

The Portal



Halloween Edition!



The Old Seaman
By Etheridge G. Lovett

Most morning beach strollers, who caught a glimpse of him, assumed that he was insane. Day after day, he'd sit alone, staring at the thundering waves of the restless sea through the dingy glass windows on the back porch of his cluttered home.

Every so often he'd pause to fix a warm cup of coffee to sooth his mind. Like a soldier at his post, he'd return to his old worn out chair to gaze, once again, at the waves of the sea rolling in upon the endless seashore. Seagulls would often visit him, soaring amidst the green palm trees grown thick around his secluded property. As he glanced away from the sea momentarily, his hazy eyes landed upon a row of broken steps leading away from his back door to the side of his moderate abode.

They were concrete steps the old fisherman hadn't walked on in months. Weeds peaked up from the cracks of each step like thin fingers that waved at him with every gentle breeze. He took another sip from his freshly brewed coffee, diverting his glance elsewhere. The aroma of the coffee wafted throughout the room.

He leaned back in his chair, savoring the peace and tranquility of his quiet home. On a good day several sea vessels would appear sailing over the vast horizon. The ships reminded him of a time during his youth when he'd rob the ocean of its finest catch. But that was the days of his past when the sea wasn't so unmerciful. Yet the sea lives on with an eternal fury, forever teaming with life.

Without warning, distinct taps were heard. Small stones pelted the windows of his private fortress. Off to the right, three teenagers, two boys and one girl, threw the stones at the home to torment the old observer. As he placed his tin coffee cup upon a small table nearby, he rubbed his dark-hued hands through his woolly white hair. In his mind he pondered over a way to regain his peace, his privacy, his only solitude. The jeers from the youngsters continued. The old man finally stood to his feet, shuffling over to the back door.

He twisted the dusty lock until it clicked then he pulled the door open. The door whined as it opened. The rust between the crevices of the hinges crumbled to the ground. Spider webs sagged downward as the old man pushed them off to one side. He stepped out of his reclusive perch, into the bright rays of the warm sun. Each sunbeam peeked from between the leaves of the swaying palm trees as if attempting to hide from him.

Even the seagulls were startled for they never seen the old man take such daring actions before. As the teenagers stood frozen, wondering what he would do next, the old man simply pointed his withered finger at them. He squint his wrinkled eyes in anger, saying, "Come here you three. Don't try and run because I know your parents. Come over here. I got something very important to tell you."

Reluctantly, the youngsters approached the old man. He sat down on the white beach sand with his legs extended outward. He allowed the white sand to run between his toes like sands running through the middle of an hourglass.

"Please, sit down here a minute or two with me and hear my story," the aged fisherman offered. The teenagers saw wisdom in his gaze when he spoke. They realized that there was no harm in spending a few minutes with the old man so they sat before him in the sand with their legs folded beneath them. The old man began to tell them his story about his fateful encounter with the merciless sea.

"I know that you three youngsters probably wonder why I'm often seen sitting near my window, gazing at the sea," the old man said, pointing at the glistening waves rolling in. "Out there is where I lost the best thing that I ever had in the whole world.

On June ninth of last year, I took my boat out to do a little deep-sea fishing. Most times I ventured out by myself, just me, and the sea. But on this one particular day, I begged my wife to go out with me. Daisy was more than just my wife; she was my other half, my soul mate. Without her, I feel like I'm only half of a man. You see; Daisy was a God-fearing woman, unlike me. Her Lord, perhaps, warned her not to go out with me on that dreadful day. However, for my sake, Daisy came along with me. Although she had a bad feeling about going with me that day, not one cloud was in the sky, so the only thing I had on my mind was fishing, no matter what. Hours later a terrible storm appeared out of nowhere.

It was as if the devil sent the storm himself. My little fishing boat was tossed about like a feather in a whirlwind. We both held onto the boat, and each other, the best way we could. Even the thunder and lightning was flashing and raging all around us. Then it happened," the old man said, using his hand to play out the movement of his sea vessel.

"My boat capsized. All that I loved and cherished was lost at sea. My Daisy was gone, forever. Now I'm

sitting here all alone, trying to make sense of it all, trying to live in complete solitude. When you young people disturbed my only peace by throwing rocks at the windows of my home, I knew that you didn't know my story. Now that you know, perhaps you'll have a little more compassion and let me rest in peace. My home and the sea are the only two things that remind me of my sweet Daisy," the old man finished, dropping his head. Tears trickled from his eyes down his wrinkled face. Each tear vanished within the winding curls of his snow-white beard.

The teenagers looked at each other. They felt deeply ashamed of their inconsiderate actions against the old man. One by one, they tossed the remaining stones in the palm of their hands, down into the sands of the seashore.

But one of the young boys struggled to understand how an old man survived such a terrible storm at sea. How could he survive the towering waves that tossed his tiny boat about like a grain of sand in a sandstorm? Unable to contain his curiosity any longer, the boy ventured out, asking the old man, "Sir, but how did you survive the terrible storm and your wife didn't?"

Hearing this, the old man lifted his head, diverting his blank stare towards the young man, gently whispering, "Who said that I survived?"

Then the old seaman slowly vanished.



Harbinger By Edward White/CP Bialois

Daniel Jeffers opened the door of his apartment, slid inside, and nearly fell onto the floor when the door swung open. He managed to catch himself on the end table sitting beside the door. Used as a resting place for his keys, mail, or the occasional newspaper it saved him from a fall on the hardwood floor of the entryway.

"What's wrong with me?" Daniel mumbled as he tried to steady himself. He felt strange, like being drunk, but he didn't drink anything stronger than coffee all day. He was light-headed and nauseous, a mix that seldom ended well for anyone. The weirdest thing was he felt fine until entering his apartment, with that strange feeling hitting him when the door opened. Slowly, and with intense pain, Daniel managed to close the door without falling. Thanking whoever heard him for small favors, he took a deep breath and pushed himself away from the door.

Before taking a step Daniel stumbled and missed the table causing him to fall hard, his knees impacted the floor with a loud thud that sent shockwaves of pain through his body. The intensity surprised him as he never thought pain like that could exist. Daniel gritted his teeth to keep from screaming, panting as he tried to force the lingering pain away. Leaning against the wall, he used it to help push himself to his feet. His legs screamed in agony at the effort.

Where are you?

He glanced around, nearly blinded

by his pain, "Who's there? Show yourself!" He waited for a moment before he shook his head, he must have imagined the voice.

"Why am I like this?" Daniel wondered. The last thing he remembered was climbing into a cab at 57th and Flint. He thought there had been a scream then a sudden jarring that shook the car. Everything else was a haze, like he just walked into a dense fog with no landmarks in sight. He shook his head; someone at work must've slipped something into his coffee to make him look like an ass. That had to be it. The first person to come to mind was Rob Jones, that bastard always tried to garner a cheap laugh to impress the girls in the typing pool. Daniel would make it a point to have a word with him and their supervisor in the morning, assuming he'd be able to work. The way he felt caused him to doubt anything could make him feel better. He had to get cleaned up and into bed; he was covered in dirt and needed to lie down for a while. Yes, a little sleep would do him wonders.

Why didn't you wait for me?

That damn voice again! Daniel put his hands to his ears and screamed, "Go away! You're not here! Go away!" He waited a few seconds for a response, when there wasn't one he lowered his hands. His head, he must've hit his head on something. Maybe he hit it on the door when he fell the first time, he couldn't remember but that had to be what he'd done. He needed to compose himself to think.

He remained leaning against the wall for at least a few minutes but they felt more like hours. Just to think about moving required a great deal of effort on his part. Daniel closed his eyes and focused on his movements, it was a trick he learned when he used to be a heavy drinker. By concentrating on how to walk he could fool anyone into thinking him sober while being stumbling drunk. When he felt ready, Daniel opened his eyes to make the trick work one more time. He took a tentative first step, thinking he must look like a deer learning to walk for the



first time. With his foot down, Daniel added his weight to it and was glad the pain he experienced a moment earlier had lessened somewhat. "Must've been the shock of his fall" he told himself. Still, he didn't fully trust his body and rested a hand against the wall for support. After another deep breath Daniel forced himself to take another step, then another. He repeated the process a dozen times until he stood outside the door to the bathroom.

