

MAY/JUNE - 2018 - VOLUME I - ISSUE IV

# storyzine.

FLASH FICTION COLLECTION



# storyzine.

Volume I Issue IV

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# storyzine.

# Editor's Note

## The Team

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\*Want to volunteer? Find out more information on the last page.

You'll notice a few major changes to this month's issue. All because someone suggested an upgrade to the look. You'll be surprised what one comment can do. I hope you like this new look and if you don't, I hope you tell me about about it. Storyzine is still in its growing stages, working out kinks here and there, making the content not only consumable but enjoyable to the eye as well. There's an amazing group of volunteers helping me put this together every month.

In addition to the new look we also have a bunch of new writers! They come to storyzine from the */r/* writing subreddit and we are thrilled to have them with a hope that more decide to become a ziner in the future. Oh, what is a ziner? Well, it's a storyzine writer, of course!

As we head into the halfway mark on our first volume there are much more things in store beyond just the design. We plan on expanding who can submit and be a ziner to include anyone who discovers it, not just those from Discord and Reddit. We also will open up spotlight sections that will feature poetry, short scripts, and other forms of writing.

After you've read through this issue, we ask that you take a few minutes out of your day to let us know how much you enjoy not only storyzine but the writers discovered within each issue. We have a Testimonial page and we'd love hear from you! A link will be available on the last page. Thank you for your continued support through reading this and all future issues.

# PROMPT 01

Spirit Animal



# SPIRIT ANIMAL

VIOLE  
ALDRITCH

HORROR

On one occasion, I was hunting stag on Packington Estate. It was a warm midsummer evening, and the last of the daylight was slowly fading away across the peaceful plains. I was a renowned hunter and marksman, and this occasion only proved my skill to any who doubted it. The night was coming to a close, the feeling in my arms had near faded away from lugging around my heavy hunting rifle.

It was then that I saw it.

The slight glimmer of something metallic shining in the light caught my attention. I very deeply regret ever taking sights upon that glistening thing in what remained of the sunlight, but I will never forget the sight - not for one waking moment shall it not haunt every thought, every contemplation that flicks through my troubled mind.

I could not make out the details of the thing from the distance, even through the expertly crafted scope. The proportions seemed extremely wrong, and unearthly in their nature, seeming more like the kind one would see on the cover of *Weird Tales*.

Drawing nearer to the sacrilegious thing, I caught a whiff of something sinister in the air. I saw it in much greater detail than I had previously; vaguely luminous bubbles of some repulsive sludge rose and fell, like that blasphemous body was rising and falling, contaminating the air around it with its noxious breath.

Where the thing had originated I could not elucidate, the bubbling mass of a body scarcely moved from its spot, only vaguely swaying, like a tree in the gentle breeze. It did not see me, as far as I could tell, and yet I felt as if some entity was watching, observing this queer interaction.

I shuddered. A swarm of jet-black eyes swelled on the repulsive mass, with pure pupils reaching deep into my soul. I felt something had been ripped from me by force at that very moment.

I had most definitely been noticed by the creature. Thousands of beady eyes glared, almost afraid. It let out a mighty sound, like none I had ever heard, it was a great screech like no other, that shook the very ground beneath my feet. No imaginable human reaction could have possibly been correct in this bizarre situation. I let out a slight scream, one of confusion and fear, and let fly a single round, before springing into a sprint.

I heard the bullet pierce the spongy flesh of the thing, however I did not look back to face my inhuman adversary, for I feared it may have been closer than I anticipated.

The strange beast gave chase. I heard it following behind for a substantial period of time, but I did not pay any mind to the noise of the thing fading. It may well have been gone for some time when I at last retired, having assured myself I had successfully evaded my ungodly pursuer.

There is not one moment that the events of that evening do not occupy my mind. More questions come to mind each and every moment I ponder the origin of that grotesque thing I saw.

# THE YEAR OF THE HORSE

LYNA  
PRAVY

YOUNG ADULT

It is six in the morning. Alone, I stand in front of the mirror that has been unkind to me lately. Unkempt hair accompanying hollowed eyes are accents to my horrifyingly soulless gaze. I touch my cheek, making sure what I'm seeing is reality. Grabbing hold onto the edge of the counter, I lower my gaze and sigh.

How did it get so bad?

While pondering my life's choices, knots form in my stomach. Anxiety has been a bitch to me.

I drag my eyes back to the mirror and confront not my face, but the face of a chocolate colored horse with glassy blue eyes. As my eyebrows furrow, so do the horse's. Leaning into the mirror together, I immediately leap backwards and, to no surprise, this magnificent horse does too.

The reflections in the mirror swirl before revealing the horse galloping across fields of flowers. Then the horse prances, dancing in the wind. Strangely, my soul feels calm, my mood uplifted.

Yes, my spirit animal is showing me the reality I need.

As if answering my thoughts, the horse looks at me, flicks its tail, and rears. The image on the mirror swirls once again and my normal face stares back at me. Leaning in and touching the mirror, the cold glass tickles my fingers. Everything begins to swirl into a blend of colors before becoming engulfed in blackness.

Awaking in a daze with a pounding headache and heavy body, somehow I had ended up on the bathroom floor. I pull myself up and look at the mirror again. My jaw unhinges, dropping lower and lower while the rest of my face melts. Screaming, my eyes close as I back into the wall; my shaking fingers trace my normal feeling face. Tears forming, I force myself to look by inching closer to the mirror. This time, my gaze is met with my childhood self. This version of me waves while smiling, turns, and

runs off to play. My eyes follow this past self and, desperately wishing to go back to those simpler times, more tears form. The room starts swirling as I slip onto the floor.

My eyes snap open and, strangely, I'm back in my bed. Daylight is cascading into the bedroom as birds sing. I turn to look at the clock; it is perplexing that it is five in the morning because that dream felt so real. I roll out of bed and run over to the bathroom mirror. I sigh a breath of relief when I'm met with that daily pathetic reflection. If only I could escape from it all, cantering through the lands like my spirit animal residing deep in my soul. I think about my little apartment with minimal belongings, the neverending bills, and my current lifestyle. Amazing; for twenty years my true values have been ignored. Thank you, spirit animal, for helping me realize I have untapped potential. I pick up my phone and casually tell my boss I quit.

# STAG

N.D.  
KELLER

# SPIRITUAL WALK

WALTER C.  
BERNARD

FANTASY

The sun shines through the stag's antlers setting them ablaze.

Fleet of foot, it bounds over the waves of grasses. I am alone, but not alone. I wonder why a deer would be on this side of the busy street. The greasy walls of the mural mock me with their golden wheat as they advertise a wholesome chip. The bags of said chips litter the sidewalk.

Cars drive past and the lights turn on as the red sun fades.

I was not alone. They walked behind me, just a few feet back. I did not know them; they wore a hoodie pulled up over their heads. A low baseball cap pulled close to their sunglasses.

I walk faster, eager to get past the park.

