

# *Abyssaire*



# *Blue Daisies Journal*

## I s s u e V — A b y s s a i r e

Blue Daisies aims to be a cozy cot for experimentation with genre stylistics to explore the psyche of changing aesthetics. Learn more about the journal at [bluedaisiesjournal.wixsite.com](http://bluedaisiesjournal.wixsite.com). Find us on Twitter @DaisiesJournal & on Instagram @bluedaisiesjournal



# EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to Blue Daisies Journal's Issue V: "Abyssaire" based on the theme of Gothic-Decadence!

This issue is a crimson gown that has been embroidered with mysterious echoes of the rotten heart, dyed with the threshold of extravagance and decadence, and finally: sewn with the threads of sounds that the ravens and gargoyles seem to make in the darkness.

To enter, you *must* swear you can be invited in without any suspicious need to draw blood.

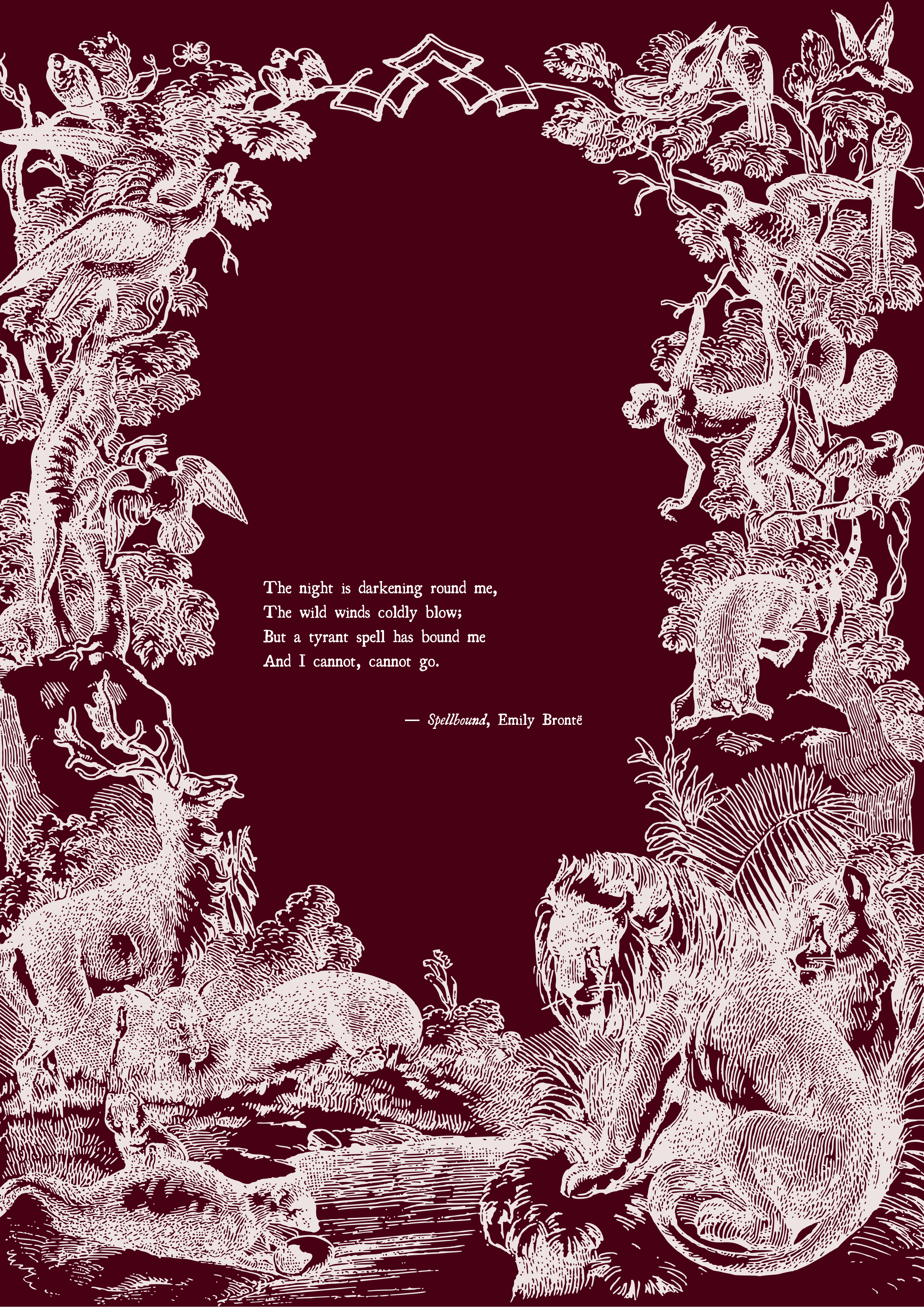
Then you are to don your cloaks that *must* bellow behind you.

And if you're able to find something decadent inside this gothic. . .

. . . *Congratulations*, you've unlocked the gate to the Abyssaire!

[Berrs, *Editor-in-Chief*]





The night is darkening round me,  
The wild winds coldly blow;  
But a tyrant spell has bound me  
And I cannot, cannot go.

— *Spellbound*, Emily Brontë



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# Hello. Is Anyone There? (Nobody Listened to Me)

a Ouija poem (aka predictive text poem)

I'm listening.                      Nobody listened to me.

Heaven's a mass unmeasured. Worms guard,  
grey ghosts crawl            up dining rooms on earth's bosom.  
Sparkled webs on my back,            body in battle  
   humbled.

Nights are electric forklifts : glistening.

I know where witches die  
when they're welcome. I know where witches die  
when they're all alone in battle.

Upon my grave sings                    the sea of their mouths,  
spilling

jewels                  sharp as a rumor,  
stretching into slivers of your                  sin  
so you are ready                  to fall gently                  in the dark.



*Kait Quinn*

## The Spirit of Wednesday Addams Once Entered My Body

I woke with my arms corpse crossed over my chest and hissed at the crush of October sun. I dreamt that I was coffin bound six feet under beetle-rich loam—no vocal chords from which to scream, no string to pull a warning of bells. It was nirvana. Until daylight dragged me from such an agreeably morbid womb. My shoulders ached from my brief eternity of carrying buckets of boy tears in hell. It was pleasurable in a terrible kind of way, like when you press your thumb into the pool of a bruise or let a woman batter the wisp of skin across your ribcage with a needle for a hellebore-laced-with-foxglove tattoo. By hour three, the nausea of muscle tense against needle kicks in. Delightful. As consolatory as the belladonna and black widow neurotoxin latte I treated myself to afterward. I had the awful good luck of crossing paths with a nasty thunderstorm on the way home. I was pleased I had my lightning rod in my satchel for just such occasions. I wrapped the cold, voltaic rain pellets around me like an electric shock. Later, when a blood moon stained the night in garnet, I fell asleep to the lull of a cemetery wind, satisfied as a storm cloud giving way to a tempest, biting as the daughter of a loaded gun.



*Marie Anne Arreola*

## How a Body Remembers a House

I place before you this ghost of childhood:  
a sweater vest with loose threads, patched  
trousers soft from too many washings,  
a collar never quite straight. A smile  
stretched wider than it had any right to be,  
like a stork lifting improbable wings.



On the table: olives that refused to hold meat,  
cheese aged past its welcome, jelly with no fruit  
to redeem it. A half-empty jar of Nutella,  
my mother's half-full coffee, the daily quarter  
for my school snack. A tin of snuff—  
my father's absentmindedness condensed into metal.

There was always more I could list,  
but I'll leave it here. The rest  
is the work of memory, still as water,  
suspicious as wood bracing for fire.  
Down in that well of childhood I hid,  
buried under a crust no hand thought to break.

If you can fly in a dream, a witness might say,  
it is your anger stretching its wings.  
Fly to the Berkshires, move upstate,  
but you can't become a child again.  
Childhood isn't nostalgia; it is





wider than the five senses, more like a small  
crowd multiplying in your chest,  
pressing from the inside.  
But only three kinds of thought last:  
the flat ones, the anxious ones,  
and the triangular ones—  
the trinities, the mercies.

There's something holy  
and irrational in it,  
like a butterfly flapping  
without knowledge of air.

*Simon Collinson*

## The house that kept the lights on.

I was awoken in the early hours and informed of the distress and commotion in Wolcan. There had been an enormous blaze that had engulfed Rhosly hall. At the mention of Rhosly I made my way immediately to Wolcan.

