to shriek aloud. Every succeeding wave of thought overwhelmed me with new terror, for, alas! I well, too well understood that to think, in my situation, was to be lost.*

But the torture could not be outrun, because it lived in my cells. Because I could not speak it, had no right to speak it, I had to let its caustic elements harden to glittering minerals inside me, for it was two of us alone in a sealed skull.

*And by strange alchemy of brain  
His pleasures always turn'd to pain—  
His naïveté to wild desire—  
His wit to love—his wine to fire—  
And so, being young and dipt in folly  
I fell in love with melancholy*

I took no pride in my psychic survival, and regarded it as evil. As rapidly as I paced, now I wrote in school notebooks, alone, hiding from the classmates who now openly mocked and feared me. I wrote at night when I could not sleep. I built up a pure self, apart from the evil self who held a scalding ember against her heart and refused to let it go. And the ones who read what I wrote sensed the fire behind it, and mistook its light for beauty.

*To me a painted paroquet  
Hath been—a most familiar bird—  
Taught me my alphabet to say—  
To lisp my very earliest word  
While in the wild-wood I did lie  
A child—with a most knowing eye.*

# Madmen of a Harmless Nature

Robert Perret

My friend the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin had garnered a reputation for divining the truth in the most outre of crimes and yet he was most content in his current repose, velvet curtains drawn tight, slippered feet to the fire, nodding over a favored tome, drifting from our inner sanctum into some phantasmagoria within his mind. The adulation of the public was a nuisance to him, only the satisfaction of bringing his praeternatural acumen to bear upon some nefarious puzzle served as an inducement to action. Others had called him a diseased intelligence, but he was proud of his rare ability to intertwine ingenuity and intuition, and thread it through a rational analysis to discover the truth that eluded others.

That horrible orb that some call the Sun, but which Dupin and I referred to as the Agony Star, was at long last diving beneath the horizon, subjecting some other corner of the damned world to it's Hellish emanations. We were free to roam the streets of Paris again. Dupin's astral self settled back hard into his body, eliciting a long sigh. It had been raining that day, and so the fetid stench of the city enveloped us as we trod those glistening cobblestones. Everywhere we walked the eyes of the night were upon us. By day Dupin was the hero of Paris, a champion of justice in a cruel world. To the denizens of these lunar streets however, he was something different—a wraith haunting the back alleys. We would go everywhere and talk to no one. As we passed they would whisper amongst themselves, “is it truly him?” Little did they know that to Dupin they were much the same—temporal flickerings of other beings, perceived only at the very edges of his consciousness.

This evening had presented an uneventful promenade when, of a sudden, Dupin grasped at my breast to arrest me. He took his famous green-tinted spectacles between his fingers and moved them up and down the bridge of his nose, as if some small change in the angle might confirm or deny what he was seeing. He was staring down into a foreboding alley, and I feared that some awful thing might extrude itself from those inky depths. Worse than I had feared, Dupin stepped in, his feet trotting forward like a marionette



inexpertly handled. I grabbed at his sleeve but he tossed my hand away. Working in a world of mental abstractions, Dupin, known for his unique perceptiveness, was often oblivious to the practical dangers of the world. It was times such as this that I felt the keen lack of martial leanings in our pairing. Indeed, should a situation ever come to fisticuffs or worse I was certain that we would be much the worse for it. That Dupin considered himself as separate from this world did not make him immune to it.

It was with these trepidacious thoughts that I followed him into this particular recess of Paris. Much to my relief the space was abandoned, but what then drew my friends particular interest? Finally, as we approached the terminus of the alley, I saw that which he had somehow seen from the avenue. Dupin and I delight in the lurid, the sordid, and the despicable. Such things were the very currency of our friendship, but what I read scrawled upon those forlorn bricks sickens me to this very day. Without a thought I made to wipe it away with my sleeve.

“Wait!” Dupin cried. “It must remain undisturbed.”

“This is too much!” I replied.

“This is an invitation to a game. Destroy it and we may miss the whole trick. There is so little of interest in Paris these days, let us not be so rash as to turn our noses up at this intrigue.”

“You say this is an invitation. Is it meant for you?”

“Most assuredly not, and the most enjoyable invitations are the ones that are misaddressed.”

“How did you discover it, then? I was at your elbow and would never had known it was there.”

“Man’s ability to observe is profound, and yet ultimately limited by our mortal frailties. An attentive man sees what is happening. An observant man looks for what is happening that has never happened before. In such a way is useful information derived.”

“What are we to do now?”

“I have committed the message to memory, an easy task, of

course, since it would be difficult indeed to forget such a thing. We shall wait and see what happens.”

And so we did. I bought a handful of papers each day, hoping for a resolution to the travesty. It had made the front page, of course, on the first day. I was much chagrined to see that, in the rush to outdo each other for readers, only two of the papers had refrained from revealing the repugnant diatribe verbatim. Yet, in a city like Paris, the story quickly sank and disappeared beneath those ink-smearred pages.

