

OCTOBER - 2018 - VOLUME I - ISSUE VIII

storyzine.

A FLASH FICTION COLLECTION



storyzine.

Volume I Issue VIII

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Editor's Note

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Why Storyzine? I've had to answer this question and other's just like it ever since I came up with it back in January. My knee-jerk answer is "why not?" But I realize a more complete answer is best. I came up with Storyzine because I want to help the unknown writers. I want to find a way to reach as many readers as possible and provide for them material that they will like enough to pursue the writers on their own. The idea behind this stems from my dream of being an Independent Author. The best way to do it, with any level of success, is to build an email list. An Indie's email list is like their life's work in one central location. Having a list of readers who liked your work enough they were willing to sign-up to get more updates and more stories from you is like gold (or better put, money in the bank).

Turning those readers into potential fans and some day, customers, is something that is ultimately up to the writer. My goal is to give as many unknown writers the lane to perform and produce work that any reader would be happy for the opportunity to read.

This is why I created storyzine. This is why storyzine is free. This is why I am proud of what it has become in the last eight months. Whether we release an issue that has four stories or twenty-four, the joy of knowing I helped even one person be read by dozens or hundreds and that that led to an increase in twitter followers or sign-ups to that one writer's social landscape, is more than I could ever ask for.

The writer's, if they could, thank you for reading. But I thank you more for staying with us through every issue.

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OCTOBER 2018 THEME:

MONSTROSITY

THE TUNNEL

WINSTON
KALLE

HORROR

You know those tunnels that run through mountains so they don't have to try and build around them? I used to love those as a kid. Bottrel's pretty flat, so they were a novelty, I guess.

There was one we'd always go through when dad'd take me to Bow Valley for volunteer work. Took about thirty seconds to go from opening to opening. Driving through it at night was the best because you didn't get blinded coming out; All those little lights whizzed past as he sped through.

There were two of those tunnels on the way into town from the compound. We were pretty far into the mountains. I'd fight to get the van for supply runs if they were before sunrise or right at sunset Just so I could push that old van as hard as it would go through them.

I didn't run into any more of them until I got close to the Appalachians.

I'd never seen the Appalachians before. They were real...I don't know how to describe them. Smooth? The Rockies are harsher, less tree coverage, with snow tipped peaks. These looked more like overgrown hills. You didn't even have to acclimate yourself if you climbed one.

While I was working my way down 77, I saw one of those tunnels coming up. It sounds pathetic, but I got excited. There was no traffic since it was a little after 4 am and foggy. I punched the accelerator. About ten seconds in, I realized something was off. There weren't any lights other than mine. I also couldn't see more than a few yards ahead or the end of the tunnel.

I figured the lights might be busted. It made me feel better for a few.

The moment didn't last long, because the tunnel just stretched further in darkness. On and on for what felt like an hour. I could feel panic starting to creep up on me. It made the darkness worse and red-tinged around the edges.

I don't believe in god. Never have; but I started

praying to whomever or whatever might be listening to get me out of that mountain.

Finally I saw the opening. Just suddenly before me like someone rolled up a curtain. Open sky and trees greeting me as I flew out. I braked then because my heart was pounding and I felt dizzy. According to the radio clock it'd been less than a minute. That didn't seem right. The cassette was clicking, waiting to be turned over. It'd gone through all the songs on the B side while I was in there.

When I looked in the rearview mirror, the tunnel looked like a mouth illuminated in red by my brake lights. I focused on the road ahead and drove off.

HIDDEN MONSTERS

DALLAS
RHINEHART

DRAMA

I used to be afraid of the monsters hiding under my bed or lurking in my closet. I'd lie in bed pulling my blanket up to my chin or sometimes even over my head to hide away. Everyone knows the first rule of monsters: you have to respect the bed. At least, I thought everyone knew.

Now I know that isn't the case.

I've learned the hard way that real monsters don't need to hide under my bed and they certainly don't need to respect it. In fact, they sometimes do their best work while I'm awake at night, restlessly tossing and turning as they pester me.

