

Cadaverous Magazine



Issue 2

Cadaverous Magazine is an online supernatural horror literary magazine.

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Cover Art by Anna Martin.

MASTHEAD

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Untreated Depression by Anna Martin

Kurst's Curiosities

By Nolcha Fox

Bert couldn't believe what he saw in the curiosity shop. He usually looked away on purpose as he walked by. He considered the shop a wastebasket of broken dreams, and he didn't want to pry into the odd sadness of other people's lives.

But this time he looked at the window display, and his eyes opened wide. Front and center was an old box camera, like the one his grandfather had, the one that opened the world of photography to Bert. Thanks to that box camera, he was now moderately famous in the art world. What a find. What a treasure.

Bert pushed open the shop door. The opening was short and narrow, and Bert was as round as he was tall, so he could barely squeeze through. His younger brother always teased Bert that he looked like a Christmas tree ornament. It was an annoying remark, but not annoying enough to stop Bert from eating sweets. He never met a dessert he didn't like.

A bell above the door tinkled. Otherwise, the shop was silent. Perhaps walking into the shop was a bad decision.

Just as Bert was about to walk out, a man appeared from behind the old cash register. Bert instinctively jumped back. The man was gaunt and pale, as if he had just pulled himself out of the genie lamp on the counter. His cheeks were pock-marked, and a scar ran across his face. He radiated an acrid odor. "Can I help you?" He smiled, revealing missing teeth.

"Mr. Kurst? Sorry to bother you. I was just – just..."

"Yes, I'm Mr. Kurst. And you were looking at that camera in the window."

Bert nodded. "Never mind. I'll..." He turned towards the door.

But Mr. Kurst blocked his path. “No problem at all.” He bent over and grabbed the camera. “Kodak manufactured it in the early 1900s. And it has quite a curious history.” He handed the camera to Bert.

Bert swallowed bile that rushed up his throat from standing so close to Mr. Kurst. He pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his mouth. “What’s so curious about it?”

“Everyone who owned this camera disappeared.”

“Really? How do you know?”

“I’ll show you.” Mr. Kurst pulled a file from a battered file cabinet, and carefully pulled out some folded and stained newspaper articles. “Come, come, you can look at them.” He unfolded the articles and spread them on the counter for Bert.

Bert scanned the articles. The last one was dated 10 years ago. “Is this a joke?”

“Not at all. They all vanished. Poof.”

“And you believe this hogwash?”

“What’s important is, do you believe.”

“Of course not.”

“I was counting on you saying that,” Mr. Kurst murmured.

“What did you say?”

Mr. Kurst bowed. “Excuse an old man for mumbling. It was nothing important.” He pulled a camera case out from under the counter. “You’ll find some extra rolls of film in here.”

“How much do I owe you?”

Mr. Kurst turned the camera over and examined the sticker on the bottom. “Twenty-five dollars.”

“Twenty-five dollars? That’s all?”

“I always give my first customer of the day a discount.” Mr. Kurst took Bert’s cash. “I have a three-day return policy, no questions asked.”

“Oh, don’t worry, I won’t be coming back.” Bert stuck the camera inside the case. Then he banged the shop door behind him, the box camera case hanging from a strap over his shoulder.

Mr. Kurst smiled as he watched Bert walk out of sight. “You’ll be coming back, all right.”

Bert walked over to the town square for the first photo with his new camera. He walked around the fountain in the center of the square, checking the sky and the shadows. He was putting together a water series for a show next month, and liked the idea of using the old box camera. “Excuse me, ma’am. Do you mind if I take a photo of your son floating his boat in the fountain?”

The woman nodded, and Bert positioned himself just right. He looked through the viewfinder, and was about to snap the perfect picture, when a group of men walked behind the fountain. “Hey guys, can you…”

“Who are you talking to, mister?” the boy asked.

“Those men on the other side of the fountain.”

The boy swiveled his head. “Mister, there’s nobody there.”

Bert lifted his head up. The men had disappeared. “Never mind.” He shook his head, looked in the viewfinder, and took the picture. “Thanks, kid.”

Bert walked to the park to take some photos of the stream. He positioned himself so that the flowers along the bank and the tree leaves framed the bridge. What a great shot. He looked in the viewfinder. And wouldn’t you know, the men he saw behind the fountain were standing on the bridge. His breath stopped. The men were close enough that he could see that they all looked

wrong somehow, long contorted bodies with pasty skin, almost floating above the planks of the bridge.

Bert lifted his head up and blinked his eyes. The bridge was deserted. He took the picture.

Bert walked the path along the creek. The creek was running high from the mountain snow melt, and the rushing water cascaded white over large rocks. Water from one of the smaller falls fed a shallow pool. Dragonflies hovered over the pool and sunlight played on the surface. He forgot about the men. He had one more shot left, and this could be a great one.

He climbed down to the edge of the pool and positioned himself just right. He looked in the viewfinder. Just as he was about to take the picture, the pool reflected the faces of six men above him on the path. Their mouths were open in a silent scream, and they were staring at him.

Bert turned around so fast that he almost fell into the pool. The path was deserted.

He must be dreaming. Or maybe it was the chocolate-filled donuts he ate for breakfast this morning. His stomach was sour, and his breath was short and fast. He took the picture, then scrambled up the incline, up to the path. He looked both ways, and didn't see anyone.

Bert waddled as fast as he could to the town square. Mothers pushed strollers to and from the park. Children jumped in the fountain. The world was entirely normal again.

He sat on a bench and wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. Something about those men scared him. Why did they look so menacing? Where did they come from? Where did they go when he looked up from the camera? Was he going crazy? Maybe he should take the camera back to the shop and get a refund.

