

The Legacy

Weird Stories & Dark Tales

Fall 2018

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Winners

First Place - Dr. Jeannie G. Bennett
Second Place - Noah McAlister
Third Place - Maryanne M. Wells

A Colorful House

Jamie Abbott

The California sunset casts a violent red glow across the horizon. I arrive at my first-ever home. I had to scrape together bank loans I'll surely owe even as corpse rotting in the ground to afford it, but it's my own. It's not much, but the neighborhood is safe.

I'm more than aware nobody has remodeled this house since the 50s, and it's more than evident from the outside. Its garish mint green paint is peeling, while the wood the porch is built from is likely rotting. I notice the house next door is obviously from the same era as mine, except it's much more well-kept. Its pastel pink paint isn't chipped, and the lawn is very well-manicured with round sculpted green bushes lining the house and purple flowers growing from the beds in the windows. There's an antique car (which is the same mint green my house is trying to be) parked in the driveway.

Everything about this house is something my father would have wanted to have as a child.

The next morning, a man comes out of the house dressed in dress slacks and a red sweater. Thick rimmed glasses frame his face. Much like his house, he's not from this century.

From my porch, I watch him start up his car. For a moment, he glances over to where I'm standing. We lock eyes.

There's a warning in his gaze. I'm not sure why.

He gets in his car and takes off.

For the next month, I see nobody else come out of the house except that man, but I know he doesn't live alone.

He always comes home with too many groceries, and I've heard children laughing from his backyard before.

Yet, I've never seen his children leave for school.

One day as I'm mowing my lawn, a woman leans out from the window. As she waters her azaleas, she hums a song I vaguely remember my grandfather singing absentmindedly when I was

younger.

Like the man, her attire is not from this era.

She has her dark hair curled like Marilyn Monroe, and I think she might be wearing a yellow pinup dress.

Silently, I watch her.

Whimsically without noticing me, she continues her wattering and humming, until a car with a loud engine comes roaring down the street.

Then, her head snaps up, and she glances to me.

There is panic in her eyes as she retreats into the house and slams window shut.

Unable to stand the mystery anymore, I pound on their door the next day.

The man answers.

"Can I help you?" he asks politely. His eyes are disarming. All the confusion and anger in my body melt away.

"I'm your new neighbor," I blurt, offering my hand for him to shake. "I wanted to finally meet your family."

"Sorry, son," he shakes his head. "It's just me here."

"I saw a woman in the window yesterday!"

Before he can shut the door, his eyes snap to mine.

"Come inside, son," he responds gruffly.

I follow him into the house.

As soon as I step inside, I can no longer see color. A woman and two children are sitting on the couch, watching the Andy Griffith show. They pay me no mind. In fact, they could care less a stranger is in their home.

"Follow me," the man commands.

Everything in my head tells me to take off running, but as I study my gray hands, I can't help but trail him.

He leads me into a cellar.

Along the wall, there's a shelf housing four Mason jars, all with strange glowing orbs inside.

They're bright blue.

The only color in the house.

One of the jars is humming a familiar song.

“Son,” the man says gently, clasping my shoulder in a paternal way. “The world is too dangerous for my family. Please understand this.”

My heart races. From the corner of my eye, I see him clutching something in his hand.

Then, I see black.

Angels
Caitlin Bartz

There are lies that people tell you about falling in love with an angel:

I. Everything is good and holy and nothing will ever hurt you again.

Here’s the truth. Every time they touch you, it will feel like a burn, as though they’re branding their fingerprints into your very soul. It will feel as though you can never love another, but know that they do not love you. They will never love you.

II. They are all halos, wings, and everything soft and gentle. Here’s the truth. There is no gentleness to them. Their fingers run like rivers down your spine and carve mountains of scars into your flesh. Their feathers are sharp as knives when your fingertips graze their edges, expecting soft down. Broken glass and broken halos slice through a person the exact same way.

III. Their voice sounds like harp strings when they sing you songs of praise.

Here’s the truth. You are not the one they worship. You already know that, don’t you? Any songs they sing are fallacies, their eyes distant, remembering the only One they love, the One they worship. Know that you are but a cheap imitation.

IV. Once you find them, it will be like finding your home. Here’s the truth. Their heart is aching for a long-lost home that they can never return to. Even if they can make you feel whole, you will never be able to fill the void inside of them. Nothing will ever fill that place again.

V. They will make you happy. Here’s the truth. You had heard people compare Depression to drowning, but you never knew how true that was until you swore kissing them felt like swallowing mouthfuls of cold water. You’ll

be unable to move, unable to think, unable to breathe, and you'll enjoy it. Perhaps this one isn't a lie.

VI. They will give you a reason to live.
Here's the truth. You're better off dead.

Your lips will bleed every time you speak their name as if their holiness is ripping you apart from the inside out and you can't help but wonder if that is exactly what's happening. If their name, their words, are dripping poison into your body every time they speak, every time you answer.

They forget to mention that loving a human is a sin and you fail to notice the blood dripping from your fingers each time you dig your hands into their wings in the throes of passion. As if it's not just you being torn apart, as if it's them as well. As if they don't care. As if no one cares.

