

# The Crow's Quill



JULY 2022

**GARGOYLES**

## TALES OF DARK DELIGHT

Six writers reimagine gargoyles as allegories for identity struggles, some as classic tales of love, faith, and even grief. Dive in and find one that resonates with you...

## *Poetry Interludes*

The Crow community brings these stone goliaths to life in two exclusive poems.

*Independent. Rebellious. Dreadful.*

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# CONTENT DISCLAIMER

Please be advised that the stories included in our magazine fall under the genres of horror and Gothic fiction. As such, there are elements and themes that may be upsetting or triggering.

You will find an **index of triggers** at the end of the magazine should you wish to apply your own personal discretion. We have done our best to identify potential triggers but we apologize deeply if we missed something.

While we do not promote stories with gratuitous gore or exploitative events, we understand the importance of communicating transparently with our readers and establishing our community as a safe space.

Yours,  
**QUILL & CROW**  
**PUBLISHING HOUSE**





# ABOUT THE HOUSE

Quill & Crow Publishing House is a quaint and curious press dedicated to promoting the integrity of independent literature.

Specializing in all things gothic and macabre, we strive to preserve the upmarket prose while lifting up voices often unheard.

Quill & Crow is not your typical publishing house. Not only because we love bleeding heart poetry and all things odd & macabre, but because we are family. Each one of us brings something amazing & unique to the table.

Whether you are joining us as an author, poet, or just want to hang out as a Friend of the Crows, you are welcomed and appreciated...

...and we will probably feed you.



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*Independent. Rebellious. Dreadful.*

# FROM THE EDITOR

Dearest dark hearts,

I am deeply thrilled and honored to bring you an issue with six unique stories about gargoyles. I admit when I first announced the theme, I was worried it was too niche to find its place, but the community really brought it. We had dozens of incredible submissions and it was extremely difficult to narrow them down.

While I wish we could have published more, I am very proud of the ones we're sharing with you in this issue. They've each brought a unique take on gargoyles, their origins, or even their sentience. In some ways, I hope they cut you to your core, in others, I hope they simply resonate.

Please enjoy these beautifully crafted pieces,  
sculpted of stone and passion.

Yours,

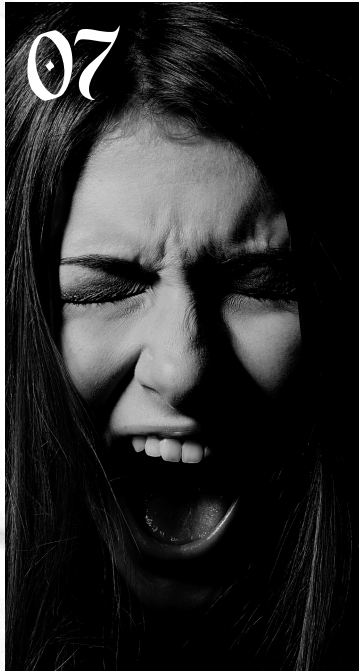
*Damon Barret Roe*

Damon Barret Roe

Assistant Editor



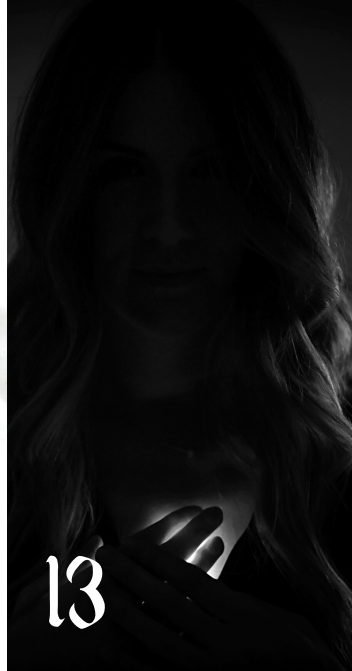
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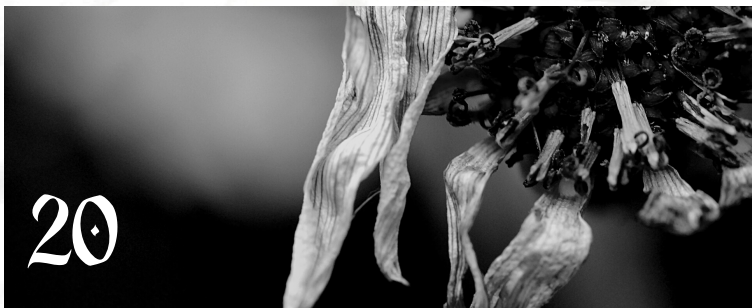
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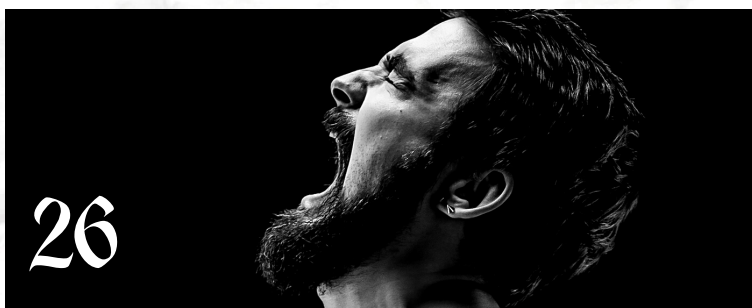
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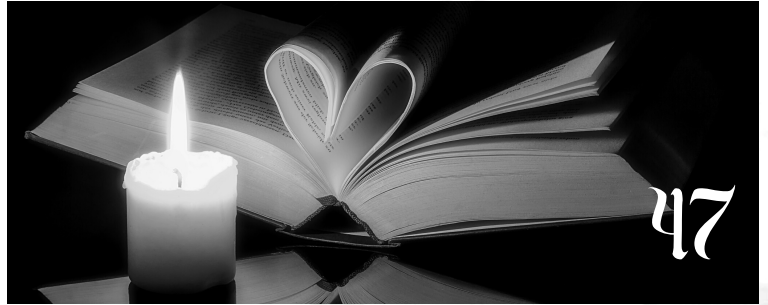
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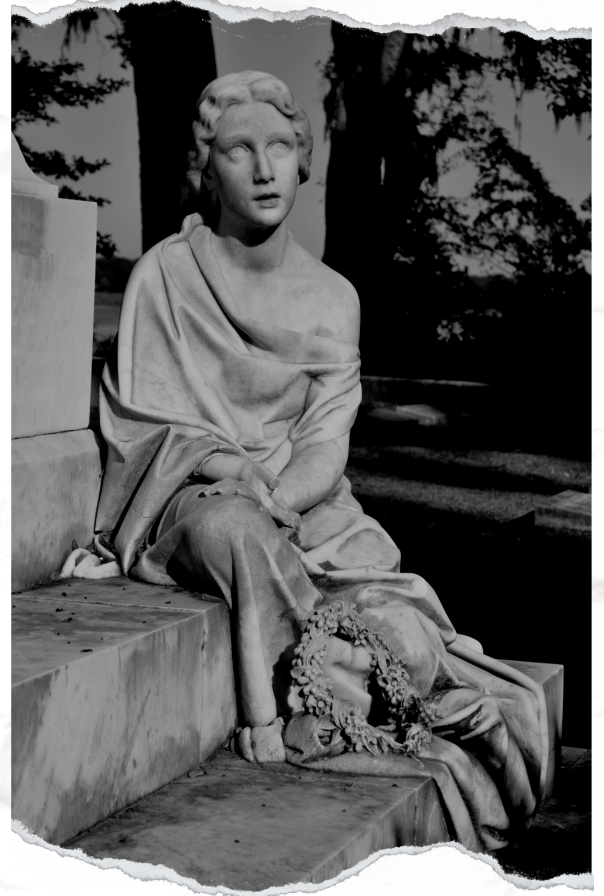
# The Sculptor

