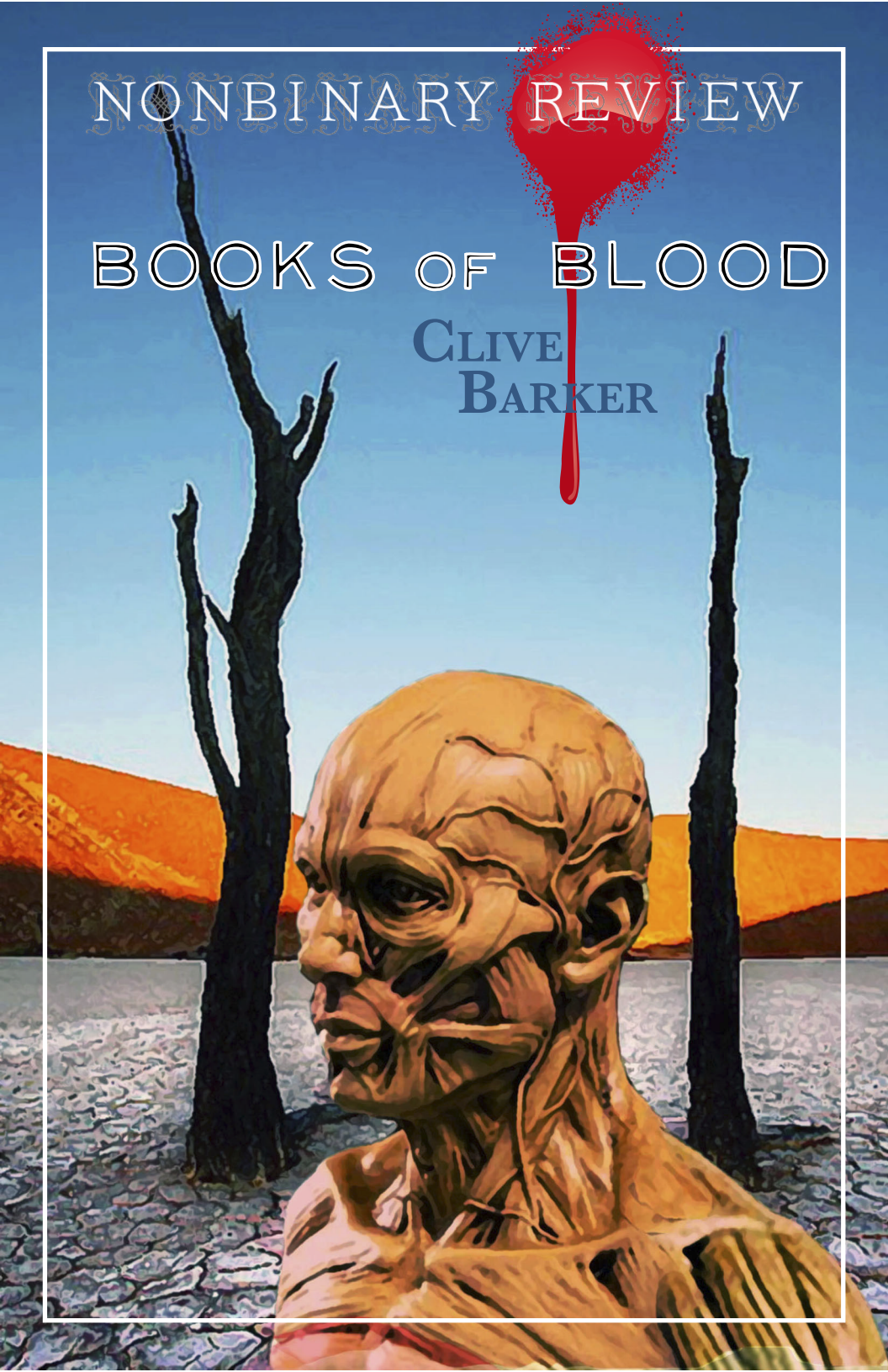


NONBINARY REVIEW

BOOKS OF BLOOD

CLIVE  
BARKER



NonBinary Review #20  
Edited by Lise Quintana



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# NONBINARY REVIEW

Issue Twenty

Clive Barker's  
*The Books of Blood*



Zoetic Press

2019

# NONBINARY REVIEW

NonBinary Review  
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# The Elevated Horror of Clive Barker

Brian Collins

My introduction to the world of Clive Barker was an odd one. I was grounded for some forgotten infraction (safe bet: talking in class and getting a bad conduct report) but had seen promos for *Nightbreed* premiering on cable, and didn't want to miss it. So I did what any intelligent 11 year old would do: snuck downstairs and watched it on mute. Or, should I say, watched SOME of it—after a while it became clear that this was no typical horror/monster movie and I would need the dialogue to make any sense of it.

Over the next few years I would do my duty as a budding horror fan and check out *Hellraiser*, *Candyman*, and *Lord of Illusions*, all of which I tried really hard to like as much as I did the usual slasher and killer doll movies I enjoyed. But as I eventually realized, Barker's work—both on the screen and on the page—requires a certain degree of intelligence and maturity to fully appreciate, and I wasn't quite there yet (some might say I'm still not). It wasn't until I was in my twenties that I really started to “get” his work, and was elated to realize that there was a lengthy bibliography that I could start to properly explore.

As a horror movie fan, naturally the majority of his books and stories that I've read are the ones that have been adapted by himself or others: *The Hellbound Heart*, *The Forbidden*, *Cabal...* these stories became movies that I couldn't fully wrap my head around as a kid, but are now among my favorites, and it was a thrill to go back and relish in the source material. Likewise, reading the (as yet un-adapted) likes of *Mister B. Gone* and *Coldheart Canyon* (a massive text I have jury duty to thank for getting through) gave me even more insight into how creative and imaginative this one mind could be, something that I couldn't have gleaned from the 20-30 minutes of silent *Nightbreed* I saw that gave me my first impression of the man.

And he hasn't stopped with books and movies; he's also an accomplished artist and theater director, hell he's even created original stories for video games (and lent his voice to one of them) and popped up in a few cameo roles for his friends. However, if

one were to list all his jobs, “author” would probably top the list, not just for their accessibility but because of how much more work his stories have inspired over the years.

His six volume *Books of Blood* series is the easiest thing to recommend to a newcomer; not only is it where you’ll find the source stories for a number of the films you’ve probably seen or at least heard of (*Candyman* began life as “The Forbidden” in Volume 5, aka *In The Flesh*), but it’s also where you’ll see the full range of his imagination at play, even within one volume. Some stories are funny, others more dramatic than horror, and others might make you blush. But each and every one of them will almost certainly tap into your right brain and get it to start churning out images and ideas of your own.

That’s definitely what happened to the authors behind the following stories and poems, all of which are inspired by one or more of the *Books of Blood* stories. It was a true gift to read them all; as with Barker’s work itself, they ran the gamut from fun to terrifying, personal to otherworldly. And they also served as a good excuse for me to revisit a few of the stories, so I want to personally thank them for that bit of inspiration. I suspect they will do the same for you.



# **Part One**

An accompaniment to Clive Barker's  
*The Books of Blood*



# Maji

Fabiyas MV

*This selection is paired with "The Books of Blood" by Clive Barker*

Thachu fears the dark lonely nights. She lives in a three-storied mansion with countless empty rooms. Only the ground floor gets human warmth. A flock of temple doves live on the first floor, whereas an owl is the sole occupant of the top story. Jouhar comes to stay with his grandmother in the evenings. But the presence of a grandson aged eleven doesn't get rid of her fear at night. She thinks of appointing a night watchman.

Thachu's husband had passed away following a car accident. His body was not brought back to India, his homeland. It was buried in the Dubai desert. Though he could heap up immense wealth, he had forgotten to live. He spent most of his life in Dubai. Even when her husband was alive, Thachu had to live as a widow. Similar widows were plenty on the bank of Kanoli canal.

Thachu cannot turn down Maji's pleadings. He has come in search of a part-time job. Soon he becomes the night-watchman in her mansion. He finds the house very comfortable. It is serene, secure, and solitary. Here he comes across Jouhar for the first time. They are attracted to each other like magnet and iron. A friendship thrives between Maji and Jouhar in Thachu's old house. The boy always gives his friend some sweets or parched peanuts. Maji is not accustomed to say "thanks", but he eats it voraciously.

Jouhar won't come today. Since his father has gone to Cochin for a business purpose, his mother is alone at home. Maji is disgusted. He feels like he is sitting lonely, on the barren surface of the moon. And he goes to sleep early, hugging his cotton pillow.

Maji is turning and twisting on his mat, while the wizened woman Thachu is fast asleep in her bedroom. Quite unexpectedly, he hears footsteps. He gets up, sharpens his ears. "Who's there?" He climbs up the wooden staircase softly.

He looks around. Seeing no one, he comes down. Again, the

same sound from upstairs. Petrified, Maji climbs up again holding his breath. He sees a discarded cane chair swaying in a corner. All the hairs on his body rise. Rustling of the leaves makes the air more frightening.

Maji goes to his mat. He has become restless with fright. Now he feels the smell of surgical spirit in the air. All of a sudden a window slams shut in the above floor. Temple doves flutter their wings. He simply shuts his eyes and lies on the mat burying his head under the black-streaked red pillow.

Next evening. Jouhar comes as usual.

“What a horrible night!” Maji can’t wait to narrate his frightening experience in his typical style.

Jouhar is all ears; he sits with awe and interest. “What was it, really?” Jouhar says. The boy cannot control his curiosity.

Maji doesn’t reply. Instead, he sprawls on his mat. He is between reality and fantasy. “Your grandma’s calling. Go and sleep, my buddy.”

Jouhar goes to sleep beside his grandma. The boy racks his brain until he zones out.

June has appeared with the monsoon clouds on the Kanoli bank. It rains cats and rats, creating a tiny stream in the yard. Maji comes holding a black umbrella. He notices a violet light moving in the air. It is a tiny comet in shape. He stops on the way and rubs his eye-lids. “Yeah, it’s real”, he whispers. He has never seen such a moving light before. It is a poisonous snake flying with a stone that twinkles like a star in its mouth. The light vanishes in a minute. Afraid, he walks quickly.

Jouhar makes paper boats to float in the monsoon water in the yard, while Thachu rests in an arm-chair on the veranda. The water level in the paddy field in front rise. Frogs croak, breaking the silence. Thunder rumbles.

Maji comes, panting.

“What happened?” the boy asks.

Maji is anxious to tell the boy about what he watched on the way. He begins his narration, but his words stumble over fear and wonder.

Then Thachu puts in, “Nonsense! Don’t frighten us!”

Maji winks at the boy, makes a gesture with his right index finger, implying that he will relate the remaining part of the event later; then withdraws into pin-drop silence. Maji believes that the snake has flown away to the Arabian Desert beyond the sea, and that it aims to hide the stone somewhere in the boundless sand. He is immersed in thoughts about snakes.

Jouhar usually spends his day drooping in the class room. Meanwhile, Maji walks about on the Kanoli bank. Sometimes, he catches crabs, prawns, and pearl spot fish from the canal. He always charges fifty rupees, irrespective of his quantity, which is really a good buy for his customers.

Maji has come earlier than usual today. He is sipping a cup of black tea with lemon juice mixed in it. He eyes Jouhar playing with a yellow rubber ball beneath an old palm tree, nearly a hundred footsteps away.

“Hey, Jouhar! It’s not a good place to play in the evening!” Maji screeches.

“What’s the matter?” The boy stops playing and comes to his bosom friend.

“I don’t want to frighten you, Jouhar. But I’m telling this for your safety.” Maji’s voice is heavy. “I heard it from my dad. When a wood-cutter had tried to cut that palm tree once, it shed blood. It was really a shocking scene. The wood-cutter dropped his axe and fled from the place, crying out, “BLOOD, BLOOD...”

Jouhar is silent.

Maji says, “Jouhar, don’t you hear an owl hooting now?”

“Yah, I do.”

“This owl spends the daytime in the top floor of our house. When the darkness falls, it goes to the palm tree, where it stays the

whole night. Its hooting”, Maji goes on in a grave voice, “foretells the death of somebody here or there. It often hoots at midnight.”

Suddenly Jouhar gets anxious about his grandmother. He prays for her good health.

“Don’t worry, Jouhar. An owl’s hooting before the midnight isn’t disastrous.”

Maji always likes to keep aloof from society. He is a tall lean man with a gloomy countenance. He has only one friend on this earth – Jouhar. Only when he meets this friend does Maji become eloquent; then his melancholy shade vanishes from his countenance.

A breezy night. Maji wanders on the canal bank. There are stars like beautiful blooms in the sky. He loses himself in the moonlight. He gets a vision of his mother, who drowned in the canal, while collecting black oysters three years ago. She sits on the embankment with a smiling face. She calls his name, “Maji” softly. Then clouds cover his mother and moon. Slowly, darkness spreads around. An owl starts hooting loudly. His mother’s voice is lost in a thunderous sound. Maji’s eyes get moist with rain and pain. And he returns to the old house.

“Why are you gloomy?” Jouhar says.

“You can’t follow it. You’re a child” Maji says centuries-old ready-made words to hide a secret from a child. A few things in a man’s life die concealed. Maji goes to his mat and buries his secret sorrows under the pillow.

Jouhar has really been flummoxed by his friend’s unusual behaviour. Fumbling in the darkness, he reaches near the bed where his grandma sleeps snoring. He jumps into the bed, jerking grandma, who opens her eyes, and then closes them slowly. He hugs her tightly.

Mystery is an integral part of Maji’s character. His subconscious mind has absorbed all the superstitions of his parents during his childhood. His world is really an amalgam of reality and fantasy.