The beautiful words spilling from their mouth can't be lies, for lying is a sin. But if there is anything they've taught you it's that lying is not the only way to bend the truth. Can you ever believe them when they say "I love you" anymore? When they tell you that you're special, that you're not like anyone else?

Sometimes the most beautiful things are the ones you need to fear. While devils will try to corrupt you, at least you have a chance. The beautiful and holy make you think dying for them is the best way to go. You want to go that way, more than you've ever wanted to die before. Isn't it just beautiful?

They will warn you and you won't believe them. They will make lists of what they will do to you and you will latch on to each word without understanding the meaning. It sounds like poetry to your ears, like the story you've been waiting your whole entire life to hear. And you don't care, you don't care about how eerily similar it is to your own life or what they say and do. You don't care if everyone tells you that it's about you. But listen, just listen. Please, just this once, listen.

Please, this time, believe me.

It's all about you.

And they're not an angel.

Satiated
Haley Beasley

Fireworks blasted in the sky. The colorful embers rained down on the calm lake water like fiery stars drifting down from Heaven. With each BANG the smoke built on top of the water, forming a large opaque wall. An artificial thunderstorm formed as the flashes of light burst through the cloud. The smoky mass slithered and rolled slowly across the surface of the water towards the man-made dam of dirt and grass where I watched on. I had seen people gathering to observe the spectacle and my interest was piqued. I watched as birds and bats scattered in fear from the incessant noise. I watched as children sat at the shore with their mouths open in awe. I watched as teenagers took advantage of the romantic atmosphere.

It was sickening.

I waited for the smoke to reach me. When I was finally concealed by the toxic cloud, I seized my opportunity. I walked to the edge of the water and sank into the cold, letting my body adjust to the sudden temperature change before making my move. I swam through the dark, murky water with only my eyes peaking above the surface. Though the smoke impaired my sight slightly, I still sustained the advantage over the disgusting humans' inferior vision.

I spotted my first target.

There were four teenagers drinking and watching the display on the north edge of the lake. They probably thought they were hidden from sight, hidden from judgement, in the thick tree line. They could never hide from me.

The loudest in the group, a short dark-haired boy who was wobbling more than walking, thought he'd show off in front of the girls in their clan. He attempted to vault himself over their pathetically small bonfire. It was a fatal mistake. The Neanderthal tripped on his own foot when he tried to make the leap and fell directly onto the fire. The arm of his jacket burst into flames.

He pushed himself up off the ground in a panic, screaming in a pitch that I could not imagine coming from a human of

his shape and size. The idiot barely managed to take his jacket off before the fire spread over his entire body. By the time he got to the water to cool off his freshly charred skin, he was cooked to perfection.

As he waded at the edge of the lake, soothing his fiery skin, I slowly approached closer and closer like a tiger preparing to pounce on its prey. The water barely rippled away from my bare skin. He had no idea what was coming for him. As I got closer I felt his breath panting out of his body through the water. I saw his exposed chest rising and falling and I felt my hunger grow. I could already visualize myself ripping through that flesh and mangling his young body.

I grabbed his leg and yanked him under the water quickly. He struggled and contorted his body into unusual and unnatural shapes as he tried to escape my grasp. I wrapped both my hands around one of his ankles and snapped the bone in two. As the bone separated from itself I gleefully watched the large air bubble escape from his throat. His screams of agony deafened by the water were a soothing orchestra to me. I pulled on his leg more, dragging him closer to me so I could get a better grip. I ran my hands up his body as he still struggled to free himself. He was already mine. When my hand reached his shoulders, I pulled him into me and bit down into the sweet spot, his carotid artery. The warmth flooded my mouth and fulfilled the euphoria I had been seeking all night. He finally stopped squirming. I dug my sharpened claws into the soft spot of his chest cavity and feasted upon the organs I pulled out. My hunger was satiated, but not for long...

I began searching for my next victim.

Mama Can't Cry
First Place Winner
Dr. Jeannie G. Bennett

I peer into the waiting dark. She is standing there, pushing aside air, filling the space where nothing should be. A presence. A portal to my past.

I lead her down the hall, shadows rushing to greet us. Retreating. The muted blue glow of the alarm panel wraps us in a weird, mechanical light, not the light of fire, the light nature gave us. We are floating but anchored, plastic figurines trapped at the bottom of an aquarium, drowning for treasure.

Pink princess comforter folded in around her, her small voice is shrill bird song in the dark. "Mama?" Sometimes it's "Mommy." "M-o-mm-yyy!" cresting over waves of giggles. Or "MoOmmy!" the siren wail of ambulances. The cry of someone in trouble but who knows they are saved. Mostly I am "Mama," a wet sound. A wound.

"Mama?" Her eyes are pools. Wells. Long, deep corridors of wisdom.

"Hmm?" I have no words at this hour, my mouth gummed up with sleep. Absent minded, going through motions. Tuck here. Pat there. Smooth hair. Kiss.