WRITTEN BY  
KAREN LYKKEBO

The heat radiating off the stone walls almost led Claire to believe she was in hell, but, alas, she was on vacation with her parents. Like nightmarish déjà vu, Claire found herself at the top of yet another old church, the pride of a small mountain town that—like so many others—hid their crumbling homes behind colorful umbrellas and street cafés. She leaned over the railing, letting the stinging summer sun blister her neck, and watched the crowds below. Tourists and merchants rushed around each other in the twisting labyrinthine streets, like ants on a hill. Perhaps she *was* in hell?

“Did you hear, Claire?” Her mother’s fake whisper was moist in her ear and made Claire shiver with disgust. “This church has the most gargoyles of any in the county. How about that?”

“Fascinating,” Claire said, rolling her eyes and turning away to avoid another wet whisper.



**She traced a finger  
along their coarse skin.  
They lingered in the  
shadows of the attic,  
seemingly forgotten...**



“You’re not even paying attention!” Her mother whacked a sun-bleached brochure against Claire’s shoulder.

Claire responded with another roll of her eyes. Like there was anything new to hear anyway. It had been the same tours, the same churches, the same blistering sun for two long weeks. She glanced at the winged statue sitting guard on the stone rail of the narrow balcony. It was worn by weather but grinned nonetheless at the horizon, fangs bared and wings spread, like at any moment, it’d take flight and leave the god-forsaken town behind. Claire didn’t blame it.

The tour-guide’s shrill voice bore through the simmering air, calling on the group to continue to the south side of the church. Claire groaned as the group of sweat-stained tourists jostled down the narrow aisle in pairs. Not wanting to be caught between them and their odors, Claire trailed behind with slow steps, eyeing the spires of the church roof, when a breath of cool air made her stop.

A hatch, hidden in the slanted wall stood askew. She tilted her head, but since the inferno on the south side of the church didn’t appeal to her, she pushed the hatch open and slithered inside.



A thick darkness overtook her eyes as a moist wall of cool air stopped her. A faint light glimmered somewhere above her, casting shadows over the criss-crossed beams, and Claire stood for a moment, getting her bearings and letting her eyesight adjust. The attic was quiet and—Claire shivered—crowded.

Line after line of stone faces looked her way. Hollow eyes, twisted grimaces, and smiles stiffened for eternity glared as though she’d just interrupted an important meeting. She gulped and looked over her shoulder at the sunshine creeping through the hatch, before taking a step towards the first row of statues. Hesitantly, she waved in front of the carved-out eyes of a young woman. Then she snorted at herself and let her fingers trace the cold stone skin.

The woman’s features were perfectly sculptured. Her eyes turned slightly upwards, her lips parting as if gasping in shock. Goosebumps crept down Claire’s spine and she looked at the next, shorter statue. A horned, winged creature that, like the gargoyles out on the balcony, hissed to the world with bared, pointy teeth.

Claire wandered further among the army of statues, each unique. Men, women, beasts, and children, all beautifully crafted with hauntingly dead eyes staring as she traced a finger along their coarse skin. They lingered in the shadows of the attic,

seemingly forgotten, or perhaps anxiously awaiting to one day be displayed on the balconies. Claire moved between them, squinting as shadows moved across the still figures, telling herself to go back to the hatch. But each new figure was even more detailed, more beautiful than the one before. Tiny crystals were placed in their eyes, making them glow as they watched her pass. Clothing, furs, and hair had been sculpted with such skill, it looked to be billowing in the nonexistent breeze.

A faint moan hushed past her.

Claire whirled, wrapping her bare arms around herself as she shivered. *Had it been the wind?* She frowned into the shadows and bent down, looking between the many stone legs.

The silence crept under her skin with cold claws. Not a sound came from inside or outside the church, only the subtle change of vibrations in the air.

The quiet whisper of someone breathing.

All around her.

Claire's heart thumped in her throat. "Nope!"

She hurried back down the narrow path between the statues, keeping her eyes downcast to avoid the malevolent glittering of the carved eyes. Fingers reached for her, created of shadows so dense they could be real. Claire broke into a run. She searched the wall, desperate to find the beam of light from the hatch, when her shoulder collided with an outstretched hand.

She leapt away, her squeal echoing.

So did the clash of stone on stone as the statue tilted into its neighbor. They teetered dangerously. Claire lunged and grabbed one of their arms, scraping the skin of her palms as she did.

"Don't fall, don't fall, don't fall!" Her whisper was a prayer, and her hands shook as she clung to the statue, hoping not to cause a catastrophic domino-effect.

Slowly, the statues settled against each other in an awkward hug. Claire exhaled and crouched down, hiding her face in her hands. "They're just stupid statues," she muttered into her palms. She chuckled nervously and stood, shaking her head, and blowing on her sore hand. Grains of white rock were stuck to a shallow cut where pearls of blood glistened. It itched terribly, and Claire picked at the specks. With each grain pulled from her skin, two more appeared, until half her palm was covered in small dots. Sweat rolled down her back and she whimpered as she rubbed her hand violently on her thigh. She held it up and stared at the faint, white crust covering her palm and fingers. She tried to flex them but they were stuck. A strangled scream



itched in her throat and her eyes flickered at the statues. They still stood in their awkward hug, but now they were grinning.

"It's not real," Claire whispered, recoiling. Her leg was getting stiff and her arm heavy, pulling her off-balance. "It's not real! I'm asleep! It's a nightmare."

Claire turned her back to the two statues and limped down along the row of stone beasts. "It's a nightmare."

Their horns elongated with the shadows, the eyes glimmering through dead stone, and the low rhythm of breathing settled around her. Claire pinched the soft skin of her stomach with her good hand until she bruised herself.

"Wake up, Claire," she cried. "Wake up!"

A low growl rose around her, trembling through the floor, and Claire stumbled as she tried to run but her arm, turned to white marble, dragged her to the ground.

A sob came over her. "Help!" she called weakly. Powerless and frail, she broke. "Someone help me!"

The growl became cackling laughter and menacing taunts.

Claire screamed for it to stop. It did, without warning, and left her in ringing silence.

"Hush now, be nice to the girl."

