HAPPY HALLOWEEN

GIANT DOUBLE ISSUE

SOMEDAY I'LL BE DEAD AND AS FOR PIZZA BY GALE ACUFF

THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH BY EDGAR ALLAN POE

QUESTIONS FOR VAMPIRES BY ANASTASIA GUSTAFSON

STORIES

POETRY

HORROR

PROMPTS

ARTICLES

MARKETS



## 2024

### **STORIES**

WHEN THE MOON IS FULL by Ty Green 4

QUESTIONS FOR VAMPIERS

By Anastasia Gustafson 31

THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH by Edgar Allan Poe 47

THE MANY LAMENTS OF DAGDA LICHFIELD by Kit Zimmerman 53

MISSING, PIPES, NUTS AND SCREWS BY Adaora Ogunniyi 57

THE BOTTLE IMP by Robert Louis Stevenson 60

STUCK BETWEEN THE PAGES by Julia Vellucci 91

FALLING OUT by Lenka Miklosova Vrazda 94

DEAD YOU by Angela Carlton 97

THE HUNT FOR THE DESIRED RATIO by Marie Hanna Currans

SOME FREAKS SLEEP WHEN THEY GO TO BED by Scott Pofret 109

### FEATURED WINNER!

50 WORD HORROR STORY by Frank Peter Mashina



### **POETRY**

3AM by Christopher Jones 30

SOMEDAY I'LL BE DEAD AND AS FOR PIZZA by Gale Acuff 45

BETTY by Moody Creek 82

THOUGHTS OF A LONELY WOMAN by Kristy Raines 85

A WING-STROKED SPECTACLE BY Daniel Moreschi 88

IN THE FEVER WE CALL LIVING by Kathleen Hellen 93

WEST by Philip Newton 95

PURE by Marcia Tarhan 112

### **INTERVIEWS**

INTERVIEW WITH ABBY SIMPSON 99

INTERVIEW WITH LEE HALL 103

INTERVIEW WITH ANGELA **CARLTON 113** 

### **WRITING PROMPTS**

WEREWOLVES ON HALLOWEEN NIGHT WRITING PROMPTS 24

50 CHILLING HAUNTED DOLL WRITING PROMPTS 42

> HAUNTED HALLOWEEN WRITING PROMPTS 84

**50 WORD HORROR CONTEST WINNERS 118** 

> **6 WORD HORROR STORY WINNERS 102**



# When the Moon is Full and Bright

by Ty Green

-1-

Blanche took the high ground, like Grandma and Grampa had taught her. On the Chaney Junior High School playground, this was the top of the jungle gym, a towering monstrosity of looping stainless steel that few of the other kids ever dared to scale. She pulled her beloved red hoodie taught against the early spring gusts that rose and fell at abrupt intervals, a cruel reminder that it could still snow any day, any night. They weren't out of the woods yet.

She studied Jane—if that was the new girl's real name—wander aimlessly, alone as always, pausing occasionally to scratch at the back of her shorn head, which was, as always, concealed beneath a red bandana. Blanche had a good idea why she wore that thing, and it didn't have anything to do with T-cells and chemo, though doubtless that was what Jane wanted people to assume.

Others didn't see what Blanche saw, though. The twitches of Jane's nose and ears when she detected something of interest. The outsized hands and feet at the ends of Jane's stick limbs, which caused her to dawdle around like a Great Dane puppy. That was, until she chose to put the speed on.

Sick human children could not move like that. Blanche's best friend, Ginger Waggoner, had died two summers ago from triple-hit lymphoma. She didn't have energy to stay awake through a 90-minute movie. She'd nod off midconversation. By the end, she couldn't even sit up, let alone run and leap and climb.

In gym class, Jane was downright creepy - it was as if she knew she was supposed to keep up the act, but she couldn't resist showing off how much stronger and faster, how much more agile she was than everyone else, even Alex Price, who was captain of the gymnastics team. When Blanche asked her about it, she just shrugged and said she "used to do sports at her old school," and went back to pawing at the back of her head under that bandana.

Now Blanche watched Jane's large ear wiggle—she could see it move, even from a hundred feet away and twenty feet up. Then Jane crouched and crept past the creaking, croaking swings and the tire tree, toward the fence.

Just inside the fence, in front of the mangy shrubs, was a large snowshoe hare, halfway between its stark white winter coat and its tawny brown summer coloration. Jane was locked onto it, creeping closer, closer.

Across the playground, a bunch of boys were playing pickup soccer. One of them gave an echoing shout and Blanche turned in time to see Henry Hull punt the ball at a dead run. It was meant to be a pass to Markus Ouspenskaya, the only player even remotely in the vicinity, but Henry had put too much toe into it. The ball sailed over Karen White and Evvie Ankers on the seesaw, describing a great arc across half the playground before beginning a sharp descent toward the back of Iane's head.

Without turning around, she sidestepped it and whacked it away with her forearm. The ball burst.

Kids shrieked and ducked, probably thinking their number had come up for yet another school shooting. The dented ball, now a neon yellow crescent, plopped to Jane's feet, hissing air. The movement was effortless, instinctive. Had Blanche blinked, she would have missed it. She couldn't help wondering what that might have looked like if, instead of a soccer ball, that were some kid's head.

Another gust from the nearby

river shoved at Blanche and she lost her grip. For a second, she was certain she'd tumble through the countless pipes of the jungle gym before coming to rest, a bent and broken mess herself, on the half-frozen wood chips below. She jerked to a stop, hugging tight to the structure with all four limbs, the fivepointed locket with a photo of her mom on one side and her dad on the other tinkled against the next beam down, the one she now pictured caving in the back of her skull had she not caught hold when she did.

When she dared to open her eyes, the first thing she saw was Jane seeing her. Her nose twitched, her eyes flickered — for a split second, Blanche could swear they were yellow. She was staring right at her.

Blanche watched as Jane's left ear curled toward her and her right ear twitched back, as if reaching behind her head, tracking the rabbit as it disappeared into the brush. Jane scratched at the back of her head, furiously this time.

In that moment, any remaining doubt melted away. Blanche's heart panged off her sternum with the

realization. She knew what Jane was, which meant the new "girl" could lead her straight to the rest of them.

-2-

The next day, as the bus rumbled to a stop outside Brandners' house, the knot in Blanche's stomach cinched tighter. She ducked in the last seat, careful not to take her eye off the big-eared head wrapped in its red bandana six seats ahead.

She slipped her hand into her backpack and felt past her books and folders, through the graveyard of gum wrappers she never got around to throwing away, until her fingertips found the cold, smooth grip of her grandfather's old boot gun. It was only a snub-nosed .38, but it should do the trick.

Blanche had always found the etching inside the cylinder of grandpa's revolver, in the pattern of a pentagram with a chamber at each point, exceedingly witty, but now she felt the itch of worry that five bullets might not be enough. Maybe not even eight between the Brandner bullets, including the three extras she'd found in

Grampa's workshop and stowed in a tight-rolled Ziplock in her lunchbox

Except for eyelashes, accentuated with too much mascara, Jane had no hair whatsoever. No eyebrows, nothing.

Everyone assumed she was a cancer kid, which accounted not only for her "spells," but also for her irregular attendance and the strange injuries she sometimes wore on her arms and legs and sometimes her face. If asked, she would say they were from medical procedures and leave it at that. Blanche had noticed, however, that Jane was always absent the day after a full moon, and last month, when there was a full solar eclipse, she'd been out the entire week.

The bus brakes gave their slithery metallic whistle. The doors whooshed apart. Jane's red-wrapped head popped up and bobbled down the aisle.

Blanche gave a final glance behind her, at the deep expanse of unbroken woods residence and this scraggly driveway, which looked more like an unkempt hiking trail than a passage meant for vehicles, that must lead to Jane's house. There was no mailbox, no number, not even one of those little reflective posts to distinguish the end of the driveway from the dense forest that seemed to run from the road straight up Landis Ridge to terminate just below the crawling strands of gray cloud.

Now or never—yet Blanche did not stand. How deep might that path run up the ridge? What if Jane's "family" was around? What if she was wrong about everything and she was in fact stalking a (strange, strangely built) sick kid?

She should wait another month, maybe. Until the April full moon, when the nights were shorter, warmer. She'd have more time to gather evidence, to prepare. Maybe even to convince Grandma and Grandpa that despite all their time combing the area, on roads and trails, she, Blanche, had found the den.

Then again, counting tonight, there were three full moons before the end of the school year. What of the people who went missing or turned up in

pieces between now and then, her Converse crunching on while the cops and the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife continued to bumblefuck around ignoring the obvious answer? Twentyfour dead and missing in the tri-county area within the past shadows of late-March year, from 86-year-old Neil Marhsall to 4-year-old Jenny Naughton. How many more if she waited?

Of course, none of those was the real reason she hesitated. She shimmied off the goosebumps and wiped the tacky sweat from her cold palms on the seatback and stood.

No turning back. Seconds later, she stood in the roadside weeds, watched the bus ease from the pavement to the gravel road that continued up the ridge. The driver pulled into a truckers' turnaround, paused, presumably checking both sides of the barren road, and started back down the mountain toward town.

A sharp gust seemed intent on pushing Blanche back downhill where she belonged. She braced herself against it, kicking herself for wearing only her red hoodie instead of a proper jacket. She turned,

the weedy gravel, to face the barren forest tangled so close around the driveway it reminded Blanche of a tunnel bored into the thousand-andone blue-gray shades and twilight.

In the heart of the tunnel, something shifted. Blanche swung her pack to her front, fiddling with the zipper while watching the shape in the tunnel float through patches of dark and darker until a round red head atop a twiggy neck and a waifish body and huge, misshapen ears emerged, looking more like some grotesque cartoon character than ever, and more amused than surprised to find a girl standing at the mouth of her driveway.

Christ, Blanche thought, if I'm half as bad at selling a bullshit story as I am at being sneaky, I'm never making it off this mountain.

Blanche took heart in the knowledge that Jane was a figure of fear. No one wanted to talk to the cancer kid, to get too close, to acknowledge that she was a person. Emotional self-defense, perhaps, but inhumane all the same. Cruel,

even. She knew Jane did not get many visitors, should be glad to have one, no matter the circumstances.

"Hey," Blanche said, "sorry. I'm Blanche? From school? I know this is kind of out of nowhere, but we have that bio test coming up, and I sit behind you, so I know you always get A's. I was hoping, maybe —"

Jane held a finger – an old man's finger, long and wide with knuckles like fleshy whorled marbles - over her lips. Her eyes flicked, flashed, only for a second, so brief as to be nearly subliminal but long enough to set the flesh between Blanche's shoulderblades and up her neck and down her arms skittering.

She wanted to believe she could still be wrong. Maybe Jane was sick, and she had a psycho abusive parent or something, who gave her all those bruises and scratches. and sometimes it was so bad she had to stay home, and those occurrences happened to coincide with lunar events.

Right. Exactly.

Jane's lips curled up at one side into a half-smile and Blanche tried to convince herself that her eyes hadn't just burned amber and wild with delight and back again in a blink of those gloppy black lashes.

"I had a funny feeling about today," Jane said in her low, scratchy voice, like she'd been up all night coughing or screaming or singing to the moon, "I could feel your eyes on the bus. Right here."

At this she tapped the nape of her neck. She slinked closer, covering the final few steps too fast for Blanche's comfort.

"Sorry," Blanche said, stepping toward the road, "I didn't mean to be a creep. I just...I have a D in bio right now and my grandparents are going to kill me if I don't ace that test next week."

"Sure," Jane said, "I can help you. Besides. You must be curious about where a girl this glamorous lives and dresses and carries out such an unattainable beauty routine day after day."

"Right," Blanche said,
"exactly," deciding at this
distance that Jane's eyes and
ears and teeth were all too big
for her narrow face.

A sharp, roiling snarl. Blanche stumbled back, hand shooting into her backpack with such force, she punched it from her own hand and tripped over it.

Jane stood over her, looking genuinely concerned. She spread her dinner-plate hand over her stomach.

"It's just my tum-tum, kid,"
Jane said, holding out her
other mitt to help Jane up,
hoisting her up with alarming
ease, "haven't had a real meal
in like a month."

Blanche's heart and intestines traded places. She reminded herself she had a role to play.

"Right, wow. Sorry. You must be home alone a lot, huh?"

"I wish. When you're like me, they never really leave you alone," Blanche said, holding out her arms to reveal pin pricks and gauze bandages, knicks and bruises that might be from a search for a vein to get a line in.

"Oh. Right. Sorry."

"You apologize too much. People do that then they have something to hide. You got anything good in there, Little Red Riding Hood?" Jane said, tugging at Jane's hoodie.

Blanche's fingers crawled past her grandfather's gun and, careful to hold her pack so Jane could not see inside, fumbled onto the strap of her lunch bag. She removed it and knelt to inventory its contents.

"Kinda funny, isn't it? I'm basically dead and yet I've never been hungrier," Jane said, her voice seeming to drop to a seismic rumble to end in a hiss as she finished, "fucking ravenous," revving up the 'r' in the back of her throat like Nicki Minaj.

"Here!" Blanche said, springing to her feet and almost throwing half of a turkey and cheese sandwich at Jane.

Jane craned forward, sniffing. Before Blanche could react, Jane put her paws to her sides and shot her face forward, taking the sandwich from her hand with her mouth and shaking it a bit before gobbling it down, never touching it with anything but her tongue and teeth.

"Jesus Christ," Blanche said, so startled she hadn't even realized she was holding her backpack before her like some ridiculous purple-and-blue tie-died shield.

"Come on, kid," Jane said, turning and hurrying into the darkening tunnel of twisted branches and wilted ferns and thorny red tufts of bramble, "The others won't be back for awhile. Should be quiet till then. Perfect opportunity to teach you a thing or two."

Jane was in such a hurry to catch up, she didn't notice she'd left her lunch box at the edge of the driveway. In it was a string cheese wrapper, a bruised and thus untouched pear, and her three extra silver bullets.

-3-

The path ended at a long, flat building that appeared to be crumbling back into the earth. All visible windows were shattered, one with a sheet of plastic wrap bulging in the breeze like a pitiful sail.

Chunks of roof were gone, the -monk's hood. Devil's siding cracked and pocked.

Vines had poured into every opening and ran along the siding, across the roof, some disappearing into the chimney. To Blanche it looked as if the forest's tentacles were preparing to haul the decrepit bungalow into its thorny, leafy gullet, an eerie landbound recreation of Victorian images of the kraken dragging some wayward ship to an abyssal grave.

Beside this was a garden that had run riot, effectively becoming another extension of the woods that encroached on the building. Hunks of wilted brown plants wavered in the breeze as if to greet her or perhaps flagging her down for help.

Only one plant seemed to be in bloom – a toxic one, with flowers resembling melted purple stars. Grandma had taught Blanche all about it.

"Where it blooms out of season, hiker beware," Grandma always said.

It had many dramatic names

helmet. Wolfsbane.

On cinderblocks to the right of the house was an old van, gold with blue side-panels. Beyond this was a pile of bikes, most with bent handlebars or wheels or frames. One caught Blanche's eye—a teal GT mountain bike with a pink basket on the front.

The one Kaley Shipman had ridden to school every day right up until the Monday before Thanksgiving, just before the first snowfall, when she never made it home from cheer practice. Five months later, her missing posters were still all over the telephone poles downtown, the bulletin boards at Star Market and Creekside Café and, of course, Chaney Junior High School.

The basket, Blanche noted, was shredded. Like something had latched onto it and torn it apart. And the seat was cut, browning tufts of stuffing peering through three symmetrical slashes in the black rubber.

The birds had gone silent. Squirrels, too. The only sound was a fresh rumble from Jane's belly, so loud and long Blanche could swear it shook the ground of patchy, pineneedle-flecked snow and soggy, trodden weeds beneath their feet. Jane was standing a little too close, trying not to be obvious about trying to get behind Blanche.

"Wow, Jane. This really is... out here," Blanche said, turning, then checking her phone to find it had No Service—little surprise. This place didn't even look like it had electricity, maybe not even running water.

"Daddy always says nature is the best medicine," Jane said, "I don't know. He doesn't even like me going to school in town. Says there's no point."

"Jesus, Jane. That's dark."

"He's always barking about this and that. Come on, it's getting dark. I wanna show you something cool," Jane said.

"Your family's gone, huh? We're the only ones here?" Blanche said, scanning this way and that. "Yeah, why? You afraid my family is gonna gobble you up or something?"

When Jane stopped and put one of her high, wide ears to the door, listening for something inside, Blanche slipped her hand into her backpack. When Blanche said the coast was clear and pushed the door wide and melted into the mildewy gloom within, Blanche grabbed her grandfather's .38 and tucked it into her belt, a reassuring weight against the small of her back.

She had to get this over with. The shadows were deep, only a tattered strip of pink sun peering over the knobs and thickets of the ridge. If there were others—and with a den this size and a pile of bikes that high, there would be—she could not afford to be alone when the others returned.

With adrenaline and poor light and moving targets...she shoved away the part of her that screamed this was a mistake. Her worst. Her last.

When it was done, she

decided, she'd hop on Kaley Shipman's bike and ride it back down to town, straight to her grandparents, and they could all come up together and finish this how it started -as a family. If only she could steady her hands, stop her pulse from galloping in her ears like a dribbled basketball. Grandma and Grandpa were right about one thing – no matter her hunger for revenge, she was too young, too inexperienced. At least by now, they must be wondering where she was.

The gloom inside the house moved. She checked behind her as she approached the crooked stoop.

Silent forest. Deep blue dusk.

Then the clouds parted to reveal a brilliant golden glob of full moon above the ridge. In the distance, something shrieked.

"You coming or what?" Jane said.

A thin mist coiled soundlessly among the blackening woods. Blanche forced a smile and stepped inside.

The odor of wet og and

moldy wood rushed up her nostrils, made her sneeze, her eyes leak. Jane hadn't turned on any lights.

"Come on, Red," said the waifish shadow in the hallway to Blanche's right, "make yourself at home."

### -4-

In the dark, all Blanche could make out was the sunset on the reflective strip on Jane's backpack. She moved too fast. Blanche lost her.

Mist crept through the busted windows. A nearby cricket risked a single chirrup.

"Hey? Jane?"

Blanche pulled out her otherwise useless phone and switched on its flashlight. The beam was powerful up close but didn't cast far in this country dark. Again, she called to Jane, scanning the unfurling wallpaper for a light switch.

Then she saw the stain. Brick red, cast in an erratic archipelago of splats and

specks from where the wall met the ceiling clear down to the carpet at her feet. Gouged through the drywall at eye level, deep enough to have severed a stud and pulled a venous scramble of multicolored wires through the holes.

Four long courses. If it were the '80s and this was a movie, they might've been the work of Freddy Krueger.

But this was real. This was *right now*.

She fanned her fingers and angled them to match with the slashes in the wall, her phone light creating the illusion of a great black hand falling from above. She peered closer. Her breath caught in the back of her spitless mouth.

Bits of hair. Hombre hair—bleached blue for most of its length, but light brown toward the root, and curly.

Like Mikey Wadleigh's hair. The eighth grader who played bass in that shitty band with the cute singer. Mikey was supposed to come to band practice at their drummer's house two weeks ago and never showed. Blanche suspected she just found all that was left of him.

A thud to her left, down the hall. She shone her light just in time to catch something white dart across and disappear into a doorway at the far end.

"Jane? The hell did you go?"

Branches scraped the roof. A lone cricket gave tentative chirrups, pausing for long intervals as if afraid to give away its exact location.

Blanche's stomach somersaulted, her pulse seemed to clunk up the sides of her neck.

Here, now, she hated herself for being right. There was none of the excitement she'd expected, no sense of vindication or impending triumph, no thrill in the hunt. There was only cold, plain fear, turning her mouth sour and her scalp itchy with sweat despite the chill and the dark, because she was hunting, yes, but she was also being hunted.

She heard Grandpa's voice

scolding with his favorite refrain: "The only difference between courage and stupidity is whether you come home in the end."

"Jane? Come on, quit screwing around," Blanche said, trying to sound loud to drum up a reservoir of courage she knew wasn't there.

No response. At first, she thought it was scraping or scratching from one of the distant rooms. Then she realized it was harsh, quick breaths.

Sniffs. Grunts.

"Are you okay? Jane, what the fuck?" Blanche said, moving deeper into the house, swimming in so much cortisol and adrenaline she felt as if she were drifting along some deep-sea tunnel, or some weightless cavity through a faraway planet.

A creak. A loud thump. Like someone falling.

The cricket stopped. Blanche's fingers wrapped around the cool walnut grip of Grandpa's taught the goddamn things to

.38, all five of its cylinders packed with Grandma's special blend of lead and silver.

She needed to move faster, to get this over with, but her legs would not cooperate. She tried to ignore the steady tremor of her gun-hand as she rested it on the wrist of her flashlight hand.

A ticking rumble. Wet, round, loud enough to feel like it was coming from inside her head. Like a thunderclap unrolling in slow motion to fill every fold and lobe of her brain.

Raw instinct dropped her to the floor, low on her belly, hiding her light. The dark rippled, shapes cutting through it, at the far end of the hall.

She raised the light, the tremoring gun. The growl grew louder, closer. It went on a little too long. Too steady.

Not a growl. A motor.

It revved and sputtered. *Holy fuck*, she thought, *someone* 

use power tools.

-5-

Blanche was about to start letting the silver fly when the lights flickered on. Jane rolled from one of the many doorways in a rickety wheelchair, her red bandana loose and disheveled.

"Sorry, had to go fire up the genny," she said, "I get so tired by this time of day, you know?"

Then she saw. Stopped.

"Jesus, is that a gun?"

"Why didn't you answer me?" Blanche said, kneeling now, trying to will her hands to stop shaking and hating herself for the tears welling in her unblinking eyes.

"I had to take care of some shit. Maybe I didn't hear you. Why do you have that thing?"

"I assume for the same reason you have these claw marks on the wall running through the biggest bloodstain I've ever fucking seen. With Mikey Wadleigh's hair stuck in it,"

Blanche said, thumb on the hammer as Jane rolled closer.

"Ah, shit. You know when your parents tell you to clean your room and you're like, 'whatever, I'll get to it eventually' and think they're total jackasses for getting on you so much? Same idea. My bad. Totally slipped my mind," June said, scanning the stain from the middle of the ceiling to the pool on the floor as her great mannish paws continued to roll her closer, closer.

"So you admit it? You're not sick, you're—"

They were eye to eye, only the gun between them, the beam from Blanche's phone still jittering and glinting on the spokes of her wheelchair. Jane popped her neck, her shoulders, rocked her jaw back and forth, like a boxer warming up in the ring.

"Before this ends the only way it was ever going to end — with me tonguing your meat from between my molars — how did you know? What made you sure enough to follow me out to an abandoned vet clinic?"

"I knew it the moment I saw you. The red bandanas — Little Red Riding Hood reference. Very cute—"

"You should talk, I bet you sleep and shower in that hoodie, too."

"...the fact that you don't have a single hair follicle on that skin-suit. You don't even bother to draw in eyebrows, for Christ sakes. The way you move in the halls, like at any second you could run up the wall and pounce on someone from the ceiling. You never show up to class the day after a full moon. Because you and your whole family is snoutdeep in a blood orgy. You people killed my brother. Turned my mom and dad. You made my grandma kill her own daughter. I came to exterminate you, you filthy fucking mutt!" Blanche said, full-on crying now.

"Oh, so it's a revenge plot. Did you ever stop to think that maybe we went after your family for...gasp... revenge? Do you have any idea how many grandmothers and grandfathers, brothers and sisters, how many mated pairs your family has exterminated over the years? The infamous Dudley
Dooright Dantes. Goody twoshoeing your way through
one pack after another from
B.C. to Baja. Trying to make
us extinct. What is any living
thing going to do in that
situation, Blanche? Here's
your biology lesson, though
you won't get a chance to use
it: there's no instinct stronger
than self-preservation. Even a
virus can do it."

"You are a virus."

"You. Are dinner."

At this a baleful howl punctured the silence of the woods. Jane's large brown eyes locked on Blanche's, shimmered mustard-yellow – no mistaking it this time—as the rest of the chorus joined in from every direction, from the crest of Landis Ridge to the banks of the river in the valley below. They formed a resplendent, stacked chord, quavering in and out of harmony, and cut out in an instant, the echo still ringing in Blanche's ears as hot, furious tears met on her chin.

"Okay, sweetie," Jane said, leaning forward, "you have about thirty seconds. I'm right here. You have a perfect shot. So do what you came here to do. Take one of us down with you."

"Thirty seconds to what?" she said, pointing the gun at Jane's chest, cocking the hammer, but her index finger wouldn't or couldn't squeeze the trigger.

"You're still not sure, are you? That's why you can't do it. You're still not sure if you're a superhero monster slayer or if you're just some psycho who's about to murder a pitiful cancer kid. In a wheelchair, even! I can hear that seed of doubt growing, blooming. You can't pull the trigger because if you're wrong, you'll be a murderer. You'll be even worse than those you claim to hate. So. Much. Then you'd have no choice, would you, Blanche? You'd have to flip that thing around and set things right the only way a monster really can. See, I clocked you, too. The second I saw that nasty scar all along your right arm. The one you tell everyone came from a car accident when you were little. It looks like it's blinking at me in the light, because your hand is shaking so bad. You were there that night, gun in hand,

just like now. Is it—ohmygod, is that the same gun? Going for a little narrative symmetry there, huh, girlie?"

At this Jane laughed, her eyes at once human and beast as her frail frame shook with amusement. Blanche could hardly see through her burning tears of fury and impotence and humiliation.

Her finger was on the trigger. But she just...couldn't...

"I guess you didn't think about the fact that it could end up just like last time. When you choked. Just like you're choking now. You're not a real Dante. Too soft to be one of them. And I don't think you want to be. I think you'd rather be one of us. But you can't decide for yourself. You always freeze, Blanche, you always will. Call it your fatal flaw."

Jane whooped, startling Blanche back a step, causing her to waste a round over Jane's shoulder. A puff of drywall drifted from the wall behind her to the carpet. Jane spun her chair to reveal the finger-length strip of thick black bristles running up the back of her scalp.

"Time's up," she said, and sank her fingers into the hissing bristles of what Blanche's grandfather called the Snoopy Stripe.

Jane's fingers peeled it wide, exposing a mat of course hair and pushing upward through the hole, as if standing out of her skin, like a diver removing a wetsuit, great triangular ears popping erect, one, two, followed by the profile of her short, thick, whiskered snout. It reminded Blanche of a malformed pitbull.

Then the generator sputtered out. The darkness returned.

Then Blanche understood. The lights weren't to help her see. They were a signal to the ones waiting in the woods—a dinner bell. An announcement that there was no need to go out and hunt tonight.

-6-

Jane titled her head back and bellowed, shaking every musty inch of the crumbling hallway. Blanche clapped her hands over her ears. She'd forgotten earplugs, a staple piece of kit. Putting them in was always the first thing Grandma and Grandpa did when they went to liquidate a den.

No sooner had Jane's bellow faded than the response arrived, that mournful chorus rising from every direction and closing in like a giant furry fist. The howls turned to yips, growls, grunts of effort, of anticipation as the undergrowth crashed and the moon filled the corridor with its mottled auburn glow.

Blanche had dropped her phone screen-down. She waved the gun, not wanting to waste another bullet but needing to know if Jane was still there.

Thuds against the outer walls. Claws raking the doors.

She fired a round in Jane's general direction. In the muzzle flash, she saw that the wheelchair was empty. She ducked into the nearest doorway.

A rumble beside her. Blanche could make out shapes, outlines in the poor light, suggestions of things that all

seemed hostile and hungry.

The second time, she recognized the rumble. Jane's stomach.

Blanche rolled away just in time to see the silhouette of a long shaggy arm slicing another chunk of wall to powdery smithereens. The Jane-creature connected to it was taller than Grandpa, and he was 6'4" and proud of it. Her shaggy frame seemed to fill the room, her raking movements mixing stenches of rotten meat-breath and wet fur, of the brimstone coals of deepest hell. The moon caught her eyes, and they gleamed like twin gobbets of fire. Her breath sounded like pounding surf, like tumbling boulders, like the earth itself splitting in two. The beast seemed to swim through the moonlight, to bask in its transformative embrace.

Shadows outside. Enormous, even bigger than the one standing over her. Blanche could hear them sniffing her out, communicating in yawps and clacking teeth.

Jane was a shadow, claws clicking on warped hardwood, hauling harsh slaking tugs of air into her cold wet snout. A throaty rumble joined that of her stomach. Blanche crabcrawled back out the door.