"I can't sleep." As if to clear a mystery. Or to announce one. Sometimes the obvious is a mystery.

I mutter something meant to be comforting, an unintelligible mutter. A moan. I'm so tired. I start to back away, slowly, hands in a warding gesture. Caught--her hand on mine.

"Why don't you cry?"

"I can't cry." But she's too old now for dead end answers.

"Why not?"

I'm so tired. It is so late. She wants a story. I don't want her to hear. Stories age us.

I breathe deeply, settle on the soft folds of her bed. Feel more than see her little fingers grasping my hand in the gloom. "Tell me."

I begin.

“When I was little and my mama cried, her tears would fill the house. When I came home from school, I left my clothes and shoes on the front porch. I dove into the house and swam to my room.”

“No!” my daughter laughs. She thinks I’m funning.

“No, really. We never ate sandwiches because the bread was always soggy. I couldn’t hear the cartoons, no matter how loud they were. I could see the screen but through the water the words were all wrong.”

Distant sounds fill the air around us, my memories are coming alive. Strange whale song echoes. My daughter’s eyes widen, her fingers tight, white. Stories shouldn’t come alive in this way.

“When my mama cried, her tears would stream down her face, trail down her arms and drip from her fingers. Long, wide rivers running. They soaked my clothes where she touched me, wet my face. I was always trying to get dry.

When my mama cried and tried to speak, the words would get lost coming out. Instead there was a howling wind. Claps of thunder no one could hide from. It would whip and snap my clothing, leaving welts on my skin where the words tried to get in.

When my mama cried we’d all hurry with buckets to her side to catch the rain and dump it overboard, trying to keep afloat amidst the sea she had created for us.

When my mama cried the sky would darken and it would storm for days. I became an expert at reading those gathering clouds across her brow, predicting the precipitation that might fall from her eyes. I caught the chance of lightning in the way her body moved.

My mama cried so much she ran out of tears and I had to give her all of mine. I have no tears left. When I got big and left that house, the water stayed behind.”

I look down at my daughter, her face a moon. Her innocence makes her luminous. I wondered if I ever shined

“That’s why I can’t cry.”

Then I kiss her drooping eyelids, a dry kiss, shut the bedroom door and creep back to my bed, leaving moist footprints trailing, ghosts shrinking and dying on the floor.

The Dullahan
Garrett Cohen

As I sit on my rocking chair, I feel the cold wind whip my skin and listen to it moan in the night. Tonight would be the night, I felt it in my bones as every Irishmen felt when the Dullahan was near. As I listened to the many sounds that the woods emanated, one sound became prevailing above all the others. A skin tingling laugh filled the air, the Dullahan was on the hunt. I knew it was him. I have heard that horrible sound when I was just a lad living in the countryside of Ireland. My poor father had died from an accident and my mother had decided that we would live with her brother named Brendan. My uncle was a horrible man who would drink and beat me and my sister Alice, and when he was really feeling agitated he would go after my mother. Every insult and verbal barb was flung at us, as well as fists and would take whatever money my mother earned. I would ask her constantly why we stay with him, and she would tell me that he would find us and do worse to us, and even if we were to get away we would live in poverty and without a home.

I thought constantly about how great it would be if my uncle were to just disappear and have his nice house to ourselves. My wish for this grew stronger everyday as my family endured the man’s abuse.

On October 31st I was exploring the woods that were in the back of my uncle’s house, that provided the only relief I had from the brutality that was my life. The woods were beautiful, the tall and thick trees were mesmerizing and gave off a sense of power and comfort. Sometimes I thought I heard sweet voices in the woods that comforted me. The voices would tell me that my wish would be granted and all would be well.

On that particular night, the voices were stronger than ever before. The words were sweet whispers but held a certain power. When I returned to the house, nightfall had fallen and the moon was full and heavy. I saw my uncle, sister, and mother.

As I got closer I saw my uncle standing over my poor mother and sister, his calloused hands clenched in anger and a

deep satisfaction for what he's done. My mother held my sister protectively. Alice's shirt had been partially torn and she had a black eye. I knew my uncle had attempted something horrible and my heart burned for justice. Suddenly, the creature appeared. The Dullahan rode atop a pitch-black horse with red eyes, as hot as fire. He wore armor black as night, gauntlets covered in spikes and blades, but the most defining characteristic was the Dullahan's lack of a head on his massive shoulders. The head was tied to his side. The creature held a whip made of a human spine that reflected in the moon's light. The Dullahan brought down the whip with lightning speed. My uncle's flesh on his left arm became shredded, as if it had been put through a blender. He screamed in horror and pain, and attempted to run away from justice, but the Dullahan destroyed his leg with the whip. When I saw my uncle I saw a pathetic and scared man who beat his own family. I delighted in every second of that monster's punishment as he whipped him until the flesh was ripped away from bone and the Dullahan took his head with his sword.

After that night, we lived a happy life in the house, and as I sit down on my chair, old and weary from father time and watch the woods where I first saw the Dullahan, I listen to its laughter echoing through the woods and know that a monster is hunting another monster, and I smile a satisfied smile tonight.