Why are you fighting? They'll ask. Why don't you just give up already? Their voices seethe with a hatred that I can't understand. They're not wrong either; I'm exhausted. All I want to do is give up and make everything stop.

You're worthless! Nothing but a coward who won't ever amount to anything! They'll practically scream at me, their voices sometimes growing so loud it's all I can hear. Even though I'm exhausted, I won't stop fighting; I can't. I have to keep going for all the people who can't see these monsters. Think about that, how embarrassing would it be to lose a fight to invisible monsters? A fight nobody even knew you were in. I'd be the year's biggest joke.

Don't get me wrong, there's hints and clues out there for all the people who aren't fighting monsters, but sometimes it just isn't enough. They'll ask me why I look so tired all the time. Maybe they'll even ask me if everything is ok. I'll, of course, show my teeth, yellowed by my impulsive smoking, in a forced smile and reply sarcastically I'm fine or never been better. I can't afford to show any signs of weakness. This just isn't a burden to be shared.

That's the beauty of these invisible monsters that are hiding in my head. Nobody even knows they're there.

TALES FROM PHOEMIA:

DAVID
GOULDTHORPE

THE ELARTAN WOOD

FANTASY

The forests of northern Elarta stand proud, proud because they keep their secrets. Around the fringes, Elartans of all sorts — foxes, rabbits, raccoons, otters — gather wood for their kingdom. Houses and ships and tools can't be made from air after all! No one dares reach for the old wood though. Whispers of ancient powers keep them out.

Of course, Elarta has always been known as a quaint country, prone to superstition. Naysayers fall silent though when they hear that humans crossed the ocean to explore the wood themselves... and never resurfaced. The Little Folk are comfortable in the forests of the world, but the Elartan Wood is a place they dare not enter. Some may scoff and call it cowardice; the more understanding prefer the term wisdom.

Wisdom is not exclusive to instinct though. Anyone who makes their way to the forests may try to venture between the trees. A hundred paces in, and the sun disappears. The sky becomes branches, the ground becomes roots. And an energy, a stillness, a death in the air. Someone, something watches. It's not an evil sensation, they say, but definitely nothing you'd want to face.

The true terror of the forests comes out in the winters. Elarta's great gush of life in the spring, and the heavy bounty of the autumn, is balanced by the bleakness of the snow. Even by the southern coasts, the waves will freeze upon the shore in elegant curls. By the Wood, the sun fails for days on end. Blizzards scream from the north and snare entire villages. The Little Folk gather close, ration their dried food, and pray the snow covers the windows.

For it's in the winter, they say, that the forest's secrets emerge.

Tales of creatures, human-like but far too thin and tall, with eyes so sunken you couldn't see them. Or a moose, twice as tall as any other and sagging beneath the weight of moss growing on its ancient fur...

Rumors grew to tales and legends, of naughty

children who tried to sneak out during the winter to play. Long fingers reached from bushes to snatch them away, never to be heard from again. Or the other naughty child, who dared to enter the forest. The cruel spirits made her run forever until she grew exhausted - and there she took root, damned to grow from that spot into a tree of her own.

Winter by the Wood does not always feel bleak. Families shelter together and, if the snow abates, they gather in their great halls for drink, for company, for a fire that will warm their stiff bones. But it all halts at the noise of scraping against the outside walls. Father and mothers and children may wake in the night to the sound, real or imagined, of knuckles against the window. It would just take a peek to see what hides in the forest.

It's a secret they'd prefer not to know.

TOXIC TASTINGS

ERICA
DEEL

COMEDY

Have you ever been poisoned—by a parent, no less? I have.

Visiting from college, I was having lunch with my mom and stepfather at one of the approximately 50,000 diners in New Jersey. I was finishing up a delightfully soggy plate of disco fries—french fries smothered in brown gravy and mozzarella cheese. It served as my perfect almost-last meal.

My mom stared in disgust as I shoved another fry into my mouth. “I have no idea how you can eat that, with how food-picky you are.”

“Hey, my ‘supertaster’ taste buds enhance bitter flavors. There’s nothing bitter about this! Just cheesy, carb-y deliciousness.”