Five months have elapsed since Maji was appointed in Thachu's house.

Hearing a bolt from the blue, people gather in Maji's yard on the bank of Kanoli canal. Jouhar stands among the crowd with his head drooping. He is in a huff. Maji's body is hanging on a rope tied to a bamboo pole supporting the roof of his hut.

There is a whisper among the people, "Why did he do that?"

Mystery prevailed throughout Maji's life. It prevails even after his death. He had no companion in this universe except Jouhar, who unfortunately was not matured enough to make out the depths of Maji's loneliness and secret doldrums.

Funeral ceremonies are completed by the evening. Thachu and Jouhar come back from Maji's house. Thick darkness. Barking stray dogs can be heard. Jouhar lights a torch. His grandmother walks through the pale light of the torch. They reach the gate of their mansion.

When he opens the iron gate, he sees a strange black cat curled up on the veranda. He has never seen it before. Grandma goes inside. Jouhar tries to drive the cat away, but it doesn't move. The boy is struck dumb with horror. He takes a small missile-shaped stone. The cat saunters to the shrubs.

Maji lives beyond a suicide.

# The Blood on Tollington

Jordan Fash

*This selection is based on "The Books of Blood" by Clive Barker*

Some things can only be written in blood.

There are people and places that crave the stroke of a pen that bleeds red. Death's swift current would have enveloped the world if not for these vessels that absorb the foaming crimson tides. Like ink that ends up inextricably bound to a blank page, blood never leaves. The pain of the moment fades but the blood?

The blood never goes away.

\* \* \*

"You thinking about him?"

Lynn Ruiz asked the question while peering into the break room. Doctor Hall, its sole occupant, sat alone at a table. His eyes had been fixed on the white tile floor that matched the rest of the hospital. She knew he was thinking about the same thing she did whenever looking at those tiles. The blood had clumped the hair on the boy's forearm together. Flecks went spattering across the pavement when she lifted him onto the stretcher. It continued dripping on the interior of the ambulance and left a trail through the ER. That wasn't the first time Lynn witnessed such expressionism, the body trying to make some desperate last mark on the world with Pollocking dots, lines, and dribbles of blood, but it was the first time it had been from a child.

"What gave me away?" Hall replied, hardly gathering the energy to look up.

"I know the coffee here isn't good enough to send you into that kind of trance." She stepped into the room and went to pour herself a cup of burnt Folger's. Over the past few months it became a habit for Hall to sit here at the end of a long shift with his thoughts, a cheap styrofoam cup, and the ambient drone of local station programming in the background.



She took a seat and shivered at the bitter sip that had already gone cold.

“You could’ve warned me about this, you know,” she said.

Historically Hall would’ve smiled at her comment, a contagious grin that spread across his whole body. He used to amuse patients with stories, somehow making bad news more bearable through impressions and anecdotes. Lynn came to think of him as more stand up comic than fifty-year-old physician. It reminded her of the way her own father had been.

There were no jokes now though. Hall stopped smiling after that day. The same retraction of the muscles took place but they were just motions now.

“Sorry,” Hall said. He set the cup down.

It had been a terrible thing for Lynn to bring a dying kid back to the hospital in her ambulance; it was unthinkable that it had been Doctor Hall’s.

“His birthday is coming up, isn’t it?” she asked.

“Next week.”

They were both quiet for a moment.

“I’ve blamed myself too,” Lynn said, mentally cycling through the guilty ruminations that kept her awake most nights. “I’ve wondered if I could’ve moved him just a bit differently. Gotten there quicker. Driven him back faster.” She noticed the distant look in Hall’s eyes. “It’s not your fault,” she said and reached a hand across the table towards his.

“Tim died in my hospital, Lynn.” Hall jerked his hand away. “My hospital,” he said in emphasis. “I should’ve known not to let him stay at his friend’s that night.” He shook his head and added with a solemn tone, “It was too close to Tollington.”

Tollington was a street that, to a visitor, could be driven down and regarded as entirely unremarkable. Well kept lawns, maintained by perfectly pleasant residents, lined the streets. The sidewalks were in good order. No street lights mysteriously flickered

overhead. Yet Lynn brought in an alarming amount of patients from Tollington. Electrical fires flared up despite good wiring. Perfectly balanced people fell down flights of stairs on a regular basis.

Almost every other week someone missed the stop sign at the intersection of Tollington and Main.

“Do you really believe it was Tollington that killed him?” Lynn asked.

“I think the stories about that place are more than just stories. Especially about Number 65.”

Most people believed that all the terrible things on Tollington spilled from Number 65. There were a thousand theories as to why: insane previous owners, ancient curses, and a sordid myriad of other tales that might attract tourists. Lynn didn't believe them or any other kind of superstition. She once adhered to the beliefs that led her father, a pastor, to claim divine intervention would come even as cancer replaced him with a frail skeleton of a man. When that faith, something he maintained until his last breath, wasn't rewarded, Lynn decided that ghosts, goblins, and God were all alike; same shit, different names.

She'd gotten good at entertaining those who held fast to those superstitions, an essential skill in order to be any kind of sociable person. Hall seemed to be the same way until Tim died. Conversations with him now usually wound back to Tollington and the unnatural powers it possessed.

Lynn glanced to the TV mounted in the corner. It showed a blond haired man in front of a poorly green screened dilapidated mansion, one of several similar ads on local programming. The youth's pale chubby cheeks complemented the overly enthusiastic smile and animated description of his services. Bold red lettering appeared on a black screen that took over the TV.

*SIMON MCNEAL: THE GHOST MAGNET... COMMUNICATION GUARANTEED!!!*

“You once told me that those stories only exist to make money for people who want to rip other people off,” she said and

pointed to the screen. “Guys like Simon here.”

“I’m not so sure anymore.” The ad flashed a phone number. “I have a friend who’s been doing some research with Simon. He’s the only guide authorized to get people into Number 65, you know.” Recently Lynn had begun to hear from Hall how that house was some kind of nexus between this world and the next. He claimed that you could hear from the dead there.

“What do you think your friend is going to find?” Lynn asked, her frustration masked by the genuine concern she felt. The same delusions that possessed her father had now taken root in Hall. She hadn’t said anything then. She would now. “I wish things could change, Doctor Hall. I’d give almost anything to talk to my dad again. Even for a minute. I know how badly it hurts that Tim’s gone. But this stuff?” She motioned again to the TV. “This isn’t going to do anything.”

“What if it could?” Hall sat up with a surge of newly found energy and desperation in his voice. “If there was a way for me to talk to Tim, any chance at all, shouldn’t I look into it?” A pause. “No matter how crazy or far fetched. Shouldn’t I do whatever it takes to hear from him again?”

“I don’t think Tim would want you to do whatever it took to talk to him again.” Lynn’s sharp tone disarmed the subconscious guard telling Hall he was talking with a friend, someone he would never snap at. A beeping from the pager at his waist stopped whatever his reply might have been. He examined the device, sighed, and stood.

“They need me in the ER.”

Lynn couldn’t tell if the glance he gave her demanded she stay. Regardless she followed him out, wondering if she should say something. It couldn’t be an apology; she wasn’t sorry for trying to pull him out of his delusions. There were other people, living people, who needed him. He had to realize that. She felt as if she’d just told a child that Santa Claus didn’t exist though. She hadn’t spoken up yet when they rounded the corner. A woman stood at the front desk while propping up a man smeared with blood.

Hardly conscious, his skin glistened slick and red under the fluorescent lights. Blood seeped through his shirt and made a trail that led back to the automatic doors. Wounds spanned the length of his body in the shape of patterns carved into his skin.

“Peter,” the woman said in a sigh of relief at Hall approaching. Her blonde hair, pulled back in what had once been a tight bun, hung loosely over the wrinkles that webbed her face. In other circumstances, Lynn thought she might’ve been quite beautiful for her age. Before Hall could reply Abby spoke up from behind the front desk.

“She keeps asking for you, Doctor Hall.” Abby leaned over the counter. “I told her someone else needs to look at him but she won’t—”

“She’s fine, Abby.” Hall waved a hand in dismissal. “Thank you,” he added. He whispered something to the woman. She nodded in reply. Hall put an arm around the man and led the two of them down the hall. As they walked past, Lynn realized that the cuts in the man’s skin were words.

Blood pulsed from them in time with his heartbeat. The writing took on a variety of shapes and styles with staggering intricacy. While most the font was imperceptibly small, occasional jagged large print stood out. It ran across his forehead and into matted hair before reappearing directly below in a new line. The words wound down his arms in spirals. Spotting on his clothing seemed to confirm that they continued even there.

The man’s arm smeared red across the thin paper sheet as Hall helped him onto a table in the exam room. Watching from the door, Lynn realized how pale his skin was underneath the layer of blood. A flinch of pain revealed his perfect set of white teeth, a smile that Lynn instantly recognized.

“Simon McNeal,” she whispered to herself. The woman turned back to Lynn. She seemed to be contemplating whether to say something when Hall spoke up.

“I think we’ll be okay here, Lynn.” His attention was still on Simon.

“I can stay and help,” Lynn replied, curiosity driving her. “Or I can—”

“We’ll be okay,” Hall repeated with a tone that said the conversation was over. Lynn took another look at the scene. She considered protesting, demanding that he let her stay. “Of course,” was all she said back and then closed the door.

“What the hell was that about?” Abby asked.

“I have no idea,” Lynn sighed. She walked to the front desk and leaned against it in exhaustion. “But that was Simon McNeal.”

“The Ghost Magnet?”

“Yeah.”

“She say how he got hurt?”

Lynn shook her head.

“Think it happened on Tollington?” Abby asked. Her excitement superseded any concern for the bleeding patient. “It was Tollington, wasn’t it?”

“She didn’t say that,” Lynn said, an exasperated correction.

“It was probably Tollington. Did you get a look at that guy? That doesn’t just happen.”

Abby began an impromptu presentation on her speculative theories. Lynn nodded along, hoping to see the door of that exam room open again. After fifteen minutes of waiting she decided to leave. As Lynn got into her car, the urge to wait for Simon and the woman flashed through her mind. She had to be the friend Hall mentioned, the one conducting an investigation with Simon, the only medium in the area who guaranteed contact with the dead. A medium who now had words carved into every part of his skin.

While Lynn stared at the entrance to the ER, the crucifix dangling from her rear view mirror caught her attention. It had been a gift from her father, a last form of superstition she’d never brought herself to get rid of. Suddenly feeling silly, she pulled it down and tossed the piece of jewelry onto the passenger seat. She’d hear

from Hall tomorrow. He'd apologize for the secrecy and explain what was going on, confirming that the wounds on Simon, stories about paranormal investigations, and Tollington Place were just more odd features of an equally bizarre landscape. By all counts that made them normal.

\* \* \*

That night she dreamed of being in the hospital. Sharp antiseptics burning her nose told her it had just been cleaned. Any hints of Tim's blood were erased, a few strong chemicals and some scrubbing having returned the crimson streaked tile to a glistening white. She knew better though. She knew what the floor hid. That's when she saw the book, one whose stories were told in blood and could read itself to her. She tried to grab it but the book was soaked as if left in a downpour and slipped from her hands. Once she held it she wiped the cover clean. Instead of coming away on her hand, the blood spilled onto the floor.

A figure stepped towards her. It was shapeless and faceless, a small boy, a grown man, and something else. Gradually the blood on the ground formed into letters. The shape stepped into the hall as the blood followed, snaking along and shaping words in its trail. Lynn pursued them both into the ER, through the parking lot, and then onto the street.

She stopped when the writing turned into unintelligible splatterings pooled around her ankles. A large brick house stood in front of her. That figure was gone but the blood surged up the path that ran from the street to the house. It grew deeper and wider, a river of red compelled to flow inside. Heads and limbs bobbed in and out of the stream's surface along with shadows and unknown terrors, some entering and some leaving. To Lynn's horror, she was swept away and carried into the mouth of Number 65.

That dream had faded from her mind by the time she walked into work the next morning, reduced to a vague recollection of blood and Tollington. She hoped to talk with Hall. At the very least she could catch Abby before the night crew left. Doctor Hall wasn't at work though. Despite the surgeries he had scheduled he

simply didn't come in. The hospital had been in a state of panic while scrambling to cover everything.

"He left with The Ghost Magnet and that lady a little after you did," Abby said. "He didn't say anything to me. Just walked out. He'd cleaned Simon up a bit but he seemed real eager to leave." Lynn didn't show any reaction as she listened, pairing that news with what Hall said about his friend's investigation.

"Do you know something?" Abby asked. Lynn snapped back to the conversation.

"Not really. I'm just thinking."

He'd said it was at Number 65.

A nurse asked if Lynn could clock in early. Glad to have an excuse to end the conversation with Abby, Lynn took the first call of the day to the rest home, her ambulance's most frequent destination. A later call took her down Tollington where an older woman thought her husband passed away; Lynn could've sworn she seemed disappointed to find he was just in the middle of a deceptively deep nap.

They passed Number 65 on the way back. A flash of that dream returned to her when she saw the car parked in front. She tried to convince herself that it wasn't Doctor Hall's. However, not everyone had the "Ask Your Doctor If Medical Experts on TV Are Right For You" bumper sticker. Focus didn't come easy for the rest of her shift, that car and those dreams coming back to her. She continued to check in with the hospital to see if Hall had shown up. When he still wasn't there by the end of night, she knew what she had to do.

\* \* \*

She'd only ever seen Tollington during the day. Her headlights outlined the houses, pulling them out of the enveloping darkness one at a time before they retreated back into it, until she came to Number 65. There were no lights on inside, but Hall's car sat in front. The moon outlined the Georgian house's brick work and white door framed by two rows of windows. A yard full of trees

and shadows filled the space between that house and the street, an area bisected by a stone path.