But years of habit prevailed, and he walked to his studio instead. He locked himself in, and tried to calm his breathing. His hands were clammy, and he almost dropped the camera. He pulled a half-full bottle of whiskey from his desk drawer and gulped it down straight. Even the warmth of the alcohol running down his throat couldn't dissipate the chill running up his spine.

But Bert's curiosity was stronger than his fear. He would develop the film and then take the camera back. The photos would prove he was just tired, and that he needed to take that vacation he always put off.

As Bert finished developing the negatives, he heard a knock at the door, a knock he recognized. He needed a break anyway, and better yet, a fresh set of eyes. And what better fresh set of eyes than his photographer friend and sometimes friendly rival, Otto.

"Otto! How would you like to see the negatives I developed from the box camera I bought this morning?"

Otto grinned and followed Bert into the darkroom.

"Some of these are absolutely awful," Otto said. "Did you take these?"

"Only the last three."

"Oh yes, I recognize your work."

"Otto, do you see any odd-looking men, perhaps in a group, in any of the negatives?"

Otto examined the negatives again. "No, no weirdos in any of them."

"Thanks! I owe you dinner tonight."

"The usual place?"

"The usual place."

After Otto left, Bert sagged in relief. He was just exhausted, that was all. That camera was going back to the shop before dinner.

He returned to the darkroom and looked at the negatives using a loupe. He almost fainted. The men appeared in all the negatives, first far away, then closer, then too close, a pattern that repeated itself six times. In each pattern, another man appeared in the group.

Nobody heard Bert's panicked wail.

Long arms and hands reached out of the last negative, through the loupe, and pulled him into the picture. As Bert squeezed through the loupe and into the photo, his body elongated and a silent scream punctuated his face. He disappeared with a loud pop.

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Mr. Kurst bent over to pick up the morning newspaper in front of his shop door. He opened it up and smiled at the article about the mysterious disappearance of Bert Gimble, famous photographer. He crouched to enter his shop, and started the coffee. After pulling the box camera from the bag slung over his shoulder and placing it back in the display window, he poured himself a cup of coffee, and cut out the article.

Before Mr. Kurst could put the folder into the file cabinet, the bell above the door tinkled. A woman dressed in a suit and carrying a leather briefcase entered the shop.

She pointed to the display window and sneezed. "I'm interested in that crystal perfume bottle." She sneezed. "Excuse my sinuses." She patted her nose with a tissue.

Mr. Kurst retrieved the perfume bottle and handed it to the woman.

"These bottles are hard to find." She turned the bottle around and examined it. "It's perfect."

"This bottle has a curious history."

"I don't care. How much is it?"

"I was counting on you saying that," Mr. Kurst murmured.

"What did you say?"

Mr. Kurst bowed. "Excuse an old man for mumbling." He smiled at the woman. "It's thirty dollars."

"Thirty dollars? That's all? These antique bottles are usually more expensive."

“I always give my first customer of the day a discount.” Mr. Kurst took the woman’s cash. “I have a three-day return policy, no questions asked.”

“Oh, don’t worry, I don’t plan to come back.”

Mr. Kurst smiled as he watched the woman walk out of sight. “Oh, you’ll be coming back. They all do.”



t-12 by Anna Martin

Garden Time

Red droplets flying, the weedwhacker progressed.

-Cobalt Jade

Shadow Thing

The beast waits in the concealing dark.
Patience is a skill both innate and practiced.

Predation has always been difficult.
It was so in the ancient times when
the quarry were armed with stones and staves.
Then they made swords and shields.
Today, it's harder still
with their weapons fierce and deadly.

There are less believers now.
It's to the creature's benefit they think it not real.
The unsuspecting are more vulnerable.

All animals evolve.
So predators must match their prey.
Adapt to new terrain and crowded realms.

Yet, some things never change.
Stealth and silence create surprise.
Black fur blends with the gloom
regardless of the century.

Some men ascribe to him unnatural and evil desires.
For the beast, it's simply satisfying
the deep and natural hunger.

At night, few look up.
Eyes search low to avoid a stumble.
This creates more blind spots.
Another advantage.

There are more lights stealing the night,
but the beast will find the shadows.
So long as there is sunset,
there will always be dark places.
To hide, to wait, to stalk.

And there are those who risk the dark.
Here comes one now.
Muscles tense, eyes narrow, teeth emerge.
The hunt is on.

-Bill Diamond

Halloween Avenue

The full moon beckons
to the werewolves of night
as they howl their sighs
and the ghosts arrive.

Sunset and black nights
mingle at midnight's hour,
a chilly breeze blowing
through haunted towers.

Cats swarm the cemetery
dressed in funereal colors,
mewling their cry before
the witch boils their tingling furs.

Yes, there is a witch.
Did I fail to tell you?
She is searching for more,
perhaps you'll join too.

Her cackle will tremble earth,
and your skin will boil too,
at this haunted cemetery
in Halloween Avenue.

-Maribel C. Pagan



Oxygenate by Anna Martin

Snow Blind

By George Morrow

“This is it, Penny. This is the place we’ve been looking for. Rattlesnake Ridge. You don’t hear about it today, but it was the scene of one of the grisliest murder cases in Oregon history.”

John Aiken and his wife, Penny, were spending the weekend hiking, when they came upon Rattlesnake Ridge. The ridge is not formidable, more of a large hill than a ridge, in the central Oregon mountains. The winter had ended, and it was mid-April when the Aikens, a couple in their early thirties, set out on the hike. The sun was shining, and most of the winter snow had melted, but patches of it still remained on the ground. The Aikens came dressed for the occasion, wearing parkas, boots, khaki trousers, which John had Penny make from his army uniforms, stocking caps, and gloves. John carried a whiskey flask in his pocket, as well as several packs of Chesterfield cigarettes and several pieces of beef jerky for a mid-morning snack. They planned to return to a lodge for lunch.