Ah, supertaster. Such a stupid word for an actual condition. But I relished finally having an explanation for my food-freakishness, courtesy of my Biological Psychology class: I had more tastebuds than the average person, apparently something we women wind up with more than men. There’s nothing *super* about this abnormality, though, other than making me miss out on things most people find delicious: tea, wine, grapefruit, yogurt, etc.

What a terrible superpower to have. It mostly singled me out as a freak in any social dining setting.

A short time later, our meal was cleared and dessert arrived. A portent of doom settled upon our tiny table as the waiter set a sundae dish in front of my stepfather. It looked like a dirt parfait with its beige-and-brown layers. At first bite, his expression changed to one that should only occur in a bed behind closed doors with my mom.

“Here, hon, you *have* to try this,” he said, feeding some to my mom. At which point she proceeded with her own reaction that rivaled the infamous *When Harry Met Sally* restaurant scene.

Awkward.

After their mutual mouth-gasms subsided, the moment of reckoning had arrived. My mom twisted to me—practically in slow motion—and raised a spoonful of that suspicious glop to my mouth.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Just try it. You’ll love it,” Mom said.

Famous last words.

My taste buds imploded as a monstrosity of flavors descended on their fragile, unwitting existences. My tongue recoiled with the horror of what I imagined a Tide Pod smoothie tasted like. My stomach churned with the disgust of watching the guy in *Saw* hack off his own foot. I gagged through swallowing the lump of death.

I grabbed the glass of water in front of me and washed out my scorched throat. “What...Is... THAT?”

My mom stared at me with a confused expression. “Tiramisu.”

“Oh,” I choked out, “you mean the amalgamation of the two most vile tastes on the planet, coffee and alcohol? Thanks, Mom! Are you *trying* to poison me?”

“I’m sorry, honey, I should have remembered your condition. Here, water won’t get out that taste. Try this.” I took a swig of whatever Mom handed me, and my taste buds gave a slight whimper and died. Tea.

If looks could kill, my mom would know the same fate as my poor taste buds right now.

ENTREPE-SEWER

SCOTTWRITESSTUFF

DRAMA

The sewer rats churned in my stomach, calling out for something to wash them down. I raised my mouth to the waterfall pouring out of a pipe for a swig of thick, swampy juice.

Downing it, a transcendent flavor hit me. Bitter flowers with a hint of rotten banana peel. Hot yet soothing. Subtle yet potent. I had to find the source of this magnificent taste!

My scaly hands heaved my slick body into the pipe. The sewage was putrid and runny, brimming with the pungent odor of used diapers, never-washed gym pants, and chunks of spoiled meat. But every now and then a whiff of the flowery scent would flow by. I was on the right track.

My webbed hands and feet swam easily through the sludge. Raising my nose-slits to the air and closing my three eyes—better to smell that way—the fragrance of flowers was so strong it overpowered the rancid milk, alcohol vomit, and forgotten Easter eggs. The pipes thinned, slowly spiraling upward. My green and blue body contorted along with them, shrinking down as necessary. First the size of a wooden plank, then a snake, and then finally an extremely long straw squirming up through a metal tube. I was almost there. I could taste it!

My eyes popped out first. Everything was blurry, hard to see. Surrounding me was some sort of metal casing. Staring down from above, pouring liquid right onto my face, two humans stood wide-eyed and screaming. Probably because they were enjoying the sweet nectar so much they couldn't help but shriek with delight. I needed to get some too!

My body squirmed the rest of the way out, expanding like a sponge. Then with a slurp, my slimy, stinky self fully oozed into the metal basin, looking around for the source of the wonderful smell.

Immediately I spotted it. One of the humans was holding a pot with light brown liquid inside. My clawed fingers dripping goo reached out for it, but they snatched it away from me.

“What is this thing?” one of the humans asked. They were probably referring to the liquid. They had likely followed its scent too, to try and find out what it was.

“It’s a monstrosity!” the other human said.

Tea. Tea. That word struck a chord within me. And this substance was a... Monstrosi-Tea. My fanged, dripping mouth opened to speak.

“Pardon me, sir and madam,” I said politely. “But would you be interested in investing in my startup where we sell your Monstrosi-Tea?”

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