I knew the estate of Rhosly and the area of Wolcan well. As a distant relation by marriage I'd been invited to Rhosly hall many times. In the past I had been a frequent visitor to the estate. Regretfully due to my work, my visits had become much less frequent these past 12 years. On my journey there I turned over in my mind all the things I'd learned. I had often heard of the rumours about the place and some frightful things said about the new owner. I had dismissed them as superstitious nonsense or local jealousy, but now...

I reached Rhosly hall early the following afternoon to find a smouldering wreckage reduced to ash.

I asked the people at the site if they had found Morgan?

They told me they hadn't, but were still searching for him in the wreckage.

About an hour later a call went up that a body had been found at the Bearpit.

My heart sank at the mention of that location, for nothing good ever came from that dreadful place, it was steeped in evil.

With leaden legs I made my way to that baleful spot. At the bearpit I was confronted with a grisly sight of a body under a shroud.

As a relation I was called upon to identify the body.

The cover was pulled back to reveal the face of a young man old before his time. The face was contorted horribly and the body was emaciated.

But there was no doubt it was Morgan.

This place had claimed another victim.

I looked around me, saddened at how the estate at Rhosly hall had changed. It was so silent. The Rhosly that confronted me now reeked of rotteness.





There was one part of the estate with an unwholesome and unsavory past. For at the edge there was an ancient bear pit where in medieval times savage and cruel games had taken place as dogs were unleashed unto bears and bets taken on the bloodshed. It brought out the crowds' base instincts. It was a place of malice. I recall that young Morgan as a child was attracted to the place. I think the past violence and gruesomeness appealed to him. I'd hoped that he would grow out of such notions.

However under the Shackletons merriment held sway. It was filled with the titles, the rich, the famous, movie stars, ministers of state, even the odd writer. All looking for a party and a merry time. There were plenty of fancy dresses, masquerades, glittering galas and balls. Rhosly was filled with happiness...

At night it was so well lit that the whole estate could be seen to glow for miles. It was like a charm, a magical spell. But the spell was shattered, at the night of the mid-summer's fancy dress ball.

That was the night when the Shackletons were killed, accidentally they say. Encumbered by dress and drink. A result of too much to drink. An argument? Or misadventure? But some say differently. Both their bodies were found at the bottom of the bear pit. Who had fallen first or had both fallen together, the result of some dreadful pact. Nobody knew for sure. And where there was doubt, suspicion soon made a home. My wife was one of those who felt that Morgan had caused the accident. But as far as I could tell there was no evidence to back up such suspicions.

The police were quick to take the bodies away without a thorough examination at the scene. I felt at the time there was unseemly haste on the part of certain individuals to have the matter tidied up quickly. And naturally in some quarters it merely stoked up rumours about the Shackleton's demise.

Some muttered darkly of murder.

Morgan's behaviour at the funeral only fanned the rumours and ill feeling against him. For some reason that I cannot fathom he chose to not enter the church for the service. It was an ill judged decision and one that people criticised him for. My wife was deeply upset at this episode and it only strengthened her conviction that Morgan had caused the deaths of his parents. And increasingly more people shared her opinion about Morgan.











They were afraid that they would take something of Rhosly's wickedness back with them.

Usually when you see a light on at night you treat it as a welcoming and comforting sight. It lifts your heart.



But not Rhosly, the house that was always lit at night. This only filled the observer with an unease, soon joined by dread and fear.

But that night of the blaze Rhosly was brighter than ever before. You could see the flames lick the sky, the heat from an inferno, bonfire ablaze.

People watched gripped motionless by terror.

In the morning after all was charred wood, smoke and ash. There was little sign of Rhosly.

Morgan's body was found at the bottom of the bear pit that was badly charred but his face was a terrible sight. I looked upon a man who was in his mid thirties, yet who looked like a man of eighty. But it was his face that was the most frightening. His muscles and mouth locked in some awful anguish. He clearly saw something that terrified him in his final moments. Was it the sight of this pursuer which drove the owner over the edge to his doom?

Had those shadows finally turned upon Morgan?

The authorities say the cause of the fire was a faulty wire or a fallen lamp. Morgan was filled with opium that made him zombified and insensible. He had not eaten anything in days. They reckon He had become a barely living wraith in his final weeks., wandering around Rhosly looking out anxiously for signs of shadows in the corners.

But most of the locals of Wolcan think that the wickedness that lived and visited this house had brought it down and laid him low. I said a prayer for Morgan.

I took my leave of this location and made a silent promise never to return to this ill omened place. I couldn't help feeling that the locals were right. Wickedness had touched this place and left a lasting imprint.

For someone who has to keep all the lights on in the house at night must have had something terrible to hide.

Some people seek Hell. For Morgan it looked as if Hell had come seeking for him.





*Jacob Stavros*

near is just an adjective

tell me everything that makes you wary of me then tell me i'm beautiful. then tell me  
three fixes per blemish. write a poem about beginning with eyes closed. write a poem  
about easing. or eking. or ailing. tell me the poem's mine, tell me a deciduous, a delirious,  
a-strip the bark by morning we have faces and every fortune until then.



*Yuu Ikeda*

## The Door

Her paralyzed fingertips  
can't open the door.  
She doesn't know that  
the doorknob is cold or warm.  
Only the fact that the door can't be opened  
dominates her mind.

A spider that was crawling beside her  
already has died.  
He has died,  
without her.

He has been released from the door,  
without her.  
She is still trying to open the door.  
She is always knocking the door,  
always pulling and pushing the doorknob.

Any equations are useless  
to open the door.  
Even Fermat might not be able to open the door.  
But,  
she is trying to open the door,  
to show herself the world,  
to gaze at the blue sky  
by her own eyes.



*Mahailey Oliver*

## Tombstone

After the phone call that ended Us  
I trembled for a week straight,  
a crisp autumn leaf struggling  
to fight the winter winds,  
to hold on to the October of us a little bit longer,  
to fight the chill that had been scratching  
at the window for months. Denial is like that.

Ignoring the warning signs  
is like that. We forgot rose-colored glasses  
when we loved each other's shades of gray.

Taupe, and you brushed your fingers  
against mine at the bus stop outside  
of the bakery. Cinnamon scones still taste  
like falling in love. Even a flaky love  
is worth biting into, right? Right...?

Marengo, and I bring coffee to you at work  
on your third graveyard shift this week.  
The hollows under your eyes soften  
as I kiss whip cream off your upper lip.  
The daylight wasn't the only thing dying.

Cinerous, and you sing for me every time  
I am in an elevator. In person, on the phone.  
I lament the opening doors, the caesura  
of your hums and chords. I cannot ride elevators  
soundlessly. Now, I take the stairs.



Slate, and I help you pick outfits  
for your newborn niece. This makes you ask  
if I think ours would have my eyes, your hair.

And this, this is the moment where the iron  
bars, the charcoal sunsets, the smoky doubt  
seeps into a swirling spiral. A pewter disapp-  
ointment flecks in your features when I do  
not respond and the fracture of that fissure  
could not be undone.

Cadet, and you were fighting for me to make a decision.

Fossil, and I am a shell of myself in the aftermath.  
Gunmetal, and you pull the trigger with That phone call.

Gray, gray, gray.

I was once a daisy blossoming in your palm,  
basking in your adoration.  
Now, I am a dandelion blown away,  
fleeing from your

final

unfulfilled

wish.