“Tell me what happened,” said Penny, lighting a Chesterfield.

“It was nearly fifty years ago, in the winter of 1884, an especially severe winter weather time,” said John as he, too, lit a smoke. “A soldier named Nate Patman took a patrol up into these hills looking for robbers who attacked gold prospectors, but Patman and his five men were caught in a terrible blizzard. Their horses ran away, leaving them no way to escape. At some point, they started eating each other.”

“Why would they do such a terrible thing?”

“They must have run out of food, and had no other way to survive. You’ve heard of the Donner Party, in the 1840’s, that resorted to cannibalism when they ran out of food? This happened to Patman and his men. When a rescue party finally reached them in the spring, about this time of year, only Patman was alive. He confessed to killing and eating his comrades to stay alive. They were going to hang him, but he escaped into the woods and was never seen again.”

“I understand that, but why didn’t others survive also? Why did all five have to die?”

“Who knows. Maybe Patman got to liking the taste of human flesh, and couldn’t stop eating it.”

“John, really, you say the most absurd things.”

“Think about it. They say once bears get a taste of human flesh, they won’t eat anything else.”

“Are there bears out here, John?”

“I hope they are still hibernating. I haven’t heard of any bear attacks recently. Now that we’re here, we can take a hike up there and snoop around.”

“I don’t like that idea. That place is scary.”

“It’s not a hard climb. We can be up and back within an hour.”

“No, John. I’m not going.”

“All right. You stay here while I go have a look-see.”

“No, way. I’m not staying alone.” Penny rubbed her hands across her eyes.

“What’s the matter?”

“My eyes are burning.”

“Does everything appear red?”

“Yes.”

“You might have a touch of snow blindness. The sun reflects off the snow, and irritates your eyes. There’s not much snow, but just enough to magnify the sun’s rays. It’s actually sunburn of the eyes, but it’s not serious. I’ll fix you up.”

John scooped up a handful of snow and put it into his handkerchief.

“Lay this hanky against your eyes, and it will cool them.”

They waited for a short time while Penny soothed her eyes, and when she felt better, they started the climb up the ridge.

“I’m trying to imagine the miserable time Patman and his men experienced when they came here,” said John, as they walked. “They couldn’t see where they were going because of the blizzard. The cold must have been piercing, and they were starving and terrified.”

“It must have been such a shock when the blizzard hit them. They didn’t know what to do.”

“Their first care was to stay alive,” said John, “and that meant keeping safe from the savage weather. I’m guessing we’ll find some evidence of a shelter up here. They had to build something, or they all would have frozen to death.”

“They did do something,” said Penny.

“What makes you say that?”

“Because, I see it up ahead.”

A shelter built from basalt rock lay at the top of the ridge. It had no door, and the roof was made of logs.

“It’s small,” said John. “I say I would no more than four people, maybe five if cramped in. Very basic. They might have built a fire inside to warm themselves. Let’s see what is inside.”

“Don’t you think you should ask permission first?”

“Meaning?”

“See if anybody is home, John.”

“Penny, nobody has been here in years.”

“John...better be sure.”

“Hello. We’re the Aikens. We were in the neighborhood and stopped by to say hello.”

“Be careful, John. We don’t want Nate Patman to coming charging out at us.”

“Very funny. Nobody is in there. Come.”

They went to the entrance, and finding the inside in total darkness, John picked up a tree limb and ignited it with his cigarette lighter to use as a torch. The nauseating odor of mildew and decay slammed them the moment they walked inside.

Penny stumbled, but John caught her.

“What did I trip over?” she said.

“It’s climbers’ gear. Ice picks, ropes, alpenstocks, blankets, boxes. We need more light,” he said, and gathered several boxes into a small pile and lit them to provide light.

The light exposed a heavy layer of dust covering everything inside.

“I’ve never seen a dust covering this thick. It must be years since anybody has been in here.”

“Not quite,” he said. “Look over here on the wall.”

John ran his torch up and down the wall, exposing a list of names etched on the stone.

“I count twenty-five of them,” he said. “They begin in 1889. Five years after the murders.”

“The last one is down here at the bottom. ‘Brenner. 1927. Just three years ago,” Penny noted.

“They must have stopped here before moving on,” he said.

“Why, John?”

“They were probably tired, and needed a rest. These hills are full of these shelters. Climbers build them and leave them as a courtesy to others who follow.”

“How about this equipment, John. Why would they leave their equipment here if they needed it later on?”

“I have no idea. Maybe one person left it all.”

“You don’t really believe that, do you, John?”

He shook his head no, and shined his light at the bottom of the names’ list.

“Penny, look at the last name on the list.”

“Patman, Nathaniel. US Army,” Penny read aloud.

“Do you notice something unusual about this list, Penny?”

“Everything is unusual about it.”

“The handwriting is all the same. Done by the same hand. At least, I think so. Look at Nate Patman’s writing. It is similar to all the rest.”

“John, you said Patman died in 1884. The first of these names wasn’t here until 1889.”

They looked at each other in silence.

“Are you thinking the same thing I am, John?”

“Patman did not die in 1884? Penny, that’s fantastic.”

“You said he escaped into the woods. Could he still be hiding there? Could he have assumed another identity? The last name was written in 1927, three years ago. Patman would be in his late sixties by now, but he could still be alive.”

“If that is true, we would have to assume Patman killed all these other climbers.”