Lynn parked and opened her glovebox. There was a flashlight she kept for emergencies buried somewhere under piles of maps and insurance papers. She found the light and clicked it on. The beam caught the crucifix still sitting on her passenger seat. She didn't know why she felt like grabbing it. There was nothing special about it. It had as much supernatural significance as the house she was about to walk into. Despite that logic she wound the metal chain tightly around her fingers. Going down Tollington alone had left an unexpected uneasiness in her stomach and the feel of that symbol somehow made it easier stepping into the frigid night.

Her light cut through the shadows cast by the overhanging trees on the path. Growing apprehension almost paralyzed her as she walked towards the house; she told herself again that 65 was just a regular house on a regular street. To her surprise the door was unlocked. She stepped inside and swept the foyer with the light. The house was devoid of any furnishings. Occasional cracks ran along the walls and a few beams bent under the weight of the upper stories. There wasn't the vandalism or broken windows that she expected though.

Muffled words sounded from upstairs.

Several more followed. She couldn't make them out. A staircase wasn't far off. The first step creaked as she began the climb to the second level.

*—ease!*

She reached the first landing.

*Please!*

Another flight of stairs.

*Please!*

On the third floor she could hear the unnerving desperation to the voice. It came from behind the door a few feet away. It sounded like a male's. She took several deep breaths.



An ordinary house. That's all it was.

Putting the chain around her neck with a last thought of her father, she pressed a trembling hand against the door. The discomfort that had been brewing in her stomach burst, a cyst full of icy dread that leaked in puss like terror throughout her body. In the darkened narrow room she first saw only what the beam of her flashlight hit directly: the scarred face of Simon McNeal, chin resting on the back of a chair so that his head faced the door. He sat naked on the chair, wrists and ankles bound. Blood ran from his back, facing away from Lynn, and trickled down his arms. It collected at his bindings, soaking the cloth and dripping to the floor. He still wore a blank, seemingly oblivious expression as his eyes maintained their glazed stare despite the sudden light.

Around him were several candles. Their glow outlined the shape of a nude man who stood with his back to Lynn. He didn't move from just outside the circle of candles either entirely entranced or simply ignoring her arrival. As Lynn's eyes adjusted to the dim room she called out to him. There was hardly any degree of recognition when Doctor Hall turned and spoke.

"I've given Tim something to write on. He won't talk."

His voice was still his own though the mixture of anger and abject despair reached beyond anything she'd ever heard. It sounded distant despite his being only a few feet away, an unearthly quality to it. He looked at Lynn but seemed to stare past her.

"You were right. He was a liar." He pointed to Simon. "He pretended to speak for them."

She kept her light on Hall but noticed the scattered names, phrases, and dates scrawled on the wall behind him.

"They were tired of his lies. So they told their stories on him. Look."

He reached a hand towards Lynn in an effort to guide her towards Simon. She started back at the movement. Momentarily confused, Hall grabbed the chair and turned it so she could see Simon's back.

The skin just below the neck was entirely different from the rest of his body. His back was devoid of any markings yet smeared with blood. Lines of stitching ran between his shoulders and down his sides, connecting again just above his buttocks. The blood seemed to stem from those lines.

“He’s proof,” Hall insisted. “He’s proof that we can hear from the dead. They had already covered every part of Simon though. Tim needed a new page.” Lynn looked at Simon’s back again.

That’s when she realized the skin there wasn’t his.

Her pulse quickened. Sweat loosened her grip on the flashlight, the metal now slick in her hand. She gave her full attention back to Hall. “Where’s the woman?” Lynn asked. “The woman who brought him in. Where is she?”

“I had her bring me here,” Hall continued. “I needed to see it.”

“Where is she?” Lynn demanded more forcefully.

“Don’t you see? Simon’s the key. I can talk to Tim again. But he won’t write on her skin.” Hall paused. An idea seemed to suddenly occur to him and that grin spread across his face, the infectious expression Lynn had come to know so well. “But he might take yours.” The speed Hall moved at caught Lynn off guard. She managed to hit him on the temple with the flashlight. The impact sent it out of her hand and clattering to the floor. Hall’s fist connected hard with her cheek. She felt her hair pulled back before her face slammed into the wall. Staggering back, she collapsed with the scent of blood filling her nose.

Despite the terror and throbbing pain shooting through her body, she had an acute awareness of every emotion in that room. She mourned for her friend’s lost sanity as well as the woman who had met Simon and stumbled onto unspeakable horrors. There was Simon himself, now reduced to an object that longed for an end to it all. Finally her father came to mind along with the host of anger, frustration, and love that she felt for him. As she apprehended the unique events that had shaped all the lives converging in this house of pain and death, the candles in the room went out.

Hall shouted in the darkness.

Lynn wiped the blood from her face. Her vision came back into focus and she fumbled on the ground for the flashlight. Hall stood a few feet away, clutching at his back; his hand came away red. A gash ran between his shoulder blades. Two others appeared along his sides before another connected them to make a rectangle that covered his entire back.

He screamed again, a sound superseded by the wet squelch of the skin on his back being wrenched off. It tore away with large chunks of flesh in a swift motion, pulsating muscles left behind. A patch of skin from shoulder to elbow came off next. Another from his calf sent Hall to the ground. He whimpered in agony. Like a child fed up with having to wait till Christmas and now eager to expose its gift, something shredded the rest of his body at a feverish rate. The warm spurts reached Lynn as the discarded flesh stacked up on the floor. Hall's body convulsed with each lost strip of skin. He soon lay shivering and unrecognizable, a mewling newborn that had been delivered and abandoned in a puddle of its own blood.

A shuffling came from the corner. Lynn's light showed something advance from the shadows. The creature might have been human once. Long limbs and an emaciated frame were accentuated by its skin with hues of grey and black, so tightly drawn that the bones looked as if they might burst through. It didn't seem to notice Lynn, instead moving with agonizing sloth towards its prey. Lynn could've sworn she heard the distant rattle of a subway as the creature joined the other beings like itself that now stood around the bloody pulp. They crouched and bit into exposed muscle, any notion of the doctor's resistance stripped away.

Lynn got to her feet with escape on her mind. The light she held again caught the face of Simon McNeal. He still wore that vacant expression, eyes fixed on the floor and seemingly unphased by what was happening.

Then they darted up to Lynn.

The movement was almost imperceptible. She would have

liked to say that she missed it. It would've made her escape much easier. But those weren't the eyes of a con artist who had scammed so many people, preying on the desperation that comes from grief and a fear of the unknown. He didn't look like some random stranger. She saw a scared little boy.

A kid on Tollington who needed rescuing.

“Damn it.” She staggered to that chair and began to undo the bindings. Her hands shook at the sound of the creatures tearing into Hall only a few feet away. She kept her eyes on Simon. Once he was untied, she lifted him off the chair. Those things that couldn't get to Hall held patches of skin, dangling them over their mouths, licking and gnawing. Other beings had joined them, beings with such monstrous shapes that Lynn couldn't comprehend them. She brought her focus back to the door and limped with Simon as fast as she could.

They made it to the landing. Something pounded on the floor behind them and rattled the staircase. Not turning to see what it was, Lynn kept her eyes on the front door that opened wide to the cool night beyond. They had to make it to that door. If they made it down the stairs to that door they would be okay.

When Simon collapsed to the ground she already had one foot outside. “Come on,” she grunted, struggling to pull him forward so that he could stand on his own feet. His limp form only sagged, seeming to grow heavier. Between tugs she noticed the thing coming down the last flight of stairs. She noticed more than ever the pain of her broken nose and the fierce agony that danced across her muscles in spasms and burns. The desire to abandon Simon flashed through her mind. She was loosening her grip when she felt that superstitious symbol, a last gift from her father, pressing into her skin.

A moment later only one person tumbled out of Tollington Place, Number 65, before the door slammed shut.

\* \* \*

Mrs. Brown was the one who spotted the man on her morning walk.

It was an odd thing to see a naked man laying outside but Number 65 was no ordinary house. Everyone who lived on Tollington knew not to step on the property. She woke her husband though. He was the one who called the ambulance. Together the couple waited, examining the man from the sidewalk. They speculated as to who he was, likely a junkie who'd snuck onto the property on some kind of trip; so many kids broke into that house on drugs and a dare. While the Browns didn't have the eyesight they once did, it looked like there was dried blood coating his side and shoulders. The man's skin even looked like it had something written on it, patterns etched into his skin.

The Browns never got close enough to see what they were. As soon as they heard the echoing sirens they walked back home. The ambulance had taken longer than usual because of a short staffed hospital. Apparently their lead doctor and an EMT were nowhere to be seen. The responders who did show up got their hands wet with blood when they lifted the man onto a stretcher. It dripped onto the pavement as they loaded him into the ambulance.

They examined the wounds spanning his body. The ones on his back seemed to be the source of the bleeding. A large patch of skin appeared to have been hastily sewn on, a makeshift graft that showed sure signs of infection. Too focused on treating the wound, they didn't take the time to read the words carved into the stitched flesh. If they had, they might have gone mad; words freshly written in blood are powerful. At the very least they would have found a story. A story that started like this:

Some things can only be written in blood.

# The Books of Bark

Evan Loehle-Conger

*This selection is paired with “The Books of Blood” by Clive Barker*

The gardener plants a tree.

The clearing has been prepared amidst old growth and prayer.

The tree sets down in the middle of it, uncornered by a curving row of low strict benches carved with ivy-blurred faces.

It is a beautiful, beautiful tree, thinks the gardener.

It is a holy, holy tree, feels the gardener in his gut and dirt and holy yearning, lonely, celibate flesh.

The tree is beautiful, but it is not holy. It will not be holy.

It is just a tree. A beautiful tree.

Men, women, and others come to worship. The tree is an ear and a mouth of pristine nature. It is there to allow congress with the spirits of all that is not mankind and all that has not been touched by mankind, they tell each other.

They burn candles in the clearing and sit or kneel on the carved benches, even so.

\* \* \*

There are forests and prairies that twist and straighten just so, just right, just enough that they direct the currents of mulched not-souls of the dead, whether flora or fungi, the same way that breezes carry the once-sequestered carbon of their stems and trunks and pulp and pulpits.

The not-souls carried through these infertile fertile places whisper with the voices they had in life. And so, there are no reports of ghostly trees, but frequently there is the smell of flowers and cut wheat which is so strange since they must be out of season.

\* \* \*

When the tree is not hearing their worship, their hymns they

call other things, or watching the devotions they perform, the tree speaks.

The tree is silent, of course.

Trees only speak when breaking. Creaks and groans and the crackle of a burn.

They say the tree is silent when it speaks and they read runes from the twigs it drops when a breeze or a season or a change in its growth causes. It shares the wisdom of nature. It reveals the hidden. It is quite popular.

Trees like this one have twigs that grow straight and tend to be just long enough that, if they were arranged just so, would be the perfect picturesque font. Trees like this one tend to drop twigs on a regular basis.

The gardener sweeps the clearing on a regular basis, too.

Framed runes of twigs are sold at the nature house down the way. Above the shelf with the glass mosaics and the incense from out of town.

\* \* \*

Plants sin.

Plants sin and are sinned against.

Any kind of life has sin it. All kinds.

\* \* \*

The summer was coming to an end. The tree was turning a beautiful blonde as its leaves tasted the changing sun. The air pulled breezes from the last turning summer days and drew in deep slow breaths of the tug and hold of fall winds.

The worshipers came in greater numbers now, to mark the change, to prepare for the symbolic sleep and healing of a long year's harvest. Long burning candles, maroon and white and tan, were placed in frosted glass and antique-style lanterns around the clearing. The branches of the beautiful holy tree were hung with symbols of death and rebirth and constructions of twigs and flow-

ers and bundles of wheat and paper lanterns.

The tree looked so beautiful and so holy.

\* \* \*

In life and in death, the sins and wounds of plants go unheard and poorly spoken.

\* \* \*

In life, plants scream out the pain of their sins, fill the ground with homemade herbicides and aggressive lust. They shout smoking clouds of chemical signs, begging for help from the other hermits that surround them.

No plant ever helps another, though, except by accident or incident.

Each plant, alone, found its own hate floating in tonight's summer breeze and autumn wind. They recoiled from the assumption of unity. Of the playacting of sticks and harvest chaff as dead worshippers of a living tree. Of holiness intruding on their empty cycle. Rose thorns were twisted from the skin. The benches splintered and sharp streaks of broken treebone found the air.

The rage of the empty unknowing greenery quaked and juddered with palsy at the motions of faith and spirit that grew and wilted like false seasons of a sickness haunted summer. The unghosts of a wronged and cruel vegetable empire swung slow and off-balance in orbit around the priestly growth with a distant husky sound of ripping, of thorn through leaf and root out of earth, of branches scratching across each other as they fall fat with ice and smut.

Of paint flat saints peeled away by dirt-veined fingernails.

Of flat holiness scraped away by immovable, inanimate nature.

\* \* \*

The gardener heard and understood what he didn't know, there in the shop amid the candles and bronze statuettes and seed



kits and driftwood.

The little rootlet veins that sputter from the bulb of a heart went thready as old pumpkins.

Some tiny emptiness, something tied into a greater and fallow truth of the world, drew colors out of his eyes.

All around him, the world seemed to still itself from its pulse, dampen the glow of its auras, blunt the scent of its breath.

Everything stood in stark form, limned with outlines of black and white and green and red and dirt and sand and woodburning coal.