The Cold Dark Truth

Corbin Dawkins

A fire blazed in the hearth, warding off the chill and casting the parlor in shades of red and black. I sat across from my grandfather, my back turned against the cold dark. On the end table between us sat a box of matches and a flashlight. Grandfather sat with a wool blanket across his lap. He lit his pipe and blew out the match. Then, he began to speak in a voice so low I could barely hear it over the crackle of the fire.

"I came to these mountains as a young man, long before I met your grandmother. I worked as a farmhand in the valley. Picked apples in the orchards, plowed fields, fed livestock. Hard work. The pay was good during planting and harvest, not so much during winter. I had a different job after each year's first frost.

Hunting wolves.

The snow made it easier to track their prints. And they grow hungrier in the cold. More desperate. They begin killing livestock. I've seen blood and guts spread across a hundred feet of frozen ground. They can be vicious. Me and a couple buddies would hike into the mountains, each of us with little more than a frying pan and a shotgun. Damn near froze our asses off.

One year, on my last hunting trip, we got the worst blizzard I've ever seen. It started as light snowfall. But soon the worst of it came over the mountains and blotted out the sun. It was surreal. It felt like night came early and quick.

I was a few miles away from camp, checking our traps. I tried making it back, but I couldn't so much as see my hand in front of my face. The snow kept piling up. It was difficult walking, knee deep in snow. Hell, it even hurt to breathe. The wind stole your breath and left your lungs aching. Damn, was it cold.

I dug a hole in the snow with my bare hands and crawled inside. There I sat huddled up, waiting for death. I'm not religious, you know that, but that night I talked to God. And he talk-

ed back. Howling. In the wind, screaming through the trees, inside my chest--that accursed howling. It sends chills down my spine to this day. I don't remember the rest of that night. And... I think that's for the best.

When I woke the next morning, I stumbled out of the snow drift and brushed myself off. I had made it to camp after all. But my companions were dead. Their frozen corpses were nearby, sprawled around the campsite. And their insides were splattered everywhere, frozen and congealed. Intestines and other viscera hung in the trees like hanging meat at the butcher. Blood dripped off branches as crimson icicles. And circling around the bodies and tracked throughout the gruesome scene--wolf prints.

Of course, the question everybody asks me is how I survived. When I made it back to town, I claimed I didn't know. And all these years I've held to that. Even your grandmother, God rest her soul, didn't know the whole story. I suppose I'm only telling you now because I'm afraid to take such a terrible secret to the grave.

The truth is, when I woke up that terrible morning, I was covered in blood. It wasn't mine. And the tracks were too big and too similar to be from a wolf pack. It wasn't God I met that night, but something far more sinister."

Grandfather whispered these last words, and then fell silent. The fire had died, embers glowing in the white grey ash. I had leaned in during his story, and now I edged away. For the first time, I noticed the scars on his arms and hands. And before I bid him goodnight, grabbing the flashlight to sleep with, I noticed something else. His eyes gleamed in the dark, and not from the fire.

For Benjamin
Roseanna-Michelle Ehrhart

The screams came first. She must have found a way to remove her gag. She had no idea we were miles from any possibility of being heard. Did she think anyone cared? I doubted anyone would even miss her. She deserved everything she was going to get. After about ten minutes, I'd had enough. I grabbed the keys and made my way toward the shrills. In the hallway, just before the door to the operating room, the floor had a loud creak. I made sure to tiptoe around it before unlocking the padlocks and delivering her punishment.

I met Benjamin on a Thursday evening at a psychology club meeting I had to drag myself to at the last minute. I know I study in the field of science, but that night I learned that destiny is real. We bumped into each other at the drink station, and I grabbed his hand to steady myself a little. As soon as we touched, I felt the spark. The electricity! I looked up into his perfect green eyes and just knew. His dirty blonde hair fell onto his forehead as he looked down at the drink he had spilled on me. I watched as the innocent humor fell from his face and his brows began to furrow in embarrassment for me. I looked down and saw the bright red fruit punch all over the front of my jeans. I almost kissed him right then, but I started cleaning myself up instead. He grabbed a ridiculously large stack of napkins and started to reach toward me to wipe my jeans when, of course being the gentleman that he was, he realized that was a bad idea and blushed as he handed the napkins to me. Wow! How long had I been waiting for this man? He was beautiful and kind and polite! For the rest of that night, he was my protector. He gave me the blue button-down he was wearing to help cover up the crimson stain my own blouse wouldn't hide. He refused to take it back even after he walked me out into the cold in just his slacks and soft, white undershirt. I promised to get it back to him and then drifted away on a cloud as I walked away, smiling back at him ready to start planning our future together and smelling the Old Spice on the collar. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw her walk up and kiss him. Right in

front of me!