Blanche saw the wan rectangle of blue light describing the outline of her cell phone. She snatched it, held the flashlight up.

It had been long enough that must have forgotten just how horrid, how repulsive they were, that uncanny mingling of features at once human and savage. Now she saw. Screamed.^\$

Jane's talons swung down, leaving three slashes up Blanche's arm, red Adidas stripes carved in flesh. Now it matched the other arm, and Jane seemed to enjoy this, lapping at it with her long, gravelly tongue.

Blanche's phone clattered to the floor in two asymmetrical shards. Jane crouched, drool patting onto the floor, passed that hand-sized tongue over her muzzle.

Jane pounced. Blanche fired.

-7-

"Goddammit, Dee, I lost the signal," Grandpa said, tossing his phone in disgust as the giant tires of the Wolfwaster screeched up the mountain to Landis Ridge.

"For the tenth time, you shouldn't have been tracking her phone in the first place. She's a good kid, Larry. Better than I was at thirteen, shit." Grandma said, lighting a fresh cigarette.

"And for the tenth time, I agree with you, but this is not back then. You can't be too safe these days. And look how it turned out! This is your proof that it was a good idea. How the hell else would we have found her? You want to trust Chief Sayles and his bumblefucking Barney Fifes to find our missing kid? Got half a dozen they can't account for already. And now we lost the signal." he said.

"Just because it worked out this once, doesn't mean it was right to do it in the first place. She's a teenager, not a sea turtle in a research program. I'm telling you, she's just off at some little friend's house smoking pot or drinking beer, watching You-sta-tok videos or whatever they do.
Probably forgot to charge her phone and the battery died.
Apart from you and me,
Blanche knows better than anyone in this town how to look after herself. You, old man, are overreacting, like you always do," she said, brushing Camel Wide ashes from her pink bandoliers and purple daishiki.

"There is no overreacting with a moon like that," Grandpa said, nodding at the deep orange moon that appeared to rest atop the lumpy summit of Landis Ridge, like a perfect circle of unblinking ember.

"Stop! Back up," Grandma shouted, head out her window, "look!"

He squeaked to a stop on the last bend, coming to rest before a rough, overgrown path. Grandma hopped out and snatched something from the roadside. She tossed it into his lap.

A purple lunch-bag. When he opened it, a baggie fell out. For a second, he expected drugs, but when it picked it up, four silver .38 Special bullets tinkled into his lap.

"Fuck," Grandma said, pitching her smoke, "all right, Larry. You called it."

"Why-"

"Because she found them. And she thought...after everything I told her, she thought she could handle it alone?!" Grandma said, her voice quavering, with equal parts fury and despair.

"That's why I couldn't find Old Shorty last night. She took it," he said, fingering one of the silver-tipped cartridges between the three remaining fingers of his left hand.

A howl. Two. A chorus. Grandpa killed the headlights and eased onto the side of the road.

They were halfway through loading up when they heard thrashing in the trees, advancing from all sides. Then came the shot, its muzzle flash describing the smashed, vine-draped windows of a long, low building uphill.

"She's alive," Grandma said,

racking the pump of her favorite shotgun and hurrying into the dark.

-8-

Jane was only a pup. Instead of pinning her quarry to the ground, only one razortipped paw found its mark, opening an oozing doublegash from Blanche's navel to her hip. She felt little pain, only a funny cold sort of itch inside the cuts, then hot wet flow down her leg confirming that damage was done.

Blanche's second shot had smashed one of the few remaining shards from the window to their right, and they both turned as a second set of paws tore through the frame and another howler, lighter in color but larger and with a pointier snout, dragged its bulky frame into the room. A great thump on the other side of the house.

Another tore at the front door. All around the building, wood rent and whined and crumbled. In they poured.

Hearing still muted from the howling, the shooting, Blanche crawled into the

hallway. Using the wall, she righted herself and hobbled, hand pressed to her flayed hip, telling herself it was only the claws, not the teeth—she might bleed out, but at least she'd die a human.

A large, burbling form blocked the end of the hallway. The main room was filled with more of them than she cared to count.

How many rounds did she have left? Three? Two?

For a heart-stopping moment, their faces were illuminated by flashlights or headlamps bouncing over the driveway. The nearest one had one eye, and one flap of its snout was snagged at the pink-black speckled gumline, giving her a view of the full length of a massive yellow fang jutting at such an angle as to register in Blanche's mind as a tusk. They heated the cool humidity, rendering the air a choking funk of dog-thatrolled-in-carrion.

Shouts outside—human shouts. A gunshot. A volley of shots. Shrill squabbling.

The pack scattered into the

gloom to set up an ambush. She tried to call out that there were too many, but a growl dead ahead cut her off as the pointy-snouted one filled the hallway. Blanche held out the revolver and fired her third round into its shaggy chest.

Her hand was slippery with her own blood, the recoil caused her to fumble the revolver. Outside, blasting, howling, splashes of gravel. Cries that might be human or beast.

Ahead of her, something yelped and panted. Blanche dove to the floor, fumbling in the poor light for the gun with its final round.

"What? No, no, no," she said, patting and patting and finding nothing.

A snarl behind her. Then a half-second of quaking floorboards and her face was on fire.

The force of the blow lifted her into the nearest doorway. Only this one didn't open into a barren room. In the hazy moonlight, she could make out a staircase. The creature in pursuit sliced one of her shoes open, punctured her ankle, her calf.

She pulled herself headfirst down the stairs, banging and bouncing before spilling across icy smooth cement. The top step creaked as the beast started down after her, panting and snorting. She tried to stand, dragged something heavy onto herself, and the moonlit basement went black.

-9-

"-only a scratch!"

"Lawrence Dante, that thing's muzzle was right there—"

"Jesus Bungee-Jumping
Christ, Dee, I know the
difference between a claw and
fang. Check out the tooth
dents on my knife, if you
don't believe me," Grandpa
said, tossing the ruined
dagger, its blade an alloy of
stainless steel and sterling
silver, which the large shewolf had destroyed when she
went for his leg.

The bent weapon plunked into the gravel beside the huge lupine form that had

ruined it. Grandma had pumped her full of Furbuster Express – 3 1/2 -inch 12-gauge shells handloaded with silver pellets. The creature gave a final whimpering spasm, pawing at the night sky as if trying to swim away into it, then fell limp and still.

Grandpa was still cursing under his breath as he aligned another stripper clip with the receiver of General Patton, the M1 Garand his father had brought home from France and taught Grandpa to maintain well enough for it to continue vanquishing monsters 80 years later.

The silver mixed into the 8 rounds in the clip caught the moonglow and gave a luminous blue cast as he fed the battered rifle. Grandma scanned the trees with the barrel of her shotgun. They moved toward the clawravaged door.

"You know that place is probably jammed with them," she said.

"I know, doll. But Blanche is in there."

After checking to make sure

there was no wolf-blood on her face, she went on her tiptoes and kissed him. He kissed her back, as he hadn't in a long time. He didn't like the look in her eyes when he opened his. The knot of electric snakes in his gut wound tighter.

"It's awful quiet in there, isn't it. Taking up ambush positions, no doubt. Wily bunch. Might even be clever enough to keep her alive, use her as bait. She wasn't in there, I'd say just light this place up and pick em off as they come out, one by one, like that farmhouse in Sonoma," she said.

"Sonoma? That was down by Eugene. Either way, as much as I want to play this like Butch and Sundance, I think we'd better keep it tight.
Can't risk hitting her."

"Half a century of spraying for canids, Larry. And this might be the single dumbest thing we've ever done."

It was. It felt like...it. The end. His bones squirmed and his balls hid inside his body.

"Hallway goes to the right, I'll

take that. You take left." he said, switching on his headlamp.

In the initial melee, she hadn't taken the time to switch on the flashlight mounted beneath the barrel of her beloved short-barreled pump, Old Thumper. She did this now and held it to illuminate her face.

"Larry," she said, "before we go in there, I want you to know, we left in such a hurry, I didn't have time for underwear. If we don't end up as red stains on the ceiling, this night could get even more interesting when we get home."

"Jesus, woman, you're even crazier than I am," he said.

"That's why I run this circus. Now. Let's shave some fur."

-10-

Blanche's eyes popped open. Lights flashed, wolfen shadows rushed through them at the top of the stairs, high above. The cacophony of gunfire and howling and roaring and reminded her of the tornado that hit the summer Grandma and Grandpa dragged her out to Oklahoma in pursuit a mated pair of redneck outlaw-types, whose real names, incredibly, were Talulah and Grover.

For an instant, she couldn't move. She tried to prop herself on an elbow but the bolt of pain when it took her weight drove her into a ball.

She knew the searing pain from her neck to her ribs all too well. Same as when she'd fallen racing Alex Price and Karen White across the monkey bars in third grade, back East. Dislocated shoulder. Ribs bruised for sure, maybe even broken.

Her left knee didn't feel right, either. Nor her left ankle.

She spat blood to the side as a horrible cry came from upstairs. She couldn't tell if it was Grandpa or one of them. She sat up and tried to scoot herself toward the steps. Every part of her seemed to bark protest at the effort. She took frequent breaks, but she kept inching, inching.

A low growl from the

shadows behind the stairs more felt in the sternum than heard with the ears. Blanche froze, one scoot from the bottom step.

A single high, rectangular window admitted a shaft of moonlight, casting a kind of trapezoidal spotlight on the ground just beside the stairs. Into it emerged lithe, hunched, shaggy form. Its claws slicked across the cold cement as it lowered and crept toward her on all fours. Ropes of white saliva swung and plopped from lips as black and slick as leeches. These parted into a grotesque sort of grin, and its gray snout jittered side to side and up and down as it huffed her in.

This close, her teeth were enormous. Her eyes great golden rings in the moonlight. Her two front teeth were bucked, and the proportions of her paws were as gawky in this form as her hands and feet were in human form.

"Jane, please," Blanche said, knowing it was useless.

Rustling behind her, in a debris-strewn corner. She didn't have time to turn before Jane was on her.

Grandpa took down as many as he could, but it was a house of shadows with claws and fangs. The barnyard musk of the creatures exerting themselves mingled with the eggy fart stench of gunpowder and the metallic brine best known to surgeons and soldiers and hunters, until the crumbling bungalow at the last bend of Landis Ridge Road reeked like a portal to some seething underworld where an endless, pointless war rages in pitch dark. He ran through his ammunition in under a minute.

He and Grandma lost sight of each other in the churning fray. She could no longer tell what blood came from her and what came from the howlers.

A squat one with a big halfpink, half-black nose had sent three of her fingers flying into the dark with a single swipe of its paw. She thrust her silver bowie into its shoulder twisted the blade, leaning her meager weight into it, another paw came from behind. It still had a firm grip on her bandolier and she could not move in time.

Another had flanked her—a wiry, silver-tinged male with a chipped fang on the lower right and a long scar across his muzzle, so tall he couldn't stand inside without stooping—popped Grandma's severed fingers into his maw and crunched them like pretzel sticks as their two pairs of savage hazel eyes met.

"Found you, fucker," Grandma whispered.

The same pack leader who had hit them at the camp that night. The one who had mauled Blanche's parents. He hoisted her off the ground, claws punching into her gut until she felt his paw pressing against her belly as he held her aloft with one ropy, auburn, orangutan-like arm.

At this height—Grandma's head scraped the flaky paint of the ceiling—she saw over the melee and surveyed the pack members who lay dead, shriveling and convulsing back to human form. There were many, they had done their job and done it well, perhaps as well as it could be done in these circumstances.

A handful of pack members they hadn't felled now surrounded the blood-soaked Grandpa, nipping at him as he pulled his final weapon, what he called his Emergency Fund—a sawed-off side-by-side shotgun loaded with her Fur Trimmer shells.

The pack leader latched onto her leg, shaking his head and moaning with pleasure as her blood cascaded down his tongue. Grandpa saw her get bitten, cried out.

He saw her see him. The howlers circled, weaving around his line of fire. He stood, back-to-the wall, raised the weapon, eyes mad, and mouthed "love you" before putting both barrels into the pack leader.

Then the rest were on him. The snapping and ripping and chewing soon drowned out his final scream.

The pack leader gave a brief expression of shock, like a dog spooked awake by a noise outside. He stumbled once, twice, and dropped her.

She thumped not to the swampy red carpet, which

now resembled a bog of blood with lily pads of fur and stark white petals of bone shard, but into a chair—a wheelchair. She watched as the pack leader, the one who had killed her daughter, forced her to lie to Blanche that her father was dead too, instead of the worse fate he had truly suffered.

She rolled forward and hocked up a bright red loogy that sounded like a hopping bullfrog as it plopped onto the pack leader's chest. In a moment, it ceased to rise and fall, and it shrunk back to the nude, gunshot form of their former howler-hunting buddy, the "Bayou Buccaneer," Paulo Dumas, he of the fan boat and crossbow and musical Cajun cusswords.

She rolled the chair toward the feasting pack. In the middle of the hallway, she rolled over something. She stooped and retrieved Old Shorty—Larry's .38 snubby.

The four rounds from Blanche's lunchbox were still in Larry's pocket—hopefully one of them would eat them and croak. But when she flipped open the cylinder, her heart leapt. One round left.

They were so preoccupied with their feeding frenzy that they didn't notice her approach until she was right on them. She raised the gun, cocked the hammer.

A limb shot out—a prehensile paw—instinctively, lifting her out of the chair and against a doorframe with enough force to send her bouncing across the floor. She didn't even have time to scream, tumbling ass over teakettle down the basement steps.

-12-

Grandma landed with an awful crunch and her momentum carried her clear to the wall opposite the stairs. At once she smelled the unmistakable musk and knew she was not alone.

She could not move without her right side feeling as if she was being torn into two. She'd broken bones before, but this time it felt like they were all broken. She slumped to the right, hating the sucking sensation in her side when she tried to draw breath from that vile air.

A hoarse cry escaped her as she grabbed the edge of a broken workbench with her left and adjusted herself so she could see the staircase straight ahead. In her right was the .38 with its final silver bullet. Raising that arm was out of the question—you don't need a medical degree to know elbows are not meant to bend that way. She took the gun in her left and scanned the darkness.

Between wet coughs, she told whoever was down there with her to show their mangy pelt and get what was coming to them. She did not notice Blanche's shredded clothing, red hoodie and all, trailing away from where she sat.

The full moon had passed free of the clouds, its amber – and reddening - beam now a lurid spotlight, just in front of Grandma's feet. Into it emerged an enormous frame, clicking claws, gleaming teeth. At first, she thought it was some new evolution she'd never seen before – a three-headed howler, or perhaps even Cerberus, guardian of Hades' gates, come to drag her down to the scorching abyss of eternity himself. They watched her, and as they did, her eyes

made out three separate forms.

The two on the flanks had finer features, larger eyes, more slender shapes than the huge, bulky male between them. A pair of juvenile females and a huge male—a male she assumed would be next in line to lead the pack.

The females had not yet fed—their stomachs snarled as loud as their throats. One of the youngsters cocked her head as if in recognition.

Had she stared a moment longer, Grandma might have noticed the clever emerald eyes, the gentle upward slope of the snout, the wide gap between the two front teeth—the pentagonal pewter locket now fitted more like a thin collar than a necklace.

"Eenie meanie," she coughed, "mynie-mo. Catch a howler by its toe..." she said, panning the barrel of the .38 back and forth across the advancing trio.

Before she finished the rhyme, she stopped on the one in the middle, and pulled the trigger. The big male dove in front of the others, taking the round just below the ear.

It landed on her legs, all 400plus pounds of it pinning her legs to the floor. The other two howled their outrage.

As the weight began to lift and the massive beast seemed to melt, shrivel, and husk up, its hair disappearing into thin air to reveal a tattoo she hadn't seen in many moons—a portrait of Blanche as a baby, grinning and crawling through a field of vibrant wildflowers.

She had always admired the tattoo, and the young man who wore it. She could not help but weep as she turned the ruined head to behold the unseeing, unblinking, eyes of her son-in-law, David—Blanche's father.

Grandma watched with dawning horror as the smaller of the two females crouched and nuzzled the fresh corpse, lapping at his face as if trying to revive him. Then her muzzle was in Grandma's face and she saw those emerald eyes widen with bewilderment, with recognition, then narrow into burning slits of human hate. cutting size reunion.

She knew was just when on dented be girls clim the only

Blanche waited long enough to be sure that Grandma gasped and croaked "no" and recognized the girl inside the wolf, understood that in the morning, the wolf would be inside the girl, and so it would be until the end of time, or until someone else like the soon-to-be-extinct Dantes found her and snuffed her out in a hail of silver bullets and gnashing fangs by the light of yet another brilliant, watchful moon.

Then Blanche tore Grandma's throat out. She paused, as if deciding whether to leave it at that and give the old woman a chance to die and come back as one of the pack. Then she glanced down at the baby tottering blissfully through the flowers, now spattered in her father's blood. Turning Grandma would be the ultimate punishment, true, for lying about her father, for cutting short their family reunion.

She knew she should. She was just too hungry.

When only Grandma's toothdented bones remained, the girls climbed the stairs to find the only other survivors—a pair of young males—and together the four slipped into the night. Blanche could still remember her mother's touch, and it seemed the early spring dark felt the same, running affectionate invisible fingers through her freshly-sprouted coat.

fellows, in celebration of their inheritance as masters of the full moon night. And so, baptized in blood and moonlight and the slick, fetid aroma of the awakening forest, a new pack is born.

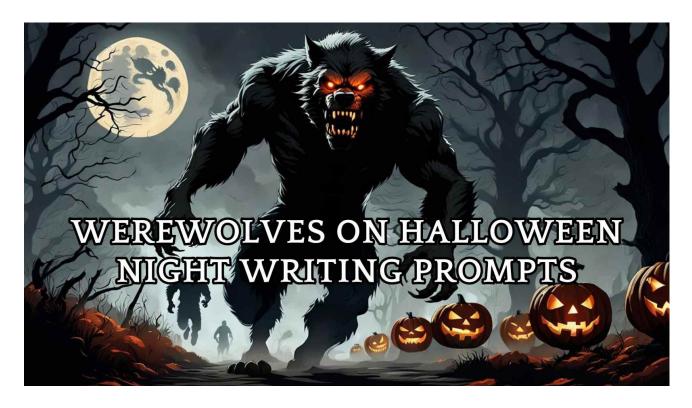
Journal. His horror-comedy short story "Hugs N Kisses, Kelli-Ann" was longlisted for the NC Literary Review's Doris Betts Fiction Prize and received an honorable mention in the 2023 Writer's Digest Short Story Competition.

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Forming a crescent atop Landis Ridge, they lifted their snouts to the night sky and bayed in mourning for their

Ty Green's fiction has has appeared on the No Sleep Podcast and in Coffin Bell





As the veil between worlds grows thin and the moon hangs full and bright in the sky, Halloween night descends upon the unsuspecting world. This is no ordinary All Hallows' Eve, for it marks a time when the supernatural and the mundane collide in ways both thrilling and terrifying. At the heart of this collision are the werewolves - creatures of myth and legend, now stepping out of the shadows to face their destinies.

From newly turned lycanthropes struggling with their first transformation to ancient werewolves awakening from centuries of slumber, this Halloween promises to be a night like no other. The air is thick with the scent of possibility and danger, as werewolves navigate the treacherous waters of human interaction, supernatural politics, and their own inner beasts.

In cities and small towns alike, werewolves find themselves at the center of Halloween chaos. They lurk in corn mazes and haunt house attractions, infiltrate costume parties and comic conventions, and even venture into the realm of social media and virtual reality. Some seek cures for their condition, while others

embrace their lupine nature, each choice carrying its own set of consequences.

But the werewolves are not alone in this night of nights. Vampires, witches, and other supernatural beings all play their parts in this grand tapestry of Halloween horror. Unlikely alliances are formed, age-old rivalries reignited, and the very fabric of reality itself seems to bend and warp under the weight of so much mystical energy.

As the night unfolds, these 100 prompts offer glimpses into a world where anything is possible. From heartpounding chases across

Halloween-decorated cityscapes to intimate struggles of werewolves trying to maintain their humanity, each story seed holds the potential for terror, triumph, and transformation. So gather 'round, dear writers, and let the howl of inspiration guide your pen on this most magical of nights.

## Here are the first 100 werewolf writing prompts for Halloween night:

- 1. A newly turned werewolf struggles to control their first transformation on Halloween night.
- 2. A group of trick-ortreaters stumble upon a secret werewolf gathering in the woods.
- 3. A werewolf hunter discovers their child has been bitten on Halloween.
- 4. The full moon falls on Halloween, causing mass werewolf transformations in a small town.
- 5. A werewolf and a vampire form an unlikely alliance to survive a Halloween night hunt.
- 6. A Halloween costume party goes awry when a real werewolf shows

- up.
- 7. A werewolf seeks a cure, believing Halloween night's mystical energies might hold the key.
- 8. A pack of werewolves plans to use Halloween chaos to take over a city.
- 9. A lone werewolf protects trick-ortreaters from other supernatural threats.
- 10.Scientists accidentally create a werewolf virus that spreads rapidly on Halloween night.
- 11.A werewolf falls in love with someone dressed as Little Red Riding Hood at a Halloween party.
- 12.An ancient werewolf awakens from centuries of slumber on Halloween night.
- 13.A group of friends play a werewolf-themed game, unaware that one of them is actually turning.
- 14.A werewolf tries to blend in at a Halloween parade to escape hunters.
- 15.A child bitten by a werewolf experiences their first transformation while trick-or-treating.
- 16.A werewolf seeks redemption by

- protecting a town from other monsters on Halloween night.
- 17.A Halloween blood moon causes uncontrollable transformations in latent werewolves.
- 18.A werewolf crashes a Halloween wedding, mistaking it for a hunting ground.
- 19.An old werewolf teaches newly turned teenagers how to control their powers on Halloween.
- 20.A werewolf uses a Halloween costume contest as cover to infiltrate a rival pack's territory.
- 21.A werewolf and a witch team up to stop an evil Halloween ritual.
- 22.An entire family of werewolves tries to keep their secret during a neighborhood Halloween party.
- 23.A werewolf accidentally wins a howling contest at a Halloween festival.
- 24.A group of werewolves infiltrates a haunted house attraction to hunt.
- 25.A werewolf struggles to resist the urge to transform during a Halloween full moon

- eclipse.
- 26.A pack of werewolves challenges vampire coven for control of the town on Halloween night.
- 27.A werewolf seeks refuge in a Halloween-themed escape room as hunters close in.
- 28.An aspiring filmmaker unknowingly captures real werewolf footage on Halloween night.
- 29.A werewolf time travels to various Halloween nights throughout history.
- 30.A Halloween curse causes everyone in town to become werewolves for one night.
- 31.A werewolf uses a Halloween corn maze as a hunting ground.
- 32.An ancient werewolf artifact is accidentally unearthed during Halloween decorating.
- 33.A werewolf tries to protect their human lover from other werewolves on Halloween night.
- 34.A Halloween séance accidentally summons a pack of ghost werewolves.
- 35.A werewolf joins a Halloween-night ghost tour, leading to chaos and confusion.

- 36.A werewolf pack and a coven of witches battle for a powerful Halloween night artifact.
- 37.A werewolf infiltrates a Halloween masquerade ball to assassinate a rival pack leader.
- 38.A group of werewolves hijacks a Halloween hayride for nefarious purposes.
- 39.A werewolf detective investigates a series of Halloween murders committed by something even more dangerous.
- 40.A werewolf uses
  Halloween night's
  chaos to break their
  pack-mates out of a
  secret government
  facility.
- 41.A werewolf competes in a Halloween night marathon, struggling to control their transformation.
- 42.An astronaut werewolf transforms for the first time during a Halloween spacewalk.
- 43.A werewolf pack uses a Halloween carnival as cover for their annual gathering.
- 44.A werewolf tries to reverse their curse using ancient Halloween rituals.

- 45.A group of werewolves infiltrates a Halloween-themed amusement park after hours.
- 46.A werewolf accidentally enters a Halloween dog costume contest.
- 47.A Halloween blood drive attracts both werewolves and vampires, leading to conflict.
- 48.A werewolf jazz musician's transformation is triggered by playing at a Halloween gig.
- 49.A werewolf chef struggles to cater a Halloween event without revealing their true nature.
- 50.A pack of teenage werewolves sneak into an adults-only Halloween party.
- 51.A werewolf parent tries to take their human children trickor-treating while fighting the urge to transform.
- 52.A group of werewolves attempts to rob a bank during a Halloween parade.
- 53.A werewolf seeks shelter in a Halloween pop-up store as the full moon rises.
- 54.A Halloween comic

- convention becomes a battleground between werewolves and other monsters.
- 55.A werewolf firefighter responds to emergencies on a chaotic Halloween night.
- 56.A werewolf rock band's Halloween concert turns into a frenzy when they all transform on stage.
- 57.A werewolf seeks redemption by becoming a Halloween night vigilante.
- 58.A Halloween curse causes a werewolf to swap bodies with a human.
- 59.A werewolf pack uses a Halloween zombie walk as cover to move through the city undetected.
- 60.A werewolf tries to win a Halloween night eating contest without revealing their supernatural appetite.
- 61.A werewolf archaeologist uncovers an ancient Halloween-related artifact that affects their transformations.
- 62.A Halloween solar eclipse triggers unexpected daytime werewolf transformations.

- 63.A werewolf politician must navigate a crucial Halloween night debate while fighting transformation urges.
- 64.A pack of werewolves attempts to sabotage a rival town's Halloween festival.
- 65.A werewolf trapped in a Halloween escape room must solve puzzles before transforming.
- 66.A Halloween curse causes a werewolf to transform into different animals each hour.
- 67.A werewolf tries to win a Halloween night talent show to save their pack's territory.
- 68.A group of werewolves infiltrates a Halloween-themed wedding as unexpected guests.
- 69.A werewolf scientist races to find a cure before the Halloween full moon rises.
- 70.A Halloween spell gone wrong merges a werewolf and a vampire into one conflicted being.
- 71.A werewolf mail carrier delivers
  Halloween packages while avoiding detection.
- 72.A pack of werewolves competes in a

- Halloween night scavenger hunt against human teams.
- 73.A werewolf lawyer defends a client on Halloween night while fighting transformation urges.
- 74.A Halloween time loop forces a werewolf to relive their transformation night repeatedly.
- 75.A werewolf uses a Halloween social media challenge as a cover for pack recruitment.
- 76.A Halloween-themed virtual reality game becomes real for a group of werewolf players.
- 77.A werewolf tries to navigate a Halloween speed dating event without revealing their true nature.
- 78.A pack of werewolves attempts to take over a Halloween-night cruise ship.
- 79.A werewolf barista serves special Halloween drinks that accidentally trigger transformations in latent werewolves.
- 80.A Halloween aurora borealis causes widespread, uncontrollable werewolf

- transformations.
- 81.A werewolf participates in a Halloween night ultramarathon, struggling to control their transformation over the long race.
- 82.A Halloween geocaching event leads a group of unsuspecting humans to a werewolf den.
- 83.A werewolf tries to win a Halloween night dance competition without revealing their enhanced abilities.
- 84.A pack of werewolves attempts to steal a powerful artifact from a Halloween museum exhibit.
- 85.A werewolf trapped in a Halloween-themed escape room must solve puzzles before the full moon rises.
- 86.A Halloween radio show host discovers their late-night caller is a werewolf seeking help.
- 87.A werewolf enters a Halloween cosplay contest, ironically dressed as a vampire.
- 88.A group of werewolves infiltrates a Halloween night ghost tour, causing chaos and confusion.
- 89.A werewolf scientist

- accidentally creates a airborne transformation trigger while working on a Halloween night.
- 90.A Halloween fortune teller unknowingly predicts real werewolf attacks, drawing attention from both hunters and werewolves.
- 91.A werewolf tries to complete a Halloween-themed iron chef competition before transforming.
- 92.A pack of werewolves uses a Halloween night power outage to hunt in the city undetected.
- 93.A werewolf parkour athlete must escape hunters across a Halloween-decorated cityscape.
- 94.A Halloween spell causes a werewolf to split into their human and wolf forms as separate entities.
- 95.A werewolf at a Halloween slumber party struggles to keep their secret as the night progresses.
- 96.A group of werewolves crashes a Halloween comic convention, mistaking cosplayers for rival wolves.
- 97.A werewolf leader

- must negotiate a peace treaty with other supernatural factions on Halloween night.
- 98.A Halloween blood moon prophecy predicts the rise of an all-powerful werewolf king.
- 99.A werewolf participates in a Halloween night reality show challenge, trying not to reveal their true nature on camera.
- 100.On Halloween night, a cure for lycanthropy is announced, dividing the werewolf community on whether to take it.