“It’s certainly in the realm of possibility, isn’t it, John?”

John knelt down to re-examine Patman’s signature, and as he did, Penny screamed, and fell to the floor.”

“What happened?” he said. “Let me help you.” He stood her up and brushed off her clothes.

“John, I saw a man standing at the door. He was looking at me. His eyes were wild, like they were on fire.”

“What else did you notice about him?”

“He had massive shoulders, as wide as the door passage. He wore a stocking cap like you. A heavy coat, and had a beard that was long and scraggily, and had pieces of meat stuck in it.”

“How old did he look? Was he carrying anything in his hands?”

“He wasn’t there long enough for me to notice, but I’ll never forget the fury in his eyes. I’ve seen pictures of wild animals with eyes like that. John, if I didn’t know it was a man, I’d swear it was a wild animal.”

John stepped outside to check for footprints, and came back.

“I can’t spot anybody, and there aren’t any footprints. Are you sure you weren’t imagining it, Penny?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Nothing to get alarmed about. We’re in a spooky place, and a person can get all sorts of ideas, and think they see something that really doesn’t exist.”

“I did see. He was there.”

“All right. No trouble. What’s that you have in your hand?”

Penny discovered that she was holding a pair of glasses in her left hand.

“I must have picked these up without noticing it when I was on the floor,” she said.
“What are they?”

“They are sun goggles. They are used to keep you from going snow blind. These lenses are different, though. They are thicker than the usual, and they weren’t manufactured by an oculist. They look like the bottoms of bottles. It’s almost funny, but I’d say they were made from the bottoms of whiskey bottles. Isn’t that something?”

“Okay, but why make them from bottles? Why not purchase a regular pair of goggles?”

“These goggles were made right here in this shelter, Penny, from materials lying about, because they were needed by someone who was here when they became snow blind. The straps that keep them on are strange also. They aren’t made of leather or cloth. Penny, these straps are made of human flesh. I’d stake my life on it.”

“These goggles were made by Nate Patman, John, and I’d stake my life on that.”

“Try them on. They’ll make your eyes feel better, and they look good on you.”

“Well, dammit, I haven’t got much choice, have I?” She put on the goggles.

“Do your eyes feel better?”

“I guess so.”

“Don’t pout over it.”

“Who’s pouting? All I want to do is get out of here. I’ll wait outside while you rummage for souvenirs.”

Penny smoked another Chesterfield and watched the smoke swirl down the ridge and into the trees. The goggles eased her discomfort, even more than she expected. Her eyes felt wonderful, with no pain, and the things she saw assumed a new meaning for her. She saw not just their outer frame, but their inner beauty. A meadow lark flew over her, and she saw inside its body, its heart, brain, organs working. A thousand tiny eyes watched her from the dense undergrowth, and she witnessed the slow melting of innumerable snow particles.

“This is beautiful,” she mused. “I’d never have seen this if I hadn’t come here. John, come out here I want to show you something.”

She looked down the ridge again, but this time a person emerged from the undergrowth. It was a man, a very large man, who walked up toward her. She was about to wave to him, when she recognized who it was.

She wanted to shout, “John, get out here! It’s Nate Patman! He’s going to kill us!” but she feared he would not come believing her to be hallucinating. She walked backwards toward

the shelter entrance, but stumbled and fell. Patman was on top of her in an instance. Those blazing eyes she looked into before petrified her with fear.

“Stay off me!” she cried, and threw her cigarette into this face. He picked her up, and started to twist off her head. She heard the ligaments in her neck snapping just before she lost consciousness.

“Penny, baby, wake up. Are you all right?” John was bending over her, and holding her, trying to calm her.

“Darling, what happened?”

“Patman is back, John. He tried to kill me. We’ve got to get out of here.”

“We are going, Penny, but you have no reason to be afraid. Once and for all, Nate Patman is dead.”

“John, I saw him. He had his hands on me.”

“I don’t see any blood or sign you were beaten up. You just tripped and fell. Here, let’s stand you up.”

“John, what’s the matter with me?”

“Like I said, you’re a bit overwrought being in a place like this. I shouldn’t have brought you. We’ll have a nice lunch back at the lodge, a hot bath, and you can take a nap, and when we get back home, you can see the doctor if you feel like it. Nothing will come of this. You’ll see.”

They walked hand-in-hand down the ridge.

“Penny, you are still wearing those ridiculous goggles. Toss them away.”

“No, John, I want to save them as a souvenir. Whenever I look through them, I feel I am one with the TRUTH.”

