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Winning Story: Not Here for a Book

By Jessica Payseur

Zoe sipped warmed cider and sorted through broken crayons. The foam pumpkins sat on a newspaper-covered table, awaiting transformation. From his perch atop the bookshelf, Zoe's cat peered down at the scene, despising everything in his lovable way.

When the doorbell rang, Zoe's arms were full of hair dryers. Tessa spilled in, bag of pumpkins in hand, and immediately began to laugh.

"What are we doing, then? Giving our pumpkins creepy hairdos?"

"No," said Zoe, leading the way to the table. "I saw this online. We're going to melt crayons over them."

"Weird," said Tessa, waving at the ginger cat. "Hi, Pumpkin Spice Latte!"

With a hiss the cat sprang from his roost and darted off, a streak of festive orange through the house.

"I always offend him," said Tessa, sighing. She accepted the mug of cider Zoe passed her.

"Anyway, where were we? Right, crayons. Nothing will ever be as good as last year's pumpkins, though. Mod Podging *Avengers* comics on them!"

"Yeah," said Zoe. "But this will still be good. I'm going to use crimson to make it look like my pumpkin's bleeding. Or maybe I should use green and make it ooze?"

"Oh, definitely the ooze, and I'm stealing that idea."

"Not fair," said Zoe, then, "Do you feel a draft?"

She retraced her steps to the door, only to find with **horror** that not only was the thing wide open, but Pumpkin Spice Latte stood experimentally outside, and he was strictly an indoor cat. As she stared, his tail twitched once, and then he was darting across the lawn.

"Stop!" shouted Zoe, dashing after him. The cat streaked away, a fiery blur, first across the street, then down it. Zoe gave chase, dodging lawn decorations, styrofoam headstones and fake coffins and giant fuzzy spiders, secretly apologizing to her neighbors. Still she could not seem to catch the cat, who always seemed to be just in front of her.

At the end of the street she came to a halt, panting. Perhaps she should have a few less Star Trek marathons and a few more days at the gym. The idea was so absurd she laughed at herself.

"I don't think it's funny, I think it's creepy," said Tessa, panting by her side. Zoe looked up to follow her gaze.

Beyond a rusted fence lay what Zoe had always referred to as 'the mansion.' The old, sprawling home built right along the lake was gray and spooky in the early dark, nothing but a thin flicker of light in the windows.

Zoe sighed, suddenly cold. Of course she'd forgotten to grab her coat.

"Did he run in there?" asked Tessa, shuddering.

"Sure looks like it, doesn't it? Come on, the sooner we grab him, the sooner we can get to those pumpkins."

Zoe could tell by her hesitation that Tessa wanted to get no closer to the place than she already was. Neither of them wanted to turn back, though.

"We watch *Supernatural*," said Zoe. "We can handle this."

Tessa nodded, and they both crossed the lawn in quick, shaky steps. Around them the willows shuddered in the wind, the trees bare of leaves and reaching out for them like some sort of land kraken.

At the door Zoe knocked, waited. Her hand was on the latch when she heard the whisper, directly in her ear.

"Please, please come in. You're here for a book?"

"A cat, actually," said Zoe.

"What?" asked Tessa, and Zoe felt her flesh crawl. Tessa had not heard the voice. She swallowed.

"Nothing," she said. "Let's go in."

If Tessa was just as scared, she did her best to hide it. Zoe silently cursed Pumpkin Spice Latte for bolting. When she got her hands on him...

They let themselves in and wandered down the darkened hallways, peering into rooms in search of the cat.

"No cobwebs," said Tessa. "This place doesn't have cobwebs. Someone lives here. That's a relief."

Zoe did not feel relieved at all. Beyond the door in front of her was the flicker of light they had seen from the road; it slid out from the gap between the wood and the frame like golden liquid. Slowly she pushed the door open, heard it creak.

"Hello?" she asked. "Pumpkin Spice Latte?"

"The cat's not going to answer you," said Tessa, gazing around the impressive library. Candles were lit everywhere, showing off floor-to-ceiling shelves of books. The room was lushly carpeted, a fireplace in the far corner, a mirror above the mantle.

When Zoe glanced at it she was sure she saw a shadow flitting behind her. When she opened her mouth, Tessa spoke.

"Oh, there he is. C'mere, Pumps!" Tessa held out a hand, withdrew it. "Z-zoe...is that a...?"

She could not finish. Zoe leaned around a chair to get a look at what Tessa was staring at so wide-eyed. Her blood turned cold.

A man, book in hand, was sprawled on the floor. His hair was a matted mess; a trail of coagulating blood led from the back of his skull to a heavy bronze candlestick.

"You're here for a book?" asked the whisper again, directly into Zoe's ear. "I have so many *wonderfulbooks...*"

Zoe turned and ran from the library, Tessa following her. In the hallway Tessa grabbed her and pulled her up short.

"Shouldn't we check for a pulse?" she asked. Zoe reluctantly nodded.

Yellow cat eyes fixed mercilessly on them as they re-entered the library, but there was no longer any trace of the body staining the plush carpet, no longer a shadow in the mirror.

"Let's get out of here," said Zoe.

"What about Pumpkin Spice Latte?"

"He can come home whenever he wants!"

Zoe led the way outside at a run, nearly bowling over a neighbor walking his dog.

"Saw you at that house," he said when she stopped to apologize. "Don't bother with it. No one's lived there since the murder. It's been deserted for years..."

THE END

Green Man
By Kathleen Kelly

A faint glimmer of candlelight shines in her hair's reflection in the mirror. I hold my breath. She tugs at something in the pit of my stomach.