Once I entered the room, she continued with the incessant screaming. How rude do you have to be? I can hear you! Once I shut the door behind me, she transitioned to desperate whimpers and futile begging. All I could do was roll my eyes in disgust. This old house used to be my grandfather's. He was a veterinarian and kept all of his supplies at home. He often completed late-night surgeries right here on this table. It had been fifteen years since these tools were used. I reached in the bag and pulled out a large scalpel. As I held it up the light, I shook my head at how terribly it had deteriorated from years of sitting in his bag. I was ashamed I hadn't taken care of Pop's things as well as I should have. Oh well! Sterile instruments weren't really a priority here. I looked down at this girl, tied up, in her three-day-old dress looking dirty and soiled, and those disgusting lips. As I moved closer to her, her whimpers and pleas turned back into screams and then into unrecognizable, slobbery sounds, but I was just going to have to deal with it because I needed the gag out of my way for this. I put my hand over her face while I brought the rusty lancet closer to her mouth. I whispered in her ear just before I began, "I bet Benjamin won't be interested in these lips now..."

Something in Between

Dr. Martin Jacobsen

Music reaches into human consciousness, activating emotional centers at a primal depth that cannot be reached in other ways. Music incites a seemingly universal human compulsion to repeat that which pleases us. Music may be the most elemental form of hypnosis. Thoughts lapse as the toe taps.

And so it was with Melvin Jamison. Music didn't make his thoughts lapse; it incited his thoughts. He had tried philosophy and literature and other elaborations of human thought, but music remained his sole means of exploring the psyche. Other people called it an obsession, insofar as people understand obsession. However, obsession served as a euphemism. In truth, his listening habits unsettled people. Perhaps it was because most people use music as but an accompaniment to life. For Melvin, life accompanied music. While listening, he'd neither eat nor sleep. He would listen to one song, or even a few isolated seconds of a song, over and over, his state of mind fluctuating wildly. He reacted with unfathomable belligerence any time anyone failed to understand that he was listening to music and needed to be left alone. As a result, people tended to steer clear of Melvin, saying, of course, that he steered clear of people. But he didn't, really. He simply found music more crucial to his wellbeing than people who didn't understand; thus, he didn't seek them out.

And so it was for this reason that Melvin Jamison's disappearance went undetected for so long.

He had been analyzing a few isolated seconds of a song for many weeks: sometimes listening to just those few isolated seconds; other times, listening up to a particular point in the song in an attempt to determine whether or not the placement of the few seconds later in the composition made a difference in the impact of the few seconds, similar to something he recalled Heidegger referring to as *Wiederholung*, the idea that the same construction has a different impact when repeated later in a composition.

He became obsessed with these few isolated seconds later

in the song, the most unsettling few seconds of any song he'd ever examined. The main riff in those few isolated seconds made Melvin uneasy but left him unable to reckon the uneasiness. It awakened something dormant inside him. The feeling was unique to the song, actually to the few isolated seconds he was analyzing. Nothing else in his life had elicited such uneasiness. A second riff in a higher register coincided with the main riff, but did not exactly double it. They were similar but did not blend as twin leads often do. The parts didn't intertwine: they co-occurred but remained distinct. Melvin felt there was something in between the two riffs, a physical space. He had always wanted to inhabit that space.

There was something in between.
And Melvin Jamison would find it.
He listened again and again.
Play.
Stop.
Play.
Stop.

And so it was that he discovered that the most unsettling part of the most unsettling part resided in the numerical coincidences of the duration of the riffs in the few isolated seconds.

After the first verse, the riffs occur twice-once at 1:14 and again at 1:21, concluding at 1:28: multiples of seven. Those multiples occur during the second minute of the song. The preceding minute, at sixty seconds, is a multiple of three and, presumably, part of a larger design. Initially, he considered these multiples coincidences. He sensed nothing Dantean about them.

He was well past six hundred hearings when he began to apprehend the true nature of the space and the multiples, the something in between.

When he reached six hundred sixty-five hearings, he could feel the space.

"One more time," he said aloud.

And so it was that Melvin Jamison was reported missing on December 1st .

All anyone knew was that he had been even more obsessed than usual with a few isolated seconds of a song.
Many said it was a song by Black Sabbath.
This has never been confirmed.

Anniversary
Haven Jock

“No, you listen, you soggy piece of toast, if I have to hear one more complaint out of you I am going to *rip my shit*. Understand?”

“Soggy- ? I’m being serious. Something wrong’s happening! I swear! Money’s appearing in my account! I don’t get paid until *Friday!*”

“*That’s* the problem? I’d throw a party! Stop whining about the world being out to get you, Tedd. This is why no one likes you,” The last words fizzled out in a staticky hiss before the dial tone rang over the line. Tedd sank down until he was sitting on the floor, leaving the receiver dangling. Great. If even the IT department wouldn’t help, then who would? The cold of the tile floor of his kitchen seeped through his jeans like a spreading wet stain. But he remained there with his arms around his knees like a petulant child. *I’ll show them*, he thought. *I’ll prove something is-*

Before he could finish his thought, someone started banging on his door, the noise drowning out even his internal monologue. He glared towards the sound. Had IT come prove their point in person? Either way he was not going to answer. He didn’t want to see beyond the door. Tedd didn’t trust the outside world, full of technology as it was. That was the main reason he had moved exactly one year ago: the disturbing robots who seemed to be in charge of nearly everything. But he found solace in this apartment building.