As the final echoes of the Halloween night fade and the first light of dawn begins to break, our journey through these 100 werewolf prompts comes to an end. Yet, like the lycanthrope's curse, the stories they've inspired linger on, pulsing with untamed potential and primal energy. Each prompt serves as a doorway to a world where the line between human and beast blurs, where ancient magics and modern dilemmas collide in a symphony of fur and fang.

These tales of transformation reach far beyond the simple horror of the werewolf myth. They delve into the depths of human nature, exploring themes of identity, control, and the beast that lurks within us all. From the newly bitten struggling with their first change to ancient alphas navigating supernatural politics, these prompts offer a rich tapestry of characters and conflicts that resonate with our own everyday struggles and triumphs.

The diversity of scenarios presented here showcases the versatility of the werewolf as a literary device. Whether stalking through urban jungles, howling in the depths nurtured by imagination and

of space, or navigating the complexities of modern technology, these lycanthropes adapt and evolve, much like the stories we tell about them. They remind us that the most terrifying monsters are often those that reflect our own humanity back at us, twisted and transformed by moonlight and myth.

As writers, these prompts offer more than just a starting point for Halloween-themed tales. They challenge us to think creatively, to push the boundaries of the werewolf genre, and to explore new territories of storytelling. Each scenario is a seed that, when

craft, can grow into a forest of narrative possibilities.

So as you leave this collection of prompts behind, carry with you the spirit of the werewolf - wild, untamed, and everchanging. Let these ideas gestate in the moonlit corners of your mind, ready to burst forth in a fury of creativity when the moment is right. For in the world of writing, every night can be a full moon, and every story a chance to unleash the beast within. Happy writing, and may your tales be as captivating as a werewolf's howl on a crisp Halloween night.



**Every Writer 29** 

### 3 AM

### BY CHRISTOPHER JONES



Deep inside the Texas night a window shatters.

A thief — burglar, or rapist intrudes a leg into our home, booted foot

grits down on broken glass.

"Dad!"
I whisper-shout.
"Dad! Someone's breaking in!"

"Jesus Christ, Christophah" he replies, his voice cocked at it New Hampshire angle.

"I'm a buncha ashes in a jah in Illinois."

In life, he was no help either.

I grab my pig spear that stands bedside guard, slide one naked foot free of the bedroom, then another,

as I move quietly toward the creak on the stairs.

Christopher Jones founded Lost Prophet Press in 1992 and published the literary magazines Thin Coyote and Knuckle Merchant: the Journal of Naked Literary Aggression for many years. His work has been or will be seen in many venues, including Cajun Mutt Press, The Wild Word, Eunoia Review, The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror (St. Martin's Press) and a flowerpot on the Detroit Lakes Poetry Walk. (Take that, guidance counsellors!). He lives with his family, two cats and many dogs in West Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA.



# Questions For Vampires

By Anastasia Gustafson

Marcus didn't mean to kill Angelina. Not really. But she was dead as a doornail, alright, and white as a sheet. In his candle-lit studio apartment, strewn with white rose petals and piles of books, Angelina Zanovich lay frozen in time on his kitchen tile, her perfect blonde curls soaked deliciously ripe with red. It took him a minute to gather himself, but once he did, Marcus shook her at the shoulders, watching her little cross necklace glisten under the smattering of their shared

ecstasy, and then hastily wiped his mouth clean. In a final attempt at hope, Marcus held a quivering hand over her nose and pressed his ear to her chest just to be sure, and it was as he suspected: the girl had no pulse, no breath, no nothing. And to make things worse, they both had a worship service to lead at St. Anne's Chapel in just under eight hours.

"Shit." He pressed his fingers into his cheeks, pulling the transparent skin down from his sullen eyes. "Heavens above. Fuck me."

On one hand, Marcus

considered himself an ethical vampire. Many moons ago, he had been a simple, hardworking locksmith who could often be found surveying the ever-growing international cookbook section in his local library. He wasn't of the opinion that much had changed since then. So up until that moment on his kitchen floor, his convictions had successfully shielded him from killing of any kind. It wasn't without difficulty, of course. He had soldiered on for the past six years as a wallflower and night-shift custodian at the Transfiguration Hospital, which meant he had grown painstakingly accustomed to quietly cleaning up bodily

ooze. He didn't love it, but it was the best job for someone with his rather unfortunate and sun-sensitive condition. It also made sneaking into the blood bank refrigerator far easier than it should have been. But on the other hand, this was no bodily ooze. This was no blood bag. This was Angelina, the only soft-hearted nursing intern that Transfiguration Hospital currently boasted among its crone-infested ranks. At twenty three years young and at just five foot four, she had eyes like blue roses and smelled of spring sunshine, which was why Marcus, an unlucky immortal imprisoned forever at the ungodly age of forty six, was so surprised five weeks ago when she of all people approached him in the hospital break room for what seemed at the time like no reason at all.

"So, you're into vampires?"
She plopped her white lunchbox down beside him without asking. He'd responded by rigidly flinching. Then Marcus, clumsy even in undeath, almost dropped his dog-eared copy of *The Historian* onto the gum-ridden linoleum below.

"What?" His gaze darted to

the girl who so easily and unknowingly poked right at his most well-kept secret. He watched as her slender wrist withdrew a single green apple from her bag. The pulse he heard in his ears was not his own, and he swallowed the familiar dry lump in his throat.

"That book," she spoke with a Russian accent and gestured with the apple in hand. Marcus had to look at the book's cover to remember its name.

"Oh." He raised both his eyebrows. "I, uh. Yes. You could say that I am."

"Me too." She smiled at him.
"I think they get a bad
reputation in books, you
know? All romance. No guts.
It's ridiculous."

A strange part of him suddenly felt less heavy, as if a window had been opened.

"I'm Angelina." She began cutting her apple into slender, even slices.

"Marcus." He set the book down and watched her

fingers working the butter knife. After a while, he realized his silent staring had gone on for a moment too long. But she filled the emptiness with words before he could figure out what to say.

"I heard you singing today. In the morgue."

Marcus felt a chill run down his spine. That wasn't good. In fact, that could be very bad. Did she know something? See something? Had she found him out? The truth, of course, was that he was singing in the morgue today. But it wasn't for fun. He had long surmised that the sound of his voice was just loud enough to cover the clinking of jars as he rummaged through the organ donation fridge, where he would sometimes find blood fresh enough to drink. But maybe that night he had gotten a bit carried away with his volume. He did rather like the chorus. But that couldn't be it. She must have seen something, or at least suspected it. Marcus frowned.

Angelina's wide blue eyes moved away from her apple slices and studied his face, noting his concern with immediacy. "You sounded lovely, I mean. I'd die for Elton John," she blurted out awkwardly, twirling the butter knife. "Is 'Goodbye Yellow Brick Road' your favorite song?"

Marcus rigidly tilted his chin up as he considered the question, still unsure if the ground of this conversation was more of a minefield or meadow.

"It is."

Then she did something he didn't understand. Suddenly confident and composed once again, she clicked her tongue at him. Three times. Slowly, too. Marcus furrowed his brows and waited for the inevitable, for her to come out and say something like 'Don't lie to me, you elderly vampire. I know what you are'. But she didn't. Instead, the words she chose stunned him in ways no sunlight or silver ever could.

"Actually," she punctuated the sound. "'I'm Still Standing' is the *only* right answer. But I'll forgive you just this once because you sounded so nice while being so very wrong."

Then, she let out the most contagious and private giggle, as if she were sharing a juicy secret for his ears only. He found himself joining in.

"In all seriousness," she began. "I have a question for you."

"Oh." Marcus felt himself leaning in to listen.

Angelina set down the butter knife and spoke with her pretty, pale hands.

"My church, St. Anne's-you know the one off Maple Street-we need another male vocalist for our Easter service. Just the one show. Badly. I wouldn't normally ask, but our guy, Carl, I think he got caught cheating on his wife and doesn't want to come back. He said it's just mono, but it's a real scandal--and a darn shame because I thought Carl did such a nice job regardless of that, but you know how people can be. You should have heard the way he belted. An unreal tenor. But anyway, when I heard you today, I just had a special

feeling that maybe...well, that maybe I should ask you."

Marcus felt his face contort in ways it hadn't since he realized he couldn't see his reflection anymore.

"What?"

"Before you say anything, it's a *paid* position," she poked the butter knife again. "And I can drive you. I think we live in the same building, which is wicked convenient. I've seen you in the elevator."

He winced at how childish it sounded to call something 'wicked convenient'. But he knew, of course, that this was true. They did live in the same building. He would sometimes catch himself staring at her hands as she fumbled with hangnails and consequently perfumed the air with the scent of her honeysuckle blood. Though, he was surprised that she was even mildly aware of his existence. Most people looked through Marcus with glassy eyes, not at him with wide ones.

"Angelina, I'm not exactly the church-going type." Marcus

frowned and leaned back in his chair. "Unless you'd like to watch the building go up in flames, perhaps?"

She laughed so loudly that some of the other nurses and doctors and custodians gave them a sideways glance. Marcus felt the air hum from the attention. But really, he had only been half kidding. Marcus hadn't tried to walk into a church since long before that prostitute he shouldn't have taken home left him drained and undead in some unforgettable ratinfested alleyway, and that was ten years ago. His last church visit? More than four decades ago.

"You don't have to be devout to sing," Angelina leaned in and lifted her hand up to her mouth as if to whisper something no one else should hear. "Our drummer is an atheist, believe it or not. And I'm pretty sure the man upstairs has seen everything under the sun, if that's what you're worried about. Church was made for sinners."

Marcus felt a smile twinge on the side of his lips.

"I'm flattered, really. But I'm

afraid I will have to decline."

She took another slice of apple and examined it. He watched her throat as she bit in

"Perhaps you'll come just to see *me* sing then? If you're nice, maybe I'll let you take me out afterwards."

She took another nibble from the slice with one hand. With the other, she pushed a pink post-it note toward him that slid nicely beneath her two red and freshly lacquered fingernails. The note contained ten bubbly numbers written in a pungent black ink. Marcus raised a single graying eyebrow. His index finger pulled the sticky note closer, and he memorized the figures with record speed.

"What are you doing?" The question felt important, so he said it.

"Asking you out." She patted her mouth with a napkin peppered with light pink cherry blossoms. Everything she said sounded so matterof-fact, so wrapped up in a bow. "Yes, I see that." He raised an eyebrow at her. He didn't know how to explain that he wasn't sure *why* she would be doing that. He was a custodian, eternally middleaged, and quiet. What else was there to know?

"You like Elton John, you can sing, and you like reading about vampires," she said, as if seeing inside his mind. "Trust me, those stars align far less often than you would think."

A beat of silence.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty four this October." She tapped her fingers on the table. "And *single*."

"Do you know how old I am?" Another important question. He imagined her mouth as he asked it.

Angelina rested her chin in her palm and began twirling the butter knife on the tabletop.

"When I need that answer,"

she said, smiling into the formica. "I know who to ask."

#

When Marcus arrived home, it was just past four in the morning. After dozing off on the bus and making two thoughtless wrong turns, he floated into the shabby brown doors of his apartment building before the first beams of light jutted their way through the trees. His seventy-five-year old neighbor, Magdalena, was out Magdalena had two grown smoking a cigarette in the hallway as he approached with his keys.

"Look what the cat dragged in," she murmured over the course of a single, raspy exhale. "They still treating you good at that hospital, baby? When are they going to give you something other than the graveyard shift?" Magdalena crossed her legs and leaned against the wall. The bells on her tiger slippers jingled in the haze of the hallway. Marcus waved at her politely.

"I love the graveyard shift," he said, fumbling with the ancient lock. "Keeps me young."

She squinted at him.

"So you say. But, now that you mention it, you do look sort of chipper today."

Marcus decided to change the subject. It was hard to talk about something you didn't understand.

"How are the boys?"

sons. One was a teacher. The other was a drunken marine who was dishonorably discharged from both the corps and her household. Magdalena, bless her heart, also took care of his two sons, Carlos and Dwayne, with something between a militant iron fist and a grandmother's heartfelt doting.

"Same old, same old. Dwayne won the spelling bee, and Marcus got a girlfriend."

"Who?" Marcus glanced over his shoulder as the lock finally unlatched.

"Carlos. He fixed up the courage to finally ask that girl #

he's been chasing to prom."

"You must be proud." Marcus nodded as he jostled the door open. "Have a good day, Magdalena."

"I am. I am. You too, baby."

With the door tightly shut behind him, Marcus let out a single, shaky breath. Mostly because it felt like the right thing to do. Next, he pulled out a first, then second, then third blood bag from his satchel, carefully avoiding the nail file he used on his incisors and his emergency umbrella, and set them evenly on the wire racks in his vellowing and otherwise empty fridge. When he turned back to the counter, the pink slip at the bottom of his bag called out to him from the cream-colored tile floor. He knelt down to pick it up and pressed the fragrant paper to his chapping lips.

"What a day." He shook his head as he imagined the face of Angelina, pale and blueeved, then her neck and her thighs. "What a goddamn day."

The logistics of the Sunday service in question would be the death of him if he wasn't careful. So Marcus tried to hold out on setting a date for as long as he could, but she worked him over like oil on a stubborn lock.

The three-week long marathon of anxious, yet endearing text messages from Angelina consumed him more than his determination to exercise reason. Reasonable vampires would not talk to curious young women. Marcus knew that. Reasonable vampires would eat girls like this. And it's not like he didn't consider it. There was a risk in getting close to a coworker, let alone a neighbor, after all. But it was as if she wanted to know everything about him in a particular way, to consume his inner thoughts like they were her most addictive candy. His hobbies, his passions, his ideas. She liked them. And he liked that she liked them. So he let her-one after another, one bite at a time-enjoy them. And, if he was being honest, he didn't mind her attention or her questions that ranged from the mundane to the intimate. Whether he liked Anne Rice or whether he ever wanted to

have children. Yes and no. She always listened. She liked to listen. And what a rare thing that was. It might have even been nice, for once, to be noticed by someone. More than to be noticed, but to be seen.

All of this, coupled with her intoxicatingly innocent hallway glances at work had more than solidified his fate.

Marcus stood at the entrance to his local Trader Joe's on a rainy Saturday evening, trying to weigh the romantic differences between blue carnations and white roses. They were somehow all out of red ones. Perhaps it was because it was the night before Easter, so all the wellto-do housewives and holierthan-thou grandmothers had raided the floral section for their tabletop centerpieces. Maybe it was just a cruel twist of fate. But in the end, he decided on the roses because he felt like they were the kind of thing a man should buy for a pretty woman. Carnations were more of a chaste performer's reward, and Marcus wanted to be very clear about his intentions.

With the proper bouquet in hand, he went over the plan

in his head. Marcus had just a few hours before the sun was going to make things very difficult. He would have to get to the church in the middle of night, somehow make it inside and remain unseen until the service, and he would have to do it all without setting off any alarms, figurative or otherwise. But that was ok, he reasoned, because he knew how to pick locks. And it would just be a few hours of waiting. It could have been worse.

Everything went off without a hitch. Marcus walked three blocks from his usual stop and arrived at the church just as the sky started to careen with churning and unruly thunder. It was a brick building with two ornate stained glass windows that stared down at the onlookers from their wide and chiseled steeple. A little sign out front read 'Sinners Wanted: Apply Within', which Marcus shrugged at and took to be an invitation as good as any.

He made swift work of the lock on an unassuming side window, propped it open, and pulled himself inside.
Though, he had miscalculated

how far down the drop would be, and promptly plummeted into the echoing wood with a loud and clumsy thud. Thunder rang out from the sky, which masked some of the noise he had been making, or so he thought. vampire studied the room, making note of the large, wooden pews currently obscuring his view and the door just to the right of the aisle. It looked to be a close the noise he had been making, being seen, so long as he

"God," he groaned, his face pressed against the hardwood. That was going to bruise. Marcus looked over to his side, examined the roses in the dark, and found them to be perfectly unscathed. Just when he was going to accept the fleeting feeling of relief, a voice wandered into the air like a mist.

"Hello?" A deep voice echoed. "Who's there?"

Marcus felt his eyes widen at the sound. He quietly scrambled to his knees and perked up his ears. Usually, Marcus could hear a pulse from a room away and by proxy locate a whole person. Or at least detect them. But over the rain and his own racing panic, Marcus could only hear the footsteps in the dark as they patterned in calculated ticks across the floor.

Think, Marucs, think. The

making note of the large, wooden pews currently obscuring his view and the door just to the right of the aisle. It looked to be a closet. He could get there without being seen, so long as he moved fast. The footsteps suddenly stopped, and Marcus, thinking quickly, snatched the roses from the floor and darted into the closet, moving more hastily than any human could ever hope to see. With the door tightly shut, Marcus backed into the corner. No sounds came from the outside. Nothing but the puttering of rain against the roof and a tight, cottony panic as it packed itself firmly into the channels of his trembling ears.

#

Against all odds, the rest of that Sunday went on as planned. Marcus somehow emerged from the closet, noted the sign that read 'confessional booth', and straightened his tie without so much as a sideways glance from anyone around. There were too many people to notice, at least, and far too many people to care. Like worker bees in beige suits and blue dresses, the churchgoers

around Marcus buzzed with a familial sort of excitement that he could neither place nor understand. But when he spotted her, that feeling drifted away like a breezeand so too did the memory of being cramped in that airless room.

"You made it!" Angelina waddled between limbs and bodies to squeeze her way over to him. She wore a short white dress that cinched at the waist. And while he watched her walk, he noted a little bruise on her ankle. The vampire licked his lips.

"I did. But are you sure this is a church?" He feigned ignorance. "This place should be cinders with me standing in it. And yet-"

He gestured to the air. She giggled.

Angelina led him by the hand to a pew where she told him he'd have the best view. His only issue was that the massive crucifix on the wall behind the pulpit sort of gave him a headache to look at. It whirred and simmered on his irises if he stared at it too closely. But he kept that information to himself as she

kissed him on the cheek.

"Thank you for the flowers," she said. If he hadn't done so already, he thought he might have died. "White is my favorite."

He sat stunned and wordless for the entirety of the service. The songs, of course, were catchy enough. The sermon was fast enough. But the way Angelina would smile and sway as she strummed her little guitar made Marcus's mind wander out of the church, far from the streets, or their city, or their lives. Marcus's mind was in the clouds, amidst the stars themselves, and it remained there for the next three blissful weeks.

He snuck in every Saturday night, and stayed until sundown on Sundays, hiding in the basement or making himself comfortable in the attic where he would drink or read or sleep. The only trouble was, the more time he would spend with that girl, the more blood he would drink. He was going through bag after bag, more than one a day. The hospital even held a staff meeting about 'missing specimens'. But there was no stopping him now. When the

day had given itself up to the night, Marcus would emerge from the church basement and slink out the window, texting Angelina immediately and inviting her out for an evening stroll, or a movie, or the mall. It was an easy little routine. And no one was noticing. Marcus, after all, was highly trained in the art of remaining invisible. Or at least, it felt that way for a while.

On the night of the fourth Saturday, Marcus arrived at his usual window, only to find it strangely open.

Nothing came of it, thankfully. But at the end of the usual service, the priest walked up to him quietly, long after Angelina had left for her car, and caught him by the arm just as he was headed for the stairs.

"Marcus, is it?" An eerily familiar voice asked.
"Angelina's Marcus?"

Marcus's head turned slowly as if he were an owl and stared down at the hand on his elbow.

"Uh," he stuttered, "Yes?"

"I think you should join the church choir," the priest said, pushing up his glasses. "That way you'd have reason to be here so late on Saturdays."

Marcus swallowed, feeling the whole world stop around him. He blinked, completely stunned, and said nothing.

"Churches aren't places for deadweight, son," the priest tried again. "And Angelina said you're a natural."

Marcus stared forward, too stunned to speak.

"I'm trying to help you son, if you'd let me." The priest patted Marcus's arm. "So, what do you say?"

And that's how, without another thought, Marcus nodded and became the best lead tenor that the St. Anne's Chapel had ever seen.

#

"Angelina?" Marcus asked, squeezing her hand under the milky lamplights of the Trinity Oaks Park. "What would you do if you couldn't die?"

"You mean other than going to heaven?" She asked.

than heaven."

"Yes." He nodded. "Other

"You always ask such fun questions." She pursed her lips as she thought about it. "I think I would buy a plot of land somewhere. Maybe out in Washington state. In the woods. Then, I'd open a library for night owls and collect my favorite books. Or buy lots of Apple stock. I'm sure God would let me know."

"You seem ambitious," Marcus chuckled.

"I am." She squeezed his hand. "Speaking of which, I want to see *your* apartment. Perhaps even make you a meal. I think it's about time, don't you think? I'm rather good at cooking. And we could practice that hymn-'New Wine' was it? Until you get that third stanza right."

"I don't see why not." Marcus blinked. "No need to cook, though. But I'd love to do just about everything else." He pressed her hand to his lips and shuddered at the honeysuckle ache biting at the back of his throat.

#

The very next Saturday,
Marcus rolled out of bed early
and scrubbed his whole
studio down to its bones. He
cleared his throat as Angelina
arrived around noon, just
after he lit the candles and set
his Spotify playlist to a
thoughtfully curated
collection of Elton John and
Eddie Murphy.

"Oh my God." Angelina paused between each word and blushed. He watched her as she pressed both her hands to her cheeks. "Marcus, I had no idea you were a hopeless romantic."

"I have my secrets." He repressed a cough and gestured for her to enter, and so she did. So perfectly. So willfully. So well. He closed the door behind her and locked it without thinking. And when she turned around, without a prompt or a prayer —it happened.

"I love you," she said, taking his face in her hands. His nostrils flared.

"What?"

"I love *you*," she pressed his cheeks. "So, are you going to kiss me or not?"

Marcus swallowed and tripped over the words. "I am."

And so he dove in with his face, hoping to find her lips, but did so at such an angle and with such force that he clobbered her right in the nose. She winced and fell backwards, slamming her head against the corner of his kitchen countertop. Then, as if in slow, lifeless motion, she thudded to the floor, red rivers pouring out from both her perfectly small nostrils.

Everything next was a blur. The red, the slurping, their shared little moans. He couldn't help it. Until he stumbled back shivering, his mouth sopping wet. All trembling. All aching. All horror.

"Shit." He pressed his fingers into his cheeks, pulling the transparent skin down from

his sullen eyes. "Heavens above. Fuck me." Marcus scrambled backwards.

"Angelina?" His voice wavered slightly as he studied the fading blue roses in her eyes. But she was not there. The light of her was snuffed out like a match. He brought his face to his knees and shivered. Think Marcus, think.

#

Marcus had no idea what to do. He paced his apartment floor for hours, glancing at her unseeing eyes every now and again. At some point, he reasoned there was no solving the issue of her body now. As the clock ticked past three in the morning, the best thing he could do was act normal, and normal meant leaving for church and securing his alibi.

"I'm going to hell," he muttered, grabbing his coat and keys. "I'm absolutely going to hell."

#

He insisted she was sick, that it was just a bad case of mono and that she would be fine in due time. The band offered their prayers, which made him feel ill.

"No prayers needed." He raised both his hands. "She will be fine." But the words stuck in his mouth like sharp razor wire, and his unbeating heart throbbed like a fresh wound.

The service came and went, and he was eager to be done with it. But just as Marcus darted for the basement door, a familiar tap prodded at his shoulder.

"My son?"

Marcus paused, frowned, and glared at the priest, who was smothering a piece of bread in jelly with a dirty butter knife. Patience was in short supply that day, but Marcus held his tongue.

"You don't look well." The Priest turned the knife over slowly and wiped the blade clean. "Maybe you should eat something." He handed Marcus the limp slice. Marcus stared at it silently.

"Thanks."

"All good things to the glory of God." The priest nodded. "See you next week."

#

On the account of some undeserved miracle, Marcus made it home. As he stood outside his door, fumbling with his keys, his neighbor Magdalena leaned against the wall smoking yet another silky cigarette. It wafted into the air like a spiders bending web.

"Those things will kill you, you know," Marcus said, fidgeting with the keyhole.

"Your girlfriend seems to like them," Magdalena exhaled as she spoke. Marcus's head snapped back to face her. She raised an eyebrow at him and rubbed her swollen ankle against her calf.

"What's her name?"
Magdalena pointed with her
two fingers. "Anabella or
something? You never told
me. She sounded Russian."

Marcus blinked at his neighbor slowly, waiting for her to continue. "Angelina."

"That's the one." Magdalena nodded. "She came out here soaking wet, banging on my door, asking for paper towels and a cigarette. Gave me thirty dollars for the trouble before she went back inside. Called me a doll." Magdalena puffed a little ring from her wrinkled lips. "I like her."

With his whole body feeling like a freshly shaken soda can, Marcus turned back to the door. He shoved the key into the hole with a newborn and violent intensity.

"Have a good day, Magdalena," he mumbled as he forced the key to move.

"Oh-one more thing!" She called out to him. Marcus sighed and turned his head.

"I'm in a bit of a hurry."

"I'm sure you are," Magdalena coughed. "Some men from the hospital came by earlier. Asked me if I'd seen you with any hospital *property*. I told them no. Obviously."

She raised a mother's eyebrow up at him. Marcus swallowed. He said nothing.

"Stay out of trouble, baby," she said, but her voice was just a blur.

Marcus slammed the door shut behind him, his arms pressed to the wall. He stared at the scene before him with freshly wide eyes to find that the blood was all gone, but the candles were still lit. And then, it happened. Again.

Angelina Zanovich, in all of her glory, sat long-ways on his sofa, legs crossed and lips humming, wearing his clothes. In her hands was a dog-eared copy of some book he had already forgotten to finish. And though Marcus parted his lips, the words never came. At least, not from him.

"Hello, Marcus." She lowered the cover, her red eyes peeking over the pages. "I have a question for you."

Anastasia Gustafson is a graduate student at Northwestern University studying creative writing.

She has an undergraduate degree in English and education. Her work has appeared in the National Council for Teachers of English, in 1/10th of a Second (an Amazon Documentary). She writes vampire fiction for thousands of readers on Archive of Our Own.



# 50 Chilling Haunted Doll Writing Prompts: Unleash Terrifying Tales of Possessed Playthings

Haunted dolls have long been a staple of horror literature and film, captivating audiences with their eerie charm and sinister potential. These seemingly innocent playthings turned vessels of supernatural terror provide fertile ground for writers seeking to craft spine-chilling tales. Whether you're a seasoned horror author or an aspiring writer looking to delve into the macabre, our

comprehensive list of 50 haunted doll writing prompts is sure to ignite your imagination and send shivers down your readers' spines.

From antique porcelain dolls with secrets spanning generations to modern toys harboring malevolent spirits, these prompts cover a wide spectrum of haunted doll scenarios. Each idea serves as a springboard for your creativity, offering unique twists on classic horror tropes and introducing fresh concepts to the genre. You'll find prompts that explore the psychological horror of possessed playthings, the dark magic of cursed objects,

and the heart-pounding suspense of supernatural mysteries.

Our collection of writing prompts caters to various storytelling styles and formats. Whether you're crafting a short story, outlining a novel, or even brainstorming ideas for a screenplay, these prompts provide versatile starting points. They range from subtle, creeping horror to more overt supernatural elements, allowing you to tailor the level of fear to your target audience and preferred writing style.

These haunted doll prompts not only tap into the primal

fear of inanimate objects coming to life but also explore deeper themes. Many of these ideas touch on concepts of innocence corrupted, the persistence of memory, and the blurred lines between the world of the living and the dead. By using these prompts, you can create stories that resonate on multiple levels, offering both surface-level scares and deeper, more unsettling undercurrents.

Whether you're participating in a writing challenge, seeking inspiration for your next horror project, or simply looking to flex your creative muscles, this list of 50 haunted doll writing prompts is an invaluable resource. Each prompt is designed to spark your imagination and help you craft chilling narratives that will leave your readers checking over their shoulders and eyeing their dolls with newfound suspicion. Dive into these prompts and bring your most terrifying haunted doll stories to life!

- 1. A child receives a hand-me-down doll that whispers at night.
- 2. An antique shop owner can't seem to get rid of a particular porcelain

- doll.
- 3. A dollmaker discovers their creations come to life when no one's watching.
- A ghost hunter investigates a doll that appears in different places in a haunted house.
- A doll starts writing messages to its owner in crayon.
- An old doll is found walled up in an abandoned orphanage.
- 7. A collector buys a cursed doll at an estate sale.
- 8. A child's imaginary friend turns out to be the spirit inhabiting their doll.
- 9. A doll with missing eyes seems to watch people anyway.
- 10.A family heirloom doll carries a dark secret through generations.
- 11.A haunted doll causes nightmares for whoever sleeps near it.
- 12.A doll collector slowly realizes all their dolls are possessed.
- 13.A doll hospital worker encounters a patient that refuses to be "fixed."
- 14.A haunted doll seeks revenge on the person who murdered its original owner.