She is combing it now, lovingly caressing every strand, those nimble fingers made languid and elegant. I have tasted those fingers in the hazy past, and would do anything to have them in my mouth again.

My heart is beating too fast – I can barely hear anything else. I will burst if I don't say it now.

"You look so beautiful tonight," I whisper, a secret message.

She whips her head around, panic in those perfect green eyes. She is staring into every corner, every shadow in the room, looking for the source of the words, but she won't find me.

"SHUT UP! Who are you?" Her voice is frenzied, "GET OUT OF MY HOUSE!"

These games that we have played for the past three months will now come to an end. Darling Jenna, it is time for you to return home.

In the gloom and fug, it's hard to see much until my eyes have adjusted, but I know my way around by feel. I trace the outlines of familiar tools – forceps, scalpels, rubber hoses, latex gloves.

A frantic beat ruins the perfect silence, a scratch-scratch-scream. I make my way towards the throbbing, shifting coffin. Standing over it, I listen for a minute, enjoying the music she is playing for me. In sweet anticipation, I bend down and heave the lid off of the coffin and onto the floor.

Once again, those eyes, staring up at me, full of tears. I know how happy she is to see me, for I too feel a burbling joy growing inside of me. I am pregnant with it, swelling massively to see my love once more.

She tries to stand, but twelve hours in the coffin have left her weakened. I hate doing this to her. She doesn't understand our situation just yet; it is for her own good. Before she has a chance to attempt it again, I slip a tranquilizer needle into her arm. I can't stand to hurt her, so she has to relax.

I watch her face as the drugs take hold, and the blissful emptiness that washes over her stirs me, moves me. When she is docile enough, I sit her up and peel back the tape from her lips. She stares into my eyes and moves her mouth, but only a faint groan escapes.

"Shhh, shhh, it's okay, I'm here now." I say as I stroke her hair lovingly, "now everything will be just the way it was."

"Do... Do I know you?" she asks. Those drugs must have addled her memory! I should have known, she's so slender, the dosage was too high.

"Jenna, it's me. I'm so happy to see you!" I reply, doing my best to control myself. Her expression flickers, and the wrinkles on her forehead are almost more than I can stand.

"I'm not Jenna. I'm not, I'M NOT JENNA!" she shouts, her tongue thick from the drugs.

I choke back a hot sob and have to turn away; I can't bear what she's saying. My brother's wife, the woman so abused, so beautiful, that I had to save her. She didn't want to see the truth, so she was reborn into a better life, a life full of warmth and light.

"I've been preparing for this," I tell her to calm her down, "You and I are ready now."

I haul her out of the coffin and onto the waiting surgical table. She trembles in contact with the cold steel surface.

"The sweet milk of your skin drives me crazy," I whisper in her ear, running my tongue around its rim, "It's been so long since I've seen its glow. Your past bodies... They couldn't hold a candle to you."

I turn to the rows of figures behind me, eager to show her my collection. The ranks of my beauties stretch before me in their perfect wax casings.

"You remember this? Your first body. I was clumsy, I slipped with the scalpel – the removal of your organs was not as clean as I would have liked. And those that followed, my heart is sad to look at them. Their eyes dull, their skin grows pallid and withered under the wax."

I turn away and reach out to an early model, running my fingers through her hair. A clump comes away in my hand. What is this, she is supposed to be eternal! My ears begin to ring and the bile rises in my throat as I stare at the limp strands...

A loud crash breaks my focus. I spin around and see Jenna on the floor and the first of my attempts rocking dangerously on her pedestal. I cannot save her. She hits the ground with a sickening thud, upsetting a candelabra. Too late, too late! Her hair alights and my world begins to melt.

Sending up dark tendrils of oily smoke, the flare quickly reaches her face and the wax drips from her once sublime face. I stumble towards her.

"No! Jenna!" I cry, and the room fills with the smell of burning flesh. The fire starts to consume her wilted skin, and I can hear it sizzle and pop. I kneel before her, my Jenna, and my hands blister as I try to beat out the flame.

Everything, my everything, begins to burn away, melting into a puddle of insignificance. I no longer care that the blaze is spreading to me.

The girl backed away from the scene before her. The burning corpse and his infatuation with it churned her stomach, causing her to retch. Her last glimpse of him, through the growing smoke, was the colour of his sweater. Later, when asked who he was, she could only describe him as the Green Man.

An Iggle Horror Story

by Jackie (Noxy)

Dear Genevieve,
Pumpkin Spice Lattes are back in season, and I was first in line at the nearest family owned cafe. The warm beverage felt good this morning. I woke up today with a twinge in the back of my throat and an ache already forming at the base of my head. I think I'm coming down with something.

Dear Kennedy,
I've never been a big fan of pumpkin spiced anything. Or coffee really. But I'm glad you were able to enjoy it! Shame you might be catching a bug, I hear the flu has been getting around a lot lately.

Dear Genevieve,
I've definitely caught something, and I think you're right. It's the flu. Pretty much been living in my bedroom for the last few days. It'll be a surprise if I manage to drop this in the mailbox.

Dear Kennedy,
Oh dear. Lots of clear fluids and rest. Do you have eucalyptus oil? I hear that's good for the sinuses. Don't bother trying to write again until your better. I'll understand.

Dear Genevieve,
I got over the flu finally about a week ago, but I still feel weak, so maybe I'm not actually over it.

Dear Kennedy,
I'm glad to hear you're over the sickness. I'm sure after a nasty flu, **anyone** would feel weak for a while.