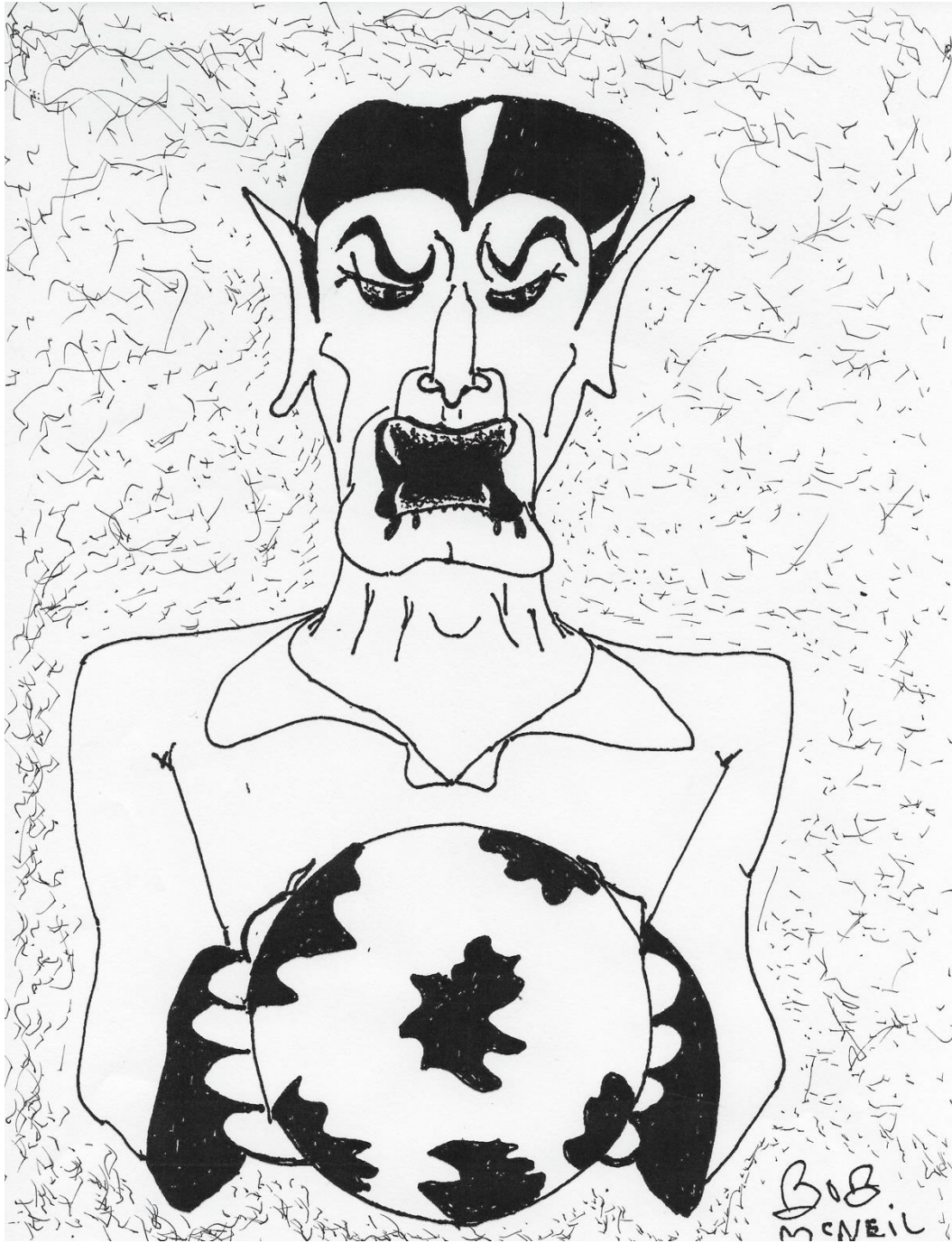
“They gave you hallucinations.”

“When I use them the next time, I won’t be in a scary place, and no, I don’t believe in ghosts. Nate Patman is dead and gone, and that’s all there is to it.”

They caught the aroma of food as they neared the lodge, and Penny stoked the goggles in the pocket of her parka. The shelter on Rattlesnake Ridge remained the same, except for one alteration. The list of names on the wall had one addition.

“John and Penny Aiken, 1930.”

THE END



Another Gormandizer by Bob McNeil

Leave the body, take the blood.

-Cathy Matos

I loved her blood too much.

-Cathy Matos

Demons like to sing the blues.

-Cathy Matos



Acerous by Anna Martin

Static

staggering figures, in this dimming dusk of the early
mind's twilight, broken bokeh angels radiating
soft, dusty blood. befalling upon this stone floor,
shackles, upon shackled minds like ghosts,
west wings, west wards of contorted eyelids crying out
in unison, deep where the light does not reach,
crawling, rotting lunacy of yesteryear's abandon, screams, bloodied throats,
and eyes full of static.

-Grace Evans

Dark Chase

You make it so much more fun when you run.
Yes....stumble through the dark woods....keep looking back.
Where am I? I'm not behind you. Left? Right? Where should you go?

Please keep screaming for help. The owls hoot their displeasure.
Crickets send signals to get out of your way. Nature can sense death.

An old farmhouse. An abandoned saw mill. Such obvious places to hide.
But I'll find you...you know I will....it's only a matter of time.
It's funny to see you trip over bramble and branches..I want to laugh out loud.
Can't attract attention..homes in the distance..soon someone will hear.

You lost your shoe! Poor dear. I'll hold it for you. I see that you're a size 8.
A piece of your shirt is caught on a branch. White with pink stripes. Nice.
Your footprints tattoo the ground. So glad it rained this morning.
I hear water. The river is nearby. Mustn't lose your tracks.

I see you! Look at you struggle through the bushes. Thorns gripping you.
I'll hang back a bit. Let you catch your breath. Feel safe - for now.
I cross the river out of your view. Come behind you on the path. Got ya!

-Shirley Jones-Luke

Cadavers in Motion

In my dreams, the dead not only
walk, but speak, they tell me stories
about their living years, so many
memories of laughter, anger and
tears, so many fears that they
carried like sacks of stone and
now that they're dead - the burden
is mine alone

-Shirley Jones-Luke



Faces of Ghosts by Anna Martin

Demon Beasts in Human Form

The demons arrive
from the dark dimension
entering through a thin plane,
our world is now theirs

These beasts thrive
on screams, heralding
the doom times &
their reign will be bloody

But across our
mortal realm, we are
unaware of the dark creatures
for they walk among us unnoticed,
hiding the scent of their burning flesh

They are the dictators craving war,
the murderers craving blood,
the bosses craving no margin
for error, mercy is a forgotten
luxury

A devastated landscape
with seared flesh and charred bone
is what they desire,
bombarding the populace
with desensitizing images
of a world gone mad,
spiraling like a manic merry-go-round,
leaving the innocent with nothing
to hold on to

-Shirley Jones-Luke

Ghosts Inhabit These Streets

During the day, they are shadows of trees, bushes & flowers.
At night, the shadows move in the evening breeze past darkened windows and dimmed porch lights, a dog barks at their passing, growling at the unseen, the grass bends from their weight, but they leave no trail.

