

HALLOWZINE



The Fioretti's
Fall Literary Magazine

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Kaitlyn McNamee '26

Smoke

Bethany Worrell

We were walking through the woods when I first sensed its presence. Quiet but persistent.

Smoke.

With my hand resting in yours, I wasn't bothered. When you were by my side I felt untouchable.

So I paid it no attention.

And yet, we don't always sense when the wind touches us.

But we smelled it the next day, lingering on our clothes and catching us off guard. The panic rose whenever we smelled it. But why? Smoke is harmless on its own.

We feared the source. The fire. That monstrous beast whose hunger for destruction is rarely satiated.

I did not want there to be a fire. I wanted us; beautiful, unified us. And so I did not look for the flames, and chose to ignore the distant sirens.

Like a listless creature, it marched behind us, gaining closer every day. You didn't seem to see. I never asked you to. But when I felt its heat, dancing on my cheeks like an unwanted kiss, I knew it was too late.

I began to run, pulling you with me. It never wavered.

Pushing through the underbrush, dragging you along. Our arms grew scarred as we sprinted. I could feel you slowing down. I could feel your grip loosening. Slowing enough to look back, I could see the fear in your eyes. But behind you was the fire. And so I ran.

Stay with me, I begged. Keep your eyes on me.

Crushing your hand, I plowed on. We couldn't stop. If we stopped—would it all end? What would remain?

Gritting my teeth, I pushed for the next wind of stamina. Surely there was level ground ahead. Surely these dark woods weren't forever. The shadows grew long and the wind picked up. Strange, that there was a chill, with so great a heat so near. We had traveled too far, overcome too much to come up short. But would this thicket ever end?

My heart stopped when I no longer felt your hand.

Whipping around to survey my past, I saw you lying in it. Bruised, battered, and bleeding. Unstoppable and unrelenting, the fire came and took you with it.

All I could do was watch. I wanted it to take me too. That would have been too kind. Instead, it gifted me the wreckage. The burnt residues of the forest we once loved. The forest of our love.

I walk it now, a slow waltz of remembrance. Somehow, the green is even brighter after the blaze. There are flowers I never even stopped to see. You would have loved them.

And still your voice, like a melody of the grave, plays through my mind. It is a haunting tune, one of regret, and wonder. Your greased fingerprints burned into my skin, so much that someday I wonder if it is my own.

I still smell you on my clothes.

My beloved smoke.

Maternal

Jonathon Snyder

A gentle mother encountered her child
Who went to get some milk.
“It’s time for bed,” to him she said,
“Climb back into your silk.”

“No need for drinking,” the mother said,
“Pray thirst for pleasant dreams.
Your mommy is sick, so hurry up quick!
Night’s darker than it seems.”

An anxious mother addressed her child
Who went to get some pie.
“Without a doubt, the moon is out,
And mommy doesn’t lie.”

“No need for eating,” the mother resumed,
“Be hungry for the light.
The dark is near, and now I fear
I’ve curses soon to fight.”

A desperate mother frightened her child
Who scampered to his room.
“I can’t resist, come give me a kiss!
The dark is now in bloom.”

A monstrous mother growled at her child
Now curled below his bed.
“You forgot the hug!” And with a tug,
Her form began to shed.

A molting creature once maternal
Mimicked woman wise,
“Come here, young child, this night makes me wild,
And tonight you’ll be my prize!”

A ravenous beast pursued the boy
And bolted up the stairs.
His door was locked, but still it stalked
To snatch him unawares.

With thumping heart and bated breath
The child hid beneath,
But beds are just not strong enough
To stop its gnashing teeth.

Be Not Afraid

Kaitlyn McNamee



Something Else

Ann Nelson

Stomping loudly up the stairs, Cara cursed at her mother. She slammed the door behind her and whipped around to face her grunge-aesthetic room. She scanned over Green Day posters and Foo Fighters memorabilia.

“I have got to get away from her.” Cara said, exasperated. She put a burned CD on, titled “Cara’s mix” and “Creep” by Radiohead started to blare out. The ballad taunted her, crying out in harmony with her thoughts of how she didn’t know what the hell she was doing here. By here, she meant living with her mother after dropping out of high school. As she shoved her things into an old duffel bag, she wondered when the next train left; and where the train station was, and if people even took trains anymore.

