

“Moonlight” by Ben Orthey

Lorenzo clutched a tattered journal to his chest as he skirted the corner of a cathedral. Behind the church, a graveyard extended into the field and woods. The full moon illuminated a woman standing at a fresh grave beside a mound of soil.

She did not turn to see Lorenzo approach. “Sister Wilhelmina?”

She craned her chin. “And you are?”

“I—I was told you have something I need. My wife has fallen terribly ill--”

“So you’ve come for prayer?”

Lorenzo produced a sketch of a necklace. An amulet resembling a blazing sun. Underneath was scrawled CURSE CATCHER. “You may be aware... but this is more than religious jewelry. Powerful curse protection. Have you seen--”

“I can not help you.” She turned back away and clutched a hand to her chest. “Forget this necklace at once. Leave, never return, and speak of it to no one. Do you understand?”

Lorenzo tilted his gaze to a chain along her nape.

He raised a shaking hand. “I’m sorry.”

As he tore the amulet from her neck, Wilhemina shrieked. Lorenzo reeled and fell. Moonbeams silhouetted her body contorting and stretching unnaturally beneath her robes. She turned. The fur and fangs of a much larger beast sprouted from her mangling visage. Lorenzo screamed.

When she finished her meal, she tossed his remains and journal into the grave. The necklace barely fit over her monstrous skull. She swiped soil into the pit until her paws turned back to hands, then finished the task with a shovel.

(Untitled) by Micah Kinard

Pongo hadn’t left Roger’s much since the mysterious disappearance of his children. As for Perdita, her spots seemed to fade as she lay in their bed day after day not touching her bowl.

He’d licked them all day, but he always seemed to find more of that foul earth in his paws... would now there always be some inescapable trace? For while his withering mate slept, Pongo had been about night work in the garden.

Work to exact his wretched mercy... but that’s what it was, he couldn’t forget... for what life is it, to live in fear of being snatched and skinned, never to romp uncollared in the light of day? So a mercy it was, one for only he to know, a weight for one.

As for his dear Perdita, she would live saddened the rest of her days, yes, but at least, in the

far corners of her mind she could play fantasies of their children being found and rescued by loving families.

But Pongo, cursed Pongo, his mind and what threads of soul he had left would be forever in contest between self hatred and righteousness.

“Time heals all wounds” Anita would say... such solace... But, no, time was his foe for it crept by in mulish slowness.

The back window that once bewitched the clock to tick faster was dead to him, that view was dead to him.

For there, beneath the roses, in earthen safe, he locked the bodies away, all 101 of them.

“Misplaced Parts” by Michael

“We found traces of lime in the back of your truck.” Detective Fields held up a bag with white powder in it.

“We use it for gardening, to help soil acidity.” Diane Williams wanted a cigarette, wanted to bite her nails, wanted the tell-tale heart in her head to stop beating.

She went through the checklist for the hundredth time: dispose of the poison, cut up the body, bag the parts, clean the tub, drive to the Northwoods, make the grave in the middle of nowhere on her father’s 800 acre hunting land, dump in the body and the lime, fill it in, and leave.

“What are your men doing with shovels in my garden?”

“One of our Cadaver shepherds is onto a spot of...of interest.” Another detective, wearing blue rubber gloves, handed a bag to Detective Fields as he whispered into his ear. Fields turned to Williams. “What’s this?”

She shrugged. “My husband’s hunting retriever sometimes conceals toys there.”

“This is a section from a tibia.” Detective Fields handed the bag back to the other detective.

“Ms. Williams, place your hands behind your head. You are under arrest for the murder of your husband.”

Williams really wanted that cigarette.

(Untitled) by Jenna

Meek and submissive, an easy choice to claiming her position as the beta of the pack. This is the place where her curiosity would not be questioned... nor her attentiveness to what was beyond the window pane acknowledged.

But unknowingly to her fellow play mates and even her parents was a peculiar and unrevealed truth. A place that she longed to be, even after moments of being separated. Her sanctuary could only be found deep beneath the soil.

For she was more than just a descendant of ferocious beasts or a four legged friend. Her late great grandmother had been used as a sacrifice to form a blood path between animal and magical humans who fell from ships in the sky. To this day the creatures of the forest gather with their fellow other worldly creature friends to celebrate the covenant of two species becoming equals. But not her. She had been taken to be adopted by a family who would never truly understand her and what made her magical. For the fence that confined her would never be enough. Because of this, her search for contentment would last as long as she lived. She only had one piece of memorabilia left. The magical knife used by the other worldly king that took her great grandmothers life. The blood stained blade was the only thing that helped her remember she was more than just an animal. She too was other worldly indeed.

(Untitled) by Jessica

The time had come. The damp, brown earth laid smooth and untouched.

His fur itched and his ear twitched.

“Bailey! Come here!” whistled Parker, the red-headed boy that chose me from the Sad Place.

“Just one paws worth of soil,” Bailey thought.

“Bailey! Come! Now!” his voice agitated.

Bailey huffed and went inside.

...

After dinner, Parker opened the back door and the smell of ozone hit the back of Baileys nostrils. Saliva began to form and was soon pouring out of his wrinkled mouth.

Bailey shot out the door and flew over the stairs, not touching the aged wood. He went to the back left corner of the blue shed and pawed out a small silver disc. He picked it up with his mouth, soil and grit covered his tongue. He found it.

His first family had given it to him before they took him to the sad place.

Sadness filled his heart as he walked over the the virgin ground he had scooped out earlier.

The soil went flying as he unearthed the brown particles. He dropped the silver disc with symbols into the ground and covered it without looking.

Unknown to him, his first given name was engraved there. But he would never know it.

He never knew love until after the Sad Place.

His boy opened the door. Bailey threw up his head and ran towards the sound. Parker scratched his neck, the scar of the embedded collar still pink.

