

STORIES FROM UNDER THE BED



REAPER
PRESS

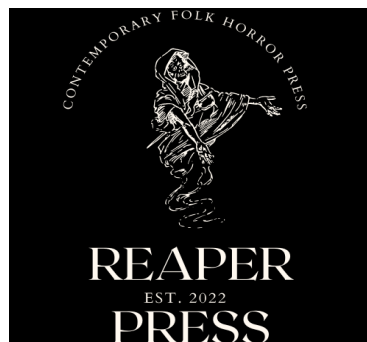
AN ANTHOLOGY

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Thank you

Reaper Press Team



Foreword

Reaper Press introduction

The Horrifying Children project emerged in late 2019 following an idle conversation about the children's television of our youth, and in particular how the deeply unsettling and resonant experiences of such programming continued to haunt us in adulthood. This quickly developed into the proposal for an academic collection and a conference planned for early in following year. Plans were put into abeyance by a pandemic that paralleled the opening of Terry Nation's 1977 series, *Survivors* – only with fewer snorkel parkas. In the dark days of lockdown the project continued to develop with a conference taking place in May 2022, featuring original horrifying stories co-ordinated by the editors of Reaper Press.

The stories of our childhood stay with us, whether they are uncanny cartoons, dark fairy-tales or glimpses of adult television that we really shouldn't have seen. Given the preponderance of these dark tales from the 1970s, '80s and '90s, it is no wonder that we are (as writer Bob Fischer suggests) the 'Haunted Generation'. These memories of childhood are not bathed in the rosy glow of nostalgia, rather they are the ghosts of a future divergent to our own. This is the essence of hauntology, and the stories in this collection are hauntological – spectres of our past haunting the future. They also echo another generation who are wildly different to us but to whom we are tied by lineage. The 'folk' of folk horror are both ourselves and our antecedents, and the behaviours of the recent past function as if they were ancient rituals – strange and strangely seductive.

This is where this collection will take you. To a world that is troublingly like our own, a place where our fears are played out in narrative form. A place which you will find suitably horrifying.

We would like to pay special thanks to Dr Rob O'Connor, the students of the MA Publishing degree programme and especially the Reaper Press team who came together for this collection.

Lauren Stephenson and Robert Edgar - May 2022

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Scarecrows

Lucy Atkinson

Dusk against an inkblot sky,
we three are alchemists with mushrooms,
thistles and wild crowberries, mixing muddy puddles
into witches' brew.

Devoted to all that is eldritch
and dark, we take the long path back
past the marshes and through the scarecrow field
where filthy rags bleed
and drip over wooden bone
like paint on canvas.

Twisted limbs that twitch
in the shadow of the last rays
of October light.

Unmoving, they watch us go,
blind faces under wide-brimmed hats.

Nothing more than a fireside story.

Harmless enough

if you don't look back.

Crazy Bones

Alex Bestwick

"My cousin sent it from America," says Jamie. "It's the only one in England."

We're tucked in a corner of the playground, tarmac pressing red shapes into our knees. Plastic figurines scatter around us, forgotten as we stare at what Jamie holds.

Little bigger than a grape, it's smooth, translucent and glittering; a tiny figure with a clenched hand for a head. Fist, our favourite Gogo's Crazy Bones character. We've been collecting the toys for months and I've never even seen his standard variant. This is practically one of a kind.

"I'll trade for both my rare B-Boys," Bradley proposes.

"No chance." Jamie's eyes alight on me and he smirks. "Like it, Danny? Get a good look. It's probably worth more than your house."

The other boys guffaw and my cheeks heat. When the bell rings, we all scrabble around, gathering our Gogo's. Jamie carefully places Fist in his backpack pocket. I keep my eyes down.

Jamie ruffles my blond hair as we walk back to class. "Only teasing, Danny boy," he says. "Oh, and I've got a story to tell you at lunch. You'll wet yourself."

"I saw Lady Lea last night," Jamie announces from the head of our lunch table.

"Who?" I ask, taking a bite from my peanut butter sandwich. The bread is dry and sticks to the roof of my mouth.

Jamie laughs. "Who? You only walk down Lady Lea Road every day on the way to school."

I frown. "That's a road, not a person."