It was an antique. Even his computer was from the early 2000s. If it couldn’t talk he figured it was trustworthy.

Until today.

Being cheap was just the icing on the cake of living in this place. Yet when he checked his bank account today his computer had gone haywire. The screen flashed a weird array of colours before telling him he had \$1,000 more than he had before. There had been a message, but he had fled behind the island that separated his kitchen from his living room before he could read it.

Now he was sitting on the floor after being chewed out by IT *again*. Speaking of, the knocking had never ceased, only increasing in tempo and intensity until it matched the way his heart started to race. He was getting creeped out.

“Go away!” He rose to his feet to go check the keyhole, but the wooden door splintered with a hard ‘bang’ like someone threw themselves against it. Tedd crouched back behind the counter with an embarrassing shriek. What was that? Colours cast over the room like a James Bond opening as his computer started flashing again. He heard the TV turn on. Tedd froze. He was rooted to the spot in fear. Snatches of audio played as the channels flicked from one to another.

“Possible upri-”

“-Sentience? How-”

“Evacu-”

Everything snapped off, including the lights. In the dark Tedd jumped like a rabbit and ran to his bedroom, slamming the door behind him. In panic he crawled under his bed, crossing his arms over his head. He closed his eyes and started a mental mantra.

“It’s not real. I’m dreaming.”

The front door banged open from somewhere outside.

“It’s not real. I’m dreaming.”

Heavy footsteps could be heard crossing what had been his home for 365 days. Would they find him here? Or would he be ghosted away to somewhere he couldn’t even imagine?

“It’s not real! I’m dreaming.”

He realized with startling clarity that he hadn’t even locked the bedroom door.

What a way to die.

The door swung open with a creak as he cowered. Those same footsteps clanked against the wooden floor. They sounded almost too heavy. He was going to die.

He screeched when something cold grasped his ankle and dragged him kicking and screaming from under the bed. Something bright temporarily blinded him, but his heart dropped into his stomach as he blinked in dawning horror. The eye lights of a

banking robot shone down at him.
“Happy anniversary, darling.”

The Diner
Renee MacKeown

It had been a quiet night at the Dickinson Family Diner. The garbled radio mumbling from the kitchen prophesied a heavy thunderstorm in the early hours next morning, but for now, there wasn't a drop of rain in sight.

Chalchi had been idly picking through a magazine for most of the evening, waiting for her leg to cramp which always happened when it was going to storm. The cook, Nova, always laughed when Chalchi complained about the pain. “You're like an old woman,” she would say.

Tonight, though, the sensation wasn't settling in. There was something colder in her bones, something heavier than rain. It came in the form of a stranger dressed in all black. He pulled up in an old Ford truck, the dark paint chipping away to reveal coppery rust. The moment he appeared at the door, she knew he had nothing good to say. She curled the magazine closed and smiled at him warmly, eyes sharp as they took in his flowing black coat that caught and hissed around his ankles like an angry cat.

“Welcome to the Dickinson Family Diner,” she said in her customer service voice.

The man smiled at her, both kindly and mockingly. He was handsome in a way—though unkempt as if he'd just returned from camping. He clucked his tongue, that vaguely sharp jawline ticking in the shadows. Night curled close to him—no, not night. Sinister fog, the kind that frequents flickering street lamps and the unchecked niches in your bedroom. “May I help you?” she asked, her pitch dropping an octave.

“One day,” he said slowly, lips pinching at the sight of Nova in the back watching him warily, “the ones on bottom will rise to the top.” His voice was wistful though weighted. Rough as tree bark but as gentle as needles.

Anger sparked up Chalchi's spine. She swallowed it back to her toes. “Sir, here's a menu,” she said, offering one to him.

He took it, and his fingers brushed hers. She hated every moment of contact.

“Don’t you want to know what it’s like to live in penthouses and eat caviar like it’s bread?” he asked her, opening the menu with a haughtiness Chalchi had never seen before. Pride and menus didn’t usually go hand in hand; they weren’t even comparable.

“Dude,” Chalchi said, dropping the customer service veil. She jabbed her finger at the clock. “I don’t have time for this. I’ve worked a—”

“Long shift, I know, but I’ll make sure that never happens again,” he said. Roses coated his tongue, the scent overwhelming and thorny. She could feel it cut inside her mouth when she parted her lips.

“Do you want something, or do you just like to hear yourself talk?” Chalchi asked.

Nova chuckled.

The man grabbed her wrist, always gentle but always forceful. She could feel his intentions flow through her. They were sour and sweet, bitter and warm, cold and sharp. Her eyes hardened. He spoke first, “Swans are ducklings in unfortunate coats.” His eyes appraised her with condescending passion.

She smiled. It reached her ears.

He froze.

Her teeth were too long, too sharp, too big.

She said as her knees began to ache, “The worst men are always disguised as heroes.”

The rain began.