“This. This is love.” He thought.

(Untitled) by Justin

The year: 3542. The world, changed over centuries since the war. Few humans had managed to survive and continue the human race by evading the Sentients. The word, resembles “scientist,” those who created them, but whose meaning was an ironic joke since the Sentients had no traits of its meaning.

Today would change the fundamental balance bringing hope to survivors. Hope much needed as those alive had experienced nothing of the sort.

Jacques was seizing an opportunity to venture out while the Sentients were compelled to their metallic hives. They would remain long enough to reenergize, providing them the stamina to continue their domination for another two months before retreating again. In what had once been a thriving residential community, Jacques noticed an object partially protruding from the ground. When he brushed the years of detritus, he noticed something. Teeth marks from that once ubiquitous family pet, now extinct since the world had changed. Brushing the age from the surface, Jacques makes out barely legible letters on the case: T. A. T. T. O. O. S. A family pet had obscured an old body art tool with its own biological excavation tools. Why? Continuing, he revealed, “The Answer To Total Overtake Of Sentients.” T. A. T. T. O. O. S. The canine bite mark made it unlikely to be a joke. Jacques tucked the container under his jacket. He was determined to uncover its truth. Doing so would set off a chain of events no one could have predicted.

(Untitled) by Brandon

The shovel came to a sharp halt, the sound of the metal impacting a solid object. Intrigued, I took a knee and brushed away the soil compacted around the unknown item. I knew Halloween was next week, but I never imagined I would uncover a skeleton while working in the garden. At least that’s what this appeared to be. It was small, only the size of my index finger. Same shape, too.

My wife was in the kitchen, just cleaning up a recent spill caused by our mischievous German Shepherd. I called from the garden as I walked back to the porch, “hey honey... Come look at this. Should I call someone? The police, maybe?”

She took a quick look and laughed, “I wondered what happened to the leftover chicken wings.” She gave our German Shepherd a playful glare. “Rocky, are you trying to save some for

later?”

I sighed in relief. That answers that. “Maybe our guest is hungry, too?”

I brought the old, mostly-eaten chicken wing down to the basement, shoved it into a small opening in a wooden crate, and started walking back upstairs. A weak, almost whispered, “Thank you” came from the box.

“Goodnight.” I replied as I turned off the basement light. “Happy Halloween.”

(Untitled) by Daniel

As the sun was at its peak, young Miles was finally ready to have a go at the piñata. Today is his birthday. Eight years old and happy as ever. With the piñata tied to a tree branch and his trusty baseball bat in hand he was set to go. After 10 spins Miles was so dizzy he could barely stand. Swing one is a wild miss. Swing two is solid but didn’t break. Swing three he winds back with all his might and the bat crushes the piñata and candy erupts in sugary bliss. As Miles and friends rush to grab as much candy as their little hands can carry, a loud noise echoes close by. Confused as to what the sound was, it was what came next that caused concern. A vast and large cloud of dust filled the air and was heading in their direction. Moments later, alarms on the adults’ cell phones began ringing. Soon videos started popping up talking of a large beast clawing at the earth. You couldn’t make out much other than the large pit of human remains and the beast that caused it. The beast was massive and had two very distinguishable features. He was red and had a tag with the name...”Clifford.”

“Mary” by Garrett

“Mary’d always been a jealous bitch,” he told the dispatcher. He inhaled on his cigarette. Its glow illuminated the woman crumpled on the lawn. “Mhm. Right. I stuck a shovel into her neck.”

He took another drag, flicked the smoke into the night.

“Mary was smart. Clever, y’know. But jealous as a bitch.” He grasped the shovel’s handle, its blade sunk five inches into Mary’s throat. “She bit it clean off.”

He listened again, nodded. “Yep, I found it. Got it here.”

He rummaged in his pocket, retrieved a loose finger. It was stained with soil. On one end of the finger was a shapely nail coated in polish. On the other, a silver ring with a chubby, blood encrusted diamond attached.

“Told Mary it was a surprise, showed it to her last night. I put it on Jenny’s finger when she fell asleep, wanted her to wake to it. But Mary,” he said, bemused, “she bit the damned thing

clean off.”

He twirled it around. “You know how collies are, little gardeners. She planted the finger out here like a god damn flower. Must’ve liked the taste of it because when I got out here she was snarling, mouth was bubblin’. So I grabbed the shovel.”

He paused, nodded once more.

“Right. She stumbled out here, collapsed, but I think she’ll be—wait,” he lowered the phone, listened into the night. “Ope, I think that’s them. Thank you, ma’am. Yep.” He smiled. “I appreciate that, ma’am. You too. G’night.”

(Untitled) by Kevin

After what happened, I wish I never learned to drive. It’s not something you’re ever prepared for. Forty-two years and an eruption of regret later, I’m single for the first time since three weeks after we met.

Our sons were kind; they flew in to help with the move while I recovered from the injuries. I want to save everything of hers. Our sons tell me I need to let go of some things. The only clothing I can persuade them to let me keep are some slippers she wore on our honeymoon. My mind has been consistent enough in deceiving me since the diagnosis, perhaps keeping those next to mine will convince me that she’s actually here.

D’artagnan (I called him “Dart”) is another issue. He’s not been the same since she died. He keeps digging ruts in the yard. The boys tried to explain why, but I keep forgetting. I want to bring him, but they’re worried.

Steve just brought me the slippers. I take one look at them, and I’m looking at her walking down the aisle, holding her close as we fell asleep together for the first time. I fought back tears.

James is in the bathroom rinsing some jewelry. I asked why.

“Looks like Dart misses her too, dad.”

I looked at the slippers again, and one of them was covered in soil. He said it came from one of Dart’s ruts in the back.

“What ruts?”