"It's named after a person. They say Lady Lea fell off her horse while riding there. You know that big white stone on the side of the road? That's where she hit her head. Hit so hard it snapped clean off."

He has the whole table's attention now, talking so animatedly that a grape rolls from his lunch tray and comes to rest against the triangle of my sandwich.

I think of Fist in his backpack.

“Me and my brother were walking back from the rec and we saw her. A woman in white on a white horse... She had her head under her arm, like a football. She rode right past us, stopped at the stone, and slowly turned to look back at us... Then, bam”—he slams his hand on the table—“gone.”

“Weren’t you scared?” whispers one of the girls. I nudge the escaped grape back onto Jamie’s tray while he isn’t looking.

“Nah. Should’ve seen her eyes, though. Danny would’ve cried.”

“Would not.”

Jamie laughs and eats a handful of grapes. I watch until he starts clutching at his throat, rasping out breaths.

“Oh my god,” the girl screams. “He’s having an allergic reaction!”

Teachers descend on our table. “Where’s his EpiPen?!”

“In his backpack!” I barely suppress my smile. “I’ll get it.”

Fist glitters in the cup of my palm the whole walk home. He’s been weighing in my pocket since lunch, but I couldn’t take him out, not when the lunch ladies were administering Jamie’s EpiPen, not when his mother showed up and kissed me on the cheek for saving her son’s life - I shudder at the memory of her wet lips. At the four-lane-ends, I turn onto Lady Lea Road. Nobody is around, so I lift Fist to the sun.

Light bursts through him, freckling the world like a disco ball. I grin, twisting him so the glitter dances. My eyes follow a fleck across the white stone half-hidden in the overgrown verge. I pause to peer at it, then walk on.

A car zooms past, music blaring. Dad never lets me walk down here at night. There’s no traffic lights at the crossroads so there’s always accidents. Of course, Jamie does whatever he wants.

I trace my thumb over Fist. Jamie doesn’t have his precious Gogo anymore. I can’t take his precious ghost story as easily. But I can outdo it with my own. A better, scarier story. Jamie will wet himself.

After tea, Dad falls asleep on the sofa, as usual. The one photo of Mum he can’t bear to take down watches him snore from the wall. He won’t talk about her, won’t even tell me how she died. He says I look like her, though.

I slip out of the front door and close it silently behind me. It’s dark outside. I start up Lady Lea Road and try to decide what to ask the ghost when I see her.

Jamie didn’t talk to her, so I have to.

I stop on the opposite side of the road from the stone, faint in the moonlight. It’s quiet, no cars on the road. I’ve decided to ask if it hurt when

she died, if she felt her head leave her neck.

I wait. Wind bends the trees back. The dark presses close. I clench my hand around Fist in my pocket, squinting into the dark for a flash of white. My throat is tight. My heart thuds. She's real; I can almost sense her approaching...

But then, nothing. The fear lifts. My shoulders untense. I shiver, cold and tired. Maybe Jamie lied, made it all up.

I pull out Fist. He looks duller in the dark. I roll him around in my cold hands, then set my jaw and sit down on the pavement. I'm seeing this ghost. I'll tell the story at lunch tomorrow, how I wasn't scared at all.

But as the night stretches on, my eyes grow heavy, my chin drifts towards my chest...

I jerk upright, disorientated and icy. Something is wrong, very wrong. Fist is gone.

I gasp and look around, spotting him where he's fallen into the road. I yelp and scramble down to rescue him, wiping away the mud. His glitter

begins to sparkle. I look up, into the blaring white of headlights.

The car swerves. I fall backwards into a crash of impossible noise.

When I open my eyes, a white car folds around a splintered telephone pole. A woman's body sprawls in the grass, white blouse staining red, three feet from her blonde head, smashed against the white stone.

River

Pete Blunden

Steam, or smoke,
rose from the roots and the waters and the soil.
Leaves laced the surface of dark currents,
the willows had been weeping.

Higher up the bank, the oak stood resolute,
and high in her boughs
the hanged man laughed.
His skeletal hand rose,
pointed downstream
and from his broken neck
a whisper crept through crushed airways:

"devils live in the water,
witches on the shore,
and spirits in the air.
You dare to wake them?"