There he paused, his body felt like it was on fire. His clothes were soaked through with sweat and every inch of him felt as though it'd been through a meat grinder. He never felt so much pain and fatigue in his life. While he stood and tried to catch his breath, his legs started shaking causing him to start to inch down the wall.

"No. NO!" Daniel reached out, trying to grab something to stop him from going back onto the floor. Somewhere deep inside a voice ordered him to move, to reach a chair or bed so he could rest. Daniel gritted his teeth and through force of will he forced his legs to stop. The pain was excruciating, as though his legs were being twisted off by unseen hands.

He closed his eyes against the pain and found himself in warm sunlight, standing on freshly mowed grass. He glanced around him. There was a small grove with a pair of Chesnut trees to his left and an old shed with a twisted tree to his right. He tried to remember, but the name of the tree escaped him, he knew this place. He heard a sound behind him, a humming he recognized from a show he watched as a child.

Daniel turned to the source of the sound, knowing what he'd see though he couldn't remember what it was. His eyes settled on a young boy in green shorts with a white stripe down the side and a white t-shirt. The boy had light brown hair and sat next to a wagon full of dirt, in it were several bugs that moved around. "Oh God." He remembered sitting there, in that same spot as he played in the dirt day after day. It had been a time when catching bugs was the coolest thing in the world. Being as careful as possible, he reached out as the boy picked up a

grasshopper and pulled off one of its legs out of curiosity.

You are mine now.

"No! Don't do that!" Just as he screamed, pain shot through his body like a burst of lightning. He clenched his jaw and closed his eyes against the pain.

Why did you run from me?

Just as quickly as it started it ended, and he opened his eyes. Terrified he would see something else that would bring him pain, Daniel was relieved to be back in his apartment and still standing against the wall next to his bathroom. He forced himself to forget that voice; it was just his mind playing tricks on him. Daniel took several deep breaths, the pain had lessened but his eyes began to burn from all the sweat that ran into them. He tried to wipe the stinging feeling from his eyes but with each effort they burned even more. Desperate, he turned towards the bathroom door and caught himself on the door jam before he fell. He felt ahead of himself but the door was open, he lived alone so there would be no reason for it to be closed but he couldn't be sure. He could still hear that voice in the back of his mind causing him grief. In pain and nearly blind, he stumbled inside and felt for the sink. Panic began to well up in him as the burning in his eyes increased with each second that he couldn't find the sink. It should be right next to the door, why couldn't he find it?

I'm not to be lost.

In desperation, Daniel threw his arms out to both sides as far as he could. The bathroom wasn't very large and he'd at least be able to feel the walls. As he hoped, both his hands found their mark, but his right one settled on something smooth instead. The MIRROR! The sink was in the back left hand corner of the bathroom and he found the medicine cabinet with his right hand. Somehow he'd gotten himself turned around after he entered but there was no time to worry about that. His happiness over finding the

sink and being able to end his torment nearly overwhelmed the searing pain in his eyes. With his eyes closed, Daniel lunged for the sink and turned the twin valves. He cackled in joy at being rewarded with the sound of running water. Instantly, his hands were under the faucet to collect the water, he felt it as it ran over his fingers and palms. The sensation of being cold, then warm, and finally the blended feeling of warm water was better than he could've imagined.

You should've waited.

Daniel didn't wait for the water to fill up the cup he made with his hands. Even partially filled it'd give him relief, he knew it to be true, so when they were half full, Daniel lifted the cleansing liquid to his face and dumped it over his head. He smiled at the feeling of the water as it ran down his face and over his eyes. He could feel the burning sweat wash away, just a few more handfuls and he was able to open his eyes. At first he could only see darkness, but that had been because he hadn't turned on the light. He chuckled at himself for such a stupid thing to forget.

Daniel reached over and turned on the light, the soft white glow of the large decorative bulbs filled the room with their purity. Even with the light he noticed everything still looked vague, like looking through a distorted window or a thin piece of wax paper. He shook his head and smiled, that was just due to the strain his eyes had been through, nothing more. Daniel turned towards the mirror, he knew he looked like hell but he did need to get cleaned up. His legs stopped hurting and his head stopped spinning. Whatever had been wrong with him must've burned out of his system.

Daniel must've passed out in the hall and remained on his feet. He'd dreamed about seeing himself as a child, it hadn't been a vision sent to torment him. Even the voice that seemed to follow him was part of the dream. That had been why he had been sweating so much, it was just the foreign toxins working its way out of his system and causing him to hallucinate.

He laughed at the realization and cursed Rob. Good old Robby, how he would enjoy kicking his ass in the morning. Curious as to how long he had been unconscious, Daniel glanced at his watch. "Funny." He thought, it stopped working at some point. From the look of it, one would think it had gone through a metal grater or something similar. It was an old watch made out of gold with black Roman Numerals set against a bone white background as the numbers. Only the background wasn't white, it was spotted with red and the hands were twisted at weird angles. Even through his misty vision it looked like the face had been hit with a hammer, but he couldn't remember anything like that happening. He'd come home and... OH GOD! Had someone attacked him? Was that why he was in such pain? That voice! That's who he'd been hearing! He turned his head from side to side as if he expected someone to be hiding behind or alongside him.

I have to find you.

For a long moment he struggled to regain his composure. "It's nothing. I probably hit it against the wall or the table by the door when I came home. Yeah, that was it." Daniel remembered that he caught himself on the end table just inside the door when he came home. That had to have been what happened, no one attacked him he'd just been really sick after that drug he'd been slipped. He began to calm down as reason began to settle in over his panic. Just to be sure he'd check the door, it locked on its own when it closed so it would still be locked, right? It sounded logical to him, but first he had something he needed to do. What was it?

His eyes refused to focus on anything around him. His towels were blue squares without a consistent shape, the shower was an oblique mass of clear plastic, the toilet resembled a half melted snowman, the sink... That was it! He wanted to finish washing up at the sink! Whatever Rob had given him must not be out of his system yet. The salty burn was gone from his eyes by then; it had dulled to

nothing more than an ache that resembled eye strain. But yet he couldn't see right. Everything was still a blur, or a conglomerate of colors in a mixing jar. Yes, he had to finish washing his face. That was the important thing to do.

Daniel turned back to the sink and turned the twin valves. At least he could make them out. Their bronze base and crystal handles would be hard to miss unless he was blind. Chuckling to himself, Daniel filled his hands up and dumped the water over his head and face. He continued until he felt clean, until he managed to wash away anything that could have caused his eyes pain, and then reached for a towel. He kept his eyes closed through the process and reveled in the retreating feeling from his eyes.

He felt the towel with his left hand and pulled it over and dabbed at his face. The softness of the fibers felt wonderful to him. In fact, Daniel couldn't remember anything feeling so soft and warm before, it was amazing how soft it felt. When he was done, he lowered the towel and raised his head to the mirror. He leapt backwards at the sight that greeted him with a scream that echoed off the walls of the small room. Daniel screamed until his throat was hoarse and he fell to the floor across from the mirror.

You must stop running.

Daniel covered his face with both his hands, that couldn't have been him! It couldn't have been! What he'd seen was something out of a nightmare. How could it have happened to him? When could it have happened? Determined, he pushed himself to his feet, his body felt lighter than he ever remembered. He hesitated before he looked at the mirror and steeled himself for the image. This time when he looked, he saw nothing of the gore that greeted him earlier. Daniel raised his hands and ran them over his face, he felt for any of the cuts or abrasions he'd seen only a moment ago.

When he first looked into the mirror, his face had been nearly torn in half; both his eyes had been pierced with something sharp. Like a shard of glass

or something, he couldn't tell for sure. The top of his head had been sheared half off and hung together by a few strands of fiber. The vision horrified him beyond anything he had ever seen. But now, as he looked into the mirror, all he saw was his normal face. A bit pale at seeing what stared back at him, but aside from his wet shirt he was fine.

A few deep breaths... That was all he needed. Daniel took a few deep breaths to relax as he cursed out Rob Jones and threatened to kill him. All done in the silence of his mind but he meant it all the same. No one deserved to go through the hell he'd been forced to deal with since he left work. No one.