The footsteps fall in pace with my own. I pull the keys from my purse and press the house key between my ring finger and my middle one letting the others jam out at the sides.

As we reach the darkest part of the sidewalk, a large oak with large summer leaves drooping down across the path, a hand touches my shoulder. I whirl letting the keys clank loudly together. "Get away!"

The hoodie slides as the man takes off into the park. A shadow of a bounding cat follows.

I wait, making sure the hoodie does not return. The stag is back, head dropped as it eats the flowers of a rose bush. I am alone. I am not. I bow my head towards the stag, thanking it for the antlers and then continue home. My keys dangle from my hand.

HORROR

I need to find my spirit animal.

It's a rough time in my life. I lost my sense of direction, my connection with the world. I just can't connect with people anymore, because I'm so scared that when I talk to them, they'll look down on me. I can't ask for help from those people. I don't even know what kind of shape I am in right now. Where's my guide out of this?

It's so unnatural. Everything is just black and shadows. The trees and the trail are all visible, yet melt into layers of blackness. I start walking. Maybe this is the part where an animal pops out and starts talking to me? Will it be a dog? A deer? There is no motion around me.

The ground gets softer the further in, as if someone was overturning the soil ahead of me. The tree branches around me start to droop, and the bark is frayed here and there.

Will this solve my problems? Will I be happy again? Is this really the right path? Nothing yet. Surely something is going to happen. In this darkness, a glowing dog will show up and lick my hand. Please.

I spin around and yell into the air. Am I going down the wrong direction? Is this going to be just a repeat of everything that I've done in my life, always down the wrong path? I always make mistakes. I stop.

How can I move when the next step is going to be the wrong step again? Direction, I need it. Please. Please. I want to live. Give me a reason to keep moving. Show me something in this awful world.

I see something and my jaw drops. A gravestone with my name. No. No. The mound of dirt looks fresh, as if the gravedigger is only a few steps ahead of me. Why is it my grave? Is my spirit animal guide in there? It can't be. It can't be impossible to help me like this!

I fall to my knees and dig at the loose dirt with my hands. Salvation, please. I see a splash of colour. My arms become limp and the last of my motivation dissipates into the devouring blackness.

Worms.



Emma silently slinked along the outside of the building, following the shadowed outline of a fluffy tail. The black yoga pants clung to her legs and protected her from the sharper thorns of the bramble bush that lined the building. Occasionally one would snag the thick material of her black hoodie but she paid them no mind because they let go as she kept moving.

A soft trill ahead of her caused her to pause and crouch down moments before the lights of a passing car swept over where she currently hid. “Thanks, Trix,” she breathed as she shifted to continue moving midway down the wall.

Trix sat at the single step up to the door, cleaning one of her midnight black paws as her tail twitched this way and that. When Emma slipped out of the bushes, Trix phased through the door and took lead entering the dark house.

It took Emma a little longer to enter, using a lockpick carefully at the deadbolt. The soft click in the quiet had a smile curling along Emma’s lips as she turned the handle slowly in an attempt to not let the latch cause any sound. The hinges gave a low creak as she opened just enough to slip into the house. She didn’t close the door though; she didn’t want to risk another sound.

Moonlight lit the kitchen she found herself in, giving just enough light to allow her to weave around the chair that had been pulled out from the table on her left. Ahead of her, golden eyes peered at her from a doorway. Trix waited silently, a shadow among those naturally cast in the house. Emma stepped lightly, her sneakers silent on the linoleum beneath her as she crept through the room and into the darkness of the next room.

The curtains were drawn, dark save for a sliver across the floor of the room where the two pieces of fabric didn’t meet. Not enough to see by. Emma took a steadying breath as she mentally reached to

connect with her spirit animal. Blinking, it took Emma a moment as her sight became a little clearer, leaning on the better night vision of her feline companion. It gave her just enough ability to slip around leather armchairs and a coffee table to a painting on the wall.

Fingers slid along the bottom of the frame until she caught the latch that allowed it to swing away from the wall on a silent hinge. She reached for the combination lock on the safe that rested in the wall, the cool metal barely under her fingers when the lights in the room flickered on and a soft growl came from behind. Emma froze as Trix let out a low warning hiss, blinded for a moment as she let Trix’s vision go and the room came into focus.

“Any chance you wanna strike a deal?” Emma’s brow arched as the man who’d caught her smirked knowingly at her.

My teenage daughter's room showed the classic signs of being born into the world after the Spirits had made themselves known. The walls were adorned with posters of famous people and their Spirits, and her bed was made with a spread of the Ursa Major constellation. The floor was almost invisible, covered with clothes and books.

I walked in on her as she was hunched over her laptop.

"Maggie?" At the sound of my voice she turned her head so fast I feared she might've hurt herself. "What are you doing?"

She sighed and closed the website. "I was trying to find out what my spirit animal is. There's this online quiz Perth told me about, and after he took it, he found his the day after."

That boy Perth was always trouble, and he was too callous to justify having his animal revealed to him.

"If you keep forcing it, you'll end up with a mouse."

"But mom! I'm the last of my year!"

"And tell me, what have they found? Reptiles? Rodents? Maggie, you are meant for greater things. You know how this works."

"But you found Erogal when you were only six."

"Yes, because I was attacked by wild boars, I walked into their den on accident." My fingers brushed past the scars on my arm. "I needed her, and she didn't let me down. You trying to force yours will not make it more likely to appear."

Sighing, she got up and put her arms around my waist. "I just want to have a friend, like you and Erogal."

From the day Maggie was born, she and Erogal had

a special connection. After all, Erogal had always protected what was most dear to me, like the fierce mother bear she was.

"You'll find yours when it's time. And you know Erogal watches over you already. You might get one who helps you become a scientist, or one that will take you to other countries."

Erogal had warned me that the Spirits had something incredible planned for my little bean and her Spirit was just as anxious to meet. But I kept him at bay. Maggie was still too young to be concerned with the Spirits.

"I'd like that, but I want to see the world and help discover the Secret of the Spirit King. You know, they found out he's actually not made of Spirit particles, and -"

"You know that will be dangerous. I'd miss you for a long time."

"I'll be fine, mom. I'll have my Spirit with me, and if I get into trouble I know I can count on Erogal to keep an eye out for me."

I pulled her a little closer, brushing my fingers through her hair. "I love you." She would have to find her destiny eventually, and the more time she would have with her Spirit before she had to leave, the better it would be.

As Maggie pulled back, her eyes went wide. He was here.

Mothar was here to take away my daughter.

# THE STAG

LOVÉ  
MORTON

HORROR

As she entered the cabin, the stag collapsed under a tree behind her. She placed her rifle by the door and the bird on the kitchen table. She washed her hands at the kitchen sink, her eyes peering out the window. Her stag looked worse, it was a gradual sickness and there was little she or anyone else could do. The issues were a lot harder to solve when the sick being is an extension of one's soul. These beings were quite sensitive to changes their human companions go through.