“How could this have come to nothing?” I wondered aloud.

“We’ve not heard the last of it,” Dupin predicted.

At that very moment there was a pounding upon the door of our secluded maise in Faubourg St. Germain. I was not surprised to see that Dupin was not surprised. I threw back the great bolt securing the entrance, and it screeched in protest at the disturbance. Outside stood Monsieur G-----, Prefect of the Paris Police, as I had found him on a few occasions before. He pushed by me to confront Dupin, still ensconced in his club chair.

“This is a most serious business, M. Dupin,” he said, shaking his fist. “Another one of those horrible messages has been discovered, and more than a few people want me to arrest you.”

“Arrest Dupin?” I scoffed. “But why?”

“Who else could know these things? These blackest of secrets, buried deep under the pillars of Paris herself.”

“These messages are telling the truth then?” Dupin failed to hide a smile behind steepled fingers.

“It is not for me to say,” M. G----- replied.

“And yet you are here.”

“You were seen at the site of the first message, and before that no one had seen anything usual there. Worse yet you were nowhere to be seen when the second message appeared.”

“So both my presence and my absence are proof of my guilt?”

“Do not attempt to twist me around with your clever words, Monsieur. At the moment I am your only friend. I have known you to be a just, if strange, man who has seen justice done in the past. More so, while Parisian society knows you to have a depraved sense of humor, I know you to be a man of no especial modesty. Thus, while I concede these disgusting epigraphs might appeal to your macabre whimsy, you would never allow the infamy of their authorship to escape you, if indeed you could claim it.”

“This second message, what was it?”

M. G----- hemmed and stuttered before finally repeating it in hushed tones. If I thought the first message was the worst thing I had ever read, I was quite sure this message was the worst thing anyone had ever heard. Dupin chuckled and his gaze drifted off into our fireplace.

“I will be hard pressed to save you from a firing squad if that is your only reaction, M. Dupin.”

My friend rose and extracted a map of Paris from his bureau. Gesturing for us to follow he took the map to the dining room and spread it out upon the table. With a pencil he marked the spot of the first message, and inscribed it below. In consultation with the Prefect, he then marked the location of the second message and transcribed that as well.

“What is the meaning of this, M. Dupin?”

“The meaning remains obscure but the method comes into focus.” Measuring against his sleeve Dupin compared the existing points, and then proposed a new one. “Leave this place unobserved until well after midnight, then have your men examine it. Let me know of the results at once.”

“This is where the villain will strike next?”

“Most assuredly.”

“What of the messages?”

“It is a poor blackmailer who gives away his wares like this. I suspect the messages contain a kind of code, but I have not deci-

phered it yet. I shall give it my full attention, but I expect the third, fourth, and fifth messages will help greatly. The more information we have the easier it will be to see the pattern.”

“Mon Dieu, M. Dupin, you expect three more messages?”

“And in short order. The first was a call to action, I think, and time was allowed for it to disseminate to the interested parties. The endeavor will proceed in earnest now.”

The Prefect left and Dupin delved into his books now, disappearing into a crowd of Euclid, Pythagoras, and Archimedes. These fellows were later joined by Dee, Andreae, and Alhazred. I tried to decipher his line of inquiry from the pages left open all about the place, but his thoughts were too eccentric for me to follow. Finally he sat back with a great look of satisfaction upon his face.

“Have you solved it?”

“The whole thing has happened within my mind already. It is now incumbent upon the material world to meet up with me.”

“If you can put a stop to some infamy is it not your moral duty to do so?”

“That which is taking place is only a crime in the sense of conventional morality.”

“That sounds as if it will be of little use as a defence if we end up in the docket.”

“There is an understanding between gentlemen of a certain sort, a memorandum of non-interference. For if we can not accommodate each other what hope of fulfillment do we have in this mundane world?”

The more my friend Dupin explained his reticence the more anxious my heart became. We took our supper at home, and sat playing at that infernal Oriental game Dupin so favored, biding our time until we heard of the results of the Prefect’s efforts. The first hateful fingers of dawn were probing the edges of the curtains by the time M. G----- returned.

“You are either an anarchist or a warlock, M. Dupin, and the

Mayor little cares which.”

“I take it there was a new message.”

“It was the damndest thing, I was there myself to see it. Not a disreputable character on the street!”

“But the street was not vacant.”

“In proximity to the incident there was but one occupant, but it was M. L-----, a respectable surgeon well known to me. Not to be indiscreet, but when the Emperor has some small malady, this is the physician he summons.”

“And yet, this was the only person seen, the only possible perpetrator?”

“I tell you it is impossible, men such as him do not scrawl things such as these in dark alleys in the dead of night.”