I replied: "no
I do not go to wake them.
I go to be reunited with those who understand."

The hanged man smiled,
his emaciated frame quivered as he chuckled.
"Very well my child."

If the carrion birds had left his eyes,
I'm sure there's be a sparkle in them now,
as I go to drown.

Strawberry Patches

Imogen Davies

When we were kids we had a strawberry patch,
A little mound packed with fat jewels
That poked from a leaf or sharp, bright stem just begging for a taste.
In June, me and my sister would pick them, sticky-fingered, to fill jam jars and tarts
While Mum and Dad watched from the patio,
Sometimes smiling, but mostly with flint eyes and tight lines for lips
And then in argument, until one year Mum left
And it was only Dad who watched from their spot on the patio.
Strawberry patches, blasts of florid juice stained his shirt
And his eyes gave a fond crinkle, his lips a laugh, a glint of teeth
So, we smiled back
With the innards of berries smushed on our fingertips.
It's true, we were young then,
Plump and filled with hope.

It was difficult to accept that the bones found the following season
Belonged to Mum or it was Dad that put her there
For the strawberry vines to lace the rib cage, endow the spine,
The little white flowers to cover her burial mound.
I still remember the heaving gasp my sister gave as she found
Mum's sticky necklace, the coppery stain, metal rusty from summer rains,
And how Dad snatched it away, slapped her so hard I felt it.
We were stunned stupid but quickly curiosity reigned.
So, we waited a week to trespass the forbidden mound,
Dug deep underground for other treasures and we found Mum –
The caved-in head, where the shovel struck and broke the skull,
The gummy, pink flesh that looked like a tongue,
Fingers splayed in the mud, strawberry red, repulsive...
You imagine the rest. Enough.

The Devil of Exbury Woods

Marie Day

She should've finished things with Bryan after the first killing. Instead, Kate put the blunt weapon into a box, along with his excuses and her dream of a normal teenage life. It was her own fault. She was the one who'd gone to the woods to summon a demon.

The Devil of Exbury Woods was a legend in the town. Eight-year-old Kate

circled the blackened yew with a gang of older children who, like her, were never too off for coming home late. There were no curfews imposed, no one home to care. The small crowd held hands and between nervous laughter, chanted, 'Ready or not, make you whole. Ready or not, take my soul.' Over and over, round and round the yew, till they fell to the ground with breathless giggles.

If the devil wasn't called by its actual name, it couldn't possess those who circled the tree. Or so she'd heard. But rules were always broken and the devil followed her home that night. Its presence was subtle at first, light drafts that glanced her shoulders, toys that went missing. Then, its groans grew louder in the wind and its horns appeared in the branch shadows outside her window.

A decade later, when she told Bryan about the tree and the legend and saw the fearful fascination in his eyes, she shivered with dark delight. At last, something that scared him.

Torch in one hand, Bryan's rough fingers squeezing the other, Kate circled the tree. His eyes locked onto hers, a drunken smile smeared across his face. They ran around the tree chanting the rhyme Kate had learnt as a child.

Hours later, Bryan killed the boy.

It was her fault. She hadn't told Bryan the boy had offered to buy her a drink while Bryan was outside smoking with an ex. It was a mistake to hide something from him. He'd been drinking in the same pub for years and most of the regulars would sell their soul for a whiskey. They thought nothing of slinking from the corners to whisper in Bryan's ear about the boy chatting up his young girlfriend. On the lonely country road Bryan gripped her throat for making a fool of him. The boy tried to intervene. Moments later, Kate was

given a bloodied weapon to hide.

Bryan settled into a strange normality, working at the garage by day, drinking in the pub at night. The killing was something they didn't speak about. Like the bad burger at Mikey's American Diner or the bad sex afterwards in the toilets. There was no need to bring it up ever again.

When Kate cried, he reminded her that, without him, she had nothing. No one. And she believed it, until the devil's outline appeared in the bruises around her wrists. Hooves rapped against the hallway floorboards so loudly at night, she could no longer sleep.

Kate had to return to the yew.

Above the woods, the moon hung high and round, edges gripped by **silvery fingers** of clouds. She leant close to Bryan and took in his cheap aftershave.

'You said you were possessed when...you know.' She knew it would anger him to bring up the boy and the killing.