Six months ago, she noticed the odd mood swings and hunger strikes. He spent more time at night pacing and bellowing until sun peeked over the horizon. She often found him rubbing up against trees, scratching his fur until it bled. She could not tell if that was any better than the time she caught him biting hard at his legs. He was losing large chunks of fur and open pus-filled sores were appearing along his body. His head always hung low and eyes unfocused.

She dried her hands on a kitchen towel before going to the frail stag. He took notice and began lifting his head. His neck quivered in the effort to turn and meet her gaze. It was not long before the stag's head thumped to the ground, panting. She crouched down and rubbed his stomach. An absent-minded dance forming until her hand felt a clump of fur tinged with blood. The stag bellowed startling her as she watched with wide eyes. There was a sickening crunch, it's hind legs bent at unnatural angles. The stag let out a whine, its spine pushing through the skin.

The Stag's bones continue to bend, twist, and pulse until his legs faced the opposite direction. He let out sounds that crossed between whimpers and hoarse screams. The stag's cheeks tore apart to form a Glasgow smile. There was a soft plop on the ground from his face, two white orbs had settled in blood and fur. His antlers were the next to go. He had tripled in size and grew bulkier in the torso. She could still see the muscles wind around his body and find new

areas to settle. His hooves were massive enough to flatten a large man. He buckled a bit as something new sprouted from his bare skin.

Under the moonlight it glinted a midnight blue. His antlers grew anew, faster and larger. The stag loomed in her direction, moving forward without eyes. Something hard pushed against her back, her hands feeling the strange object. The texture was coarse against her fingertips. Without any memory, she had stumbled backwards into a tree. The stag stood a foot away, a silent prompting. Unsure, she reached out. The new coat now poked like small needles. She stared into the dark abyss of his eyes and wept.

# NO NEED TO HIDE IN THE SHADOWS

JOAN  
GREY

FANTASY

Ochoa was used to the whispers following him. These didn't seem out of the ordinary; just another small town, with small-minded people making the same small-hearted statements about small things. At least he wouldn't be here long.

He checked his phone, confirming he was at the right address, then walked up to the house and rang the bell. The woman who answered the door looked as if today was simply the latest bad day in a series of bad months. A shadowy fox peered at him from under a cluttered table. When Ochoa introduced himself, she grunted and pointed down the dingy hallway to a closed door.

"Kendris is down there. I dunno why you gotta come here and say that thing's normal. It ain't." Her voice was piercingly nasal. Ochoa ignored her and edged past the leaking trash bags and old boxes in the kitchen.

Ochoa reached for the door, but it swung open at his touch. The room behind it was small and exquisitely clean. Books piled against one wall and a desk and chair huddled under the tiny window. A meagre coverlet scraped over the narrow bed.

"Did the Corone Corps send you?"

Ochoa turned. A skinny young man in threadbare clothes sat cross-legged in the furthest corner of the room, shadows pooling around his knees.

"Yes." Ochoa pushed the door nearly closed, but deliberately left a small gap. He saw the woman standing halfway down the hallway. "May I sit?"

"It's a free planet."

Ochoa lowered himself into the flimsy chair and leaned his elbows on his knees. Across from him, Kendris huddled further back into his hoodie.

"Well?" he demanded, when Ochoa was silent.

"Aren't you supposed to be telling me that my corone will fix itself if I just 'think happy thoughts'?"

Ochoa raised his eyebrows. "No. That's ridiculous."

Kendris blanched. "So you're just going to kill me?"

Ochoa recoiled. "No! Why would I do that?"

"You said that things will never be okay."

"Ah. No, I meant that your corone doesn't need fixing."

"Of course it does," Kendris said bitterly. "Did they tell you why they sent you out here? I'm a freak!"

"Are you?" Ochoa crossed his legs. "In what way? You look normal to me."

Kendris stood up, the shadow boiling up behind him. His face twisted in anger. "That's a fucking lie. Why would they send you, if all you're going to do is lie to me?"

Ochoa leaned back and extended his right arm. Slowly, a shadow grew on his hand, then coiled up his arm. He caught the moment that Kendris realized what he was seeing.

"Because I'm not lying. Not about nothing being wrong and not about anything else." Ochoa's corone wrapped itself around his shoulders like a cape and he smiled at Kendris' astonishment.

"Some of us," he said, "have unusual corones. This doesn't make us freaks. It makes us special." He stood. "Come with me and I'll show you just how special you can be."

# THE STAG

STELLA  
SAUER

HORROR

Andi does not slam the door to her room, but instead hurls herself onto her unmade bed and buries her face in a pillow.

She hears a soft tap at her window.

“Andi?” A whisper. “What is wrong?”

“Dad’s being an asshole,” she murmurs.

“Oh no. Again?”

Slumping off of the bed, Andi goes to the window. Despite the late hour, warm light presses against the outside of the glass. A tall, lustrous stag stands shining in the night.

“Phillip made a mess and Dad made me clean it up. But Phillip did it! Why do I have to clean it up?”

“I am sorry.”

Andi kneels before the window. “I wanna go with you.”

“Andi . . .”

“I do! I’ve really thought about it this time.”

“But what about soccer? What about your friend Sharon? You would miss them.”

“No, I wouldn’t.”

“I think you would, Andi.” The stag lightly drags the tip of an antler against the glass. “Open the window. I have a gift for you.”

Andi excitedly reaches up to undo the latches. When she yanks the window open, the stag’s luminescence spills into the room. His eyes are blue and gem-like. His rippling fur glistens like gold. He lifts his mouth to the windowsill and drops a small bundle of green grasses.

“See? I wrapped it.”

Andi takes it in her hands and carefully untwines the long strands of grass. The bundle crinkles open to reveal a large golden walnut. She laughs.

“Is it funny?” the stag asks.

“It’s just a walnut.”

“Oh no. Is it a bad gift?” The stag whiffs out a breath. “I will do better.”

“You don’t have to give me presents.”

“I want to. I want to make you feel better.”

“Then take me with you.”

The stag tosses his head in exasperation, making shadows dance across the canary-yellow walls of her bedroom. “Andi, we have talked about this.”

“I really wanna go. Please! I promise I won’t change my mind.”

“You cannot change your mind. That is why you must be certain.”

“Please!”

The stag hesitates, studying her with his sapphire eyes.

“You could not bring anything with you,” he says.

Hope flutters in Andi’s chest. “I don’t care.”

“You would need to do everything I ask.”

“I will. I promise!”

Still, the stag hesitates. Andi remembers the words she promised not to say unless she was absolutely certain.

“I, Andrea Nichols, pledge myself to you.”

The stag takes a step back, dipping his regal head.

“Very well, Andrea Nichols. If this is truly what you want. Then I accept.”

“You’ll take me with you?”

“Yes.”

With a whoop of excitement, Andi heaves herself up onto the windowsill. Then she looks down. Two small, silent children huddle behind the stag’s gleaming hooves. Their shadowed, red-rimmed eyes stare up at her in a mixture of pleading and despair.

The rotten, wormy walnut tumbles from her fingers.