\* \* \*

The things from after-the-green began to scar and pull the cutting edges it had found across, around, and through the holy tree. A people without personhood writing words without a language. The catalogue of sins began everywhere at once. The briefest of condemnations and confessions scratched lightly on the waxy green of leaves or fit between and within the large symbols of larger species with louder stories. Algae clawed their books of drowning conflicts and choked betrayals in the shallow clefts of the bark, crawling like mites through the cracks and in the groves of words still in the act of inscription. The times were uncertain. Future past present tenses blurring together.

Some sins could be explained. Some were alien, too strange even for outer annotations of an enlightenment-ridden botanist's dissertation.

A dropwort's root is dangling unearthed and half-floating in the shit-slicked water of what is supposed to be a ranch, but is in fact simply neglect as measured in units of acre and blackfly. The old milker drags it out with boneless finger-lips, eats the damned plant-tail, stumbles, falls, and drowns in shallow brown water. The body rots, ignored, with the water leaching from its useless mass the byproducts of its own decay. The water goes bad. The dropwort drops.

A wild field overturned looking for stone body memories of

plants dead so long they lived when the light was different and the air was a famine of carbon, too clean to eat. Fossils are found, picturesque and coiled and bound for wall-hanging frames and the shine of a tumbler. The grassland grows dusty, topsoil blown away, The upturned vegetation is not remembered and it leaves no seeds.

\* \* \*

The gardener runs out the door, feet bare and scraping across the stepstones.

The world is stark and gnarled around them. The path becomes wilderness and the stars seem laid out in city grids above them and they do not know where they are.

So they take that tiny emptiness in them and open it. Through that bare window, the path is clear and the stars are once again wild. They run faster, a sinister sense of library paper and lumber burning in the back of their eyes.

\* \* \*

Along the east side, near the base, the writing was jagged as teeth.

The cutting of a vine, planted near its motherself, growing strong and uncaringly. Its idiot limbs strangling the motherself, choking it down beneath the weight of a twin that is a child that is as sure a suicide as a hand wrapped around its own throat. The twinself cutting pushing the motherself into the bed of soil, blocking out the light so it can't breathe, crushing it beneath its other self.

Red leaves turned green.

The oldest apple tree along a walking path, the first tree planted on the track, has roots that bulge above the soil and hungrily pulls down stones and woodchips into the blind mouth of itself that spreads beneath it. Its bark is pale and thin and peels and wrinkles into cracks, but the trunk at its center somehow lives on through the years. Saplings are planted nearby in the hopes of they will take root like the oldest one. Every year the lawnkeeper finds a young tree or two growing strong and out of place, pulls them from

their place at night when no one walks the paths, and separates their fresh and vital forms into a rich and lovely mulch. The mulch is always put at the feet of the oldest tree, its red apples glistening in the cold humidity of a night.

Two weeds grew across a field from each other and never fertilized each other. Neither found the right wind to send their hope for children on.

Two weeds grew across a field from each other and regularly fertilized each other. The wind blew like the swing of an axe across them.

\* \* \*

Under the woven wood of the arch, the gardener's breath ran out, coughing on the idea of sawdust, lungs rustling with imaginary parchment.

Through the arch, riddled with flowering vines at the end of their season, the gardener saw the plague of hungry writing, the locust clouds of smashed benches and impatient thorns.

Through the arch, draped with half-hearted celebrations of life, the gardener saw beyond the creaking snapping cloud to the beautiful holy tree.

The tree was screaming, tense against the shadow that painted the grove as an empty backdrop to the single activity left.

The gardener saw the beautiful holy tree, the leaves atop it just beginning to turn gold in the late heat of the summer, as it shook beneath the carving impulses that groped and flicked across it.

\* \* \*

An iris moved like a mouse as the wind turns across a window planter only to be eaten by a cat that finds itself moved to full stop. The man with its collar on his mantle pulls every iris up and out and refuses them the dignity of compost or muddy ditch. The innocents bleed out and dry in slick black plastic beneath a thousand forbidden unclean things that one day will themselves settle flat

beneath a park. Astroturf and soft black rubber are popular there.

A war of chemicals sweated and squeezed sweetly out of pores and roots and stamen. That plot of earth grew fertile and healthy. There could be no redemption for it.

In a stump, hollowed out as much by axe and metal as by crack and rain rot, someone has planted flowers. It is quite pleasantly quaint. The flowers soon die and are let be. Dead things in dirt in a dead thing in dirt and nobody really cares how it all started and the whole thing rots faster now, a bowl for water and a blanket over all the squirming clacketing chewing infiltrating things that cure the clutter of forest floor.

A fat, squirrel-emptied pinecone squats heavy on a smear of soft mud, refusing to make way for the winding walk of a misplaced, death-drunk beetle.

The horror of sex and inversion is written in shaking lines across a leaf. A budding sweet pea scrawls its story of sex organs clasping into themselves, turning to things like leaves and nothing like the promise of bud and flower. Castrated and with its womb stolen, the sweet pea weeps as it recounts its only legacy: Sickness enfleshed as shapeless offspring floating in the slow-flowing blood of stem and leaf, waiting for the flying mouths of insects to cut the veins and give them birth<sup>1</sup>.

\* \* \*

The gardener cannot let this happen.

The shrine of the tree, the connection with the divinity of nature, the umbilical closeness of that bridging growth can't just be lost. Can't just be defaced by some... some...

The faith in him finds nothing to name the world in front of him.

The tiny emptiness in him, open and starting to flow thick as sourness and fruit mash inside the gardener, offers a list of options. The gardener wants to admit to none of them, but nothing else can be done.

---

<sup>1</sup> Phytoplasmas

\* \* \*

A decorative bush had hunkered down, surrounded by decorative stones and polished gravel. Its roots and trunk almost indistinguishable from one another, its wrist-thick body gripping the garden, a survivalist in its bunker. One day, it finds its the fate of all things decorative and alive, pulled up and thrown away. As it leaves, its desperate wooden fingers unearth old seeds. In the spring, invasive greenery topped by raw redbulbed heads aggressively tours the garden. The savagery of its spread burns the lawn to a wreckage of meaty red and leathered green.

An oak falls, crushing acorns and sons and cousins.

Some ungrowing thing finds the sun again before it kills itself again.

The leaves that lay across the floor grow white through the spring and something takes ahold of the roots and tender new growth of the little patch of forest. The trees die, feet soaked in their own cast off mouths coated by a false and hungry snow.

\* \* \*

The emptiness floods out of the holding tank of the gardener.

The pulp of paper. The flare of firewood. Shit on the flattened mash of the bodies of the tall. Pissing liquors. Baseball bats striking a ball of cork. Wildfires and cigarettes.

Salted ground and worn out soil.

The gardener's emptiness spills out as a word that rasps and grinds against itself, coined as it was amidst a national depression, a word that translates best as "Dust Bowl" and "Black Sunday" and "Clear Cutting" wrapped in warm blankets, but means a world without itself when passed amongst leaves and tainting sap. It meant an emptiness of emptiness, a self-cored negation beyond vegetal sins and wounds. It acknowledged the non-holy, the necessary, the absent and fed it a cracking jaw with dust pile teeth.

The inscribing cloud, cracking with its alien fury, sighed out its final meaningless comment through the billowing fall of its

makeshift knives and needles. And with that, they closed the door of the horizon behind them, flowing back out into the no place where the soulless go after death.

As the door closed, the flames of candles were pulled like clumps of hair and were drawn swirling together against the face of the tree in a flushing blackness that left the clearing blind and quiet.

When the gardener's eyes adjusted, there was written the word, the hollow honest word that had banished the dead empire of growing things, off center and unavoidable and scorched deep into the bark of the tree. A large and imperfect circle the size of a tongue of uneven shade and texture, but still dark even in the darkness.

The gardener's tiny emptiness approved.

The gardener, for their part, gazed at the beautiful, drooped body of the beautiful tree and knew it was not holy. Knew others would see the words and know holiness where it was not and the gardener could not stand that and could not stand to lose the tree.

The emptiness left the gardener dizzy and almost drunk on themselves and they reached out to touch the broken, spidered bark of the beautiful tree. As their fingertips traced the words some dull and flattened spark crackled thick and rich through the gardener's nerves.

The gardener and the spilling emptiness knew in a single moment they would never share the tree, would never reveal the words and signs they found, and began to read.

# Waiting for the Train

(a cittandine)

Lancelot Schaubert

*This selection is paired with “The Midnight Meat Train” by Clive Barker*

I saw the consequences of our chosen fate  
we read the world’s ending in cardboard and mile-high signs  
—to be so near by so far, so far cause so close—  
on intricate sandcastles grown men make, which vanish at night.  
You have not died. You had fallen asleep and will now wait...

I met the kite club at the beach. They grow wings, yet stay  
tethered to this sand through snares imposed  
by those whose consequences cage our chosen fates.

Where Astoria’s humor meets Inwood’s *bachata* under the eldritch  
lights  
no seer can take stars by astrolabe Home.  
There we write world endings on mile-high, cardboard signs.

I met the Minotaur at the center of the West Village labyrinth.  
He said to me, “What, you want a fucking cookie?” And clip-  
clopped off.  
You have not died. You had fallen asleep and will now wait

for thirty minutes on the other platform for a fifteen minute train  
ride  
or walk for forty. You choose to walk, repose  
from intricate sandcastles grown men make, which vanish at night.

(Walking was a bad choice at two in the hot mornlate).  
One-hundred dollar ticket for a used two-fiddy swipe-o  
I saw the consequences of our chosen fate:

Hell’s Kitchen’s tiny forts fading in a purgatory of might,  
Chileans shouting to Arabs “In English! In English, pote!”

We read our world's ending in cardboard, mile-deep signs—

“This here's a misdemeanor. Ever been arrested?”

“No.” “You sure? You ain't lying? Cause in a sec I'll know.”  
—you have not died. You had fallen asleep and now await

flat Triangles Below Canal Street to grow up spires.  
Still in two-thousand years they'll stand on Wall and go,  
“This seems to have been some sort of market site,”  
on intricate sandcastles grown men make, which vanish at night.

Though not yet midnight—drinking five minutes later  
means you missed the train and will wait until another ghost  
goads dioxide into humid carbon from some unknown palace of  
nether-sky.

To be so near by so far, so far cause so close  
we coax the world's ending onto bright rag signs  
trim intricate sandcastles grown men make, which vanish at night.  
You hope for consequences of The Chosen fate:  
we will not die. We had fallen asleep and must now wake.



# From: *The Yattering and Jack*

Shannon Hardwick

*These selections are paired with “The Yattering and Jack” by Clive Barker*

## PART I\*

Her suicide was convenient—  
the absence, from nine to five,  
passed in earnest. The lampshades,  
however violent, would think  
they were, of course, victims.  
So inflamed, a young widow,  
nervously escorted with  
infinite loss, unzipped  
the bright animals inside her.

## PART II†

He cleared his daughters’ rooms,  
made their beds, hung tinsel  
against the windows.  
He could have wept, Father,  
but he must lie barefoot—  
on the kitchen tiles, tender victims  
skimming down his neck.

\* Found poem. Source material: Barker, Clive. *Books of Blood: Volumes One to Three*. New York: Berkley Books, 1998. 45-48. Print.

† Found poem. Source material: Barker, Clive. *Books of Blood: Volumes One to Three*. New York: Berkley Books, 1998. 49-52. Print.

# Wholesome

Sarah Peplow

*This selection is paired with "Pig Blood Blues" by Clive Barker*



With this drawing I am trying to approximate the subversive humour and ratcheting unease which Clive Barker is so good at producing. Ostensibly, a young boy eating an apple is a perfectly wholesome, innocuous image. It is the kind of subject you might find in mass-produced paintings from the mid-twentieth century. The tousle-headed peasant lad enjoys a treat.

The fruit carries connotations of good health and innocence (“apple-cheeked”), cheerful submission to authority (“apple-polisher”). But it also suggests a moment suspended between purity and corruption, via the Biblical link to forbidden fruit. And Lacey is no vision of pleasant, fresh-faced youth. Bad posture, bad skin, ageing bruises and bitten nails, his expression a disturbing combination of supplication and challenge, his body swamped in an institutional jumper. Here are the childhoods we don’t put on the wall.

And, of course, the boy with the apple at his lips is a visual echo of a roast pig with an apple in its mouth. Eating and being eaten.

The confounded expectations and queasily fleshy details of the image are given further disturbing resonance by the events of *Pig Blood Blues*. Overall, I hope, the wholesome is rendered profoundly unwholesome.

# Creeley wasn't exaggerating

Parker Jamieson

*This selection is paired with "Pig Blood Blues" by Clive Barker*

When the time has come  
To conceal the  
Feeding of animals

Then I will have finished  
My age of rapture  
And begun my age

Of listless apocalypse.  
If it builds up out of  
corrugated iron and rotting wood

I will have no reason  
To say exaggeration is false,  
To say hyperbolic tendencies

Are as elegant  
As chickens  
covered in pig filth.

## 2034

Jamal H. Iqbal

*This selection is paired with "Sex, Death, and Starshine" by Clive Barker*

It was pleasantly warm in the effervescent white capsule Djana paced inside. No sudden noises would startle her gentle tango, step by immaculate step, perfectly parallel to the twelve welcoming sides of the oval.

Not a single threat of a shadow even periled the warm June sunlight Djana basked in, arms extended, shoulder flowing freely, the lines still precise and graceful, without a hint of the sometimes crooked, peacock gait that affects ballerinas as they transition from just blossoming to full bloom. If it were the finals of the Shanghai Ballet Girls under 20, Ms. Djana-wei Tallu-ha would have been appraised as close to a perfect 9 the judges would ever consider parting with.