Dear Genevieve,

I still feel weak. I took a trip to the library this afternoon to see if I could find what might be wrong with me. All it did was put thoughts of disease and death in to my head, and I'm no closer to finding anything.

Dear Kennedy,

I urge you to go to the doctor. I know you've told me before that you have that fear, but you're going to have to suck it up, because I'm worried. It's been over a month since that flu. Please?

Dear Genevieve,

I just can't. Iatrophobia is no joke! I'm too terrified! ... I'm getting weaker day by day. I've been looking at myself in the mirror a lot lately. I'm noticing a change. I'm paler and thinner, and there are dark circles under my eyes no matter how long I sleep, which is quite often nowadays.

Dear Kennedy,

I wish you'd change your mind about the doctor. I'm even more worried now than ever. At least *call* someone - friends? Family? Talk to them and see what *they* have to say about it.

Dear Genny,

I've never been very good at keeping friends. It's why I signed up for a pen pal in the first place. I haven't talked to anyone in my family since I turned 18 and walked out the door - that was nearly three years ago. There's no one. I'm not going to the doctor. I'd rather die.

Dear Kennedy,

Please don't say that. I'm glad you signed up for a pen pal, because now you and me?

We're friends. And I care now. You **need** to keep living, okay? Keep on living until I say so!

Dear Genny,

Today I accidentally cut my finger on a soup can lid. It hurt quite a bit. The blood that oozed from the opening had more of a bluish green tint to it than it did red. It was fascinating.

Kennedy,

You're scaring me. Please. Please. PLEASE see a doctor. Something is definitely wrong. I've looked online, I even went to *my* library, but I can't seem to find anything. Please Kennedy.

Dear Gen,

A spider crawled across my bed this morning. I'm terrified of spiders, and yet, I stayed right where I was, and watched it. I just didn't have the energy to panic. My mirror shows that my skin has a green tint to it now. I look and feel like I'm wasting away. I could almost be mistaken for a zombie at this point.

Kennedy,

I'm coming to you.

* * * * *

That's it. That's all it said. Kennedy was on the couch in her living room, forced to rest after doing the simple task of moving from the bedroom to the front door to check the mail. When she was finally able, she had opened the letter only to find such a short response. Kennedy puzzled over the letter only briefly before the doorbell rang. Feeling so lethargic, she seriously considered just staying on the couch and ignoring it, but it rang again. So she got herself up, and made her way slowly, painstakingly, to the door.

A distressed young woman was standing on her porch. "Kennedy?" she asked, her voice rushing out so fast the last syllable was barely spoken.

"Genevieve?" Kennedy could only whisper. She was still out of breath from her walk to the door.

The woman nodded. Genevieve took a deep breath and sighed. Then she smiled. She reached in to her inner jacket pocket, and pulled out a rusty scalpel. "Looks like I got here just in time," she said as she calmly stepped inside, leaving Kennedy with no choice but to take a step back. "You're a strong woman, Kennedy. The others took to the laced letters much, *much* faster than you."

Genevieve locked the door behind her. Kennedy couldn't even find the strength to scream.

A Web of Fear

by Cecilia

I am like a **spider** now. How ridiculous, it's like something out of a Kafkaian nightmare. Nightmares should never be so predictable. Or frightening. Knowing how a story ends doesn't stop it from being blood-curling.

It's funny how our minds work. Even as we taste the most primal of terrors, we still try desperately to make sense out of it, to find some remains of logic among the chaos. As if that could make it all go away, fade into the night, or hide away among the **trees** of a mental landscape that's alive with a thousand **whispers**, alive with a madness that can't be named, unless you are brave enough to face it.

I run through infinite **mirrors**, each one of them a threat and a torture. Shadows move behind my back, daring me to turn around and look, but there is nothing there. Real horror isn't about the **green**, slimy **oozing** monsters we were all told about. It's about looking into your own soul, and feeling your heart stop by what you've seen. It's about waking up amid the bloodbath of your own imagination, or inside the **coffin** you built inside your own head. If you allow it to, your mind will be the biggest horror **library** in the world, with never-ending stories to send you to sleep, full of promises of nightmares and restless nights.

That's why I don't sleep anymore. I am like a spider now, forever building a web of madness, each thread like a drop of blood. One more step into darkness.

Strawberry Hill

By Alexandra Dugarte

Shelley had been attempting to write her thesis paper for over an hour. She stared at the blank word document, its blinking cursor a patronizing reminder of her progress- or lack thereof.

Small pile of

books and colorful notepads containing scribbling notes were scattered around the desk in the library.

Shelley thought she'd breeze through the topic of Gothic elements in modern societal consciousness;

since for the past year she'd studied alongside the muse of Gothic Revival literature, Strawberry Hill

House. The muse, however, wasn't offering her inspiration but writer's block.

I could use coffee, no, a Pumpkin Spice latte, she thought.

But shops at the Uni were closed for the Half-term and it was too late to walk back into town for a local café. She considered heading home but then the whole evening would have been a waste.

'Besides', she said, 'might as well take advantage of the 24-hour access.'

She got up, putting on her scarf and jacket. She left her materials on the desk, not worrying about theft, since she hadn't seen another soul all evening. She knew most students had gone home or

out on Holiday.

She pocketed her student ID and stuck her tongue out at the mocking computer screen.

Shelley walked past St. Mary's chapel, the classical gothic architecture a stark difference to the modern library. She cut through the building, walking out to the open fields. She normally preferred this

side of campus, filled with nature, grass a vibrant green, even on overcast days. Tonight, however, the

area had a nefarious appearance, dark and gloomy. The sounds of fallen autumn leaves crunching

beneath her feet made her anxious.

