



Soft Whispers

Special
Halloween
Edition

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WHEN THE DEAD WHISPER

by
J . R . Mc L e m o r e

I walked into the cemetery on a cold, but beautifully sunny day. The sky was deep blue and clear, save for a few wispy cirrus clouds. I was bundled in my wool coat, my breath vaporized before me as though I was exhaling cigarette smoke. I hadn't been here in over twenty years.

* * *

As children, my sister and I played hide-and-seek with our friends among the burial markers. Most of the graves were extremely old, dating back to the early 1800s. One grave had a rock as its marker, with marbles cemented onto it, spelling out a single name—Zina. This mysterious grave was at the back edge of the grounds, beside the forest. Lichens covered most of the headstones, while creeper vines extended from the nearby woods. Large marble monuments dotted the area, marking plots of the wealthier families, but there was one tombstone in particular that stood out from the rest—the statue of a cherub.

This cherub balanced on one foot, extending its arms toward heaven. The angel's face had weathered over the decades and moss grew up its leg. By itself, the sculpture was not scary, but coupled with the legend told by the neighborhood kids, it was ominous.

* * *

In the legend, a prominent citizen, Elizabeth Stanchfield, erected the figure to watch over her deceased infant. Elizabeth and her husband, Graham, tried unsuccessfully for years to have children, until she eventually became pregnant. Her husband was ecstatic when the child was born until he learned that it was not his, but instead, the child of one of his house staff.

While Graham was away on business, Elizabeth had a secret love affair with their groundskeeper. Graham was enraged when he discovered this, and ran out of the house, searching for this gardener. Unable to find him and still furious, Graham went home and killed the illegitimate child.

The local magistrate tried Graham, found him guilty, and sentenced him to death. Elizabeth inherited the estate and the money, some of which she spent to erect the statue over her child's grave.

This was the legend of the cherub that we knew, but some older boys in our neighborhood embellished it.

* * *

My sister and I were with four of our neighborhood friends in the cemetery. We were playing the usual game of hide-and-peek, when Danny Pruitt and his two cronies came upon us. Danny had a reputation as a bully, a boy frequently in trouble at school and, from time to time, with the police. My heart rate doubled when I saw him approach

behind our friend Billy Lehman. Danny stuck his finger in his mouth, wet it, and poked it in Billy's ear, giving him a nasty "Wet Willy".

"What are you babies doing?" Danny asked.

His two friends stood behind him with smirks on their faces.

Billy stepped away, wiping the spittle out of his ear, and not daring turn his back on Danny.

"We're playing hide-an'-seek," my sister, Amy, said. "And we're *not* babies."

The sun was waning in the sky, melting into the western horizon.

"Aren't you scared of ghosts grabbing you?" Robbie Stark, one of Danny's friends, asked us.

"There's no such thing as ghosts. My mom said so," Amy said.

"Oh yeah? Then I guess you're brave enough to listen to the cherub's secret, aren't ya?" Danny said sneering.

It was obvious we had no idea what Danny was talking about as we exchanged glances at each other. Our faces had quizzical looks because none of us knew this part of the legend.

"Don't tell me you've never heard the story of the baby's cherub," Danny said.

Again, we each looked around and then back at Danny. We shook our heads.

He explained to us that if you put your ear to the statue's lips and cupped your hands, the statue would whisper a secret to you at midnight on the infant's birthday.

He did not tell us what the secret was, however. We asked him if he had ever been brave enough to do this himself. He said he had and that if we wanted to know what the secret was, we would have to do this ourselves.

Finally, Danny and his degenerate entourage started to leave, but not before Robbie Stark snatched our friend Lenny's baseball cap. They high-tailed it through the burial markers with Lenny following them, calling for them to give back his hat.

The sun was below the trees now, making the graveyard appear monochrome. Amy grabbed my arm and said, "C'mon. We gotta go eat supper."

We started down the path toward the road. As we walked past the cherub, Amy stopped to look at the grave. While I stared at the statue, she checked the birth date on the child's headstone. She told me the child's birthday was only three months away, in November.

* * *

We were lying in bed on the night of the infant's birthday when I heard Amy's bedsprings creak as she climbed from under her covers. I saw that she was dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt.

"Where're you goin'?" I whispered to her.

"Shhh. I'm goin' to the cemetery to see if Danny Pruitt's a liar."