*Betty Stanton*

## Threshold

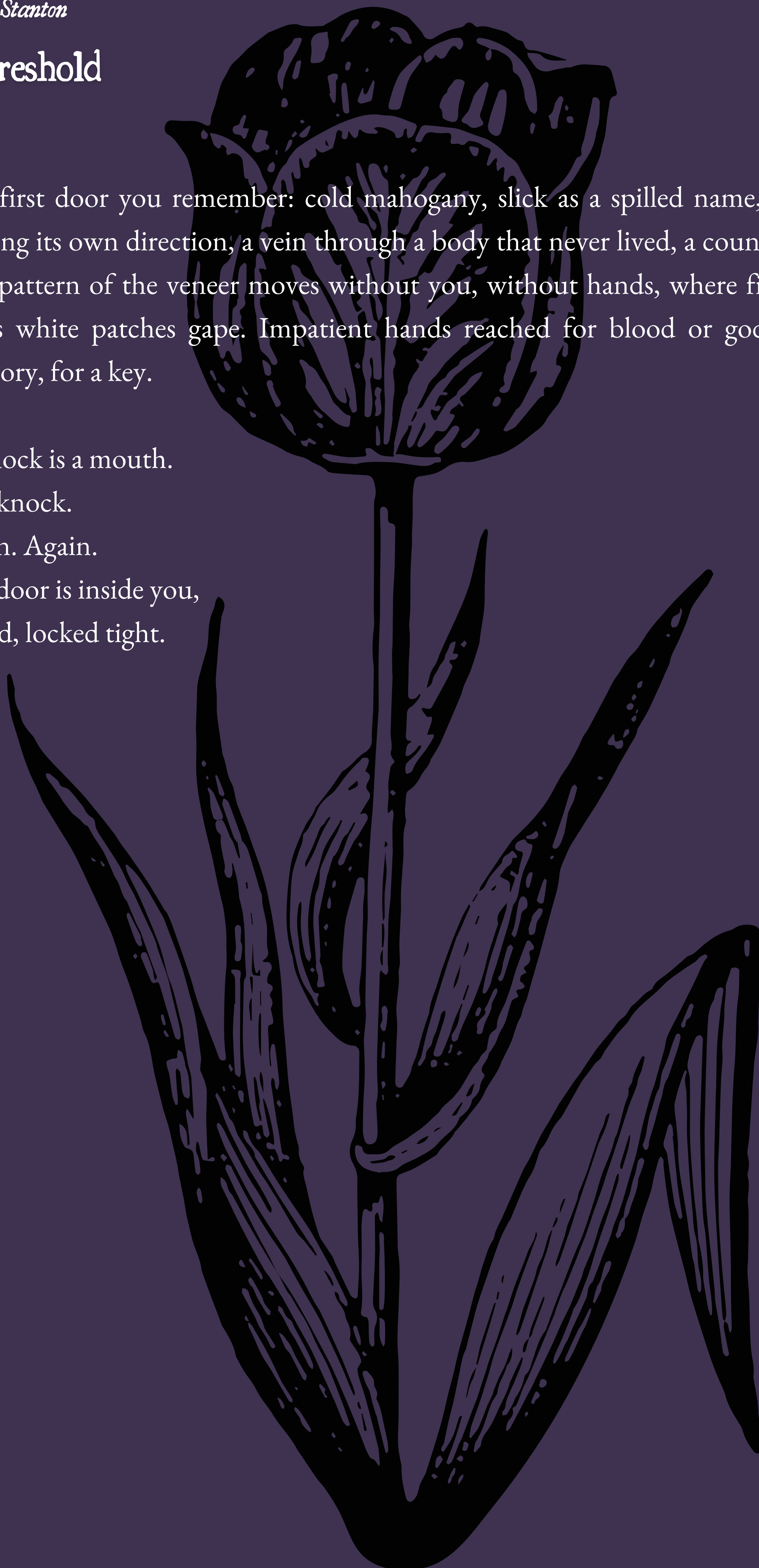
The first door you remember: cold mahogany, slick as a spilled name, as oil, as blood moving its own direction, a vein through a body that never lived, a counterfeit heartbeat. The pattern of the veneer moves without you, without hands, where fingers peeled the edges white patches gape. Impatient hands reached for blood or god, skin torn, for memory, for a key.

The lock is a mouth.

You knock.

Again. Again.

The door is inside you,  
closed, locked tight.



*Betty Stanton*

## Candlelight

The dark arrives too fast. It doesn't fall; it seeps. It spreads like rot through the air, coating the walls, the breath, the silence. It is not night—night would be merciful. This is something older, hungrier.

They tell us: don't scream. The dark listens for that.

So we light candles instead.

The first flame wavers, small and unfaithful, but the shadows recoil, twitching like insects in salt. We huddle close. Our faces look strange in the glow—familiar bones warped by yellow, eyes too wide, teeth too sharp.

The girl with the scar down her jaw whispers that candlelight is the only language the dark cannot swallow. If the wick burns, we survive. If it dies, we disappear. She does not say where we go.

The wax burns fast. Already it gutters, spitting smoke. The boy beside me tips it too far, and the flame almost drowns. We hiss at him, clutch his wrist, steady the light. He shakes, says he saw something moving in the corner, something pulling itself along the floor with too many arms.

We do not look. Looking makes it real.

The candles do not last. That is their cruelty. Each one is a clock, each flicker a tick. When the wax pools on our palms, we pass the flame like a baton, one wick to another, our fingers blistered, dripping. The heat is nothing. Pain is nothing. The only sin is letting it go out.

Someone asks what happens if they all go dark at once. No one answers.

But I imagine it: the dark rushing in like water through a broken hull, filling our mouths, our lungs, our eyes. I imagine bodies hollowed into nothing but silhouettes. I imagine voices gnawed to silence, bones stacked in corners, wax still cooling on empty hands.

I imagine we are already gone, and the candlelight only lets us pretend otherwise.

The girl with the scar is the first to falter. Her candle slips, flame licking her wrist, and for a breath the wick dies. The dark snaps at her like a whip. She gasps, half-vanished, her outline flickering thin. We press our candles to hers until it catches again, but she is less now—her jaw softer, her scar blurred.

The dark has already eaten part of her name.

We burn through the night—or what passes for night—in silence. The dark waits, patient as hunger. The candles stutter. We hold them higher, close enough that the flames blur into one wavering crown above us. It is not enough.

In the final hour, the boy with shaking hands closes his eyes, breathes deep, and pushes his flame against his own skin. He holds it there until his flesh ignites, until the smell of him fills the room, until his body is one long wick.

The others follow. One by one.

Now I am the last. My candle is nearly gone, wax puddled, flame sputtering. I can feel the dark pressing at the edges, a tide ready to consume.

I look at my own hand. At my skin, pale as wax. I know: the body was always meant to burn.

I tip the flame down.

The dark howls, recoils. For one breath, I am light.

For one breath, I am everything the dark cannot hold.

*Alexei Raymond*

## On the Nature of Sleep

My dearest Ida,

I am Alyosha; I introduce myself anew in case you have rightfully forgotten.

I reach out to you despite all, because, in my growing distress, I almost reached the heart of a matter that seemed important to you, in those days. Once, when we were bundled up in intimacy's warmth in the dead of winter, conversing deep into the night, you mused, then asked whether I have a private theory, some inkling, regarding the nature of this world, this life, and existence at large. I still recall how, on the fourth floor of Kammenstraat 65, your face soured and retreated in disappointment when I expressed my genuine sense of being at a loss—that deflating lack of theory. At that point in time, enthralled as I was by you, grand matters of existence were of little import. Now, after all we had been through, as I write this, I feel as though with a few more moments' thought, I will arrive at a truth—perhaps *the* truth—that explains why on some nights and mornings (even after a midday nap) we are assailed by a most bone-chilling sensation—deep-seated, aching illness. Please accept it, in lieu of all that I failed to grant.

My current estimation is as follows: when I sleep, I do so not on a mere mattress. I have come to understand that I sleep on—rather, *cling to*—a magnificent, gargantuan being. That much I am convinced of for now. I cannot yet ascertain its exact size, though the word *planetary* comes to mind. Please, fear not. I anticipate your distress as you read this. I was once an imperfect keeper of your fears. I failed plenty, betrayed plenty. But this train of intuition does not lead to terror. At least, I do not think it does. To think that my entire life I have been under a false impression about the nature of sleep. Our ache, which becomes more pronounced as we age, is neither sourceless anomaly nor bodily banality.