Wen stood on the edge of the cliff. The wind toyed with her golden hair and her dress billowed behind her as she stood on her tiptoes, reaching up high.

“Careful, my friend,” said a voice behind her. The young girl didn’t turn her pretty face to look at the stag. She knew it was there, standing at the foot of a rocky outcrop below. She felt the intensity of its gaze on her back, always focused, always alert.

“I’ll be fine.” She smiled and raised her head toward the sky to enjoy the cool breeze. The peerless night stretched above her, a dark velvet dome speckled with twirling stars. She took a deep breath and the fresh air prickled through her body.

“Can’t you feel the life that blooms under our feet? It’s beautiful! And pure!” She stretched her arms in the thrilling wind to enjoy its touch on her bare skin. “It’s so great to see this world coming alive.”

The creature stomped behind her. “All lives come with their part of responsibilities, you can not be reckless forever.”

“Don’t be so serious! Let me enjoy this new journey!” A graceful figure in the wind, she whirled to the creature. Her hair lashed at her face but she ignored it and glanced at the white stag. “A new age has begun, can’t we just enjoy it!” She laughed and her voice lilted with crystalline echoes. “Why can’t we take that leap of faith?”

“Because the future is not so bright, my friend.”

She frowned and cocked her head to the side.

“How can you know?”

The stag swooped its head down in a smooth arc. Its antlers caught the twinkle of the stars; the soft fur covering them glistened. Eyes of gold shrouded as their irises dimmed.

“It is how it always ends.”

“Let’s not talk about the end.” Wen retorted, her voice harsh. “Let’s enjoy life as it is now. Let’s let the earth nourish our heart and grow in its glory. Let’s only care about the present of life.” She closed her eyes again to face the sky. Stars echoed her pledge with their bright intensity. Soon, Wen knew, there would be light and all the earth will waken and blossom. She was eager to run through it, wild and free.

“You are a bold spirit, my friend. You stand at the beginning, ready to make the jump.” It snorted softly. “Enjoy the journey, but be careful. All paths don’t lead to wonders. I will let you explore this new world, watching over you because I know that even in times of uncertainty, you will find your way.” The stag raised its head to look at the sky. “There are no foolish beginnings.”

# THE SUMMER BIRD (BUTTERFLY)

OARMFAN

DRAMA

A sunny breeze spins around my house, melting away the last remains of the week-old snowman. Small sprouts of green appear on the old trees, early flowers poke through the soil, and birds sing for attention. Small colorful wings connected to a small straight body with six legs, are flapping around in the warm wind, decorated in all sort of patterns. Here in the sprouting landscape they are on the search for their favorite dish, green leaves of the trees for their offspring to eat. I take down a book off the shelf and proceed to my balcony, where I can see the small butterflies fly around in peace. Gathering the nectars of the emerging flowers, spreading the pollen to their delight. In the garden, a little cat is jumping around, trying to catch the small flying rainbows. But they evade it with such elegance, surviving yet another day. But still, elegance is the only thing they have, as it is so fragile that a little touch of a kid's fingers can put a stop to its doings. It makes my thoughts go back to all the ideas that I have had, ideas I thought so highly of, but then I meet someone that touches them, and they shatter in a brutal cascade. But that's life, we only have something until it is gone, and then we will need to replace it. So every year, all animals, or at least most animals, will make an attempt to make life anew. And so I too will try to make new thoughts and ideas to expand my imagination.

On the trees where the small eggs of the butterfly were placed, small caterpillars begin to crawl around. Eating the leaves, growing, and growing till they can't anymore and they enter a new stage. They mold and transform all they have been eating. From a creature that crawled upon the earth, it goes into itself and changes it all. Just as now, I can make my own conclusions based off what I just read in my little book. The former caterpillar breaks free. Uneasy and crumpled at first, but it has the strength of elegance, and it focuses on what it has to do. Pumping blood out into its wings, it stretches them out, determined on making it out into the air. And so it flies, flapping its small colorful wings in the air, lighting up my eyes as I see them pass and continue out in the big blue.

Oh the Butterfly, found in so many sizes and colors, oh truly the most beautiful animal.

# PROMPT 02





# FATE'S EYE

N D  
KELLER

HORROR

Jessica was clearing out her attic when she came across a hardwood box engraved with a golden eye.

"When did this get here?" she mumbled.

The eye glinted in the light of the window. The wood was smooth with a glossy finish and did not have any dust. Compared to the floor full of dust bunnies, it was pristine.

She opened it and blinding light poured out. Images flashed in her mind. She saw the cosmos, the void, the world and things beyond her comprehension. She saw a bouncing ball and her childhood dog chasing after it, a ship searching plunging hooks into the sea, searching and a grave, hollow and waiting. She covered her face and the images stopped.

Her head ached. Carefully she removed her hands only to have them come pouring in again. She closed her eyes but still they came until she realized it was not her eyes that saw the images. She covered her head and they stopped. It felt different up there but still smooth, did she have a third eye? Focusing in her mind, she finally closed it. The images slowed to a trickle.

"That wasn't yours to open!" hissed a voice.

She turned to see a small imp sitting on one of her boxes. It was about as tall as the old, scratched up coffee table with a stain. Its blue skin shimmered in the light of the window. Its wings spread as it tried to intimidate her.

"Propane." The word came to her lips as if it belonged there. "This is my attic."

Propane hissed, agitated that she knew its name. She looked back at the box with its golden hue, now dulled to a rusty brown. Fate's eye was one with her, now.

"Give it back."

"I can't." She touched her third eye, unable to figure out how to remove it, or to completely shut it.

Images still poured through: her best friend sitting on a flight, the plane diving downward into a deep ocean. Tears sprang to her eyes. This hadn't happened yet. She didn't want to see this. "How do I get it off?"

"Come with me," said the imp. She followed it out the front door and over to the ancient graveyard over the hill. She pushed past the ivy hiding the entrance.

"What is this?" She did not like the feel of this place. It smelled of rot and images of bones dance in graves. Her third eye saw what she could not. A heavy presence loomed like a fog around them. It swirled seeming to come from a single grave with a broken headstone.

"Dig!" shouted the imp and it stomped over the grave. "My master will remove it."

She dug till her hands bled from blisters on the old shovel. Inside was a casket, nailed shut. 'Do not open', was engraved in the wood.

She couldn't stand the images any more. She opened it. The presence rose and she stared into a gaping maw.

# THE BARBITON

E.L.  
DRAYTON

HORROR

“My services come with a price. I trust you can pay?”

Johann knelt beside a chest lit by a solitary flame which seemed to float and flicker about upon a table, the only other piece of furniture in the dark and desolate room. A drip of black wax bubbled over and slid onto the already covered wooden plate on which the candle sat. The gentleman, dressed in finer attire than Johann tossed a pouch full of coins beside the candle and gave an annoyed grunt.

“This ought to satisfy half the payment required.”

Before the man could continue, Johann lifted the latch and opened the chest. An unnatural silence settled over the room as if its contents had removed all sound.