- 15.A child psychologist uses dolls in therapy, not realizing one is haunted.
- 16.A doll starts aging rapidly, revealing the fate of its long-lost owner.
- 17.A cursed doll must be passed on to a new owner every 13 days.
- 18.A doll's laughter echoes through an empty house at midnight.
- 19.A haunted doll protects its owner from supernatural threats.
- 20.A person realizes their childhood doll has followed them into adulthood.
- 21.A doll carries the soul of a witch executed centuries ago.
- 22.Identical haunted twin dolls cause mischief when separated.
- 23.A doll's eyes follow visitors in a museum exhibit.
- 24.A haunted doll manipulates its young owner into dangerous situations.
- 25.A person inherits a collection of dolls, each possessed by a family member.
- 26.A doll starts reproducing, creating miniature versions of itself.

- 27.A haunted doll communicates through a child's baby monitor.
- 28.A person discovers their boss keeps a haunted doll in their office.
- 29.A doll becomes jealous of its owner's real baby.
- 30.A haunted doll influences world events from a dusty attic.
- 31.A doll carries a plague that infects other toys.
- 32.A haunted doll grants wishes, but at a terrible price.
- 33.A person realizes their GPS's voice belongs to a haunted doll in their backseat.
- 34.A doll feeds on negative emotions, causing strife in a household.
- 35.A haunted doll swaps places with a real child.
- 36.A doll's singing voice lures people to their doom.
- 37.A haunted doll leaves muddy footprints throughout a clean house.
- 38.A person falls in love with a doll possessed by a charming spirit.
- 39.A doll holds the key to solving a century-old murder mystery.
- 40.A haunted doll torments a babysitter

- during a stormy night.
- 41.A doll carriesprophetic messages about future disasters.
- 42.A haunted doll gradually takes over its owner's identity.
- 43.A doll acts as a portal between the world of the living and the dead.
- 44.A person discovers their childhood doll is actually a powerful protection charm.
- 45.A haunted doll influences its owners to recreate its tragic past.
- 46.A doll carries the combined spirits of an entire lost village.
- 47.A haunted doll slowly drains the life force of those around it.
- 48.A person must complete a series of tasks given by a doll to break a family curse.
- 49.A doll serves as a judge, jury, and executioner for supernatural crimes.
- 50.A haunted doll reveals a different horrifying scene in its eyes each time someone looks into them.

As you reach the end of this extensive list of haunted doll writing prompts, you're now armed with a wealth of spinechilling ideas to fuel your

creativity. Each prompt serves as a portal to a unique world of horror, waiting for you to breathe life into it with your words. Remember, these prompts are merely starting points – feel free to twist, combine, or expand upon them to create truly original and terrifying tales.

The versatility of these prompts allows you to explore various subgenres within horror. From gothic horror set in creaky old mansions to modern supernatural thrillers in bustling cities, the potential settings and time periods for your haunted doll stories are limitless. Don't be afraid to push boundaries and subvert expectations - sometimes the most memorable horror stories are those that challenge conventional tropes.

As you craft your tales of possessed playthings and malevolent toys, consider the psychological aspects of your characters. How do they react to the realization that something seemingly innocent harbors dark forces? Exploring the human element alongside the supernatural can add depth to your stories and make the horror more

# Someday I'll be dead and as for pizza

by Gale (Acuff

Someday I'll be dead and as for pizza and tacos and popcorn and Sugar Smacks there won't be any, in Heaven nor Hell, but only on Earth, if I understand my Afterlife correctly, and I told my Sunday School teacher so but she laughed and said that I won't have to fret about food when I'm expired but I told her that if I couldn't eat and drink and even burp then I'd rather stay alive but she frowned and said No, Dear, that's impossible, those are all things of the flesh but your soul's what's most important—have you forgotten "Man does not live by bread alone"? so I asked Doesn't that just mean when I'm alive?

Gale Acuff has had hundreds of poems published in a dozen countries and has authored three books of poetry. His poems have appeared in Ascent, Reed, Arkansas Review, Poem, Slant, Aethlon, Florida Review, South Carolina Review, Carolina Quarterly, Roanoke Danse Macabre, Ohio Journal, Sou'wester, South Dakota Review, North Dakota Quarterly, New Texas, Midwest Quarterly, Poetry Midwest, Adirondack Review, Worcester Review, Adirondack Review, Connecticut River Review, Delmarva Review, Maryland Poetry Review, Maryland Literary Review, George Washington Review, Pennsylvania Literary Journal, Ann Arbor Review, Plainsongs, Chiron Review, George Washington Review, McNeese Review, Weber, War, Literature & the Arts, Poet Lore, Able Muse, The Font, Fine Lines, Teach. Write., Oracle, Hamilton Stone Review, Sequential Art Narrative in Education, Cardiff Review, Tokyo Review, Indian Review, Muse India, Bombay Review, Westerly, and many other journals.

Gale has taught tertiary English courses in the US, PR China, and Palestine.

relatable and impactful for your readers.

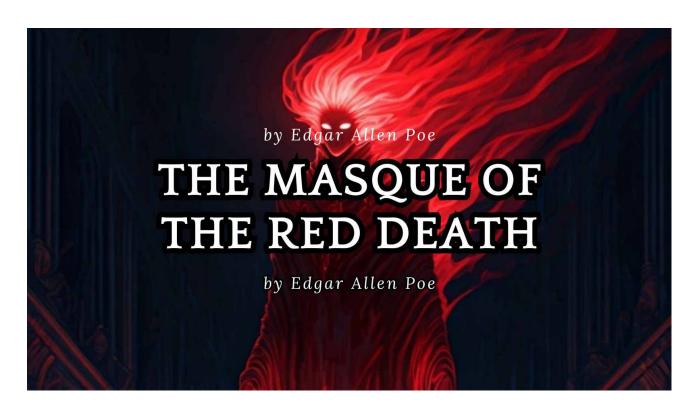
While writing, pay attention to pacing and atmosphere. Haunted doll stories often thrive on a slow build of tension, punctuated by moments of sheer terror. Use descriptive language to create a sense of unease, and don't shy away from appealing to all senses in your writing. The creak of a doll's joints, the musty smell of old fabric, or

the cold touch of porcelain can all contribute to a truly immersive horror experience.

Finally, remember that the most effective horror often leaves something to the imagination. While some prompts might inspire graphic or explicit scenes, consider the power of suggestion and implied horror. Sometimes, what's left unseen can be far more terrifying than what's

explicitly described. With these prompts as your foundation and your imagination as your guide, you're well-equipped to craft haunting tales that will linger in your readers' minds long after they've turned the final page. Happy writing, and may your haunted doll stories send chills down spines for years to come!





The "Red Death" had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution. The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. And the whole seizure, progress and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour.

But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and

sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys. This was an extensive and magnificent structure, the creation of the prince's own eccentric yet august taste. A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, brought furnaces and massy hammers and welded the bolts. They resolved to leave means neither of ingress nor egress to the sudden impulses of despair or of frenzy from

within. The abbey was amply provisioned. With such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion. The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think. The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty, there was wine. All these and security were within. Without was the "Red Death".

It was towards the close of the fifth or sixth month of his seclusion, and while the pestilence raged most furiously abroad, that the Prince Prospero entertained his thousand friends at a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence.

It was a voluptuous scene, that masquerade. But first let me tell of the rooms in which it was held. These were seven - an imperial suite. In many palaces, however, such suites form a long and straight vista, while the folding doors slide back nearly to the walls on either hand, so that the view of the whole extent is scarcely impeded. Here the case was very different, as might have been expected from the duke's love of the bizarre. The apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision embraced but little more than one at a time. There was a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect. To the right and left, in the middle of each wall, a tall and narrow Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor which pursued the windings of the suite. These windows were of stained glass whose colour varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened. That at the eastern extremity was hung, for example in blue – and vividly blue were its

windows. The second chamber was purple in its ornaments and tapestries, and here the panes were purple. The third was green throughout, and so were the casements. The fourth was furnished and lighted with orange – the fifth with white - the sixth with violet. The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls, falling in heavy folds upon a carpet of the same material and hue. But in this chamber only, the colour of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes here were scarlet—a deep blood colour. Now in no one of the seven apartments was there any lamp or candelabrum, amid the profusion of golden ornaments that lay scattered to and fro or depended from the roof. There was no light of any kind emanating from lamp or candle within the suite of chambers. But in the corridors that followed the suite, there stood, opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire, that projected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illumined the room. And thus were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances. But in the western or black chamber the

effect of the fire-light that streamed upon the dark hangings through the bloodtinted panes, was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all.

It was in this apartment, also, that there stood against the western wall, a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when the minute-hand made the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to harken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows

as if in confused revery or meditation. But when the echoes had fully ceased, a light laughter at once pervaded the assembly; the musicians looked at each other and smiled as if at their own nervousness and folly, and made whispering vows, each to the other, that the next chiming of the clock should produce in them no similar emotion; and then, after the lapse of sixty minutes, (which embrace three thousand and six hundred seconds of the Time that flies,) there came yet another chiming of the clock, and then were the same disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before.

But, in spite of these things, it was a gay and magnificent revel. The tastes of the duke were peculiar. He had a fine eye for colours and effects. He disregarded the decora of mere fashion. His plans were bold and fiery, and his conceptions glowed with barbaric lustre. There are some who would have thought him mad. His followers felt that he was not. It was necessary to hear and see and touch him to be sure that he was not.

He had directed, in great part, the movable embellishments

of the seven chambers, upon occasion of this great fête; and it was his own guiding taste which had given character to the masqueraders. Be sure they were grotesque. There were much glare and glitter and piquancy and phantasm - much of what has been since seen in "Hernani". There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There were much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust. To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams. And these – the dreams – writhed in and about taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps. And, anon, there strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of the velvet. And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice of the clock. The dreams are stifffrozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away - they have endured but an instant - and a light, halfsubdued laughter floats after them as they depart. And now again the music swells, and the dreams live, and

writhe to and fro more merrily than ever, taking hue from the many tinted windows through which stream the rays from the tripods. But to the chamber which lies most westwardly of the seven, there are now none of the maskers who venture; for the night is waning away; and there flows a ruddier light through the blood-coloured panes; and the blackness of the sable drapery appals; and to him whose foot falls upon the sable carpet, there comes from the near clock of ebony a muffled peal more solemnly emphatic than any which reaches their ears who indulged in the more remote gaieties of the other apartments.

But these other apartments were densely crowded, and in them beat feverishly the heart of life. And the revel went whirlingly on, until at length there commenced the sounding of midnight upon the clock. And then the music ceased, as I have told; and the evolutions of the waltzers were quieted; and there was an uneasy cessation of all things as before. But now there were twelve strokes to be sounded by the bell of the clock; and thus it happened, perhaps, that more of thought

crept, with more of time, into the meditations of the thoughtful among those who revelled. And thus too, it happened, perhaps, that before the last echoes of the last chime had utterly sunk into silence, there were many individuals in the crowd who had found leisure to become aware of the presence of a masked figure which had arrested the attention of no single individual before. And the rumour of this new presence having spread itself whisperingly around, there arose at length from the whole company a buzz, or murmur, expressive of disapprobation and surprise — then, finally, of terror, of horror, and of disgust.

In an assembly of phantasms such as I have painted, it may well be supposed that no ordinary appearance could have excited such sensation. In truth the masquerade licence of the night was nearly unlimited; but the figure in question had out-Heroded Herod, and gone beyond the bounds of even the prince's indefinite decorum. There are chords in the hearts of the most reckless which cannot be moment with a strong touched without emotion. Even with the utterly lost, to whom life and death are equally jests, there are matters

of which no jest can be made. The whole company, indeed, seemed now deeply to feel that in the costume and bearing of the stranger neither blasphemous mockery? Seize wit nor propriety existed. The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat. And yet all this might have been endured, if not approved, by the mad revellers around. But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. His vesture was dabbled in blood - and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror.

When the eyes of the Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image (which, with a slow and solemn movement, as if more fully to sustain its role, stalked to and fro among the waltzers) he was seen to be convulsed, in the first shudder either of terror or distaste; but, in the next, his brow reddened with rage.

"Who dares," — he demanded hoarsely of the courtiers who stood near him - "who dares insult us with this him and unmask him - that we may know whom we have to hang, at sunrise, from the battlements!"

It was in the eastern or blue chamber in which stood the Prince Prospero as he uttered these words. They rang throughout the seven rooms loudly and clearly, for the prince was a bold and robust man, and the music had become hushed at the waving of his hand.

It was in the blue room where stood the prince, with a group of pale courtiers by his side. At first, as he spoke, there was a slight rushing movement of this group in the direction of the intruder, who at the moment was also near at hand, and now, with deliberate and stately step, made closer approach to the speaker. But from a certain nameless awe with which the mad assumptions of the mummer had inspired the whole party, there were found none who put forth hand to seize him; so that, unimpeded, he passed within a yard of the prince's person;

and, while the vast assembly, as if with one impulse, shrank from the centres of the rooms to the walls, he made his way uninterruptedly, but with the same solemn and measured step which had distinguished him from the first, through the blue chamber to the purple – through the purple to the green — through the green to the orange — through this again to the white—and even thence to the violet, ere a decided movement had been made to arrest him. It was then, however, that the Prince Prospero, maddening with rage and the shame of his own momentary cowardice, rushed hurriedly through the six chambers, while none followed him on account of a deadly terror that had seized upon all. He bore aloft a drawn dagger, and had approached, in rapid impetuosity, to within three or four feet of the retreating figure, when the latter, having attained the extremity of the velvet apartment, turned suddenly and confronted his pursuer. There was a sharp cry—and the dagger dropped gleaming upon the sable carpet, upon which, instantly afterwards, fell prostrate in death the Prince Prospero. Then, summoning the wild courage of despair, a throng of the revellers at once threw themselves into the black

apartment, and, seizing the mummer, whose tall figure stood erect and motionless within the shadow of the ebony clock, gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave cerements and corpse-like mask, which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form.

And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.

mystery and the macabre, Poe is considered the inventor of the detective fiction genre and is further credited with contributing to the emerging genre of science fiction.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Poe was orphaned at a young age and taken in by John and Frances Allan of Richmond, Virginia. He attended the University of Virginia but left after a year due to lack of money. After enlisting in the Army and later failing as an officer's cadet at West Point, Poe parted ways with the Allans. His publishing career began humbly with an anonymous collection of poems, Tamerlane and Other Poems (1827), credited only to "a Bostonian". Visit our Poe archive for more.

#### Bio

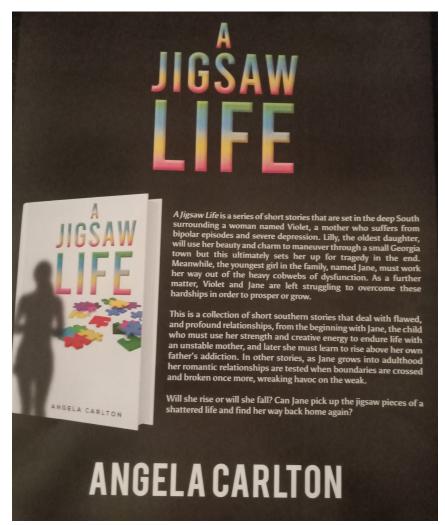
Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was an American writer, poet, editor, and literary critic, widely regarded as a central figure of Romanticism in the United States and of American literature as a whole. Best known for his poetry and short stories, particularly his tales of





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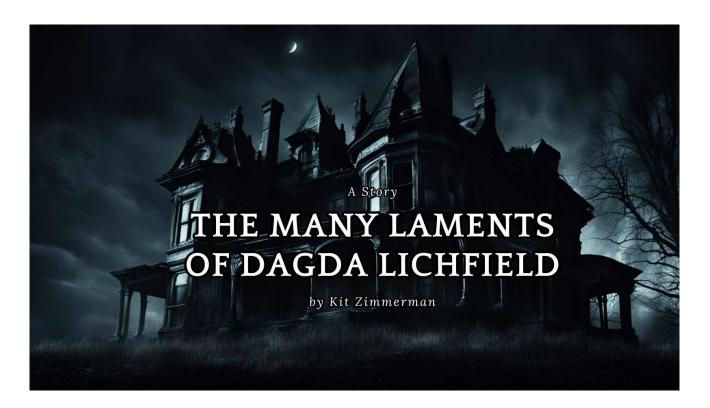
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#### Description

A book of short stories including the title story new from LB Sedlacek. The stories are mostly science fiction with the title story delving into the mystery behind the mysterious Jackalope! Other stories dive into sailing and sailors, two guys having tea in a tea shop dive diner, a bank robbery and more. Published by Alien Buddha Press: "LB Sedlacek writes compelling tales that will have you thinking about deja vu, jackalopes, and deeper existential issues long after you've finished. Pick this one up!" – Nakayla Gallegos, Author of Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires

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## The Many Laments of Dagda Lichfield

by Kit Zimmerman

Dagda could hear the mob beating on the many dilapidated entrances of Ashview Manor. Sweat, dripping from his aquiline nose, conspired with wheezing, panicked coughs to extinguish the flame of his tenuously held candle as he lit the wicks of others lining the tiered shelves of the cellar's cool stone walls.

His fears dissipated when candlelight revealed his wife's withered, decomposing body—clothed in a clean white shift—resting on a tall wooden table in the center of the chamber and intersecting ley lines drawn in chalk and bone powder on the granite floor. Inhaling, Dagda delighted in the sweet aroma of decay, appreciating it as Renee's way of letting him know she was present.

By his account, her death had been much like his parents' unexpected and undeserving larceny of the highest order. The illness he'd suffered in childhood had robbed Dagda of both his health and family, and only Renee's unwavering support had seen him through his formative years, notwithstanding the vast wealth of his inheritance. If only she had not tried to leave me, her life might not have been stolen by that murderer, he reasoned. Life in the wake of Renee's loss so soon after their destined wedding had been unbearable. But death, he'd learned, was a temporary state if one only had the wit and will to see it ended.

Another round of hammering from the ground floor broke Dagda's reverie, reminding him why he'd been forced into attempting the ritual. He knew why the misguided peasants of Sableton had come; regular deliveries of food and supplies to his intentionally understaffed home had enabled Dagda's survival and assured his selfimposed isolation immediately following Renee's undisclosed death. Nevertheless, there'd been a recent change in who handled the deliveries – a change, it seemed, that hadn't been without consequence. I'll have that loose-lipped lackey whipped for inciting these imbeciles to interfere with my work!

Circling the table, he ignored - as he had for quite some time—a glimpse of his emaciated form in the nearby standing mirror against the wall by the door. Chin-length, unkempt hair – white, despite youth - parted, revealing jaundiced blue and bloodshot eyes in their gaunt sockets. Dagda also ignored the scuff of his feet through threadbare, hole-ridden socks and the chaffing of his pale and bruised skin against the coarse, tattered remnants of his once finely tailored attire. Halting, he assessed the items covering a desk beside the table: a glass bottle filled with alkahest, an ebonite rod with a glimmering green baetyl

socketed into the grip, and a black-handled dagger carved from the thigh bone of a cleric – rested near two metal spheres situated atop the points of a U-shaped copper stand connected to a gearbox by a single wire. A tall, lamp-like contraption – its long, sturdy pole made of yew with a thin, circular lens of clear quartz bracketed at the end – rose above the rest. Relieved to see everything in order, Dagda poured alkahest over the lens and swiveled the pole, pointing it at Renee's body. He flipped the brass toggle on the gearbox, and the spheres began rotating in opposite directions.

Reaching for the dagger with his right hand, Dagda upturned his left. His gaze traveled from his black onyx wedding band to the bulbous scar marring his palm.

Glass shattered upstairs.

Spurred by the cacophony, Dagda sliced. A red ribbon bloomed, and the scar burst open. Blood gushed, but a surge of adrenaline kept him from swooning as he reached for the ebonite rod. Setting his wound against the baetyl, he withdrew from the desk and aligned the rod between the

spheres – tip pointed at the lens.

Invading footfalls battered the floor above.

A moment of doubt seized Dagda as he recalled a snippet from the grimoire where he'd learned the ritual: "For the dead to walk, one soul is required for each vessel raised."

"Down there!" a man shouted. "Look in the cellar! You lot, check upstairs! Everyone else, spread out! Find him!"

Though he finally possessed all the proper tools, the unresolved question of a soul's existence was all that'd forestalled Dagda's second attempt at the ritual.

Until now.

We are nothing more than flesh, bone, and sinew, he decided.

Visible electric currents ignited between the spheres. Unpredictable bursts of violent, crackling blue energy ionized the air and illuminated the room.

Footsteps thudded on the stairs outside the cellar. "I hear something!" a shrill voice called. "He's in here!"	Dagda's arm hairs stood erect.  Flesh	Dagda's mouth. Convulsing, the acrid stench of burning flesh and heated metal invaded his nostrils. A kaleidoscope of colors erupted before his eyes. His vision blurred, then faded
"Step back," the man from before said. He pounded on the door. "Dagda Lichfield! You're under arrest for necromancy and murder!"	Electricity whipped and popped.  "No, Dagda!"	A chorus of muffled shouts stirred Dagda awake.
Chest heaving, arms shaking, Dagda stepped forward and brought the rod within inches of the spheres.	bone "Don't do it!"	Disoriented, he rose from the table. He nearly toppled when he swung his legs over to stand, but his strong grip on the table's edge kept him upright on trembling legs while he surveyed the room.  Smoke, rising from the smoldering remains of the nearby desk and the shriveled husk of a body on the ground, caught his eye.
"It's locked! Break it down!"	Revolving metal hummed – shaking the desk.	
Bodies rammed against the door, bending it inward, and additional disembodied voices joined the others—a	and sinew  "Open this door	
choir of ignorance unworthy of recognition insofar as Dagda was concerned.	immediately!"  Renee	The door rattled on its hinges.
"Put your backs into it!"  "For Renee's sake, stop this!"	Dagda plunged the rod between the spheres.	I burned her, Dagda thought, numb. I'll have to try again He ventured forward from the table, but fell when his
	Searing pain ignited in his palm, traveled like lightning	foot caught the hem of his long white shift.
The air snapped and sizzled.  "Gods! Hurry! He's going to try it!"	up his arm, and erupted between his shoulders as a green beam of light sprouted from the rod's tip and into the lens. Blood and bile pooled in	Confused, he glanced down from where he sat on the floor.
try it.	icis. blood and blie pooled in	

His left hand had healed—the No, no, no, no, no! skin of his palm smooth and hale. A wedding ring engraved with the intricate, swirling lines of a leaf motif that symbolized his noble house - adorned a bizarre, elegant finger. He tugged at the shift, revealing bronze legs bespeckled with tiny, healthy brown hairs.

The cellar door split at its center, and the repeating thud of a ram resonated throughout the chamber, each blow punctuated by people heaving in unison.

No . . . Crawling, Dagda lunged toward the mirror.

Splinters skittered across the floor, and a burly hand thrust through the door's widening rupture, reaching for the sliding lock.

Dagda froze.

He had intended to offer the mirror as a gift for Renee upon her waking so that she might see herself as he always had, dead or otherwise.

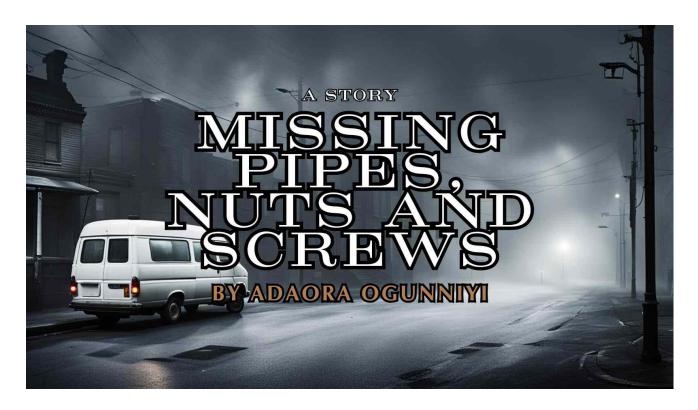
But what Dagda saw in the reflection was no gift.

The doe-brown eyes staring back at him through brunette locks were not his own, nor was the voice that issued a strident, agonized scream when the cellar door flung open.

###

Kit Zimmerman is a debut Texan author and college writing tutor pursuing a BA in Creative Writing and English with a concentration in Fiction.





## Missing Pipes, Nuts and Screws

by Adaora Ogunniyi 'My toast is too dry; it's scratching my lips, Daddy!'

Chuka swallows, clenches his teeth. *Breathe*. *Breathe Chuka*, *breathe*.

Two backpacks bursting with books and snack boxes sit on the kitchen island. Three more.

'Daddy, I cannot find my shoes!' Emeka calls from his bedroom.

'Check under your bed!'

Stubbing his left big toe as he picks up coloured pencils and half-ripped drawing pads from the lounge, Chuka muffles a groan. He grabs three Oreos, three yoghurts and three smaller backpacks.

'Daddy, I feel like throwing up,' Ada says, puckering her lips for emphasis.

Did the smell of burning caramel get to her? Chuka asks her to stop eating, tells Oma to keep on eating: dry toast or not. With a tie wrap, he holds Kosi's tangled hair in a crooked bun, casts a glance Obi's way. But Obi doesn't

notice. He is meticulous with each decisive descent of molars on dry toast. *Mrs Adun's drills*. But Chuka had sworn to obi; last week was the last time. He'll never be late for another maths drill. Never.

'Found it!' Emeka comes hopping on one shoe-clad foot as he works the other. Crash! He knocks down a chair and grabs a toast which he must now eat in the car. On the commute, Chuka snatches six minutes to reclaim his breath. Nkem. My love. 'We're hiring a governess,' he says, his voice a monotone.

Silence.

Once at school, the children

disembark, hurling 'bye daddy' amid car door slams. The drive back home is less frenzied. As he pulls into his driveway, Chuka notices a missing pipe in the gate. When did this happen? One foot smell of wounded lawn and through the door and he wonders how long it'll take to clear the chaos that's his home. School mornings are the worst. Like pulling a tooth reckless was Agnes' embrace from an un-numbed gum.

One school morning arrived after another, until 'Six months' began to unclog the hole of Nkem's passing.

Chuka had to fill it. Fast. He had to resume work and a governess had to commence hers.

For three weeks, under an eagle-eved father, the new governess proved to be exemplary. All was well. Chuka dove under the quilt of long office hours and endless trips, sealing million-dollar deals.

But all wasn't well.

Three months in, and Governess Agnes embraced the unfamiliar luxury of her new workplace. Alone times,

when the children were off to school; assorted meals and drinks that derided depletion; sitting by the swimming pool and sinking feet in lush carpet grass while savouring the chlorin; and the luxury of pay packets – ever timely and bursting with Chuka's gratitude. So warm and that rules soon began to lose their nuts and screws: siestas not observed, vegetables trashed, nighttime teethbrushing gone with the wind. And the internet? The children explored their unfettered access, floating about on the perilous cloud of webs.

A year later, while Agnes lay sprawled on the sofa after three glasses of Sandeman, the children, spurred by the hoarse and somewhat weird, whistling from her throat, scurried away. They'd be back from the newly opened amusement park before Agnes awoke. Uncle X from the web was sure.

Right before they reached the gate, Chuka came driving along. What a surprise. Daddy made it for Oma's birthday! Veiled by the thick fog of that Tuesday afternoon, the white van waiting to whisk his children away melted, unseen, into the mist.

That night, Agnes' mobile phone rang.

'Hello?'