Allow me to elaborate. When I lie down, if some instinct in me remembers, I use something akin to bed sheets as a barrier—however meager—between myself and this grand *It*. In my youth, my mother would always admonish me if she walked by my room and saw me sleeping on an uncovered mattress. I understand why. She must have known, or sensed, as all those driven by love do, that to sleep unguarded against It is somehow wrong. Wrong—or



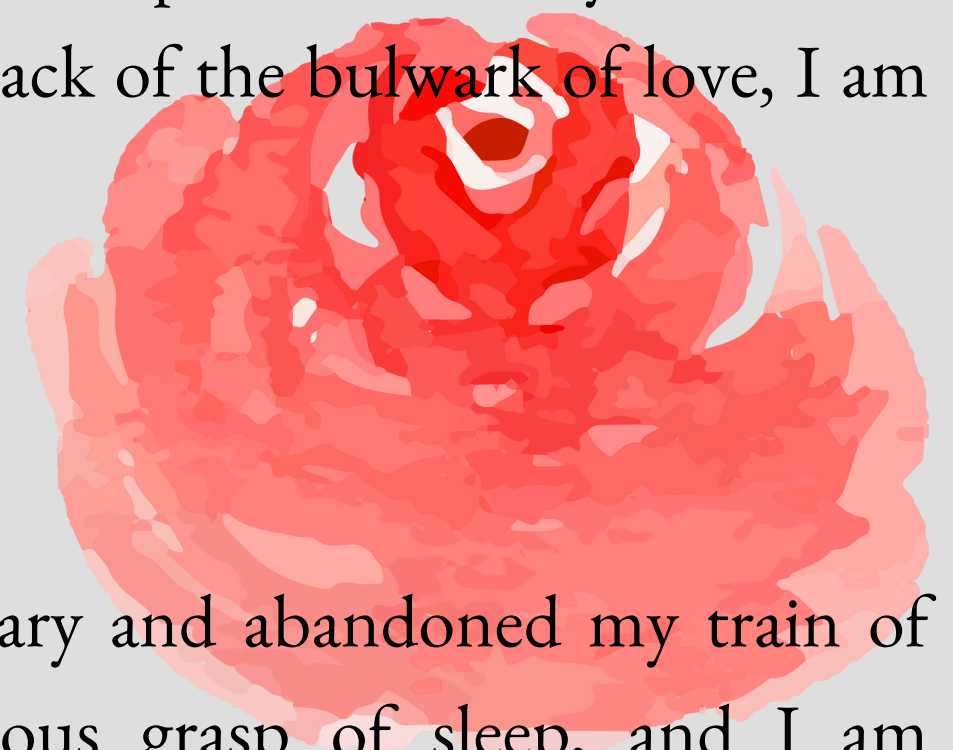
perhaps dangerous. For on nights of degradation and misery, when I forget to lay insulating bedding between myself and whatever It is—not mere sheets, not a mattress—I do suffer consequences. I believe you do, too, my irretrievable dearest. So, when we fail to protect ourselves and dampen the ill effect, something terrible trembles through to us. Sometimes no precaution matters. It is no fault of our own. Perhaps it is obvious by now. The danger lies in raw contact. Our skin against Its dark, ruby flesh—yes, my instinct tells me so. Or is it indigo? Hard to tell, let alone define with certainty. Our relationship to It is painful for us both. I admit I know not how It feels—whether *It* feels at all—but it cannot be pleasant for It to bear our multitudes, this cumulative weight.

The next ill effect we suffer, on some occasions (perhaps it is imperceptibly always) concerns oceanic tremors—those rumbles in the deep. They come from the depths of It. The leviathan magnitude of the seismic activity is what reveals the true scale of the being we commune with in sleep. These tremors are a key aspect of the illness we suffer more acutely as we age. We all do, to varying degrees. Come to think of it, my very first pang of awareness was around four or five years of age. A mere child. I must have contracted it then through initial exposure, falling asleep on the floor, unattended, at play. Or, indeed, the condition is intrinsic.

Whatever that may be, if I were not already haunted—perhaps have always been—I am now doubly so; it is assured. Each person must wrestle with It, through increasing difficulty. The older we get, the lonelier we are. Various factors thin the protective membrane that dulls us to the truth. Those with sensitivity—the young, the old, even those bolstered by love—are at heightened risk. That risk is what could, in turn, alert a person to the true nature of sleep, and nudge them down this path I hesitantly walk now. It is likely that, due to my sleeping alone as of late and lack of the bulwark of love, I am more attuned—more vulnerable—to perceiving *It*.

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Please forgive the abrupt shift in the letter. I grew weary and abandoned my train of thought to doze off. I now emerge from the tenuous grasp of sleep, and I am inconsolable. I must record the truth I have just witnessed, however hazy my recollection. I attempt to reach consolation in this truth, however feeble. I only wonder how I did not intuit it sooner. Did you, my dearest, already know?



You see, it is a Heart we sleep on—our *cor mundi*. In our sleep we lie upon its dark surface, against muscle, vein, and curve, and it is painful for all involved. I still see it now, when I briefly close my eyes. O, how terribly it beats. The pain is beyond anything we can measure, and this fact keeps comprehension beyond our reach. We only ever feel whatever remains once the pain has passed—the dull ache, faint traces. The Heart's tremors, or rather, Heartbeats, stir and set our very souls rattling in their bodily cages. This rattle, I believe, is transmitted to our submerged consciousness as a high, thin note signifying the unassailable certainty of mortality, finitude, and the grand farewell to all things. It is then, when our membrane is not thick or coarse enough, when our sentiments are permeable due to some lack or wound, that we lie on this Heart direct and defenseless, and receive the full brunt of Its force. In turn, through Its flesh, Its shadowy chambers, the collective din of our multitudes reverberates as a sonic resonance, and becomes amplified deep within that cavernous space, like a choir expressing inexpressible sorrows. These myriad cries are thus synchronized, harmonized, and in turn emerge as the very Heartbeats I speak of—those selfsame tremors. If mortality had a sound... Well, it does. *Cor mundi* beats thusly.

And so, born of It, we live out our lives on Its vast cardiac planes. At this stage, I know not whether at life's conclusion we become submerged, returning to its red, intracardiac streams when the membrane gives way, or simply fall away in a perpetual shedding as autumnal leaves. Perhaps there is more to it, more Hearts, but I am now feverish, expression recedes from me, and all I want is to weep.

In conclusion, I can only leave you with these words: *It* is a magnificent, colossal Heart we live on. We commune in sleep. In my dreams, I allow my hand to rest on Its tender surface. I believe It grieves us—always.

Whether all of this is a mere distraction from how I grieve you, my dearest, my girl, and how ardently I have loved you, I simply do not know. Would that love had been enough.

Sincerely, futilely, wretchedly yours. In beating sorrow and purest grief.

Alyosha, your *другок*



*William Doreski*

## Characters Fresh from *Candide*



Dusty curtains lounge in folds.  
The room smells of cruising mice.  
No one has lived here for years  
but the radiator coughs and snores

as cold creeps past the curtains  
to arouse a few lazy ghosts.  
We should rent this room and live  
lives of mold, rust, and mildew.

Like characters fresh from *Candide*  
we could spend our final years  
perusing our litanies of failure.  
Someone in another room

strikes a door with heavy fist.  
A picture falls from its hook  
onto a moldy carpet and sighs,  
its glass luckily unbroken.

The other lodgers emerge at dusk  
to lick storefronts for nourishment.  
They scatter when police arrive,  
although no crime has occurred.

Yes, we should live here despite  
the angry voices in the walls,  
despite the sneering landlord  
who rents by the day or week.