She catches sight of the Gothic Revival villa in the far end stretch of trees. Strawberry Hill was magnificent, even in darkness, its presence elegant and striking. From her position, the only lights were

those surrounding the perimeter. The windows black outline an antithesis to the white exterior. She

spotted the closed off area to the house that was in restoration and construction for the new exterior

room. She'd been trying to imagine the final product when the pressure of a hand landed on her shoulder.

Shelley shrieked.

"Whoa, calm down." A male voice said.

She turned around and quickly recognized the neon vest worn by school security. Shelley's heart

raced in her chest and she swore she just aged ten-years. "What's the matter with you, sneaking up on somebody like that?"

"Sorry, ma'am didn't mean to scare you, just doing my rounds, doing my job."

Did that include scaring someone to death? She thought.

"Ma'am, why are you on the premises? You know the school is closed for Half-term, yeah?"

"Yes," she showed her student ID. "I'm a student here, just using the library to get some work done."

"On Halloween?" he asked. "Shouldn't you be trick or treating or out dancing, not being stuck in a confined space?" He smiled. Shelley found the dimple on his cheek adorable.

"Yeah, I guess." She smiled back, her fear abated.

"You should be careful, bunch of crazies roaming around this time of year."

Shelley couldn't deny that.

"Well, I should head back and finish working then."

"See you'round."

She made her way to her corner of the library, the computer's default screen saver glowing. Looking over the pages of notes and references she felt focused and was about to begin when she hears

a clank sound. She turned seeing only the empty desks and shelves of books.

'Relax, Shelley, probably just the heater clicking on.'

She heard the sound again coming from the dark area of the library.

"Hello, is anybody there?"

Clank.

She slowly walked over, the motion detector lights shining each row she passed, one by one.

Clank. The sound grew louder.

At the last row when the lights come on she screams. There's a man in a pool of blood his face unrecognizable, something smashed it in, wearing a black shirt with "SECURITY" written on and a walkie

talkie clutched loosely in his hand. She stumbled backward knocking over a few books, trying to grab

onto something.

She ran back to her things and swiftly put the books in her bag. In her haste, she accidentally bumps the computer, the screen reverting to the document she'd left open. She would have ignored it if

it weren't for the size of the blinking cursor. It had taken up the half the first page. Noticing something

was different, she looked closer. The font had been changed to 'Franklin Gothic Heavy' and the size was

at '79' and the page count was at 5. The first page was blank, she scrolls down and as the cursor slides

down the pages she sees the following on the screen:

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She heard the clank and then felt scorching pain to the side of her head. As she fell over, somebody whispered, "I told you I'd see you'round."

Shelley's head was throbbing when she came to. She tried turning over but couldn't, her body kept hitting into something. She opened her eyes and everything was pitched black. She tried moving

her arms to feel where she was. She was surrounded by smooth wood. The area felt tight and approximately her size.

She froze.

She didn't want to believe it but she knew. She'd been put into a coffin. She remembered the dead man at the library and the note on her computer, and the pain. The man's words reverberated in

her mind.

She started screaming.

"Hey Marty, whatcha reading?" the man asked.

Marty took another bite of his sandwich, turning the newspaper over. "The girl and security guard that went missing a few weeks back. They still have no clue what happened to them." "Bloody shame." He sat next to his coworker, removing his construction hat. The man smiled at the new addition of Strawberry Hill, his dimple showing.

Reflective Screens

By Ruby Breen

You probably know how it is. You're on the YouTube loop, or playing a video game, or waiting for your computer to shut down, and in the black of your screen, you see a reflection of a face. Maybe it makes you self-conscious, maybe not – the feelings it inspires in you is not relevant to what I want to tell you.

What I want to tell you is much more concrete.

Before I opened up my gift shop, I worked in the screen-making industry for about ten years. In the end, my leaving it was not so much a desire for a change of scene as an escape from something evil.

What I saw in there, however, I had to keep secret. It was part of my contract. In the years since then, I have grudgingly abided by it, but after hearing about Robert Stelter, I decided it was time to break it. The world needs to know.

For those who don't know, Robert Stelter was recently in the Australian news for defecting to North Korea. A handsome, charismatic white 25-year-old from the Western suburbs of Sydney, he was perhaps the most unlikely candidate for doing something so radical, but it was not defecting alone that got him into the news.

He also escaped to China and made it to Beijing. Lord knows how. No doubt his whiteness helped him in some way – if it wasn't intentional (and I have my suspicions it was).

Sweaty and grimy, he stumbled into the Australian embassy in Beijing and shot himself through the mouth. As his brain oozed out through his skull, with it went knowledge of who exactly he was and what had happened to him.

His face was cleaned up and he appeared on television.

And he was recognized. His mother called the police and he was identified as Robert Stelter, her son who had gone missing on a camp with his friends some months ago. She had thought he had run off somewhere in Australia, but North Korea... No matter what had happened to him, she would have everyone know he was the most normal boy who ever was.

No doubt he was somewhat disgruntled at that description of him when he visited her a week later, hair dyed green and tattoos up his arm. He had a boyfriend now, he told her, and he'd been living with him. He kept meaning to call her, but every time he came close, he found an excuse to do it later.

And that was the end of the story, as it appeared in mainstream news. Who exactly was in the coffin was a mystery, but he looked exactly like Robert Stelter.

What does this have to do with reflections in computer screens?

Not all the screens my company produced were of top-notch quality – many models were reflective. It was these that became the source of much controversy.

People reported seeing faces in the screens, when the screen was at an angle where it would have showed a reflection. These mysterious faces sometimes appeared very briefly, and sometimes for longer seconds at a time.