Claire looked up and saw a man in dusty monk's robes approaching, caressing the statues as he passed. She trembled. "Sir! Don't. The statues. They're alive!"

"All art is alive, *mia bella*." He crouched beside her.

"Please," Claire sobbed, "please, help me. I don't know what's happening."

"Ah," he said, smiling, "we mustn't touch what isn't ours." He traced his finger down Claire's cheek, drying a tear in the process. "But you are much too pretty for the hounds to have you, I think. You have the face of an angel."

"Please," Claire croaked again. Her arm throbbed dully, weighing heavy on her shoulder, discomfort building in her torso. "Please, sir. I can't breathe! Help me."

"It won't hurt for long, *mia bella*."

"Outside." Claire gasped as dark spots danced in her vision. "I need—to go—outside."

"Of course." The man helped her to her feet. "I think you'll look beautiful in the sun. In fact, I'll craft you a pair of wings to go with that sweet face of yours."

Claire didn't listen, but staggered forwards, dragging her leg, eager to get away. Get out. Into light and away from the grinning demons.

The man held open the hatch and she crawled out into the blistering sun, pulling

her marble arm, squinting her eyes. “My parents,” she whispered.

“Right this way, mia bella.”

Claire followed blindly. The sun glared down on her; its stunning light burning. “It’s hot,” she mumbled. “I’m too warm.”

“It will get cold tonight.”

“My parents...”

“They are coming. Now, step up here.”

The man held her hands tight, supporting her, and Claire followed the directions and stepped up on the balcony railing.

“You look stunning, mia bella! Smile for me.”

A faint smile pulled Claire’s lips.

“That’s it. Smile for an eternity.”

The man kissed her forehead and Claire’s heart shattered into pieces of marble. Her body ached inside and out, as every bit of muscle cramped and burned. She wanted to scream, but her face was frozen into a soft smile as she gazed into the horizon. The man left her standing alone, poised with her arms open in welcome. She heard voices behind her. The chattering murmur of a group of tourists heading back down spiral stairs.

“Where is she?” Her mother’s voice cut through the crowd.

“I’m sure she’s waiting downstairs in the shade,” her father said as they vanished behind her.



Claire stared out over the town, humming under the blistering summer sun. The heat radiated off her stone skin and evaporated the tear that escaped her eye; the last she would ever shed, as she smiled into hell.





# Karen Lykkebo



Karen Lykkebo writes epic fantasy drenched in dark emotions, love, and—occasionally—hope. She’s the author of *The Palace of Winds* series and *Heir to The Sun*, and recently dove into the world of short stories and horror, and is enjoying exploring this morbid side of her heart. When she’s not writing, she’s entertaining her two lively cats, studying anatomy, or getting lost in the woods.

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THE CROW'S QUILL  
presents



# The Heart is a Strange Star



WRITTEN BY  
XAN VAN ROOYEN

*Strange matter is created when nuclear matter (the regular stuff made of protons and neutrons) is compressed beyond critical density. At this extreme pressure, the protons and neutrons dissociate—that means, like, break apart—into quarks, which could hypothetically—meaning it might—give us quark matter and strange matter. I think that’s what I must be made of.*

Note in the margin of my ~~daughter~~’s son’s 5th grade math book



Varjo burrowed deep within bruise and silence. From insult and threat, he’d woven the bowl of his nest, slicked down the sharp edges with nose-blood, and glommed it to the walls of the closet with spider-web tears.

‘Safe’ was a pipe-dream, a syllable wish shoved back between gapped-teeth by



**Holding his  
breath, Varjo  
was cradle and  
coffin.**



playground fists, eroded by teacher ambivalence, and scorched to ash in the glare of parental disapproval. But, here, no one raised an eyebrow at the cat-scratch excuses for the geometry cut into forearms and shins. No one threw labels like grenades —‘freak’ didn’t explode in graffiti smears, ‘troubled’ didn’t leave shrapnel kisses, ‘deviant’ didn’t ricochet comet trails of ice and flame through skin, snapping sinew, cracking bone.

Varjo shifted in his moldering bower, skinny spine curling question-mark protection around a dying ember. He was sure it had once been a star, flicker-bright, nebula-hued—now the last remnant of a smothered constellation, charred and brittle, and one shaky exhalation from shattering.

Holding his breath, Varjo was cradle and coffin.



*There are many different flavors of quark (not that yoghurt stuff—gross). You get Up, Down, Top, Bottom, Charm, and my favorite, Strange (also known as sideways). Its anti-particle is called anti-Strange. There are also particles called ‘strangelets,’ which are another hypothetical thing containing Up, Down, and Strange quarks. When really big, a strangelet could be considered a star all by itself. Also, strangelets might be dark matter, yet another hypothetical thing that actually makes up 85% of the universe. I think I feel better knowing really smart scientists don’t even know what we’re made of. Maybe it doesn’t matter if I don’t know what I am, then.*

Note accompanied by hexagon doodles at the back of  
my ~~daughter~~’s son’s 6th grade biology textbook



Ruho perched on the frosted roof of the cathedral, her bronze wings rippling as her talons adjusted their hold on the buttress. The bells rang midnight, the clang and chime rousing her from her stupor. She craned her stiff neck, gaze darting about the spires as others of her ilk hefted their heavy bodies from their roost.

The wind whipped salted ice off the sea and scoured her verdigris feathers. The memories, netted between quill and sculpted down, rustled, like whispers offering disjunct melodies to the night. Ruho caught the splinter-voiced threnodies in a careful talon and dropped them, morsel by melodic morsel, down her gullet:

The sick-sweet taste of trauma.

The treacle-bitter aftermath of regret.  
Sour-burst guilt and savory-anise shame.

Inside, the memories curdled into threads, stitching their stories between her petrifying organs. She savored the pain, her penance and only compensation for her afterlife service: protector by day, scavenger by night, ridding the city of soul-shed effluvia.

Her pinions snapped open and she caught the wind, spiraling to cruising height. Few humans still scuttled below, most blown indoors by the biting wind, howling with the promise of winter. None noticed her; none would, even if they'd thought to glance upwards, for the gargoyles flew phantom through the darkness, creatures bound in metal and stone by the weight of their wrongdoings.

Ruho flew away from the sea, meandering along trails of lights spangling empty streets and garroting store-fronts, criss-crossing her territory in search of soul-slough. Her nostrils parsed the varying aromas, eyes searching the shadows.

Discarded memories tended to gather in forgotten places, clinging to crumbling masonry and battered sewage grates, turning gritty on the sharp edges of broken glass, or scabbing abandoned beer cans, car parts, exposed rebar.

*There, a tang.* A peculiar waft lassoed her senses, reeling her past tenement squats and boarded-up factories, across the train tracks, and into a park equidistant from the school and beetle-back row houses. Birch and maple stood silent sentinel, leaves muttering only when the wind coaxed opinions from the boughs. Playground equipment loomed monstrous in the darkness.