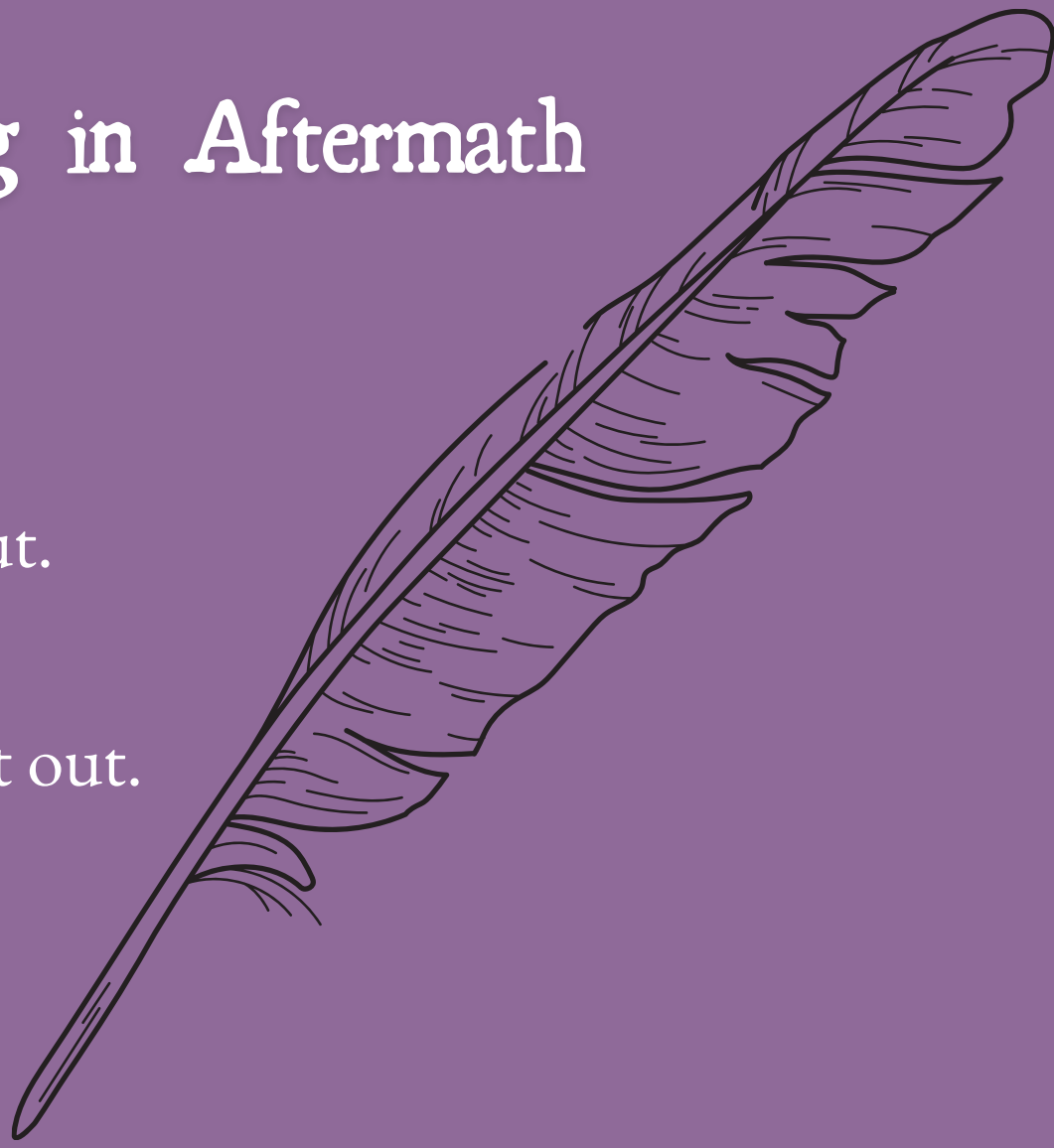
We'll soon be naked enough  
to wear those filthy curtains  
as if they robbed the royalty  
everyone hates but respects.

*Kirbee Barney*

## Accessing in Aftermath

It's quiet.  
The fire is out.  
At my feet,  
the ire, burnt out.

Soft ash, a  
wasted pyre.



*Owen Habel Lowanda*

## STAINED GLASS AND BELLADONNA

The moon was a sliver of bone through the fog,  
Where the wax of the candle wept over the stone.  
You stood in the chapel, a mask of cold lace  
In a velvet gown heavy with sins of our own.  
The gargoyles watched as the stained glass bled red,  
While the raven kept time with the souls of the dead.

A rusted key turned in the mausoleum door,  
Beneath the soft weight of a black butterfly.  
You offered a vial of sweet belladonna,  
A crescent of silver reflected in your eye.  
In the shards of a mirror, the purity broke,  
As thunder descended for the promises made.



*Andrea Tillmanns*

## The Haunted House

When the seller mentioned that the old house was haunted, I had to laugh. Nobody believed in ghosts anymore, not even the new owners. They moved in with their two children and a dog and began renovating. Only the dog seemed suspicious, as if it could actually sense a ghost. Of course, the adults didn't notice anything. When the children mentioned that the dog was acting strangely, no one believed them.

Except me, of course. I waited until the new owners had repaired the leaky roof that had been bothering me for centuries before I began to haunt the place.



*Andrea Tillmanns*

## Lilli's territory



Of course Lilli needed a gravestone, I understood that. Together we chose a stone from the back of our garden and wrote “Lilli” on it, along with the date of her death. We didn’t know how old she was, as we had taken her from the shelter when she was already an adult cat.

And I didn’t mind that David, at eight years old, was convinced he had to play her a farewell song. I didn’t understand why it had to be “Mary Had a Little Lamb” of all songs – it didn’t seem really appropriate for a cat. But to be honest, after three months of recorder lessons, any other song would have sounded the same. And Lilli couldn’t hear it anymore anyway.

As we buried our cat in the small pet cemetery in the far corner of our garden, which already contained many cats, two dogs, and, above all, several guinea pigs and hamsters, my husband and I stood next to David with as relaxed an expression as possible and listened to him play what felt like five verses of “Mary Had a Little Lamb” – far too many, in any case. “I don’t know the rest of the lyrics,” he apologized when he finally stopped.

We placed flowers on Lilli’s grave and went back into the house. And even though I wasn’t entirely happy with the location of the grave in retrospect, when I remembered the last funeral there, the matter was settled for me.

Not for Lilli.

It started with little things that were insignificant on their own. Sometimes at night, I thought I heard the sound of our cat flap, even though we no longer had a cat and both dogs were too big and too comfortable to squeeze through it. The third or fourth time, I went to check, but to no avail; no one had strayed into our house. Nevertheless, I decided to secure the cat flap as a precaution to prevent raccoons or martens from gaining access to the house in this way. Our pets caused enough chaos; we didn’t need wild animals in the house as well.

Every now and then, mice would lie in front of our garden door with the typical bite marks that cats leave behind. We cleaned them up, again and again, and were a little upset that the neighbor's cats had apparently expanded their territory into our garden. "Maybe we should get another cat from the shelter," I suggested to my husband one evening. "Then at least we'll know who to thank for these gifts."

But to my surprise, David vehemently disagreed. "That won't work, Lilli never got along with other cats," he said. "If you get a new cat, they'll fight terribly."

We calmly explained to him again that Lilli was now in cat heaven and would surely be happy if we adopted a new little kitten, just as we had adopted her back then. But somehow David didn't agree with that today. "She promised me she'd come back," he said. "Lilli was my cat, not yours ... that's why she only talked to me. And she would never break her promise."

My husband was just as critical of these remarks as I was, so when I ran into David's teacher a few days later while shopping, I asked her about his behavior at school. "Same as always," she said, obviously surprised by my question. "Of course he was sad for a few days after his cat died, but now that he has the new cat, everything is fine again. Although I'm not sure it was a good idea to name the new cat the same as the old one – that can be confusing for a child of that age."

And not just for a child, I thought as I said goodbye in a friendly manner. Now I was confused too. Had David's idea that Lilli would never leave him actually gone so far that he believed she was back with him in his dreams? Or, even worse, had she become a kind of imaginary girlfriend for him now that he could no longer have her in real life?

When I talked to my husband about it that evening, we quickly agreed that things couldn't go on like this. Even though David was only eight and imagination certainly didn't harm any child, the fact that he lied to his teacher and told us such confusing stories was not a good sign for his mental development. "On Saturday, we'll go to the animal shelter and let him choose a new cat," we decided. Then everything would surely return to normal.



But as soon as we arrived at the shelter, we both realized that it wasn't going to be as easy as we had hoped. "Lilli doesn't like any of these cats," David said after reluctantly walking past the cages with us once. "If you really want to get another pet, why don't you get a hamster? Or a rat."

"Let me guess, Lilli would definitely prefer a rat," I replied sarcastically.

David nodded. "Of course." There was no smile in his eyes, no question. He obviously assumed that his dead cat would eat a tame rat, just as it had repeatedly brought mice and sometimes even rats from our garden.

"We'll take a young cat, and that's that," I decided without further ado. "David, if you don't want to choose one, I will."

At least our son now seemed to be coming around. He walked along all the cages again, looked closely at all the cats, and then actually chose the youngest-looking one, who was still clumsily padding along the bars and looking at us with big eyes. I had to smile. There you go, it worked out after all – I had always suspected that David was secretly ready to let go. In a few weeks, he would probably be playing with the young kitten just as he used to with his Lilli, and he would grow just as fond of the new cat. And then he would finally stop thinking about Lilli.

To cut a long story short – I was wrong.

The new cat hadn't even been given a name when we found her dead in the garden the next morning. My husband and I couldn't figure out how she had gotten there in the first place, since the cat flaps were still closed and we would never have let her out so soon after she moved in with us. David also insisted that he couldn't explain it. But the fact that the new cat was dead didn't seem to bother him much. "I told you that Lilli doesn't tolerate other cats in her territory," he said as I drove him to school.