From my bedroom, I can see them like no one else can.
One of them is a young girl who had been shot in the head.
Another is a woman with a baby, they had died in a car accident.
There is a teenage boy, not much older than me, wearing his baseball cap backwards, he has bullet holes in his jacket.

I see Mr. Murtrie, shuffling along, he was 97 when he died. His wife has passed the year prior & he missed her terribly. They say he died of a broken heart. Now he holds his wife's hand with a smile on his face. The dog is silent, sensing that the spirits mean him no harm. He settles down to sleep.

The specters see me & wave. I returned their greeting.
The fog rolls in & they enter into the mist. Silence. The street is now empty. They are gone. I return to my bed & dream of who they once were.

-Shirley Jones-Luke

The Zombie Postman

Briskly, he conveys presents of infection: stamps, scraps, scabs. He oozes perversion in conversations requiring awakening; that is, like certain beetles, only emerging at night. You could put a bullet through his head in self-defense and he'll say he didn't mean to offend you. He shambles onwards, insinuating subtext, slipping into the lives of mayors and gun runners. No one he hurts can ever banish him to the desert alone. He operates without lanterns. He eats handfuls of shame.

-Kayla Bashe



Restraint by Grace Evans

A Final Call to Ourselves

by Bob McNeil

“No wonder I am never alone on a Saturday night.” Olivia Hart, an exotic dancer, said to herself while staring at her wet and naked body in a full-length bedroom mirror. To better see herself, she wiped some dust off the reflective surface. Her hazel eyes panned her 67-25-36 body. She ran her hand thru her corn-colored, shoulder length hair and admired her face that reminded people of a young Mamie Van Doren.

“Still hot and alive at twenty-five,” Olivia thought as she picked up a towel on the doorknob of her closet. Rivaling only Narcissus, Olivia loved looking at herself.

Quite aware that she was late for her date with a lawyer named Thomas Coventry, Olivia took her time and drank a lot of Moët & Chandon champagne. No different than the other men on her list that exceeded the length of 432 Park Avenue, Tom had to wait for his peep at her pulchritudinous presence. Again, same as the other men, he was average, average features and average height. Even his obsession with Olivia was average. That preoccupation came with a price tag and Olivia made him provide for everything, including her rent, car payments, clothing bills, pedicures, manicures, and trips to the hairstylist. As far as she was concerned, it was what beautiful women did to men, average or otherwise.

Later, fully clothed in a plus-size Marilyn Halter Dress and clear platform heels, Olivia walked to her front door. She was not home often; therefore, the place was a mess of dirty dishes, food stains, takeout menus, and an empty refrigerator. Leaving her one bedroom apartment in Queens, New York, Olivia prepared to race over to Godiva’s Grove, Manhattan’s trendiest club. Although her date offered to either drive her or have a car service pick her up, she insisted on driving herself.

That spring evening, at eleven twenty-three p.m., Olivia entered the elevator of her seven-storey building and headed to the garage. All the while, she was doing what she enjoyed a lot—texting. Those thumbs communicated with her date, some girlfriends and various blogs. They received her misspelled pithy comments with emoticons. When she phoned people,

she would ask them to text her and hang up. A pot, a pan or a man never received the amount of touches that Olivia's phone got. Men, those who dated her, envied her phone. It received the tactile attention they craved. Never at a loss for a phrase to post, her output surpassed most journalists. Nevertheless, the comments had the insightfulness of cotton candy's nutritional value.

Previous to pulling out in her purple Corvette Stingray, Olivia stopped texting long enough to guzzle champagne again. Enjoying her ever-increasing inebriation, she decided to celebrate her love of herself with another glance at her favorite person—herself. Regardless of her booze-addled state, possessing great care, Olivia had no problem applying some lipstick. Throughout the process of improving her appearance, she just wished her life could afford her the luxury of not working. She craved a life of texting and looking at the greatness of herself. Sure, she would treat some man to the glory of her presence if he served her financial needs. Moreover, he had to serve her emotional need for adoration. Above anything else, the woman wanted the adoration that she did not receive in a halfway house. Such adoration was denied Olivia when her drug-dazed parents abandoned her at age six. A desire to cry was drowned under her champagne.

Achieving a speed that would better serve a racecar driver, Olivia zoomed out of the parking lot and headed for the streets. Within the seconds it took her to leave the garage and pick up her smartphone for another text, Olivia hit someone or something. First, unaware of what happened, the driver assumed it was a pothole. The victim's cry made Olivia realize her error.

Movements toward the front of the car were wrought with trepidation. Fearing the gruesomeness of the collision, Olivia held her eyelids down. Upon mustering the fortitude to view the injured party, Olivia opened her eyes. There, beneath the front bumper, a dark-skinned old woman with a grey afro was sprawled out in pain. Both short and Rubenesque, the geriatric female was around sixty or seventy years of age. Conflicted, Olivia expressed compassion for the victim, but she wanted an express lane to her date.

Just with her gesticulation, the matronly figure told Olivia to crouch down and come closer. Hesitant, but compliant, Olivia knelt towards the injured individual. It was then, with

the grip of a handcuff, the older lady seized Olivia's arm. Embarrassed, Olivia looked for witnesses. She was relieved to find none.