He took a swig from the bottle.

'The devil can't possess you unless you call its name.'

'What do you know?' he spat.

'I know its name.'

Over the years, Kate had heard the name in the squeals of rusty hinges, in the rumble of not-too-distant thunder.

'Go on. Call the devil.' Bryan's eyes glowed in the fire he'd built.

Kate pushed off her trainers, the damp grass cold beneath her feet. She shivered and wrapped trembling arms around her body.

'Ready or not, make you whole. Ready or not, take my soul.' The trembles eased. What began as a timid whisper, grew into a chant that rushed over her bared teeth like a river flowing over rocks.

Joy tingled like electricity under her skin as she skipped around the tree, a strange courage growing within. On one side of the yew was Bryan, orange in the firelight, on the other side, the darkness of the forest and her memories. The bludgeoned boy. The tightness around her throat from Bryan's grip. The blood on her hands when she hid the hammer.

'Ready or not, make you whole. Ready or not, take my soul.'

In the glow of the fire, Bryan had never looked older to her. The lines around his eyes were deep, dark ravines from which there had been no escape. She spun back to darkness and smelled blood. He had a taste for the kill. The wind whipped through the trees and told her the truth: it would be her next. Her blood spilled.

She took a long breath. There was only one escape.

'Ready or not, make you whole. Ready or not, take my soul. Take my

soul for evermore. Take my soul, Sweet Ragnikor!

Bryan laughed or swore at the rhyme. Kate couldn't tell which she'd heard but felt the derision follow her as she circled the tree one last time.

The forest shook, trembled around them.

Bryan's fingers gripped her arm, pressed into her flesh as they had many times before. But this time the unwanted touch burnt his fingers. Hand ablaze, he staggered away, his screams filling the forest before he spewed into the fire. The power he'd held over her slithered through the darkness to breathe through her.

Strength filled Kate's spine, forcing her to stand tall. A snap, like dried twigs beneath preying animals, broke in her head. Blood trickled down her temples to her cheeks. She touched the sticky warmth and her fingers glided higher to the top of her head where two bony horns protruded through her skull. Ready or not, take my soul. Ready or not, make me whole. The moon hung high over Exbury Woods and a smile lingered on the lips of the devil.

In the Next Life

S.C. Fisher

“Are you going to write about the haunted bungalow?” my mother asked, with the tone of one who remembers it all.

I immediately laughed.

Whilst nothing about that ten year situation had been comical, the words ‘haunted’ and ‘bungalow’ adjacent to each other tickled me. It conjured images of old lady ghosts named Ethel or Joan, doomed to wander the mortal sphere in wrinkled stockings, wafting phantom odours of peppermint and Deep Heat ointment. They’d turn television sets off, not on – mindful of the days when there was a strict pension budget to adhere to – and there’d certainly be no chain rattling or table tipping with eternally arthritic joints to consider!

I tapped out a text to share the joke with my sister, who’s used to my macabre sense of humour on account of the fact she helped to cultivate it. Of course, she laughed, too. Or rather, she shot back a string of emojis leading me to believe as much.

After a pause, a second message flashed on screen. This one rubbed like a persistent thumb at the lines of my amusement until it smudged - reshaped into something resembling contemplation.

‘You could, though. Do it.’

Could I? Perhaps the words were there, but was the will?

Cancer. Court. Divorce. Death. We’d lived it all and, at nine years old, that time had served as a baptism of fire into the world of adult problems. Did I want to remember that? No.

Should I forget it?

My grandmother, Helen, had been my anchor at sea, holding me steady against the most tempestuous of waves. That ‘haunted bungalow’ belonged to her and my grandpa, until a pancreas rotten with cancer snatched him away.

My childhood memories of Helen and John MacFarlane shine with the lustre of their kindness; a strong woman who’d sit by my bedside when I was ill to sing me to sleep (albeit tunelessly) and a gentle man with twinkling eyes who’d tell me ‘Charlie Spider’ stories to abate my fear of the Kaiju-arachnids that lurked in his greenhouse. He grew cucumbers I’d eat whole as I pottered

their garden, where Nana had 'trained' the clematis to caress the archway, and the roses bloomed custard yellow like those she carried in her wedding bouquet.