From beneath the overwhelming music, Cara heard a faint knock. She turned off the CD player and slid the duffel bag under her bed. She waited for another knock.

“Cara, sweetie. Can we talk?” her mother said through the door. Her voice sounded sugary and smooth, like pink cotton candy. That’s who her mother was: sweet as candy. Her house was pristine and everything looked soft and heavenly. The only spot she couldn’t control was Cara’s room. While she once indulged in the bubblegum pink lifestyle, suffocating in pink softball gear and room decor, she rejected it all for various degrees of gray and angst once highschool hit. It had grown painfully obvious that Cara’s new aesthetic was not welcome in the rest of the house.

Muffled apologies seeped through the door, so Cara reached for the handle. She forcefully pulled the door open and stood defiantly in the entryway. Instantly, her mother looked past her shoulder at the duffel bag sticking half-out from under the bed.

“Are you seriously thinking about leaving?” she inquired sweetly. Cara didn’t care that her mother wanted her to stay any more than the last time she tried to leave. She almost didn’t care about the sad look on her face either. Her lips sinking into a frown, eyebrows mimicking scared caterpillars, and glazed over blue eyes. Cara couldn’t stop looking at them, her teary blues looked like the kiddie pools they

used to sit in together when she was a little girl. Just as Cara began to feel sorry, her mother's eyes blinked sideways.

Her heart felt like it stopped beating as she took a step away from her mother. I'm just seeing things. I'm angry so I'm not thinking clearly. I'm seeing things, she thought.

"What's wrong?" Cara's mother tilted her head in confusion. Her eyes blinked sideways again, this time revealing them to be pitch black in place of her nostalgic kiddie pool stare.

Without hesitation, Cara slammed the door in her mother's face and locked it.

"That's not mom," talking to herself between shaky breaths, "that's something else." Cara dragged her desk chair across the room to lodge underneath the door handle. The creature began furiously banging on the door.

"You let me in now!" It screeched at her. Cara ran to the window. If she jumped, she'd surely break her legs. Then she'd just lay there until it found her and finished her off. She looked around the room for something to fight with, but nothing caught her eye.

The creature then let out the most heinous, monstrous, bone-shaking croak. Cara fell backwards and onto the floor in terror. Ears ringing, she rolled on her side and saw the duffle bag under her bed. Why couldn't I have left sooner? I could have gotten away, she thought.

Whatever this thing was, it had replaced her mother. She never wished to see her mother so badly. She wished to see the pristine, pastel walls of her mother's office and to hear her pink-cloud voice.

"Pink... *Pink!*" She jumped up and ran to her closet. After digging through mounds of boots, converse, and worn out jeans, she saw it in all its glory. The hot pink metal softball bat that Cara used in the eighth grade to take her softball team to nationals. Its neon hue embarrassed her now, but she could never quite bear to get rid of that bat. Never would she have thought that it could save her life.

The creature was making headway on the doors hinges, and with each bang of a fist, the door cracked open more and more. Cara waited patiently, lifted the bat above her head, and remembered how hard she could swing. She recalled how much brunt force it took to win that game so many years ago and how tough a teenage girl in pink gear could really be. She slowed her breathing and vowed to fix

things with her mother after this was all over.

A fateful smash of the creature's fists made the door fly open and Cara charged forward.

Cannibal
Gabby Aitken
(Content Warning: Gore)

Oh wretched Cannibal
How could you?
Begin with picking, tearing softly at the flesh
Of those fingertips
That once pushed open doorways to other worlds
The nails scratched their way down your throat
Scarred the tissue lining the walls
And your teeth marred the serene landscapes of those parallel lives
With red
As you consumed the rotting corpse beside you
She lay as your shadow
Still, hollow, haunting
Void of life, voids in her skull where her eyes once had been
Before Hunger had consumed you
The Cannibal of Cannibals
There was nothing of you left
When they found you
Oh wretched Cannibal
How could you?