“What fresh missive do we have?”

The Prefect’s face turned grey, and with but two fingers he placed a file upon the table before Dupin, and then turned away before it was opened.

Dupin’s mouth turned up in a smile, and he added the message to his map.

“Can you tell me nothing, M. Dupin?”

“I could tell you everything, M. D-----, but I choose not to.”

The Prefect sputtered, “Why not?”

“There is a kind of justice at work here, a kind as good as any other in my estimation. Besides, my incarceration will but prove my innocence.”

“Your incarceration?” I said in disbelief.

“As M. D----- has indicated, it is inescapable that I must be considered a suspect in this most distasteful episode.”

“Only you could know these things, M. Dupin.”

“Only I could prise these black truths free, perhaps,” my

friend conceded. “However, clearly these things are known to those involved.”

“It is treason to the Crown to even think so.”

“It is treason to analytics to think otherwise. I stand ready to surrender myself as an act of cooperation with the police.”

M. G----- looked to be as befuddled as I. At long last he rolled up the map and tucked it under his arm and escorted Dupin away. I was left alone in our parlor wondering what I was to do. Dupin left no notes, indeed I had never seen him personally put words to paper. I could recall the books he had submerged himself in but I had no means of divining what he had plundered from their depths. The next day I presented myself at the jailhouse but was turned away. M. G----- appeared briefly to scowl at me, and, between curses, to explain that Dupin sat smugly in his cell, refusing to divulge anything until after midnight two days hence.

“My plan was to starve him out,” the Prefect complained. “But this morning there was a silver tray in his cell, laden with the finest omelette from Le Grand Vefour, and fruit and champagne besides. None of my officers will admit to passing it through. It looks quite bad for your friend, I would not expect to see him walk free again.”

Thus, like the rest of Paris I was left with little recourse but to wait to see what would happen. I trusted Dupin’s assessment over that of M. G-----, and yet sorrow began to ache in my heart. The next day the papers reported on a fourth message, emblazoning it in large type on the front of every paper. The very Empire now teetered on the edge of collapse, and as a nation we trembled before whatever final blow the fifth message might strike. I re-plotted the sites of the messages on a fresh map. Replicating Dupin’s method I connected them and then measured the angles and the length of each segment, thereby placing a fifth mark. Connecting those revealed a pentagon, but one that covered a not inconsiderable portion of the city. Turning back to Dupin’s books I searched for the meaning of the shape. It was quickly revealed to me that, in occult writing, pentagons are often embellished by connecting

the points internally to form a star. Doing this to the map created a new, smaller, pentagon, but one that still encircled several blocks. I almost felt the breath of Dupin upon my ear as I had the sudden inspiration to repeat the procedure three more times. A tiny pentagon was now directly over a certain royal garden I was familiar with, although it pointed to some obscure section, far removed from the hedge mazes and flower beds I had frequented.

I was awoken on the fifth day by a pounding upon the front door. A surreptitious peep out the upper window of my bedchamber revealed the Prefect and a dozen other men. In a panic I threw on my clothes, retrieved my map from the table, and slipped out the old servant's passage in the larder, just as the police had battered their way in the front. I heard them ransacking our maïse as I slipped through the dirty forsaken crevices of the neighborhood. Once at a safe distance I took the first opportunity to return to the traditional thoroughfares of Paris. I stopped for a quick breakfast of croissant, nuts, and cheese to calm myself. Feeling much more civilized, I combed my hair and proceeded to the garden in question. Casually I paid the entrance fee and, in no particular hurry, wandered the grounds like any other visitor. I knew that I had until midnight, and my problem would in fact be whiling away the excess time, rather than making it up. I wandered the hedge maze until at last I found myself alone. With some small force I pressed myself back into the shrubbery and through, out into the wild grounds. While still imminently picturesque, they were not immaculately groomed like the area on display. Purposefully I strode into the trees opposite. I loaded my pockets with apples, pears, and nectarines, reluctantly admitting on some subconscious level that I was stealing from the Emperor's orchard, and that alone would be enough to see me hang. Those were archaic laws, and would certainly never be enforced in modern day, I assured myself.

Looking at the map and the walls of the garden I pressed onward, deeper into the forest. After a brief patch of wilderness I was surprised to find evidence of civilization again. Old Roman paving stones protruded from the ground. Odd bits of statuary were intertwined with the bushes and brambles. Finally, ahead under a deep canopy of old trees I found a circle of columns around an ancient

tomb, pocked with time and smooth with weather. To my untrained I could not decipher if the decorations on the large slab were Grecian or Egyptian, or perhaps the depiction of some other lost society entirely. It was cold to the touch and the stone lid far too heavy for me to move. I looked at my pocketwatch, despairing at the hours until midnight. My exhausted form was quite unused to being about at such a respectable hour, and so I found some nook just away from the clearing that was padded with moss and clover and I laid down in it, listening to the leaves rustle and the insects chirp. My eyes grew heavy and I let them slip closed, to rest them for a moment.