As she increased the speed of her movements, Djana felt herself grow lighter, the air in the cocoon webbing her in fine-filigreed ether lifting her towards rushed euphoric flight. To see a ballerina take what appeared to be true, graceful flight bereft of any grounding or limitation would have provided a unique kind of thrill to anyone watching her. That's if the cocoon would had been transparent glass.

Instead, passers by continued to walk past this strange capsule placed by the Illyria municipality just at the gate of the Bolshoi. Some said it was a new kind of cloud seeding invented by the Chinese. Others just used it as an occasional footrest as they adjusted a stray fray running down their leggings; or, late on Friday nights, a quick partition behind which to relieve themselves of distilled pre-distilled ethanol, as they staggered out of club doors, still pulsing with electronic mayhem.

From inside the cocoon Djana watched them pass her by, unaware that with each back and forth across the bright white cocoon, each drop of her own hardening saliva weaved her prison tighter, and tighter, until she would pirouette no more, lift no more, and finally, fly no more.

# In the Mind, the People

Mack Mani

*This selection is paired with "In the Hills, the Cities" by Clive Barker*

I am haunted,  
my body home  
to many spirits  
colonized,  
I walk these woods  
lost in the throes of grief  
(possession)

I am ancient,  
this I know  
by my ambling gait  
and wrinkled skin;  
where my hands should be  
lie little writhing bodies  
queerly folded,  
madness lurking  
in their every squirming.

I fear that  
I am losing  
(my people)  
my mind  
by way of  
glacier lake  
and devils canyon,  
where my muscles hold  
the memories of Judd  
(Podujevo)  
and I fall beneath  
the weight of their specter,  
their many tongues  
guide my own

to speak their names  
and sing their songs:

Bury me with no gravestone,  
My story is my own,  
The straps that they forgot undid them-  
It was Nita's death that doomed them all,  
Seek me in the hills and cities...  
My man, my men, my life, for time  
(stale incense, old sweat, and lies)  
We are all masterpieces in the bloody book...  
and I have nothing left to give

I am the blood in the water  
and the depth of the well

I am the body of the state  
and the shape of their lives

I am Popolac  
enter me and be alive.

# The Beautiful and the Macabre

Adrik Kemp

*This selection is paired with "In the Hills, the Cities" by Clive Barker*

It was in the pages of an omnibus edition of *Books of Blood Volumes 1-3* that I came of age. While reading *In the Hills, the Cities*, in my pubescent mind, I discovered a path that deviated from the limited possibilities I already knew.

I grew up reading cheap pulp fiction bought at discount prices at newsagents and corner stores. Real, live bookstores were places of wealth and gems I could never dream of possessing. Along with my mother, I would scour far-off secondhand stores for cast-offs instead. I gathered a collection of Stephen King novels, collected and discarded in turn a collection of Dean Koontz, dismissing them, in my juvenile way, as derivative of the master, King. Along the way, I read others, Shaun Hutson, James Herbert and various one-hit wonders. And then, one day, surrounded by the smell of washed used clothing, decaying paperbacks and the sight of white shelves filled with mismatched crockery and glassware, walls adorned with abandoned views of the countryside and framed puzzles of animals, I uncovered *Clive Barker's Books of Blood Volumes 1-3*.

I fell in love at first sight. The cover was a cacophony of the beautiful and the macabre. Fingertips on fire, knives and blood, hell's damnation in the distance, and the forefront. And a man, naked and staring out of the cover.

I demanded of my mother that I have it, and my history of unsavoury reading allowed her to buy it for me with only a slight worried glance at the artwork adorning it.

I dove straight in.

I might have been twelve or thirteen at the time. I had read so much cheap-thrills horror and been exposed to such a range of sexual encounters through it that I felt far more worldly than I have ever been. I was familiar with the terminology of the *member* and the *seed* and the way both could fill a person. In my mind's eye,



I had seen powerful, muscular, hirsute men sleeping with voluptuous, accommodating, buxom, moaning women. I had pictured these things and thought of myself as having a window into the secret lives of adults—the filthy things they kept hidden from children. The blood and violence, supernatural and horrific, didn't hold a candle to the wonders of the flesh these books contained.

While other boys and girls found themselves through magazines pilfered from parents and stores, VHS tapes of grainy sex scenes recorded from late-night television and even exploring with one another, I found tantalizing glimpses within the pages of well-worn books.

It was here that I first glimpsed a different sexuality, one borne of male lust, unfettered by societal restrictions and free to explore the topography of another male body. But it was invariably within the confines of abuse, the bullied and his tormentor, the depraved urges of a murderer-rapist, even necrophilia in extreme cases. It was always a fetish, a secret beneath the other secrets. Something to hide and something to fear.

What I saw of this so-called alternative lifestyle in other media wasn't much better. Eroticised, exaggerated and weaponised. Paraded down the streets in patterns of flesh and sweat in the name of pride. Remarkable as a reason for this or that kind of deviant behavior. Or rolled out as a punch line for a joke on TV. On rare occasions celebrated, but for the most part maligned. I was too young to analyse this however, so simply felt alienated from what society was telling me I had to become and what I felt like I was already.

The sense of titillation sparked by the homoeroticism of the cover of *Books of Blood Volumes 1-3* fed my desire to read it from cover to cover as quickly as I could. I churned through stories, in love with the idea of reading them from the scarred flesh of the living book, the tales of the dead, marked on a young man's skin. I saw murderers and wonders, ignoring both my mother and the long train trip back home from our latest foray to feed my insatiable need for words on a pitiful budget. I paused my reading in order to walk from the train station to our home, not far from the tracks, and read once more in my room. Door closed, my bedspread and

furnishings chosen by my mother, posters and drawings of skulls and monsters chosen on my own.

It was here that I started and finished reading *In the Hills, the Cities*. Here that I discovered that I was not as worldly as I had thought. Barker wasted no time at all establishing Mick and Judd as a gay male couple. They are friends with ex-boyfriends, they have differences of opinion and a relationship that is based in love, affection, irritation and attraction, similar to all the other heterosexual relationships I had seen. And they were on holiday together. While in somewhere exotic I could only picture from a few photos in bound encyclopedias, from the writing, Yugoslavia seemed to be at once a perfect place to holiday and also too boring to be able to ignore the problems in your own life.

The two men fuck in a field. In a never-ending series of firsts, it is the first sex-positive portrayal of homosexuality I have witnessed. My cheeks bloom. I try to control my body. I wonder whether my mother will barge in and somehow be able to see the words still in my head, the visions flitting across my mind. The endless scene of flesh on flesh I have just added to my ever-growing library of fantasies.

I had known only one gay man in my life. He was a teacher at my primary school. And the rumours that swirled around my years there were relentless and unforgiving. He was a deviant. He dressed in women's underwear. He wore leather underwear. He wore no underwear. He was a woman. He wanted to cut off his dick to be a woman. He peed on boys. He was a pedophile. The words came to me and I passed them on, dutiful, hiding and fearful, as I had been taught. I would also wonder what it might be like, to be like him. But he was a joke, forever on the receiving end of our taunts, so it was never something I considered for long and never voiced aloud.

Within *In the Hills, the Cities*, Judd and Mick were separate people. They were both men, with no hint of hetero-normative (a word that did not exist at the time) traits to their relationship. They were like the protagonists of so many other books I had read. The only difference was that they were together. They had different

personalities, and different interests and they talked and bickered and fought and made up and fucked. And when confronted with the incredible sight of two Serbian cities in giant configurations comprised of their respective populations, the lovers broke down in different ways.

In hindsight, it was the simultaneous dissonance of the couple being such a different combination than anything I had seen before, and their actions, horror setting notwithstanding, being almost boring in its banality. The normality of a shared holiday experience. The slow breakdown and micro-aggressions of relationships. The primal, carnal connections between people.

In the moment however, I finished the story, thrilled by the waves of blood, at the utter carnage and at the little horrors along the way, but particularly impressed with the bleak, desolate ending. I finished the story with a pause and a thought before I thumbed the pages back and re-read the scene in the long, yellow grass again.

I pictured a wheat field, the closest I could come to imagining the countryside of Yugoslavia being a direct replica of a dry farm in rural Australia. I painted Mick and Judd as pornographic men, Tom of Finland caricatures. I saw every part of them, as penned to paper by Clive Barker, and I embellished, I added more things I had seen before, fleshed even this out to be something that could happen to me. I found myself in the scene, reacting along with Mick, desperate for it to happen to me.

I was too afraid to fold the page over, like I had done for other scenes I enjoyed. But I remembered and returned to the scene repeatedly over the years, sometimes only in my mind's eye. I read all of Clive Barker's books and was not disappointed at the range of sexualities and genders represented. And looking back, the inclusiveness, the awareness and most of all, the unspoken but crystal-clear acceptance inherent in his characters.

But it was within the yellowed pages of my salvaged *Books of Blood*, and with Mick and Judd that I was able to accept that I was not alone in the world and that a future of my own making – and not one in which I would be pigeonholed – awaited me.

# Repertoire Screening

Sean Woodard

*This selection is paired with “Son of Celluloid” by Clive Barker*

## ONE: WORKPRINT

The diagnosis was no surprise to Birdy. Still, it hit her hard in the gut—the same way movie theater nachos rumble through your intestines moments before you shoot up from your chair mid-film and hope you make it to the restroom in time.

Not heart disease. She’d changed her diet in the past eight years and lost nearly 100 pounds. Not early onset of dementia, like her Aunt Susan. Birdy’s brain was still sharp for a 42-year-old woman.

This was breast cancer.

She started the radiation treatment her doctor recommended. The dosages made her weak, but she was determined to beat this.

Not that she hadn’t faced cancer before. She had. But that was a long time ago, almost seemed like a different life. And it wasn’t hers. It belonged to some dead criminal named Barberio.

## TWO: CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

Stepping out the cancer clinic into the midday sun, Birdy zipped up her sweater. She bounced from one foot to the other to get the blood pumping in her legs. Then she took off at a light jog down the sidewalk, her sneakers splashing through puddles.

She used to be self-conscious about her weight, especially when she ran. But now her body fat no longer jiggled—something that had constantly irked her, especially during that night in the Movie Palace. Hell, if being chased up a flight of auditorium steps by a monstrous tumor was enough to get her to seriously tackle her weight problem, then that was fine with her.

As she approached her apartment building, she saw a red Toy-

ota sedan parked outside. Her friend Sheila sat in the driver's seat. Birdy slowed to a stop and leaned into the car's open window.

"Sorry, I'm late," Birdy said.

"I was beginning to think you'd forgotten about tonight."

"No, I hadn't." She paused. "My appointment took longer than expected."

"That's okay."

"What time are we meeting Dan and Jerry?"

Sheila rolled her eyes. "Jerry called to say they had to cancel."

"That's just great . . ."

"But we'll have a nice girl's night instead."

Birdy stood aside so Sheila could step out of the car.

"Alright, just give me some time to freshen up."

"Of course."

They walked inside the building and took the elevator to the third floor.

"Let's grab dinner and then catch Casablanca at the drive-in."

Birdy almost dropped her key when Sheila said this. "Really? A movie?" She turned the key in the lock and pushed the apartment door open.

"Yeah, it's a 50th anniversary screening." Sheila sunk into the couch, burying herself under a heap of pillows. "Come on. It'll be fun." She gestured around the living room at the stacks of books, yellowing newspapers, and countless sewing kits. "Besides, you don't even have a TV in here, Birdy."

"I know, it's just that—"

—You were almost consumed by a sentient tumor as slimy as the Blob—

"—I don't like movies that much."

Sheila plucked the latest issue of *Movies and Movie Stars*

from the coffee table. She held it in front of Birdy's face. Birdy glanced away.

"Okay, I like some . . ."

"Then let's go." Sheila set the magazine down. "Look, if you want to leave early, we can. Just give it a try. Hey!" She gave Birdy a serious look. "Here's looking at you, kid."

Birdy nearly shuddered. An image of a solitary floating eye in the Movie Palace foyer flooded her senses; however, seeing Sheila's lips crack into a smile made her brush the bad memory off.

### THREE: THEATRICAL RELEASE

Birdy hadn't been to a movie theater, yet alone seen a movie, since the last day she worked at the Movie Palace. After the police made their inquiries and took away Ricky and Dean's bodies, she never returned. Two years of psychiatric evaluation helped her move past the horrific incident, but she could tell the psychiatrist believed she was raving mad at having witnessed a man's cancerous tumor murder everyone else in the theater that night. Except for Lindi Lee. Birdy found Lindi a year later in Seattle and blew three holes in her. It was the only way to ensure the cancer was gone forever. The cancer had poured out of every orifice of Lindi's body, but it dissolved once she poured acid over the remains.

When Sheila's parked the car in the drive-in lot, a shiver coursed through Birdy's body. Sheila noticed, so Birdy pulled her jacket closer around her.

"I'm just cold," she said.

There were two reasons why she agreed to go in the first place. First, Sheila was probably right: they might have a good time. Birdy thought that seeing a movie could help her to face her fear. Second, if anything happened, she was in a wide-open area from which she could easily escape. No locked doors, no bloodied bathroom tiles, no crawl spaces behind the screen . . .

Sheila tuned the radio dial until the audio from the trailers came through her car speakers.

“I’m going to grab a soda,” Birdy said, stepping out of the car. “Want anything?”

“Sure, a small popcorn and some licorice.”

“Alright. Be right back.”

Birdy weaved between cars as she made her way back to the joint tickets and concessions stand. Her eyes scanned the area around her—she noted the space between cars, how the concessions stand stood adjacent to the projection booth, the long driveway up to the main highway, the tree cover. Just in case she thought

When she reached the counter, a pimple-faced teenager greeted her with smile. His face resembled pepperoni pizza.