They did not respond to stimuli – at first.

After a few months, we noticed some begin to shoot their eyes toward sound, or even open their mouths as if to whisper something, or scream.

The employees also noticed that it tended to be the same six faces.

At the time I was anti-superstitious. I dismissed it as hysteria and continued to see that screens were produced efficiently.

And then we noticed that the faces of our own employees were changing, slowly. It was barely enough to be noticeable. Being a white man from a mostly white country, I found it hard to tell apart Asian faces as it was – it took some time for me to be convinced.

Their faces were transforming to look like any one of the six faces that appeared in the screens. These were the people who were working closest with the screens. Some of them were even looking increasingly Caucasian or African.

Somehow, the reflective screens were changing people's faces to make them like those imbedded in the screen.

This was before a computer was attached to the screen. Whatever was happening, it was happening within the screen itself.

But the reflection, we realized, was not the only time the faces appeared. By exploring the phenomenon under different lighting conditions, we learned that the faces were always there, in the screen, staring out, only revealed on occasion under certain lighting conditions.

I never got to learn if it was the same deal with non-reflective screens. When my higher-ups learned of my experiments, I was moved to another department within the company, and shortly afterwards I quit that line of work altogether.

But, under contract, I kept what I learned secret. Thinking I would seem insane, or that it was harmless anyway, I did not tell anyone.

Until now.

Statisticians predict that there are six people in the world who look exactly like you.

Since his face appeared on Australian television, four hundred Australian men have identified themselves as having the same face as Robert Stelter. None of them remember their faces changing.

This has not appeared in the mainstream news.

How many computers are affected, I do not know.

Who these faces originally belonged to, I do not know.

Whether the people who have had their faces changed are still the same people they were originally – I suppose we will find out.

I do not believe that North Korea is behind this. They do not have the resources. Rather, I believe whatever is behind it is far more extensive, far more well-resourced, far more *godlike*, than any government of which we know.

So next time you glimpse a face in the screen of your computer, maybe you will wonder, is that face *yours*?

Green With Envy by Ruby Breen

It's like a constant whispering, whispering at the sides of my head – 'Alexandra is a writer', 'She has published books,' 'She has Harvey, the one man I could have loved,' 'Everyone loves Alexandra,' 'Alexandra is the life of the party, the soul of her social circles, the winner of prizes.'

I *hate* Alexandra.

When I was younger, I used to think the term 'green with envy' was a figure of speech, but as I reached my thirties, I realized it was a description. At its hottest, envy was red, the colour of rage. Then, after the rage wore out, it turned sickly, wilted, became nauseating green. The green was long term.

Early in university, we'd had English classes together. She was a shy, weird girl with acne scars. I had always wanted someone to confide in, someone who was interested in the things I was interested in. I had not had that at my high school, and she seemed like the perfect person to fill that void.

After that unit had ended, I asked her to a movie with me. Afterwards, we bought cake at a nearby shop and talked about things. Light topics – nothing too personal.

I realized after a while that we never talked about serious topics. It was always the weather, or some book that had become popular, or each other's jewellery. I tried to talk about more meaningful things, but could not think of a way to bring them up.

Even so, my relationship with her was the closest I had ever had.

And then one day she stopped returning my emails. In our classes together, she avoided making eye contact.

One day, I saw her holding hands with a young man.

I followed them. When they passed by and greeted a mutual friend, I approached him and asked who this boy was. He was from one of the university's clubs, he told me, and they had just started dating.

They were together for a few months. I tried not to think about her, but when I remembered the happiness in her face as her eyes glossed over me, I was filled with hot rage.

In those months, I tried to distract myself by thinking about men. I was heterosexual, but for all my efforts, no opportunity ever opened up for me to actually date someone. I felt ugly.

She broke up with her boyfriend. It pleased me. Then, three weeks later she started dating someone else.

At this point, I had given up on dating altogether. I started writing the fantasy novel I had always wanted to write.

Then, out of the blue, I started speaking to a man my age on the bus home and we ended up trading numbers.

His name was Harvey and he had just entered the workforce. We found a lot of shared interests. I told him about my fantasy novel, which I wanted to turn into a series. He said he would definitely read it.

For the first time, I realized what it meant to be close to someone. We were in love, I was sure. It was only a matter of time before he kissed me.

I had forgotten all about Alexandra by this point, so it was almost a pleasant surprise when she emailed me out of the blue and told me she wanted to meet up. I expected she would apologize and explain herself.

It started off as a pleasant afternoon at a cake shop. I asked her what she was up to, and she told me she had started dating someone new a few weeks ago. He'd asked her out a year ago and she'd said no, but a few weeks ago she's asked him out and he'd said yes.

And she told me his name was Harvey.

It was the same. I told her I was acquainted with him.

She must have known.

She also told me she had made a contract with a small publishing company. This time next year she expected her first novel to be published.

I left there feeling cold. Later, my hands began to shake.

I tried not to think about her, but it never stopped. It was obsessive, almost beyond something personal, and after a few years, I accepted that it would never go away.

A few days ago she died in her early forties. A library bookshelf had fallen onto her as she tried to climb it, and she had broken her neck. It was in the news.

I went into the office bathroom and stared into the mirror for a long time.

The answer came to me in a flash of insight. I knew what I had to do.

I went to the place where her body was being kept and snooped around. The security was lax.

Before it came time for her coffin to be transported to the graveyard, I removed her body and stored it in my car. Then, giddy with excitement, I put myself into her coffin.

I was taken to a cool place, where the sound of trees was calming.