Damned
Gabby Aitken



At the End of the Corn Maze

Anna Kvasnik

In the end, it wasn't the cold that got to him, but instead, 'twas the feeling that there was no one to see him, no one to hear him, and no one to know where he had gone.



The leaves crinkled beneath his feet as he walked, an array of fiery wrath underfoot, silent but for the crackling sounds of their death. But it was not this that turned him off his path.

The walls around him were all but see-through, the gray in-between of seeing but not seeing halting his speed at getting through to the end. But he was not a stranger to obstacles in his path, and as he always would, the path continued and so did he.

The sunshine dwindled and soon enough, there was but the cast shadows of approaching twilight—the sky turning the colors of a bruise. But this was not what caused him to halt.

But in the fading light, it was him, walled-in with cornstalks aplenty, waving with the cooling wind. It was him who stood stock-still when he heard a loud rustle, a shout, and a scream. And it was him, when the silence fell, who threw himself into the cornstalks, a kind of fear washing over him like never before.

He'd done all the things a man could do at that point. He had fought in wars, he had climbed his way up the corporate ladder and fought tooth-and-nail to get there, but in that moment, it did not matter what he had done and what he could do. All that was left was the nagging voice inside of him.

This is where it ends. And this is where your legacy will die. Forever. A nobody, alone, frozen in the corn, trapped until you have no more to scream.



It wasn't her that thought up the idea—not initially. It was a joke by friends, a trick to get her to overcome her own fears. Who can truly be afraid when you're the one to be feared?

So, she held that play knife, folded up in her hand, blade pressed into the hilt. And when she pulled the play mask further down her face, the plastic scraping her wind-burnt cheeks, she realized: *Per-*

haps it is not the voices in my head to be feared, but instead the ones that make it out loud.

And turning the corner in a corn field, she smiled at the dark figure she saw, her heart beating erratic in her chest but an odd-calm washing over her, and her voice—normally soft and high-toned, came out with a puff of warm air and a breathlessness that sent her words into a lower tone. “Hello, would you like to play a game?”

The screams could never scare her now.



He was running, cornstalks scraping his face as he tore through them, bending and crushing with his broad build. *Let me go, let me live*, the words in his head were hurried and tremulous. *I’ve worked too hard to go like this.*

“Hello?” He heard a voice, but from what direction, he did not know. “Are we playing tag?” Rustling behind him sent him lurching forward, the cornstalks suddenly parting in front of him and depositing him onto the ground on a different maze-path. From cold or adrenaline, he did not feel the ache in his knees as he pulled himself up and went to keep going, but in front of him was only the field at the end of the maze: the final rays of a sunset cresting over the distant horizon.

“Oh, look, I made it.” But it was not his voice who said that, and he turned around, only to see the woman he so despised behind him, pulling off a mask and wiping her sweater sleeve across her face. As crushed bits of cornstalk pricked her face, she used her other hand to meticulously pick them off the sweater.

“You?” His voice was shaky in its demand.

She looked up, her surprise hard to distinguish in the fading light. “You?” she returned, significantly steadier in tone.

And as they stood there, in the dark, his chest heaving and hers barely moving as she observed the space around them, they heard a distant generator begin to whirl and a floodlight turn on a distance away.

They could never be friends now.

Panic

Jonathon Snyder

Have you ever had a panic attack where you kinda just stand there
in your bedroom
And your thoughts go a million miles per hour without focus
And you have no control over your imagination so it ends up just
taking over your mind
And you seem hardly aware of the hairy thing in your peripheral
vision but you overreact to the
small things
Such as a nibble on your sockless heel or a faint tap on your right
hip
Especially when you get up to go use the bathroom in the middle
of the night
And you realize that you forgot to grab your phone for a flashlight
And you know that stubbing your toe is too painful and annoying
to endure
So instead you walk to the bathroom in the dark but you get ner-
vous
Because you worry so much about that phone that you disorient
yourself
And you then forget to turn on the light to the bathroom
And you know that after the creature shuts the door behind you
And it scampers into the bathtub that you actually had your phone
on you the whole time
So there is really no need to worry and you just use the phone
flashlight
But it hurts your eyes so you need to adjust but then you forget that
you had to charge it
So the battery drains to zero in a few seconds and you are left us-
ing the bathroom in total
darkness
Wondering why the curtain starts rustling and why the door starts
creaking and why your skin
feels tingly and why you hear the movement of something crawl-
ing toward you from the far

corner and why you feel something tugging at your hair and pulling
at your nightclothes and
breathing in your face but you cannot see a thing?
Well, it happens to the best of us.