Then there was the sound of bodies tromping through the wood. I feared I must have been discovered, and again felt that hangman's noose about my neck as I made to discard the fruit from my pockets. However, when I opened my eyes it was dark, with just a trickle of moonlight making its way down through the treetops. The sounds had kept on moving, the people oblivious to my presence.

I watched from the darkness as the men carried a shrouded figure upon a litter, one man at each corner like pallbearers, and the final leading the way with a lantern. They propped one side of the conveyance up against the tomb and moved the body over, so it lay directly on the stone table. The lantern bearer hung the light from the crenulated swirls of one of the columns, and then began a strange invocation. The men stepped around the body, unwrapping it as they went. At intervals the wrappings revealed some trinket, unrecognizable to me in the darkness, The man who uncovered it would hang it about his neck or wrist, or place it atop his head, as the item dictated. By the time the body was unwrapped they were each dressed like kings in a pantomime. The last item was a golden dagger, and it was revealed by the lantern bearer. He shouted some savage gibberish into the heavens as he raised it above his head. I thought it to be more theatrics but he plunged it down into the chest of the body. The chanting of the others continued unabated.

The lantern bearer sawed at the corpse, causing the thing to heave and jerk. At last he wrenched the chest open and then



attacked the inside. The man's hands and face, now drenched in blood, had disappeared into the blackness of night. Yet I still saw when he at last relented and then held something aloft—the heart of the deceased, I realized with a shock. For a moment I feared he might eat it, but instead he produced a cylinder from under his coat. He open it and slid the heart inside before resealing it. He then seemed to wave it towards the four cardinal directions before pressing the container to his lips and whispering something to it. He stepped back and the next man stepped forward. With his bare hands he fished about the gruesome cavity, finally holding aloft some veiny sac in victory. He produced his own jar and repeated the ceremony. This continued until all five men had claimed some repugnant prize.

They then paraded about the body in the opposite direction, wrapping it up again as they went. When it was once again enshrouded the lantern bearer retrieved his burden and opened a valve. Solemnly he poured the fuel out over the deceased, until the reserve appeared to be exhausted. The men all stepped back and the lantern was thrown, shattering upon the tomb and igniting, quickly flaring into an azure inferno. The strange party hurried away into the night and I was once again left alone to wonder in abject confusion. Unsure of the way in the dark I allowed myself to be mesmerized by the morbid pyre. When the last tendrils of flame had lapsed the lid of the tomb was clean, as if untouched. What strange rite was this, I thought, and how many bodies had been surrendered to the infinite upon these grounds? Most importantly, what did it have to do with the horrible messages written all around Paris?

The answer was to be revealed the following day when my friend came strolling in through our splintered door as if nothing was amiss. He plucked the gloves from his fingers and poured a generous brandy before settling into his chair.

“What was the truth of it?” I wondered.

“A simple case of revenge.”

“Simple? I saw them cleave the man's guts free before immo-

lation.”

“Did you really?” Dupin gazed proudly upon me. “You are one up on our friend the Prefect then. He had half the Paris Police encamped on the Rue B-----.”

“The fifth point of the star?”

“Indeed, and a clever trick that was. At the hands on the clocktower turned they wound up a rope attached to a shuttered window across the street. Just as the clock struck midnight the rope yanked the shutters open, and upon the windowpanes behind was the final message painted. The room within was lit so that none present could miss it.”

“So it was set in advance?”

“The length of the rope will be conclusive, but I expect the trick was set several hours ahead of time. The perpetrator would want to be sure of getting away before any police arrived, but also certain his contraption would not be disturbed prematurely.”

“What was the final message?”

Dupin’s whole face was contorted in a smile. “I will say only that the Prefect shot the windows out immediately and made the men present swear a blood oath to secrecy.”

“Will it hold?”

“Of course not, but there are always these kind of rumors flying about. I expect no reaction at all from the Imperial family, thus ensuring it remains but one more whisper carried upon the breath of Paris.”

“So this man was killed for sharing these secrets?”

“To the contrary, this man shared these secrets because he was dying. There is a brief respite before death when an ailing man is untouchable by this mortal world. Most who find themselves there are already thinking of the next life. This man, instead, made one last strike from this life.”

“Why not simply send a statement to the papers?”

“This was not an expose meant for the masses, this was a game being played between kings. The departing man was invoking an ancient rite, he simply found a way to lash out at the same time. A man with but days to live can develop a certain strain of ingenuity. He tells his mundane secrets while invoking the divine. You see, the strange meter of the messages can be explained in that there is a simple cipher represented by the arrangement of the words. Convert those to numbers like this,” Dupin scribbled some figures on my map, “and then change those back to letters simply by counting and the meaning is apparent.”