Johann reached inside the chest and pulled from it an instrument that had not been seen in centuries. He had believed its powers were lost forever when the great grandfather of the woman who raised him was assassinated, ending the male bloodline needed to make it work.

The gentleman’s eyes grew wide as he could not take look away from its magnificence. Its seven strings appeared to glow multi-colored by the flame. Johann closed the chest and placed the barbiton, a guitar-shaped instrument, on it and began to speak words the gentleman could neither hear nor comprehend. He stumbled backwards but Johann grabbed his arm and pulled it towards himself, palm up. Eyes crazed, he extracted a dagger and passed it across the palm. Blood came quickly. Johann picked up the barbiton and pressed it into the bloody hand, causing streaks of blood to drip down the strings towards its base. He laughed maniacally, sound slowly returning to the room.

“Now, let us get to work.”

The gentleman yanked his hand away and took a clean white cloth from his pocket to wrap around

his wound. But there was no wound to speak of. No blood or pain at all.

Johann began to pluck the strings of the barbiton and smiled at the sweet sound it produced.

“Does it not work?”

Johann’s face fell. “Who are you? And careful how you answer. The barbiton knows all.”

“What difference does it make who I am? I paid you. Now can you do what I ask or not?”

“No,” Johann answered, placing the barbiton beside the flickering candle, its wax now flowing over its plate, covering the bag of coins. “You have seen too much. I should not have let this happen but, we all have our sins to bear. Yours is lying to me.”

“And what is your sin?” The man asked, stepping back from Johann who took the white cloth and used it to wipe away blood from his dagger. At the sight of his own blood, the gentleman winced and looked down at a fresh wound on his hand.

“Killing you.”

# DEAD RINGER

SCOTTWRITESSTUFF

HORROR

I cracked open the chest in the attic with the crowbar from the garage. Its refrigerator-sized lid heaved open with a dusty groan, revealing its contents in the sparse sunlight.

I froze at the sight, dropping the crowbar with a clang. The chest was filled with wedding rings.

Baffled by what I saw, I dipped my hand into the musty wooden box, rubbing my fingertips over the countless smooth metal curves. There were rings of all different types: everything from gold bands, to diamond-encrusted engagement rings, to some that were just iron or steel.

I brushed them away, and buried beneath the sea of rings were hundreds of trinkets: brass cufflinks, small silver glasses, ornate brooches carved out of ivory. Anxious to see what other treasures lay inside, I plunged my hand down even further.

My fingers clasped around a cluster of tiny bits, like sticking my hand into a barrel of corn kernels. I grabbed a handful and pulled it up through the thick layers of jewelry.

Opening my fist in front of me, dozens of gold teeth spilled to the floor.

I let out a scream and dropped everything to the attic floorboards. The teeth and other horrors I'd dredged up clattered against the wood, including a single glass eye that rolled away into the shadows.

I looked down at what I'd unearthed. Stones that had runes carved into them, feathers that had become hard as rock, and a curled-up petrified lizard whose eyes had been replaced with jewels.

There was also a golden locket that had snapped open when it had fallen. I picked it up and the hairs on my arms stood up straight.

Inside was a black and white photo of my wife that

looked right out of the Civil War era. She had her usual disapproving scowl but was wearing a petticoat dress that covered everything from her wrists to her neck.

On the other side of the locket was a man in a Union coat. He had a sword by his side, mutton chops that ran the length of his cheeks... and an eyepatch. I glanced at the glass eye hiding in the shadows; it stared back at me, as if warning me about something.

I needed to find out more. My heart pounding, I reached into the chest again. I didn't stop until my fingers touched the bottom and grabbed onto what felt like a solid, cold doll. Nearly sick with anticipation, I pulled it up into view.

It was a gold statue of my wife, like something from an ancient Aztec temple. It had been intricately carved, every detail in her face and body as perfect as if I was holding a miniature version of her in my hands.

"Well," my wife's voice came from behind me. I shrieked and turned. She was standing over me. "It seems you've stumbled upon something you shouldn't have."

For the first time since I'd met her, she was smiling.

# MY FATHER, MY FUTURE

BHARAT  
KRISHNAN

## MYSTERY

The smell of old books permeates every inch of dad's attic. My attic, I correct myself. I still haven't gotten used to the idea that he's dead. He left me everything he had, from good manners and the ability to tie a Windsor knot to the two-story Tudor house where he spent his final years. I exhale, putting my head in my hands for the fifth time today – 61 was too young to go. Despite it all, a smile sneaks past my beard to the corners of my lips when I get up to continue cleaning; dad would have appreciated the irony of a postal worker not getting the chance to collect his social security.

"Anything up there?" I roll my eyes as his wife shouts up at me from the retractable attic ladder; I don't bother answering. She's loud and buxom and younger than I am. At 29, Alexis was able to give Dad something I never got – sex with a woman in her twenties.

"What's taking so long?!"

She said she wasn't "emotionally ready" to deal with his old stuff, so here I was. I knew the truth – she couldn't risk breaking a heel coming up here. I stomp the floor to let her know I heard her and hopefully send some dust her way. It was her fault dad and I hadn't spoken the last four years; the last time I saw him was at the wedding. He said he was happy, but I knew she just wanted that pension.

"Hey!" Her scream tells me she probably got some dust on those fake red nails. I move to the corner of the attic where he kept his old military uniform and the other stuff he didn't care about, and that's when I see it.

"For Alexis – my love endures even if my heart couldn't."

That's strange. I admire the ornate lettering emblazoned on the wooden chest. Dad had died of a heart attack. I blow dust off the silver knocker I now notice in the center of it. A lion's head, with

the handle shaped like teeth. It's almost lifelike, and when I touch it, a pulse runs through me so that I have to let go, stumbling backwards and falling on my ass.

"What are you doing up there?!" I ignore her again.

What is this? And why would he leave it to the bimbo and not me? I move to touch the lion knocker again, and this time I'm prepared for the shock of energy that runs up my arm to rattle my teeth. In my mind, I smell rain and hear my father's voice as if he were next to me.

"Stay away!"

Dad...what were you into? I open the chest, and darkness consumes me.

"You never knew who I really was, and it was better that way."

His voice echoes, and I am gone now, too.

# THE MYSTERIOUS TRUNK

A RAMBLING  
DAD

SCI-FI

It was almost moving day, and just about everything was packed, but Steve had one more room to tackle. He sighed heavily as he stared up at the pulldown stairs to the attic. He had been dreading this day for so long. It was so hot up there and the stairs freaked him out. Tomorrow was supposed to be even hotter; it would be even worse then so he might as well get it over with. The stairs let out a loud metallic clang as he unfolded them placed them on the floor. As he ascended, he could feel the sweat on his brow grow more intense with each step. Heading off to the far end to begin consolidating some of the things, he noticed a large trunk he had never seen before.

“What’s this?” he wondered aloud.

“Jill!” he called down to his wife. “Did you put a big trunk up here?”