"You know he is," I protested and told her mom and dad would spank her if they caught her out at this hour.

"They won't know unless you rat on me, you little snitch," she said.

"I wanna come."

"No. You'll get us caught for sure."

"No I won't."

“Yes you will. Just stay here—”

“I’ll call for dad,” I told her, slowly raising my voice.

She plopped onto my mattress and clamped her hand over my mouth.

“Okay, but you better be real quiet,” she said, releasing me to get dressed.

We crept out of our bedroom window and ran to the graveyard. The moon was waxing and shone bright enough so that we didn’t need flashlights, which was a good thing, because we neglected to bring any.

I have to admit, I was scared walking among the graves at night, even with Amy along. I kept trying to coax her into going back home, but she wouldn’t have it.

We stopped in front of the statue of the cherub. The moonlight glistened on the figure as if it had sequined skin. Amy held her watch up to her face and pressed the side button. I saw its green glow.

“What time is it?” I asked her.

“It’s 11:58,” she replied.

I felt fidgety, as if eyes watched us from the shadows of the nearby trees. I tried once again to persuade Amy to leave, but she was committed to fulfilling this task.

At midnight, Amy pressed her ear to the marble, cupped her hands, and listened. It was only a couple of seconds, but I remember quivering in the cold night air, feeling those seconds drag on for minutes.

I nearly soiled myself when Amy yelped and bolted down the path between the graves, running for the road. My heart was racing and my legs moved like pistons. I was sure someone or something was behind us, giving chase. Of course, when I turned and

looked back there was nothing there. None of that mattered though, because Amy was well ahead of me and I was not about to slow down or stop, so I kept running.

She was visibly upset. By what, I didn't know, until we were on the road and she told me what happened. She said the stone figure whispered a date in her ear, that she felt the figure's lips move. I thought she was just trying to scare me.

After that, we never talked about that night. She never told me the date the cherub whispered to her, but I found out one day while I was sneaking peeks at her diary. I saw where she had written her account of that incident, and I realized she wasn't kidding about it. She had jotted down the date. It was January 12, 2008; such a long way off, I remember thinking.

* * *

I hadn't given much thought to that date or what happened that night in a couple of decades. Childhood is always fraught with such nonsense, or so one would think. At least I thought so up until three days ago, the same day I got that dreaded phone call from my mom. You see, mom called me on January 12, and yes, the year is 2008. She called to tell me that my sister had died. Today, we are gathered for her funeral. I weep dearly for my sister, but I can't help but think: *when the dead whisper, you may not want to hear what they have to say.*

About J.R.: J. R. McLemore is the author of numerous short horror stories and three novels that are currently in the works. His short story, Jason's Last Wish, was published in the June issue of Static Movement. When not writing, he enjoys playing his bass guitar. He lives in Rome, Georgia with his wife, Lara, and stepdaughter, Bonnie. You can find more information about him at, <http://www.jrmclemore.com>

ECHOES

by
Laura Mercurio Ebohon

Shivers of Fear, like a cold blade
cutting through my soft skin,
Tears like ruby drops of warm blood
descend in a slow and endless
chain of little diamonds of pain.
The dark menacing figure
advances, slim and bold
eyes like sharp nails
Acute shudders like needles
in the back of my head
sting, hurt, freeze,
Echoes of tortured souls
arrive through thick walls
to torment my ears
I see demons
at the end of dark shafts
embracing a shaken soul
possessed
by the evil desire of more blood.
Escape is a far away dream
I am blocked in this nightmare!
I run and look back
just to see again the shadow
of my persecutor getting closer
Flashbacks and colors of lights
soon become frames of old pictures
torn to shreds of Life just before Death

About Laura:

Laura Mercurio Ebohon's book "If I look inside" , "Se guardo dentro" in Italian, will be out in November, also as an e-book. Published by in both Italian & English by Gruppo Albatros Il filo [<http://www.ilfiloedizioni.it/>] (Italy)

I walk but I don't know where I'm going.
I slip, stumble and draw myself up.

[...]

And I keep on walking but I don't know where I am going.

(Walking)

These verses allude to a situation of deep bewilderment and they open Laura Mercurio Ebohon's book. The author tells us immediately that she has lost her way, she has fallen... but she also shows us the strength inside to get up and eventually loose the way again, because maybe this is the essence of living.

