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Scare Me If You Can

Burials

Funeral Arrangements

The way the flowers grew in shade,
I knew at once that one fine day
They'd make a funeral bouquet
All prearranged, as though pre-made
By funeral mutes in plumed top hats
And wearing bombazine black sashes,
Their pearly skin as pale as ashes,
Accompanied by coal-black cats
Between the funeral-wreathed front doors,
Their carriage drawn by sleek black steeds,
With passengers in widows' weeds
As fitting as the hellebores'.

Her Monument

In a strange little homestead lit by electric light
is a passing builder's fancy floating in the neon night;
the spirit of the artisan flits by, nocturnal blue,
and shoots the moon by swooping through the ashes in the flue;
she drifts in starry glimmerings beyond the crooked room
where comet dust is settling on the folly of her tomb. O,
let lie the tools of wisdom where your little homestead rises,
and cry Hurrah! for moonlit nights
and foolish enterprises.

R.E.M.

Under a slab
Of cement I sleep,
Wilderness heavy,
Sorrow deep;
Sorrow deep,
Archaeology old,
Running through
Corridors untold—

Racing the hallways
Of my dreams,
Ankles shackled,
With muffled screams;
With throttled throat,
I strive to wake,
Covered in cobwebs
I cannot shake;
Cobweb-bound,
Imprisoned in doom,
Under concrete,
In the dreamer's tomb.

Campfire Stories to Keep You Awake All Night

Inquisition

Her lipstick was of fiery red,
Her mane wild copper, and her nails
Lacquered in scarlet by which pales
The rouge of which the pious said
Was made civilization's end,
And surely, in her crimson silk
Cut down to there, she and her ilk
Wore carmine on that downward trend
That would someday blood's red require
As she and they leapt in that fire
In meantime, sanguine all were those,
This ruby dame and all her kin,
And painted red from cloak to skin,
Until the bloom wore off the rose
And in wine-tinged despair, demise,
They fell in desperate gasps for breath,
Plagued by their past like some Red Death
Infected them; to their surprise,
This day their bad blood did require
They leap in that eternal fire

Desolation

Way out west of Petaluma,
Where the streetlights cease to go,
Only weeds and broken concrete
And barbed wire in one hard row
Braiding up the roadside grasses
In a knotted wind-strung quilt
To whip out and give ten lashes

To the devils in the dirt
There are houses still beyond here,
Long abandoned, though, and shot
Through with rust and melancholy
And dead dreams long since forgot,
And one tough and stringy lady
Hanging on by fingernails
To a past she can't remember,
Out here where the flat wind sails

Storied

The house on the lake, awake, asleep,
Has legends to tell, and secrets, keep,
Of seasons fled and of lives gone by,
In whispers, hushed, like the distant cry
Of an owl that's flown on her muffled wing—
The house on the lake holds everything
Behind closed shutters and boarded doors,
As tightly as novels protect their stores
Of stories—the ghosts of bygone make
The pages turn in the house on the lake.

Ghosts of February

[Ghosts of the Bayou]

Sweet gum and sycamore, leafless and pale
Worn granite angel bends under a veil
Stony, too—hooded to hide in its grief
A sorrow too deep to be hid by the leaf,
If spring were to offer one, tender and thin,
As pale as the mist in this vale of chagrin...

Creeping Creatures

World-Weary, or Geologically Tired...

If you wake me at an hour too far ante-meridian,
I'm sorry, but my heart is dark and harder than obsidian—
But if you keep me up too late and sleepless in the night,
It's just as likely I will have a heart of anthracite.

Labyrinth

I crawled the narrow halls in
Darkness ever deepening,
Thinking I might find some clear way through
But too tightly fitted in, too close,

No chance of going back or backing out,
No scent I could recognize to bring me
Back to the distant shore,
No vision, not a speck of spectral light to give
A guide around those curves crepuscular, those turns
Winding ever more toward claustrophobia, to where
The heat was growing more intense, the sound
Of a pulsing drum seeming to speak of waves, making
Me dream the ocean lay ahead—but behind me, in
The now impenetrable night, some Thing, a dragon
It seemed to me, began to drown the liquid lure
Of the drumbeat ahead with its own more frightful,
Louder noise, and then to scabble wildly at me
With its terrifying claws, at which it seemed
The labyrinth must finally swallow me and
Draw me down into its fatal end—but then—
In a turn of events that was quite shockingly detached
From any turns my path had made
Thus far, the whole puzzling place tipped
Over on its side—there I lay, too fixed
In the halls' constricting ways to turn and follow or
To roll, and the sea broke forth on me at last, a rush
Of saline waves tearing upon me, heaving me out
Of where I'd wedged, and in a cataract, sent me
Blasting right back through all the sightless turns
Of that preternatural dark, shot me with my sodden
Useless wings back into blazing day where I
Could lie, quivering faintly in my long-lost world,
Deciding whether it was time to die or time
To spread my fragile wings and see
If there was any life left in them.