Dupin had reduced the messages to a single, most surprising name.

“You must never tell M. D-----, or indeed anyone else. You are protected by certain understandings I have in place, but they are tenuous at best.”

The following day the Prefect announced that the case was closed as he had arrested a degenerate for the hateful, treasonous, sacrilegious writings. A besotted unfortunate who wandered the streets, overhearing just enough to make plausible, but entirely false, accusations, the Prefect declared. He was a danger to the very fabric of France, according to M G----- . We had seen the man often in our travels. He fed stray cats from the meagre scraps he scrounged and tipped his hat to light poles. He was one of us, a fellow wanderer of the night, just another of Paris’ madmen of a harmless nature.

# The Imp of the Perverse

Chris Bullard

He asked, “Why not take  
that jewelry from your dead  
mother’s safe deposit box?”  
Now you have a lovely emerald.  
Your siblings never found out.

He said your spouse wouldn’t  
suspect a thing if you invited  
that cute business associate  
over to your hotel room. You  
still smile to yourself about that one.

And when he told you  
to send the fat cats a message,  
you felt no anxiety pushing  
a button in the voting booth  
for someone who could start a war.

So when his confident voice says:  
“Twenty stories, that’s not so far.  
Don’t you know you’re immortal?”  
Go ahead and have an adventure.  
He’s never steered you wrong.

# A Girl's Guide to Being Buried Alive

Julia K. Patt

You will think it's a trick of the light, at first, or that your bedclothes obscure your vision. It is not; they do not. Scrub your face all you like—the dark will not fall away from your eyes, but you will dislodge the shroud you don't yet know is a shroud. Reach now, if you must, for that bedside candle. Knock your knuckles against rough wood. Withdraw your hand and try again.

It is very important to breathe. Slowly.

You may remember, as I did not, your brief tangle with illness, the wilting of your pink cheeks, the drying-thinning of your hair, the sudden fragility of your bones. One day you were young and hale and the next you were a pale, gaunt thing, hushed and whispered over. The doctors and your parents and your love were all quite sure you would die. Prepared themselves for the final closing of your dimming eyes.

Yes, be angry. It will help. It will burn clear through the panic.

They thought you a small and delicate thing, briefly coloring their worlds, like the summer butterflies you admired in the rose garden. They wept over you, rest assured. Your mother still weeps. Your love languishes, bemoans that he never took a lock of your hair. In a day or two, he may come and stand at your tomb, over your grave. Throw his body on the cold earth or stone. Curse the uncaring heavens.

No, you cannot wait that long. And what if he does not come? What if he does not hear your muffled cries?

It may occur to him to dig you up, as my love did me. Not out of any faint hope that you are still alive, that there was some mistake, although there was. He doesn't do it for you at all. It's for him. Oh, he'll say he just wants some small token—that lock of hair or a scrap from your dress. Or else he only wants to say goodbye, to look at your face once more before the rot and the maggots take it. Some want more than tokens, more than words, more than tearful looks.

If you are sick in here, you will have to live with it, as long as you live. Swallow down the bile. Save your strength.

They were hasty when they put you in the earth; they often are when it's quick, unexpected. Someone young. Your grandfather's monument was finished long before he gasped his last. You have only your best dress, your simple wooden box, your long white sheet. The earth over your coffin has not settled. The mausoleum is locked, but they designed it against grave robbers, not escapees.

I'm not saying it will be easy. I assure you, it will not be. But you have a chance.

Your first impulse will be to scratch, tear at the wood with your delicate nails and peel up curlicues of fiber piece by piece. This will take far too long. The wood is cheap, but it's also almost green. If it were rotten, maybe. No, you'll take advantage of the hasty craftsmanship. You'll kick and punch and thrash. Beat at the boards, loosen the bindings. This is no time to be dainty—the gentility of your last life has no place here. You are a woman embattled. Recall every tiny step you had to take instead of running. That ridiculous demure whisper—eyelids lowered—you exhaled, breathy, instead of shouting. Un-bottle the girl you were before you heard the word “unladylike” for the first time all those years ago.

There is no one here to offend. No breaches of courtesy. No injury of your reputation. Just you: under the earth, behind stone.

If you are lucky, you are above ground and your struggles will have tipped your coffin onto the floor, where it's broken. You crawl out from the splintered boards, disheveled and panting. Your heartbeat is thrumming in your ears and, although you are cold, you are *alive*, blood rushing through you. If the undertaker doesn't hear your cries, you will have to smash your way out, attacking the gated door. If you are clever, you might take the pin from your hair and pick the lock. Or else you grin, heady with your fury, and begin the barrage with urn or statuary, whatever's handy.