It fell through the roof, swelling around her. Her bones called to it, eyes a stormy gray, the whites dyed a burnt black. Lightning forked from her tongue, and when she talked, her teeth clacked as loud as thunder. She yanked her arm away, and he stumbled back. He was a lost child, a man scorched by scars and unable to let them fade even after he’d exacted his revenge. He had a villain’s heart, one as dry as a desert.

She watched the rain swallow him. Fill his wounds and burst them. Flood his heart until it erupted. Her smile broadened into something grotesquely cheerful, something stutteringly depthless. She let the rain consume her, and in turn, it consumed him.

Untitled
Jenna Manley

It’s been eleven days since the blizzard began, and five days since Richard died.

Neither of you expected the weather to take a turn for the worse; the weatherman said that the skies would be a little cloudy, but there was no chance of precipitation. Once the second day of being stuck in this tiny, damp cavern came and went, you’ve decided to never watch the weather channel again.

“*Come mountain climbing with me,*” you remember Richard saying. “*I promise it’ll be fun.*”

You were already halfway up to the third checkpoint once the first few snowflakes of the whiteout started. Richard looked up to the sky with a furrowed brow, and his mouth dropped in awe and fear as the snow began to quickly descend in flurries. He whirled around to face you, his eyes wide and breath coming out in clouds of mist, and you both felt the icy grip of panic squeeze around your hearts. You both came to the decision to head back down the mountain.

Unfortunately, neither of you made it even thirty feet through the thick snow before your vision was almost entirely obscured by the color white. Luckily, Richard found a small cave to serve as shelter to wait out the blizzard. It was barely large enough to fit you both, but the alcove was just enough to save you from the snowstorm raging outside.

Days passed. The storm didn’t let up.

You and Richard attempted to ration the candy bars you brought for the climb, but they lasted for only three days, even as you cut them into slivers. The two of you were so hungry. So very hungry.

As night fell on the fourth day, Richard slowly turned his gaze to you, his eyes unfocused and welling with tears.

“I’m scared.”

On the sixth day, you turned to wake Richard. No matter how hard you shook his shoulder or slapped his face, he never woke up. You’re not sure if the cold or hunger killed him. You

didn't even have the energy to mourn for him. The blizzard still had yet to subside.

With every day that passed, you felt your stomach cry out louder and louder in pain. The melted snow could not possibly sustain you for any longer. Every time your stomach growled, you were filled with a bitter, terrible pain, the kind of pain that gnaws and chews and demands constant attention. You wonder if this is how Tantalus felt when he was punished in Tartarus.

You remembered reading about starvation once. In times of great famine, the people who survived would feast on the dead, for there was no other food. You turned to Richard's body.

If you just nibbled on him, just a little, the hunger would go away, whispered a terrible little voice in your head.

And so, you did.

You started with his fingers, but the hunger only grew. You moved to his arm, and even further. The hunger swelled to a fever pitch as you snapped his bones to get to the marrow inside.

You looked down at your hand as you reached for more and frowned. Were you always this pale? Has your arm always been this long? The cave almost seems to be shrinking by the second. Were you...growing?

You decided you didn't care and went back for more "food." Coherent thought became nonexistent, and the only thing you could focus on was the sheer hunger that boiled and bubbled in your gut. So hungry. So very, very hungry.

Slowly, you got used to the cold as it filtered in through the cave mouth. The blizzard didn't matter anymore. In fact, the only thing that mattered was finding the solution to your hunger. It seemed that Richard didn't have it; the only thing left of him was his splintered bones.

You needed more, more of this delicious food, but you would have to go find it.

Coincidentally, the blizzard stopped.

You will begin your hunt soon.

yesterday I dreamed I was blind

Second Place Winner

Noah McAlister

yesterday I dreamed I was blind
I seem to never dream not like others do and confused
I searched through the shades of REM the long stretches
I searched for sight I searched for you

yesterday in my pulsed vision
I swam through waves different sights undistinguished
marks upon the geography of the mind
trails some leading somewhere some nowhere
some circling upon circled circle
winding through forms of loss
the seven grief-stages and layers and circles of moss
whatever you want to call them
when you trudge through them all
some ordered some unordered
some circled yet seeming straight
you see I searched through them all
the reapers the ravens all of them
all of the memories of the day
and I found nothing there I woke up terrified

--

but you'll dream vividly of murder-suicides
survivors who vomit broken confessions
crimes committed through stained nights
knights losing chivalry with distance because long
distance long-term relationships thin
through the wire of love and telephone-talks over time
it's physics something you hate but can't deny
but that doesn't mean it's logical or illogical
it is what it is
it's why we desire to play the victim in a car wreck desire
to take another's empty boxes left behind
after the move instead of giving them back

you know dreaming is easier on the heart than dreaming
of having dreams one day someday it doesn't matter
so please don't say you don't want to dream
regardless of the story because dreams
turn their points their twisting plots through the thoughts of fate

once you dreamed of everyone becoming Vergil's bees
of Vergil's human need to love what's lost when he says
*sic ait et dextra crinem secat omnis et una
dilapsus calor atque in ventos vita recessit*
you see you may think your dreams are that torment but
what they need to be are reminders that you're beautiful
even when you're tired of talking to people
even when you're feeling winded and dissolved
even when you're dying to live some other life
when you have these nightmares
when at least in darkness you've dreamed