“I’ll have a Cherry Coke, a small buttered popcorn, and a pack of licorice, please.”

As the kid grabbed her order, he smacked a wad of grape-flavored bubblegum. It stuck to his braces, each chew producing a wave of saliva that threatened to spill over his lip and trickle down his chin. The gum’s purplish-black hue made her irrationally take a step back, as if she expected it to jump out and swallow her.

The kid handed the items over to her. Birdy thanked him and handed over a couple of bills. She walked back to the car, juggling the food in her hands.

Birdy slid into the passenger seat. She tossed the licorice into Sheila’s lap before passing her the popcorn.

“You got back just in time,” Sheila said, shoving a handful of popcorn into her mouth. “The movie’s about to start.”

The trailers ended and the main feature started. Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman’s names filled the screen.

As the opening credits rolled, Sheila leaned over.

“So, how’d the treatment go today?”

Birdy gave her a forlorn look.

“Oh, honey. Are you feeling okay?”

“Fine, I guess. This last dosage of radiation didn’t help much, so the doctor wants me to switch to chemo next month.” Her hand moved first to the lump in her left breast and then up to her shoulder-length hair. “But I can’t imagine going bald.”

“We’ll take this one step at a time,” Sheila assured her.

Birdy tried to concentrate on the movie, but her mind wandered. She often caught herself glancing in the sideview mirror to see if anything was slowly crawling on the ground alongside the car. The words: “OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR” stared back at her. At one point she tilted her head out the window at what appeared to be an oozing figure seeping toward her. But it was only soda spilling out of a discarded cup.

The only cancer here was in her body. And the chemotherapy would eradicate it.

“Are you even paying attention?” Sheila asked.

“Yes. I, uh . . . sorry, I got distracted.”

At that moment, they heard a distinct sucking sound. Birdy glanced in the mirror again but saw nothing. That sound . . . it was like when the tumor had spread over her body in the Movie Palace, leaving her clothes slimy to the touch as if a horde of snails had passed over her.

Sheila pointed to their left.

“Over there.”

In the car next to them a couple were making out, their lips smacking together.

Sheila laughed. “Ever do that as a kid?”

“No,” Birdy replied, her eyes dropping.

No boy had ever wanted to take a fat girl out to the movies, let alone kiss her. Instead, kids would chase her around the playground until they cornered her. In their pre-pubescent voices, they’d screech: “Dumbo! DUMBO! DUM—”

Birdy sighed and tried to focus on the movie. From time to



time, she and Sheila would hear weird sounds coming from other cars, but they brushed it off as lovers having fun in the dark.

Around the time in the film when Ingrid Bergman asks Sam to play “As Time Goes By,” Sheila gave a start.

“Hey Birdy. See that?”

“What?”

“Look!”

Two cars ahead of them to the right was the silhouette of a man and woman. In the light from the screen, they could make out a black leather jacket and a mop of brown hair.

“That son of a bitch!” Sheila seethed.

“What?”

“It’s Jerry. I’d recognize that jacket anywhere.”

“Do you want to leave?”

“Not before I give him a piece of my mind.”

She got out of the car, slamming the door behind her. Birdy got out, too. She headed toward the concessions stand. Might as well try to get our money back, she thought.

Halfway there, she spun around as a scream pierced the air. But there was no movement around her, so she chalked it up as being a sound effect from the film. When she reached the concession stand, however, her stomach dropped.

The pimple-faced kid stood at the counter, but his body shook all over. His eyes twitched and his limbs gyrated in random movements, as if he were experiencing an epileptic seizure. The wad of gum shot out of his mouth and landed on Birdy’s blouse. She wiped it away in disgust. But she sucked in her breath at what she saw next.

The teenager’s eyes bulged out of his head. Pulsating and red, they tore out of his sockets in a spray of blood. Blackheads on his face exploded in rapid succession and oozed a black liquid as thick as tar.

That's when the boy spoke. "Hello, Birdy. I've been waiting for you." The voice was a mixture of Humphrey Bogart, Peter Lorre, and Sydney Greenstreet.

The concessions worker's body writhed like a puppet's whose master had tangled up its strings. Gunk spewed from his mouth all over the cash register. Then his body collapsed, and the reeking mass flung itself at her feet.

Birdy screamed and ran toward Jerry's car. She yanked the door open and shrieked. Sheila was strewn across the laps of Jerry and the lady in the car. Each pair of eyes had exploded from their skulls and landed on the dashboard. That cancerous tumor dripped out of their sockets, their mouths, their ears. She ran from car to car, screaming for help, but she found each guest similarly mutilated.

The cancerous mass wrapped around Birdy's foot. She tripped, her face colliding with the ground. Her forehead split open and trickle of blood ran down her face.

The tumor climbed up her leg now. It moaned in pain as she kicked it. When it let go of her foot, she sprinted toward the first thing she saw: the projection booth. She flung the door open and lunged inside. Locking the door behind her, she backed away. Her foot brushed against something. She looked down and saw the dead body of the projectionist. But unlike the others, he bore no signs of being attacked by the cancerous tumor. Perhaps he had died of fright instead, she thought.

The door shook and the tumor seeped through the gaps in the door.

"Thought you could get rid of me?" the tumor said. It reformed in the room, much larger than she remembered.

"I told you before. I am the dreaming disease. I feed off souls. I'm in every person, including you. I am death incarnate."

Birdy's brow furrowed in anger.

"I decide how I'm going to die, not you!"

She overturned the projector onto the tumor. The film cut out and the projector's bulb burst. The tumor writhed under the weight of the machine. A portion of it grabbed her leg and pulled her toward it. She fell on her back, reaching for anything to hold onto. Her hand brushed the projectionist's shirt pocket. She seized a packet of matches that fell out. The tumor escaped from under the equipment and crawled up her waist. It tried to take hold of Birdy's arm, but she resisted. She struck a match against the pad and held blue flame across the other matches. The tumor's stench was unbearable—it reeked of dead cats and dogs, gutted fish, Barberio's corpse.

Birdy held the flaming matchbook in front of her face. The cancer recoiled at the heat. Birdy yanked her body free from its grasp.

“So long, motherfucker!”

She threw the matchbook at the tumor. It burst into flames and emitted an anguished roar. The flames licked the ceiling, catching the overhead beams on fire.

The fire blocked the door, so Birdy dashed to the projection window. She pulled herself through and collapsed on the wet ground. Then she sprinted down the road, forcing herself not to look back.

#### FOUR: AND THE AWARD GOES TO . . .

Birdy sat in a chair as her doctor read the test results.

“No signs of cancer,” he said.

Birdy sighed in relief.

“I would like to set a follow-up appointment with you for two weeks from today. But consider yourself in remission.”

“Thank you, doctor.”

She smiled.

“Birdy, I've admired your good spirits during treatment.”

Birdy covered her bald head with a beanie. “I’ve already beaten cancer three times now. So if it returns, I’ll be ready for it.”

The doctor’s face scrunched up in a perplexed look.

“It’s a joke,” she said, laughing it off. “I’ll see you in two weeks.”

As Birdy exited the medical clinic, the sun shone brightly.

# Scape-Goat Offering

Elsa M. Carruthers

*This selection is paired with "Scape-Goats" by Clive Barker*

To the lost soldiers and sailors:  
I don't blame you your depravities.  
With your bodies piled this way and that,  
Haphazardly buried and unmarked,

Is it any wonder you demand your due?

You were discarded,  
Cast aside,  
forgotten.  
You were thrown out at war's end;  
Left to rot on an uncharted island

A few sheep, a ship  
driven to shore  
don't make up for the totality  
of this nightmare.

You are nameless and countless:  
A monstrous accumulation of bodies  
and souls that have become of one mind,  
one purpose.

So, take me as you did the  
Sheep Feeder.  
I offer myself to join you  
in your mass grave.

I cannot atone for Ray's atrocity,  
or the sin of not knowing you...  
But I shall stay here in eternal vigil,  
Finding meaning in life from my death;

For that I thank you.

# Remembrance

Matt Carlin

*This selection is paired with “Scape-Goats” by Clive Barker*

The violence fast approached the mainland.

On a clear day, in the distance, you could see it, and on a windy day, you could smell it: putrid, pungent fumes of the long dead and decomposed—that refused to be forgotten. The island from which the smell arose not much more than an oversized burial mound. They used to debate whether the island was a natural phenomenon or a retribution for the wars that man has waged—until a rock caved in Eoin’s head. Then debate seemed a trivial academic exercise of little import. More urgent matters have occupied the village since then.

War-dead and drowned. Driven off European mainland, deposited on a remote coast and forgotten. Until they chose to be no longer. Until Eoin’s head erupted in acrid streams of crimson.

Prior to Eoin, it was a twice-told tale, often told twice removed. And never with the same facts. It amounted to this: a sailor took his girl to the island to do things best done in private. The girl was said to be an innocent (though why then would she go on a jaunt with a playboy with a sailboat was often asked). They laid out a blanket on the beach, ate peaches and drank of wine. Then he entered her, and she bled. It was then that it started.

Of course, nobody knows if this is so.

He tried to compile what he did know to be so as he boarded his boat and looked on at the horizon. There was not much. The Great War and its sequel had created numerous dead. The dead needed a home. He stuck his paddle into the quick and settled out onto the water.

Later, perhaps thanks to the sailor’s gardening, bringing bloom to the girl’s flower, the dead made their statement. Or perhaps, it had nothing to do with the sailor’s girl. He rubbed his head.

Remembrance.

As he paddled, a shiver too bold and irksome to ignore crawled up his spine. *You must remember this...* An old song fluttered through his brain, rattling in what few dark crevices these beings had not yet contaminated. Remembrance. Well a rock slicing clean through the cranium of a longstanding member of a fishing village...that is hard to forget.

Now on the open water, he had run out of facts. Strange reverberations on the island and rock formations; rippling images of what might be the dead crawling and scaling the ocean floor had all been seen and countless gossiped in pubs. Were those facts, he wondered? Sightings of these bastards, closer and closer to the mainland: fact, speculation, or gossip—it was, quite literally, hitting too close to home.

Baa! Baa! Baa! That incessant sound. He looked back, staring sympathetically into the eyes of the caged creatures.

Sheep Herder. That is not what he was born, nor raised to be in this life, until the dead spoke. It was now what he was. Sheep Feeder. This is what he would soon be—an unlucky draw of the straw. Sheep Herder. Sheep Feeder.

The three lambs in the cage wedged awkwardly into his boat looked back at him puzzlingly. Where are you taking me? They Baa-ed.

To Hell girls, he wanted to say. To Hell. And they were nearly there.

He cautiously approached the shore. This island was tricky. It had a way of suddenly just...being there. First not, then so.

Aden had arrived at the idea. Even had to expose a long-suspected but never convicted notion that his wife dabbled in things that were not always altogether holy. It was brave of him, the Sheep Herder thought as he beached the boat. He was opening up his family to the will of a panicked town: when the floor drops, it is easiest to blame the one who believed there had always been a cellar. Witch! Witch! And all those shitty cries from Boston-land. Certainly, more than a few of the wives would curse Aden's wife for the arrival of a plague. In truth, she might be the very one

which saves them.

He was willing to try anything, the Sheep Herder was. He was a man in his second youth who had yet to start a family. He had seed still to plant; he wanted to do so. When he had first heard of this plan, he had worried of its cost and practicality. For he thought they would eat the sheep. What is a sheep to a squadron of soldiers? How could they keep up?

“The dead have no stomachs, no bowels. They can shit no more than intake any material with which to do so. They will not eat. They are no longer of the body,” Aden chided him. He explained to the Sheep Herder (“explain” may be too strong a word; the Sheep Herder still hardly grasped much of it). “These—the dead, killed in a war so that others might live. Then fed anonymously to unconsecrated lands of Satan’s Weed...to a mound of dirt with no gravestone to call their names to. No names called at all. No service. No worship. All forgotten.” The sheep would be there...to mark them and remember. A token, maybe? A memorial? The Sheep Herder racked his brain but never quite got it. Nevertheless, the woman, through her books and her studies, swore by it. Nor was there any other notion. The best the Sheep Herder could muster was that the sheep were, in effect, some sort of scapegoat. Paying a price for the memory and lack of respect paid to the deceased, so that the mainlanders would not have to.

Now the Sheep Herder arrived, with his scapegoats dragged along in a cage, to a clearing where a few other mainlanders who had drawn short straws in this task had raised a field and built a fence enclosure.

He led the sheep in and the ground spoke. At first, it was a whisper, the bauble of pebbles losing foundation with gravity and clinking farther down hills. It quickly turned to a murmur, like a quake. Was this—science be damned—truly what an earthquake was? The dissatisfaction and reminiscences of the blood that had spilt upon the soil?

He had of course heard of the rock formations, yet he had never seen one form. The day was turning to dusk, and his eyes



were starting to fail him, but he could be sure he saw stones raising and shifting out of his peripheries. He tried to shake this off. “In you go,” he patted the last bleating lamb in. He tossed some scraps, tied down the compound, and tried to deny what his eyes had seen. It was not something one wished to accept, or recall.

Denial became impossible when he arrived back at his boat. Dozens of skeletal figures rose above the surface, seemingly watching him with curiosity. Some had mangy, purplish, bloated blots of skin struggling for foothold on bone. Others’ flesh had long abandoned them, leaving a hollowed shell that resembled more the crumbling fossil of a reef than the skeleton body the Sheep Herder recalled from visits to the medic.

The beings did not move, only watched. The Sheep Herder did not freeze at such a frightening sight, as he had feared he might. He did make water as he approached the water, however. In order to get through the ocean, he first had to traverse the sea of soldiers.