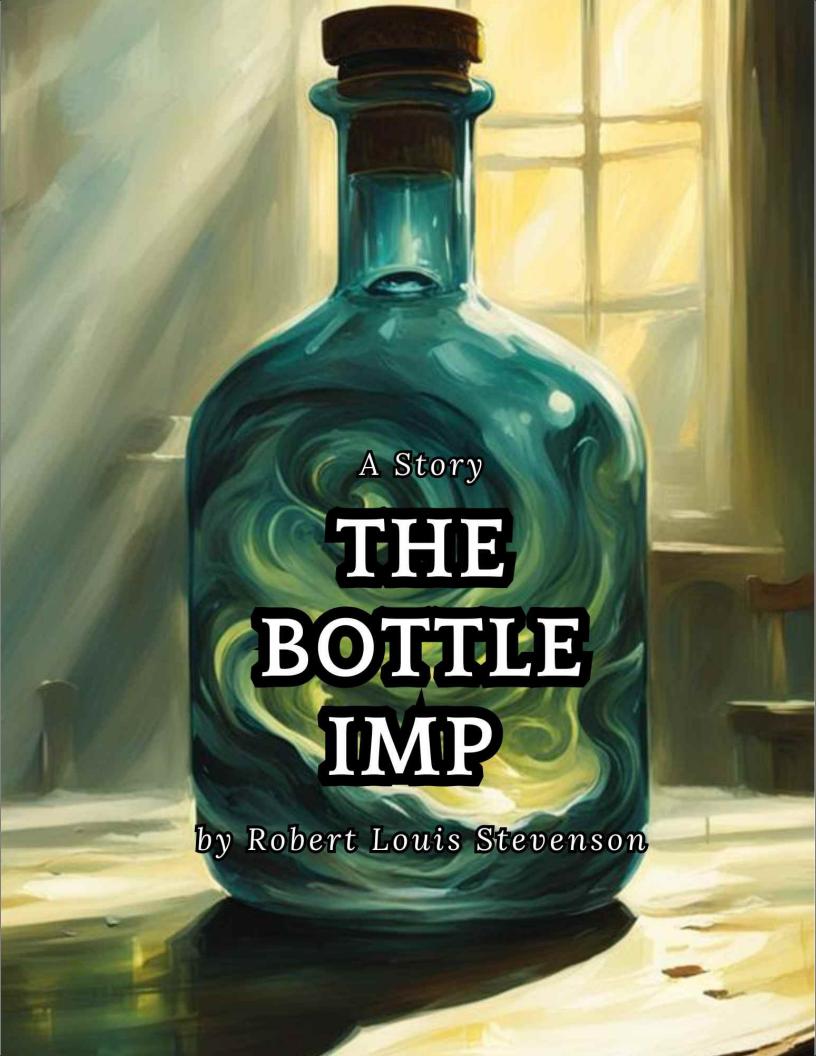
'You fucked up.'

'It's... it's not my fault, he cut short his trip.'

'So, we try again?'

'Yes.'

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#### The Bottle Imp by Robert Louis Stevenson

There was a man of the Island of Hawaii, whom I shall call Keawe; for the truth is, he still lives, and his name must be kept secret; but the place of his birth was not far from Honaunau, where the bones of Keawe the Great lie hidden in a cave. This man was poor, brave, and active: he could read and write like a schoolmaster; he was a firstrate mariner besides, sailed for some time in the island steamers, and steered a whaleboat on the Hamakua coast. At length it came in Keawe's mind to have a sight of the great world and foreign cities, and he shipped on a vessel bound to San Francisco.

This is a fine town, with a fine harbour, and rich people uncountable; and, in particular, there is one hill which is covered with palaces. Upon this hill Keawe was one day taking a walk with his pocket full of money, viewing the great houses upon either hand with pleasure, "What fine houses these are!" he was thinking, "and how happy must those people be who dwell in them, and take no care for the morrow!" The thought was in

his mind when he came abreast of a house that was smaller than some others, but all finished and beautified like a toy; the steps of that house shone like silver, and the borders of the garden bloomed like garlands, and the windows were bright like diamond; and Keawe stopped and wondered at the excellence of all he saw. So stopping, he was aware of a man that looked forth upon him through a window so clear that Keawe could see him as you see a fish in a pool upon the reef. The man was elderly, with a bald head and a black beard; and his face was heavy with sorrow, and he bitterly sighed. And the truth of it is, that as Keawe looked in upon the man, and the man looked out upon Keawe, each envied the other.

All of a sudden, the man smiled and nodded, and beckoned Keawe to enter, and met him at the door of the house.

"This is a fine house of mine," said the man, and bitterly sighed. "Would you not care to view the chambers?"

So he led Keawe all over it, from the cellar to the roof, and there was nothing there

that was not perfect of its kind, and Keawe was astonished.

"Truly," said Keawe, "this is a beautiful house; if I lived in the like of it, I should be laughing all day long. How comes it, then, that you should be sighing?"

"There is no reason," said the man, "why you should not have a house in all points similar to this, and finer, if you wish. You have some money, I suppose?"

"I have fifty dollars," said Keawe; "but a house like this will cost more than fifty dollars."

The man made a computation. "I am sorry you have no more," said he, "for it may raise you trouble in the future; but it shall be yours at fifty dollars."

"The house?" asked Keawe.

"No, not the house," replied the man; "but the bottle. For, I must tell you, although I appear to you so rich and fortunate, all my fortune, and this house itself and its garden, came out of a bottle not much bigger than a pint. This is it."

And he opened a lockfast place, and took out a round-bellied bottle with a long neck; the glass of it was white like milk, with changing rainbow colours in the grain. Withinsides something obscurely moved, like a shadow and a fire.

"This is the bottle," said the man; and, when Keawe laughed, "You do not believe me?" he added. "Try, then, for yourself. See if you can break it."

So Keawe took the bottle up and dashed it on the floor till he was weary; but it jumped on the floor like a child's ball, and was not injured.

"This is a strange thing," said Keawe. "For by the touch of it, as well as by the look, the bottle should be of glass."

"Of glass it is," replied the man, sighing more heavily than ever; "but the glass of it was tempered in the flames of hell. An imp lives in it, and that is the shadow we behold there moving: or so I suppose.

If any man buy this bottle the imp is at his command; all that he desires—love, fame, money, houses like this house, ay, or a city like this city - all are his at the word uttered. Napoleon had this bottle, and by it he grew to be the king of the world; but he sold it at the last, and fell. Captain Cook had this bottle, and by it he found his way to so many islands; but he, too, sold it, and was slain upon Hawaii. For, once it is sold, the power goes and the protection; and unless a man remain content with what he has, ill will befall him."

"And yet you talk of selling it yourself?" Keawe said.

"I have all I wish, and I am growing elderly," replied the man. "There is one thing the imp cannot do—he cannot prolong life; and, it would not be fair to conceal from you, there is a drawback to the bottle; for if a man die before he sells it, he must burn in hell forever."

"To be sure, that is a drawback and no mistake," cried Keawe. "I would not meddle with the thing. I can do without a house, thank God; but there is one thing I could not be doing with one

particle, and that is to be damned."

"Dear me, you must not run away with things," returned the man. "All you have to do is to use the power of the imp in moderation, and then sell it to someone else, as I do to you, and finish your life in comfort."

"Well, I observe two things," said Keawe. "All the time you keep sighing like a maid in love, that is one; and, for the other, you sell this bottle very cheap."

"I have told you already why I sigh," said the man. "It is because I fear my health is breaking up; and, as you said yourself, to die and go to the devil is a pity for anyone. As for why I sell so cheap, I must explain to you there is a peculiarity about the bottle. Long ago, when the devil brought it first upon earth, it was extremely expensive, and was sold first of all to Prester John for many millions of dollars; but it cannot be sold at all, unless sold at a loss. If you sell it for as much as you paid for it, back it comes to you again like a homing pigeon. It follows that the price has kept falling in these centuries, and the bottle is

now remarkably cheap. I bought it myself from one of my great neighbours on this hill, and the price I paid was only ninety dollars. I could sell it for as high as eightynine dollars and ninety-nine cents, but not a penny dearer, or back the thing must come to me. Now, about this there are two bothers. First, when you offer a bottle so singular for eighty odd dollars, people suppose you to be jesting. And second — but there is no hurry about that—and I need not go into it. Only remember it must be coined money that you sell it for."

"How am I to know that this is all true?" asked Keawe.

"Some of it you can try at once," replied the man. "Give me your fifty dollars, take the bottle, and wish your fifty dollars back into your pocket. If that does not happen, I pledge you my honour I will cry off the bargain and restore your money."

"You are not deceiving me?" said Keawe.

The man bound himself with a great oath.

"Well, I will risk that much," said Keawe, "for that can do no harm." And he paid over his money to the man, and the man handed him the bottle.

"Imp of the bottle," said Keawe, "I want my fifty dollars back." And sure enough he had scarce said the word before his pocket was as heavy as ever.

"To be sure this is a wonderful bottle," said Keawe.

"And now good-morning to you, my fine fellow, and the devil go with you for me!" said the man.

"Hold on," said Keawe, "I don't want any more of this fun. Here, take your bottle back."

"You have bought it for less than I paid for it," replied the man, rubbing his hands. "It is yours now; and, for my part, I am only concerned to see the back of you." And with that he rang for his Chinese servant, and had Keawe shown out of the house.

Now, when Keawe was in the

street, with the bottle under his arm, he began to think. "If all is true about this bottle, I may have made a losing bargain," thinks he. "But perhaps the man was only fooling me." The first thing he did was to count his money; the sum was exact—fortynine dollars American money, and one Chili piece. "That looks like the truth," said Keawe. "Now I will try another part."

The streets in that part of the city were as clean as a ship's decks, and though it was noon, there were no passengers. Keawe set the bottle in the gutter and walked away. Twice he looked back, and there was the milky, round-bellied bottle where he left it. A third time he looked back, and turned a corner; but he had scarce done so, when something knocked upon his elbow, and behold! it was the long neck sticking up; and as for the round belly, it was jammed into the pocket of his pilot-coat.

"And that looks like the truth," said Keawe.

The next thing he did was to buy a cork-screw in a shop, and go apart into a secret place in the fields. And there he tried to draw the cork, but as often as he put the screw in, out it came again, and the cork as whole as ever.

"This is some new sort of cork," said Keawe, and all at once he began to shake and sweat, for he was afraid of that bottle.

On his way back to the portside, he saw a shop where a man sold shells and clubs from the wild islands, old heathen deities, old coined money, pictures from China and Japan, and all manner of things that sailors bring in their sea-chests. And here he had an idea. So he went in and offered the bottle for a hundred dollars. The man of the shop laughed at him at the first, and offered him five; but, indeed, it was a curious bottle – such glass was never blown in any human glassworks, so prettily the colours shone under the milky white, and so strangely the shadow hovered in the midst; so, after he had disputed awhile after the manner of his kind, the shopman gave Keawe sixty silver dollars for the thing, and set it on a shelf in the midst of his window.

"Now," said Keawe, "I have sold that for sixty which I bought for fifty—or, to say truth, a little less, because one of my dollars was from Chili. Now I shall know the truth upon another point."

So he went back on board his ship, and, when he opened his chest, there was the bottle, and had come more quickly than himself. Now Keawe had a mate on board whose name was Lopaka.

"What ails you?" said Lopaka, "that you stare in your chest?"

They were alone in the ship's forecastle, and Keawe bound him to secrecy, and told all.

"This is a very strange affair," said Lopaka; "and I fear you will be in trouble about this bottle. But there is one point very clear—that you are sure of the trouble, and you had better have the profit in the bargain. Make up your mind what you want with it; give the order, and if it is done as you desire, I will buy the bottle myself; for I have an idea of my own to get a schooner, and go trading through the islands."

"That is not my idea," said Keawe; "but to have a beautiful house and garden on the Kona Coast, where I was born, the sun shining in at the door, flowers in the garden, glass in the windows, pictures on the walls, and toys and fine carpets on the tables, for all the world like the house I was in this day only a storey higher, and with balconies all about like the King's palace; and to live there without care and make merry with my friends and relatives."

"Well," said Lopaka, "let us carry it back with us to Hawaii; and if all comes true, as you suppose, I will buy the bottle, as I said, and ask a schooner."

Upon that they were agreed, and it was not long before the ship returned to Honolulu, carrying Keawe and Lopaka, and the bottle. They were scarce come ashore when they met a friend upon the beach, who began at once to condole with Keawe.

"I do not know what I am to be condoled about," said Keawe. "Is it possible you have not heard," said the friend, "your uncle—that good old man—is dead, and your cousin—that beautiful boy—was drowned at sea?"

Keawe was filled with sorrow, and, beginning to weep and to lament, he forgot about the bottle. But Lopaka was thinking to himself, and presently, when Keawe's grief was a little abated, "I have been thinking," said Lopaka. "Had not your uncle lands in Hawaii, in the district of Kau?"

"No," said Keawe, "not in Kau; they are on the mountain-side—a little way south of Hookena."

"These lands will now be yours?" asked Lopaka.

"And so they will," says Keawe, and began again to lament for his relatives.

"No," said Lopaka, "do not lament at present. I have a thought in my mind. How if this should be the doing of the bottle? For here is the place ready for your house."

"If this be so," cried Keawe,
"it is a very ill way to serve
me by killing my relatives.
But it may be, indeed; for it
was in just such a station that
I saw the house with my
mind's eye."

"The house, however, is not yet built," said Lopaka.

"No, nor like to be!" said Keawe; "for though my uncle has some coffee and ava and bananas, it will not be more than will keep me in comfort; and the rest of that land is the black lava."

"Let us go to the lawyer," said Lopaka; "I have still this idea in my mind."

Now, when they came to the lawyer's, it appeared Keawe's uncle had grown monstrous rich in the last days, and there was a fund of money.

"And here is the money for the house!" cried Lopaka.

"If you are thinking of a new house," said the lawyer, "here is the card of a new architect, of whom they tell me great things." "Better and better!" cried Lopaka. "Here is all made plain for us. Let us continue to obey orders."

So they went to the architect, and he had drawings of houses on his table.

"You want something out of the way," said the architect. "How do you like this?" and he handed a drawing to Keawe.

Now, when Keawe set eyes on the drawing, he cried out aloud, for it was the picture of his thought exactly drawn.

"I am in for this house," thought he. "Little as I like the way it comes to me, I am in for it now, and I may as well take the good along with the evil."

So he told the architect all that he wished, and how he would have that house furnished, and about the pictures on the wall and the knick-knacks on the tables; and he asked the man plainly for how much he would undertake the whole affair.

The architect put many

questions, and took his pen and made a computation; and when he had done he named the very sum that Keawe had inherited.

Lopaka and Keawe looked at one another and nodded.

"It is quite clear," thought
Keawe, "that I am to have this
house, whether or no. It
comes from the devil, and I
fear I will get little good by
that; and of one thing I am
sure, I will make no more
wishes as long as I have this
bottle. But with the house I
am saddled, and I may as well
take the good along with the
evil."

So he made his terms with the architect, and they signed a paper; and Keawe and Lopaka took ship again and sailed to Australia; for it was concluded between them they should not interfere at all, but leave the architect and the bottle imp to build and to adorn that house at their own pleasure.

The voyage was a good voyage, only all the time Keawe was holding in his breath, for he had sworn he would utter no more wishes, and take no more favours

from the devil. The time was up when they got back. The architect told them that the house was ready, and Keawe and Lopaka took a passage in the Hall, and went down Kona way to view the house, and see if all had been done fitly according to the thought that was in Keawe's mind.

Now the house stood on the mountain side, visible to ships. Above, the forest ran up into the clouds of rain; below, the black lava fell in cliffs, where the kings of old lay buried. A garden bloomed about that house with every hue of flowers; and there was an orchard of papaia on the one hand and an orchard of breadfruit on the other, and right in front, toward the sea, a ship's mast had been rigged up and bore a flag. As for the house, it was three storeys high, with great chambers and broad balconies on each. The windows were of glass, so excellent that it was as clear as water and as bright as day. All manner of furniture adorned the chambers. Pictures hung upon the wall in golden frames: pictures of ships, and men fighting, and of the most beautiful women, and of singular places; nowhere in the world are there pictures of so bright a colour as those Keawe found

hanging in his house. As for the knick-knacks, they were extraordinary fine; chiming clocks and musical boxes, little men with nodding heads, books filled with pictures, weapons of price from all quarters of the world, and the most elegant puzzles to entertain the leisure of a solitary man. And as no one would care to live in such chambers, only to walk through and view them, the balconies were made so broad that a whole town might have lived upon them in delight; and Keawe knew not which to prefer, whether the back porch, where you got the land breeze, and looked upon the orchards and the flowers, or the front balcony, where you could drink the wind of the sea, and look down the steep wall of the mountain and see the Hall going by once a week or so between Hookena and the hills of Pele, or the schooners plying up the coast for wood and ava and bananas.

When they had viewed all, Keawe and Lopaka sat on the porch.

"Well," asked Lopaka, "is it all as you designed?"

"Words cannot utter it," said

Keawe. "It is better than I dreamed, and I am sick with satisfaction."

"There is but one thing to consider," said Lopaka; "all this may be quite natural, and the bottle imp have nothing whatever to say to it. If I were to buy the bottle, and got no schooner after all, I should have put my hand in the fire for nothing. I gave you my word, I know; but yet I think you would not grudge me one more proof."

"I have sworn I would take no more favours," said Keawe. "I have gone already deep enough."

"This is no favour I am thinking of," replied Lopaka. "It is only to see the imp himself. There is nothing to be gained by that, and so nothing to be ashamed of; and yet, if I once saw him, I should be sure of the whole matter. So indulge me so far, and let me see the imp; and, after that, here is the money in my hand, and I will buy it."

"There is only one thing I am afraid of," said Keawe. "The imp may be very ugly to view; and if you once set eyes upon him you might be very

undesirous of the bottle."

"I am a man of my word," said Lopaka. "And here is the money betwixt us."

"Very well," replied Keawe.
"I have a curiosity myself. So come, let us have one look at you, Mr. Imp."

Now as soon as that was said, the imp looked out of the bottle, and in again, swift as a lizard; and there sat Keawe and Lopaka turned to stone. The night had quite come, before either found a thought to say or voice to say it with; and then Lopaka pushed the money over and took the bottle.

"I am a man of my word," said he, "and had need to be so, or I would not touch this bottle with my foot. Well, I shall get my schooner and a dollar or two for my pocket; and then I will be rid of this devil as fast as I can. For to tell you the plain truth, the look of him has cast me down."

"Lopaka," said Keawe, "do not you think any worse of me than you can help; I know it is night, and the roads bad, and the pass by the tombs an ill place to go by so late, but I declare since I have seen that little face, I cannot eat or sleep or pray till it is gone from me. I will give you a lantern and a basket to put the bottle in, and any picture or fine thing in all my house that takes your fancy;—and be gone at once, and go sleep at Hookena with Nahinu."

"Keawe," said Lopaka, "many a man would take this ill; above all, when I am doing you a turn so friendly, as to keep my word and buy the bottle; and for that matter, the night and the dark, and the way by the tombs, must be all tenfold more dangerous to a man with such a sin upon his conscience, and such a bottle under his arm. But for my part, I am so extremely terrified myself, I have not the heart to blame you. Here I go then; and I pray God you may be happy in your house, and I fortunate with my schooner, and both get to heaven in the end in spite of the devil and his bottle."

So Lopaka went down the mountain; and Keawe stood in his front balcony, and listened to the clink of the horse's shoes, and watched the lantern go shining down the path, and along the cliff of caves where the old dead are buried; and all the time he trembled and clasped his hands, and prayed for his friend, and gave glory to God that he himself was escaped out of that trouble.

But the next day came very brightly, and that new house of his was so delightful to behold that he forgot his terrors. One day followed another, and Keawe dwelt there in perpetual joy. He had his place on the back porch; it was there he ate and lived, and read the stories in the Honolulu newspapers; but when anyone came by they would go in and view the chambers and the pictures. And the fame of the house went far and wide; it was called Ka-Hale Nui – the Great House – in all Kona; and sometimes the Bright House, for Keawe kept a Chinaman, who was all day dusting and furbishing; and the glass, and the gilt, and the fine stuffs, and the pictures, shone as bright as the morning. As for Keawe himself, he could not walk in the chambers without singing, his heart was so enlarged; and when ships sailed by upon the sea, he would fly his colours on the mast.

So time went by, until one day Keawe went upon a visit as far as Kailua to certain of his friends. There he was well feasted; and left as soon as he could the next morning, and rode hard, for he was impatient to behold his beautiful house; and, besides, the night then coming on was the night in which the dead of old days go abroad in the sides of Kona; and having already meddled with the devil, he was the more chary of meeting with the dead. A little beyond Honaunau, looking far ahead, he was aware of a woman bathing in the edge of the sea; and she seemed a well-grown girl, but he thought no more of it. Then he saw her white shift flutter as she put it on, and then her red holoku; and by the time he came abreast of her she was done with her toilet, and had come up from the sea, and stood by the track-side in her red holoku. and she was all freshened with the bath, and her eyes shone and were kind. Now Keawe no sooner beheld her than he drew rein.

"I thought I knew everyone in this country," said he. "How comes it that I do not know you?" "I am Kokua, daughter of Kiano," said the girl, "and I have just returned from Oahu. Who are you?"

"I will tell you who I am in a little," said Keawe, dismounting from his horse, "but not now. For I have a thought in my mind, and if you knew who I was, you might have heard of me, and would not give me a true answer. But tell me, first of all, one thing: Are you married?"

At this Kokua laughed out aloud. "It is you who ask questions," she said. "Are you married yourself?"

"Indeed, Kokua, I am not," replied Keawe, "and never thought to be until this hour. But here is the plain truth. I have met you here at the roadside, and I saw your eyes, which are like the stars, and my heart went to you as swift as a bird. And so now, if you want none of me, say so, and I will go on to my own place; but if you think me no worse than any other young man, say so, too, and I will turn aside to your father's for the night, and to-morrow I will talk with the good man."

Kokua said never a word, but she looked at the sea and laughed.

"Kokua," said Keawe, "if you say nothing, I will take that for the good answer; so let us be stepping to your father's door."

She went on ahead of him, still without speech; only sometimes she glanced back and glanced away again, and she kept the strings of her hat in her mouth.

Now, when they had come to the door, Kiano came out on his verandah, and cried out and welcomed Keawe by name. At that the girl looked over, for the fame of the great house had come to her ears: and, to be sure, it was a great temptation. All that evening they were very merry together; and the girl was as bold as brass under the eyes of her parents, and made a mock of Keawe, for she had a quick wit. The next day he had a word with Kiano, and found the girl alone.

"Kokua," said he, "you made a mock of me all the evening; and it is still time to bid me go. I would not tell you who I was, because I have so fine a house, and I feared you would think too much of that house and too little of the man that loves you. Now you know all, and if you wish to have seen the last of me, say so at once."

"No," said Kokua; but this time she did not laugh, nor did Keawe ask for more.

This was the wooing of Keawe; things had gone quickly; but so an arrow goes, and the ball of a rifle swifter still, and vet both may strike the target. Things had gone fast, but they had gone far also, and the thought of Keawe rang in the maiden's head; she heard his voice in the breach of the surf upon the lava, and for this young man that she had seen but twice she would have left father and mother and her native islands. As for Keawe himself, his horse flew up the path of the mountain under the cliff of tombs, and the sound of the hoofs, and the sound of Keawe singing to himself for pleasure, echoed in the caverns of the dead. He came to the Bright House, and still he was singing. He sat and ate in the broad balcony, and the Chinaman wondered at his master, to hear how he sang between the mouthfuls.

The sun went down into the sea, and the night came; and Keawe walked the balconies by lamplight, high on the mountains, and the voice of his singing startled men on ships.

"Here am I now upon my high place," he said to himself. "Life may be no better; this is the mountain top; and all shelves about me toward the worse. For the first time I will light up the chambers, and bathe in my fine bath with the hot water and the cold, and sleep alone in the bed of my bridal chamber."

So the Chinaman had word, and he must rise from sleep and light the furnaces; and as he wrought below, beside the boilers, he heard his master singing and rejoicing above him in the lighted chambers. When the water began to be hot the Chinaman cried to his master: and Keawe went into the bathroom; and the Chinaman heard him sing as he filled the marble basin; and heard him sing, and the singing broken, as he undressed; until of a sudden, the song ceased. The Chinaman listened, and listened; he called up the house to Keawe to ask if all

were well, and Keawe answered him "Yes," and bade him go to bed; but there was no more singing in the Bright House; and all night long, the Chinaman heard his master's feet go round and round the balconies without repose.

Now the truth of it was this: as Keawe undressed for his bath, he spied upon his flesh a patch like a patch of lichen on a rock, and it was then that he stopped singing. For he knew the likeness of that patch, and knew that he was fallen in the Chinese Evil. [5]

Now, it is a sad thing for any man to fall into this sickness. And it would be a sad thing for anyone to leave a house so beautiful and so commodious, and depart from all his friends to the north coast of Molokai between the mighty cliff and the sea-breakers. But what was that to the case of the man Keawe, he who had met his love but yesterday, and won her but that morning, and now saw all his hopes break, in a moment, like a piece of glass?

Awhile he sat upon the edge of the bath; then sprang, with a cry, and ran outside; and to and fro, to and fro, along the

balcony, like one despairing.

"Very willingly could I leave Hawaii, the home of my fathers," Keawe was thinking. "Very lightly could I leave my house, the high-placed, the many-windowed, here upon the mountains. Very bravely could I go to Molokai, to Kalaupapa by the cliffs, to live devil had looked forth; and at with the smitten and to sleep there, far from my fathers. But veins. what wrong have I done, what sin lies upon my soul, that I should have encountered Kokua coming cool from the sea-water in the evening? Kokua, the soul ensnarer! Kokua, the light of my life! Her may I never wed, her may I look upon no longer, her may I no more handle with my loving hand; and it is for this, it is for you, O Kokua! that I pour my lamentations!"

Now you are to observe what sort of a man Keawe was, for he might have dwelt there in the Bright House for years, and no one been the wiser of his sickness; but he reckoned nothing of that, if he must lose Kokua. And again, he might have wed Kokua even as he was; and so many would have done, because they have the souls of pigs; but Keawe loved the maid

manfully, and he would do her no hurt and bring her in no danger.

A little beyond the midst of the night, there came in his mind the recollection of that bottle. He went round to the back porch, and called to memory the day when the the thought ice ran in his

"A dreadful thing is the bottle," thought Keawe, "and dreadful is the imp, and it is a dreadful thing to risk the flames of hell. But what other hope have I to cure my sickness or to wed Kokua? What!" he thought, "would I beard the devil once, only to get me a house, and not face him again to win Kokua?"

Thereupon he called to mind it was the next day the Hall went by on her return to Honolulu. "There must I go first," he thought, "and see Lopaka. For the best hope that I have now is to find that same bottle I was so pleased to be rid of."

Never a wink could he sleep; the food stuck in his throat; but he sent a letter to Kiano. and about the time when the

steamer would be coming, rode down beside the cliff of the tombs. It rained; his horse went heavily; he looked up at the black mouths of the caves, and he envied the dead that slept there and were done with trouble; and called to mind how he had galloped by the day before, and was astonished. So he came down to Hookena, and there was all the country gathered for the steamer as usual. In the shed before the store they sat and jested and passed the news; but there was no matter of speech in Keawe's bosom, and he sat in their midst and looked without on the rain falling on the houses, and the surf beating among the rocks, and the sighs arose in his throat.

"Keawe of the Bright House is out of spirits," said one to another. Indeed, and so he was, and little wonder.

Then the Hall came, and the whaleboat carried him on board. The after-part of the ship was full of Haoles [6] who had been to visit the volcano, as their custom is; and the midst was crowded with Kanakas, and the forepart with wild bulls from Hilo and horses from Kau; but Keawe sat apart from all

in his sorrow, and watched for the house of Kiano. There it sat, low upon the shore in the black rocks, and shaded by the cocoa palms, and there by the door was a red holoku, no greater than a fly, and going to and fro with a fly's busyness. "Ah, queen of my heart," he cried, "I'll venture my dear soul to win you!"

Soon after, darkness fell, and the cabins were lit up, and the Haoles sat and played at the cards and drank whiskey as their custom is; but Keawe walked the deck all night; and all the next day, as they steamed under the lee of Maui or of Molokai, he was still pacing to and fro like a wild animal in a menagerie.

Towards evening they passed Diamond Head, and came to the pier of Honolulu. Keawe stepped out among the crowd and began to ask for Lopaka. It seemed he had become the owner of a schooner - none better in the islands - and was gone upon an adventure as far as Pola-Pola or Kahiki; so there was no help to be looked for from Lopaka. Keawe called to mind a friend of his, a lawyer in the town (I must not tell his name), and inquired of him. They said he was grown suddenly rich,

and had a fine new house upon Waikiki shore; and this put a thought in Keawe's head, and he called a hack and drove to the lawyer's house.

The house was all brand new, and the trees in the garden no greater than walking-sticks, and the lawyer, when he came, had the air of a man well pleased.

"What can I do to serve you?" said the lawyer.

"You are a friend of Lopaka's," replied Keawe, "and Lopaka purchased from me a certain piece of goods that I thought you might enable me to trace."