Maybe, though, you are unlucky, like I was. Maybe the earth begins to shower through the cracks in your prison. Maybe you

are panicking. It's hard, but keep breathing, shallow, through your nose. Cover your mouth with your shroud. You have only this moment before you will need to dig, to climb. Take a breath in each pocket of air you find—they are precious. Do not stop. This is not the moment to quit, to fall victim to the frailness they taught you was lovely. *This*, this is lovelier, this struggle for the surface, your filthy fingers breaking through the topmost layer, that first deep clear breath of fresh air, cold and pure in your aching lungs.

Entombed or buried, drink deep this taste of freedom. It is yours and yours alone.

You have a choice now, of course. Maybe the undertaker will find you, flopped on the wet grass like a caught fish, collapsed on the steps of your family's crypt. If you wait, there will be voices and blankets and hot tea with a little brandy to help you sleep. Your mother will weep on your hands and even your stoic father will look at you with wet-eyed affection and your brothers and sisters will wait on you for days. And your love, your love will never leave your side again. You could wait and it will happen.

Or—

Or, you could struggle to your feet, pull a workman's coat from a nearby headstone, shrug it over your thin shoulders. Hands in the pockets, head down, you could walk away from all of it, newly made. Reborn.

And never look back.

# Silicone Valley

Adele Gardner

*after "Eldorado"*

Shining pristine,  
A silver sheen  
On armored chips and circuits,  
A robot strong  
Hummed merrily on  
In quest of human units.

But he grew weak—  
His power, peak'd—  
No socket, fuse, or battery—  
Through valley green,  
The only gleam  
The sun on windows empty.

"I'm late," he looped,  
Distressed and pooped,  
"I should have met my maker—  
Where are you, Dad?  
Your metal lad  
Has come to claim his acre!"

Wind whistled through  
The barren few  
Mansions that stood like castles:  
Once-flashing screens  
Replaced by beams  
Of information facile.

The human grail—  
For memory's frail,  
So plug in, store, and share it:  
Thus robot son  
Found everyone  
Linked up and skipped the planet.



“Oh Father dear,  
Why leave me here,  
While humans all chase shadows?  
Friends in the stars?  
I’m here, not Mars!”  
He shut down salty gyros.

# Living in the House of Usher

Janet Reed

“Evidence of some bitter struggle [was] on every pore of her emaciated frame.” Poe

I was Madeline in those lost years. Unable to waken my better self. Voices blew shoulds through our damask-covered windows. I could not stop them. Expectations echoed in our halls, ricocheted off walls, brought our house down. Don't misunderstand. I saw the fissure in our foundation—toed quietly around it. You said I should have known the perils of an aging house—that wandering grounds at night would tear my white gowns. You dismiss the danger of sidestepping sense with sensibility. Let me tell you: I was scared of what you didn't see. The acid reflux of dissatisfaction, the sound of gears grinding behind the public face, the silence of disapproval. Misophonia and migraines sent me to bed, a pillow over my head. Usher's love of mother and the Scout creed but mostly of himself built bricks of resentment. Add mortar of alienation. You see how tendrils of melancholy formed the cement that immobilized me. The implosion of the house we built is the B-grade nightmare that prevents me still from wearing white. Sometimes Usher is just the tale of a madman, but after the dream, I catch the rock hard, moonstone face of Madeline in my mirror and feel ice in my veins.

## Contributors

**Selena Chambers'** (Guest Editor) fiction and non-fiction have appeared in a variety of venues including *Mungbeing* magazine, *Clarkesworld*, *NonBinary Review*, *Tor.com*, *Bookslut*, and in recent anthologies such as *Cassilda's Song* (Chaosium, 2015) and *Mixed Up: Cocktail Recipes (and Flash Fiction) for the Discerning Drinker (and Reader)* (Skyhorse Publishing, forthcoming Oct 2017,). Writing as S. J. Chambers in 2011, she co-authored the critically-acclaimed and best-selling *The Steampunk Bible* with Jeff Vandermeer (Abrams Image), as well as served as an Articles Editor for *Strange Horizons* in 2009, and then as Articles Senior Editor from 2010 through 2011. She has since eschewed the initials.

Heavily influenced by the works of Edgar Allan Poe throughout her life, she coined the term "poepathy" in 2007 to describe the unique disease of the imagination that has afflicted Poe enthusiasts since the nineteenth century. She wrote about this ailment in the essay "The Poe Bug," which has been reprinted several times, and is now the focus of her on-going column for Dunham Manor Press's *XNOYBIS* magazine. Her poepathy is also treated in her fiction, where several of her stories riff on Poe's life and works, namely "Of Parallel and Parcel," which was nominated for a Pushcart prize, and the novelette "The Last Session," both of which appeared as limited edition chapbooks from Dunham Manor Press.

In addition to a Pushcart nomination, her work has also been nominated for Best of the Net, the Hugo award, and two World Fantasy awards. Her debut collection, *Calls for Submission*, will be released May 2017 by Pelekinesis. You can find out more about her work and happenings at <http://www.selenachambers.com>.