He paused a moment, what had he meant since he left work? Daniel didn't remember leaving work at all. All he could remember was getting into the taxi and then... opening the door to his apartment? He couldn't even remember what happened at work that day, it was as if a cloud descended over his thoughts and kept him from seeing it. Why? Why wasn't he allowed to remember what happened? What the hell happened?

Daniel felt sick, but he couldn't stay there any longer. He felt as though he was being pulled away from the bathroom and he didn't want to fight it. No, it was more than that. He was being pulled away from that place all together, but why and where to? Clumsily, he stumbled out into the hall and fell against the opposite wall. He had to get to a phone and call an ambulance, he needed help. His body began to betray him and he slunk to the floor in the hall. It was a struggle to open his eyes but he tried, he knew he had to stay awake. The rest he wanted earlier wouldn't help him, he was sure of it now. One final time he tried to open them, this time he saw a figure in dark robes standing before him.

"Call an ambulance. Please, I don't want to die." Daniel's voice was very weak, barely above a whisper as he slouched against the wall. The figure just stood there and watched him for an eternity. Why didn't he try to help him? Why did he watch him suffer and do nothing?

"It's not my place to interfere."

"Who are you?" Daniel was sure he heard that voice before, but he couldn't remember. It had been full of power and life while his was weak and dying.

"He who comes for those such as you."

"Oh." Daniel couldn't fight it any longer, he let his eyes close and his question was answered. He saw himself as he got into the taxi. He felt the impact as the other car lost control and collided with them. He never left the taxi; he died there as surely as he died here. Piece by piece. "Funny," he thought, "I never felt a thing." He felt himself being lifted and carried off by his lone companion. "I didn't mean to be so much trouble



Lakota and the Vet
By Jamie White

Lakota and the Vet
"Ok, girl... it's time to go bye-bye."

The magic phrase forced Lakota to open her eyes and wag her tail excitedly. Every time her master said that word, she got to go out for a walk or got a ride in the car. Usually, they took her to a park or the store where all the good bones are. Anxious to find out where they'd be going, she jumped off the couch she'd been napping on and bounced around on the floor. Her playful yips rang through the air, expressing her approval vocally, just in case her owner didn't get the picture just by her bouncing around.

"Hold on, girl... you gotta settle down in you want me to get your leash on so we can go."

She didn't quite understand the words the human was trying to say to her, but she did know that the man was holding up a leash and she'd learned by now that meant she'd better sit down and relax or the whole trip might get called off. It'd happened before.

Actually, it'd just been delayed until later in the day, but that was beside the point in the dog's mind. She sat down quickly, her body taking on a proud stance. She was a good girl and now she was going to get rewarded for it!

"Good girl, Lakota," he praised, clipping the end of the leash to her collar. "Let's get going." Lakota happily pranced out the door and waited for her owner to finish locking up the house, as he called it. She didn't understand why he did it. She'd much prefer the doors to stay open so she could come in and out of the house as she pleased. Imagine how many interesting things she missed because of being closed up inside for part of the day? As soon as he completed the task, he turned towards the car and opened the door. "Inside, girl."

She jumped up, her tail continuing to wag as her master put her into the dog restraint he'd bought last week. She didn't like this thing much, but if it meant getting taken on rides, she'd put up with it. She busied herself sniffing at different things in the car while he came around the other side and got in. "Ok, Lakota, here we go!"

She looked over towards the window as he backed onto the road, watching the familiar scenery go by in fascination. She rarely saw the familiar street go by so quickly. These car things were amazing! She sniffed at the window her owner had generously left open for her, taking in all the wonderful smells in the area. She thought she detected the scent of a dog she didn't like halfway down the road and growled lightly. He was always snarling at her as they walked by his house. Sure, she did that when some animals walked by her, but not all! Shouldn't they be

friends now after seeing each other so often?

A turn brought them onto what she'd heard her owner call a highway. Here, the car moved much faster and Lakota barked as she watched several other cars go by with dogs sitting in the back of a truck or backseats. Lakota felt bad for those dogs; she liked sitting in the front next to her master. It made it much easier to watch out for him and see what's going on.

A short time later, the car went off the highway and pulled up outside of a building Lakota had never seen before. It was a tall one, with lots of trees and plants outside. As they walked past them, Lakota tried to stop to sniff; there was some great smells coming from them. She'd love to mark it as her own. Unfortunately, her owner didn't allow her to stop. "No, girl... we're almost late. Let's go." A gentle tug on the leash settled the matter for sure and they were standing inside the doorway of the strange place.

Lakota wagged her tail, seeing a few other animals sitting inside the place. Maybe this was a different store. Off to the one side was a display with what looked like the same containers her food came in. Well, not exactly like them, but very close. She also spotted some dog toys in a basket on the other side of the room from the food. She started to walk over to explore the toys, but was once again foiled by a tug on her leash.

"Come on, Girl." Lakota was led over to a big table where a lady she didn't know was sitting at the desk.

"Can I help you?" She seemed nice enough. She had a smile on her face and reached down to pet Lakota.

"Yes, I'm Sam Phillips and I'm here for Lakota's first checkup."

"Oh, yes, of course." She handed him some papers and pointed across the room. "Have a seat and the doctor will be with you shortly."

"Doctor?" Lakota had never heard that word before. She wondered what kind of a place this was. They never stopped at a table and got a paper first before getting her toys before. It sounded like a messed up place to her! The puppy sat down next to the seat

her owner took and looked around, whining. She wanted to go over to the other dogs and sniff like they did everywhere else she went. Why were they just sitting here? The other dogs were doing the same thing. One large one started barking at her, so she barked back.

“Mr. Phillips?” Lakota looked around, spotting the same lady who’d been sitting at the table before. She was waving at them. “The doctor can see you now.”

Very curious about who this mysterious “doctor” person was, Lakota pulled at her leash to follow the lady, her owner not moving nearly fast enough for her taste. How could people be so calm about everything? There was someone new to meet! Why wasn’t he more excited? Finally, they reached the door and the woman opened it, revealing a taller, dark-haired woman standing inside.

“Well, hello! Who do we have here?”

“This is Lakota,” her owner answered. “She’s here for her first check-up.” There was that word again! What did it mean?

“Ah, how nice!” The mysterious woman knelt down and petted her. Lakota liked the way she rubbed ears. Whoever a “doctor” is, they sure know how to pet! “Well, then, let’s see how you’re doing.”

The lady picked her up and set her on a table that was a big cold for her feet. Ok, maybe this wasn’t going to be as good a place as she thought. The mysterious person proceeded to pet her a moment, looking in her ears and staring into the dog’s eyes before opening up Lakota’s mouth with her hands. “Hmm... well, so far her teeth look good and her weight looks pretty good.” Lakota was once again picked up and moved further down the table. Suddenly her feet weren’t quite as cold anymore. Much better!

“Now, I’m going to take a closer look at her ears.” Suddenly, the strange lady was looking into her ear with this strange looking device that had a light coming off it. “Very nice!”

Lakota sat up a little straighter at the approving tone in the woman’s voice.

She must have done something good! She loved hearing that tone of voice; it usually meant a treat was coming. Lakota was disappointed when several minutes passed without one as her owner and the lady talked about stuff she didn’t quite understand.

“Ok, let’s see how her temperature is and then I’m going to take a sample and prepare the vaccinations.”

Vaccinations? Samples? What was all this stuff? Lakota was brought back to attention quickly when she felt a strange, cool, sensation in her backside. The dog hunched over, attempting to get away, but her owner was holding her in place. Whose side was he on, anyway? What was this lady doing? The strange sensations continued for several minutes as the woman continued to do who knew what. Finally, she stepped back, saying she’d be right shortly with the results.

As soon as the strange lady closed the door behind her, Lakota began fidgeting. She wanted to get out of here and now! Her master set her down, but instead of walking over to the door, he just continued to sit in the chair he’d been sitting in when the woman was looking her over. Lakota tugged at her leash, hoping to give him the message it was time to go. Her efforts were wasted, as he just told her to settle and lay down.