We moved into that one-bedroom bungalow in the January of 1996. By April, Grandpa was buried, and Nana was bereft.

Crammed in – mother, grandmother, sister, two dogs, a rabbit, and me – we more resembled baked beans in a can than sardines, given our number.

It was after the attic was converted into additional bedrooms that the activity started, as is often the case.

In the beginning, my sister and I would lie in the darkness of our new bedroom, gripping duvets under our chins as we listened to footsteps patrolling on the stairs outside. Shift – creak - pause.

We knew it wasn't the dogs. Both too afraid of stairs to attempt them, they slept by Nana's side. Meanwhile, we slept with the door closed, always. Whoever wandered that hallway, we'd no desire to know them.

One summer evening, as twilight loomed, my mother rushed into the lounge to urge the rest of us outside. She babbled about flying lights – and how **we giggled** at the woman who enthusiastically embraced the Roswell Conspiracy. As it turned out, that hadn't been at all what she meant.

We gathered on the path to watch as orbs like glittering sapphires darted about the garden, crossing paths, mingling, changing direction on a whim like nothing we'd ever seen. There must have been thirty of them, maybe more. Impossible to truly count considering their speed.

We didn't attempt to touch them – reminded too much of that scene from Poltergeist where the dead descend the staircase – and so we just gaped a while before silently returning to the house. When we peered out of the kitchen window, they were gone.

Weeks later, whilst we washed up dirty dinner dishes, my mother – alerted by scratching and a bark to the presence of a dog in the garden – threw open the door. Three of us watched in amazed horror as a black beast we didn't own scampered up the hall, then vanished. That phantom dog made a **second**

appearance, in time; beside Nana's chair, in the gloom, amber eyes aglow.

We often propelled ourselves from our beds, screaming. Clammy fingers on the backs of our necks; a whisper of "pull her hair" before the follow through; a voice in our ears pleading for help.

Perhaps you wonder, did we encounter full body apparitions of the **human persuasion?**

Too many times to count.

We bumped into them in the hall that was so long, we dreaded walking it. My sister stared with saucer-wide eyes as an unknown man, clad in flares glided from the dining room to the bathroom.

Before Nana passed – the fourth consecutive owner to succumb to cancer – she spent a night alone, tormented by the persistent ring of the doorbell and a radio that wouldn't be silenced. In the morning, when I returned from my friend's sleepover, I found her hollow-eyed and shaken.

Nana's dying wish was to sell that house as quickly as possible. A task made harder when the estate agent refused to set foot inside.

"Someone watches me in there," she said.

Looking back, it can be difficult to pinpoint the timeframe of particular occurrences. I know not when they happened in my timeline, only that they did. No sceptic can convince me otherwise. That 'haunted bungalow' (as ridiculous as it sounds) is a testament; my proof.

One day, I'll walk again in a garden with custard-coloured roses, and an arch overhung by clematis. I will hurry - home-grown cucumber in hand - to the side of a man with a twinkle in his eyes, and a story on his tongue. In the next life, they wait.

Some more quietly than others.

Sleeping with Death

Molly Israel

Death itched quietly at my scalp, scraping its nails delicately along the ridges. I asked it to go away. I asked it to go away three times, then three times more, and I scratched purposely at other spots to dull its insistent stroking.

Death went away.

Death slid into another crevice, buried in my closet, though I knew it would peek at me whenever I looked away. Death is hard to trap, no matter how many locks you may wrap around it. It has learned tricks far older than you.

Morning came and Death stayed away, preferring to keep to the warm shadows, lurking and slumbering, resting for a busy night of watching. Itching. Insisting.

Morning came and my mother asked how I slept, high up in my cloud of a bed, built to prevent monsters from hiding underneath. I slept well, but did not tell her that the monsters had found other places to hide, places you could not build a hiding spot from.

The day continued, and I wondered where else monsters had learned to hide. Where else the things that we know are coming for us but shy away from, go when we avoid them.

Did they hide in my friends' faces? Were games of pretend, just ways for our little monsters to get some air? Or did they lurk in corners, running from us just as we do them, fearing their inevitable capture?

Night came and Death pulled at my thoughts, ripping them out one by one. Death does not like company. Death plucked away my three appeals, and my three appeals more, hungrier than before.