If I look inside, like the title suggests, is a collection of poems, written in a very intimate dimension: they are filled with words caressing the pages like a dancing vortex of sensations, emotions, sometimes anguishes that emerge from her memory, uprooted from any metrical conditioning, free from any rhetorical oppression. In this magic space drawn by the poetic word, reality does not loom over, it lives in a parallel dimension. From the preface by Giuseppe Palladino www.riscrivimi.it.

Laura also writes a blog

http://apps.facebook.com/blognetworks/blog/if_i_look_inside_verses_in_motion_2009/

(on FB to follow) or

<http://iamlauramercurio.com>.

The Ones Who Would Not Die

by
Kristine Olg Muslim

1.

Dorian

This is the underworld where nothing ever sleeps.
The ground underneath is borne of my brothers'
pain; they always try to make it here before they turn
into ashes. There is so much suffering in this room.
The weakened ones have fed on rats and lesser
creatures, but soon they will learn to hunt again.
Nothing but dust here in these silent empty halls
where untouched portraits hang on white walls.
The air is stale, forever still. This is our temple.
Outside, everything else recedes and is forgotten,
but not us and you, Dorian, and immortality.

2.

Mina

"Is this your wife? What a lovely throat."
-- from *Nosferatu* (1922)

I would lick you free from sin, drink
you weightless and shriveling like
the husks in that corner which were
once your untouched forefathers.

They never watched the full moon
quite like the way we did tonight.
I was always grateful for this
affliction, always madly in love.

3.

In the halls

With corrupted youthful skins
sheathed in black lace and tuxedos,
they danced in banquet halls

and swirled bloody marys.

No talk of curses and myths
about wooden stakes here.

A whirlwind of shades: red and black
amongst the most beautiful ones.

We hear the violin strains in our dreams,
the echoes undiminished by time.

4.

Origins

Tucked in worn caskets to endure
the years, you trade, through this
lifetime and the next, one
ageless soul for every one.

More than human, you and your
memories are incomplete: recurring
nights of carnage and the thrill
of the hunt at certain phases

of the moon. Everything else is just
a montage from another lifetime.
Remember these myths for
these are all you will ever have.

5.

The temples in our midst

....to exhume those who were
beyond decay,
colder than the earth

....to hear the distant footsteps
of the shapeshifting ones chased
across the winding staircases
of the towers where they rested
their bones.

About Kristine: Kristine Ong Muslim has been published in numerous publications worldwide, including *Beeswax Magazine*, *Boxcar Poetry Review*, *Fifth Wednesday*, *GlassFire Magazine*, *Grasslimb*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Otoliths*, *Ottawa Arts Review*, *Pank*, *Quay*, *Riddle Fence*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, and *T-Zero*. She has been nominated three times for the Pushcart Prize and twice for the Science Fiction Poetry Association's Rhysling Award.

The Book Club

by
Lily Mulholland

Fran ran her white-gloved right hand along the smooth spine of the book she held carefully in her left. She couldn't believe she was holding a very rare first edition imprint of a Henry James. She loved his work and had coveted *The Two Magics* but knew she couldn't afford the asking price for a first.

'May I open it?' she asked its owner.

'If you wish. My interest is in the covers. I don't much care for the contents.'

Fran paused for a moment, taking in the man's expression. He was looking at her quite strangely, with a faraway look in his eyes. She remembered to keep her face impassive, recalling the feedback she'd had at work recently. They'd had to undergo the torturous process of a three-sixty degree review and several of her co-workers at the library had commented – anonymously of course – that they felt Fran looked down on them. That she often wore a look of contempt on her face when they were talking to her. Fran's cheeks burned with embarrassment at the recollection. She didn't think badly of her colleagues. She just often couldn't hear them properly and had to concentrate extra hard to understand what they were saying.

When she realised she was blushing, she felt even more uncomfortable, knowing the man would think she was blushing because of what he'd said to her.

'Get a grip, Fran.' And now she was talking to herself. And all the while the man was watching her. She carefully opened the book and quickly read a few lines of her favourite James story, *The Turn of the Screw*. She closed the book and placed it carefully back on the stand.

'It's in wonderful condition,' she said to the man, avoiding his inscrutable gaze, as she removed the cotton gloves.

'To the untrained eye, perhaps. When I purchased it the cover had been water damaged. If you look closely you will see that the leather is perishing and beyond repair. Refinishing my collection is my greatest passion.'