“The Vet will be back in a minute, sweetie, and we’ll be going soon.” Vet? Was this like the person they’d called the doctor? She hoped not; Lakota didn’t know if she could take anymore cold things being stuck in places they didn’t belong! Knowing there was no point in continuing to struggle, the puppy curled up on floor underneath her master’s chair. Maybe this “vet” wouldn’t see her there!

A short time later, Lakota’s head perked up at a sound of a door opening. Were they leaving? Instead of seeing her owner standing and calling her to follow him, the same lady who’d just been examining her ears walked back inside. Lakota noted with disappointment that there were a couple other things were in her hands.

“Well, the sample came back negative so she’s all set! We’ll get the

results of the heartworm test in a few days, so someone will call you to let you know about that. If that’s all good, you can start her on the medication the next day. All that’s left now is the vaccines.”

“Thank you, Doctor.” He reached down and picked Lakota up again, setting the small dog back up on the table. What was medication? She had a feeling it wasn’t anything good. She didn’t think those things the mysterious woman set out of her sight were any good either.

Her master talked to her a moment and petted her while the doctor did something behind her back. Seconds later, she felt a couple little pokes, but they were nothing like the cold sensation she’d had earlier.

“There you go, sweetie. All done!” Her master gave her a kiss on the head and put her back on the floor. “She did very well,” a praising tone came from the woman’s lips as she added, “Would you like a treat, Lakota?”

Now, that was a word the puppy was very familiar with! She danced on her hind legs, her discomfort of seconds ago completely forgotten as she focused on the small, square treat in the woman’s hands. As Lakota chewed the treat, her tail began wagging hard; it was good! Before she knew it, the treat was done and they were walking out the door. Maybe that wasn’t so bad, after all.

“See you again in six months, Mr. Phillips.” She waved as they turned towards the door.

“Thank you, doctor.” Her master waved at the lady and they started towards the door. “I’ll make the appointment now.”

Then again...



A Night to Forget By A. D. Layedra

I was 18 and on the way back from camp with my youth group, the summer after my senior year in high school. The group was driving from upstate Massachusetts to New York, and stopped off in Hartford, Connecticut to stay overnight in a hotel.

As we drove up to the hotel on our bus, half the guys made loud yawning noises and threw pillows at each other as some kind of young lion cub ritual. The girls were tying their hair up in ponytails and starting to gather their things.

“Okay guys, we’re here,” one of our youth leaders alerted us. “Keep track of your things and let’s get checked in quickly.”

Outside in the parking lot, I nearly tripped over someone’s bag, scrambling to catch up to my youth pastor. Pastor Dave was a medium-built Native American man, with a rich complexion and confident eyes. He and his wife, Miss Vanessa, a sweet-natured Puerto Rican young woman, had become like parents to me, as my own father was in and out of my life since I was three years old. They were really only old enough to my older brother and sister, but they were still like parents to me. My mother raised me on her own, and had done the best she could; but somehow Pastor Dave and Miss Vanessa were as drawn to

me as I was to them. They just took me under their wings.

“Pastor Dave!”

“Hey Ben, you still gonna to meet your cousin in town before turning in?”

“Yeah. I was just gonna ask you. Is it still OK?”

“It’s fine -- just be back at the hotel by nine tonight. Keep my number in case of anything...”

“K, I was about to dash off --”

“Listen, Ben.” He pulled me aside. I noticed that familiar line of concern dividing his forehead. “You OK? You look a little pale or something. What’s up?”

“Yeah, I know. No, I’m fine. It’s probably the ride up; just kinda queasy.” I tried to look casual and relaxed, but I knew that he could tell something was stirring.

“Okay. He looked at me incredulously. “I have stuff for that. Lemme ask Vanessa.”

“No, no, I’ll be fine. This happens sometimes when I travel. It always goes away. I better get going, anyway, Pastor. I have to call my cousin to pick me up.”

“Okay, but are you sure? You should probably take something in the meantime.”

“Hey, guys!” Miss Vanessa walked over to us. “Everything okay?”

“I’m fine.”

“Hmm.” She seemed to be studying my face. Miss Vanessa had these discerning brown eyes that seemed to know when something wasn’t right.

“Listen, guys, I better go now. Let me call my cousin now and drop my bags off upstairs.”

“OK.” Miss Vanessa said, looking at Pastor Dave, as if she didn’t really believe I was OK.

“Ben,” she said. “You know you can always come to us with anything...you know that, don’t you . . .”

“I know -- thanks, guys.” I gave them both a hug and went upstairs, calling my cousin on the phone on the way up. I dropped my bags off and signaled to my roommate, Jon, that I would see him later, as planned.

I dialed my cousin’s phone number. I could feel my heart rate increase and my fingers tremble as I dialed. My

mouth became dry and a tight feeling came over my head. I pressed “L” on the elevator panel. Nobody picked up the phone. As I coasted down on the elevator, I left Robby a message.

“Ah, yeah . . . Robby? It’s Ben. Uh . . . I’m in town now. I wasn’t sure if you wanted to get together still. Ah, just gimme a call when you get this, okay? Bye.”

“It figures,” I thought. “Robby’s . . .”

Then my phone rang. It was Robby calling me back.

“Oh hey. Yeah, yeah, I’m here now. Uh huh, yeah; the Holiday Inn Express? Yeah, same address I gave you, okay? Okay -- alright. Cool man. Later.”

I felt like my heart was going to stop for an instant. I took some deep breaths and tried to calm myself. I had a change of heart. I decided I would keep my visit with Robby short and not really get into anything deep. Whatever it was I wanted to say to him left my mind in the shock of hearing his voice on the phone after all these years. He sounded so much older than I had remembered. My mind raced with what seemed like hundreds of thoughts. There was no reason to get into anything major with him, I reasoned. This would be a time to put the past behind us. Being a man meant letting go of things.

I walked in and out of the hotel lobby, passing time by checking old text messages. About twenty minutes later, my phone rang again. It was Robby.

“Yeah, I’m standing right here in front of the entrance,” I said. My eyes scanned the parking lot; back and forth. He had told me he was in a black Charger.

“I see you -- okay.” I hung up the phone, swung my arm up in the air and waved at his car. My head was pounding by now.

He pulled up, parked and got out of the car. He looked so happy to see me.

“Hey, Bro!” he jogged around the front of his car and gave me a quick hug and a few slaps on the back. He smelled strongly of cigarette smoke and leather, and his face had aged him almost twenty years. He was no longer the skinny, older teenager I knew who

was wild and full of authority. He used to run everything in his world and all of us younger kids in the neighborhood did whatever he said. Now he looked so stocky and his wispy, curly hair was thinning. What had life done to him?

I felt like I was turning red and I heard my voice crack. “Hey, Robby, how ya been?” I spoke as powerfully as I could. I signaled to his car. “Wow . . . nice!”

“Yeah, well, that’s my baby, I’m still paying it off!”

We got into the car; a White Snake song was on.

“Huh,” I chuckled. “Everyone liked that one.”

“Yeah, with or without that music video, it was a good one. That’s like everyone’s song about making it on their own alone, ya know.” He let out a laughed and a smoker’s cough, that half our family had.

“Yeah.”

“I’m takin’ you to a burger joint that has just about everything, really . . . burgers, whatever. That cool?”

“Sure, that’s fine.”

When we arrived at the place, we made small talk, reminiscing mainly about kids we knew in our old neighborhood, and family holidays.

“It’s crazy.” Robby’s bright smile turned a bit serious, as he looked out of the window of the diner. There was a little girl pretending to run away from her parents. They were laughing and jerking around playfully. The little girl’s shrieks could be heard through the window.

“We sure had some crazy times growin’ up, huh?”

“Hmm . . . yeah, we did.”

“Listen, Ben, I know some things happened that were -- you know, not right.”

“Yeah, you know how it is with kids.”

“Yeah, but Ben, you were a kid; I wasn’t quite a kid. I did some pretty messed up stuff, man.”

“Man, don’t worry about it -- it was just kid stuff.”

“Naw, man, it wasn’t kid stuff, it was wrong.”

“Yeah, well, that was in the past, man; we gotta move on.”