No response. She probably couldn’t hear him while he was all the way in the attic. He went to grab the handle and pull it towards the stairs but it didn’t budge. He pulled a little harder, but still no movement. Grunting now, he used two hands and pulled with all his might. It’s like it’s bolted to the floor...What could possibly be inside? Approaching the front of the box, he looked at the lid. There didn’t seem to be any locks of any kind. As he began to open the lid, he noticed a soft light piercing the darkness of the attic. It startled him and he let go of the lid; it closed with a thud and the light disappeared. What the hell? His mind raced as he gripped the lid and began to open it. The mysterious glow once again pierced the darkness and bathed the attic in a warm light. He found himself covering his eyes as they began to adjust and trying fruitlessly to peer into the now wide open trunk.

He reached in blindly maybe I can just grab whatever it is. He felt a smooth sphere in the bottom and nothing else. It was warm to the touch, strangely pleasant, and for some reason completely immobile. As he began to pull away he realized he couldn’t remove his hand. He pulled harder now; it wouldn’t

budge. Some invisible force had glued his hand there. The harder he pulled away, the harder he was drawn in. He became frantic, struggling to dislodge himself; his arm was disappearing into the trunk now. Putting both feet on the rim of the opening, he struggled with all his might to get his arm out and immediately plunged headfirst into the trunk. The top swung shut and the attic went black.

“Steve?” Jill poked her head up into the darkness. “I thought I heard some banging, are you ok?” Her eyes scanned the attic, stopping on a weird trunk in the corner that she hadn’t noticed before...

# CHEST OF VALOUR

WALTER C.  
BERNARD

## DRAMA

The chest in the attic bore his name, but it was not his.

Sergeant Nelson Neville dragged it toward himself, sending an uproar of dust throughout the dim space. Booming, patriotic music from the band bled into the attic, indicating the start of the memorial ceremony. He knew that outside, people were waiting for him at the park. For him, this was something he had to do today.

For fifty years after the war, he was the greatest hero the town ever had. They would all be waiting for him to speak.

Nelson swore and threw the lid open. Inside, a case with a glass top sat on a pile of fabric, holding his war medals.

The first one. He earned for standing against advancing enemies.

The second one. He earned for rescuing a fallen comrade under fire.

The third one. He earned for losing his foot.

All from the same battle. Of course, he was a hero. They had a ceremony and everything for him when he went home.

Nelson threw the box aside, smashing it against a nearby pile of boxes. The next thing inside the chest was a large folded flag.

For his country, he served with only the greatest honor and dignity despite being drafted. He lost his foot for his country, that was but a mundane sacrifice for a hero like him. They had to hold him back so he wouldn't hobble onto the field missing a foot, alone against an entire battalion!

He picked up the flag and threw it aside too. Underneath, he found his standard-issue rifle waiting

for him. He picked it up and held it close to his chest. This was the rifle that he last carried on the field and refused to let go. Such an infallible hero like him deserved only the most loyal partners possible—his own weapons and the pride for the greatest country ever.

At the initial charge, he had fallen behind his fellow soldiers so he wouldn't be mowed down by the first barrage. He had kept his head down and shot the rifle at the sky until empty so that they would believe him when he crawled back with nothing left. He had dragged a fellow soldier's corpse along so they would not shoot him for deserting.

Putting the rifle down, he reached inside the chest and brought out his service pistol. The only thing he shot with it was his own foot, so that he would never be drafted again.

He had found fifty years of valor by living out his lies. What a hero he was!

For the last act of valor, he chambered a round and put the barrel in his mouth. He bit hard and pulled the trigger.

*Click.*

He stared down the barrel of the gun.

*Click. Click.*

The bullet had succumbed to age before he did. Nelson dropped the pistol and wailed.

# THE OLD CHEST

LOVÉ  
MORTON

HORROR

It was an uneventful day spent searching through boxes of old clothes, old photographs, and other piles of junk in the attic. She organized three piles: Keep, Toss, Donate. When she was not doing that, she was killing spiders or sneezing her lungs out.

Suddenly, there was three quick thuds from somewhere deep in the attic. Mia leaped up and pushed through boxes in search for the source of the noise. Stacks of boxes near the corner was especially heavy, as if whatever laid behind it had been intentionally walled in.

Taking a few moments to grasp her footing, she slid the box over. Behind it, there was a wooden chest. Old and worn, it was nothing she recalled her parents ever owning. She leaned down to get a closer look, it was covered in dust and a few spiders hung from it. Spinning their webs, connecting the chest to the wall. It was then, the thump happened again, vibrating the chest. Mia stumbled back, eyes wide.

She gulped and caught the clasps and flicked them loose. She pushed the top open, and a pale hand came bursting out. It was clenched in a fist and knocked the air three times. There was a slight groan coming from the chest before the hand had another to accompany it. They both grasped the sides of the chest and pulled up a tall, looming man.

His dark hair was slicked back and he wore a mustache. Eyes as green as leaves and skin as smooth as a doll's. He wore a finely tailored brown suit with a red polka-dotted bow tie. Mia trembled to her feet and took a few steps back.

He flashed a toothy smile, his eyes twinkling with amusement before his pale skin bled away to a dark beige. It was a fraction of second before this once man became a spitting image of her. Mia's eyes widened in horror, and screamed. She scrambled back, only prompting the creature to follow slowly. There was a deep crunch of bone as the being opened its mouth. It dropped until the lower jaw hung

down to its chest. Its teeth were sharp to a point, and the tongue danced wildly in the drooling mouth.

In a blink of an eye, the creature descended its mouth upon Mia's neck. All she could do was beat her fists against the beast, a soundless scream falling from her lips. It bit and licked, grinded deep down till it hit bone and moaned as the crimson liquid spilled into its mouth. It was not long before Mia's eyes grew heavy and faded black.

# PROMPT 03





Pastel flowers accented the waterfall bashing against boulders. A young boy and his kid sister gaped at the hideaway they stumbled upon. Their pet black lab, Fido, seemed to be doing the same. The trio noticed a pink and white cottage, so they skipped to the door and knocked excitedly. A gorgeous young woman with bouncy blond hair invited them inside.

Their little eyes wandered around the dainty interior full of vintage pink and white decor. Sugary sweets and juice were presented to the kids on a golden tray. The sweets were snatched and gobbled up between mouthfuls of thanks. The nice lady gathered the children into a circle and acted out stories about fairies and monsters. The monsters were a little too scary for the girl; she clung tightly to her brother. He patted her head, realizing that she'd never stop looking up to him. Giggling rang throughout the house when the hideous monsters turned into fairies with a kiss. This place was beginning to feel like home.

Then, the lady talked about her twin sister who lived in the cottage behind hers, with a young daughter that never had friends. The girl asked if she could be her friend, and the lady nodded, smiling. So, the children and Fido ran up the path to the cottage in the distance, determined to befriend her.