As the service took place, I imagined that the people were speaking about me. I smiled. The feelings I had kept bottled within me for so long began to subside, and over that hour, for the first time in a long time, I felt at peace.

Then it came time for the coffin to be lowered into the ground, and I realized I had missed my chance to emerge and tell them what she had done to me.

I was too embarrassed to move.

The coffin was lowered into the ground, and I was paralysed.

A spider crawled along my ear.

Handfuls of dirt fell onto the lid, and I realized this had always been coming to me.

This was what I deserved.

The Wild Ones

by Lee Bradford

Deep within the darkened trees, beyond the streets and sleeping bees, six candles lined a circle of iron sticks: charred and black upon their wicks. A match to light each one, dripping wax oozing down the tapers and cooled upon the grass.

"I ask the spirits within these trees to come and take my pain from me," she said, dressed in white and lifting a candle to the sky. "Come to me," she said again. "Wash it from me like the rain."

They came from the within trees, from the moon, and on the breeze; they came to her in shadow shapes of deer, and spiders, and of snakes. They slithered amongst the blades of grass, eyes like emeralds and moving fast. They towered over and wove themselves under.

The woman never stopped to wonder why they did not come forward past the melting wax and iron cast. There was the ancient tale of creatures from beyond the veil, who would strike a deal at midnight, but could not pass a circle of light.

She held the flickering light close and they waited while she chose. A pause of silence filled the night while their eyes glittered with delight.

"Spirits of the wood, my heart has been broken." It was whispered more than spoken. "She loved me and left me and now I feel empty. Memories of my love, take them from me. I will make room for another," said she.

The shadows paced along the light and creaked and croaked throughout the night. But one stood tall among the rest, and in its voice it seemed to jest. "What does she give to us when all is done? Memories are but trinkets for the Wild Ones, and we have enough pain to go around. Promise me this: when you are in the ground, and your flesh has rot away, your soul should not go astray. But not to Heaven and not to Hell; with the Wild Ones you will dwell." A tendril of shadow like an arm uncoiled. "Do we have a deal," sang a throat of soil.

The woman hesitated, knowing old lore of how you must be careful what you wish for. But her heart hurt badly with every thump and, though the spirits made it jump, she could not see herself holding on long without the woman whose name was a song.

"On one condition," she said, holding herself high. "Tonight is not the night that I die."

The spirit conferred with its brothers, cousins, sisters, fathers, and mothers: chattered and chittered through the air, whirred and brayed and found it fair.

"Human child, the deal is made." The shadow unfurled, eyes of jade. Her hands did not waver and shook it firm. In her palm it felt like a worm.

They withdrew and time still ticked: a loophole she must have thought to predict. That a deal made at night does not carry to morning. That she should heed her mother's warning.

At midnight she was filled with doubt.

A minute later the lights went out

The beeswax dripped; the woman slipped. The creatures descended; her life then ended.

She should have known, and did all along not to trust that Spirit Song.

Flesh and Bone, Trees and Sky- Spirits lie, spirits lie.

Whisper of the Mirror Trees

By Charles Payseur

"There are so many," Ann said, admiring the polished silver frame of a leaf. Each was beautiful, mysterious.

"Horrible," her mother said, face red. Her mother hated mirrors. Having one was against the rules. Even more than answering the phone or the door. Almost as much as going into the basement. Mirrors were evil things. Ann thought the ones on the trees were amazing, but she kept it to herself.

"How do you think it happened?" Ann asked. The entire orchard had changed, the trees no longer bearing fruit but bowing under the weight of a thousand mirrors twinkling in the moonlight. Ann held her candlestick closer to one of them, amazed by the detail in the inlay.

"Stay away from that," her mother snapped, and Ann pulled away, familiar with the anger in her voice.

"It doesn't matter, anyway." Her mother snatched a mirror from a branch. "We can't eat glass and silver." She threw the mirror at the ground and it shattered with a scream.

Come in under the shade, a voice whispered, so soft Ann wasn't sure she had heard it. And if her mother did, she gave no indication

"You stay away from these," her mother said and Ann, flinching slightly, nodded. Then her mother sent her inside and Ann retreated to her bedroom. She wasn't tired, but her mother would be furious if she found Ann up in the library again, reading instead of sleeping. Ann climbed into bed and pulled the covers up to her chin, just like she was supposed to.

Outside she heard her mother working, glass shattering, branches snapping.

Come in under the shade, the whispers called from outside, each time a mirror broke. Ann tried not to listen, tried to sleep.

The morning dawned bright, the windows twinkling with frost. Ann jumped out of bed, surprised her mother hadn't woken her. She was home schooled and every day was supposed to begin prompt, but even without a clock Ann could tell it was late. The change made her uneasy, and she ran to the window, drew her hand against the cold chill, wiping herself a clear spot.

The green of the lawn was coated with a sheath of white frost, and the whole orchard seemed to shimmer with light, a sea of reflections. She backed away. Her mother would be angry if she saw, would accuse Ann of trying to see herself in the glass.

Without direction, Ann walked to the kitchen. Empty. It was possible her mother had gone into town. She did sometimes and Ann was always supposed to stay in her room, away from the windows. Her mother would be gone hours, would return with the last sip of a pumpkin spice latte for her, or a part of a cookie, if she had been good enough. But the car was still in the driveway.

A loud curse made Ann look out into the yard, into the orchard. She saw her mother standing among the trees, screaming. Ann ran back to her room, slipped back under the covers, and pretended to sleep.

We can show you, a voice seemed to ooze into her ear as a crash sounded from the orchard. Another followed it, and another. *We can show you*.