Ruho landed atop the jungle gym, claws tearing sparks from warped iron. She sniffed, forked tongue tasting the air for that unique carrion—the detritus of the heart and mind, the discarded litter of human conscience and consciousness, left to flutter unwanted until clasped in a beak and sewn into undead feathers, or swallowed to become internal embroidery.

But this smell was different.

Ruho flapped ungainly to the ground, talons curling in knee-skinning, palm-stinging gravel. The stench of gore made her insides quiver. Her meals were usually willingly loosed, occasionally accidentally released, lost, or misplaced—but never so crudely torn, never *this*...

A cindered, tattered truth.

An atrophying fragment of heart.



It cowered beneath the slide, withered and corroded, time-gnawed, and yet—a faint glow at its center, a quasar wilting like cotton candy in the rain.

Remorse rusted in her eyes as she remembered her life, how, with razor tongue, she'd lacerated and bled her daughter—her son, her son, her *son*—how she'd bled *him* dry. Such amends left to make, and she, a dead soul dreaming of redemption.

Tenderly, Ruho scooped up the battered shard and held it to her face, tasting the limping hope along its ragged seam still suppurating from violent excision.

Over a million souls shedding soul-stuff in her city.

She only needed to find the one.



*A white hole. Everyone knows about black holes, but white holes exist, too. White holes are kind of like the opposite of black holes. Black holes suck everything in, they let in all these external forces that pretty much destroy space-time, but white holes don't let anything get in at all. Instead, it lets everything out. In fact, some argue that the Big Bang was a supermassive white hole and that white holes might be able to create whole new universes outside the parent universe. I really wish I was a white hole.*

My ~~daughter~~'s son's answer to the 7th grade question  
'what do you want to be when you grow up?'



Spine-rigid, Varjo braced as a hand grappled with clothing. Searching, pulling, tugging—a battle, a war—the morning ritual left him raw and wheezing, hoping, as fingers grasped past blouse and skirt to tie and shirt. But the tie was left dangling, becoming a noose as he caught a mirror glimpse, a slivered reflection—hair too long, face too soft, body all wrong angles.

A rage-slam swamped him in seeping darkness. New wounds appeared across his legs, a carved eulogy, apology, and he drew his knees up to his chest, ember guttering, its light weeping from the marrow spilling through his snapped ribs.

Later, a storm rattled windows like admonishments on Mother's tongue.

A gust like Father's furious disappointment.

A gentle rapping against the wood, a creak of old hinges, and the aroma of cold stone, of flaking metal, of the grave.

"I've been looking for you," she spoke, her voice dead spider husk and dropped

locust wing. “I found something that was stolen from you.”

Varjo peeled his head from where it rested on his knees.

A creature with bat-head and vulture-beak, with lion-body and eagle-claw, stood silhouetted in the doorway. Fine mist trickled from her raven-feathers. She extended a hand—each finger capped sharp and speckled gangrene, nails that could slash and ribbon—reaching out with kindness. “I’m Ruho, I’m here to help.”

*I can’t.* Varjo couldn’t speak, voice pummeled into silence.

“I think you can.”

Veins pumped fear tremors, tendons twanged discordant with ‘what ifs’ as he pushed the guttering ember to rest within the gristle of his chest.

“Take my hand,” she said. And the shadow reached for the ghost.

Folded small and stooping beneath the weight of secrets, Varjo emerged from the safety of the closet.

Ruho stood tall beneath her cloak of feathers, each quill a spear stabbed into her skin.

*You’re bleeding.* He stroked her ruby wing.

“So are you, but you don’t deserve it.” She bent forward, coughing and gagging, disgorging an oblong pellet. The smooth surface glittered in fractal swirls, thrumming as it radiated forgotten shades.

Varjo splayed his hand over his chest, hollow but for the fragile ember. Light leaked between his fingers, the ember warming. He took the pellet, split his palms along its facets, and pressed the forsaken truth between his ribs. The remnants found their matching edges, seams sewn with searing tendrils.

A supernova rewound, until—with timid shudder—his heart, whole and sutured, began to beat.



*A strange star is a hypothetical type of quark star made of strange matter. Strange stars will have a crust of neutronium (another hypothetical substance made up entirely of neutrons, those particles that are neither positive nor negative, but entirely neutral). Strange stars are also known as hybrid stars. I guess technically, strange stars are dead stars—maybe that’s why I think my heart is one.*

Note in my ~~daughter~~’s son’s copy of Romeo & Juliet, 8th grade





Ruho waited, melding into the shadows gathered at the window between curtain and glass.

Varjo waited, heels kicking restless against the bed, gaze on the door.

It opened and a girl-appearing human poured in—a soul gouged and scarred by self-loathing, sorrow-clotted and fear-stained. Tears tore runnels down the adult face as tired eyes regarded the little boy.

He opened his mouth, tried to speak, the words toffee-stuck between his teeth. Ruho shifted, feathers fluttering. “We can’t do this any more,” Varjo said, all stutter and quaver.

“I thought I buried you.”

“You did,” he said. “You tried.”

Sob, swallow, breathe.

Varjo pried the truth from his chest—heart-shaped, pulsing, bleeding—and offered it with a fragile smile. “For us.”

“For us.”

Clasped in four hands, two halves raveled in iridescent strands, the *she* and *he* became the *they* they’d always been.

And still, Ruho waited until the boy faded to shadow, to the ink-black echo of the human who now stood before the mirror, the human who took scissors to their hair and unburdened themselves of expectation and assumption, who stepped from the confines of denial and threw their closet open wide.

Slowly, slowly, knots of memory loosened, and the unwanted detritus of their life puddled at their feet. Ruho detached herself from the darkness. As the human busied themselves with hopes and dreams once relegated to the dingiest corner of self, the gargoyle began to feast.

Beneath a sky heavy with cloud, Ruho returned to her roost. Memories of her son carved their blotted calligraphy across her mind, the son she’d failed to know and never known how to love, the one who left her with nothing but scribbles in the margins.

Unwritten refrains spilling from wrists across bathroom tiles.

His parting—the grief that turned her to stone.

The storm began, a soothing deluge that slicked her feathers and loosened congealed soul-stuff. Rain spilled from her beak, her voice joining the melodies washed free. Her voice, her son’s, joined the revenant choir, their notes like the glitter of stars as dawn pried apart the darkness.

# Xan van Rooyen



Climber, tattoo-enthusiast, peanut-butter addict and loyal shibe-minion, Xan van Rooyen is a genderqueer, non-binary storyteller from South Africa, currently living in Finland where the heavy metal is soothing and the cold, dark forests inspiring. Xan has a Master's degree in music, and—when not teaching—enjoys conjuring strange worlds and creating quirky characters. You can find Xan's short stories in the likes of Three-Lobed Burning Eye, Daily Science Fiction, Apparition Lit, and The Colored Lens. Xan hangs out on instagram, twitter, and facebook so feel free to say hi over there.