This house had a bland exterior, with white walls and red accents. The boy shivered when his knuckles touched the front door. This place seemed wrong somehow. A pudgy woman and her unkempt daughter, about the same age as the girl, answered the door. Squinting suspiciously, the mother motioned the trio inside before hurriedly shutting the door. Her husband sat on a chair guzzling booze, eyeing the children tiptoeing over empty bottles scattered on the floor. The mother offered baked goods that the children gagged on; they were just as bland as everything else in the house.

"Wanna go on an adventure?" the boy squeaked to the raggedy girl. The mother grabbed her daughter

by the arm, stopping her from leaving. She begged and pleaded, pulling her arm free. The father, losing his temper with the commotion, slammed his fists on the table and roared at the trio to get the hell out. He chucked a bottle at his wife but missed. Pieces went flying everywhere.

The girl ran to a corner as the brother, sister, and dog dashed out of the house. Holding hands and shaking, they stopped and looked at the waterfall. The girl demanded that they go back and rescue the daughter just like the fairies rescued the monsters. Her brother nodded and squeezed her hand tighter as they ran back to the house.

"GO GET 'EM!" yelled the brother to Fido. The lab barked loudly as the brother and sister simultaneously grabbed the girl. They ran out of the house as the parents threw bottles at the dog, injuring him as he escaped to join the others.

Jane sighed as she followed Calen, just a step or two behind her brother as he led their way out of the bright cottage they had moved into. “I don’t get why we had to move.”

“Because people were asking too many questions.” He snapped his fingers gently and the black lab that had been trailing behind Jane trotted to his side with a soft huff of breath.

A glance along the walkway had Jane squinting slightly against the brightness of everything around them. Plumes of color bunched together along the path, purples, pinks and blues all vying to be the brightest flowers. The sun held high in the sky, declaring that it was midday heading into evening. “Why somewhere so annoyingly vibrant?”

Calen glanced over his shoulder at her, a frown etched into his features. “Why can’t you be the girl you appear?”

Her eyes flickered down to the pink dress she’d picked out for the day, paired with white tights and black shiny Mary Janes. Coupled with the curled pigtails her blond hair had been carefully arranged in, she looked the quintessential cute little girl. “Just because I have to dress this way doesn’t mean I have to act the sweet doll in private.”

“We’re not currently in private, Janie.” Calen stopped short on the bridge that overlooked a beautiful waterfall. He rested his hands on the railing, taking in the sight before him. The black lab settled easily at his side, content to stay close and rest. “We need this.”

Jane sighed softly and stopped next to her brother, letting her blue eyes take in a bit of the town in the distance. The soft murmur of the town could be heard just over the gentle sounds of water as it tumbled over the edge of the small cliff. Her tiny hands reached up to rest on the railing, too small to wrap around it and squeeze with her displeasure.

“I hate being trapped like this, small, tiny, constantly moving and lying about our parents.”

His hand reached over and rested over one of hers, larger and enveloping hers. “I know, but we have to make the best of it. They’d try to whisk us off into a loving home if they found out we were on our own. They wouldn’t understand and we’d have a greater risk than just moving towns.”

“I know that, Cae.” Jane huffed and closed her eyes against the sun as it reflected off the water. She blocked out everything but her brother and the lab as he panted gently next to them. “And I’ll play the part when we are around people.”

Caden smiled and tugged one of her pigtails gently. “Good. Because in order to feed, we need people to be taken with how cute you are. I can practically taste them already.”

A soft agreeable hum slipped from Jane’s throat. “Let’s start. I’m peckish.”

# THE FOREVER GARDEN

DAVID  
GOULDTHORPE

FANTASY

If you visit the charming cottage with the gardens and gurgling water, it doesn't seem like a cursed place. And it's not. It's just the home the most dreadfully cursed man.

Very few know about him. He has not paid taxes since the fourteenth century, and, according to modern governments, he doesn't exist. Every now and then a foreign horseman stumbles across the home, or a knight fleeing his oath, or a child running from men with guns. They may stay for a day or a month or a year. Sometimes they remember him and visit again.

You can see his age, his face hanging in folds. It's clear he's cried over many people, seen crowns rise and shatter. The world runs in fast-forward, but he tends the gardens. Over the winters he's gathered ruby tulips and bred the most golden carnations. He needs minutes to sink to his creaking knees, to poke holes in the soil, to prepare the fall's bounty in the spring. The summer sun beats into his skin, caramelized and spotted from years of toil. He can barely open his eyes past a squint anymore, and when he opens his mouth, no teeth can be seen. His head is bald with white fuzz hugging his ears. His habits stay unchanged, a clock ticking with his shuffling steps. It seems that death will strike any moment.

He will outlive you, though.

If you ask why, the old man merely shrugs. With a raspy voice he explains that there are many powerful spirits in the world. The worst they can do is kill you, though.

But what do you do when you anger the spirit of Death?

Don't ask him his crime; he'll shake his head. The old man won't tell, lest it's repeated. But he says that he deserves it. Every day he sees the gravity of his great offense, the reason for his sentence.

At this point his voice wavers a bit, and his eyes shine. At least he assures you that if you don't go sticking your nose where it doesn't belong, you'll be okay. You won't end up like him, damned to more than a lifetime. That's why he takes so long to raise the cup to his mouth. Time means nothing to him anymore: a liberation of chains.

If you press, he'll show you the scars. A Vandal's sword against his neck, which missed the crucial vessels and nerves. On his shoulder, the bullet of a cruel officer, which just bypassed the heart. He had been left to die for a painful week on his kitchen floor, but the wound healed instead, cell by cell.

Resources are valuable when scarce. When life is infinite, what do you do? The man's answer is to plant his garden. When you leave, he goes back out. His shaking elder hands caress tiny white blossoms, looking into their faces. All he wants is to make his prison beautiful.

He has an eternity to do so.

# THE DOLL MAKER

LOVÉ  
MORTON

FANTASY

In a small corner of the forest, there was a man who carved an idyllic home for himself. In front, there was a small wooden bridge that stretched across a small waterfall pond and led to a modest cottage home.

The man's name was Charles Sinclair. He was a tall, lanky, middle-aged man with graying black hair and icy gray-blue eyes. Charles was a finely-dressed man. He always wore a white dress shirt under an ornate vest with a gold pocket watch in the right-hand pocket. He had a charming personality and a deep voice that was soothing to listen to. He could talk about philosophy and how humans work or sprout off jokes like a child would.

Yet that was not the only reason I enjoyed his company. He had special gifts and could make things move with nothing more than a look. I was in awe the first time I saw him bring a dead flower to life. I only knew the man for two weeks and it made me feel warm inside that he trusted me with this. It was rare to see anyone with gifts like these. Most were killed or ran away, forever exiled from their homelands. Charles never spoke of his youth but I suspected it was not a happy one.

It was why, at the age of eleven, I took my little sister and ran away from home. I had nothing more than a suitcase each of our personal belongings. My parents spent more days cursing the day we were born than loving us. We left at night when they were sound asleep and trekked all night to Charles' home by early morning.