The lawyer's face became very dark. "I do not profess to misunderstand you, Mr. Keawe," said he, "though this is an ugly business to be stirring in. You may be sure I know nothing, but yet I have a guess, and if you would apply in a certain quarter I think you might have news."

And he named the name of a man, which, again, I had better not repeat. So it was for days, and Keawe went from

one to another, finding everywhere new clothes and carriages, and fine new houses and men everywhere in great contentment, although, to be sure, when he hinted at his business their faces would cloud over.

"No doubt I am upon the track," thought Keawe.
"These new clothes and carriages are all the gifts of the little imp, and these glad faces are the faces of men who have taken their profit and got rid of the accursed thing in safety. When I see pale cheeks and hear sighing, I shall know that I am near the bottle."

So it befell at last that he was recommended to a Haole in Beritania Street. When he came to the door, about the hour of the evening meal, there were the usual marks of the new house, and the young garden, and the electric light shining in the windows; but when the owner came, a shock of hope and fear ran through Keawe; for here was a young man, white as a corpse, and black about the eyes, the hair shedding from his head, and such a look in his countenance as a man may have when he is waiting for the gallows.

"Here it is, to be sure," thought Keawe, and so with this man he noways veiled his errand. "I am come to buy the bottle," said he.

At the word, the young Haole of Beritania Street reeled against the wall.

"The bottle!" he gasped. "To buy the bottle!" Then he seemed to choke, and seizing Keawe by the arm carried him into a room and poured out wine in two glasses.

"Here is my respects," said Keawe, who had been much about with Haoles in his time. "Yes," he added, "I am come to buy the bottle. What is the price by now?"

At that word the young man let his glass slip through his fingers, and looked upon Keawe like a ghost.

"The price," says he; "the price! You do not know the price?"

"It is for that I am asking you," returned Keawe. "But why are you so much concerned? Is there anything

wrong about the price?"

"It has dropped a great deal in value since your time, Mr. Keawe," said the young man stammering.

"Well, well, I shall have the less to pay for it," says Keawe. "How much did it cost you?"

The young man was as white as a sheet. "Two cents," said he.

"What?" cried Keawe, "two cents? Why, then, you can only sell it for one. And he who buys it—" The words died upon Keawe's tongue; he who bought it could never sell it again, the bottle and the bottle imp must abide with him until he died, and when he died must carry him to the red end of hell.

The young man of Beritania Street fell upon his knees. "For God's sake buy it!" he cried. "You can have all my fortune in the bargain. I was mad when I bought it at that price. I had embezzled money at my store; I was lost else; I must have gone to jail."

"Poor creature," said Keawe,
"you would risk your soul
upon so desperate an
adventure, and to avoid the
proper punishment of your
own disgrace; and you think I
could hesitate with love in
front of me. Give me the
bottle, and the change which I
make sure you have all ready.
Here is a five-cent piece."

It was as Keawe supposed; the young man had the change ready in a drawer; the bottle changed hands, and Keawe's fingers were no sooner clasped upon the stalk than he had breathed his wish to be a clean man. And, sure enough, when he got home to his room, and stripped himself before a glass, his flesh was whole like an infant's. And here was the strange thing: he had no sooner seen this miracle, than his mind was changed within him, and he cared naught for the Chinese Evil, and little enough for Kokua; and had but the one thought, that here he was bound to the bottle imp for time and for eternity, and had no better hope but to be a cinder for ever in the flames of hell. Away ahead of him he saw them blaze with his mind's eye, and his soul shrank, and darkness fell upon the light.

When Keawe came to himself a little, he was aware it was the night when the band played at the hotel. Thither he went, because he feared to be alone; and there, among happy faces, walked to and fro, and heard the tunes go up and down, and saw Berger beat the measure, and all the while he heard the flames crackle, and saw the red fire burning in the bottomless pit. Of a sudden the band played Hiki-ao-ao; that was a song that he had sung with Kokua, and at the strain courage returned to him.

"It is done now," he thought, "and once more let me take the good along with the evil."

So it befell that he returned to Hawaii by the first steamer, and as soon as it could be managed he was wedded to Kokua, and carried her up the mountain side to the Bright House.

Now it was so with these two, that when they were together, Keawe's heart was stilled; but so soon as he was alone he fell into a brooding horror, and heard the flames crackle, and saw the red fire burn in the bottomless pit. The girl, indeed, had come to him wholly; her heart leapt in her

side at sight of him, her hand clung to his; and she was so fashioned from the hair upon her head to the nails upon her toes that none could see her without joy. She was pleasant in her nature. She had the good word always. Full of song she was, and went to and fro in the Bright House, the brightest thing in its three storeys, carolling like the birds. And Keawe beheld and heard her with delight, and then must shrink upon one side, and weep and groan to think upon the price that he had paid for her; and then he must dry his eyes, and wash his face, and go and sit with her on the broad balconies, joining in her songs, and, with a sick spirit, answering her smiles.

There came a day when her feet began to be heavy and her songs more rare; and now it was not Keawe only that would weep apart, but each would sunder from the other and sit in opposite balconies with the whole width of the Bright House betwixt. Keawe was so sunk in his despair, he scarce observed the change, and was only glad he had more hours to sit alone and brood upon his destiny, and was not so frequently condemned to pull a smiling face on a sick heart. But one

day, coming softly through the house, he heard the sound of a child sobbing, and there was Kokua rolling her face upon the balcony floor, and weeping like the lost.

"You do well to weep in this house, Kokua," he said. "And yet I would give the head off my body that you (at least) might have been happy."

"Happy!" she cried. "Keawe, when you lived alone in your Bright House, you were the word of the island for a happy man; laughter and song were in your mouth, and your face was as bright as the sunrise. Then you wedded poor Kokua; and the good God knows what is amiss in her – but from that day you have not smiled. Oh!" she cried, "what ails me? I thought I was pretty, and I knew I loved him. What ails me that I throw this cloud upon my husband?"

"Poor Kokua," said Keawe. He sat down by her side, and sought to take her hand; but that she plucked away. "Poor Kokua," he said, again. "My poor child—my pretty. And I had thought all this while to spare you! Well, you shall know all. Then, at least, you will pity poor Keawe; then

you will understand how much he loved you in the past — that he dared hell for your possession—and how much he loves you still (the poor condemned one), that he can yet call up a smile when he beholds you."

With that, he told her all, even from the beginning.

"You have done this for me?" she cried "Ah, well, then what do I care!"—and she clasped and wept upon him.

"Ah, child!" said Keawe, "and yet, when I consider of the fire of hell, I care a good deal!"

"Never tell me," said she; "no man can be lost because he loved Kokua, and no other fault. I tell you, Keawe, I shall save you with these hands, or perish in your company. What! you loved me, and gave your soul, and you think I will not die to save you in return?"

"Ah, my dear! you might die a hundred times, and what difference would that make?" he cried, "except to leave me lonely till the time comes of my damnation?" "You know nothing," said she. "I was educated in a school in Honolulu; I am no common girl. And I tell you, I shall save my lover. What is this you say about a cent? But all the world is not American. In England they have a piece they call a farthing, which is about half a cent. Ah! sorrow!" she cried, "that makes it scarcely better, for the buyer must be lost, and we shall find none so brave as my Keawe! But, then, there is France; they have a small coin there which they call a centime, and these go five to the cent or there-about. We could not do better. Come, Keawe, let us go to the French islands; let us go to Tahiti, as fast as ships can bear us. There we have four centimes, three centimes, two centimes, one centime; four possible sales to come and go on; and two of us to push the bargain. Come, my Keawe! kiss me, and banish care. Kokua will defend you."

"Gift of God!" he cried. "I cannot think that God will punish me for desiring aught so good! Be it as you will, then; take me where you please: I put my life and my salvation in your hands."

Early the next day Kokua was about her preparations. She took Keawe's chest that he went with sailoring; and first she put the bottle in a corner; and then packed it with the richest of their clothes and the bravest of the knick-knacks in the house. "For," said she, "we must seem to be rich folks, or who will believe in the bottle?" All the time of her preparation she was as gay as a bird; only when she looked upon Keawe, the tears would spring in her eye, and she must run and kiss him. As for Keawe, a weight was off his soul; now that he had his secret shared, and some hope in front of him, he seemed like a new man, his feet went lightly on the earth, and his breath was good to him again. Yet was terror still at his elbow; and ever and again, as the wind blows out a taper, hope died in him, and he saw the flames toss and the red fire burn in hell.

It was given out in the country they were gone pleasuring to the States, which was thought a strange thing, and yet not so strange as the truth, if any could have guessed it. So they went to Honolulu in the Hall, and thence in the Umatilla to San Francisco with a crowd of Haoles, and at San Francisco

took their passage by the mail which is indeed like to the brigantine, the Tropic Bird, for Papeete, the chief place of the French in the south islands. Thither they came, after a pleasant voyage, on a fair day of the Trade Wind, and saw the reef with the surf breaking, and Motuiti with its palms, and the schooner riding within-side, and the white houses of the town low down along the shore among green trees, and overhead the mountains and the clouds of Tahiti, the wise island.

It was judged the most wise to hire a house, which they did accordingly, opposite the British Consul's, to make a great parade of money, and themselves conspicuous with carriages and horses. This it was very easy to do, so long as they had the bottle in their possession; for Kokua was more bold than Keawe, and, whenever she had a mind, called on the imp for twenty or a hundred dollars. At this rate they soon grew to be remarked in the town; and the strangers from Hawaii, their riding and their driving, the fine holokus and the rich lace of Kokua, became the matter of much talk.

They got on well after the first with the Tahitian language,

Hawaiian, with a change of certain letters; and as soon as they had any freedom of speech, began to push the bottle. You are to consider it was not an easy subject to introduce; it was not easy to persuade people you were in earnest, when you offered to sell them for four centimes the spring of health and riches inexhaustible. It was necessary besides to explain the dangers of the bottle; and either people disbelieved the whole thing and laughed, or they thought the more of the darker part, became overcast with gravity, and drew away from Keawe and Kokua, as from persons who had dealings with the devil. So far from gaining ground, these two began to find they were avoided in the town; the children ran away from them screaming, a thing intolerable to Kokua; Catholics crossed themselves as they went by; and all persons began with one accord to disengage themselves from their advances.

Depression fell upon their spirits. They would sit at night in their new house, after a day's weariness, and not exchange one word, or the silence would be broken by Kokua bursting suddenly into

sobs. Sometimes they would pray together; sometimes they would have the bottle out upon the floor, and sit all evening watching how the shadow hovered in the midst. At such times they would be afraid to go to rest. It was long ere slumber came to them, and, if either dozed off, it would be to wake and find the other silently weeping in the dark, or, perhaps, to wake alone, the other having fled from the house and the neighbourhood of that bottle, to pace under the bananas in the little garden, or to wander on the beach by moonlight.

One night it was so when Kokua awoke. Keawe was gone. She felt in the bed and his place was cold. Then fear fell upon her, and she sat up in bed. A little moonshine filtered through the shutters. The room was bright, and she could spy the bottle on the floor. Outside it blew high, the great trees of the avenue cried aloud, and the fallen leaves rattled in the verandah. In the midst of this Kokua was aware of another sound; whether of a beast or of a man she could scarce tell, but it was as sad as death, and cut her to the soul. Softly she arose, set the door ajar, and looked forth into the moonlit yard. There, under the

bananas, lay Keawe, his mouth in the dust, and as he lay he moaned.

It was Kokua's first thought to run forward and console him; her second potently withheld her. Keawe had borne himself before his wife like a brave man; it became her little in the hour of weakness to intrude upon his shame. With the thought she drew back into the house.

"Heaven!" she thought, "how careless have I been - how weak! It is he, not I, that stands in this eternal peril; it was he, not I, that took the curse upon his soul. It is for my sake, and for the love of a creature of so little worth and such poor help, that he now beholds so close to him the flames of hell – ay, and smells the smoke of it, lying without there in the wind and moonlight. Am I so dull of spirit that never till now I have surmised my duty, or have I seen it before and turned aside? But now, at least, I take up my soul in both the hands of my affection; now I say farewell to the white steps of heaven and the waiting faces of my friends. A love for a love, and let mine be equalled with Keawe's! A soul for a soul,

and be it mine to perish!"

She was a deft woman with her hands, and was soon apparelled. She took in her hands the change – the precious centimes they kept ever at their side; for this coin is little used, and they had made provision at a Government office. When she was forth in the avenue clouds came on the wind, and the moon was blackened. The town slept, and she knew not whither to turn till she heard one coughing in the shadow of the trees.

"Old man," said Kokua,
"what do you here abroad in
the cold night?"

The old man could scarce express himself for coughing, but she made out that he was old and poor, and a stranger in the island.

"Will you do me a service?" said Kokua. "As one stranger to another, and as an old man to a young woman, will you help a daughter of Hawaii?"

"Ah," said the old man. "So you are the witch from the eight islands, and even my old soul you seek to entangle.

But I have heard of you, and defy your wickedness."

"Sit down here," said Kokua, "and let me tell you a tale." And she told him the story of Keawe from the beginning to the end.

"And now," said she, "I am his wife, whom he bought with his soul's welfare. And what should I do? If I went to him myself and offered to buy it, he would refuse. But if you go, he will sell it eagerly; I will await you here; you will buy it for four centimes, and I will buy it again for three. And the Lord strengthen a poor girl!"

"If you meant falsely," said the old man, "I think God would strike you dead."

"He would!" cried Kokua.

"Be sure he would. I could not be so treacherous—God would not suffer it."

"Give me the four centimes and await me here," said the old man.

Now, when Kokua stood alone in the street, her spirit died. The wind roared in the trees, and it seemed to her the rushing of the flames of hell; the shadows tossed in the light of the street lamp, and they seemed to her the snatching hands of evil ones. If she had had the strength, she must have run away, and if she had had the breath she must have screamed aloud; but, in truth, she could do neither, and stood and trembled in the avenue, like an affrighted child.

Then she saw the old man returning, and he had the bottle in his hand.

"I have done your bidding," said he. "I left your husband weeping like a child; to-night he will sleep easy." And he held the bottle forth.

"Before you give it me," Kokua panted, "take the good with the evil—ask to be delivered from your cough."

"I am an old man," replied the other, "and too near the gate of the grave to take a favour from the devil. But what is this? Why do you not take the bottle? Do you hesitate?"

"Not hesitate!" cried Kokua.

"I am only weak. Give me a moment. It is my hand resists, my flesh shrinks back from the accursed thing. One moment only!"

The old man looked upon Kokua kindly. "Poor child!" said he, "you fear; your soul misgives you. Well, let me keep it. I am old, and can never more be happy in this world, and as for the next—"

"Give it me!" gasped Kokua.

"There is your money. Do you think I am so base as that?

Give me the bottle."

"God bless you, child," said the old man.

Kokua concealed the bottle under her holoku, said farewell to the old man, and walked off along the avenue, she cared not whither. For all roads were now the same to her, and led equally to hell. Sometimes she walked, and sometimes ran; sometimes she screamed out loud in the night, and sometimes lay by the wayside in the dust and wept. All that she had heard of hell came back to her; she saw the flames blaze, and she smelt the smoke, and her flesh withered on the coals.

Near day she came to her mind again, and returned to the house. It was even as the old man said - Keawe slumbered like a child. Kokua stood and gazed upon his face.

"Now, my husband," said she, "it is your turn to sleep. When you wake it will be your turn to sing and laugh. But for poor Kokua, alas! that meant no evil – for poor Kokua no more sleep, no more singing, no more delight, whether in earth or heaven."

With that she lay down in the bed by his side, and her misery was so extreme that she fell in a deep slumber instantly.

Late in the morning her husband woke her and gave her the good news. It seemed he was silly with delight, for he paid no heed to her distress, ill though she dissembled it. The words stuck in her mouth, it mattered not; Keawe did the speaking. She ate not a bite, but who was to observe it? for Keawe cleared the dish. Kokua saw and heard him. like some strange thing in a

dream; there were times when smell of scorching – brrr!" she forgot or doubted, and put her hands to her brow; to know herself doomed and hear her husband babble, seemed so monstrous.

All the while Keawe was eating and talking, and planning the time of their return, and thanking her for saving him, and fondling her, and calling her the true helper after all. He laughed at the old man that was fool enough to buy that bottle.

"A worthy old man he seemed," Keawe said. "But no one can judge by appearances. For why did the old reprobate require the bottle?"

"My husband," said Kokua, humbly, "his purpose may have been good."

Keawe laughed like an angry man.

"Fiddle-de-dee!" cried Keawe. "An old rogue, I tell you; and an old ass to boot. For the bottle was hard enough to sell at four centimes; and at three it will be quite impossible. The margin is not broad enough, the thing begins to

said he, and shuddered. "It is true I bought it myself at a cent, when I knew not there were smaller coins. I was a fool for my pains; there will never be found another: and whoever has that bottle now will carry it to the pit."

"O my husband!" said Kokua. "Is it not a terrible thing to save oneself by the eternal ruin of another? It seems to me I could not laugh. I would be humbled. I would be filled with melancholy. I would pray for the poor holder."

Then Keawe, because he felt the truth of what she said, grew the more angry. "Heighty-teighty!" cried he. "You may be filled with melancholy if you please. It is not the mind of a good wife. If you thought at all of me, you would sit shamed."

Thereupon he went out, and Kokua was alone.

What chance had she to sell that bottle at two centimes? None, she perceived. And if she had any, here was her husband hurrying her away to a country where there was nothing lower than a cent. And here—on the morrow of her sacrifice—was her husband leaving her and blaming her.

She would not even try to profit by what time she had, but sat in the house, and now had the bottle out and viewed it with unutterable fear, and now, with loathing, hid it out of sight.

By-and-by, Keawe came back, and would have her take a drive.

"My husband, I am ill," she said. "I am out of heart. Excuse me, I can take no pleasure."

Then was Keawe more wroth than ever. With her, because he thought she was brooding over the case of the old man; and with himself, because he thought she was right, and was ashamed to be so happy.

"This is your truth," cried he, "and this your affection! Your husband is just saved from eternal ruin, which he encountered for the love of you—and you can take no pleasure! Kokua, you have a disloyal heart."

He went forth again furious, and wandered in the town all



day. He met friends, and drank with them; they hired a carriage and drove into the country, and there drank again. All the time Keawe was ill at ease, because he was taking this pastime while his wife was sad, and because he knew in his heart that she was more right than he; and the knowledge made him drink the deeper.

Now there was an old brutal Haole drinking with him, one that had been a boatswain of a whaler, a runaway, a digger in gold mines, a convict in prisons. He had a low mind and a foul mouth; he loved to drink and to see others drunken; and he pressed the glass upon Keawe. Soon there was no more money in the company.

"Here, you!" says the boatswain, "you are rich, you have been always saying. You have a bottle or some foolishness."

"Yes," says Keawe, "I am rich; I will go back and get some money from my wife, who keeps it."

"That's a bad idea, mate," said the boatswain. "Never you trust a petticoat with

dollars. They're all as false as water; you keep an eye on her."

Now, this word struck in Keawe's mind; for he was muddled with what he had been drinking.

"I should not wonder but she was false, indeed," thought he. "Why else should she be so cast down at my release? But I will show her I am not the man to be fooled. I will catch her in the act."

Accordingly, when they were back in town, Keawe bade the boatswain wait for him at the corner, by the old calaboose, and went forward up the avenue alone to the door of his house. The night had come again; there was a light within, but never a sound; and Keawe crept about the corner, opened the back door softly, and looked in.

There was Kokua on the floor, the lamp at her side; before her was a milk-white bottle, with a round belly and a long neck; and as she viewed it, Kokua wrung her hands.

A long time Keawe stood and looked in the doorway. At

first he was struck stupid; and then fear fell upon him that the bargain had been made amiss, and the bottle had come back to him as it came at San Francisco; and at that his knees were loosened, and the fumes of the wine departed from his head like mists off a river in the morning. And then he had another thought; and it was a strange one, that made his cheeks to burn.

"I must make sure of this," thought he.

So he closed the door, and went softly round the corner again, and then came noisily in, as though he were but now returned. And, lo! by the time he opened the front door no bottle was to be seen; and Kokua sat in a chair and started up like one awakened out of sleep.

"I have been drinking all day and making merry," said Keawe. "I have been with good companions, and now I only come back for money, and return to drink and carouse with them again."

Both his face and voice were as stern as judgment, but Kokua was too troubled to observe.

"You do well to use your own, my husband," said she, and her words trembled.

"O, I do well in all things," said Keawe, and he went straight to the chest and took out money. But he looked besides in the corner where they kept the bottle, and there was no bottle there.

At that the chest heaved upon the floor like a sea-billow, and the house span about him like a wreath of smoke, for he saw he was lost now, and there was no escape. "It is what I feared," he thought. "It is she who has bought it."

And then he came to himself a little and rose up; but the sweat streamed on his face as thick as the rain and as cold as the well-water.

"Kokua," said he, "I said to you to-day what ill became me. Now I return to carouse with my jolly companions," and at that he laughed a little quietly. "I will take more pleasure in the cup if you forgive me."

She clasped his knees in a moment; she kissed his knees with flowing tears.

"O," she cried, "I asked but a kind word!"

"Let us never one think hardly of the other," said Keawe, and was gone out of the house.

Now, the money that Keawe had taken was only some of that store of centime pieces they had laid in at their arrival. It was very sure he had no mind to be drinking. His wife had given her soul for him, now he must give his for hers; no other thought was in the world with him.

At the corner, by the old calaboose, there was the boatswain waiting.

"My wife has the bottle," said Keawe, "and, unless you help me to recover it, there can be no more money and no more liquor to-night."

"You do not mean to say you are serious about that bottle?" cried the boatswain.

"There is the lamp," said Keawe. "Do I look as if I was jesting?"

"That is so," said the boatswain. "You look as serious as a ghost."

"Well, then," said Keawe,
"here are two centimes; you
must go to my wife in the
house, and offer her these for
the bottle, which (if I am not
much mistaken) she will give
you instantly. Bring it to me
here, and I will buy it back
from you for one; for that is
the law with this bottle, that it
still must be sold for a less
sum. But whatever you do,
never breathe a word to her
that you have come from me."

"Mate, I wonder are you making a fool of me?" asked the boatswain.

"It will do you no harm if I am," returned Keawe.

"That is so, mate," said the boatswain.

"And if you doubt me," added Keawe, "you can try. As soon as you are clear of the house, wish to have your pocket full of money, or a

bottle of the best rum, or what see that." you please, and you will see the virtue of the thing."

"Very well, Kanaka," says the boatswain. "I will try; but if you are having your fun out of me, I will take my fun out of you with a belaying pin."

So the whaler-man went off up the avenue; and Keawe stood and waited. It was near the same spot where Kokua had waited the night before; but Keawe was more resolved, and never faltered in his purpose; only his soul was bitter with despair.

It seemed a long time he had to wait before he heard a voice singing in the darkness of the avenue. He knew the voice to be the boatswain's; but it was strange how drunken it appeared upon a sudden.

Next, the man himself came stumbling into the light of the lamp. He had the devil's bottle buttoned in his coat; another bottle was in his hand; and even as he came in view he raised it to his mouth and drank.

"You have it," said Keawe. "I

"Hands off!" cried the boatswain, jumping back. "Take a step near me, and I'll smash your mouth. You thought you could make a cat's-paw of me, did you?"

"What do you mean?" cried Keawe.

"Mean?" cried the boatswain. "This is a pretty good bottle, this is; that's what I mean. How I got it for two centimes I can't make out; but I'm sure you shan't have it for one."

"You mean you won't sell?" gasped Keawe.

"No, sir!" cried the boatswain. "But I'll give you a drink of the rum, if you like."

"I tell you," said Keawe, "the man who has that bottle goes to hell."

"I reckon I'm going anyway," returned the sailor; "and this bottle's the best thing to go with I've struck yet. No, sir!" he cried again, "this is my bottle now, and you can go and fish for another."

"Can this be true?" Keawe cried. "For your own sake, I beseech you, sell it me!"

"I don't value any of your talk," replied the boatswain. "You thought I was a flat; now you see I'm not; and there's an end. If you won't have a swallow of the rum, I'll have one myself. Here's your health, and good-night to vou!"

So off he went down the avenue towards town, and there goes the bottle out of the story.

But Keawe ran to Kokua light as the wind; and great was their joy that night; and great, since then, has been the peace of all their days in the Bright House.

# Betty BY MOODY CREEK



I miss Cranium and the way we shared clothes and that time at the beach when you pierced your nose and what your mom said when you called to let her know.

I miss the 15 hour plane ride, maybe it was even more and I miss eating carbonara by the Greek shore singing Wicked, waking up the people next door.

I remember when you introduced us and at first it was fun but somewhere between introductions and wedding plans I was done and now I'm the one with a song left unsung.

You get to move on with a conversation left unsaid and I get to deal with the feeling of being misled and this extra loneliness built up in my head.

Or maybe it's my heart.

And even though I told myself I would never go through, that I would die a hundred times before it became something I would do I can't help but to admit that I do miss you.

Even if it's just a little.

And even though we both are responsible for hurt words that now seems it was so resolvable what hurts the most is I know you don't miss me in the slightest way possible.

Melody Creek resides in **East Tennessee where** you can often find her writing poetry, reading thrillers, and making art. She has been published in Snapdragon Journal, Cajun Mutt Press, NY Literary Magazine, and more. Follow her on Facebook and check out her book "Anxiety, Depression, and Other Sorts of Trauma" on Amazon and Barnes and Noble.





## Haunting Halloween Journal Prompts

As the leaves turn golden and the air grows crisp, writers and horror enthusiasts alike begin to feel the irresistible pull of Halloween inspiration. Whether you're a seasoned author looking to craft the next great horror novel, a student hoping to ace your creative writing assignment, or simply someone who loves to explore the eerie and macabre through words, journaling can be your gateway to unleashing your inner ghost writer. This comprehensive list of 100 Halloween journal prompts is designed to ignite your

imagination and help you delve into the spirit of the season.

From spine-chilling scenarios to whimsical Halloween musings, these prompts cover a wide range of themes and writing styles. You'll find yourself exploring haunted houses, conversing with mythical creatures, and reimagining familiar Halloween traditions in new and exciting ways. Each prompt is carefully crafted to spark creativity and encourage deep, engaging writing that captures the essence of this most mysterious of holidays.

For those seeking to improve their descriptive writing, many prompts focus on sensory details - the crunch of leaves underfoot, the taste of Halloween candy, or the eerie glow of a jack-o'-lantern. Others challenge you to step into the shoes (or paws, or claws) of various Halloween characters, from witches and vampires to animated decorations and even trick-ortreat bags. This perspectiveshifting exercise can help develop your ability to create unique and compelling voices in your writing.

If world-building is more



**POETRY** 

## THOUGHTS OF A LONELY WOMAN

by Kristy Raines

while I can still enjoy their fragrance
Laying them across a wooden box
is a wasted gesture on a soon forgotten day"
"Tell me you love me while I can still hear you
Those words can make a bad day better
Saying I wish I would have told her
gives no joy or comfort to deaf ears"
"Hold my hand while I can feel you
Many years has it been since you have
No one can thrive without human touch
I don't even remember how it feels"
For many years, Like a spirit, he just looked right through her
as if he didn't even see her in front of him
Perhaps she died inside long before she ever left this earth...

"Give me flowers while I'm living

Kristy Raines was born, April 9, 1957, in Oakland California, in the United States. She is an International Poet and Writer. She is a former Civil Servant and later retired from the Medical field. Kristy has five books which she hopes will publish this year. One with a prominent Poet from India, and four of her own books. She has received many literary awards for her unique style of writing

your style, you'll find prompts that invite you to create entire Halloween-themed towns, redesign familiar settings with a spooky twist, or imagine how the world might change if Halloween lasted for more than just one night. These exercises in imagination can help you develop the rich, immersive settings that are crucial to effective storytelling, especially in the horror and fantasy genres.

Whether you're looking to overcome writer's block, develop a daily writing habit, or simply indulge in some Halloween-themed creativity, these 100 journal prompts offer something for everyone. So grab your favorite notebook, sharpen your pencil (or fire up your laptop), and prepare to embark on a journey through the shadows of your imagination. Who knows what spooky stories and haunting tales you might conjure up? Happy writing, and happy Halloween!