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THE CROW'S QUILL  
presents

# Of Duty and Love

WRITTEN BY  
RAINE AUGUST

The manor frightened her when she first found it. Dark and dank, a strange smell in the air, like wet pavement after a storm. Across the cobbled bridge, a large stone figure with talons and sharp wings loomed above the double doors.

But nothing frightened her more than the humans, screaming *witch* and *devil lady*, spitting at her feet, and throwing jagged rocks. What other choice did she have but to run, when all she wanted was to help their drying crops? The children had liked her, and they were so very hungry. If only she had hidden in the forest, secretly refreshing their harvest. Maybe more would have survived the devastating famine.

This world was once filled with magic of all kinds, creatures of all shapes and sizes, but as the human race grew, so did their fear of what they didn't understand. Or perhaps, what they didn't care to understand. For she may be a witch, but she loved to teach others, she longed to help those who needed it.



**Though the earth witch  
was free, her heart  
would not venture far  
from his. She, too, was  
bound, to him, though  
not by magic.**

The humans *did* need it.

But to the humans, she was the source of the plight. When they caught her weaving her hands, the magic flowing from her fingertips to their frost-hardened dirt, they screeched, “A curse! She’s cursed us! Tainted our crops! She is the one who has damned us!”

The bright smiles and curious eyes of the children that had once flocked to her had grown frightened as they cowered behind their parents, grasping at their tailcoats and skirts. A dull ache pulsed in her chest at the sweet, cherubic faces, now full of fear. Her heart sped when they brought out whips and chains.

And so she ran.

The manor had been her only sanctuary. The humans didn’t dare follow her there. It was said to be haunted by ghouls, goblins, and other unspeakable horrors. It had been years since she was driven from that small village.

Now, it was a home covered in flowering vines. The once-marbled halls were grassy playgrounds. Her favorite room was the library, its shelves crowned in flowers and the floor bedded in moss, where she often lay reading an ancient book, waiting for him.

Though he appeared terrifying, with his snarling snout, upturned eyes glaring and gray body taut with angered muscles, she found he was as much in need of her as she was of him and the home he guarded.

When she crossed over the threshold of the entrance, their souls were bound.

He would often follow her into the nearby fields as she frolicked, keeping her safe from the humans. She would pick flowers and braid them into her hair, an everlasting smile dancing across her lips as he stood watch, his arms folded across his broad chest.

“I used to be frightened of you, you know.” She skipped around him, her auburn hair bouncing.

“You have nothing to fear in my presence,” he said in his gruff voice.

She stopped for a moment, looking at the lilacs in her pale hands, their color a shade away from her almond-shaped eyes. “I suppose I don’t, do I?” She looked up at him, at the tenderness in the way he returned her gaze. Finally, her heart felt at ease. The days became bearable, enjoyable even.

On one such day, his sharp, stony wings carried him to the library, and he lay next to her. His stern features softened as he turned to gaze upon her. Where her exterior was soft and gentle, his was cold and hard, but where her fingertips grazed



his skin, it was like stroking the surface of a lake. Gentle and cool. He shivered at her touch.

“They will come one day.” His voice was a low growl.

Her lavender eyes rolled as she sighed, resting her arm behind her fiery head. She knew they would, she could feel the fury and fear in the air. The humans carried a lot more power than they realized, and they were fortunate enough that they had no concept of how to harness it. “I shall hide,” she replied shortly. It was a simple solution for her.

“They will burn this place to the ground,” he countered.

“Then we shall run.”

He was quiet, somber.

She turned her head, a crimson tendril falling in her face. She brushed it away to look at him. “Let them burn every corner of this earth. I was made to sow, to reap. We can build another home.” She stroked the side of his cheek and he closed his eyes, leaning into her warm touch.

“I will burn with this place. Of that, I am certain.”

Silence. She shook her head, auburn curls waving violently around her.

He opened his eyes and met hers. “I was made to protect this manor. I am bound.” It was the nature of gargoyles to defend the place they were created to protect, should it be threatened.

It was something she both loved and hated about his stoicism. He was indeed bound, but those bonds began to feel like a curse to her. Though the earth witch was free, her heart would not venture far from his. She, too, was bound, to him, though not by magic. “Then I shall protect you.” She buried her face in his cool chest, hiding her tears. But nothing could hide their burn on his stony skin as he wrapped his arms around her.

Protect him, she did.

When the humans finally came, in droves, with their pitchforks, fires, and axes, she stood before the manor. Her hair whipped in the wind like dancing flames, her arms outstretched as she called to the ground and trees around them. Roots gripped the feet of many, dragging them beneath the soil. Branches swung out, severing limbs. The dirt bled, and no amount of rain would ever wash it away.

“My love, there are too many.” His voice thundered over the raging storm as the humans continued their advance. When two fell, five more appeared from the surrounding woods.

But she would not hear it. She would not let them take away her home, her heart. He leapt down from his guard post above the doors, and the ground shook as he landed behind her on the cobbled bridge where she was rooted. He spread his wings as the humans nocked their arrows. In one swift motion, he wrapped his wings around her, clutching her close to his chest.

The arrows bounced off of him as he looked down at her. “We cannot hold them off,” he growled desperately.

“Then we burn together,” she cried, her eyes deep purple flames.

His eyebrows furrowed, searching hers for reason. She would survive if she would run and leave him. But their time together had taught him of her earthly stubbornness. He pushed her behind him and faced the humans, a low rumble growing from his chest. The humans faltered for a moment as his wings outstretched. His blazing eyes scanned the hesitant cavalry. Before the humans found their gall, he beat his wings, gusts of his wind kicking them off their feet.

“Kill them both!” voices cried all around. “The monster and the witch!”

They fought and fought, but the humans were filled with otherworldly rage and determination. The south wall crumbled, all windows shattered. She looked around at the men and women, their faces twisted in ugly snarls. Those once-pure beings... she saw the pollution in their core. How could any creature be filled with so much hatred? No one could survive that. No wonder their lives were so short.

She grabbed his hand and pulled him, yanking the double doors open and running through the grassy halls, turning corner after corner.

Finally, she kicked the library door open and they were there again. Their spot. She pushed down the nearest bookshelf to bar the entrance.

“I failed.” His voice cracked as he stared at his hands. “I failed my one true duty.”

“No.” She ran to his side, cupping his cool face in her hands, urging, “Your duty, if it ever was a true duty, is to protect the inhabitants of the abode. Me. You. *We* are the inhabitants.”

The sound of their home’s destruction echoed. That’s all the humans were ever good at; destruction. Not protection, like the gargoyle. Not growth, like the earth witch. They sought only power and would leave everything in ruins in their search.

“Lay with me. One last time.”

His shoulders slumped in defeat and he nodded as they fell to the mossy bed of the library, embracing one last time. She was his softness, and he was her strength.

Together they lay as their world fell apart.



# Raine August



As a resident of hell (or Arizona, as it's most commonly known), Raine likes to cool off by kicking up her feet and writing about chaos, love, and despair. Being a menace is hard work and providing these stories serves as catharsis for her.