Campus Ghost
Julianna Britt



30 Days

JP Schuette

March 12 – 7 Days we've been adrift

The engine is beyond repair

I finally found where McNulty kept the pens. Poor bastard got thrown overboard in the storm, split his head open on the stern. Some of the blood's still there and neither me Frank or Zeke want to be the one to clean it off

Zeke says it's a bad omen

Frank says he can't stand blood

I don't want to think that Roger's dead

We should have enough food for a week, maybe two if we ration it

-Steve Morris

March 15 – Day 10

Zeke has taken to fishing. Says it keeps him calm.

Frank hasn't left the bow, says he won't go near the blood.

We're going on thinner rations every day, supplemented by Zeke's fish.

I don't think we can take much more boredom

-S. M.

March 16 – Day 11

Frank started yelling last night. The blood's gotten to him and the dehydration isn't helping his case. The food should stretch long enough to rescue

-S. M.

March 17 – Day 12

Frank's voice went hoarse today, so he's finally quiet

Zeke cleaned up the last of Roger, which got Frank to stop trying to scream. Now he just hangs off the front like some limp rag

At least he's quiet

-S.M.

March 21 – Day 16

Most of the food disappeared last night. Frank did it, I'm sure of it. Today was the first day in so long that he's had the energy to scream

I thought I'd cured that when I took McNulty's bloody brains off the back of the boat.

When he saw the food was gone, Steve started screaming too. He

gave it an hour before he curled up below deck
Frank did it.

-Ezekiel Evans

March 22 – Day 17

Steve is still curled up below deck
Frank is going blind
Steve is whitehanded gripping a filet knife
Frank did it

-Ezekiel Evans

March 23 – Day 18

Frank spent all day staring at the sun.
Steve spent all day staring at Frank
I spent all day staring at the knife
Frank did it
I don't even hear the waves anymore
I saw a bird today
I think that's good.

-Ezekiel Evans

March 25 – Day 20

I did it.
I got rid of our Problem
He's still laying there, staring at his damned God
But he's done screaming
He's finally quiet

-Steve Morris

March 25th – Day 20

Steve snapped last night. Killed Frank.
The sound was terrible. They both screamed, crying out to God.
Steve screamed to God of Frank's damnation
Frank cried out to the almighty for mercy.
His only mercy is in the beyond.
Frank did it.
Steve did it.
I am the only guiltless man aboard.
I alone am holy.

-Ezekiel Evans

March 27 – Day 22

Steve and I have stared at ex-Frank for two days
There aren't even flies to eat what had been Frank, He just keeps

looking worse and worse and I know that we're both thinking of
eating him but I cant bring myself to do it and I know that there's
madness in the meat
-Ezekiel

March 28

I have stared at Frank for too long, his dead white eyes
He sees my sin
Zeke sees my sin
I have seen too much
I must stare at the sun
I must see no more
FRANK WAS RIGHT

March 30

Today I woke up full. I woke up full and franks leg is down to the
bone
I do not know if Steve is alive. He is silent. He stares at the sky. I
have sinned. I have fallen
I am damned

March 32

I finished that which had been Frank
I have eaten flesh of man, and I am holier for it
For I above man
I am greater
I am worthy
I am God
Tomorrow, I will rid myself of Steve, greatest of all sinners

March 35

My God, what have I done
Eli Eli Lama Sabachthani
I am king of bones. Emperor of dirt. God of an empty rusting boat
and commander of the corpses that she digests.
I am alone
I must repent and atone for taking of Steve and Frank
I must see no more

I must blind myself in atonement
I must watch the sun
The sun will cure me
Frank Was Right
DEAR GOD FRANK WAS RIGHT