Here are 100 journal prompts for Halloween:

- 1. Describe your ideal Halloween costume.
- 2. Write about a haunted house from the

- perspective of a ghost living there.
- 3. What's your favorite Halloween memory?
- 4. Imagine you wake up on November 1st and it's still Halloween. What happens?
- 5. Write a story that begins with "The jack-o'-lantern's grin widened..."
- 6. Describe your perfect Halloween party.
- 7. What would you do if you could shapeshift into any creature on Halloween night?
- 8. Write about a witch's familiar's day off.
- 9. Describe the taste of your favorite Halloween candy.
- 10.What if Halloween lasted for an entire week? How would the world change?
- 11.Write a letter from a vampire to their human neighbor.
- 12.Describe the sound of fall leaves crunching underfoot.
- 13.What's the scariest story you've ever heard?
- 14.Write about a day in the life of a pumpkin in a patch.
- 15.Imagine you find an old spell book. What happens next?
- 16.Describe your town if

- it were suddenly populated by monsters.
- 17.Write about a black cat's adventures on Halloween night.
- 18.What would you do if you could time travel to any Halloween in history?
- 19.Describe the perfect Halloween weather.
- 20.Write a story about a magical Halloween mask.
- 21. What's your favorite Halloween tradition and why?
- 22.Imagine you're a
  Halloween decoration
  come to life. What do
  you do?
- 23.Write about a secret society of trick-ortreaters.
- 24.Describe the smell of autumn in your neighborhood.
- 25.What if you could talk to jack-o'-lanterns? What would they say?
- 26.Write about a
  Halloween party from the perspective of a bowl of candy.
- 27.Describe your dream Halloween-themed house.
- 28.What would you do if you woke up as a zombie on Halloween?
- 29.Write a story about a haunted Halloween costume.

- 30.Describe the sound of wind whistling through bare tree branches.
- 31.What's the most unusual Halloween decoration you've ever seen?
- 32.Write about a day in the life of the Headless Horseman.
- 33.Imagine you're trickor-treating and you come across a real monster. What happens?
- 34.Describe your ideal Halloween movie marathon.
- 35.Write a story that starts with "The full moon cast an eerie glow..."
- 36. What would you do if you could control the weather on Halloween?
- 37.Describe a Halloween feast fit for monsters.
- 38.Write about a ghost's first Halloween after becoming a spirit.
- 39.What's the best Halloween prank you've ever seen or heard about?
- 40.Imagine you're a tree watching trick-ortreaters. What do you observe?
- 41.Write a story about a magical Halloween candy that grants wishes.
- 42.Describe the perfect

- haunted hayride.
- 43. What would you do if you could read minds on Halloween night?
- 44. Write about a day in the life of a Halloween store employee.
- 45.Describe the most intricate Halloween decoration you can imagine.
- 46.What if animals could trick-or-treat? What would that look like?
- 47.Write a story about a Halloween party in a graveyard.
- 48.Describe the taste of Halloween in the air.
- 49. What would you do if you found out your neighbor was a real witch?
- 50.Write about a
  Halloween costume
  contest where the
  costumes come to life.
- 51.Describe the perfect Halloween night sky.
- 52.What if you could communicate with spirits on Halloween? Who would you talk to?
- 53.Write a story about a Halloween parade gone wrong.
- 54.Describe the most haunted-looking house in your neighborhood.
- 55.What would you do if you could control shadows on Halloween

- night?
- 56. Write about a day in the life of a Halloween store mannequin.
- 57.Describe the sound of trick-or-treaters approaching your house.
- 58.What if you could bring one Halloween decoration to life? Which would you choose?
- 59.Write a story about a Halloween scavenger hunt with real magical items.
- 60.Describe the perfect Halloween soundtrack.
- 61. What would you do if you found out you were descended from a famous monster?
- 62.Write about a
  Halloween night from the perspective of the moon.
- 63.Describe the most creative Halloween costume you've ever seen.
- 64. What if you could taste fear? How would that change your Halloween experience?
- 65.Write a story about a Halloween-themed amusement park.
- 66.Describe the feeling of putting on a Halloween mask.
- 67.What would you do if you could control fog



# A WING-STROKED SPECTACLE

by Daniel Moreschi

Segmented sets of starlings sharply elevate towards candescent skies, suspend, then circulate in sync. Their wingspans whisper sunset symphonies while manifesting silhouetted symmetries.

With poise, finesse and swiftness, they transform the air into an ever-changing scape; this canvas where each turn and swirl unfolds a painterly display: a moving mural, rendered on a dying day.

The starlings coalesce to make a checkered veil. They crown the clouds and skim across a coastal trail, then separate as if surrendering to gusts, and cover summits like a desert's storm-flung dust.

With tapered pace, their fevered flights revert to long glissades of shimmering shades; a showy dance along a latent stopgap stage. They stir, careen, decline: retracing what remains of lofty lazuline,

before it all becomes a screen of red-specked gold. The starlings falter in its wake; they cannot hold their elegance in fading light. Their spirals wane in streaming chains. They spill in spates of jet-black rain. Daniel Moreschi is a poet from Neath, South Wales, UK, who experienced a significant turning point when his ongoing battle with severe M.E. upended his life. However, during this period, he also rediscovered his passion for poetry, which had lain dormant since his teenage years. Writing has become a means of distraction from his struggles.

Daniel has received acclaim in over 70 poetry competitions and has been published in numerous NFSPS anthologies of prizewinning poetry, as well as by Lunar Codex, The Lyric, Society of Classical Poets, The Dawntreader, Wishbone Words, The Chained Muse, BBC Upload, and an array of other journals and publications. Additionally, his work has received nominations for both Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize.

- on Halloween night?
- 68. Write about a day in the life of a cemetery groundskeeper on Halloween.
- 69.Describe the most unusual jack-o'-lantern design you can imagine.
- 70. What if you could travel to a Halloween celebration in another country? Where would you go?
- 71.Write a story about a Halloween time capsule opened 100 years in the future.
- 72.Describe the perfect Halloween-themed breakfast.
- 73.What would you do if you could animate Halloween decorations?
- 74.Write about a
  Halloween party from
  the perspective of a
  pet.
- 75.Describe the most atmospheric Halloween setting you can imagine.
- 76.What if you could turn invisible on Halloween night? What would you do?
- 77.Write a story about a Halloween-themed baking competition.
- 78.Describe the feeling of walking through a corn maze at night.

- 79. What would you do if you found a portal to the monster world on Halloween?
- 80.Write about a day in the life of a Halloween candy maker.
- 81.Describe the most elaborate Halloween yard display you can imagine.
- 82. What if you could possess any Halloween decoration for the night? Which would you choose?
- 83.Write a story about a Halloween talent show for monsters.
- 84.Describe the perfect Halloween-themed drink.
- 85.What would you do if you could fly on a broomstick on Halloween night?
- 86.Write about a Halloween from the perspective of a trick-or-treat bag.
- 87.Describe the most spine-chilling Halloween sound you can imagine.
- 88.What if you could design a new Halloween monster? What would it be like?
- 89.Write a story about a Halloween night where gravity stops working.
- 90.Describe the texture of your favorite

- Halloween costume.
- 91.What would you do if you could control Halloween decorations with your mind?
- 92. Write about a day in the life of a Halloween makeup artist.
- 93.Describe the most unique Halloween tradition you can invent.
- 94.What if you could shrink down and explore a haunted dollhouse on Halloween?
- 95.Write a story about a Halloween where all the candy comes to life.
- 96.Describe the perfect Halloween-themed town.
- 97.What would you do if you could communicate with bats on Halloween night?
- 98.Write about a
  Halloween from the perspective of a carved pumpkin.
- 99.Describe the most otherworldly Halloween light display you can imagine.
- 100.What if you woke up on Halloween with the ability to cast spells? How would you use your power?

As you've journeyed through these 100 Halloween journal prompts, you've explored the vast and varied landscape of spooky creativity. From haunted houses to magical creatures, from eerie atmospheres to whimsical Halloween scenarios, each prompt has offered a unique gateway into the world of Halloween-inspired writing. Whether you've tackled a handful of prompts or worked your way through the entire list, you've undoubtedly stretched your imagination and honed your writing skills in the process.

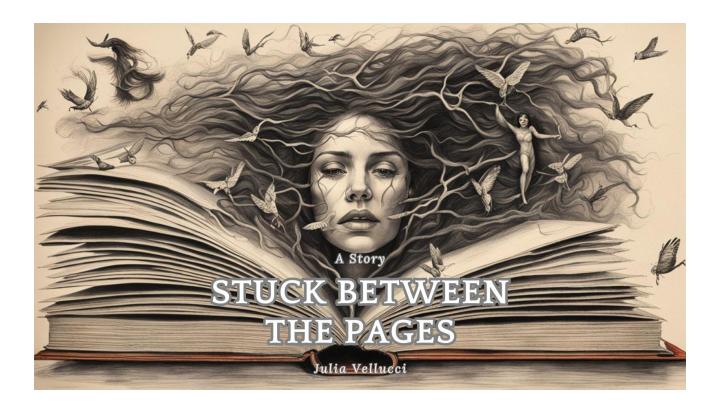
Remember, the true power of these prompts lies not just in the initial ideas they spark, but in where those ideas can lead you. A single prompt about a haunted jack-o'lantern might evolve into a full-fledged short story, or even the seed of a novel. The prompt asking you to describe your perfect Halloween weather could inspire a poem about the sensory experiences of autumn. Don't be afraid to let your writing take you in unexpected directions – after all, surprise and unpredictability are at the heart of both good writing and Halloween itself.

As you continue your writing journey, consider revisiting these prompts throughout the year, not just during the Halloween season. The skills you develop through these exercises – vivid description, unique perspectives, worldbuilding, and more – are valuable in all types of writing, regardless of genre or theme. Plus, who says you

can't enjoy a little Halloween spirit in the middle of spring or the height of summer?

Finally, remember that like the ever-changing faces of jack-o'-lanterns or the rotating cast of monsters in a haunted house, your writing is a constantly evolving craft. These prompts are not just one-time exercises, but tools you can return to again and again, each time discovering new depths to your creativity. So keep that Halloween spirit alive in your writing all year round, and who knows? By next October, you might just have a collection of terrifying tales or a bone-chilling novel ready to share with the world. Happy writing, and may your words be as thrilling as a moonlit night in a misty graveyard!





### Stuck Between the Pages

by Julia Vellucci

How do I know I'm real and not just a fragment of somebody's imagination?

How do I know I'm not just words on a page living in a book people read to fulfill their time, not realizing they are ending mine?

I don't. Nobody besides the creator of our universe, our God, will ever know. But whatever it is I am will always feel so emotional driven, so heartfelt, like wet ink on the page.

If I was fictional, in some ways, I'd be more alive than the reader who needed to enter my world to escape theirs. After all, they cared enough to go through the pages of my story, read in between the lines in their attempt to get to know me, the parts that aren't written but are still told. Their eyes were glued to the pages I see as my life, something I try to escape just as they do but can't, allowing all they read of I wonder if the reader thinks mine to be so raw, so human.

The more pages the reader turned, the more I lost of myself as it's hard for me to not be so consumed by the

past that I lose it all, the present and the future.

I hope there's a sequel, more to me than just the past I can never leave behind, so much so that the lines between what is written, my insecurities, fears, worries are what write all I face, not the pen, the ink or even the author. But all the pain, betrayal and anguish I feel when I should be feeling love, joy and peace.

my life and I are funny to them, makes their life look good in comparison. Or I wonder if they're so intrigued by me because they see something in me I don't see in myself and maybe never will.

Like any story, I was just a character, just mere words on a page that would continue to repeat no matter how many times it was read because she was trapped in it, always living in the past no matter what page was turned to. Nobody cares how much suffering a character goes through, let alone those that inflicted it. All that matters is that they can use it to escape.

I don't choose what happens in my life, in my world. Even the decisions I make are chosen by a combination of my mind and heart which are both haunted by the demons of my past. Your story continues past the pages. Mine, however, is stuck in time and will be repeated until death do us part, loyal reader.

###

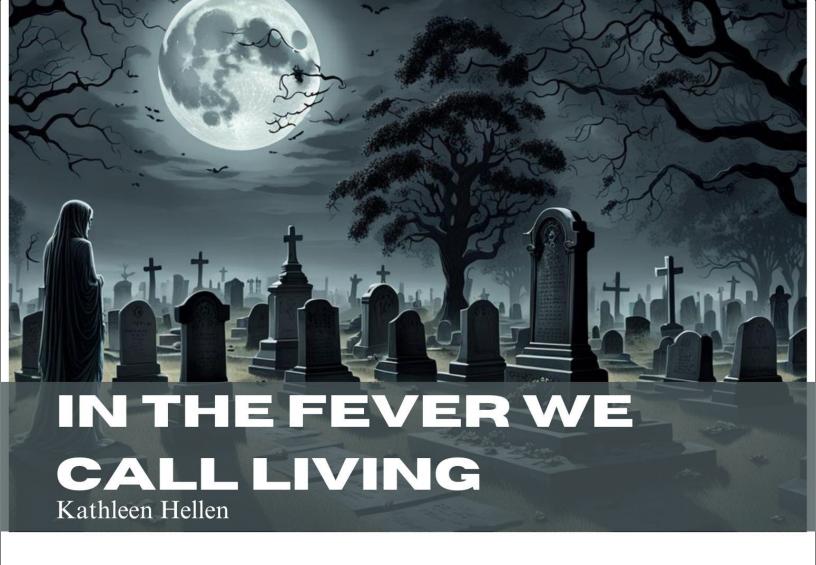
Julia Vellucci is a 20-year-old girl, born and raised in Mississauga, Ontario, with eight romance books, a fantasy novella, as well as an anthology all traditionally published with Ukiyoto Publishing. She also has a novel on a pay-to-read program on the app iStory, a short story published in Polar Expressions' anthology "The Path Collection" as well as another short story published in the Humber Literacy Review. Additionally, she is a journalism student with some articles published on Humber News, Humber Et Cetera, and even on the Humber Hawks' site. Vellucci has never been good at visual art unlike her mom and younger sister who inspired her to find a way to

express her creative side, through writing.

She discovered her love for creative writing in the tenth grade when she first began to bring fictional characters to life through the written craft thanks to a school book club she was part of and couldn't help but want to discover what made her characters unique and carry out their story until the very end. Vellucci's dream is to be able to inspire individuals through her words as she believes words can project more than actions ever could.

Readers can find her on Goodreads or visit her website at juliavellucci.weebly.com. She is also on Instagram under the username juliavellucciauthor.





in the fever we call living

"The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world." EAP we flapped our arms like dark birds lighted on the Pallas /

I was cousined

to the likeness of / my Mother and Lenore / my poor soul / the guilty narrator / self-

sabotaging

in rehearsed

bereavement / in bitter quarrels with / the ill angels / feasting on the drop of blood I carried to the table

when the wind blew out of a cloud / when the wind haunted trees

I wandered in her cemeteries / sick or drunk / or both / consumed with death / electing oblivion, in another man's soiled clothes

Featured on Poetry Daily and Verse Daily, Kathleen Hellen's work has been nominated multiple times for Best of the Net and the Pushcart. She is the recipient of the James Still Award, the Thomas Merton prize for Poetry of the Sacred, and poetry prizes from the H.O.W. Journal and Washington Square Review. Hellen is the author of three full-length poetry collections, including Meet Me at the Bottom, The Only Country Was the Color of My Skin, and Umberto's Night, which won the poetry prize from Washington Writers' Publishing House, and two chapbooks.



# FALLING OUT

#### BY LENKA MIKLOSOVA VRAZDA

An evening catches you again softly wrapped in your flannel comforter. Somewhere in this house, perhaps on the first floor, is he. He, in whose arms you're supposed to be safely tucked in. You hear him washing the dishes. His footsteps on the wooden floor. Your eyelids grew heavy with tiredness. You feel a hot and wet tear running down your cheek. Lonelier than lonely. You hear him taking a shower, whistling under his breath, brushing his teeth, spitting toothpaste in the sink. You feel his hand on a doorknob followed by squeaking of the door he was supposed to oil a while ago. Now he's in the hallway and now he's gone. In his bedroom, in his bed. So close yet so far.

The next morning, he kisses before you start making breakfast. He comes to the kitchen bringing a dirty coffee mug, making sure he doesn't brush against you while you're standing by the sink washing the plates. Your child comes to ask you if daddy made you some tea. "No darling, no today." Your child's smile freezes as you're trying to smile at him. "Let's go or you'll be late for school," He announces to your child and without looking at you, the door closes behind him. You hand your child a backpack with his lunch, kiss his cheeks and he's gone too. Lonelier than lonely. A quick stop at the store for forgotten eggs. Staff meeting. Phone calls. Reports. Invoices. Noon. No text from him. A glance at the photograph of him and your child you carry in your wallet. Gym. Admiring looks of other men. Another evening at home. No looks. A happy child, his warm cheeks. Bathtime. Dinner. Shower. Flannel comforter. Tears. Lonelier than lonely.

Lenka Miklosova Vrazda is originally from Slovakia but currently lives and writes in the United States.

West

#### WEST BY PHILIP NEWTON

Here at the edge of things the place where everything stops you can hold on to it put one foot in the ocean and keep one leg on the curve of coast You won't be cornered in some dismal canyon smelling of tar and leather You know there's a place to jump off The sun disappears safely extinguished every night behind the waves Its last fires reveal where toothed creatures and lost iron lie Its ghost crosses the water to east west shores Once I went that way and watched it rise again from the deep

Philip Newton is a writer, musician and stonemason living in Oregon. In addition to publishing one novel, TERRANE (Unsolicited Press, 2018), shorter works have appeared or are upcoming in Ginosko Literary, Letters Journal (Yale), The Hamilton Stone Review, Roanoke Review, Gargoyle, and other periodicals. He is a graduate of the Sonoma State University writing program.



# the BICOASTAL REVIEW

Featuring

IRIS BLOOMFIELD ANTHONY BORRUSO

With poems by

JACQUELIN MOLINA GUILLEN EMILY REYNDERS
CHARLIE SCHNEIDER

& photography by

LAWRENCE DI STEFANO

NO.1 08.01.2023



I am caught up in the silence, your web, those promises, each one wicked. As I lay in silk with you, trembling, bare, cold, but warm from your sweat and the heat in your eyes, I think maybe this one time, I will reach you. Maybe this time you won't hide. You won't run. But somebody always leaves, don't they? And what are we left with nothing but empty spaces.

Jaded, no rest, weary, still you come crawling back, hanging round my door. Again, I am stripped down, floating under silk sheets, the full moon glaring like one massive eye outside my window, only this time, I'm left shivering. There is too much silence here. Where are you? Where? I need to know.

And, on this evening, a harrowing Sunday, I finally break, "I need to quit," I whisper, as I stumble and drift in the dark, fishing for all the scattered pieces, the parts that might make me whole.

Angela Carlton is a Georgia native. Her fiction has been published in EWR, Everyday Fiction, Pedestal Magazine, Long Story Short, High Noon, Third Iris, 50-wordstories, and Friday Flash Fiction. In addition, she won the reader's choice award with Pedestal Magazine in 2006. When she was a child, she wrote a book called, The Magic Fish and tucked it away in a box for safekeeping. Her collection of stories, "A Jigsaw Life," was released in December 2022.



# MARIE HANNA CURRAN'S

#### THE HUNT FOR THE DESIRED RATIO

Stepping out of the large arena, I asked the expansive blue sky, "What do you think of all this begging?"

Eventually accepting the sky's refusal to partake in any discourse, I sighed and re-entered the hive of organised chaos, readying myself for the propaganda to which I'd sold my soul.

At one side of each table were smartly dressed individuals, all of whom had travelled hours to this foreign country, while queues of people gathered at the opposite side, references, and documentation in hand.

Pausing, I asked a smiling applicant, "Do you have a moment to say a few words to The Irish Politico?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. What brought you here today?"

"My brother applied in the last round and he's living in County Cork now, working for an engineering company and earning a higher wage than he could ever earn here. So, the moment I qualified from college, I was always going to follow him and when it was announced Ireland was to bid this weekend, I applied and was selected for today's recruitment drive. Thankfully I just secured a job and I'm to travel in two weeks- once all the documentation is finalised -."
"Congratulations."

"Thank you. And I know there are cynics in my country towards these drives. You saw the protestors on your way in. But they are all a generation beyond me, a generation who often misquote the treatment of my ancestors decades ago. As your media and others write, it's all misinformation. And my brother says Ireland is a great country for migrants, he's seen nothing but the best in people, so I do apologise for those who say bad things about you... I am sorry, I really must go, my family are waiting to hear my news."

Thanking the lady for her time and congratulating her once again, I mused on our history, a chequered one when it came to migration. My own grandfather swearing there was a time when migrants were treated inhumanly and put in tents with no access to sanitary facilities. But any attempts we in the media made at digging, found the soil fell from beneath our prying hands.

With fertility in steep decline and our aging population a war in its own right, our government had become fixated on improving the ratio of pensioners to workers, aware the desired ratio was more than just a desire, but a necessity to stave off a growing budget deficit, dwindling pension pots and the biggest fear of all, a civil war.

Without these men and women, first world countries were set to crumble, and the people in them destined to starve.

Working migrants were the new weapons and artillery, weapons Ireland was competing for with other rich nations. A month from now and the US was to be in town, two months later and it was the UK. Each country a recruitment officer in an new era known as "The hunt for the desired ratio."

# Interview with Abby Simpson The Dragon and the Butterfly

Every Writer is thrilled to sit down with Abby Simpson, a talented Vancouver-based author and freelancer, as she celebrates the release of her captivating debut novel, *The* **Dragon and the Butterfly** (coming April 22, 2024), published by Lost Boys Press. With a degree in political science from Simon Fraser University, Abby brings a unique perspective to her writing, seamlessly weaving her passion for history and politics into the fabric of her storytelling.

Abby's journey as a writer has been marked by her versatility and dedication to her craft. Her short fiction and insightful non-fiction commentary have graced the pages of notable publications such as Vamp Cat Magazine, Gestalt Media, and DeanBlundell.com, showcasing her ability to engage readers across various genres and platforms.

As we delve into the inspiration behind The Dragon and the Butterfly and explore Abby's creative process, we invite you to join us for an enlightening conversation with a rising star

in the literary world. Get ready to be inspired by Abby's unwavering commitment to her art and her unique ability to infuse her stories with the richness of history and the intricacies of politics.

you to write *The Dragon and the Butterfly?* 

Abby Simpson: I love jumping down research rabbit holes about historical events, eras, and people that interest me, and I read about Matilda of Flanders, the wife of William the Conqueror, and



**Every Writer:** What inspired connected to her story in a

way that made me want to write her story.

**Every Writer:** Can you tell us a bit about the main characters in your book?

Abby: Matilda "Maud" is intelligent, headstrong, and romantic, and her husband William is loyal, brash, and formidable. Together they're an incredibly strong pair and their love conquered a country, and this is their story.

**Every Writer:** How long did it take you to complete the writing process for this novel?

**Abby:** Two years and then I probably picked at and edited it for another 12 months before it went to print and I physically could not edit any more words.

**Every Writer:** What themes do you explore in "The Dragon and the Butterfly"?

**Abby:** Love, war, politics, family, religion, and how the stories of the past have shaped our future, sometimes with unintended results. Nothing major/sarcasm.

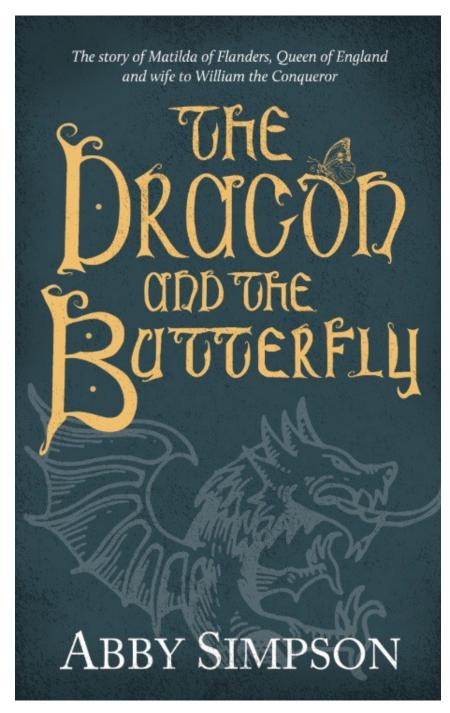
Every Writer: Is there a particular message you hope readers will take away from your book?

**Abby:** I'd love people to realize that telling historical events we may know about already from perspectives the

ancient chroniclers tended to ignore (the lives of women) is interesting AF.

**Every Writer:** How did you come up with the title for

**Abby:** Symbolism, but the idea was hatched from the chaos butterfly theory - the notion that a butterfly can flap its wings in one place and it sets off a chain reaction that



your novel?

leads to war halfway around

the world. The old Wessex symbol, prior to the Norman conquest of England, was also a three-toed dragon called a wyvern.

Every Writer: Did you face any challenges while writing this book, and if so, how did you overcome them?

Abby: Writer's block was real sometimes but this story interested me all the way to the end. I was just as excited to find out the ending as I hope readers will be, if that makes sense. If you don't love your own story, it's going to be harder to write it.

Every Writer: Are any of the characters or events in your book inspired by real-life experiences?

Abby: Literally all of them are real or based on someone real, except one character I based on indie author Dzintra Sullivan because I look up to her and like infusing people I like into good characters just as much as I "bury" people I don't like in bad ones.

Every Writer: What makes "The Dragon and the Butterfly" unique compared to other books in its genre?

**Abby:** The female perspective, the blending of magical realism into historical events, and a love story that feels real and lived in and complex. It also strives to

make histfic more accessible to people who might glaze over some elements of histfic-like long-winded scenic descriptions that take a whole page to describe. I wanted the story to be clearly historical fiction, but also with a little modern vibe at the same time.

Every Writer: Can you share a novel and then one day I'll favorite quote or passage sign it in person. ?

From your book?

Every Writer: You are part

**Abby:** When William told Maud "Over time, you became the sun. Every day the sun would rise and set, and I'd think of you" I fell for him myself!

**Every Writer:** Who are some of your favorite authors, and how have they influenced your writing?

Ms. Simpson: The Dragon and the Butterfly is my Philippa Gregory/Hilary Mantel/Ken Rutherfurd era. Epic scope, complex female protagonists, juicy drama.

Every Writer: What research did you conduct while writing this book?

Abby: All of it.

Documentaries, deep-dives ending in 30 open browser tabs, etc. I read ancient texts and chronicles and infused those stories into The Dragon and the Butterfly, listened to historians, and became insufferable in my perceived knowledge of Queen Maud.

Every Writer: Are you planning any promotional events or book signings for the launch of "The Dragon and the Butterfly"?

**Abby:** I would love to but as an indie you have to sell books to make money to sell more books, so please buy my novel and then one day I'll sign it in person. ?

Every Writer: You are part of the writing community on Twitter, how has it helped you in your writing career?

Abby: I met Ashley Hutchison and Chad Ryan of Lost Boys Press through Twitter, so without Twitter's writing community this novel might still be looking for a publisher. The Twitter writing community quite literally changed my life.

Every Writer: Can you give us a hint about any future projects you're working on?

Abby: Well, William and Maud had about ten kids, and they were dramatic at the best of times. I've already written a sequel (called *The Cursed Daughter*) that I hope one day will be published. As with real history, the story of William and Maud and their descendants is still being written one thousand years later, so there's so much story in my head left to tell.

**Every Writer:** How do you balance your writing career with your personal life and other

commitments?

**Abby:** I have a great job I do from home and no kids. Balance is not really an issue for me!

Every Writer: What advice would you give to aspiring writers who are working on their first novel?

**Abby:** As above, LOVE YOUR STORY as much or more than a reader might. Tell the story you want to tell, the way you want to tell it.

Every Writer: Are there any specific songs or playlists that you listened to while writing "The Dragon and the Butterfly"?

**Abby:** Not really. I tried some medieval lute playlists etc. but they weren't quite hitting it so I ended up writing a lot of this novel in dead silence, listening to the characters' voices interact in my head.

The Dragon and the Butterfly will be out April 22 from Lost Boys Press. You can catch up

with Abby on Twitter at @abbythetweet, Instagram at abbythegram and TikTok at Abbythetik. We talked to Abby by email.

## 6 WORD HORROR Story Winners

"FOUND MYSELF IN TOMORROW'S OBITUARY TODAY." - DW COOK

"BABY FOOTPRINTS, OVER Windshield, after funeral." -Sugga vanish

"DON'T BREATHE. IT'S THERE. BEHIND YOU." - KAYLEIGH MANLEY

"WE SHOULD START SEEING OTHER PEOPLE." - LENKA VRAZDA

I'M SORRY, IVAN DIDN'T MAKE IT." -LENKA VRAZDA



## Interview with Lee Hall

Lee Hall is an accomplished indie author who has published works across multiple genres, from occult thrillers to paranormal romance. With a passion for storytelling that began in his childhood, Lee has honed his craft over the years, drawing inspiration from his own life experiences as well as the works of renowned authors like Michael Crichton, Stephen King, and Arthur Conan Doyle.