“Too long, too long have the Tanzanian Titans, Hypatians, The Ann Hibbins' Society, and other Witches ignored the 1.6 million crashes caused by you texters. I, against my coven's wishes, will use what's left of my aging powers to scour your kind off the Earth. You're sediment on a pan in need of cleansing. I, Tituba from Salem, shall cleanse life of you.

“Our empathic link is complete. Alas, I now know you, child. Over a decade ago, before your family discarded you, your soul was a peach. You must return to that state. Vanity, itinerant as germs, crawled through the media, fads and social networks, then made mold turn you into something rotten. Stripped of yourself, I cast you into the thing that you care for above self-aggrandizement, human beings, and even money, that damnable phone. Unwittingly, you grasp that device, but, in fact, it seizes you. It takes your ability to imagine and intellectualize. So, tonight, this incantation shall imprison you in this mesmerizing mechanism dubbed a smartphone. Until you can convince someone to live a proper existence sans using their phalanges to look up artificial intelligence, your soul shall remain in that machine.”

Pained by the grasp, Olivia wanted an incantation that could get her far away. Unintelligible utterances erupted. Tituba's plosives, dentals, sibilants, nasals, fricatives and gutturals seemed to be glossolalia. But, whatever the witch was saying had a thaumaturgical effect. A pervasive fog surrounded them. Olivia's heart pounded at a hummingbird's speed and a marathon runner's amount of perspiration poured. Far surpassing Olivia's worst phobias, she saw her flesh fade as if she were a pasty smudge on a car window being wiped away. Abduction from some paranormal force caused panic in Olivia. Muted in the absence of corporeal substance, Olivia could not cry over her anguished situation.

Wherever Olivia wound up, she did not recognize it. Outside of that, her body felt strange. From what she could tell, her whole mass had no appendages. She felt an electric current in a box. Equivalent to pins and needles or static shock, the woman knew she was something different. Olivia considered her situation and the voltaic anxiety increased.

Through her boxed view, searching circumspectly, Olivia was able to determine her location. Based upon the clear glass shelves, the white cash register and rows of smartphones and other communication devices, she was in Gourd, Inc., a local computer store. Along with seeing her present place, Olivia could hear loud, angry voices.

“Whatever this place is, my lawyer is going to know of it,” a dictatorial male voice bellowed.

“Hold on, be quiet, let me pray. Perhaps we should pray,” an old patriarchal voice said in a fatigued tone.

“Speak for yourself, pops, even in hell, I don’t pray to anybody,” a boy yelled.

“We are not in danger, such as we are. Do you remember what the witch said?” Some woman’s operatic voice queried. “Well, does anyone recall?”

“Until you can convince someone to live a proper existence without using their something or another, your soul shall remain in a machine.” Olivia responded.

“Yes, she said something similar.” the melliferous-voiced woman agreed.

“So, according to you lot, we ran over the same woman and the witch cursed us to remain in these phones. We must remain in these things—that is, of course, until we make people get lives and leave their bloody mobiles. What a ridiculous theory. My rather clever deduction is this, we’re dreaming,” an Englishman concluded.

“Because of IMing and SMSing while driving brought us here. Ya’ heard? Basically, being lost in blogs, chat rooms, games, and postings got us doin’ a bid up in here,” an irate lady growled.

“She’s right, my friends, this is our punishment for an egregious sin.” In a bitter tone, the honeyed speaker replied.

“My God, hell is merely a call away,” an adolescent female voice said while sobbing.

A hundred voices chimed in and described their auto accidents. Each story had the same description of the black woman, her conjuration and that mist, etc.

Silent and motionless, Olivia accepted her fate. Albeit a cruel sentence, she determined it was deserved. Even the irony made sense. Stuck inside a machine, Olivia had a greater amount of feelings for the world and herself than when she was full of formed flesh and moral flaws.



Electric by Anna Martin

The Risen

The scent of autumn and decay
Incites nostalgia of the grave:
My old resting place near Bombay
Damp with tears the mournful gave.

I arose and flew from sorrow
To live as I had lived before
Whether for wealth or to borrow
In headlong rush from death's door.

Alas a hunger takes control
Against my will I feast
I'm not the master of my soul
I have become a beast.

So off anew, to Marrakesh,
Feeding ground of blood and flesh
And then again to Kosovo
Where apples and hawberries grow.

Chased like the beast I have become
No chance for quietude or rest
Until recalling where I'm from
The grave had after all been best.

-Jessica Amanda Salmonson

Joshua Tree

Benjamin Dagget, hey, where is he?
Buried beneath the Joshua tree?
Fell for a gypsy in a wild west show
Got a sweet feeling, couldn't let go.

Had a good thing, nice for a while
Until he offered Nancy a smile
Never-never-never cheat on a gypsy
It'll end you under the Joshua tree.

-Jessica Amanda Salmonson

Nightcrawlers

Not the sort you'd stop to buy
at your small town fish and bait shop –
juicy worms and bugs to catch your
limit of perch or trout -- but aliens.

About four feet tall with no
discernable arms. Slender, all-white
(Could probably use them for bait
on another planet, but to catch what?)

We only have cell phone video footage:
a Fresno sighting and a Yosemite
National Park sighting, So what's it doing
on this planet? Informed minds want to know.

The local aboriginal populations claim
they're here on a mission: to restore
the balance between man and nature
and save the planet from our wicked ways.

O.K., we know the villains of this tale;.
We're all agreed on that. But why?
Why would they want *anything* to do
with homo sapiens? What's *their* fishing limit?

-Richard Stevenson



Sarcous by Anna Martin

She became a pet of hell.