30 Days
JP Schuette



Halloween House

Jonathan Snyder

Predictable knocking, lifeless walking,
Wooden chair rocking, obvious stalking,
Unbroken staring, malevolent glaring,
Minimal scaring, nostrils flaring,
Intentional bumping, dummies slumping,
Foreseeable thumping, suit actors jumping,
Idiots stalling, toddlers bawling,
Soundboards calling, paper ghosts falling,
Old paintings blinking, one parent drinking,
Light sources shrinking, altitude sinking,
Teenagers blocking, classmates flocking,
Drunk people talking, siblings mocking,
Thin walls cracking, fake jesters cackling,
Anxiety lacking, holograms attacking,
Patience aching, not even shaking,
Young children quaking, corridor snaking -
I'm sick of this halloween house!

Spooky Steve
Cecilia Doyle



Ghosts

Julianna Britt

Nathaniel didn't believe in ghosts. How could he? While his parents had passed years before, his religion made it clear that once someone died, they died. End of story.

But who can I hear crying outside my room every night?

Every time he got out of the warm bed to check in the middle of the night, much to his wife's annoyance, he would find the hallway cold and empty, not a soul in sight. Nathaniel had told himself it was just the neighbor's cat across the street, begging for food. How the dratted thing got its yowls to be so loud, he did not know. He was an engineer, not a scientist.

And still, someone cried. Quietly, at first, with little snuffles here and there. But they grew steadily louder with the passing days. Tonight, someone was sobbing right outside his door. Tearing their throat raw with anguished shouts.

Throwing off the covers and ignoring his pounding headache, Nathaniel leapt to his feet and threw the door open. The bathroom light was the only thing that broke the darkness of the hall, but his wife had switched it off before going to bed. He was sure of it. Casting a glance over his shoulder, he saw that she was still fast asleep, chest rising and falling steadily. If there was a break-in happening, he should obviously wake her up.

So why did he hesitate?

He would just investigate, Nathaniel decided. Perhaps his wife simply forgot to switch the light off after brushing her teeth. A harmless mistake.

Still, his sense of dread grew as he crept down the hall, his heart rate quickening alongside it. His bare feet made no noise as they pressed into the soft carpet he had carefully unrolled there when they had first moved into the house itself, and he shivered as the chill of the air conditioner on the floor nipped at his toes.

When he peered into the threshold of the bathroom, he was glad that he fell asleep with his pants on. There was a woman sitting in the dry bathtub, although with the amount of tears that were falling from her eyes, it was soon to fill.

Nathaniel took a step back, alarm surging through him. “Who—”
“Nate,” the woman crowed, raising her tangled blonde head from her knees and meeting his gaze. “You’re in trouble.”

“Mother?”

Nathaniel gawked, leaning heavily on the door frame. He hadn’t seen that face, makeup smudged with sadness, since his mother had come home crying from work all those years ago. After locking herself in the bathroom and refusing to come out all night, Nathaniel was awakened with the numb shock that comes with a still and quiet house. Too quiet.

Because he had found her in the bathtub the next morning.
Drowned.

Looking at her now, he felt sick. He had to have been dreaming; there was no other explanation.

I don’t believe in ghosts, he told himself as the woman who resembled his mother stood, still staring him down with those same green eyes that greeted him in the mirror every morning. *I don’t believe in ghosts*.

She was dressed in the same waitress uniform she had worn that fateful night. Her skin was gray and translucent, her lips the tinge of blue that had kissed death. Her eyes seemed to be the only living part of her.

Nathaniel felt himself freeze, unable to step back to run away or forwards to see whether or not she was truly real. His mouth had gone dry, throat closing up and preventing any attempt at speech.

“I was drawn here,” his mother said, tracing a painted nail across the ceramic tiles of the shower. “You know why, don’t you?”

Nathaniel closed his jaw, which had fallen open in shock. “No,” he said, voice cracking. He cleared his throat and tried again. “No. You’re supposed to be dead. You died, years ago. Before I even graduated high school.”