Yet here is the thing: they did not move. Did not attack. He kicked loose of shore and drifted so slowly, yet they were everywhere. The ship could not help but bump into bone...and keep drifting. They did not seem to wish him harm.

Almost free. Almost clear.

Then the boat stopped.

Jolted, prevented from travel. The Sheep Herder turned and saw a mashed, gnarled hand latch onto the boat. He lifted his paddle from the wet, intending to strike at the creature, intending attack, when, upon approaching, the creature had at him first.

Many digits cut through his shirt, pulling the Sheep Herder face to misbegotten face with the being. An atrocious smell, worse than any death could naturally cause, filled the Sheep Herder’s nostrils. The sockets of the thing contained no eyes, yet the Sheep Herder felt—was sure—that it was staring deep into him.

It said nothing. What could it say, and how? It had no mouth with which to do so. It stared instead, and made sure it was seen.

The Sheep Herder's nostrils forced vomit up his throat, but he caught it in his teeth. He dared not even breathe on the thing.

The night went full dark of pitch, and all that was to be seen was the dead. Nothing but the dead.

Then, the corpse released the Sheep Herder, suddenly. Let go too of its grip on the boat. The boat commenced again to drift.

Just like that.

He had seen the creature, and the creature knew that the dead could not remember, and it clearly did not wish to be forgotten.

Remembrance.

The ways of folks was often odd, but if respected often trouble can be avoided, the Sheep Herder thought. He would take to his job of Sheep Feeder gladly then, and without fear. For what he had seen was something deep and penetrating. Something of great import and monument. He would have no fear. This tacit agreement he would respect, and no farther blood would spill. For alongside the Sheep Feeder, the lambs were there also, to account for the lost lives. And who could harm something as innocent as a lamb?

## **Part Two**

The Alphanumeric Selections



# Blood

## a Found Poem in Tanka form\*

Tracy Davidson

*This selection is paired with “The Books of Blood” by Clive Barker*

the dead have highways  
an endless traffic of souls  
across the wasteland  
seducing out of silence  
a shiver of lunacy

a promise of blood  
the wandering dead glimpsed through  
that wound in the world  
cracks made by acts of cruelty  
this orgy of destruction

deaf to the babble  
creatures whose appetites were  
abominable  
acid tears boiling on cheeks  
scent lingered in sinuses

awash with spilt blood  
her cries did not diminish  
as the dark ate her  
murdered men between her teeth  
their eyes spoke their agonies

\* A found poem—all lines are Clive Barker's own, just rearranged into tanka form.

# The City Your Father, the City Your Brother

Amelia Gorman

*This selection is paired with “Midnight Meat Train” by Clive Barker*

How hard it was to share a father  
with an entire city and compete  
with all the neon, oil slicks, and crashes.

A painting in your dining room subway car  
asked you every meal why Saturn ate his children  
as you ate dinner in a throne alone at dawn.

A riddle whose answer meant you’d be ready  
to leave the underground. An answer you hunted  
with squat city aunts wielding femurs and snares.

Poor little rich kid, rich like blubber.

You were jealous of the skyline as any brother taller  
and brighter than you.

You crawled up his manholes looking for comfort  
when you skinned your velvet knees, got indifference.  
All hopes of learning the answer from him faded,  
even though he got outside somehow.  
Back in the tunnels the half-city infants licked your blood  
with tongues of glass—there are some down here  
still lonelier than you.

But all you wanted was to be taken  
seriously. All you wanted  
was to be the wanted one.

Poor little rich kid, rich like marrow.

And the answer to that riddle reveals itself  
in the halogen haze of a dining room,  
a rarefied meal you share with your father.

The answer is: because they let him.

# Ink and Flame

Hanan Muzafar

*This selection is paired with "In the Hills, the Cities" by Clive Barker*

The cost of everything  
value of nothing;  
Sun shines,  
and moon cries:  
Without you,  
There ain't anything free.

Rain tapering us,  
and we're travellers;  
How we move,  
A rhythm inside us,  
and my wings carry me,  
where I can't predict:  
Indeed, the marvellous fate.

Love, you make me,  
fall again,  
and the strangers,  
Call me back to you.

Bare children,  
holding my fingers,  
touching the wind:  
Place to place,  
looking for home,  
and a roof.

Ink and flame,  
Birds inside the cage,  
Ticking clocks,  
Blaze the rage.



Ravishing thoughts,  
and empty carnivals,  
Stay with me,  
while I hold you,  
It's autumn time,  
under falling leaves.

# Quaid

Morrow Dowdle

*This selection is paired with "Dread" by Clive Barker*

In the absence of God,  
there you are.

Crouched on your bar stool,  
brandy in one hand,

Bentham in the other,  
haloed by your own smoke.

Eyes so pale  
they conjure milk,

cold and sustaining.  
Train them on me.

To everyone else,  
I am scarce of scariness.

Only you see its slight vibration  
undermining the foundation.

Take me to Pilgrim Street  
and lock me inside

that stifling room,  
plain and holy as your face.

Lay out my father's edicts  
and my mother's denials.

Lay out the friends' rejections  
and the lovers' ridicule.

Lay out my husband's mistresses  
and my children's future therapists.

Lay out what my boss stole from me  
while I sat—like this—in silence.

Lay out the stinking fish  
of my own ego,

its fragile scales gleaming  
now good enough, now assuredly worthless.

I won't waste time in avoidance,  
raring to wrap my tongue

around that fetid meat,  
longing to lap at the maggots.

Take my fervid hand,  
and let me touch the beast.

Only in the presence of dread  
is there salvation.

# My Tumor's Hunger

Alana I. Capria

*This selection is paired with "Son of Celluloid" by Clive Barker*

There was a man who collected little bits of me. Strands of my curling hair, a piece of my menstruation, a scraping of my arm. My underwear, the papery shedding of my favorite ovarian tumor (which had a mouth and stomach of its own), an eyelash. This man kept all these parts in a little box beneath his bed. It was his box of totems and he prized it above all. When the man slept above this box, he dreamed of being consumed, piece by piece, always painlessly. He dreamed this eating was done by my mouth, not my tumor's, although it was my tumor's hunger. My tumor devoured him without pause, sucking him dry, tossing him down her stomach like he was nothing. My tumor did not even need to gulp. When my tumor ate too much, she slept, and then I went to the man, slipped him inside myself, and just held him there, his body trembling within mine. I wanted to feel every bit of him, his tremors and spasms, and without doing anything, I milked him into me. When the man finally slipped out, my thighs were wet and my cunt dripped. I smelled the chlorine, the musk, of him and then my tumor smelled it, too. She woke within me, stretched out, came creeping along my flesh to reach him. She touched his throat, scratched his tongue, directed him between my legs where he did as she insisted, although he was so tired. I wanted to protect the man from my tumor and I also wanted to take him back into myself, cram all of him within me so that I was stuffed fat. Come inside me, I said and so he came, his hardness hurting me as he thrust. He did not have to fuck me for long. He slipped in, twitched once, and it was over, his body buried inside, already emptied. My tumor ate him from within me. She extended her tongue, licked slowly, and took all of him. I tasted him through her. I swallowed and my tumor swallowed and together, we swallowed the man up, left him voided within us. My tumor tried pushing him out but I held him where he was, held him tight, did not want to let go because I did not want that hole to open again, could not stand

its vacancy...

But this man could only stay within me for so long before he began rotting away. Poor him. How he wept and pleaded but I could not let him go, would not scrape him out. I left him where he was, his flesh melding with mine, turning liquid. I pet his head, caught his tangled hair in my fingers, rubbed his eyes, and he dissolved, his flesh reddening, darkening, blackening. He smelled of old meat, my menstruation, sour milk, all my old pregnancies that went watery with failure. My tumor crept down to him, buried her face in him, sniffed and licked, took his rancid self into her body, ate with full mouth and cramping tongue, ate with sour throat and sour stomach, ate until she could not eat anymore, and then she did, because she was my tumor and nothing was ever enough. She took more than I was able and together, we tore this man to pieces. His taste was on my teeth and his taste was on her gums. This man tasted like chlorine. When he finally slipped from out of me, I caught bits of him in my hands. I held them to my face and I cried while my tumor nestled herself comfortable within my meat. Do not cry, she said but I could not help my grief. How I wanted him to stay a little longer, to keep me stuffed. They never stay, my tumor said. They only ever go away, my tumor said. We must use them, my tumor said. We must eat them up, my tumor said. We must eat and eat and eat...

Once the man's taste faded from my mouth, I was free. I did not want him anymore, I did not think of him. I did not sleep because my tumor's howling was so loud. I did not eat because my tumor ate enough for us both. I did not shit because my tumor and I did not produce waste. It was only that my stomach growled with false hunger, with the need to put something between my teeth, and when I hesitated, my tumor directed me to the woods, where the trees bent towards me, raked at my skin, tore me apart (tore me so deep, even my tumor was cut up), and I bled there in the earth, spilled myself to the roots and mud, waited for the men to come creeping from the shadows (that was where they lived, hidden away in those places my tumor and I could not see). When they came, they thought they would be the ones to hurt me. They surrounded me, laughed and hooted, sounded like great beasts, ex-

cept they were so small to me, so deflated. They grabbed my wrists and squeezed but I felt no pain. They spread my legs but found that they could not get hard enough to enter. These men thought they could scramble my insides, bleed me out in the dark, spread me flat on the ground, riddle me with holes, bash me open, leave me weeping with the pain of what they did, and how disappointed they were when they could not hurt me, not even a little. Then my tumor and I rose high above them, tongues salivating, eyes narrowed, hair like snakes, and we rose up and up, silhouetted against the moon, and warned these men to run. They did not listen and so I swooped, knocked them to the ground where they choked upon the earth. My tumor and I ate them from their spines and throats, ate them from their cocks and mouths, ate them while they spewed and spasmed, ate until our mouths were filthy with them, and my breasts were heaving with them, and we were red with them, and we were sopping with them. There were so many men and my tumor and I took our time but then it was over. The ground was soggy and the trees were close together and the dark was heavy and nothing felt like enough. My tumor held me and I held her. We breathed into one another, listened to the slow rustle of the dark over those spent bodies. Are you sad, my tumor asked. And I was not...

# The Benefits of Southern Hospitality

W. T. Paterson

*This selection is paired with “Human Remains” by Clive Barker*

Dear Judge Marigold,

It is with most shock and outrage that I learn that twenty years after Arthur Wallace savagely murdered his mother in cold blood, he is being considered for release and reintroduction into society. Not only is this an unethical act, but we—as good, law abiding citizens—fear a most dangerous turning point in American history. Evil must not be tolerated.

This case still gives me nightmares. The crime scene photos of Judy Wallace are forever burned into the back of my eyelids and I fear I may never truly sleep again. But this is the price we pay to make sure that evil people are handled swiftly and justly. There was no question of his guilt. Not a single one. Arthur himself has gone on record to talk about his mother’s death. What does this tell us? That he is proud of his actions, that he needs only a listening ear to expound on the tragic event that rocked Silverton Bridge, South Dakota to its very core.

Now, I’m not one to tell a Judge how to do their job. The choice and ultimate consequence falls on the court and for that I am grateful. I am only a State Prosecutor working in conjunction with Social Services. I will caution, however, the dire nature of this crime. If we consider letting him go, what’s next? Shall rapists who find God be let out? Should sex traffickers who took up painting be allowed to sell their work for tens of thousands of dollars? Should the man that beat his wife be given a license to box in a televised event, thus creating a crooked path to success? Be wise, Judge Marigold, this is not just the life of Arthur Wallace that hangs in the balance. It is an idea that must be snuffed out like the life that he took. No mercy for the wicked, Judge. None.

When I was a boy, I ate my vegetables, said my prayers, and did my homework. That is the American dream. I played baseball and went to law school. That is the American dream. I married my

wife and had two beautiful daughters who go to private school. That is the American dream. The American dream has always been about working hard and reaping the rewards. I would hate to see this dream turn into a nightmare where murder is accepted and it is society who must change for the deviant. I will not stand for that, and I urge you Judge Marigold to not stand for it as well. Our eyes are on you. They watch with admiration.

Don't let that change.

Sincerely,  
Harvey Devereaux  
Assistant District Attorney

\* \* \*

Dear Judge Marigold,

My name is Dr. Isaiah Young. I am the psychologist that has been working with Arthur for the past twenty years, and I am advocating for his release. This is not, nor will it ever be, a matter of good versus evil. Such ideas are human constructs to justify our behavior. Instead, we must look at the facts, at what we know, at Arthur himself to make our best determinations.

He was four years old when he stabbed his mother. This fact is not up for debate, nor has it ever been contested. What the prosecution missed was whether or not young Arthur understood the gravity of his actions. Does a boy only a few years into life truly grasp the meaning and finality of death? It is only as a society that we look at his actions as inexcusable. Perhaps.

I have three children at home, each learning about the world through trial and error. My eldest used to throw temper tantrums to get what he wanted. It almost never worked, but sometimes we gave in, which taught him to keep trying until his vocabulary was rich enough to describe his thoughts, feelings, and wants. When he learned to better communicate, the tantrums disappeared.

My daughter, the middle child, found that she could get attention by pushing our (my wife and I's) proverbial buttons. She would say outrageous and horrible things, not because she



meant them, but rather because it put the spotlight on her. Even through scolding, she enjoyed our focus. It wasn't until she was in third grade—only a few years older than Arthur was—that she said something mean to a classmate, and the classmate burst into tears. During her teenage years, she recalled that moment as one of immense growth and clarity. She learned that words can hurt, and that hurt is a potential with any interaction. For this, she learned to employ the grace and wisdom that she still carries with her as an adult.