Ann closed her eyes.

Later her mother came in.

"I need to go to town," she said, and Ann nodded. "Stay in here. Do not leave this room. If you do..." She didn't need to finish. She left.

Under the shade. Under the shade. Come in under the shade.

Ann tried to block them out but it was no use. Even without breaking they spoke to her. Finally she slipped out of bed and padded to the door, unlocked it, slipped into the yard.

Her mother must have broken hundreds of mirrors, but it didn't seem to have reduced the amount on the trees. Had they grown back? Ann picked her way around broken glass until she came to the shade of the tree, to a silver mirror in full light. It flashed as it caught the sun and she blinked as her vision cleared. When she could see again it was pointed directly at her.

She flinched, afraid it was some sort of spell, some evil creature, but nothing happened. She reached out, grabbed the mirror. A lazy spider was crawling along the frame, and Ann felt sorry for it. The mirror wasn't an apple, and the spider couldn't eat glass and silver.

Then something moved in the mirror, and Ann looked into its surface, saw a girl's face looking back. Was it her? She had never seen her reflection before.

"The basement," the face said, just a whisper. "Go. Now."

Ann let go of the mirror and stepped back, hissed as she cut her foot on a piece of glass. No. The basement was against the rules. Then she heard the sound of the car. Her mother.

The basement...

Ann ran. The basement was locked but she knew where her mother kept the key. Her foot burned with pain as she ran to the house, retrieved the key from under the tin of coffee. She opened the

door and hurried down. She was breathing fast, too fast. But she couldn't let her mother find her. Couldn't. It would be so bad.

It was then that she noticed the smell, the damp. And the light. It should have been dark. But there, as she turned, she saw it. A soft glow. From a mirror.

It was huge, as tall as Ann. It was affixed to the ceiling, pointed down at a box. No, a coffin. Ann stepped closer. The door to the upstairs opened, and Ann gasped. She stepped back toward the mirror, the light.

"Ann?" her mother's voice called. She took another step toward the mirror, was close enough to see into the coffin. She stopped. A body. Her body. The one she had seen in the mirror. She screamed.

END

Secrets of the Library

By Elizabeth Mays

It was the silence that woke her. The silence and the tingling sensation of something creepy crawly wriggling its way up her arm. Some little spider had crawled its way across the arm of Claudia Szymanski as she slept on the floor of one of the library's many silent study rooms, little rooms with a desk in one corner and a single window in the door. Claudia flicked the offending arachnid off of her before sitting up.

From the little bit of light spilling into the room from outside, she could see that her iPod battery had died. Dead as a doornail. Her cell phone was just as deceased. There wasn't even the chirp of a dying battery to ease the silence. The fact that what little light was coming in through the window was of an eerie green color, didn't ease Claudia's trepidation.

Why was it so dark? A library shouldn't be that dark. Or so quiet.

As Claudia gathered her things and opened the door of her little study room, she noticed there was almost no sound. There was no sound of the librarians shuffling their carts as they put away the books. No click-clicking of fingers on computer keys. No muffled giggles of frat boys looking at something less than scholarly. Not even the sound of the elderly patrons shushing said frat boys.

The only sound Claudia could hear was the humming of the exit sign, the green exit sign; the sole source of illumination.

The library was dark and empty. And closed.

Claudia went in the direction the exit sign pointed and began to weave her way through the stacks in the direction of the entrance. Her favorite study room was in the 800's, with the poetry and plays. She could barely make out the names of a few of her favorite books as she walked: *The Poetical Works of John Keats*; *Leaves of Grass* by Whitman; *The Wind Among the Reeds*, W.B. Yeats.

The humming growing louder in the silence. It was probably just her imagination playing tricks on her, but Claudia thought she heard voices in that electrical hum. Just light murmuring, like the whispers of voices from ages past, as if her favorite poets were coming alive to taunt her in the dark. The library was obviously closed, so there was no one there to make any sounds.

No one except Claudia and her imagination.

Where were the windows? The exit was along a wall of windows that faced Hammin Street; if she could find the wall with the windows, she'd find her way out. But everything was so dark. She could hear the exit sign, but its green glow had dimmed the further she got from it, until she could no longer read the titles on the spines of the books. When she looked back the way she came, she couldn't really see the exit sign at all, just the green glow, but it wasn't directly behind her like it should have been, rather it seemed to be coming from all different directions. Claudia felt alone at the eye of a sluggish green light storm in a sea of darkness and musty old books.

Normally she found the smell of books reassuring, as it mellowed the harsh smell of sweat, cologne, halitosis, and all the other noxious every day smells of the people she encountered. The books could give her comfort like no human could, and now they had turned on her. She couldn't even remember where she had begun. The books had trapped her in the dark.

The whispers grew louder, like a hundred voices telling their individual stories all at once. They seemed louder to her right. That must be where the next exit light hung.

Claudia followed the murmuring sound, groping along in the dark. She ran her hand along the shelves, searching for that comfort from the great works. The books in this section seemed much older, more worn. Many of the leather bindings felt almost papery to the touch, as if they'd been rubbed bare by the many hands who had touched them through the years.

This section of the library seemed different and Claudia couldn't remember ever having been in this section before. The smell was more pungent, not soothing, but stifling. The light in this section seemed different, too. It was definitely getting brighter, but it appeared more sickly, and shifted, as if from the flame of a candle instead of the electric lights. Shadows began to twitch and dance causing eyes and figures of monsters to jump out at her.

Claudia wanted so desperately to go back, but was more frightened of being lost in this strange part of the library, where the dust and sticky cobwebs were beginning to cover the books.