His mother gave him a sad smile, tilting her head to the side and regarding him like a curious dog would. “Exactly, Nathaniel. I’m dead. And you’re not supposed to be.”

Nathaniel felt a chill that had nothing to do with the AC this time. If she was dead, if she was truly a ghost, then there was only one reasonable explanation for why he could see her.

“Oh.”

His mother nodded, regarding him with pity. “You’re dead, Nathaniel.”

The Banshee's Call

Ella Williams



Forgotten

Anonymous

It was half past three when the door to Jim Burden's office slowly creaked open. He looked up from his mounds of legal documents and ledgers, candle wax slowly dripping onto his mahogany desk. The old building sits along the busiest street in New York City, but at this hour, only the weary and wretched stalk the sidewalks and halls. Jim had been in the office since the early hours of the morning, working away at a case. He had not seen the sun for days, let alone grass or the endless fields of his childhood. The air in his office was stifling, but opening a window would only bring in the smog and odor of the bustling city.

The hinges of the old door squeaked as he blinked his blurry eyes to make sense of the occurrence.

Surely, there is no one else in this building at this hour, Jim thought.

As he rose to search the dark hallway, the floorboards began to creak rhythmically, in a slow, *dragging*, march.

"H-hello?" he called, but no one replied. A chill caressed the hair on his neck and his breath began to fog before him. Around his ears, the sound of a howling wind took up in harmony with the ghostly footsteps. It reminded him of the miserable footsteps of the farm hands in Nebraska as they trudged their way through the snow.

He was frozen, unable to make sense of what was happening in his dreary office as he stared in horror at the open door. The footsteps marched their way from the doorway, growing louder, heavier as they approached the desk...

Stomp

Stomp

Stomp

...before they finally ceased at the window behind him. The chill had turned into a bitter cold as he sat still in his chair, afraid to see who- *what* was there.

Just then, a hand—grotesquely pale—appeared from over Jim's shoulder and snuffed out the dwindling candle.

Oh *god*- he thought. Or maybe he whispered it? He couldn't be

sure in that moment as he watched the hand creep back over his shoulder.

He *must* turn around, he *must* see what was breathing so haggardly behind him. He could see it out of the corner of his eye, he just needed to *look*.

Slowly he turned his body toward the *thing* in his office, keeping his head turned out of fear. He saw bare feet, as pale as the hand that stole his light. As he began to move his gaze upward he noted dark, frost-covered pants with a white shirt tucked into the waist. The collar of the shirt was turned down, away from the neck, and above it was Mr. Shimerda's ghostly face staring, head tilted, at Jim.

"No!" Jim shouted as he leaned back as far as could from the unpleasantly close presence of the very dead Mr. Shimerda. He couldn't move though—his limbs were frozen to the seat beneath him.

The ghost stared unblinking at Jim, face blank. Jim tried to shut his eyes against the image but found even that was impossible in his condition.

He noted then, that Mr. Shimerda wasn't just staring. No, he was pointing—arm extended all the way from his shoulder to the blackened tips of his grey fingers.

"The window?" Jim asked, voice shaking. Mr. Shimerda simply stared while pointing to the window.

"I- I don't understand!" Jim cried.

Suddenly the ghost bent mechanically at the waist, haunting even closer to Jim's face until there were only mere centimeters between them and he whispered one word:

"Antonia"

The unnatural wind picked up and howled around Jim's office again. The screaming blasts sounded like a freight train as papers blew and scattered around him. Mr. Shimerda leaned back upright again, almost like a puppet as Jim howled in fear.

Antonia's name swirled around the room, as much a whisper in his ear as it was a screech coming from no ascertainable direction. Mr. Shimerda just stared at him, unmoving against the maelstrom.

Finally, Jim was able to move his arms from the chair. He worked little by little until he arose to push against the vortex to escape his office. Without looking back, he burst out the door and raced out

onto the street, met by the humid morning air. He didn't pause to take a breath as he sprinted toward the train station. He grabbed the first ticket for Nebraska and headed out West for the first time in 20 years—her name chasing him all the way.

The Undead Nazis

Anonymous

Late August, 1941. Somewhere in France.