At the word 'passion' Fran looked up at the man. His face had taken on a different appearance. *A new visage*. He looked entirely different. Younger.

'Would you like to see some of the other books I've refinished?'

‘Oh, yes please.’

He beckoned to her to follow. She did as she was bid and walked through a series of interconnected rooms. Her eyes opened wider as she was transported through each room, for every wall was lined floor to ceiling with shelving – each filled with books. When they reached the farthest room, Fran gasped audibly. Before was a room whose four walls were full of rare books, each covered in creamy leather embossed with gold. The effect was almost overwhelming.

The man turned and looked at her.

‘You have a good appreciation of beauty. These books form the heart of my collection. I keep them in this special room which was built especially to house them. It is climate controlled, moisture controlled and sound proofed.’

‘Sound proofed?’ Fran thought to herself.

‘I like to read in peace. I do not like interruptions,’ he said.

It was as though the man could read her mind. A chill ran from her head to her toes and back again.

‘Are you cold, my dear?’ asked the man.

‘A little.’

‘Come, let us have something to drink and get down to business.’

‘When will the others be here?’

‘Others?’ His response to her question trailed off as he led the way back through the series of rooms and down the stairs to what she supposed would be called the parlour. It was that kind of house.

‘Here, have a sherry.’ The man offered a small cut crystal glass to Fran which she took obediently.

‘And you must try this *panforte*. I had it imported from Siena. I discovered it on one of my book buying visits.’ Again, Fran took the plate that was offered to her without demurring. He spoke with an authority she did not question.

‘So,’ she tried again, ‘Who else is coming this evening?’

‘Who else?’

‘Yes,’ she said, a whisper of exasperation entwining itself around her words, ‘to the book club meeting?’

‘You’re it, my dear.’

‘Oh. I thought...’

‘Drink your sherry.’

Fran was starting to feel a little light-headed. ‘I really don’t think I should.’

‘Drink.’ It was more a command than an entreaty.

‘I don’t ...’ Fran’s voice faded as she slumped back in the couch, her plate and glass tumbling towards the hand-cut silk rug that spread across the room like freshly spilled blood.

Fran awoke. She was cold. She tried to move but her head felt heavy and her body was leaden. Unconsciousness reclaimed her.

‘And now, my dear, let us get down to business.’

Vincent turned the girl over onto her back and slit her shirt open from hem to neck. He parted the fabric and ran his hand over the skin of the girl’s ample back. He was pleased. The girl’s back was unblemished. He had chosen wisely, a librarian devoting her life to books and reading. No freckled flesh, no tattoos. Young women these days were often disappointing.

Holding his scalpel aloft for a moment, Vincent took the time to ensure he made his first incision in exactly the right place. The new leather for his precious Joyce had to be absolutely perfect.

Able's Fire

by
Dawn Allen

The fire flickered, crackling like aged paper as the warmth of the room overwhelmed Able Cain. In spite of the heat, chills racked his frail frame. Midnight stood inches away. His seventieth year had arrived too fast, and he was facing the end. A nice peaceful heart attack or stroke, like so many of his compatriots in business and industry, would be preferable to what he had to look forward to this night.

Aging had proven an ugly reckoning. He spent more time with doctors than he did alone. His pill container boasted twenty-five sections, only one was empty. He drank fiber, ate fiber, and even gagged down prune juice but hadn't had a decent shit in twelve months. That was probably apropos. He'd been told he was full of it for enough years. The bravado of his youth had faded as well. Tonight fear replaced it – fear bordering on hysteria.

Tonight, when his debt came due, he would die.

Able made his first million by 25, bought and sold twelve companies breaking his first billion by 31, and it had all been because of a chance encounter, one he hadn't taken seriously. At the time, he was finishing college, dead broke, and wondering how he could maximize his profits with the least amount of work. He and his college roommate headed to a bar on the outskirts of town, a white, square building squatting in the middle of a parking lot.

They had gone down a ramp into the basement. He could still remember the smells. Cigarette smoke hovered and the distinctive odor of sweaty men on the troll had curled his nose. The bar was sticky to the touch so he sat with his arms in his lap wondering why Seth always wanted to come here.

Harvey the bartender slammed two grimey mugs in front of them and watched as they threw back the beer.