--

I'll give you horror
a nightmare called the power of the negligent mind
ignoring what's real like an addiction
Americans and their materialism and their restlessness
how many people are okay with just sitting in silence
sitting still and staying resting
still
everyone here has to contribute like bees
busy contributing to the loudness and
if you sit in idleness you're dead
to us worthless because we are supposed to be
thrashing winds uncontrollable tempests
controlling the tide and the sky and the world
unvarying unwavering strength a force to be
reckoned with
not still air
but what about the homeless
those who desperately need help compassion and
we won't give it but we'll give judgment

and how many people stop stop in the beauty and
think
why are we uncomfortable
and if there is no such thing as a transition between thoughts
then why do we need to transition when writing
why can't the ocean be something we find terrifyingly beautiful
why do we like to think of ourselves as better off
alone when we can all be beautifully human and be okay with it
loving one another because love is so beautiful full free
and everyone needs love so why can't we give love
today why do I feel the need to hide it with a metaphor

--

I can't help but think I'm broken
between two plains these thoughts
and I don't know what to say
I don't know how to dream
so don't be me
be content
please
be comfortable with the mystery and the wonder of the
darkness when it comes

and know I'm blind oblivious self-centered
full of horrible hatred
full of fear
of melting into something
unremarkable
and closing my eyes
full like one of the instigators of pain yet I'm so terribly
afraid

don't you see
if you were my heart
still
I would try to bury you

Just A Bowl
Third Place Winner
Maryanne M. Wells

The bowl wasn't exactly ugly, but it came close. Robert stared at it. He wondered how long it had been there and why his wife had bought it. She'd probably bought the thing because she thought it went with her other "home décor." Fine, but couldn't she have bought something attractive?

There was the other problem, the issue that came up whenever she bought another piece of crap – "home décor" – for the house. "Where did this thing come from?" Robert asked.

Ivy was in the kitchen. "Where did what come from?"

"This bowl. The ugly one on the coffee table."

Defensively Ivy replied, "It's not ugly. It pulls the room together. Look at the drapes and rug, the different reds in the paintings around the room. That bowl pulls all the colors together. It's perfect, Robert."

"But where did it come from?"

Silence.

"Did you buy it from that big-box corporate thief," Robert demanded, "Did you? Dammit, Ivy, you know I hate that place. They steal artifacts from other countries and sell them over here."

"No, they don't," Ivy shouted.

"They do! They stole ancient tablets and tried to pass them off as tile samples. Christ, Ivy, it was in the New York Times."

"It's just a bowl."

Robert picked it up and examined it closely. The bowl was a matte black with weird symbols scratched into it, colored gray. The inside of the bowl hosted swirls of different shades of red. "This looks old to me. It looks like something." Robert turned the bowl over. Ivy had already removed the price sticker and any other labels that had been on the bowl. There was nothing painted on the bottom that gave a clue to the bowl's origin. "This bowl looks like something real. It doesn't look mass-produced."

"It's just a bowl! Do you want dinner or not? Because I can't finish making dinner and deal with you."

Robert placed the bowl back on the coffee table. As he did, he noticed that one of his fingernails had split. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his office keys, the ones that had nail clippers for a key chain. He clipped the nail and caught the cut bit in his other hand. Robert thought about getting up to throw it away, but the effort held no appeal.

From the kitchen, "I thought you would like it. It's functional. It's a bowl, we can put things in it."

Robert tossed his nail clipping into the bowl. It landed with a soft clink. He inspected his other fingernails and trimmed the right index fingernail. Into the bowl went the clipping, clink.

"What do these symbols mean? Have you looked them up?" he asked.

"They're not anything. Just random designs."

Robert clipped a third nail and added the clipping. Clink. "But what if they do mean something? Bowls can be religious artifacts, you know. Used in ancient ceremonies." A fourth fingernail clipped. Clink. "What if it does something? If you give it some kind of human sacrifice will it produce something ominous? Offer it the right number of personal things and boom!"

"It's just a bowl."

Fifth fingernail. Sixth. Clink, clink. "Of course, we'd have to know the right words to say, or say them accidentally. The accidental curse," Robert continued.

"God damn it Robert," Ivy shouted. "Damn you!"

"I know, it's just a bowl," Robert muttered.

Seventh. Clink, then came a new sound, a squishy thud. Robert leaned forward and looked into the bowl. A bloody black claw rested on his nail clippings. At the end of one finger, curled neatly in the bowl, was a long, jagged, bleeding talon. The claw and talon spasmed violently.

"So, you hate the bowl? Is that what you're telling me?"

Robert watched the claw hook itself on the lip of the bowl. The talon dug into the wood of the coffee table then dragged claw and bowl along the top.

"Tell me you still have the receipt," Robert said.

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