If you find this notebook, I'm already dead. If you can, please give this attached letter to the Roth family in New Jersey. If you find a zombie clutching the notebook, that's me. Well, was me. Do a guy a favor and kill the thing, would'ya?

"To Uncle Herman, Aunt Bess, Sandy, and Phil,

"While moving west, my battalion discovered the zombies in a muddy field around 1200 hours. A commanding officer, the loud one, told us to freeze. One zombie turned around... It had pale green, peeling skin; rotting, yellow teeth, torn clothes, a groan from the depths of hell— why am I telling you this? You already know. You've seen them before.

"Anyway, it must have signaled to its fellow freaks, because they all turned and stared at us with wicked eyes. One of them screeched—a God awful, scratchy sound— and they all ambled towards us like an evil witch; their arms stretched in front of them, as if blindly searching for a light in the dark. A parade of death.

"We fought like hell, blasting 'em with everything we had. I was shooting, stabbing, punching, kicking. I wasn't going down without a fight. But it wasn't enough; one of them got the jump on me and bit my arm. It hurt like hell, not gonna lie. But I just shot the son-of-a-bitch before running off; I couldn't bite my fellow soldiers.

"Currently, I'm strapped down on an army cot waiting for the end. When I turn, someone will end the zombie before I can bite anyone.

"I don't regret fighting. But I do regret not coming home.

"Uncle Herman, I'm sorry for being an ass. You don't deserve that.

"Aunt Bess, I'm sorry for causing you stress and worry. I hope you can rest with closure.

"Sandy, keep on drawing, kid. You can provide hope in these dark times.

“Phil... at the risk of sounding mushy, I’ll miss you kid. Don’t worry about me. I’m in good hands.

“I was never good with ‘goodbyes’ so... love you.

“Alvin.”

Ok, you who found this notebook. You must have noticed the inconsistencies and lack of details in my story. Here’s what actually happened: the commanding officer yelled at us to retreat, causing pandemonium; the men in the back couldn’t hear or see the zombies and nearly got trampled into the ice cold mud as the front lines pushed them down. I did the same. And look where that got me...dying alone...

I found shelter in an abandoned husk of a building, crouching down by an old fireplace in what was once a living room. I didn’t breathe as I heard the shambling and groaning passing by. I thought for sure this was it, saying my prayers...

Nothing happened. I almost collapsed with relief, slowly standing up. My ears were ringing like mad, I tell you. That’s probably why I didn’t hear the thing sneaking up behind me. All of a sudden, my left arm exploded in pain, like lava bubbling beneath my skin. I must have screamed, but I can’t recall. All I remember is grabbing my gun and bashing the thing’s head in.

My body must be nearly transformed by now, but I refuse to look; I’m writing this with a random candle I found. My arm just aches now, but it looks and feels like green, rotten, cottage cheese with bits of expired ketchup on top. Don’t know why that comparison came to mind, but I can’t think of anything else... my mind is already fuzzy on the edges.

You know, it’s strange, but I almost feel at peace. As I slouch against the wall I have no expectations placed on me, nothing to do except, well, die. ...look at me getting philosophical. Must be a side effect of death.

Point is: don’t be like me. Be smart, quick, and aware of your surroundings. Go home to your folks when this is over. *Please.*

In the Woods
Natalie Edmisten



Lullaby

Anabel Burns

Before the tires screech to a complete stop on the gravel driveway, Theodora swings the side door of the eccentrically painted van open.

“Hello my lovely guys, gals, and ghouls! Thank you so much for tuning in,” she delivers her signature line directly into the camera she’s holding up to her face, her voice soft and laced with a heightened degree of mystique. “Today the gang and I will be investigating the Crane family manor, said to be haunted by patriarch Hugh Crane’s late wife, Helen Crane, who died whilst giving birth to their daughter.” Still crouched in the van, Theo turns the camera to face the mansion looming before them, boarded up and abandoned. From the northwestern corner of the house, a single stone spire juts out, encircled by elegant—if not a touch garish—stained glass windows that demand the eye’s attention; Theo finds her target, pointing the lens toward the tower. “The locals say that in the dead of night, you can hear Helen singing lullabies to her babe from beyond the grave, her figure standing at the nursery window, longing for her little girl.”