It was hard for me not to grab him by the shoulders and explain that Lilli wasn't coming back, that he would have to accept that. But I knew myself that it wouldn't do any good.



Instead, after school, the three of us – David, my husband, and I – went to the little pet cemetery at the end of the garden. I pushed Lilli’s gravestone aside and began digging until I came across the cardboard box in which we had buried the dead cat. I had expected the box to be soggy and perhaps already somewhat decomposed, but of course it would be just as closed as it had been a few weeks ago when we buried it there. But it wasn’t. The lid was torn to shreds, and if I hadn’t known better, I might have actually believed that Lilli had dug her way out. But of course that couldn’t be. Cats only had nine lives in the saying. In reality, Lilli had been dead, and nothing could have changed that later. It must have been some other animal that had dug her out – because even I couldn’t deny that her carcass was no longer in the box.

“Do you believe me now?” David asked defiantly and went back into the house.

I shook my head. “How can we get this nonsense out of the boy’s head?” I asked my husband, as I shoveled the hole back in and put the gravestone with the painted inscription “Lilli” back in its rightful place, as a reminder that no one else would be buried here. As usual, he said nothing and just shrugged his shoulders. He hadn’t always been so silent, I thought. But that was a long time ago, before the accident, as I always called it. Luckily, David was only two years old at the time, otherwise he might have told even stranger stories at school than the one about Lilli’s return. But probably no one would have believed him anyway that his father had disappeared for a few days and was covered in dirt when he returned. And that even in the hottest summer, he never took off his shirt so that no one would see the gaping wound in his chest where the knife had been stuck.

“In any case, he has to learn that no one comes back from the dead,” I said to my husband, and he nodded in agreement and followed me into the house, as if he were still afraid of me. As I said, he had changed since his death.

*Brandi Lynn*

## The Cypress Echo

No lungs to hold it. The sun, a painter's dream on the cypress.  
Stillness. Suspended. A perfect, fragile lie.

And here. In the deepest shadow. An absence watches.  
A ghost of a feeling. A whisper of what was.

The ache. Of a touch.  
On air that isn't there.  
The hummingbird. A splinter of light.  
Drinks from the fuchsia's throat.  
No warmth now.  
No tremor of life.  
Only the hollow echo. Of what used to be.

Beauty unfolds.  
A silent, mocking display.  
A tear. Never forming.  
A song. Forever muted.  
The heavy weight. Of a memory.  
Held by no hand.

For every shimmer. On the water.  
A memory. Of ripples. Unfelt.  
Every sunbeam. A phantom warmth.  
Passing through.  
It sees the world. Vibrant. Alive.

A magnificent. Agonizing torment.  
Forever bound. To witness.  
Forever lost. To touch.



The apple  
fell  
into my hand

the way  
Lucifer  
fell  
from Heaven.

Juicy, delicious—  
how could I resist?

With fingers like writhing snakes, I take a bite.  
Delight in the cool deliciousness of it,  
the sweetness, before

the sour sin  
seeps in,  
pouring down my throat

like poison,  
burning like all Hell.

I let out a pained hiss.  
But what's eternal pain,  
when any pleasure exists?

Aching,  
I reach out to you,  
hand on hand.

touching tentatively,  
at first.

and yet,  
soon enough,  
we are joined  
in our naked sin,  
skin to skin.

*A.S. Winters*

Your Eve



I let your fingers scale  
 each and every  
 crevice  
 of my pure, untouched  
 body.  
 Hands clutching the sheets,

like how I imagine  
 Jesus' disciples must have clutched  
 the boat while their Saviour  
 slept on through the storm.

And then, I call out,  
 yelling loud enough for God to hear,  
 the dirtiest prayer,  
 seeing Heaven  
 for a few seconds  
 that I'll remember  
 for a lifetime.

At the end of the day (is it the sixth?)-

Jesus said, 'love thy neighbour as thyself'.  
 Our rooms are next to one another's,  
 and we have both loved ourselves before,  
 many times.

Knowing ourselves.

Knowing each other too, now.  
 You can read me like a well-thumbed book.

These delectable fantasies  
 drive me to lunacy.  
 Urge me to get down on my knees

and pray for a miracle,  
 by letting this happen,  
 Hellfire be damned.

Let me love you this intimately,  
 the voice in my head sings,  
 a sinful Psalm, one of hope and need.

Let me become a sinner.

I know I can be a tempting serpent, but please-  
 Let me be your Eve.



*A.S. Winters*

## Love's Ghost

My red lips pout into a kiss,  
leave a stain on the mirror  
our eyes met in.

I turn around to meet your face  
through the dark, lit sporadically  
by the candlelight. Shadows cross between us.

I begin to move, with quick, light footsteps.  
You follow me, with a heavy tread.  
I pick up my dress which is rustling in the wind.

A ghost girl  
Greets you,  
Eerie,

all wild ice-blue eyes and cherry lips.  
Close enough to touch,  
but you would not dare.

You think  
I am here one minute  
and gone the next,

when you are the one  
who disappears,  
as though into a wintry mist.

My heart feels like a haunted house  
the moment you leave me behind.  
Ivy creeps up the walls, suffocating.

But the house waits, warmth  
rushing through at the memory  
of your presence,

erasing the chill of your absence.  
You may leave,  
but you

always  
come

back

for me.





*Ben Robertson*

## The Knacker My Love

On our conversation's table  
my supine body's laid bare,  
assorted instruments arrayed  
beside it of which you'll use none:  
there's no need of other tools—  
your flensing tongue strips me  
of pretense, down to bone  
and raw nerve; or with a twist  
gouges out sordid viscid globs  
of doubt; carves off accumulated  
fat of self-negation; and with brisk  
scoop reveals the immured marrow  
of my truth; and leaves my flesh  
ragged and flushed, shuddering  
at the keen ecstasy of dissection.



*Christ Keivom*

## Inventory of Absence

Those months, being cold at the bench.  
 The nights kept account of things we told no one.  
 What was desire, if not the thing we were.  
 We spent all year falling in love. I dreamt of snowfall  
 inside a tent and warming hands by a bonfire.  
 I wrote to stay ahead of the thought of you.

I let the streets lure me to follow life to its lair, between  
 Rain and sun with no one wondering where I was.  
 Like a cat looking through the window. You were the  
 Wonder of the city. Even now, I'm still forgetting things  
 I should've already forgotten—  
 bloodstains on the lip of the cup.

Watching death usher you like a glowing exit sign,  
 not knowing what to do, but knew it had to be  
 more than this. I remember your body returning  
 to where it came from, until it was the dirt  
 In grandma's hand.

The flames deserted their wicks in the shrine.

The sky was the color of birds spreading like buckshot.  
 Verses from the last sermon beckoned through  
 The lampposts in the fog: *there will be... no more*  
*Mourning or crying or pain.*

When they gestured, I would be lying if I said I listened.  
 My guilt overdue as a confession delayed. I realise  
 Now I wanted to die instead of you.

*JH Tomen*

## Undying Admiration

When I reached the manor, I could hardly see it through the mist. Rain had plastered the hair to my forehead, and even my father's old war horse, Swift, seemed skittish for the thunder. I pulled the reins, squinting. I could just make out an old spire, lit by lightning crackling on the horizon, its face covered in gargoyles.

*This* was the ancestral home of Lady Shackleton? I'd only ever heard tale of the manor, Tenebry Hall, though I'd imagined something less...imposing. They'd lived near my father's estates since the war, and their home in our part of the country was always bright and filled with visitors. If only Lady Shackleton hadn't left so hastily.

I nudged Swift forward, guiding him through a gate that had been left hanging open. No one came to greet me, no servants appearing by way of bobbing lamplight in the darkness. My eyes scanning the mists around me, I nearly jumped, startled by a statue appearing through the gray. I approached it on horseback, discovering dozens of them lurking on the grounds. Each stood atop a marble platform, staring into the distance.

I felt the hairs raise on the back of my neck, those stone eyes seeming to follow me despite their stationary nature. I urged my horse forward, hurrying toward the house. Still, no one approached, and even the windows were dark. With no one to take my mount, I hitched him to a stake near steps.

I frowned, taking in the door. Shaped like some sort of demon, its gnarled horns climbed along the top of the doorframe. I looked about for a bell to ring, finding it in the demon's mouth, a velvet rope for its tongue. I reached through to seize it, avoiding the stone fangs that still looked as sharp as razors despite their age.