**David Anderson** (Eddie's Bird) lives outside Tucson, where he watches ravens battle great horned owls for perching rights in his Aleppo pine. He's had the pleasure of learning from Steve Almond and Anthony Doerr at two Tin House Writers Workshops.

**Laurence Raphael Brothers** (From Out a Full-Orbed Moon) is a

writer and a technologist with R&D experience at Bell Communications Research and Google. His stories have recently appeared in *Nature Magazine*, the *New Haven Review*, and *Spirits' Tincture Magazine*.

**Chris Bullard's** (The Imp of the Perverse) chapbook *Leviathan* was published in 2016 by Finishing Line Press, and Kattywampus Press published *High Pulp* in the winter of 2016. His work has appeared in publications such as *32 Poems*, *Rattle*, *Pleiades*, *River Styx* and *Nimrod*.

**Patricia Coleman** (Tell Tale Voice) has published poems, fiction, essays, and interviews in *Rat's Ass Review*, *Bomb*, *PAJ*, *The New Review of Literature*, *Nedjeljni Vjesnik*, *Culture Magazine*. Upcoming poems in *POST(Mortem)* and *Poetica*.

**Katelyn Dunne** (A. Gordon Pym: A New Ending) has been published in *Pensworth*, current and forthcoming. Dunne is a student editor of *Pensworth* and the Managing Editor of *The Drowning Gull*. While she isn't writing or editing, she spends her time enjoying vegetarian entrees.

**E. M. Eastick** (The Ebony Clock) is a retired environmental manager, avid traveller, and writer of no-fixed form or genre. Her creative efforts can be found in *Mad Scientist Journal*, *Ember*, and a number of anthologies.

**Sandy Feinstein** (The Case of the Stolen Letter, or, The "Procrustian Bed") has published poems responding to *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night (A Fine Frenzy: Poets Respond to Shakespeare)*, as well as to Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls (Caduceus)*. She is proud of her hybrid Alice contribution appearing in *NonBinary Review*.

**James Flanagan** (Once Upon a Midnight) is an Australian scientist working in London, UK. He writes fact by day and fiction by night and never the twain shall meet. Currently more people have read his scientific articles than his fiction.

**Adele Gardner** (Silicone Valley) has a poetry book, *Dreaming of*

*Days in Astophel*, and works published in *American Arts Quarterly*, *Strange Horizons*, *Daily Science Fiction*, and *NewMyths.com*. She's a member of SFWA and literary executor for her father, Delbert R. Gardner.

**Josh Gauthier** (*Night of Darkness, Flames of Blood*) is pursuing his MFA through the Stonecoast creative writing program. He has previously published work in *Stolen Island* and *Current Magazine*. Josh works across genres with a focus on fiction and playwriting.

**Orrin Grey** (*The Murders on Morgue Street*) is a writer, editor, amateur film scholar, and monster expert whose stories of monsters, ghosts, and the ghosts of monsters have appeared in Ellen Datlow's *Best Horror of the Year*. He is the author of two fiction collections as well as a book of columns on vintage horror films.

**Meadhbh Hamrick** (*The Ravening*) is a human living in the more rural districts of downtown Seattle. Evidence indicates Meadhbh was born, attended college, was married and reproduced by budding; some scientists still disagree.

**Jamal H. Iqbal's** (*SoliTaire*) poetry, flash fiction, essays and art have been published in *Nowhere Near A Damn Rainbow*, *Sukoon*, *Uncommon: Dubai*, *Rip/Torn Magazine*, *Five2One Magazine*, *#thesideshow*, *The Syzygy Poetry Journal*, *Cease*, *Cows*, *Literary Orphans*, *Peardrop*, and *NonBinary Review*.

**Adam Knight** (*A Brush With Death*) is a writer and teacher whose short fiction has been published in *Enchanted Conversations*, the *Were-Traveler*, and *The Big Bad Vol. 1* anthology. He is currently finishing a novel based on the life of a Holocaust survivor.

**Sam Lauren** (*Gwendolyn*) is a writer with a passion for dark fantasy, horror, and science fiction. Her first short story was published by Every Day Fiction. She can be found competing at Cracked-flash.com or reporting local news for Ideas in Motion Media.

**Marie C Lecrivain** (*Love in the House of Usher*) is the editor of *poeticdiversity: the litzine of Los Angeles*, a writer, and jewelry

designer. She's the author of several volumes of poetry and fiction, and her newest chapbook, *Fourth Planet From the Sun*, is in the final stages of development.

**Jennie MacDonald** (Lemonade) has published poetry, short stories, opera reviews, and academic articles. Her story, "On Reflection," appeared in NBR's Issue #11, *Anne of Green Gables*. She shares Poe's birthday of January 19th, which might explain a lot.