The funny thing is . . . hearing him say all this; I suddenly felt I could forgive him. My mind was far away by now.

“Yo Ben . . . Ben!” I had been daydreaming.

“Huh?”

“You just zoned out! What’s goin’ on, man?”

“Nothing; nothing.” I looked up at Robby. His face bore the marks of a rough life. It’s as if he had permanent lines on his face that indicated his disgust with certain things, yet he seemed to be hiding behind an occasional smile or laugh. The waitress brought our water.

“I asked for lemon, ma’am,” his leg was bouncing up and down with impatience. I suddenly had a flash of the old Robby -- rough, loud, and demanding.

The waitress walked away with a promise to bring some lemon right back. “These waitresses today!”

I smiled faintly, as I tried to get my mind back on the present. My mind was straying back to old memories that I for years blocked out when they threatened to crowd my mind. I caught a glimpse of Robby’s expression as he looked outside the diner at the passersby and the diners back and forth. It’s as if he was looking for the next thing to say.

“Hey man, I gotta step outside for a cigarette.” He rose up as he patted his pockets, seeking his cigarettes and lighter. “Be right back, man.”

He pulled away from the table, brushing past a young couple, hardly making room for them. It’s as if he felt he owned every space into which he moved.

He stepped outside under the scaffolding, smoking, slightly hunched over. His stomach protruded through his black leather jacket. He looked too old to be wearing that jacket. He struck up a small conversation with a stranger, laughing, shrugging his shoulders, motioning with his hands as he talked. At times he shook his head in disgust, with a smirk on his face; other times, he nodded with the other guy, in agreement – like a pact between

thieves. I could still see the younger version of him somewhere inside of him.

I suddenly felt a twitch of anger. What gave him the right to have sat here in this diner with me, and not so much as say sorry to me for what he had done years ago? He had no reason to be complaining about anything in his life...not as long as he hoarded his secret and denied me my apology. He would have to contend with me on this night. I took a sip of root beer, breathed in and waited for him to return. He had no idea what was in store for him.

He walked back into the diner and walked over to the table. The stale and fresh smoke mingled in the air as he sat down at the table.

“Man, Benny, I still can’t believe it’s you!”

“Yeah, it’s me alright.” I felt like my eyes were shifting here and there, just waiting for the right time to say something. Why was I starting to feel like I was about to do something wrong?

“So, Robby, we sure have a lot of old memories, huh?”

“Yeah, man, we go way back. I can’t believe we never stayed in touch,” he sheepishly grunted as he looked around the restaurant. I kept looking for him to make eye contact with me. I wanted to sense some kind of connection, to help ease me into what I had to say.

“Hey . . .” I hesitated. “Remember those crazy times over at Peter Clark’s house?”

“Yeah, wasn’t Peter that kid on Nevers Road with the nice parents?”

“Yeah, that’s him.”

“His parents let him do whatever he wanted! They were so stupid!”

“Yeah, I think they were just trying to be nice.” I kept thinking of what to say next. “Wow. Some pretty messed up stuff happened that one summer over at the Clarks’, huh?”

“Which summer?”

“That summer when every kid in the neighborhood was over at that house.”

“I mean I remember having some fun, but nothing too crazy. And I don’t remember a lot of summer stuff. I

thought it was more in the winter. I remember we used to go over there in the winter and sled down that hill. It was freezin'. You don't remember?"

"I'm more talkin' about the summer, Robby. You don't remember anything really screwed up happening, one summer?"

"Like what? What are you talking about?"

I panicked inside and tried to slow my breathing. I was hoping he wasn't just playing a game with me. Here it is, he had destroyed half my childhood, and was now acting like nothing ever happened. He just sat there, hunch-backed and blank, with a thunder of smugness inside of him that I could hear, but he was probably unaware existed.

Then it occurred to me. No matter what I said, it was too late to bring it up. Nothing could take back what happened. I couldn't get back my childhood, and he would never admit to anything.

"What happened, man? What are you trying to say?"

A sickness came over me. I knew right then that it was hopeless. I had that same stifling feeling I always had whenever I tried to stand up for something that was right. All of the those inspirational movies I had watched and sermons I had listened to, Sunday after Sunday, about standing up for what is right, telling the truth and forgiving others for your own sake, were all a useless, muddled blur to me.

"Are you alright, man?" Robby had no idea what was going on inside of me. I did not feel like going through the torture of telling him a thing about what was inside of me, so that he could trample it beneath his soiled boots.

"Oh, sorry man -- think I'm just coming down with something; that's how I get. We can go now if you want."

"Are you sure? We can have some ice cream or somethin' if you want."

"Naw, I'm good. I better be getting back to the hotel now."

We quietly drove through downtown Hartford, as a light rain sprayed the car. Spring in Hartford always brought the

hope of washing away the long, dirty winter. We drove up to the hotel.

"Hey, man, it was good seeing ya!" he said. I heard the words, but only a few moments after he said them.

I acted like everything was fine, opening the door.

"Yeah, you too. Oh . . . don't bother getting out. It's kinda raining; no sense in getting wet."

"Aw, rain doesn't get ya dirty, man!" He laughed, as if he thought I was a silly boy.

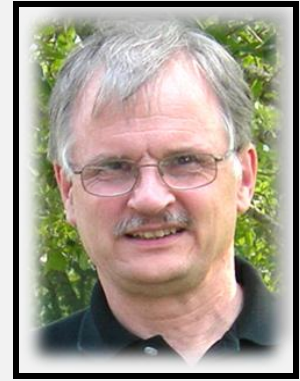
He got out of the car and walked around to say good-bye. I ignored the stench of smoke and wet leather.

"See ya later." I insincerely grinned and turned away.

"Yo, keep in touch, okay?" Robby called out as he slithered back into his black car that drove him straight into the dark.

"Sure," I heard the echo of myself saying, the roar of his car's motor fading.

I looked up at the hotel building, at some of the windows whose room lights were still alive. I wondered how many people were still awake and enjoying their evenings; how many were alone watching television; how many were waiting until it really felt like nighttime to them. I wondered how many people were waiting up until they knew for sure that they had not missed any opportunities that day -- so that they could sleep in peace, knowing they had closure.



Samhain
By Rick Weber

It was the Iron Age and the Romans had just entered this part of Gaul. The end of summer was upon them and Cuinn was helping his father Briag to finish a hay rick, a thatched pile of hay, near the family home in what would later be called Scotland. The harvest had been good. A storage pit had already been built and stocked with the crops to get their family through the winter. They were almost done as the sun began to set and Briag addressed his son.

"Tomorrow is Samhain. Will ye be frolicking with your friends?"

"I will," Cuinn uttered with a bit of reluctance in his voice. He felt he had outgrown things, such as, this new Roman custom of bobbing for apples with other children. Cuinn was maturing and knew this would be his last year for such frivolity. Cuinn did enjoy the other rituals associated with the Gaelic New Year.

"I will also help chase the evil spirits away," he added in a more assertive tone. "May I use the head of the sheep we slaughtered for my costume?"

"You may," his father replied with a slight smile on his heavily bearded face. "Will you be dancing between the bonfires tomorrow night?"

"Yes, father. I want to make sure that only the good spirits are with us on Samhain. I hope grandfather Padruig can visit us when the walls between our worlds are at their thinnest."

"We can only hope. We will have a place set for him at the table. It has been almost a year since he died. I do miss him." Then looking up to the gray

overcast sky, Briag said, “We have to get the hay ricks finished for the animals before the weather becomes dark and cold.”

Briag and Cuinn headed to their home; a byre, a stone structure with a thatched roof which served part as their home and part as a stable for the animals they were keeping through the winter. Their descendents two thousand years later would no doubt find this arrangement unhealthy and repulsive but at this time it was a necessary arrangement. Even though they used peat to heat their home, it alone did not provide enough warmth during the winter. The animals needed a place to stay and their owners needed their body heat to help keep them warm during the season of darkness.

Sorcha, Cuinn’s mother, was inside and prepared a sparse supper for them. “We’ll be eating plenty tomorrow at the Vigil of Samhain,” Sorcha told Cuinn and Briag as they entered the byre.