My youngest son recently went through a breakup and was beside himself with confusion and loneliness. Night after night he made desperate attempts to understand why he felt the way he did after she left. During the relationship, he described himself as unhappy and stifled. Yet, after she was gone, he described himself as empty and hollow. In his grasp was young love, and then it slipped away. Through it all, he learned what made him happy and how to sustain happiness. These lessons are invaluable.

My point is that every child needs to make mistakes because it is inside of those mistakes that we grow the most. Arthur Wallace was four years old when he stabbed his mother. Imagine that something you yourself did as a four year old that had to hang over your head forever without any chance at redemption.

In my professional experience, there is no such thing as a born evil. He is not spawn of satan. He is not out for the blood of the innocent, like the media would have us believe. Now, before his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, after a lifetime of being heavily medicated, sedated, he has been to therapy more than most people ever will. He shows immense remorse, incredible self-awareness, and a drive to put something positive back out into the world.

I implore the courts to look within themselves and consider the circumstance. He was a neglected child who often went without meals, clothes, or affection. While his mother was rushed to the hospital after a fist-fight with her live in partner, Arthur met a very kind nurse who stayed with him in the waiting room. They colored in a coloring book (a page that he still has framed over his bed). He asked if she could be his mother. She told him no because he al-

ready had a mother. That night, when he went home, he made it so that he didn't have a mother. Inside of a four year old's brain, this course of action not only made sense, but could potentially grant him a better life.

I'm not saying that the murder was an act of courage. I'm not saying it was justified. All I'm saying is that if we pigeon hole ideas of good and evil onto everything we do, then we fail to see the full picture. We have the unique opportunity to see if redemption is truly possible, if the system works, if we learn from our missteps to go on and find success.

When is a debt to society paid in full? Is it ever? We can find out. Arthur Wallace is our key.

By no means am I arguing for his release into the outside world with no questions asked. Instead, I am asking for leniency. I am asking for implementation of a halfway house, a slow immersion. For twenty years he has been inside of our facility the same way an animal at the zoo looks out from behind the bars of their cage and knows something else is beyond the stone walkways and herds of people. However, like an animal that has only known captivity, the shock of freedom could prove to be overwhelming and he could drown in the choices of modern adult life.

Consider Arthur Wallace. See yourself inside of him. Ask yourself how much longer you might be able to last having a single choice from your fourth year be picked apart and analyzed for the next twenty years. Give him the reassurance that life is sacred, and not something that is easily tossed away.

With regards,  
Dr. Isaiah Young

\* \* \*

Dear Judge Marigold,

I am a clerk at the Forsythe County Inpatient Facility, Psychiatric Ward. I have no opinion on the holding or release of one Arthur Wallace. My superiors have asked me to put together Mr. Wallace's record over the twenty years with us. Normally, I don't

do such a thing, but I grew up in Fayetteville Arkansas and my superiors know that because of my southern hospitality, I would not say no.

Mr. Wallace wet the bed until he was eleven (11) years old.

Mr. Wallace was friendly with the orderlies, especially women of mixed descent with dark hair that reached their shoulders.

Mr. Wallace did not make friends until he was seventeen (17) years old. This is not because he was anti-social, but because he was kept isolated from others his age. When introduced, he overcame his shyness.

His first three friends killed themselves during their stay with us. Two by overdose, one by hanging. Mr. Wallace wept at their remembrance sessions. He was not allowed to attend their funerals.

Mr. Wallace has only been in two (2) altercations. Once during puberty, he was caught masturbating in the women's room and when an orderly tried to sedate him, he broke the orderly's nose. After counseling with Dr. Young, the incident was never repeated. The second was during a string of robberies that had been occurring over several months. A patient was sneaking into other patient's rooms and taking their personal belongings. Mr. Wallace had a cactus succulent by his window and woke up while the accused was trying to take it. Mr. Wallace screamed for the orderlies and held the accused down. Though it was never confirmed, the accused claimed Mr. Wallace had tried to stab him with the succulent.

Mr. Wallace has been polite and courteous to all staff when approached.

Mr. Wallace has expressed interest in getting a GED, and attending an online university.

Mr. Wallace keeps a journal that is monitored nightly by staff. Nothing in it thus far has raised an alarm.

Mr. Wallace exudes great happiness when Shep, the Golden Retriever therapy dog, comes to visit on Tuesdays and Thursdays. He has expressed interest in one day adopting a dog and naming it

Shep.

Mr. Wallace has a slight speech impediment that prevents him from properly pronouncing his “Rs.” Instead, they come out like soft “Ws.”

May you find this information useful.

Amber Lynn McFarley  
Forsythe County Psychiatric Clerk

\* \* \*

Dear Judge Marigold,

My name is Arthur Wallace. I will be turning twenty-five (25) in May. I’ve been under the custody of the state, specifically Dr. Young, for over twenty years.

I am good.

In my spare time, I enjoy reading. Did you know coyotes have different barks and howls for different situations? I read a lot about nature.

My favorite movie is *The Lion King*. I understand Simba because I had to grow up without parents, too. The only part I don’t like is the fight with Scar at the end, because fighting doesn’t solve things.

I know that there is a life outside of this facility. I love it here and they treat me nice, but sometimes I watch the birds fly in the yard and wonder where they’re going. I want to ask them, but they can’t answer me because they’re birds, silly!

My favorite job right now is to lead by example. When new patients come in, I help show them how well things can go by listening to their problems, helping them problem solve, and being creative.

If I got a dog, I would walk him every day and call him a good-boy, even if the dog was a girl, because they like being called *good-boy*. I would pet him on the head and tummy whenever he wanted.

Sometimes I dream of my mother and I wake up crying. Once, I got a bloody nose and when I looked into the mirror, it made me sad. I looked like her.

The Beatles are really fun! We like to dance and flash the lights to their albums and even people in wheelchairs like to spin around. See? I'm just a regular kid.

The only thing I want for my birthday, it can even be my Christmas present too, is to live in the world again. Is that so much to ask? I don't remember what it is like, and I really want to know what it is like.

I like your name, Judge Marigold. Did you know that for years, farmers included the open-pollinated African marigold 'Crackerjack' in chicken feed to make egg yolks a darker yellow?

Take care, and Hakuna Matata.

Arthur Wallace

\* \* \*

Dear Judge Marigold/To Whom it may concern,

I've never done this before and don't know what the proper format is. My name is Suzi Florentine and I was named in the Arthur Wallace trial as the nurse who sat with him on the eve of his mother's death.

Do not let him out, I beg of you. He's been sending me letters over the past few years talking about how he's going to come and see me. I don't know how he gets them into the mail, or how he found my address, but I've alerted the authorities. They told me to simply throw the letters away and pay no mind.

They talk of how he can be a good son again, of how he can finally be with me. They talk about holding hands near ferris wheels, licking ice cream off my fingers when it drips from the cone, and sleeping in the same bed so that we can be there for each other if we have nightmares where "the ocean rises and we can't grow angel wings".

This whole ordeal has me so shaken that I can't function. Al-

ready medicated, I'm falling into fits at work where, in my profession, people can die. I'm not eating, not sleeping, and every sound I hear is him coming to collect.

It took me over a decade to get past it mentally. I'll never fully be over it. I'm the cause of murder, an unknowing accomplice. How does one live with that burden? How does one ever recover?

The answer is simple: they don't. This is why Arthur Wallace will never be rehabilitated. He's crafty. He was born with something that we don't understand in that human life means nothing. In my world, human life means everything.

I've tried to kill myself twice already because of the guilt. Though I've been told I'm not directly responsible for any of the events that transpired, I will always feel like I am. If I had not said those words, if I had been slightly less caring, maybe none of this would have happened.

If he gets let out, I'll kill myself. I'm fully prepared. This time, I'm not mincing my words to sound kind. I'm being direct.

Proceed with caution and wisdom, Judge. My life hangs in your blind balance.

Suzi Florentine

\* \* \*

Dear Dr.'s Amanda Pothanos and Henry Schill,

It has come to my attention that a nurse in your residency has been experiencing an alarming amount of mental duress. One Suzi Florentine wrote me a letter expressing suicidal intent, and so I sent local law enforcement to collect her. It appeared that she was upset about the idea that one Arthur Wallace might be released into society, which he will not.

Suzi has been formally checked in to the Forsythe County Inpatient Facility, Psychiatric Ward. Her stay is indefinite. She will be working with Dr. Isaiah Young if you so need to get in touch with her.

Please contact our office for any further questions or clarifica-

tions. We are happy to work alongside our hospital's chief of staff to generate the most suitable resolution.

Best,  
Hon. Judge Deborah Marigold

PS—Tennis soon? The weather is becoming most perfect for a doubles match.

## Contributors

**Alana I. Capria** (*My Tumor's Hunger*) is the author of the novel *Mother Walked Into the Lake* and the story collection *Wrapped in Red*. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Fairleigh Dickinson University.

**Matt Carlin's** (*Remembrance*) fiction has recently appeared in *The Sea Letter*. He has also made several short films, and has had film criticism pieces featured in *Senses of Cinema*. He is a regular contributor to *MUBI Notebook*.

**Elsa Carruthers** (*Scape-Goat Offering*) is a writer, poet, and genre scholar. Her story "God Bless the Freaks" will appear in *Amazing Stories, volume III*, and she is editing an anthology of critical essays on *Westworld* which will be published next year.

**Tracy Davidson's** (*Blood*) work has appeared in *Poet's Market*, *Mslxia*, *Atlas Poetica*, *Modern Haiku*, *The Binnacle*, *A Hundred Gourds*, *Shooter*, *Journey to Crone*, *The Great Gatsby Anthology*, *WAR* and *In Protest: 150 Poems for Human Rights*.

**Morrow Dowdle's** (*Quaid*) publication credits include *River and South Review*, *Dandelion Review*, and *Poetry South*. She was a Pushcart Prize nominee in 2018, and writes graphic novels, most recently with the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences.

**Jordan Fash** (*The Blood on Tollington*) is a graduate of English and creative writing in Kansas City. When not teaching, he works on short fiction. He has been featured on *The Literary Whip*.

**Amelia Gorman** (*The City Your Father, The City Your Brother*) is a horror poet, programmer and baker. Her recent poetry can be found in *Vastarien* and *Liminality Magazine* and her upcoming fiction in *Sharp & Sugar Tooth* from Upper Rubber Boot Books.

**Shannon Elizabeth Hardwick's** (*From: The Yattering and Jack*) work has appeared in *Salt Hill*, *Stirring*, *Versal*, *The Texas Observer*, *Devil's Lake*, *Four Way Review*, *Huffington Post UK*, among others, and she serves as the poetry editor for *The Boiler Journal*.

**Jamal H. Iqbal** (2034) is a RETIRED actorwriterpoetcomicartis-



entrepreneursingerproducercreativestrategist seeking valhalla. His poetry, flash fiction, essays and art, were once published in journals across multiple countries.

**Parker Jamieson's** (Creely wasn't exaggerating) fluid. They've been published in various journals and online formats. They go to school to study humans—how they think—and why philosophy matters to all people, whether they know that or not.

**Adrik Kemp** (The Beautiful and the Macabre) has short stories out in a number of publications including *Aurealis Magazine*, *Third Flatiron*, *Transmundane Press*, *CSFG Press*, *Alban Lake Publishing* and *Pride Publishing*.

**Evan Loehle-Conger** (The Books of Bark) makes mistakes with words and hopes they're the mistakes that come out the other side as not-mistakes. He loves to watch surreality and mundanity live in peace and balance, but is still working out the logistics.

**Fabiyas M V** (Maji) is the author of *Kanoli Kaleidoscope*, *Eternal Fragments*, and *Moonlight And Solitude*. His work has been published by Western Australian University, British Council, University of Hawaii, Rosemont College, Forward Poetry, and others.

**Mack W. Mani's** (In the Mind of the People) work has appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *NewMyths*, and *The Pedestal Magazine*. His screenplay *You and Me and Dagon Make Three* won Best Screenplay at the H.P. Lovecraft Film Festival in 2018.

**Hanan Muzafar** (Ink and Flame) is a research scholar in MTech Electronics & Communication Engineering at Cochin University of Science and Technology, Cochin, Kerala. For him, a poet is a trash bin of the society, who converts junk into fragrant flowers.

**W. T. Paterson** (The Benefits of Southern Hospitality) wrote the novels *Dark Satellites* and *WOTNA*. His work has appeared in *Fiction Magazine*, *The Gateway Review*, and several anthologies. He is a current MFA candidate at the University of New Hampshire.

**Sarah Peplow's** (Wholesome) short stories have appeared in Snowbooks' *Game Over*, Martian Migraine's *CHTHONIC*, and the online horror/erotica journal *Body Parts*. She also writes and illus-

trates comics as part of Mindstain Comics co-operative.

**Brian Malachy Quinn** (cover) has illustrated children's books, literary fiction anthologies, speculative fiction magazines and sci-fi, fantasy and horror magazines. His online portfolio can be found at: <https://www.brianquinnstudio.com/>

**Lancelot Schaubert's** (Waiting for the Train) work has appeared in *The New Haven Review*, *McSweeney's*, *The Poet's Market*, *Writer's Digest*, *The World Series Edition of Poker Pro*, and others, and was chosen by *Spark + Echo* for a 2019 writer in residence grant.

**Sean Woodard's** (Repertoire Screening) writing has been featured in *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Cultured Vultures*, *The Cost of Paper*, *Found Polaroids*, and *Los Angeles Magazine*. He is a staff writer for Drunk Monkeys' Film Department.