Death did not go away.

Morning came, and I had slept well.

I still can't spell optimist

Jade King

I was seven, maybe
younger, the first time

I touched a bird. You stared
at the red eye and that big bottom lip.

Wet hair and a grudge.
You told me to stop being

such a child, despite being one.
Immediately, I was older

and looking down
a sloping nose.

I try to imagine the man
behind the flash. Nothing.

Not even a glimpse
of the feathers in question.

Black Annis

Sophie Marlowe

Come little children and listen closely to the story
of the wicked blue faced witch with iron claws
that dug herself a cave near a grand old oak tree.

Black Annis with her unnaturally long and lanky arms
would howl and if your parents ignored her cries and
left your house unprotected she'd snatch you from your bed

and if you were a naughty girl or a naughty boy that
wandered too far from home she'd grab you too and she'd lay
in wait amongst the branches of her oak tree to take another.

"But what did Black Annis do with the children?"
I hear you ask and let me tell you the vile truth behind her
snatching and grabbing and taking little children like you.

Black Annis would skin those little pinched children alive and
with her yellowed fangs she'd gobble them up and she'd leave
their skin to dry on her old oak tree and once the **skin was dry.**

Black Annis would simply sew the skin to her ever growing skirt made
from other children she'd snatched and skinned and eaten over the years
she lived in that sandstone cave she dug with her iron talons.

So little children hear this and beware
though Black Annis hasn't been heard from for years and
though her home has long since been gone

Black Annis was never confirmed alive or dead and so beware
of the dark and of howls and of old oak trees for she could still be
snatching and grabbing and taking little children like you.

Gef Revisited! Voirrey Irving Speaks!

Jacob O'Sullivan

Often enough I would wish he'd never come at all
but that's a hard thing to truly wish
of one once so familiar
so closely in the likeness
of friend.

The Daily Mail named him 'Man Weasel'
Harry Price declared him real and Polt.
I never wanted to be famous.

All the scratching and swearing, the switching;
English, to Yiddish, Russian, Manx;
that diabolical cackling,
the little stones, the weary lack
of any certain privacy; none
was so scary or funny like the papers made out.

And worse was that he came, that he stayed, and
then he left.
Nobody asks 'the spooky girl' to dance.
I've not been back to the island in years.
Sometimes, even now, I pray I never hear from him again
and then

in silence I find myself listening to the skirting boards, stood here
facing the scullery, whistling for an echo...

[In the 1930s, Doarlish Cashen farmhouse on the remote west coast of the Isle of Man was haunted by a talking mongoose named Gef. He was particularly drawn to Voirrey Irving, who was 13 when he first made his presence felt. The Gef story was reported extensively by the British tabloid press. Gef seems to have stayed for most of Voirrey's teenage years. She swore by Gef's existence for the remainder of her life].

Gwyllgi

Ria Rees

[Mar. 25th, 2001 | 11:21 pm]

[mood | tired]

[music | I Wanna Be U by Chocolate Puma]

Mam's out working and I can't sleep. The neighbours keep shrieking at the top of their lungs and I'm just so tired. I have to be up for school in the morning but I know it's gonna be one of those nights again... guess I'll keep you all updated.

1 comment

[Mar. 25th, 2001 | 11:53 pm]

[mood | scared]

[music | What Took You So Long? by Emma Bunton]

Guys there's something out on the street. It's sneaking about and looking in the windows of the houses. I was locking the back door and I saw it looking into the house opposite. It's like a big black dog. I don't know what to do but I'm scared. What should I do?

3 comments

[Mar. 26th, 2001 | 00:02 am]

[mood | scared]

[music | I Need You by LeAnn Rimes]

The dog is outside my house now. It looks like one of those huge **russian** things, **borzey?** Like from lady and the tramp you know - but black, and its eyes were red. I swear to god guys if I could upload a pic I would. Ive turned off the lights and muted all the music. I hope it goes away.

16 comments

[Mar. 26th, 2001 | 00:14 am]

[mood | anxious]

[music | Please Stay by Kylie Minogue]

Its sniffing at the door. I tried phoning mam but she wont answer. She must be on the shop floor. Should I call the police?