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## A BALLAD IN GRAPHITE

How she needs me,  
she'll never know.  
I am her church,  
her solace,  
Her pair of crows.

For her moon-spun halo,  
her treasure's troved.  
She's the only glow,  
in my dark alcove.  
And she'll never know,  
how I love her so.

And may she never know,  
never feel,  
cold,  
called home.  
A tundran heath,  
where fluttering heartbeats  
are frostbitten leaves.



And may she never know,  
never feel,  
warmth,  
when it's stifled.  
Like the finger-licked  
snuffing of a dying candle.  
How you ache for the sizzle.  
That exquisite churning.  
Always yearning,  
for what's not frozen,  
not broken.

May she never know.  
Where tears go  
when they run dry.  
How it's rust that bleeds  
from anguished eyes.  
Drained from your marrow,  
soul silkened sorrow.  
From ether.  
From particles.  
From mortar and pestle.

AMY WESTPHAL

She'll never know.  
A heart of fractals.  
A hunger that's hollow.  
Unseen and shackled.  
Sentience swallowed.  
I'm always drowning,  
silent throes. Alone from a  
weeping portico.  
In perpetual toil.  
For affection unknown.  
And there's no mortal coil,  
for a heart of stone.

She'll never know.  
And I'll never show,  
these buried dreams  
foiled, by barren soil.  
For who could love,  
a gargoyle?





THE CROW'S QUILL  
presents

Holy Water Makes  
My Wicked Throat Smooth

WRITTEN BY  
ELOU CARROLL

I am terrible, and because I am terrible, I have become stone.

From up here, the city sprawls like a map, tiny as a child's toy, and it is terrible, too. It will harden before long. Together, we will be firm and foul, until the whim of the wind and the rain and the burning sun turn us back to sand, to stardust—unmake us in their own image.

I have already been unmade once.

There is a woman walking below. Her long hair is too neat, her clothing too freshly pressed. She is immaculate, on the outside. I see myself in her stride. Once, I stepped with her same certainty. Once, I held my chin that high.

Beneath her fine coat and her fine shirt, there will surely be a rough spot, porous and smattered with lichen. That is how it starts.

I found it first on my palm, a gritty patch under my ring finger, the size and shape of a penny. There was no pain, only discoloration and texture. The finger



**My teeth splintered,  
my lips and chin split  
—there was still blood  
there, some part of me  
was still human.**

itself was dented, recently un-ringed.

*Just a callous*, I thought.

But nothing is ever *just* anything.

Stone is not sudden, and yet, there was my hand, smooth one moment, roughening the next. An hour later, the grit had spread to my wrist in unconnected splotches, the white bloom of fungation traveling beetle-like between them. In the bathroom, I scrubbed my palm raw. It did not wipe away with soap and water like I expected, but ripped through my flesh like sandpaper. When I nudged up the little strings of ruined skin with a nail, I found stone waiting to be excavated.

I bit my lip so hard, it should have bled. Instead, it crumbled. The mirror showed not the woman I was, but a tearful waif, weak with fear, moss and rock running across her skin.

“This isn’t happening.”

It wasn’t my voice but the sound of gravel crunching.

“This isn’t happening.”

That’s what I said when I slipped the ring from my finger. Just like that.

“This isn’t happening.”

He’d scrunched his eyebrows together, lips popping open like he hadn’t heard me properly, like I couldn’t possibly have said those three words. “What do you mean ‘this isn’t happening’?”

“This. Us. The wedding. It’s off.”

He sighed. “Knock it off, Halle. It’s not funny.”

I was never known for my sense of humor.

We’d met outside a church of all places, Max and I. Funny, how things come back on themselves. I’d dropped my keys at precisely the wrong moment. They ended up down a grate too low for me to reach.

Max found me right before the tears started. “Chin up,” he’d said. I hated the phrase and was about to tell him so when he continued, “I’m not against a little light vandalism. Wait here.”

I waited, hugging myself against the wind, trying not to let my face crumple. I was never a pretty crier, and I worried that my would-be rescuer might abandon me if he saw me red-faced and snot-covered, but Max would never.

I heard the low growl of the motorbike first, a sleek black thing with cool blue racing stripes. Then I saw the grin on his face. The way his hair danced in the breeze. He wasn’t wearing a helmet; instead, it hung uselessly from the handle bars. I raised



an eyebrow at it and his smile deepened.

"I was only 'round the corner." He slipped from the bike and opened up the saddlebag. The motorbike wasn't a sleek thing, despite the racing stripes. He rooted around for a moment before pulling out a long cord—the kind you might use to secure a boat to a car—but I didn't think he was the sort of person to have a boat, or a car. "You look concerned," he said.

"Oh, I don't know, a complete stranger comes at you with a rope—definitely not something to be concerned about."

He laughed at first. Until he realized I hadn't joined in. The awkward smile that followed was enough to coax my own, just slightly. "I'm Max," he said. "And now, I'm not a complete stranger."

"Halle. What do you plan to do with that?"

"Pretty name." He didn't answer the question. At least, not with words. Max clomped up to the grate, slipped the rope between the spokes, and tied it deftly—perhaps he *did* own a boat, or maybe he'd been a boy scout before he grew up and got into motorbikes and saving near-sobbing women. Next, he secured the rope to the bike.

"You can't be serious," I said.

"I can."

And he was.

I don't remember when I decided to take him home with me, or when we became something more than strangers. I'm not sure I even remember him giving me the ring—I told you, I am terrible—but I remember how it ended.

"I'm not trying to be funny." I don't think I meant to snap at him, even back then. It wasn't his fault, not really. As soon as the words slipped from my mouth, Max recoiled and I tried, I tried so hard to feel guilty.

That's what I tell myself now, anyway.

He looked like he didn't believe me, but when had I ever lied?

*Only every time you spoke, every time you smiled.* I pushed the thought away. I liked to pretend I hadn't always known it would end like this. That I didn't care like I should.

"So, what? You're calling off the wedding? Since when?" His expression shaped itself into a challenge, a dare. Max never expected me to take it.

"Since now."

His fist clenched on the table. He wanted to look away, I could tell. Max was never

good at arguments. He preferred to look away, to wait until the storm had passed and talk about things like adults. Max had always been reasonable.

“Why?” he asked, and I felt like I should’ve faltered then, but I didn’t. I couldn’t. There was only one way that it could’ve gone.

“I don’t want to marry you.” I should’ve been softer, pillowed my words with niceties or regret or something. But I’ve never been very good at being nice.

He chewed on his lip. Max always did that when he was about to cry, or when he was trying not to. Still, he held my gaze and lifted his chin and said, “Why did you say yes if you had no intention of going through with it?”

I shrugged. “It’s what you’re supposed to do. I thought I might want to, eventually. But I never did.”

“You’re made of stone, Halle.”

When I said nothing, he left and, when the motorbike roared to life, Max roared with it. Guttural, as if I’d broken more than just a promise. I should have felt it in my chest or in my belly; my eyes should’ve been fountainous with tears for hurting him, but I didn’t, and they weren’t. All of those years together, Max and I, and I couldn’t bring myself to feel for him.