“Seth, that dude you been asking about? Mephisto? He’s here.” Harvey pointed to a booth at the back. The corner was so dark, they couldn’t see the man sitting there.

Tick.

Able jumped as a log fell, sparks flying through the thick air of his cabin. The log landed with a crack but another sound caught his attention – loud, rhythmic.

The mantle clock. The pendulum swung back and forth with a click clack, cadenced and constant.

Tick. Tock.

He narrowed his eyes, blinking back sweat, or was it tears? Finally, the hands came into focus.

11:55.

So close. Seventy and out.

At 24, this had seemed so interminably far away. Impossibly distant. With youthful

abandon, he had squandered the time away.

Sell your soul. Just a phrase, a colloquialism if you will.

Seth had led the way that night, and Able followed. He scanned the dirty tables, filthy floor, and slimy occupants. He shuffled from side to side avoiding contact of any kind. At the booth, a man stood guard. At roughly seven foot tall, he blocked view of the booth's occupant.

Tick.Tock.Tick.Tock.

Able ran his trembling hand through snow-white locks. Was it his imagination or was the

ticking of the clock speeding up as it inched toward 12:00?

Inch by inch it came, with the interminable patience of death.

11:56.

Something in the nonverbal exchange between Seth and the guard had caused him to step aside. The man they were here to see was beyond nondescript.

“Gentlemen. What can I do for you?”

“We hear you can guarantee success in business.” Seth glowed in the dark corner and Able suffered the quiver of someone walking across his grave.

“Perhaps. What is it you seek?” The man's face was shadowed by a ball cap but the lower part of his face was angular and bearded.

Able struggled to see the man's eyes but he kept them hidden.

Seth pointed to Able. “He's been offered an entry level job but he wants to...shall we say skip some levels on his way to the top.”

“And you? What do you want?”

Able had tried to make eye contact with Seth but he looked away.

“My friend will take care of me. His gains will be mine as well.” Seth said.

The man nodded and he and Seth studied each other. Able had the distinct impression he had missed something.

Now, of course, he knew what that something was. At the time, he made his date with the devil unaware of Seth's machinations.

And Mephisto had made good.

Able thought of the things he'd accumulated over his life; an impressive portfolio, a formidable estate, including this cabin – worth a small fortune – the mansion in Connecticut, the

cottage and boat at Martha's Vineyard, and his money. His buddy Seth? Would now have his own personal fortune built on Able's back and he'd have Able's as well. Irony or duplicity? Did it matter now?

The clock ratcheted up a notch louder.

Its pendulum sped up, racing back and forth in the frame, slamming from wall to wall no longer with the beauty or rhythm it once had. Now, it kept time with the anger of an innocent man on death row.

Able's chest tightened, and he placed a mottled hand against it willing his lungs to continue the business of breathing. Sweat streamed down his grizzled neck.

The pendulum slammed. Able jumped.

11:57.

The wrinkled pockets of skin under his eyes gave way as tears tumbled down his cheeks. No wife, no mistress, no children. His life was reduced to this: nothing.

An eternity of nothing.

If he was lucky, nothing.

What must hell be like? A wasteland? A desert? Frozen tundra? Ugly smells rolled across his senses as if he were already there. The smell of rotting meat mingled with that of harsh chemicals, like formaldehyde or bleach, burning his sinuses.

Again, the pendulum slammed. With each strike, his startled jump increased.

11:58.

His heart slammed against the wall of his chest as his lungs struggled for air. His vision failed him.

He clutched his chest. His ears ached from the clamoring of the clock and sound continued to swell around him. The fire sizzled, then died out but within seconds flared up again.

The room shrunk.

11:59.

Pale, rheumy eyes stared at the fire – flames burned brighter, hotter, leaping higher and higher.

The pendulum slammed a final time, busting through the clock wall and sending wooden shards through the air. It spun across the room, crashing into the doorframe.

Able's heart vaulted into the space between his eyeballs and he squeezed them tight. 12:00.

It was over.

In the space of seconds, he flashed on his grief at the choices he'd made. The people he'd betrayed, the one who had betrayed him. Expectation and rage strangled him;

sweat galloped freely down his neck and back. His knees trembled and goosebumps erupted on his mottled skin.

Tick.Tock.

The tick of the clock broke through his senses, and he chanced a glance. The sight of the pendulum swinging rhythmically to and fro startled him.

12:01.