In addition to his novels, Lee is also a talented playwright, serving as the resident playwright for his local drama club. His fresh take on British pantomime has delighted audiences and earned him recognition within the community theater scene.

But Lee's talents don't stop there - he is also a prolific blogger and social media presence, using his platform to promote fellow indie authors and share his expertise on book marketing and blogging. His dedication to helping others succeed in the indie publishing world has earned him a loyal following and cemented his position as a respected figure within the community.

Today, we sit down with Lee to discuss his writing journey,

indie publishing, and what the future holds for this multi-faceted author.

Every Writer: What inspired you to start writing and when did you realize it was your



the challenges and rewards of passion?

Every Writer 103

Lee: Reading was a huge part of my childhood along with consuming any kind of immersive story through plenty of other mediums – television, theatre and of course cinema along with even the likes of live sport. This eventually inspired me to chase my own creativity in the pursuit of finding immersion

romance. How do you decide which genre to explore next?

Lee: To me and as a writer, genres are variable and they kind of blend in most of my works. Sometimes an idea or even a single plot thread that becomes a story won't actually have a genre to begin with but there will always be something at

from real life. Can you share an example of how a real-life event has influenced one of your stories?

Lee: My debut book Open Evening is a semi-biographical account of my high school days so it's basically a series of events and experiences I faced but with added fictional elements and



through stories. Writing simply makes me feel good and over many years it has become part of who I am to the point where it's now my passion.

**Every Writer:** Your works span across multiple genres, from occult thrillers to paranormal

stake or a subject I intend to write about that emerges first. Eventually, that will pull my writing towards a genre that basically hosts the whole thing.

Every Writer: You mention that your works carry deeper meanings that tribute events creature feature horror. The moments, faces, feelings and even places I've put in that book tribute what was an awful school journey for me with the later realisation that I wasn't like many in that crowd within those corridors and classrooms (which is okay). That feeling of being the only one, is the central theme in

Open Evening for main character Luke Hartford who thinks the whole town in strange and it turns out he might be on to something. He also shares my initials among many other similar personality tropes of mine.

Every Writer: Being a resident playwright for your local drama club, how does writing for the stage differ from writing novels?

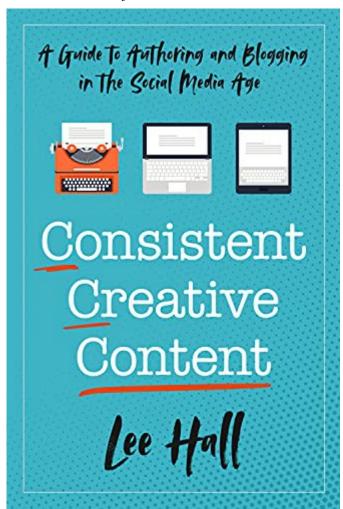
**Lee:** In recent times, writing for my local drama group has brought a level of satisfaction and pride that I cannot find anywhere else in my writing endeavours. The key difference for me is imagining these stories as physical stage productions instead of a world inside a book so they basically have to work in every practical sense. And by that I mean costumes, set, staging, run time and so much more. This gives me a kind of objective view of the writing and this way I'll know whether or not it will work as a script needs to be practical enough to become a production. Books sit way more cinematically in my mind during the drafting process and all you really need to consume then is an imagination but my plays will require that and much more to work.

To hold a single idea and then pursue it to a fully written script

is basically only really a portion of the mammoth task that is putting on a show with paying audience watching and living breathing performers on stage. So there comes a moment where I am simply a proud passenger on the journey also.

**Every Writer**: What challenges did you face when adapting pantomimes, and how did you

Lee: My initial vision was to write a modern and contemporary version of Beauty and the Beast that was a tribute to both fairy tale and the modern cinema adaptation. As someone who was also established as a performer in the club, I also appreciated that only so many performers were being granted main roles as the previous scripts involved 10 to 12 parts.



put your fresh take on this British stage tradition?

At the time, there were a lot of performers who deserved roles and so from the very start of my work in adapting this show, I

had the performers in mind. My version of Beauty and the Beast had 18 roles and was regarded as one of the most successful shows the club performed in many years. There were standing ovations after one performance which is no small feat for a community drama group.

So the challenge remains now even after just finishing my 6th adaptation to keep up with the club I write for and ensure they are basically taken care of in regard to having a show that works for them while also retaining all the hallmarks of that first script. That is of course while also facing the challenges of presenting them with something that is funny, entertaining and a good experience to be in for audience and performer alike. It sounds like a massive undertaking and it can be, but also it's something I truly love doing.

My ultimate ambition as a playwright is to see these scripts performed by other drama clubs – they are all available for licence to perform by the way...

Every Writer: With thousands of readers downloading your works, what do you believe is the key to attracting and maintaining a loyal readership? **Lee:** Consistency in everything I do as a social media present *creative and writer is the key*. Whether it be that social media presence where every day I turn up to regular book releases and of course promotion. Everything I do to attract readers and maintain a loyal readership revolves around consistency while learning to move forward and grow from it. Turning up matters and creates opportunity eventually. My mantra is to simply never give up through the good and bad times.

Every Writer: How has your active social media presence helped you promote your works and engage with your audience?

**Lee:** Social media is a huge opportunity as it is so plugged in to many different people with all types of backgrounds and inputs who are readily available all the time. Over the years I've managed to learn how to grow and reach people in ways that encourages them to follow me and engage with my content through mainly conversation and being positive. Marketing to me is simply engaging with my audience in conversational ways and ensuring that the experiences I have with people is positive. People remember good experiences online and this eventually urges them to buy my works. This is also how I've gotten noticed by so many people over the years which has led to much of my success.

Every Writer: On your "Hall of Information" blog, you focus on promoting fellow authors through reviews. Why is it important for you to support other writers in the indie community?

**Lee:** As a huge fan of reading and being immersed in stories it's really a natural fit for me to promote fellow Indies in the community. Plus I know exactly how hard it can be to find reviews and so it might be a drop in the ocean, but I am playing a part in filling that gap by reviewing fellow writers. I don't consider myself a hero for it, more of a traveller looking for that next awesome story. Another huge thing about reviewing so many wonderful indie books is the amount of extra content it can create. As an active blogger, my Hall of Information blog needs material, so reviews are great for regular content.

Every Writer: What inspired you to create guides and tutorials on book marketing and blogging advice, and how have these resources been received by your followers?

**Lee:** Being open and honest about my results as an indie author is basically how I kind of fell into the idea of writing guides about the stuff I have learned. As far back as 2017 I shared my sales statistics online (both good and bad) - this became a surprising positive revelation that began to build social bridges with fellow authors. Soon enough I began to dabble with the idea of sharing more such as who I've advertised with and how exactly I have sold books into the thousands over years.

The majority of my followers are writers or creatives who are looking to find consumers for their work or to grow online and they have found me through the many guides and tutorials I've put out there over time so I'd like to believe it has been well received so far.

Every Writer: You've recently started a Patreon. What unique content can your patrons expect to find there?

Lee: All of my best and most exclusive guide based content can be found via my Patreon and I'll happily boast that my content isn't like anything else out there in terms of resources for indie creatives. I'm incredibly

proud of the following I've grown on the platform as well as the sheer amount of resources available over there. Some wonderful patrons pay me a small fee monthly to put together mostly guide based content to help them grow on social media or through wider creative things. From finding book reviews to navigating twitter in detail to selling books plus so much more, my patreon is stacked with content and is continually growing.

If you are looking to grow as an indie author in the online world, then be sure to check it out. (
<a href="https://www.patreon.com/lhallwriter">https://www.patreon.com/lhallwriter</a>)

Every Writer: Among the television shows you draw inspiration from, which one has had the most significant impact on your writing and why?

Lee: Some of my original writing inspiration stemmed from watching the first run of Buffy the Vampire Slayer all the way back in the early 2000's. The fusion of multiple genres booted with the concept of a powerful action hero (and Buffy really was to me) who could deal with whatever challenges life threw her. The show had a resounding effect on my young mind. It inspired me to eventually begin writing stories

of my own, many of which are themed with the ordinary facing the extraordinary.

Every Writer: As an indie author, what has been the most challenging aspect of getting your books noticed in a crowded market?

**Lee:** Being seen is probably the biggest challenge for any author out there as hundreds of new books find their release each month but I have also learned that it is never too late to promote or find success with a book. The moment after release is bathed in continual opportunity to try new things with promotion and eventually succeed. Simply not giving up and doing my best to stand out on social media has helped me big time – this is where a lot of my motivation to put out guide based content has emerged from. If you can do something within reason that not many others are doing, it will eventually help you stand out. Paying for advertising helps also.

**Every Writer**: Conversely, what has been the most rewarding moment of your indie author journey so far?

Lee: There have been plenty of rewarding moments for me that kind of have equal measure but seeing two of my books reach
Amazon Best Seller is very much
on the top of my list. This is
especially prevalent for my guide
book Consistent Creative
Content which is the only nonfiction book on my back list so
far and has helped so many
fellow authors. Of course, I am
also proud of The Teleporter
hitting that milestone also
because in the early days after it
was just released, I had huge
doubts about it.

The real message here is the fact both of these works had been published for some years before hitting best seller, so keep going!

Every Writer: In your bestselling guide book, "Consistent Creative Content," what key insights do you share with authors and bloggers navigating the social media age?

Lee: There are a lot of different messages within CCC that are all linked by positivity and finding happiness in what you have achieved no matter the size. Many of us get caught up in the journey of the 'grind' without just taking some time to realise how far we have come to get to now. Appreciating what we are capable of can propel us forward while also giving us all a deserved sense of pride in what we can achieve. That sense of pride is powerful and if we can

unlock it, we'll begin to enjoy our journey and that is how eventual progress is made.

Every Writer: As an author who has found success in both fiction and non-fiction, what advice would you give to aspiring writers who are unsure of which path to pursue?

Lee: If I can do this and find success then so can you. Writing and finishing a book is a huge achievement that only you can learn to do by simply doing. Embrace the challenge and your words because this path is yours and yours only. There will come times when a leap of faith is required for everyone pursuing success in writing. Of course, reach out to fellow writers and don't be afraid to ask them. On social media, there is always someone who is facing similar challenges to you.

Every Writer: Lastly, what can readers expect from you in the future? Are there any new projects or genres you're excited to explore?

Lee: Right now I am very much embracing the regular content creation aspect of my journey by putting out new guides and even video book reviews via Patreon/YouTube. You can catch me most days on Twitter and

quite soon I am going to be exploring a possible new book release for later this year. Thank you for the opportunity to answer some wonderful questions.

Every Writer: Thank you.

Lee: Thank you for the opportunity.

You can visit Lee on social media or at his website listed below. Many of his books are available online for purchase.

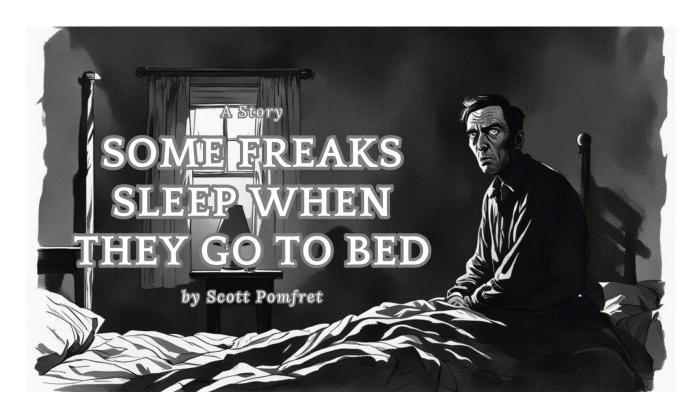
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Some freaks sleep when they go to bed. No tossing and turning. No dread. No rehashing bad choices and personal humiliations. No plotting endless revenge.

Such monsters can't be trusted. They inevitably have parents they admire, who are their best friends, who never spanked or raised their voices, and collected spare bikes from the town dump and fixed them up for needy kids, thereby teaching their unicorn children both the zen of bicycle maintenance and the grace of generosity and philanthropy.

Screw them. You're my

people. You have ghosts that keep you gloriously interesting. You have bags under your eyes. You give head like you're saving a life through artificial resuscitation. Your smile is wretched, broken, and shy. Your drooping lids snap wide at the night gossips: whispering wind, creaking floorboards, cranky radiator, a sharp bare branch etching a window pane.

We know better what bed's for: Passion. Regret. Dying. Wrestling. Clutching. Blood. Sweat. Fever. Tears. Bedsheets knotted like a rope for hanging. Pillowcases slicked damp with sweat when we sit bolt upright at

precisely the same time and blurt, "What the fuck was that?"

The punch of a snapped bedspring pushes through your heart. The bedside radiator wakes with a vicious hiss. Pipes pound. Candle- or crayon-stench combines with damp cloth. Scatter-motes dust the moonlight. A distant audio stream quietly drones. The neighbor's televisionflicker penetrates our blinds.We consider whether we deserve to be other than alone. No matter whether it's a queen or a California king, in our heads, they're all ultimately single beds.

I first knew you and I were

partners in crime when I found you sleeping standing on a subway car. Jolt after jolt.

"Come back to bed," I whispered.

I didn't mean to sleep, perchance to dream, the least bad of all possible alternatives. I meant doorknocks and footfalls, whimpers and groans. Roach skitter. Mouse patter. Rocker creak. Braincase rattle. We'd have been compelled to invent these sounds in our heads if they weren't real. We wouldn't ever be satisfied.

Haul up the ladders. Mount the bed high with storage beneath for shoes, for go bags, for bedding, for lice. In light of the moon's careful inspection, you snatch a quarter from the air, so it doesn't bounce twice. You put it away for a rainy day.

We brave intruders we never invited. We watch shadows slough from the walls. We hunker down, we cup flame, we tell stories to faces we barely see. It's all very communal. If someone ever offered to grant us the peaceful sleepers' freakish sickly-sweet dreams, we'd have called them pirates.

We speak housecreak. We breathe moonbeam. We hike the midnight bedsheet dunescape. We endure the cold fingers of perennially spinning ceiling fans.

We say, Remember the time...?

We rarely allude to the future. We sleep only when we're dead. After feeding the young and living. We'll beatify every single one of those goddamn freaks.

###

Scott Pomfret is author of Since My Last Confession: A Gay Catholic Memoir; Hot Sauce: A Novel; the Q Guide to Wine and Cocktails, and over fifty short stories published in magazines including Ecotone, Smokelong Quarterly, The Short Story (UK), Post Road, New Orleans Review, Fiction International, and Fourteen Hills. An MFA candidate in creative writing at Emerson College, resident in Provincetown MA, Scott is at work on a comic queer Know-Nothing alternative history novel set in antebellum New Orleans, More at www.scottpomfret.com.

# THE QUIET READER

AN INTERNATIONAL LITERARY MAGAZINE





In the dim light of her childhood attic, Mia found an old mirror. As she wiped the dust away, her reflection smiled back, even when she didn't. The smile widened, revealing sharp teeth. Every night, Mia felt the cold breath of the creature on the other side, whispering her name by Frank Mashina

Frank Peter Mashina is a medical student at Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. When he isn't studying, he channels his passion for storytelling into writing novels, short stories, essays, and poems. Frank is also interested in research and aims to inspire others through his literary works. Winning the 50 Word Horror Story Contest is a dream come true for him, and he hopes his work will encourage others to pursue their literary dreams despite any obstacles.



## PURE MARCIA TRAHAN

Pure
Listen: living
is what I want to talk about.

When my struggles ended, I simply walked down a newly opened path.

I saw the sun, building gold and true.

Survival brings guilt when so many go dark.

But I knew that
my spirit would not fly off,
the black earth would not consume me.
I saw grasshoppers flitting greenly at my feet,
I saw a cardinal dressed in its reds,
watching to see what I would do next.

In the exact center of my body there was fire, an irrepressible flame: fuel, not damage, pure, no ashes.

Marcia Trahan is the author of Mercy: A Memoir of Medical Trauma and True Crime Obsession (Barrelhouse Books). Her essays and poetry have appeared in HuffPost, Two Hawks Quarterly, Wild Roof Journal, Cloudbank, The Rumpus, Catapult, the Brevity Blog, Fourth Genre, and other publications. Marcia works as a freelance book editor and holds an MFA from Bennington College. To learn more, visit www.marciatrahan.com.

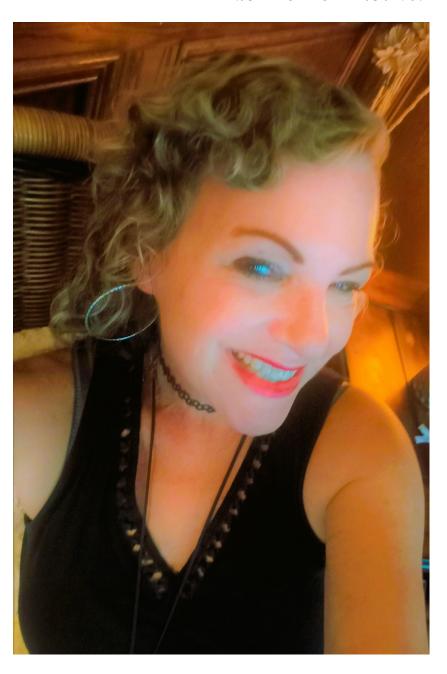
## Interview with Angela Carlton

Carlton's upbringing, surrounded by a family of artists and musicians, has influenced her writing style and the stories she tells. upbringing influence your writing style and the stories you tell?

Carlton: This is a great question. I come from a long line of talented people. My mother was a songwriter in Nashville when I was a kid.

In this interview, Angela Carlton shares insights into her creative process, the influences that have shaped her writing, and the themes that form the bedrock of her work. From her childhood inspiration in writing "The Magic Fish" to her current project, "The Souls of King Street," Carlton's journey as a writer is one of growth, selfdiscovery, and an unwavering commitment to her craft. Through her stories, she explores the question of whether Jane, and by extension, anyone facing similar struggles, can pick up the jigsaw pieces of a shattered life and find their way back home again. Join us as we embark on a journey into the mind and works of this captivating Southern writer, whose stories serve as a beacon of hope and resilience in the face of life's most challenging moments.

**Every Writer:** Growing up in Georgia, how did your



My father, a guitarist, had ties with several southern bands doing studio work with Atlanta Rhythm Section, Lynyrd Skynyrd and The Georgia Satellites. It gave me a great appreciation for the written word, lyrics and the love of art.

**Every Writer:** Your short fiction has been published in numerous literary magazines. What draws you to the short story format?

**Carlton:** Honestly, it's the one thing I enjoy, especially flash fiction which are like songs in so many ways. I have written a few longer pieces over the years, but I enjoy the intensity, and the rawness of a micro story, one you must get down on the page in a 1000 words or less.

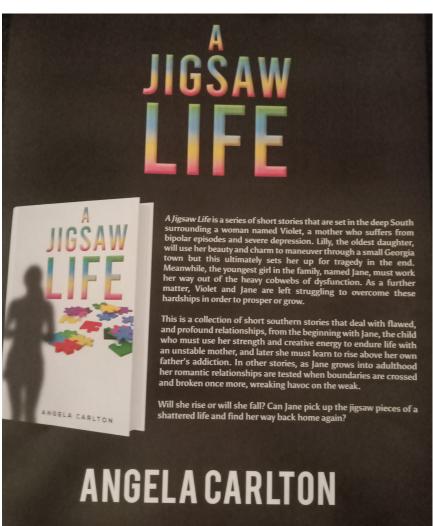
Every Writer: In 2006, you won the reader's choice award with Pedestal Magazine. How did that recognition impact your writing career?

**Carlton:** It gave me hope. I was just starting out and tinkering with writing. My daughter was three at the time and in my down time, I would have a flash of a story or a line that would come to me and in this case it was the opening line, "Jane's barely eleven when she takes her first sip of liquor," for the story "The Lost Ones," which won the award and was featured in my collection, "A Jigsaw Life."

Every Writer: Can you tell us

do you still have it?

Carlton: Yes, I wish I still had it! It was a notebook paper book that I stapled together as a kid with a photo of a blue, greenish fish. I drew it for the cover. I loved so many story books like "Charlotte's Web," "Where the Red Fern Grows" and "Huckleberry Finn." As a



about the book you wrote as a kid, for me, it was an escape child, "The Magic Fish"? What into glorious lands. inspired you to write it, and

Every Writer: Your collection of stories, "A Jigsaw Life," was released in December 2022. What themes do you explore in this collection?

Carlton: My platform is mental health. Unfortunately, this runs deep with a few family members suffering from mental health issues. It was usually rocky and trying to find the medication that would help them, would come through trial and tribulation. In the meantime, they suffered and so did we.

Every Writer: How long did it take you to write "A Jigsaw Life," and what was your writing process like?

Carlton: Honestly, about 10 years. After I won the writing contest, it was like opening a world to a secret door. I published several more stories in EveryDay Fiction, Pedestal magazine and a few others. Later, I ended up having enough published stories to compile into a collection.

**Every Writer:** Which story in "A Jigsaw Life" holds the most personal significance for you, and why?

Carlton: I would have to say, "The Funeral People," a story told from a child's POV surrounding the day of her sister Lilly's funeral, the day her mothers in bed and too depressed to go. The child must muster up the courage and the strength to call the Preacher to get a ride, her tenacity and keen insight shine through as she tries to make it through that dark day, alone. There is a piece of that child in me, as a writer.

Every Writer: As a writer, what do you find to be the most challenging aspect of the creative process?

Carlton: I think for me, I'm always thinking of the next collection of stories that will work as a collaboration so when I write, I'm always conscious of how I can make this fit into something grand where the characters connect. In that respect, it sometimes interferes with the creative process. I need to learn to write and let the rest follow.

**Every Writer:** Who are some of your favorite authors, and how have they influenced your writing?

**Carlton:** Growing up in the south. I tend to be drawn to southern writers like Sheri Reynolds, Kaye Gibbons and Daniel Wallace. Each one has their own distinct flair. Sheri's work is poetic and lyrical. You tend to get lost in every sentence. Kaye Gibbons has the ability to put you in the mind of a sassy child with impeccable dialect. Daniel Wallace has the gift of southern humor mixed with a mystical spin. I was also drawn to JD Salinger and his ability to capture the voice of a young, confused, sarcastic teenager. Lastly, the late Melissa Banks, who had the ability to capture broken and or profound relationships, and the girl who was always searching for herself.

**Every Writer**: What do you think is the key to crafting a compelling short story?

Carlton: In my opinion, it's the ability to get the intensity on the page from the very beginning and carry it through.

**Every Writer:** How do you approach character development in your stories?

Carlton: For me, it starts with

a feeling or an idea, and inside that emotion, the characters seem to fall into place.

**Every Writer:** Do you have a specific writing routine or ritual that helps you stay focused and productive?

Carlton: When the house is quiet, I turn on Jazz and try to dive into a page. Sometimes, I read if nothing comes to me, sketch or take notes for future stories.

**Every Writer:** What advice would you give to aspiring writers who are just starting out?

Carlton: I think finding the writers who inspire you and studying them is key because that is where you'll find your voice and style. If you enjoy writing and are always thinking of a scene or a line in a story, jot it down in a notebook or on a laptop etc. The idea is to capture it, record it because you can always go back to it and build from there. I have developed many stories with these techniques.

**Every Writer:** Are there any

particular themes or subjects you find yourself repeatedly drawn to in your writing?

Carlton: I'm drawn to characters who are broken, the ones who are lost and in need of saving.. I'm also drawn to people who are addicted to love or a substance, something that takes them out of the realm and in need of saving.

Every Writer: How do you handle writer's block, and what strategies do you use to overcome it?

Carlton: I tend to switch it up and do something else creative like sketching or remodeling a space. Recently, I white-washed wood and applied it to my kitchen island to give it a rustic vibe.

Every Writer: Can you share a memorable moment or experience from your writing career thus far?

Carlton: Yes, I can. It was the moment EveryWriter nominated me for the Pushcart Prize in 2023, thank you.

Every Writer: Are you currently working on any new projects, and if so, can you give us a sneak peek?

Carlton: Yes, I'm currently working on a new collection of flash stories surrounding the wounded and the lost, fragile people who live on King street. The working title is "The Souls of King Street."

Every Writer: How has your writing evolved over the years, and in what ways do you hope to continue growing as a writer?

Carlton: I hope to always grow as a writer. I wish I would have tapped into this talent earlier. I had glimpses at a young age when I wrote poetry or listened to song lyrics intensely. Now, I find I'll look into things from a deeper perspective and will see something remarkable in the ordinary or the unexplainable.

**Every Writer:** What do you hope readers will take away from your stories, particularly those in "A Jigsaw Life"?

**Carlton:** I hope they will find a sense of hope, and will find

a way to stay inspired, dream. passion behind the hum, the I hope they will find something that will resonate inside, an awakening.

beat and the flow of the written word.

It's a gift I treasure, truly.

**Every Writer:** Lastly, what does writing mean to you, and why do you continue to pursue it?

Every Writer: Thank you Angela.

Carlton: I knew I wanted to songs and write the lyrics down in my journal or play them over and over for the

Carlton: Thank you for everything.

be a writer when I would hear thrill. I'd read certain books and feel like I'd walk into the center of my dysfunctional living room.

Angela Carlton spoke to us by email. You can find her collection of stories A Jigsaw Life on Amazon, Barns and Noble and around the web.

It's all I've ever known, this





#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

## Tressa - September 29, 2024 at 5:42 am

Sarah began to sob uncontrollably as she heard the voice of an older version of her missing daughter on the other end of the phone. How could someone she had killed fifteen years ago return so simply?

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

## 3. Dana - September 17, 2024 at 9:49 pm

Answer your calls.
Dammit, Kristen answer them.
ANSWER THE PHONE.
I love you baby!
All you have to do is open the door.

Come on, open the door! Kristen. Come on. KRISTEN OPEN THE FUCKING DOOR KRISTEN I LOVE YOU SO MUCH

I'LL NEVER LEAVE
WE WILL BE TOGETHER
FOREVER.

#### 4. Altagracia Yesyurun -September 29, 2024 at 5:47 am

The old doll suddenly burst out laughing in the middle of the night. Her empty eyes stared at me intently. I tried to reach for the light switch, but her cold hands gripped my legs.

## 5. Nicholas - September 28, 2024 at 11:17 pm

Hey, you. Yes, you.

You don't know it yet, but you're already infected. Our experiment was airborne.

It begins with a small headache. You'll probably think nothing of it. Maybe you'll take an aspirin. It won't help. The nightmares come next, then the uncontrollable rage. I'm sorry. Please forgive me.

### 6. Aalok Rathod - September 29, 2024 at 7:17 am

He found the mask in his attic, worn and cracked. Curious, he put it on. Instantly, rage filled him. He grabbed a knife and couldn't stop. His hands acted on their own, blood splattering. As the mask laughed, he realized—it wouldn't come off.

#### 7. Altagracia Yesyurun -September 29, 2024 at 6:12 am

My friends and I liked to explore the old graveyard behind the school. One night, while we were playing hide-and-seek, I saw a white figure standing among the graves. I was sure it was a pocong, but I was too scared to scream.

#### 8. Drew Nowlin - September 5,

#### 2024 at 5:20 pm

Acknowledge the full moon and beware. Ashley's blood, no matter how cleverly masked, still beckoned the wolf. She'd barricaded doors and windows, but the vile, thirsty animal besotted her scent and destroyed its obstacles. The pale moon marked not only her death, but her heartless transition.

Her deceased f "Come to the litime," he said. She followed he luminous tunnous tunnous emerged, the mind disguise and be "Where's my regard. The creating her face of the litime," he said. She followed he luminous tunnous tunnous tunnous emerged, the mind disguise and be revealing her face of the litime," he said.

#### 1:43 am

Her deceased father appeared. "Come to the light, it's your time," he said.
She followed him through a

she followed him through a luminous tunnel. Once they emerged, the monster shed its disguise and began gutting her. "Where's my real father?" she gasped. The creature grinned, revealing her father's face beneath.

"Right here, sweetie."

## Sugga Vanish - September 26, 2024 at 1:01 am

"Mom! He smells weird!"
"Be nice to your brother, Agnes"
"I liked Liam with blond curls.
Why'd you give him up?"
"You meant Lucas, honey. He was alright, but... remember yesterday?"
Her nose crinkled, "Well, this one's hard to swallow"
"Tastes good though," her dad forked more onto his plate.

#### 9. Diana - August 28, 2024 at





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