“I see you have hazelnuts set aside. Will you be asking the druids to tell our fortunes in the New Year?” Cuinn asked.

“I may,” Sorcha responded as she doled out the evening meal to Cuinn and his father.

“Let’s eat!” Briag bellowed. “We need our rest tonight. Tomorrow we have to bring our herd down from the pasture and into the byre before the vigil.”

“We will have our feast tomorrow,” Sorcha informed them. “The sheep slaughtered by you and your father will give us more than enough to eat. I will prepare more of your favorite treats but don’t ask me which ones. I want that to be a surprise.”

The days were getting shorter. Beltane, the season of light, was almost over. Samhain, the season of darkness, would begin the next night. Beltane and Samhain were the principal seasons of their year. Unlike their descendants whose day would begin at dawn, this family’s day along with the other ancient Gaels began at dusk, symbolizing not an end but a new beginning. The vigil of Samhain provided a number of things; a chance

to talk with the dead, the opportunity to cast off evil or mischievous spirits, and to look at a new beginning. For them, Samhain was the more important of the two seasons.

The next morning, Briag and Cuinn moved the livestock from the pasture and placed them in the byre. They also erected another hay rick to feed their animals during the dark months. As dusk was beginning to settle, Briag extinguished the fire in their hearth and Cuinn placed an unlit candle in the west window of the byre. It would be lit later that evening to guide the spirit of Padruig to them for the feast.

The food had all been prepared by Sorcha and at the table in the byre on a cool, crisp, night they would eat. A separate place had been there set for Padruig. Their neighbors also had places set for the ancestors in their homes. These next two nights would be the most challenging of the year when it came to the spirit world. For the most part, everyone would stay inside as not to have too much contact with the dead. This would not prohibit them from participating in the bonfires’ ritual later that evening. It would not bar them from calling on the ghosts of their dead ancestors, but they also had malevolent spirits to deal with.

In the middle of a clearing in the forest, Cuinn and Briag observed Lanval, an old Druid, putting together two piles of wood which would be the bonfires as part of the night’s ritual. Lanval was assisted by two young Druids who were new to the area. The Celts were in awe of the Druids and the mystical powers they possessed. Some from the community had lined up to have Lanval tell their fortunes for the coming year. Sorcha hoped that a druidess would be there so that she might get a potion for what was ailing her, a mild aching, but persistent problem in her back and joints.

Cuinn had joined his friends to don their costumes to chase the evil spirits away dancing between the bonfires. The ceremony was called to order by Lanval as the day ended. Lanval announced the end of Beltane and the beginning of Samhain. As part of the ritual he lit the bonfires with the help of

the other druids. Cuinn and his friends in the animal skin costumes and animal heads danced between the fires.

As the ritual progressed, a person from each home went up to the fire. As head of his household Briag took a flaming piece of wood and headed to his home. There he relit their hearth with the burning branch and the candle in the west window of the byre to guide his father’s spirit to the feast.

As Briag was doing this, Sorcha walked between the fires throwing in some bones from the sheep Briag and Cuinn had slaughtered into each of them. She did this not only to help drive the evil spirits away from the Samhain ritual but also to help prepare Padruig’s spirit pass on to the world of the dead. This was part of the purification rite of Samhain.

Winter would soon be upon them and the days would become shorter and colder. Cuinn grabbed a leaf falling off a tree on his way back to the byre with his mother. Briag later asked him, “Do you know what that means? It means you will have luck in the New Year.”

“I hope so,” Cuinn replied enthusiastically. “I hope that we have a better harvest in the year to come than what we had this past year.”

“We did not do badly,” Briag said with a note of caution in his voice. “You best not say too much. We don’t want the gods to think that we are ungrateful.”

In their home, the family partook of their Samhain feast.

“We best eat while the food is still fresh,” Sorcha instructed. With that the family ate and prayed for the spirit of Padruig to visit them.

Suddenly, a loud wind was heard coming up outside the byre. The three of them looked at the window sill where the candle was burning. Before anyone could speak, the candle’s flame was extinguished. Sorcha leaned over to her husband touching his hand and whispering in his ear, “Briag, your father has passed on to the world of the dead. I hope he left us some kind of message before he departed.”

“I hope so, too,” Briag responded. “If my father is of the same nature in

the afterlife as he was in this one, I am sure that it may take us a while to find it.”

That winter was long and cold, but the family fared well under the circumstances. They were fortunate that they lost no livestock during Samhain and even a couple of calves were born late in this season of darkness. Some snow had fallen but it was not much. As Beltane neared and the days became longer, Sorcha remarked to Briag, “Samhain has been kind to us this time and we even have a couple more head of livestock than we did last year. I think your father left us this as his message.”

“Maybe, he did,” Briag said with a smile as Cuinn looked on.

Samhain to them was over and the festival of Beltane was at hand. Bonfires would again be built by the druids and the walls between the worlds of the living and the dead would become thin again. Briag and Cuinn took their herd out of the byre and let them up to the pasture for the summer. During Samhain, Cuinn experienced changes of his own. He had grown and was almost as tall as Briag. Facial hair was beginning to sprout on his face. Soon, he would have a beard as thick as his father’s. As they led the livestock up to the pasture, Cuinn spoke with Briag about Beltane.

“Father, when will we be planting the seeds for this year’s crops? I think that we should do it soon if we want to make the most of this season of light.”

Briag looked at Cuinn and thought to himself, “My son has become a man.” Briag could only smile and nod at Cuinn.

That Beltane was the best one Briag, Sorcha, and Cuinn ever had. Their harvest was bountiful and when Samhain came, they had much to thank the good spirits for, especially Padruig, who seemed to be keeping watch over them. Cuinn did not don a costume to chase the evil spirits away. Instead, he took bones from a calf he had slaughtered with Briag and placed them into one bonfire, walking over to the other, and doing the same. Cuinn hoped, as did Briag and Sorcha, to be visited by Padruig’s spirit.

A few years later Cuinn took a wife. They subsequently had children of their own bringing them up in the Gaelic tradition. The seasons of Samhain and Beltane were observed. Cuinn’s children bobbed for apples and wore costumes on Samhain just like he did when he was young. Briag and Sorcha were proud of their grandchildren.

More time passed and one Samhain was bittersweet.

Shortly after their youngest grandchild was born in the middle of Beltane, Briag passed away suddenly from some malady that would be given its name centuries later. Sorcha missed him deeply. That summer came to an end and the festival of Samhain was again upon them. The feast had been prepared; The druids had readied the bonfires. One of the druids opened the festival but, it was not Lanval. He had fallen victim to a plague a few years earlier prompting some to say that Lanval had sacrificed himself for their benefit to chase away the evil spirits responsible for the pandemic.

Cuinn had taken a burning piece of wood from a bonfire to their home where he lit the peat in the hearth and also lit a candle in the west window of the byre. The rest of the family returned from the bonfires and they had their feast, that year with a place set for Briag, as well as, Padruig. As they enjoyed their meal together, they heard a great wind stirring up outside their home and without saying anything, turned their heads in unison to the window where the lit candle was. As the wind reached its crescendo, the candle was blown out and the wind immediately became calm.

“My father’s spirit has passed on to the other world,” Cuinn told his family. “I wish him peace.”

“All of us wish him peace,” said Sorcha with a smile.

Sorcha, Cuinn, and generations of their descendents would pass away over time but, Samhain would evolve over the centuries into the season to be known as ALL HALLOWS’ EVE.



Eye Creatures By DiVitto Kelly

Michael Nagle loved monster movies. It seemed like every Saturday afternoon, the nearly eleven-year-old would camp out in the family den under a beautiful dark wood rectangular table, gazing up at the 25-inch Zenith color television. The Gruesome Ghouls hosted a monster movie double feature program on channel 13, serving up a smorgasbord of classic monster movies; both A and B material. The 1970’s were a great time to be a kid.

With the drapes drawn in and his trusted worn Snoopy stuffed animal by his side, Michael took on every monster movie there was: Classic Universal monsters like Frankenstein, Dracula, and the Mummy? Check. Rampaging Japanese monsters like Godzilla and Mothra? Piece of cake. Flying saucers filled with alien creatures ready to conquer earth? Bring it on! Supersized insects the length of school buses? Por favor!