He looked around the cabin. The fire was dying down; the air beginning to chill, but he was still here.

He was alive.

Maybe he'd been wrong. Maybe Seth...

He began to laugh, almost maniacally, unable to stop himself as relief washed over him.

Suddenly, his chest seized, and he tugged at his shirt ripping it away, struggling to breathe. The giant hand squeezing his heart bore down, and he doubled over with the paroxysm of pain.

“Arghh!!” He screamed to the room at large.

12:02.

His heart stopped.

About Dawn: Dawn Allen is a writing instructor and the founding member of a critique group, Novel Clique. Since 2000, while completing one novel and an anthology of dramatic skits, she attended writer's conferences and presented writing workshops. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Nebraska.

HALLOWEEN

by
R . K . S I N G H

Between bare branches
two pigeons share silence
All Hallows' Day

Painting a dragon
with broken crayons—
Winnie's masked face

Making holes
in the wooden cross
white ants

A cloud-eagle
curves to the haze
in the west

A trespasser
in his own garden—
masked worshipper

Standing behind
the window bars observes
darkness in shapes

About R.K. Singh: Have been teaching English language skills to students of earth and mineral sciences at a leading technical university in India and practicing poetry for the last three decades; have published 34 books, including 13 collections of poems.

All Hallows Eve

by
Darra Ross

On this hallowéd eve
from the depths of beyond
stepped a creature of dread
from a chasm that yawned

His fingers were crooked
but masked tensile steel
his long stringy legs
had no tender heel

In his left hand he carried
an instrument of pain
while his right hand strummed
chords of an eerie refrain

When he opened his mouth
to sing his strange lament
chills riddled my spine
and turned my heart to cement

I longed to run South
to a much warmer clime
but North was his goal
and I was chained to his time

With notes from his throat
he bade me to follow
and in leaden despair
my soul newly hollow,

I could only obey
in spite of deep dread
to go in his shadow
wherever he led

into the deep night
far beyond all I knew
I was dragged by his song
and his gathering crew

of misfits and demons
who joined on the way
with their crude devices
the music held sway

At long last we reached
a clearing of sorts
bright moonlight revealing
their sordid cavorts

in a dance to the darkness
their wild music rose high
and the crazed guitar man
unleashed a mad cry

In the thunderous pause
I now understood
what he brought me to witness
as no one else could

He could only release
his pain once a year
and he needed the soul
that to him was once dear

His message delivered
they all faded from sight
far away dawn was breaking
and canceling the night

Now I knew the identity
of the crazed guitar man
I knew him as only
a good widow can

His death by his demons
had long haunted me
he came back on this night
to set my love free

JACK'S BAD DAY

by
Jim Wisneski

It was what felt like the worst day of Jack Hamilton's life. That was until he stumbled up to his front porch and found another dead body lying there. This time, it really pissed him off.

"Another one?" he whispered under his breath.

He swallowed hard, still tasting the sting of whiskey. Jack kept a bottle of cheap whiskey under the seat of his truck. It was convenient; and it complemented his new found drinking habit.

The dead body didn't piss him off, it was the fact that it was still daylight out. What if a kid saw this mess? Or a cop? How do you explain to a cop that a demon lives under your house and has a compulsion to mangle people? Top that off with sour whiskey breath and Jack could find himself spending a lot of time in jail.

And then the bodies would really pile up.

Jack hurried and opened the door to the house. He grabbed the mangled remains of what used to be a person's hand and pulled it into the house. Just as the tips of the toes crossed the doorframe, the door slammed shut.

The house smelled of dust and mold. Half the lights didn't work and Jack never had to urge to change them. He wasn't sure how electricity and running water was available to the house as it wasn't Jack's house.

It was the demon's house. And it was all part of the deal.

A while back, actually it was winter, Jack found himself almost frozen to death on a park bench in the middle of January. He decided just before what could have been his last breath to walk. Coming down an empty sidewalk he heard a voice. But the voice wasn't outside but rather in his mind. A minute later he was inside the house. The demon that seemed to overtake his mind explained what Jack called "the rules".

Jack could live in the house as long as he cleaned up the bodies that demon consumed. It sounds a little crazy, but Jack would have died that night if it weren't for the demon.

Jack's job was to take the remains and bury them in the basement. It was a dirt floor basement and each time Jack placed a body there, it disappeared. He assumed that the demon killed the victim and left it on the front step like a cat does with a bird. Once

buried, Jack would go upstairs to sleep. The investment in whiskey was needed after the first time he heard the demon eat the body.