26 comments

[Mar. 26th, 2001 | 00:32 am]

[mood | terrified]

[music | Mr Writer by Stereophonics]

I know it sounds crazy but I swear im not lying. Why wont you believe me? This thing is outside, its been creeping around outside my doors for ages now and wont leave me alone. Im just sat here by the computer in the dark wondering what to do.

I even called 999 but I hung up - I thought they might laugh at me if I told them what I'd seen. Am I going crazy?

81 comments

[Mar. 26th, 2001 | 00:36 am]

[mood | confused]

[music | Don't Panic by Coldplay]

So it looks like you all think I'm insane or something. I dunno what im meant to do here, I feel like I should call someone for help but if it was going to hurt me it probbaly would have broken in by now. I tried going to sleep earlier but the thought of it out there.....

So many of you have just come into my LJ uninvited - I dont even know you people and your tryin to tell me how to kill this thing? It could be someones pet for gods sake. I mean... its got something wrong with it.... Ive never seen eyes like that on a dog before. Maybe its blind or somethin, maybe its tryin to find its home.

I wish mam was here. Shed know what to do.

666 comments

[Mar. 26th, 2001 | 00:48 am]

[mood | calm]

[music | I Put a Spell on You by Sonique]

It's okay. I spoke with it, everything is alright now.

The dog was friendly, it just wanted some company. It's misunderstood — everyone thinks it's evil and runs away but it's just trying to help us. Once it got close to me I could feel its soul, sparkling and warm. It spoke to me, and everything got better.

It told me what we need to do, how we'll make the world better together, just wait and see.

Mother will be home soon.

8935 comments

The Abyss

Rachel Wainwright

Every night my mother tells me to go to bed,
'It's 8pm darling, time to rest your weary head.'
'Mum I'm not tired yet!' I reply, and she sighs,
as I try to guilt her with my puppy dog eyes.
Alas, no luck, for she does not care
and instead directs me up the stairs.

Aching, groaning, the stairs let out a warning,
'Keep going, little girl and you won't make it to morning...'
Climbing under the sheets, my mother tucks me in,
kissing my forehead and caressing my chin.
'Goodbye my darling, sweet dreams, sleep tight',
but even her love does not soothe me tonight.

'Please don't leave, I can't sleep when you do',
'Mummy must dear, she needs to sleep too'.
'But under my bed is scary, can you please just check?'
She sighs and crouches, craning her neck.
'Ah, as I thought, there is nothing there,
only dust and odd socks, no grizzly bears'.
She smiles and leaves after blowing a kiss,
leaving me alone in the pitch-black abyss.

Every thought is begging, pleading, hoping,
as I stare into the eyes of darkness they do not open.
The faint sound of footsteps thumping in the distance,
I listen intensely and they seem to quicken.
Louder and louder, closer they come,
'Who goes there?', I pretend it is Mum.
I shiver as a nightmare crawls down my spine,
Fear grips my shoulder – paralysed.
My pupils sting, I'm losing the fight.
I close my eyes and succumb to the night.

Author Biographies:

Lucy Atkinson - Scarecrows

Lucy Atkinson (she/her) is a poet and playwright based in the North East of England. She is currently completing a PhD at Durham University and writing a novel about the Newcastle witch trials. Her poetry has been widely published both online and in print in magazines such as Acumen, Agenda, Ink Sweat and Tears, among many others. Her debut play *As It Was* was published in 2019. She can be found on Twitter at [@_Lucyatkinson_](#)

Alex Bestwick - Crazy Bones

Alex Bestwick (he/him) is a writer from Derbyshire, currently studying MA Publishing and Creative Writing at York St John. He is also an editor for Ergi Press and founder of Ram Eye Press. Alex is currently working on a collection of dark fiction inspired by the folklore of Derbyshire. *Crazy Bones* is inspired by the village ghost story of Lady Lea which he heard growing up. Previous work has been published in *Horror Tree*, *The Wild Hunt Magazine* and *Secret Attic*. Find him on Twitter [@alexbestwick_](#)

Pete Blunden - River

Pete is a postgraduate student studying Creative Writing at York St John University, hailing from Gloucestershire. Finding his poetic voice in Swansea whilst studying English Literature, he quickly became a very active member of the spoken word community in the South of Wales, where he performed regularly and was also the headline poet at the International Dylan Thomas Day celebrations in 2019. He hosts a regular poetry open mic night in York, and is currently working on his first full collection. His passions include rugby, painting and axe throwing (but definitely not all at the same time).