I am terrible and he was right. I am made of stone, now.

As the rock ran roughshod over my body—my limbs growing heavy with it, my breath getting short—there budded a need to get higher, to climb, to perch. To find somewhere old and nestle right up in its eaves.

Air, I needed air. I couldn’t breathe, and if I couldn’t breathe I couldn’t think, couldn’t—

*There.*

Once outside, I could see the hulking great tower of the church—yes, *that* church—and the stone beneath my skin called it home. The closer I got, the more my limbs became solid. The more urgent my steps. By the time I reached its large doors, one arm had statued completely, and pressed itself flush with my body. Even my shoulder slid downwards, so the entirety of my left side was one long line, from neck to foot.

The climb was torturous, with one arm useless. I used my teeth, my chin, to pull me up the side of the church. My teeth splintered, my lips and chin split—there was still blood there, some part of me was still human.

I reached the top before I lost the use of my legs. I lay on a ledge and sobbed out my pain until it, too, turned to stone. My face was the last thing to go. I screamed out the sound of a rockslide, and that is how I stayed, mouth perpetually wide, eyes



perpetually open.

From here, I watch the city and her awful ways—see people, just like me, as they harden and run and climb and scream. If I could, I would warn them, beg them to change before they were forced to. Would I have, had I known?

When it rains, the church makes the water holy and I am relieved. The rain, now sacred, seeps into me and slips down my long, long throat until it fills me, and spills out of my mouth and down and for a moment, I feel I am forgiven. That I am not so terrible after all. That when the rain comes the next time, I might once again grow skin.



# Elou Carroll



Elou Carroll is a graphic designer and freelance photographer who writes. Her work appears or is forthcoming in Hexagon SF Magazine, Luna Station Quarterly, Kaleidotrope, In Somnio: A Collection of Modern Gothic Horror (Tenebrous Press), Spirit Machine (Air and Nothingness Press), Ghostlore (Alternative Stories Podcast) and others. When she's not whispering with ghosts, she can be found editing Crow & Cross Keys, where she publishes all things dark and lovely, and spending far too much time on twitter. She keeps a catalogue of her weird little wordcreatures on her website.

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A CROW'S

# POETRY INTERLUDE



## THE BINDING

Entombed  
And binded  
Together  
Forevermore.  
Dark souls  
Whisper  
Intimately  
Inside mausoleum  
Of chiselled  
Marble,  
With curtains  
Of weeping willows.

**LAURA HUNTLEY**

THE CROW'S QUILL  
presents



# If I Don't Make It Home



WRITTEN BY  
JEAN LEVASSEUR

His daughter finally stopped crying and fell asleep on his chest, sweating and whimpering. She clenched and unclenched her tiny fist in his shaggy, unkempt brindle beard. Near-silence filled the cramped stone house for the first time in hours, interrupted only by the gentle creak of the antique black rocker—a wedding gift from his grandmother.

He fought off tears and kept rocking, until the sound of crickets floated through the windows, afraid that she would wake as soon as the motion stopped. He couldn't bear the thought of watching her search the house for her mother again.

She stirred in his arms as he finally stood, turned her head, and snuggled in again, still snoring with her fist in his beard. At least she'd stopped crying earlier, long enough to suck down a few thimbles worth of goat's milk and chew on a piece of bread.



**Nothing.**

**He may as well have  
been trying to capture  
the cricket outside by  
pulling on its music.**



How had it already been two days since his wife had left?

The baby's room, behind the kitchen, shared the brick wall with the fireplace, its fire low and smoldering. Salvageable, but he would have to feed it soon, for though spring was in full swing, the last remnants of winter still clung to the deep night air.

The sage sprigs his wife had hung beside the window filled the room with a cleansing aroma, and the wreath of dill above the door made the hair on his arms stand upright as he passed beneath its protection.

"There's nowhere safer in the entire world," he whispered as he untangled his daughter's hand from his beard and laid her down in the crib. She mewed once, but the exhaustion of screaming had broken her, and she stretched out without waking. Now that she was off him, the tears stuck in the back of his throat spilled down his cheeks and got lost in the same beard that comforted her.

The last time he'd stood here, his wife had stood beside him, their arms wrapped around one another as they stared at their sleeping daughter.

"I don't want you to go," he'd whispered.

"I don't want to go." Her fingertips massaged the back of his head, and she pressed a kiss into his shoulder. "But you know what happens if I don't. The entire coven has been called. If we don't stop those monsters..." Her voice cracked. "What good is it for our daughter to have a mother if the Inquisitors take control and strip her of her self? Or worse, burn the valley and every witch in it, like they did in Sollan? I'll not allow her to grow up under their rule. If they let her grow up at all."

He kissed the parting in his wife's hair, dyed green in preparation for the impending battle. He'd have done anything to go in her place. But this wasn't a battle that he had the weapons for. Even the combined might of the Coven of Riece might not be enough. "Promise me you'll come home."

"We swore on our wedding night that we'd never lie to one another."

Silence hung as he tried to wrap his mind around what life would be without her.

His wife stepped away in the shadowy moonlight and reached into the satchel she'd packed with potions, herbs, and who knew what else. Even after seven years together, that side of her life remained a mystery. He'd been too afraid to pry, though he had no reason to think she wouldn't share it with him. Maybe when this was over, when she finally came home, he'd work up the courage to understand. For his daughter, if not for himself.

How could anyone expect him to raise a witch without a witch by his side?

The sob that hitched in his throat surprised him as much as it had his wife. She

put a hand on his back, but kept digging until she pulled something from the bag.

A gargoyle made of dark walnut shone in the moonlight. Fangs hung from a half-open mouth, its eyes wide and somehow bright despite their lifelessness. It sat on its haunches with wings folded flat against its back, simultaneously at rest and ready to spring.

His wife kissed the wood, whispered in the witches' unfamiliar language, and placed it beside their daughter.

She rolled over and, with a tiny hand, pulled the small figurine close.

"It will protect her. And you. And if something happens, if I don't make it home, it holds some spark of me, and will for as long as she lives. It will let you know if I'm coming home." She pulled his face to hers and kissed him with all the love and passion and anger and hope and mourning that seven years of marriage had built. Then she was gone, out the front door without a word or backward glance, to join her sisters against the invasion, lest their entire way of life be destroyed, and their daughter have her heritage and her power stolen.

Now, two days later, he wondered how he could find the strength to protect her in a world like that. How could he, a gardener and stonemason, help her understand what her mother had been? Her glory and terror and power and love? He was even less equipped for this task than he was to face the Inquisitors.

The gargoyle lay in the far corner of the crib. Careful not to wake the baby, he reached over and picked up the figurine. He closed his eyes, trying to imagine that its warmth was actually from his wife's hand in his, a connection across whatever space was between them that would let him feel her in the world, to touch some part of her being.

Nothing.

He may as well have been trying to capture the cricket outside by pulling on its music.