-Dora Estela Gonzalez

The Making of a Monster

A scream, a cry and a miracle—
all happened at once.
The bloodied dagger clanged to the floor
and the virus started to work.

Tick-Tock, the time started up again.
Tick-Tock, death resumed its course.
Flesh continued its decomposing path
and the hunger started.

Tick-Tock, a loud bang erupted in the room.
Tick-Tock, two bodies dropped to the floor;
Teeth bared and tore at delicate skin,
then muscle to suck on white bone.

Tick-Tock, two dead bodies occupied one room
where one had only been before.
Tick-Tock would never sound the same,
time had both stopped and continued.

Two blood soaked bodies rose,
doors budged open to a new food source.
The sun shined brightly on—
a town of the living crying out to die.

-Dora Estela Gonzalez

Rotting flesh beneath, the ghoul dreamed.

-Dora Estela Gonzalez



Globe Gormandizer by Bob McNeil

Movement

Autumn like the moon—
ostentatiously showy,
yellow leaves wane quick.

-Breslin White

BIOGRAPHIES

BILL DIAMOND

Bill Diamond is a writer living in Evergreen, Colorado. Recently, several of his initial stories have been published.

MARIBEL C. PAGAN

Maribel C. Pagan is a Latina homeschool graduate. She has appeared in *Foliate Oak*, *7x20*, *Cuento*, *Blue Marble Review*, *Zaum*, *Persephone's Daughters*, and others. She has also appeared in *The Box Under the Bed*, a bestselling horror anthology. She has received the Presidential Scholarship from Mohawk Valley Community College and has received 4th Place in the *Word Weaver Writing Contest*, among other prestigious awards. Additionally, she is the Editor-in-Chief of *Seshat*, a Prose Reader for *Apprehension*, a Poetry Reader for *Frontier Poetry*, and a singer and musician for *The Angelic Family Choir*. Visit Maribel at <http://therollinghills.wordpress.com/>.

GRACE EVANS

Grace Evans is a young, emerging poet and writer currently living in Manchester. She is very fond of coffee, cotton candy and neon lights.

SHIRLEY JONES-LUKE

Shirley Jones-Luke is a poet and a writer from Boston, Mass. She is afraid of spiders and being buried alive. Her writing comes from the deepest, darkest parts of her soul. She has an MFA from Emerson College.

DORA ESTELA GONZALEZ

Dora Estela Gonzalez is a writer and freelance illustrator. Her works have been published online, in various online anthologies and magazines, and in print. Her poetry and illustrations have been showcased in various issues of Writers Bloc Literary Magazine. Her fantasy novel *The Five Kingdoms of Severi Book One The Keys of Destiny* was published in April 2015, with the second book in the works.

KAYLA BASHE

Kayla Bashe is a student at Sarah Lawrence College. Her fiction and poetry has appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *Liminality Magazine*, *Mirror Dance*, *Ink* and *Locket's "LGBT Warriors"* anthology, *Cicada Magazine*, and *The Future Fire*. She has also released several novellas. Find her on Twitter at @KaylaBashe.

BOB MCNEIL

Bob McNeil was influenced by Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe. Furthermore, after years of being a professional illustrator, spoken word artist and writer, he still hopes to express and address the needs of the human mosaic.

RICHARD STEVENSON

Richard Stevenson has recently retired from a thirty-year teaching gig at **Lethbridge College** and published thirty books in that time, most recently, two collections of haikai poetry: **Fruit Wedge Moon** (Hidden Brook Press, 2015) and **The Heiligen Effect** (Ekstasis Editions, 2015). Since retirement, **Rock, Scissors, Paper: The Clifford Olson Murders**, a long poem sequence, has just been released from Dreaming Big Publications in the US, and **A Gaggle of Geese**, haikai poems and sequences, has just been released from Alba Publications in the UK.

BRESLIN WHITE

Breslin White is a poet with Irish and Japanese family. He can be found sharing the books he likes at Goodreads. He has published a book of poetry called Lily Thrust.

JESSICA AMANDA SALMONSON

Jessica Amanda Salmonson is a Lambda Award and World Fantasy Award winning poet, novelist, short story writer, and anthologist. She has big collection of poems of the supernatural forthcoming from Hippocampus Press, **THE GHOST GARDEN AND FURTHER SPIRITS**. Her Ace Books heroic fantasy trilogy **The Tomoe Gozen Saga** has been re-issued by Open Road Media for kindle and other e-readers.

COBALT JADE

Cobalt Jade is a Gen-X writer and landlady from Seattle, Washington and has written erotica, horror, science fiction and fantasy for many years. "Garden Time" was inspired by a pruning accident involving a dahlia.

CATHY MATOS

Cathy Matos is a Philadelphia based author of short fiction. Raised between New York and Miami, Cathy has lived in three continents and hopes to share her international perspective through writing.

NOLCHA

Nolcha worked as a professional writer in the software and finance industries for over two decades. Retirement couldn't stop the itch in her fingers to write, so she started blogging about life in a small town in Wyoming (<http://nolchafox.wixsite.com/buffalo-wyoming-blog>). Blogging wasn't enough, so she turned to her old love of short stories. She focuses on (dark) humor, horror,

fantasy, and science fiction.

GEORGE MORROW

George Morrow enjoys writing horror fiction with an historical bent. He lives in Salem, Oregon. He has written horror pieces for Pill Hill Press, Silver Moon Digest, Thrillers, Killers and Chillers, Dark Gothic Resurrected, Ink Well Press, Scatterbrew and Macabre Cadaver, and Necrology Shorts and others. He has also written news and feature articles for several Oregon newspapers.



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