Oh sure, there were monster movie moments that scared the heck out of Michael, especially one titled “Night of the Demon,” a 1957 British gem of a film that gave him nightmares for months. The scene where the towering creature hoists up those monstrous claws for the victim to see – wow weel!

There were other movies where Michael remembered only bits and pieces, probably because he was hiding under his red and blue checkered blanket during the scary parts. In one horror movie, possibly a Hammer film, a man is peering through a pair of cursed antique binoculars. While focusing, spikes jut out and skewer the man’s eyeballs! Yikes!

Through the blood, gore, and actors dressed up in rubber monster suits, Michael's mom and dad were surprisingly Laissez-faire about the whole thing. Dad occasionally wandered in to watch the older movies like the Invisible Man and The Thing from Another World. Sometimes Michael's fifteen-year-old brother, Brian, would stumble in after playing basketball with the Healy twins and tease the ten-year-old for being scared, but for the most part, Michael owned the Saturday, one to three afternoon time slot.

Michael also loved his collection of Aurora monster movie models, some with glow in the dark pieces. The one with the Phantom of the Opera was especially cool. His room was filled with monster models, at least eight were perched up on a book shelf; another two sitting on his desk. For some, watching monster movies was a phase. For others, it was a passion. For Michael, it was as much fun as playing baseball or watching the Big Red Machine at Riverfront Stadium. But there was one film in particular that not only frightened Michael, giving him multiple nightmares, but nearly killed him.

It started out as any other Saturday afternoon double feature. The first film was one of Michael's favorites, "Them," starring James Whitmore and James Arness. Michael tried to get his mom to watch, but she already had a fear of ants, so anything featuring ones the size of Cadillacs was met with a resounding no.

The second was called "Attack of the Eye Creatures," a 1965 science fiction film featuring a flying saucer that lands somewhere in the dark woods. Multi-eyed alien creatures soon terrorize a bunch of unsuspecting teens. Maybe it was the landscape - lots of trees, darkness, alien creatures with many eyes, but Michael's imagination ran wild.

From his two-story house nestled up on a slight hill, Michael had a clear view of the surrounding forest. Sometimes at night, he would open his bedroom window and hear a potpourri of nature, from croaking frogs to

chirping crickets. Throw in an owl, barking dog, and screeching cat and you had a symphony. And because there were few houses around, the blackened night offered stargazers like Michael a perfect view of the constellations.

One night, Michael couldn't sleep due to another dream of Godzilla gazing through his bedroom window and trying to devour him. Every room he ran to, Godzilla seemed to track him down. Somehow, he always ended up in the basement with nowhere to go. He looked at his clock; it was nearing two in the morning. At least it wasn't a school night, he thought. Michael stumbled over to the bedroom window and opened it. Surprisingly, he didn't hear a sound. He scanned the whole backyard; nothing. There were two rolling hills to the right of the house that he and his friends used for sledding in the winter. At the bottom ran a narrow creek. Michael and his friends built a makeshift wood bridge during the early summer, about ten feet long, over the widest part of the slow-moving water. With nothing in sight, he closed the window and went back to sleep.

The next evening, Michael stayed up late, but finally fell asleep, a comic book lying open on his chest. He had a different nightmare. This one involved dreaded eye creatures marching up the backyard hill towards his house eager to kill. Michael twisted and turned, finally waking up. Sometimes he wished he didn't like horror films, but he just wasn't into the Wonderful World of Disney and the like.

Dropping the comic book on the floor, Michael walked over to the window, nearly tripping over his Rawlings baseball glove. He hesitated, peering outside first. Michael noticed a glowing light that seemed to fade in and out far off in the deep woods. He slowly lifted the window open, trying to be as quiet as possible. Lately, the window had developed an irritating screech. Not a sound.

Michael reached for his binoculars on the top of his dresser, but stopped cold when he brought them up to his eyes, thoughts of a certain horror film flashed before him. Instead, he took out

his telescope, nothing fancy, a Christmas gift from three years ago. He focused the telescope as best he could, first everything appeared blurry. "Alright, much better," he said. Hold on, there was something.

"What's that moving?" Michael said to himself out loud, keeping his worried voice low. It was early fall, most of the leaves were still attached to tree limbs, a few in multicolored form, but it was hard to make out the object.

Michael's door creaked open, Michael turned in fear. "Ugh! Oh, it's you Karloff." The pet cat was named after one of Michael's favorite horror actors, Boris Karloff, star of Frankenstein and the Mummy.

The cat hopped up on the desk next to the open window. Gazing outside, the feline took in a heavy sniff then growled. Michael panned the backyard with the telescope; he still didn't see anything. Then, near where the glowing was, he saw something move . . . lumbering, slowly, but it was definitely something.

First there was one, then another, and off to the side, a taller one appeared. "Eye creatures?" Michael uttered to himself. There they were; Michael's latest and greatest nightmare in full bloom, a reality. The stoic creatures were dirty white with black, pancake-sized splotches all over, like freakish, humanoid Dalmatians. He stepped back, pacing in circles, petrified. He darted back to the window. The eye creatures were inching closer, struggling now to get up the grassy incline.

"If this is real, then bright lights should kill them," Michael thought, referring to the film's finale, but where could he find a bright light, and in thirty seconds! The boy couldn't take his eyes off the menacing, slow-moving beasts. Michael looked into the telescope again. He could barely make out the dozen eyes and fingerless limbs. Suddenly, one pointed its cumbersome arm in Michael's direction.

"Oh no, they saw me!" gulped the boy. "I've got to do something!" Michael had only one idea – a flashlight, but he wasn't about to confront this nightmare up close and personal with a lousy

flashlight. But he had no choice; he had to save himself and his family. This included his younger sister, sound asleep in her all-pink bedroom, and annoying to the tenth degree and his older brother, who could be a world class jerk from time to time. Pains, sure, but it was his family, and he was going to do something about it.

Michael ran downstairs into the kitchen. He peeked outside through the window above the sink and could see the creatures reaching the top of the hill. They were almost there! “What do I do?” Michael begged. Then the light bulb went on.

Michael remembered how the creatures met their demise in the film – headlights, headlights from a car! All Michael had to do was wake up mom and dad, have them drive their cars into the direction of the oncoming frontal assault, and voila, no more eye creatures! “Piece of cake!” Michael exclaimed.

“Hold on, I can’t wake them up; they’ll think I’m having a nightmare and then they won’t let me watch monster movies anymore!” he postulated. I’m doomed,” quoting Linus from the Peanuts “It’s the Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown Halloween special.

Michael pulled back the kitchen curtain again. To his horror, an eye creature was staring right at him, drooling and groaning. The dozen-plus eyes glared at the boy. Michael jumped back, scrambling; the creature pounding on the window. The boy saw his older brother’s car keys dangling from his jean jacket. He ran over and grabbed them then sprinted down stairs into the two car garage. There, his older brother’s recently polished apple red Volkswagen Beetle convertible glistened from the lighting above. Michael fumbled for the right key and opened the car door.

The automatic garage door opener sat on the black vinyl dashboard. Michael pressed the button; the door gently rattled and rose. Michael often observed his brother starting the car when he took him to baseball practice; hopefully he learned enough to actually drive. The ten-year-old started the car, revving the engine then shifted into first

gear. The car practically leaped from the garage like a prowling tiger, throwing Michael back hard against the seat. He quickly turned left to where the eye creatures were advancing.

Michael bore down on the three eye creatures standing in the back yard next to the swing set. Searching for the high beams, he accidentally turned on the wipers. The radio turned on blaring Light My Fire by the Doors, as he drove on the bumpy turf. The three monsters raised their bulbous limbs and began . . . waving?

“Stop! What are you doing!” screamed his brother, his voiced muffled as he struggled to pull off the costume head.

Michael slammed on the brake pedal, coming to a sudden halt. The boy flashed the headlights wildly, flicking them on and off. Nothing.

“You’re supposed to die!” yelled Michael, panicking. The convertible top was down so it was just a matter of seconds before he’d succumb to the deadly eye creature’s assault.