He was surprised to see us but settled us into the home with breakfast. A variety of meat, cheese, fruit, and bread were laid out on the table. Charles had disappeared for a moment as I ate with my sister, her eyes wide with excitement. He came back with two vials of purple liquid, a potion to ensure we were healthy he told us. I twisted the cork off and swallowed the bitter potion, my sister following suit. It had a slight burn as it made its way into my stomach.

I made the move to grab the bread to rid the taste from my mouth but it was like meeting a wall. I could not move anything on my body besides my eyes. Charles moved to pick up my sister, who was stiff, and carried her out of the room. Moments later he came back and took me outside to the backyard. There was a small podium with four chairs facing twenty seated people in front of it. Charles settled me down beside my sister. From my peripheral vision, I could see three other strangers sitting stiffly as well.

"Welcome to my collection of living dolls," Charles said to the audience, a gavel in hand. "Best offer wins."

# WATERFALLS

CURTIS  
MCINTYRE

DRAMA

“One day, Sister, all of this will be ours.”

“Really, Brother?”

“Oh, yes. The fields of flowers, this waterfall, the dog... All of it, just for us. No more parents telling us what to do.”

“Well, it does sound nice. But what about Mommy and Daddy? It’s not like they’d just give it over. Maybe the estate would be passed down to us after they died, but that won’t be for dozens of years.”

“Dear Sister, you never could think outside the box. Have you ever considered what would happen if, hypothetically, some kind of accident were to befall our poor progenitors?”

“An accident?”

“Right. For example, if we accidentally pushed them down the waterfall and then laughed as their skulls were dashed on the boulders below.”

“Oh, that kind of accident. That would be wonderful.”

“Wonderful indeed, Sister.”

“Why, if Mother and Father were finally gone, not only would we have the house and land to ourselves, but we wouldn’t need to keep our relationship a secret anymore.”

“Exactly, Sister. Our love could turn this house into the home it always should have been. But first, what say you run inside and bring Mother and Father out here? Tell them we want to show them something.”

A wind swept across the land as the siblings took each other’s hands. They could see the reflection of the waterfall dancing in the other’s eyes as they shared a loving look.

“Oh, Brother, this is so exciting. We’re really going to do it?”

“We are.”

“I love you, Brother.”

“I love you, too, Sister. Now, go fetch our parents.”

As she departed, her footfalls were staunchly muffled by the roar of the waterfall, a cascade beating against the rocks below with a force to topple empires.

# PROMPT 04



# THE STORYTELLER

VIOLE  
ALDRITCH

HORROR

In many abysmal nooks and crannies across the globe, there are those with stories to tell. I was there, in a near-abandoned tavern in Devonshire, for that very reason. I had heard of a man who, when not taken away by the drink—and the opium—would tell any who would listen of ancient cults and their blasphemous rituals.

Sure enough, he was there, I had caught him, thankfully, on his way into the bar, and so, he was not quite too far gone to tell me - or anyone- his tale.

“Well, I’d suppose it start’d many years ago... for me at least. There’s been old wives’ tales about Lundy since before you or me was born. I’d heard ‘em many a time, and never knew what to think. The myths went frum cults und ritchulls tah ghosts ‘n witches.

“I vis’ted the island one mumf, it wusn’t like anythin’ I’d seen, I’d s’pose it wouldn’t be like anythin’ you’d seen neither.” He signalled to the bartender, ordering another pint of ale as we sat together. The last of his drink dripped down his chin as he took a sip, dampening his faded white beard.

“There were only uh few there when I went. They were weird folk, prob’ly pagans or some’ in, but I di’n’t think nothin’ ‘v it ut the time.

“I’d ‘eard there were cults ‘n such on islands hidden away from modern folk, but none like this. They went about thin’s quietly, late ut night, while ev’ry un else was ‘sleep, as you’d ‘spect frum these kinds of people, but in th’ night I woke up, and I heard. Some’ut was stirring, like a big stomach growlin’ far away.

“I rem’buh how fright’nd I wus the next day, I hadn’t slept ‘cuz uv the noise, and I wusn’t used tah stayin’ up at all hours of th’ night back then, di’n’t ‘ave the energy I s’pose. I di’n’t think tah ask the island folk about th’ noise.

“Th’ noise was there ‘gain when night came, ‘twus

louder still when I left th’ ‘ouse, and even louder when I walked closer, ‘nd closer, ‘nd closer, ‘till it was nearly deaf’ning. It wasn’t comin’ from any ‘ouse,” he paused, I saw how his eyes were glazed over with fear as he stared past me, out of the window, at the growing storm, “‘twus comin’ from und’rground.”

Well into his fifth, perhaps even sixth drink, the old man had had enough, and it seemed he would unravel at any moment. I refrained from questioning him any further, unsure he would give me any coherent answers. I left the tavern having gained more than the man could have ever known. I knew where I would go next...

# THE FIXED WOLF

PAUL  
TISTLE

## HORROR

The Fixed Wolf is a place of stories. Sailors recount tales of glory over a pint of ale. But some of these are ungodly, tales which you hope are made up. The worst one I heard still sticks with me today, haunting my sleep. This was the tale of The Cambria.

The old man asked me, "What is the worst creature you seen?"

I responded, "A squid, the size of the entire boat."

The old man chuckled. "That would cower under its mother if it looked at what I saw."

"What was it?" I asked.

The old man said, "When I was a lad about your age, I was a sailor on The Cambria, a trading vessel carrying rum to the colonies before they broke off. On the second week of our journey, a storm like no other hit our ship. The clouds made the world pitch black with only the strikes of lightning showing our way. The waves rocked our ship like we were just a log. I was below decks fixing the holes that appeared out of thin air. Our captain, John, ordered everyone to come to the upper decks. When we got there, he was screaming of a beast of hell in the distance. We knew that he had lost it, but he kept pointing into the darkness and shouting. We locked him in the brig for our, and his, safety. I took over steering the ship, controlling it from overturning. Then the largest strike of lightning lit up the whole world and I saw it, a beast walking in the water. Though its shape looked like that of man, hands and legs protruded everywhere on its body. It stood as tall as a mountain and had eyes of red. Those eyes, you could see all of hell itself in there. The waves seemed to bend around him in submission."

I was in complete shock, and said, "This has to be false."

The old man raised his right hand and said, "I swear by God that everything you hear is true. Now, can I continue?"

I shook my head.

Ignoring my protest, the old man started again. "I was not the only man who saw the beast. Charles started screaming, begging to load the cannons to fire. But before I could stop him, someone fired one of them. The shell hit him on the shoulder, but the beast only flinched. It then turned to us and I knew we were doomed. It ran towards us with speeds unmatched by anything I have ever seen, then or now. It ripped our boat apart and ate crewmembers, its mouth burning. I blacked out, and when I woke, I was in a mental hospital; they said I was raving like a madman. I only was released when I stopped talking about it 15 years later."

When I tried to sleep that night, all I could dream of were those red eyes.



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