**MANDEM** (cover) is a media-fluid artist conglomerate. Their work on disability poetics, the visceral body, gender and childhood is in critical dialogue with art history, religious iconography/mythology, and various -punk aesthetics. MANDEM serves as art editor for *The Deaf Poets Society* journal ([deafpoetsociety.com](http://deafpoetsociety.com)). They have recently been artist-in-residence at Il Palmerino (Florence, Italy) and Negative Space Gallery (Cleveland, Ohio). MANDEM's current painting series, *Hypermobility*, is documented online at [www/MANDEMart.com/hypermobility](http://www/MANDEMart.com/hypermobility).

**John C. Mannone** (Poe) has work in *Peacock Journal*, *Gyroscope Review*, *New England Journal of Medicine*, and *Inscape Literary Journal*. He has two collections (a third, *Flux Lines*, forthcoming from Celtic Cat). He edits poetry for *Abys & Apex* and others.

**Alan Meyrowitz** ("The Raven" Revisited) retired in 2005 after a career in computer research. His writing has appeared in *California Quarterly*, *Eclectica*, *Existere*, *The Literary Hatchet*, *Poetry Quarterly*, and *The Storyteller*. In 2013 and 2015 the Science Fiction Poetry Association nominated his poems for a Dwarf Star Award.

**Julia Patt** (*A Girl's Guide to Being Buried Alive*) has never met an abandoned bookstore she didn't like. Her fiction has appeared in such publications as *Phantom Drift*, *The Fiction Desk*, and *PANK*. She lives in Maryland with her family and two cats.

**Robert Perret** (*Madmen of a Harmless Nature*) is a writer, librarian and Sherlockian living on the Palouse. He has previously published "How Hope Learned the Trick" in *NonBinary Review*. More

of his writing can be found via [robertperret.com](http://robertperret.com).

**Guy Prevost** (Death of a Poet) is a screenwriter whose fiction has appeared in *The North Atlantic Review*, *SQ Mag*, *Quantum Realities*, and *Lively-Arts.com*. His latest screen credit: *Dinoshark* (SyFy Channel). He lives with his wife in Los Angeles.

**Brian Quinn** (Lord of the Bones; Madeline; Lenore; The Plague) uses different media: watercolors, pen and ink, etchings, block prints, digital and mixtures of all of these. His subjects include animals and people, both fanciful and realistic representations. His on-line portfolio is at <https://www.brianquinnstudio.com/>

**Janet Reed** (Living in the House of Usher) teaches writing and literature for Crowder College in Missouri. She is a 2016 Pushcart Prize nominee. Her work has been published and is forthcoming in multiple journals, and she is at work on her first chapbook.

**Alexandra Renwick** (From Horn to Horn) is a writer of poems and stories translated into nine languages and adapted to stage and audio. When not in Austin or Portland she curates a crumbling urban castle north of the border, co-hosting salons, music, and readings with fellow wordster Claude Lalumière.

**Marge Simon** (A Dream; Alone) has won the Strange Horizons Readers Choice Award, 2010 the Bram Stoker Award ® for Poetry, the Rhysling Award and the SFPA Grand Master Award, 2015. She has work in *Chiral Mad 3*, *You Human*, more.

**Samantha Stiers** (My Mother's People) has published fiction, memoir, and poetry in magazines including *Conjunctions*, *DIA-GRAM*, and *Black Warrior Review*. She was awarded the Frances Locke Memorial Prize in Poetry. She lives in Boulder, Co.

**Nancy Ellis Taylor** (A Cask and a Curse) is a longtime member of the Science Fiction Poetry Association. Her work has appeared in *Postcard Poems and Prose*, *Strange Horizons*, *Star\*Line*, *Tales of the Talisman*, *Illumen*, *Astropoetica*, and *Dwarf Stars*.

**Nathan Tompkins'** (To My Daughter) work has appeared in many publications including *Menacing Hedge*, *Drunk Monkeys*, and *Hobo Camp Review*. He is the author of four chapbooks, the latest of which are *Lullabies to a Whiskey Bottle* and *A Song of Chaos*.

**Evan Morgan Williams** (Ronnie Jackson and the Rainbow Lights) has published stories in *Witness*, *Kenyon Review*, *ZYZZYVA*, and *Antioch Review*. A book of stories, *Thorn*, won the Chandra Prize at BkMk Press (University of Missouri-Kansas City) and the gold medal in the IPPY series.

**Shannon Connor Winward** (Ligeia in the Bridal Chamber) is the author of the chapbook *Undoing Winter*. Her writing appears in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Analog*, *Literary Mama*, *Star\*Line*, and elsewhere. She is an officer for the Science Fiction Poetry Association, poetry editor for *Devilfish Review* and founding editor of *Riddled with Arrows*.