Snaking Upward

I'm not a caterpillar, no,
I'm just a humble worm;
I have my aspirations, though
Ambitions make me squirm;
I like to keep a secret how
I wish for fame and wealth;
I know to climb's not bad, I just
Prefer it done by stealth.

Insssssituations

Don't worry, Dear; take no alarm—

I'm just designed this way!
If my appearance threatens harm,
Don't suffer such dismay!
You sense I'm glaring hate, perhaps?
Just something in my eye
That irritates me between naps—
Not meant to make you cry!
This whiplash tail so menacing
Waves only out of habit—
It really doesn't mean a thing,
You silly rabbit—grab it!
Fear not my hiss or venom's kiss:
They're breath and smiling, merely—
There is no threat in all of this—
I would embrace you dearly!
Ignore my hard, ignoble sneer—
It's just coincidental
That my dentition's pinking shear
Does not appear more gentle!
So snuggle up among my curves
And let me hug you closely
And cuddle you to soothe your nerves—
You have misjudged me grossly!

North

The depth of the lake cannot be guessed
Its shimmering silicate glacial glow
With turquoise mask screens what's below
In filtered glimmer, thought at best
To be just deep enough to hold
Beneath the frigid upper glass
Down in its centermost crevasse
Something mysterious, so old
It's passed from memory and ken
And only surfaces when stars
Come showering down as red as Mars
To call it upward once again
Communing with its antique kin
For roaring moments in the night
Before the day dawns turquoise bright
And glassy water closes in
Once more its inexpressive glow
A wall of silence ageless, stern
And secretive, where none can learn

What lives those fathoms down below

Here Lies Insanity

Here Lies a Haunted Man

First thing in the morning a perfect blue sky,
with a few sheepish clouds and a breeze,
gives no indication of what, when or why
we believe we must hide in the trees,
to disguise from what enemy, storm, or what foe,
or to vanish from sight for which reason;
we know none of that, but we certainly know
we have entered a paranoid season.

Dreamscape

Out of the leaves of a banana tree
A mysterious Eye is staring at me;
I have some magnetic pull, it seems,
For the kind of stuff that makes up dreams.
Ten past midnight, and all is well
Except that I'm under the nightly spell
That thrusts me onto those strange savannahs
Where pursuers send me stark bananas.

Tasting Danger

She made us cocktails, bright and cold and brilliantly tasty
And nearly great enough to save all humankind,
Though possibly we could, in slurping them, have been less hasty,
For Thursday, carelessly it seems, she lost her mind.

Kept at Bay

Greedy little nightmare,
You stole from me an hour
Of sleep that should have been repose
With twisted, dark and sour
Delirium and horror-shows
Of ghosts and ghouls and glee-
Filled monster tales and dragon-scales—
O! Set this captive free!
For if you deign to torture me
Incessant, sleepless grind,
I'll out you in a rotten verse
And *you* will lose your mind.

Unholy Hauntings

All-Hallows' Eve

In the breathless still
of a windless night
under the powdery gaze of the moon
a skeleton sped in the mad cartoon
of a leap and a dance
in her calcined white

A skeleton leapt
from her mouldy grave
into the shivering bat-strewn air
and gave a wild toss of her grass-dry hair
one eye staring out
of its orbital cave
The lightning flared
when she flashed her teeth
as though their clickety-clack could speak
but she gave one harsh immortal shriek
and hanged herself
with a mourning-wreath

So fled the night
of that fearful scene
with all its jittery terrors filled
its ancient horrors newly killed
the morning after:
Hallowe'en

Perpetual Haunts

Children always know where danger lies—the goblin in the corner who'll surprise
And bite you on the ankles as you pass—grownups forget to fear it, though, alas!
For in the passage of the years they've grown to fear only the earthly, and bemoan
Mere politics and taxes, while a child retains the wisdom that the brute and wild
Still hides among the passages of day, waiting to snag unwary young at play.
On Halloween, adults recall but faint and humorous details of ancient taint
And treachery, the light dust, if you will, of ghostly tracks upon the windowsill
Or campfire tales meant less to warn than joke at quaking children by the fires' smoke,
Forgetting that what was, remains still here: the monster that can swallow all is Fear.