The boy watched in horror as the creatures appeared to rip their own heads off. “Oh my God!” Michael cried out in horror. “Huh?”

“You almost destroyed my car, booger snot!” screamed Brian. His two friends, Tim and Terry Healy, identical twins, were laughing hysterically.

“I take it you’re not eye creatures?” asked Michael, now starting to feel like a complete moron. Michael’s brother often enjoyed teasing him about his obsession, as he liked to put it, about monsters.

“No duh, crap head,” said Brian, looking at his friends, grinning. “Nice job, huh?” All three were quite proud of their artistic skills.

“Who knew papier mache could be so terrorizing!” added Terry, spouting the words in a goofy, over the top French accent.

“You’re a real barf head!” said Michael, looking around at the pranksters. “You need six people just to scare me?”

“Six?” asked his brother, “What do you mean six?” Michael started counting off, starting with his older

brother and two friends, and the three coming up the hill.

“It’s just me and the Healy twins,” Brian replied, “What are you talking about?”

“Behind you?” pointed Michael, beginning to feel bit anxious. His brother and two friends turned around.

“I don’t know who they are,” said Brian, looking over his shoulder. “The joke’s over folks; time to go home.” No answer. The three figures moved closer, making strange, gargling sounds.

“Maybe we should get out of here, now!” said Michael, directing his brother to get in the passenger seat, Tim and Terry leaping into the back of the car. “Hurry!”

Michael drove the car in a looping circle, bringing the car face to face with the menacing creatures, a modest hint of fury in their numerous, beady eyes.

“High beams! How do you turn on the high beams!” yelled Michael to his brother, who reached over awkwardly, turning them on. The creatures raised their clumsy appendages over their deformed, marshmallow-esque faces, doing their best to shield themselves from the penetrating rays, but to no avail.

The two stream of light met the creatures head on. One by one they began to dissolve, burning down into ash like spent charcoal. Stunned, Michael and his brother looked at each other. Michael inched the car towards the edge of the hill, the four stared downward.

Suddenly, a softened, highlighter green glow appeared from the woods followed by a deep, humming sound. Like a reverse shooting star, the flying saucer lifted off the forest ground and torpedoed off into space.

The following Saturday afternoon, the weather was overcast, with a heavy dose of lighting and thunder mixed in. Both Michael and his older brother Brian were enjoying popcorn, soda and a pair of Saturday afternoon monster movies. The first one was the original “Night of the Living Dead.”

The two watched as a pack of zombies munched down on their hapless victims. “Remember kids, don’t

fill up on junk, we're having ribs tonight," said their mother. Both kids groaned in unison.

"Wanna borrow my Snoopy?" asked Michael, observing his brother getting squeamish.

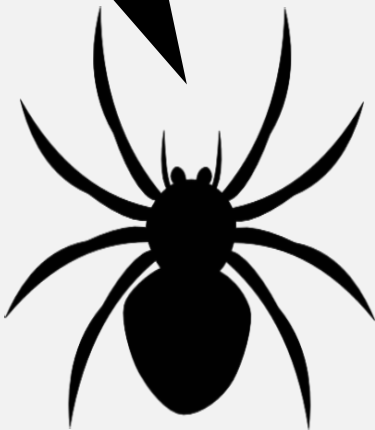
"Uh, yeah . . . thanks."



*Writer's note: In the early 1990's, I would see "Attack of the (the) Eye Creatures" on the television program Mystery Science Theater 3000, which did a wonderful job lampooning this motion picture debacle. Little did I realize that this film, which gave me such horrible nightmares as a child, would be considered one of the worst films ever made. It now scares me for other reasons.

Now enjoy some Halloween poems!

Boris the Spider



The Hearse Song
A Traditional Children's Rhyme

*Don't you ever laugh as the
hearse goes by, For you may be
the next to die.*

*They wrap you up in a big white
sheet, From your head down to
your feet.*

*They put you in a big black box,
And cover you up with dirt and
rocks.*

*All goes well for about a week,
Then your coffin begins to leak.*

*The worms crawl in, the worms
crawl out, The worms play
pinochle on your snout.*

*They eat your eyes, they eat
your nose, They eat the jelly
between your toes.*

*A big green worm with rolling
eyes, Crawls in your stomach
and out your eyes.*

*Your stomach turns a slimy
green, And pus pours out like
whipping cream.*

*You spread it on a slice of bread,
And that's what you eat when
you are dead.*

Halloween
By Joel Benton

*Pixie, kobold, elf, and sprite
All are on their rounds to-night,-
In the wan moon's silver ray
Thrives their helter-skelter play.*

*Fond of cellar, barn, or stack,
True unto the almanac,
They present to credulous eyes
Strange hobgoblin mysteries.*

*Cabbage-stomps-straws wet
with dew-Apple-skins, and
chestnuts too, And a mirror for
some lass,
Show what wonders come to
pass.*

*Doors they move, and gates
they hide, Mischiefs that on
moon-beams ride Are their
deeds, and, by their spells, Love
records its oracles.*

*Don't we all, of long ago,
By the ruddy fireplace glow,
In the kitchen and the hall,
Those queer, coofllike pranks
recall?*

*Eery shadows were they then-
But to-night they come again;
Were we once more but sixteen,
Precious would be Halloween.*

Ghost House
By Robert Frost

*I Dwell in a lonely house I know
That vanished many a summer
ago, And left no trace but the
cellar walls, And a cellar in which
the daylight falls, And the purple-
stemmed wild raspberries grow.*

*O'er ruined fences the grape-
vines shield. The woods come
back to the mowing field;
The orchard tree has grown one
copse Of new wood and old
where the woodpecker chops;
The footpath down to the well is
healed.*

*I dwell with a strangely aching
heart. In that vanished abode
there far apart On that disused
and forgotten road That has no
dust-bath now for the toad. Night
comes; the black bats tumble
and dart;*

*The whippoorwill is coming to
shout And hush and cluck and
flutter about: I hear him begin far
enough away Full many a time
to say his say Before he arrives
to say it out.*

*It is under the small, dim,
summer star. I know not who
these mute folk are Who share
the unlit place with me--
Those stones out under the low-*

*limbed tree Doubtless bear
names that the mosses mar.*

*They are tireless folk, but slow
and sad, Though two, close-
keeping, are lass and lad,--
With none among them that ever
sings, And yet, in view of how
many things, As sweet
companions as might be had.*

**Jack-O-Lantern
Anonymous**

*Jack-o-lantern, Jack-o-lantern,
You are such a funny sight.*

*As you sit there by the window,
Looking out into the night.*

*You were once a sturdy
pumpkin,
growing on a curly vine.*

*Now you are a Jack-o-lantern,
See your night lights shine.*



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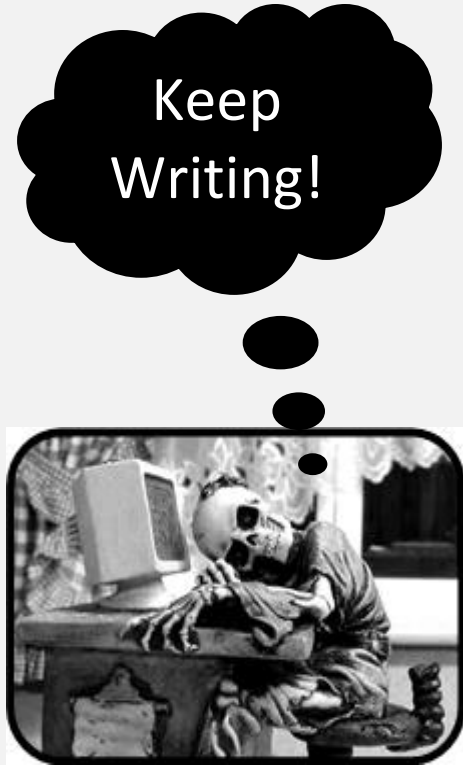
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All communications with the editors and all inquiries concerning this publication should be addressed to:

**Editors of the Portal Pamphlet,
South Regional/Broward College
Library
7300 Pines Blvd.
Pembroke Pines, FL. 33024.
Telephone: 954-201-8870.
mkelly@broward.org**



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