The whiskey also kept the demon at bay inside Jack's mind. Outside the house, Jack was free. But at the start of the sidewalk that led to the house, the demon entered his mind. Most of the time, the demon was quiet. It was the notion of the demon being there that bothered Jack.

Jack stumbled away from the body and walked into the kitchen. He tore open a cabinet and found a fresh bottle of whiskey. Over the passing months, he learned how to open the bottle using one hand. His thumb would twist of the cap and clank to the floor.

"It's still light out," he murmured. "You're gonna get me in big trouble."

The demon spoke. It wasn't an evil sound as one might expect. It wasn't high pitched either. It was just a voice.

"I feed when I feed."

The voice began repeating itself. The demon often did this. Jack began to drink the whiskey heavily. The pain of his throat burning wasn't nearly as bad as the demon repeating the line over and over. Each time the demon said it, Jack swore he could feel the demon moving around his body. One time, he felt his heart beat in unison with the words. The next, he legs shook with the words.

A minute later, the bottle was empty and the voice was gone. Jack smiled and threw the bottle against the wall. Glass shattered atop of the fresh corpse. He turned back to face the kitchen and slid on a small puddle of whiskey and spit that had formed under him. Tired and drunk, Jack fell to floor. His head hit the counter on the way down and it knocked him out cold.

Jack regained consciousness in darkness. He was no longer in the kitchen, but in bed.

The body, he thought. I didn't finish the job.

"I need to feed."

Jack blinked and slowly the demon formed around him. Small hands stuck of out the apparition and red eyes glowed at Jack. A mouth of fangs somehow glistened even though there wasn't any light. Each fang got longer and sharper as the demon's mouth opened. Jack closed his eyes, preparing for the worst.

He hadn't followed the rules.

When Jack opened his eyes again, the demon was gone. It was still dark and he wasn't in bed anymore. He was on a hard surface. He felt cold. Just as he was about to turn his

head, he felt something grab his legs. Slowly he was pulled into his own house. Jack tried to scream. He tried to kick. But he couldn't. He shifted his eyes down and saw that his body was mangled almost into pieces. He wasn't sure how much time had passed since he was in bed.

"Another body?" he heard a voice say.

Jack moved his eyes up and saw a man hovering over him as was guided step by step down into the basement.

Once the dirt covered Jack's face everything became dark for good as the demon rustled up from underneath him and came out to feed.

About Jim: Jim is an author/poet living in Pennsylvania with his wife, son, baby-on-the-way, two cats, two fish, and a hermit crab. Visit his personal blog at www.WizWorld.wordpress.com. Listen to his podcasted stories and novels at www.JimCast.wordpress.com. AND don't forget to visit his writers site at www.WritersnWriters.blogspot.com.

This next part is a real treat for us. This is something new started by Jim Wisneski called A Line at a Time (twitter search: #alineatotime). The basis is pretty simple: you look at a picture and then write one line about it and send it to Jim either through Twitter, Facebook, or SMS Texting.

This is the first one ever done, so please enjoy it.



A restless path of time

Twisting vines, strangling; your voice slips from my mind

The road unpaved and sights untouched by the new
enchanted way, leads to the cords of my soul

Crestfallen memories drown in a past that won't let go
and this walk is like a still frame with no space or time

Framed by nature, solemn and sublime

Dust beneath and branches above, I inhabit the middle
helplessly, hopelessly - time's narrative lost

The bramble-framed house sits in a tableaux, which is testament to lives lived long ago

A dusty path to nowhere calls

Where storms shall be no more

THE CONTRIBUTORS:

A restless path of time (@wisneski, www.writersnwriters.blogspot.com)
Twisting vines, strangling; your voice slips from my mind (@CascadeLily, www.tensecondsaday.blogspot.com)
The road unpaved and sights untouched by the new (@marisabirns, www.oalice.blogspot.com)
enchanted way, leads to the cords of my soul (@LauraLME, www.iamlauramercurio.com)
Crestfallen memories drown in a past that won't let go (@JodiMacArthur, www.jodimacarthur.blogspot.com)
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A FINAL NOTE:

THANK YOU to everyone who submitted to this special issue. We hope you enjoy it as we plan on having more in the near future!

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