A low bell tolled somewhere within, sounding more like a dirge. For a long span, I stood there waiting, the rain still dripping from my cloak. Only when I was about to give up did the door creak open. Thankfully, what greeted me was an angelic vision, the shape of Lady Shackleton appearing, a lamp in her delicate hand.

"Lady Shackleton!" I cried, reaching for her free hand so I could hastily kiss it. "You've no servant to answer the door?"

She smiled, the enchanting twist of her pouting lips the only light that had guided me across the moors to this dreadful place.



“Lord Nester, what a surprise,” she said, though her face betrayed none. “There’s only Motley here. We tend to serve ourselves at Tenebry.”

“We? Did your mother join you.”

“Oh, no. It’s...only me.”

With a start, she seemed to finally take in my dripping coat. She opened the door more widely, ushering me in.

“Please do come in. You must be dreadfully cold.”

“Not anymore,” I said, feeling my heart race at the sight of her. Still, there was not much warmth on offer as I crossed the threshold. I found myself in a sweeping stone hall, no fireplace in sight.

“Whatever brought you out this far? I suppose you’ll want to stay the night?”

“I’ve come for you, of course. I came to call as soon as I heard about poor Nicholas, but you’d gone before I could see you.”

She looked up at me through her black veil, her face dewy as always despite the gloom.

“For me?”

Her fiancé had died, a family relation, and she’d apparently come to oversee his burial on their family lands. I thought yet again of the statues outside, the distant faces in the darkness. I hadn’t been able to stop her in time — even though a proposal of my own would be impossible until she stopped wearing black. Still, I wanted her near me, where I could chase off other suitors until the time was right. I’d failed to prevent her engagement to poor Nicholas, but I wouldn’t let the opportunity of his consumption go to waste.

“Yes, you, my dear. You ought to come back with me posthaste. I know you’re in mourning, but surely you’d rather be on the edge of a ballroom than at the edge of the world.”

“Perhaps,” she said, looking away. “Though maybe I’ll stay here for the duration. This is where all the women in my family found their husbands, after all.”

My heart sank. Surely, there were no bloody husbands to be found in a dreary place like this! Still, I imagined a phalanx of cousins coming to call, each one more gruesome than dear Nicholas had been. I opened my mouth to protest when a door slammed open, candlelight spilling across the floor.

“We’ve guests, my lady?” an old voice croaked. It belonged to a withered old man, the aforementioned Motley, perhaps?

“Only one,” she said, looking over my shoulder. “I presume you’ve no valet?”

“I suppose I thought...” I trailed off, not wanting to say anything derisive about their house, though this was a rather hard way to live for people as rich as the Shackletons. Not even a valet to dress me? I most certainly wouldn’t let this Motley creature touch my things. “But no matter. I’ve enough years in the army to dress myself, surely.”

“I’ll make up a room,” Motley said, stalking toward a sweeping staircase, his candelabra bobbing all the way.

“Well, do come in,” Lady Shackleton said, beckoning for me to follow. “Perhaps some tea to take the chill.”

I couldn’t help but notice that Motley had failed to take my coat. Still, Lady Shackleton hardly seemed to care that I left a dripping trail of water as I followed her. We wound through several cavernous hallways, finally coming upon an old wooden door in need of polish.

She opened it, revealing a cozy library completely at odds with what I’d seen of the house so far. Here, at least, there was a fire in the grate and a pot of tea on the table.

Unfortunately, as I crossed the threshold, I found the room already occupied by a sizable painting of Nicholas.

“Do I presume correctly that this is a reference for one of the statues outside?” I asked, folding my coat over the arm of an open settee.

“Statue?” she asked, frowning. “Ah, those. No, no. Just a keepsake for my dear Nicholas.”

“Quite,” I muttered, reaching for the tea. I found it cold and bitter, though it was better than nothing after my long ride.

We sat in silence for a time, the crackling of the fire the only sound aside from the ticking of a far-off clock.

“I hope you don’t find it impertinent of me to say you still look fetching,” I finally said, my voice hoarse. “Uh...despite your grief.”



“Grief? Oh, I suppose it is that. I prefer to think of it as waiting.” She looked through the walls at something I couldn’t see. I opened my mouth to ask what she meant when there was a rapping on the door.

“Room’s ready,” Motley said, opening the door before being bade to enter. “Best not waste the candles, meager s they are.”

“Thank you kindly, Motley,” Lady Shackleton said, standing. “I will see you in the morning, Lord Nester.”

Following the old man up the stairs, he said not a word. We wound down another set of interminable hallways, the light from his candelabra casting shadows along the walls.

“Quite a lot of rooms,” I said as we passed chamber after chamber without turning in. Presumably, he was trying to keep me at a distance from the lady of the house, though his measures seemed rather extreme.

“And so few unoccupied,” Motley said.

“Excuse me?” I asked. But he gave no reply, stopping at once to fling open a door to our left.

“For the light,” he said, pulling a single candlestick from his candelabra. “Use it sparingly, mind.”

“Would you by chance be able to see to my horse?” I said, finally remembering poor Swift tied up in the rain.

“Already been seen to, my lord.”

With that, he disappeared, leaving me to my own devices. I entered, finding the room as horrible as the rest of the house. The bed had four posts made of ebony, each one carved with dozens of hands grasping for something unseen.

“It’s a wonder anyone sleeps here,” I said to myself, undressing as quickly as I could. Still, when I finally laid my head down, slumber came quickly after the day I’d had.

I woke to the sound of scratching, my sleep already fitful from an awful dream. I remembered little of it save for the looming face of Nicholas, his aquiline nose like a beak set to devour me. I sat up, looking around the darkened room. Was it Lady Shackleton, perhaps, finally come to her senses? I'd had more than my fair share of hallway dalliances, and a grieving woman was hardly the strangest of them.

I crept to the door, easing it open only to find no one there. I listened to the hallway, no sound reaching my ears. Then what had that scratching been? Part of the dream? I sighed, turning back to bed when my heart nearly stopped. A dark figure stood before me in the room, just at the end of the bed. I lunged for it, my fighting instincts always rather eager from the army.

As I struck the figure, though, I found only wood, the awful carved hands meeting mine in the darkness.

"Don't be absurd, old boy," I chuckled, though I pulled the covers tight against my throat. "Just a house."

By morning, thankfully, the rain was gone, though the mist hadn't seemed to budge. I stood by the window, rubbing my eyes and feeling out to sea. The house was awash in low-hanging clouds, each one spiraling along the ground like a lock of ghastly hair. Had I really traveled so far by horseback that the weather should be so pitiful in June?

I dressed myself — cursing the haste that had me leave my valet back on my estates — and went down. I had hoped to find a bit of toast or a kipper, even one made by the dreaded Motley. Instead, I found Lady Shackleton dressed in a black riding coat heading for the door.

"Where are you off to?" I asked.

"To check the graves, of course," she said, pausing with her hand on the door. "I...don't suppose you'd like to join?"

I said I would, following her out into the mists. As promised, Swift was gone from the post I'd tied him to, though there was no sign of a stable anywhere I could see. We headed left, Lady Shackleton weaving through the statues. Even in the mist, the light of day revealed there to be far more than I presumed, possibly even hundreds.

"When do you suppose I might see you back at Haverly?" I asked, eager to make some kind of conversation to prove we were still amongst the living. "My sisters do so dearly want you at their balls this summer."



“I had thought I’d have to stay a while. Though now that you’ve arrived, perhaps it might be sooner.”

This, naturally, set my heart to soaring. So, she *had* considered me after all? Or had it been my gallantry that swayed her, riding after her into this crypt of a house?

“Marvelous,” I said, using every ounce of my restraint to keep from squeezing the hand she’d settled onto my arm. “I know it’s difficult to move on, but such is life, my dear. It is the provenance of the living.”

“Move on?” she asked, frowning. “I don’t know about that.”

I tried to ask what exactly she meant, but she pulled away, stopping by one of the long marble plinths with no statue on it. There was no name etched, only a single golden bell attached to a rope disappearing into the ground. Only then did I notice the bells upon each grave. They seemed to shift ever so slightly in the wind, making me feel as if dozens of souls were trying to signal us as one.

Lady Shackleton, for her part, stooped down, peering closely at the bell. “Perhaps not yet,” she muttered, the words only barely reaching my ears.