Brighter the light beckoned, and quicker the voices seemed to call. Claudia's heart was a jackhammer in her chest. Finally, she came upon a mirror, nearly running into it and breaking it. Claudia saw herself, but the reflection behind her was not the library she knew. Candles flickered upon tables, and men in dark robes whispered to each other as they looked through heavy, leather bound books.

These books were the ones who had betrayed her, these pungent smelling, books that hid the secrets of evil men.

The fear shook through Claudia, making her teeth chatter, she placed both hands over her mouth, but it was too late. The men in the mirror had heard her. One of the robed figures walked towards her, his dark hair, beard, and eyes forming a scowl as menacing as that of any villain she had read in any of her precious books. He reached towards her, Claudia wanted to scream, but her throat was dry. Her vision began to dim; she could feel herself begin to lose consciousness. Just before she passed out the man spoke: "*Venit mulier et mulier moriuntur.*"

"The woman has come and the woman must die."

Some Secrets Must Be Kept

By Nichole Capps

The whisper is what started it all. I heard it, low, and summoning, while sitting alone, sequestered in my favorite study room in the library. It was the second door on the left after you entered the genealogy room. The man at the desk never said anything to me about the pumpkin spice lattes I had been carrying in with me from the moment they became available from any coffee shop I could get to before I headed into spending my evening on researching my family history for genealogy class. Kids never came into this part of the library. They rarely even came near it, so the sounds of their voices rarely ever managed to ooze into my thoughts as I sat with Beethoven playing quietly, floatingly around me.

Fall was just cracking its way through the Louisiana heat, but summer was still winning by far. The day the whisper came, I had gone so far as to order my latte over ice after spending much of the afternoon outside at work. I stunk, badly, trudging up the stairs toward my awaiting room. Mr. Kearson was kind enough to never say anything about the way I looked or smelled, only, "You look brighter every day, Helena," as he handed me the key to the room.

Finding out our past was not easy. Much of my family's history appeared to have been buried under mythos and pretty-making by generations that followed some hideousness that had been caused at the hands of my multi-great grandparents. It took much traveling about the middle parts of Louisiana and digging through mounds of old books and documents. I'd had to knock on doors of families as old as mine to ask for a look at priceless documents and journals. Finally, in the two weeks prior to the due date of my paper, I had pieced together the horrible history that was Tenebres family.

Safely in the room, I had plugged my computer into the flat screen monitor on the wall and pulled up my Beethoven playlist. (About which, I always heard my best friend's voice say, "I hate Beethoven. Beethoven hated altos.") I should have been so lucky to have been listening to "Moonlight Sonata" when the whisper came. Instead, it was the Piano Sonata 24, about as upbeat and happy a piece of music as you could get. That's when the whisper came. More than hearing it, I could feel it, a burning uneasiness that sat on the top of my skin and moved. "Come away," was what it had said, and for a moment, I forgot the way my skin felt oozed over, and lit upon by fear. For a moment, I felt lulled, and at rest, and the horror of what I had found under all that research stopped being real. As the lulling took me, I slid forward onto the table, knocking my iced latte over. The smell of holiday warmth broke the quiet I was feeling, and the unease came back.

In that typical human way, I told myself that I was tired. I had spent too much time looking at the accounts of disfigured bodies, and the spells that were purportedly used to cause those disfigurements. These were spells that came from the middle ages of France. My friend's friend's French literature professor translated pieces of the spells for me. Among the worst were the spells that lead to broken infants, and those that seemed to turn children into wisps of smoke before their parents' eyes. What led to the apparent controversy surrounding my family, though, was something altogether otherworldly.

"Come away," said the whisper again, as I was reviewing my notes on the spell and the journal of the man who witnessed the doings of my great-greats. Again, I felt sleepy, drawn into some green headspace, where I could sense the evisceration of this little girl, as she stood before her screaming parents. The green became red. And my quiet became bright and overwhelmed by a sound that was familiar to me, but far away. The face of the little girl, being peeled alive for the theft of a ring, a ring of some great, old, evil, her face burned into mine. I began to feel her skin, ripped in minute shreds, peeling away as though it was my own skin. And the sound renting through my **horror** is the sound of my screaming. Under the scream, came the sound of the whisper again, "Come away."

Within a moment, I could see my study room again, with Mr. Kearson leaning over me, lying prone and stupid and, worst of all, in the puddle of my wasted latte.

"Helena," he patted my hand, "get up. You're alright. Come with me and I'll get you some water."

I followed him into the office behind his desk, with its poster-covered windows, avowing the virtues of visiting Baton Rouge. He closed the door behind us, and the moment he did, I could feel the whisper crawling my skin again, though I heard nothing.

In an old mirror, leaned against the wall, I could see my pale and shaken reflection, with my arms pulling myself into a hug. Mr. Kearson was busying himself with the water jug behind me. I turned my head just a bit to watch him, for no real reason, but it was then that I realized I could not see him in the mirror.

"Did you know," he said quietly, "That Kearson is my first name."

I was too scared to even tremble.

"My second name is Tenebres," he continued. The water he had prepared for me was floating in the reflection of the mirror. A green haze, so very faint, as to almost be unnoticeable, was all there was to see of Mr. Kearson. "It is time, Helena, to come away."

Down my spine I felt something hot, and burning, but lulling and soft.

"Come away," he whispered once more.

And in my reflection, I saw a dark puddle growing, dark, dark red. And as I watched, the green got closer, and closer. I slipped farther away as the mist slipped into my spine.

"Some secrets must be kept," my voice said before I saw the last of me leave.