A Grackle May Cackle

Creeping down into October and its necromantic nights,
thrilling, chilling masqueraders revel in the season's frights,

both imagined and uncanny, sweets in surfeit, pranks and scares,
work to raise each other's hackles, catch out courage unawares—
And the bat and spider, ghostly visitors and ravens reign;
even crows can briefly boast the power to enchant the brain
with a Halloweenish horror, freeze the unsuspecting nape
the suggestible door-knocker turns to sky while dressed in crape—
All a-cower, cowards wander in the dim light of the moon,
hold hilarious their hauntings lest they all prove true too soon,
everyone immersed in darkness, celebrating cyclic fear
as the month and season trickle, bloodied, off to end the year—
All this rampant spookiness, however, leaves the Grackle cold:
black and iridescent bird, she perches, watches, and of old,
knows the crows' and ravens' moment passes, quick as life, is gone,
and her rule o'er earthly foment, like her tail, goes on and on . . .

Endless Falling

A whisper in the gloaming just pre-dawn
A shiver or a prickling on the neck
A flutter of the eyelid, quick, then gone
And hope of any sleep is now a wreck
Above me in the dark are broken dreams
Above my brow an icicle of fear
Above the awful emptiness, the screams
In silent agony are all I hear
And under all this brittle disarray
And under skin and in the bone and soul
And under some enchantment, night and day
I know this wickedness will eat me whole
Against the dangers present in this fright
Against the door of Death I'll knock tonight

Young & Vulnerable

The Jitters

Remember the years when we were young
And captive among our babysitters?
Sheer terror would reign with its horrid thrill,
The unspeakable chill we would call the Jitters.
Under the bed or under the house,
A mouse isn't safe when the Jitters gleam
Reptilian fangs and rhinoceros horns;
O! The scorns we would risk to release a scream!
Anything dark and anywhere doored
Could harbor a horde of Jittery creeps;

They hide under blankets and lurk behind stones:
The wrack in the bones that never sleeps.
Do I hear the wind? Did you hear an owl?
Or was it the howl of the restless dead?
The moan of a sailor just as he drowned?
All around are the sounds of the things we dread.
That flickering light! The curtains a-moving,
And both of them proving that something is near:
We'd writhe in our agonies, plagued by deceptions
And all the perceptions of what we fear.
This, you remember, was life with the Unknown,
And all of the fun known as children was moot
Whenever night fell or a stranger came calling;
Appalling how it never stopped its pursuit.
Now deep in adulthood, responsible, sane,
We scoff at the pain of those gibbers and twitters,
Yet get us alone, in a vulnerable state,
And sooner or late, we succumb to the Jitters.

Don't Go into the Forest

From long ago, our elders cautioned us
That in the wood there lurked a dreadful beast
Whose fangs were fiercely fine, and for whose feast
A hearty haunch of whole rhinoceros
Was scarce an appetizer, and the main
Entrée, a village full of soldiers, knights
And heroes snapped up, each, in single bites,
Made more delicious by their screams of pain.
Our fear of this stayed abstract, since the hurt
Inflicted, terrible enough, was made
For full-grown animals and men, which stayed
The doom from us—but then we learned dessert
Was Children, and we changed our minds, for good,
About the lure of wand'ring in the wood!

That House on Our Street

The doorway was a toothy maw, the casement was an eye,
and all the children crept in awe each time they must pass by,
regardless what they heard or saw; they knew that they would die
if anything at all should draw them in, no matter why,
For bogeys, fiends and ghastly ghouls inhabited the place,
entrapping and devouring fools, and set on them apace;
those children who had left their schools and homes without a trace
now lay decaying in deep pools as dark as outer space,

Dug in the basement deep below, a catacomb of holes
filled up with youth who'd tried to go into this cage of souls
and found, not fun adventures, no, but rather, evil moles
of spirit-kind hid here—and so, for them the town bell tolls;
Lost children wail twixt yonder walls at night while moonlight creeps,
and roam like mists down endless halls while all around them sleeps;
no knowing parent ever calls again; the mansion keeps
its secrets tight, and silence falls, far as the deepest deeps;
At least, the children's fears said so; the legend kept in thrall
the children thereabouts, who'd go timidly past it all
at anxious speed along the row, lest they lose their recall
to safety. As grownups all know: life's scary when you're small!