Imogen Davis - Strawberry Patches

Imogen Davies is a Publishing MA student at York St John who is rediscovering her love of poetry. From a rural village not far from Carlisle, she has a penchant for long walks in the countryside, usually with an audiobook playing in her headphones. When she's not painting cards or playing Stardew Valley, you'll find her editing for Ergi Press or posting book reviews on her bookstagram. She was shortlisted for the Terry Kelly Poetry Prize in 2019 with her poem Drifting Into Space.

Marie Day - The Devil of Exbury Woods

Marie is a part-time primary teacher and full-time daydreamer. Originally from a mining town in Yorkshire, Marie now lives near Bristol with her family. She's had stories published by @Flash500, PaperBound, Paper Lanterns and WriteMentor Magazine. Several of her short stories have won prizes and have been published in anthologies. Her middle grade novel won the Local Prize at the Wells Literary Festival in 2021.

S. C. Fisher - In the Next Life

Raised in the shadow of the Denbighshire mountains, S. C. Fisher has music in her blood and an inordinate amount of horror stories in her soul. Examples of her work can be found on the Crystal Lake Publishing Patreon Page, the Trembling With Fear website, and in the upcoming horror magazine, Cepheus Rising. Last year, Fisher was also long-listed for The Book Edit Writer's Prize with her debut novel. The first book in S. C. Fisher's new military horror series, Base Fear: Deadly Secrets, (published by Raven Tale) is available to buy now on Amazon.

Molly Israel - Sleeping with Death

Molly Israel (she/her) is a 20 year old University student from California, who moved to the UK to pursue a Psychology degree. She enjoys baking in her free time, curling up with a good book and previously mentioned baked goods, and consuming an absurd amount of horror movies. She is an obsessive list maker, though she rarely follows them, and enjoys scratching her random thoughts into whatever scrap of paper, or Notes page on her phone is available at all hours of the day.

Jade King - I still can't spell optimist

Short biographical note: jade is a dyslexic poet from the UK. She is often told she “looks like a dog person.” She is the Rhine Translation Prize Intern for Black Lawrence Press, the Curatorial Assistant for TAP EDITIONS and a Poetry Editor for The Lincoln Review. **jade** is also an MA Creative Writing student with publications in 3:AM and Schlag Magazine.

Sophie Marlowe - Black Annis

Sophie Marlowe (she/her) is a York based writer in her second year of Creative Writing at York St John. Her writing typically takes influence from folklore, mythology, and superstition due to her passionate interest in them. She lived in New Zealand for a few years as a child during the Christchurch earthquakes, which occasionally influences her writing as well. Sophie is currently unpublished, but her submission for York St John’s Beyond the Walls 2022 anthology has been accepted.

Jacob O'Sullivan - Gef Revisites! Voirrey Irving Speaks!

Jacob O'Sullivan was born in Leicestershire and grew-up in Castletown, Isle of Man. He has a keen interest in ghostlore and intangible culture more generally. He has previously had poems published in The Open Ear, The North, and Ram Eye Press. He now lives in Edinburgh, where he works in museum development, and runs a monthly Poetry & Pints evening in Leith.

Ria Rees - Gwyllgi

Ria Rees writes from her cosy cottage in Wales, praying that her creations will never become sentient. Her first loves in fiction were Horror and Sci-Fi, and she leaps at any chance she gets to combine the two, and has work published or forthcoming in various Horror Anthologies, Fantasy & Science Fiction Magazine, and Martian Magazine. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, gardening, and nerding out over 90s nostalgia. www.riarees.com

Rachel Wainwright - The Abyss

Rachel Wainwright (she/her), is a 22-year old writer from Newcastle upon Tyne. She is currently studying MA Publishing after attaining her undergraduate degree in English Language & Creative Writing at York St John University. Interested in poetry and short fiction, she has previously been printed in various magazines and publications, such as Beyond The Walls and the Young Writer's poetry anthology The Poetry Games.

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