“Not yet, what?”

“Oh, nothing. We keep vigil, as every good family does. After all, someone has to be here, and Motley’s hearing isn’t what it used to be. I just suppose it isn’t quite yet time for giving up. It’s only been a week.”

A week was an awfully long time for a comatose man to lay up in his grave. Besides, I’d heard Nicholas’s consumption was rather bad at the end. It wasn’t exactly something one recovered from... Still, I held my tongue, hoping I at least cut a dashing figure waiting for her.

The rest of the day idled by in a more...*typical* fashion, spent reading a few odd treatises in the library. Motley brought a few trivial morsels, promising we would “supp” after sundown. When he finally rang the dinner bell, I was famished, leaping up to lend Lady Shackleton a hand.

“I know you said it’s only been a week, my dear, but how long do you truly intend to stay?”  
*Surely*, I wished I could say, *at some point the man will prove sufficiently dead?*

“One never truly knows,” she said, her eyes on the windows. “Love is not a simple barter made for time. It is something earned.”

The dining table revealed a rather sad looking goose, the vittles served by Motley himself, his hands shaking underneath the platter. The only other dish was some kind of steamed herb, each bite more bitter than the last. Our conversation was stilted, no doubt due to Motley's presence. Strangely, I felt I heard that scratching noise again, echoing from somewhere up above.

"That noise," I said, chocking down a bite of goose with their vinegary wine. "Did you hear that?"

Lady Shackleton looked to Motley instead of me, raising an eyebrow.

"Perhaps the critters are back from the forest?"

"Or the field, my lady," Motley said, smiling in the oddest way. Who would want a pest rooting around their house?

We retired soon after, Motley's single candelabra clearly showing strain by the time our dinner was through. Lady Shackleton excused herself first, denying me the privilege of knowing where within the house she slept.

As I climbed the stairs, looking out upon the grounds, I thought I could hear those awful golden bells. Thankfully — strange as it was to be thankful for such a thing — it seemed yet another storm was blowing in.

"Just the wind is all," I said to myself, hurrying up the last few steps. "Once the weather clears, hopefully we can be rid of this place."

I didn't quite fancy inheriting a place like this should we actually manage to be married, but it would be a small price to pay for Lady Shackleton's hand. Even as I nodded off to sleep, all I could see were her gorgeous eyes, the pupils dark pools I'd soon see welling up with love.

I woke again to scratching, sitting up in bed. I had *definitely* heard it that time, the cursed critters seemingly surrounding me. Thunder rumbled overhead, though I saw no lightning. I held the covers tight around me, listening.

*Scratch, scratch, scratch.*

It was as if the sound were growing ever closer. Just what sort of creature could it be? Ideally not one of pestilence, though any rodent in the bedroom would be a horror. I closed my eyes, though Nicholas's awful face floated up to greet me. Had I dreamt of him again?



“It’s only fair, old boy,” I whispered to the phantom in my mind. “I’m the one who’s alive to claim her.”

*Scratch, scratch, scratch.*

I peeked one eye open, my heart racing again as I saw the same dark figure by the bed.

“Only those cursed hands,” I whispered.

A lightning bolt flashed outside my window, lighting the room in an instant. What I saw in that brief moment was something far worse than any carving. I saw Nicholas, his body bloated and blue, *his* hand the one stretching out toward me.

“I daresay,” his voice said. “It really is only fair, Lord Nester.”

I screamed, the sound drowned out by thunder.

—————

The next day, Lady Shackleton sat atop her carriage, ready to return to her family’s new estates. It was as if the storms had been a dream, the sun shining gayly on the grounds of Tenebry, each grave like a shining beacon. Next to her, her beloved Nicholas held the reins in one hand, the other wrapped around her waist. Oh, to see him so hale and strong again!

“Never again shall we part, my love,” he said, kissing her on the cheek, her face no longer blighted by her mourning clothes.

“Never again,” she whispered, holding tightly to him.

He urged the horses forward, the coach moving faster with the new addition of the horse named Swift. She waved goodbye to Motley, the old man smiling from the front steps. She looked forward, only turning back at the end of the drive. There, amongst the graves, was a new “statue,” the face of Lord Nester shining in the sunlight.

“I will always feel an admiration for him,” she said, squeezing Nicholas’s hand. “He did come after me, you know.”

“He’d have been a fool not to,” Nicholas said, smiling. “Even if he *was* a fool in so many other ways.”

They turned onto the road, leaving a sunlit Tenebry behind them. What a gift the house was, a place where love never had to die.

## About the contributors. . .



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**William Doreski** lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Cloud Mountain* (2024). He has published three critical studies, including Robert Lowell's *Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.



**Kirbee Barney** is a technical writer from Washington state. She writes most of her poems at 2 am, which is the best time for poetry. You can find her on Instagram @kirbeetastespoetry.

**Owen Habel Lwanda**, is a Computer Science enthusiast with passion for poems and stage plays. He has earned accolades at the Kenya Schools and Colleges National Drama Festivals. Owen draws inspiration from traveling and reading, bringing fresh perspectives to both stage and page. His poems have previously appeared in [roughcutpress.com](http://roughcutpress.com), [roughdiamond.com](http://roughdiamond.com), [floatingacornreview.com](http://floatingacornreview.com) and brittle paper.

**JH Tomen** (he/him) lives in Chicago and works in clean energy. When not writing fiction, he's the author of the climate Substack, The Carbon Fables. You can find him on all socials @jhtomen

**Brandi Lynn** writes into the tension between the visceral and the whimsical. Her work is a study in contrasts: from the raw, bone-deep energy of her poetry to the vibrant clarity of her stories for children. A writer, artist, and literacy specialist with twenty years in education, she understands the mechanics of language—and as a creator, she seeks to break them. Brandi is currently transitioning from private creation to the public page, rooted in the belief that expression should be as untamed as art itself.

**Andrea Tillmanns** lives in Germany and works full-time as a university lecturer. She has been writing poetry, short stories and novels in various genres for many years. Her poems and stories have been published in The World of Myth, Hawthorn & Ash, SciFanSat, and other journals and anthologies. She has also published more than twenty books in German. More information about the author and her texts can be found on her website [www.andreatillmanns.de](http://www.andreatillmanns.de).

**A.S. Winters** (she/they) is an emerging writer who has had over 35 poems, 24 articles, 5 pieces of short fiction, 14 blog posts, and 16 posts for Mental Health Notebook published as an adult, as well as 20 pieces from the ages of 12-18, a script for Blackpool Youth Theatre and 260+ fanworks. She is studying English Literature and Creative Writing at Lancaster University and hopes to become a published author, poet and professional journalist. They are currently working on their debut novel, a WLW historical fiction novel called, 'Love Dotty,' and they hope to publish it this year.

**Kait Quinn** (she/her) was born with salt in her wounds. She flushes the sting of living by writing poetry. She is the author of five poetry collections, and her work appears in Anti-Heroine Chic, Blue Daisies Journal, Exposition Review, Full House Literary, and elsewhere. She received first place in table//FEAST's 2025 Nano & Micro Contest for Women Writers and Sad Girl Diaries' 2023 Fall Poetry Contest. Kait is an Editorial Associate at Yellow Arrow Publishing. She enjoys cats, repetition, coffee shops, tattoos, and vegan breakfast. Kait lives in Minneapolis with her partner and their very polite Aussie mix. Find her at [kaitquinn.com](http://kaitquinn.com).

**Ben Robertson** has published poems in a variety of journals under a variety of names. He is a widely varied fellow. He lives and sometimes sleeps in Charlotte, NC.

**Christ Keivom** is a poet based in Delhi, India.







## AFTERWORD

This issue came together slowly. For me, gothic and decadence are not just about darkness. They reflect what keeps pushing back when you think something has ended. I kept thinking of *Crimson Peak*, how even the walls remember, and how beauty there is never innocent. Many of these pieces weave through twists, hidden hints, and metaphors that don't resolve simply. They rely on the reader to follow along. That feels very gothic to me; meaning isn't just given to you; instead, it's something you discover, room by room. Angela Carter once said that "*a book is simply the container of an idea.*" This issue feels like that, a container for obsessions, decay, longing, and things that don't behave. If *Abyssaire* leaves you feeling a bit unsettled or oddly connected, then it has accomplished its goal.

We will return soon.

[Tanya, *Creative Head*]