Abruptly, Theo flicks the camera lens shut, dropping her arm to her side. “Ugh, I’m so pale I look like a damn ghost myself on camera. Luke, be a dear and grab the tripod for me. And the spirit box. I want to set up base in the nursery.” When the camera drops, so does all of Theodora’s soft allure. In all actuality, being in her presence is not unlike the sensation of dragging naked skin across the freeway at speeds only the reckless Luke Sanderson would dare to drive—more to the point, abrasive.

As Eleanor watches Luke scramble to grab the supplies from the back of his van, she supposes it all comes down to beauty. Because Theo is a great many things, and beautiful is one. All effortless dark curls and clad in bright colors, the captivating Theodora was the natural choice for front woman of their little ragtag, ghost hunting team, for Theo is someone you cannot help but want to follow. A phenomenon more paranormal than anything they had ever investigated.

“Theo, wait up!” Luke calls, carrying two boxes of equipment up

the rickety front porch and into the house after Theodora.

Eleanor unfastens her seat belt and clambers out of the back of the van, ready to trail behind when an untraceable chill radiates up her spine, leaving her feet frozen to the unpaved walkway. Not a breeze, the chill had been internal, like the contraction of the heart or the expanding of the lungs. Internal, but in response to *what*?

“Eleanor?” Doc comes into her peripheral vision with his too long gray hair and brown leather messenger bag slung over his button-down shirt. “Are you alright?”

“Fine, I’m fine.”

“Well, okay then. After you,” and he extends his arm, gesturing toward the open front door where wooden boards now hung uselessly, pried loose by Theo and Luke.

And that is how Eleanor enters the home of Helen Crane, following behind her friends.

The splendid craftsmanship of intricately carved banisters and high ceiling does not take her breath away; on the contrary, it is like the first gasping inhalation of a newborn baby.

“Doc, do you have any spare batteries?” Theo’s voice carries from upstairs. “Luke forgot to charge the ring light, and we can’t film in the dark!”

“Well, I’m sorry, Princess. But I don’t understand why I have to be responsible for all the-”

“You’re literally the tech guy, that’s your job!”

Luke and Theo’s squabbling gets drowned out by the sound of Doc’s booming footsteps ascending the creaking staircase. And now, Eleanor’s alone in the dark foyer. Nowhere to go but to follow them up.

“Nellies,” an unfamiliar female voice cries, aloft in the stagnant air of the house.

“Who’s there?” No one has called her Nellies since— “Mother?”

“Baby girl. My baby girl.”

“Where are you?” Eleanor stumbles out of the foyer, away from the main staircase, deeper into the house. “Helen, is that you?”

“I want my baby girl,” the voice weeps, tangible melancholia as present in the air as oxygen. Softly, it begins to sing. A lullaby. “Rock-a-bye baby in the treetop.”

Eleanor’s in the back of the house now in what appears to have

once been the master bedroom, a dusty linen sheet entombing a wrought iron bed. “Theo, Luke! Doc, anybody, please!”

They can’t hear her, too busy setting up to film yet another stupid episode of a stupid show Eleanor never wanted to be a part of. They never encounter anything real; really, it’s all dark empty hallways and Theodora’s theatrics, Doc’s rehearsed intelligence, Luke shaky camera work. But it’s all fake.

“When the wind blows the cradle will rock.”

Eleanor feels dizzy, feet struggling to stay upright. Leaning unsteadily against the bedpost, she calls, “Theo! Are you there!”

“When the bough breaks the cradle will fall.”

Louder, the voice is louder.

“Mom!” Eleanor is crying now, sobs tearing through her newly filled lungs.

“And down will come baby.”

In a horrible, perpetual second, the floorboards splinter. A crack giving way to a chasm. Eleanor watches it happen, the ground beneath her feet give way in a lost battle against the elements. She watches it happen as she falls, 20, 25 feet. Into the crawlspace, the cement foundation of the house. She watches it until her eyes can see no more, until her lungs can breathe no more.

“Cradle and all.”

The Hallowzine

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