"Maybe you'll have better luck reaching your mama," he whispered, and slipped the gargoyle next to his sleeping daughter.

Outside, the thrumming drumbeat of heavy rain pushed through the valley. He knelt beside the crib and closed his eyes, resting his forehead against the cool wooden slats, and prayed to the Gods and devils—that he didn't believe in, but knew existed—to keep the thunder away, to let her sleep.

The wind picked up and the shutters started to rattle along with the branches outside. He stood and drew the heavy curtains tight, remembering the hours of work



that had gone into sewing them, and the hours more the coven had spent warding them. The home of a witch was all but impregnable, but somehow, the Inquisitors had found the key to undermining their magic. And they were coming for his wife. For his daughter. For everyone who had ever touched the power they feared so much.

He wondered if they'd found the key to surviving an axe blow to the neck. And then he laughed at his foolish bravado. Anyone who could challenge the coven's magic had nothing to fear from a man with a woodcutter's axe.

Movement from behind caught his attention, and he turned, expecting to see his daughter stirring. But she was motionless. Still, scratching came from the crib, and he ground his teeth. Mice had been a perpetual nuisance. Why the coven hadn't seen fit to ward the home from rodents would be forever beyond him. Another question he'd been too afraid to ask.

But there was no rodent in the crib. Everything was still, save for his daughter's back, rising up and down in the slow, steady relief every parent looked for when they checked on their child in the middle of the night.

Another scratch came from the crib, and something moved in his daughter's shadow. Horrified, he reached for the mouse burrowing up to his daughter. But instead of warm fur, he grabbed cold wood and pulled it from the crib.

The gargoyle stared at him, solid and immobile.

"Idiot," he muttered. Jumping at shadows for no reason.

Then he realized the wings were no longer tucked against its back. They were stretched out, as though ready to fly. He turned the gargoyle to get a better look, certain that exhaustion was playing tricks on him.

The gargoyle turned its head to look at him.

He yelped and leapt backward, drawing his arm back to throw it at the wall. Then he heard her voice from somewhere inside him.

*"If I don't make it home, that gargoyle holds some spark of me, and will for as long as she lives."*

With heart racing and lips dry, he lowered the wooden figurine and stared in wonder as it stretched its wings and then its limbs, its wooden claws tickling his hand.

*It will let you know if I'm coming home.*

The phrase replayed over and over in his head, the reality sinking deeper and deeper into his soul.

She wasn't.

He'd shed all the tears he had left over the past two days. Only hollow pain that threatened to engulf and destroy him remained. What hope did he have if she had failed?

Or had she failed at all? Was the battle still raging and she merely a casualty? Had the coven been victorious or overrun? In so many ways, it didn't matter, and in so many others, it was the only thing that mattered.

She wasn't coming home.

He stared at his daughter, resisting the urge to stroke her hair. She was young enough that he didn't have to tell her. But she was also young enough that she wouldn't remember her mother. Of all the loss that he felt, *that* was the greatest.

The gargoyle pushed forward and pressed the top of its head against his thumb, nuzzling the same way his wife had into his shoulder.

"Did you win?" he asked in a whisper. "Or are they coming for us?"

The gargoyle had no way of answering, but it turned away from him and reached out for the child asleep in the crib. He lowered it, and it hopped off, standing sentry near his daughter's head. It was nothing. Just a small piece of wood. But the power within it felt like his wife, and he knew.

Nothing would harm his daughter tonight.

As he stared down at her, the gargoyle standing guard, he knew the best way to protect her from the Inquisitors and the others like her. It wasn't with an axe, though he would pull it down from over the fireplace and keep it close. No, the best way to protect her was to help her discover the power that her mother had found as a girl. Her own power. So, whether her mother had won or lost, whether she'd sacrificed herself in victory or defeat, their daughter could continue the same fight.

He leaned down, pushing her sweaty, matted hair aside, and gently kissed the girl's forehead.

Then he walked out of the room and to the bed that he'd shared with his wife for seven years. Her side stretched into the eternity of their memories together. He put a hand on the cold pillow where her head should have been, and cried himself to sleep.

He dreamt of his daughter standing atop a mountain, surrounded by the sisters of her coven, breathing strength back into the world.





# Jean Levasseur



Jean M Levasseur has written professionally since 2007 and currently freelances for Reviewed.com and Popular Science. He holds an MA/MAT in English with a concentration in fiction writing from Salem State University. When he's not writing or chasing after his six-year-old twins, he likes to sneak in a video game or two, woodwork as NineRings WoodCraft, and play guitar.

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THE CROW'S QUILL  
presents

# Her Furious Angels

WRITTEN BY  
NEWTON

Spiraling slowly amidst the spires of the great cathedral, Lucifer landed heavily upon the roof of one of the towers, folded his filthy wings behind him, and reclined upon the tiles.

"Are you lost, Foul One?" inquired a nearby gargoyle.

"Is this not the celebrated Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, France?" he asked.

"You know it to be such. You also know the Devil is not welcome here," the gargoyle replied with a stony snarl.

"I'm well aware of my standing with the Lord of this manor, Grotesque," said Lucifer snidely, "and I've not come to seek an audience with Her. I'm actually here to see you."

"Not interested."

"Oh, come now, don't be that way."

"We have no current quarrel. Be gone."



**I have a question. One  
that will require a  
truthful response.  
Even from the Father  
of Lies.**



“At least hear me out.” Lucifer folded his hands behind his head. “I have a proposition that I believe could be mutually beneficial for both of us.”

“Highly doubtful,” replied the gargoyle.

“A young maiden has recently been brought to the cathedral by her parents with the intention of declaring sanctuary,” Lucifer continued despite the lack of interest on the gargoyle’s behalf. “The girl has been charged with heresy by their local magistrate. She’s guilty, of course. She sold her soul to me, bound forever by blood rite, with the union consummated by moonlight. I want her back.”

“Why tell me?” the gargoyle asked.

“Why you?” Lucifer laughed. “Because I know that you are fair and sensible, and will listen to reason. And because you can grant me access into the cathedral so I may reclaim that which is already rightfully mine.”

“Not a chance. Your matter is of no concern to me.”

“The girl was practically dragged here by her overzealous and, to be quite frank, abusive parents. This magistrate they seek to escape is a vulgar and violent man, one whom I highly suspect has designs for the girl that are, shall we say, *unsavory*. You’d actually be doing the poor girl, and me, a tremendous favor.”

“Again, none of this is of any matter to me.”

“Pragmatic, as always.” Lucifer smiled. “But the matter is of concern to you, my friend, in so much that you stand to benefit a great deal by assisting me in resolving this minor trifle. All I’d require from you would be just the briefest of moments, the very slightest of intrusions, within these hallowed halls.”

“No,” said the gargoyle.

“The girl will resist any attempts at redemption. She’ll scream, and spit, and scratch at them until they’re left with no choice. She’s sure to be tried, found guilty, and unceremoniously put to death. And you, my friend, will have missed out on a golden opportunity to have that which you desire most.”

“I desire nothing,” the gargoyle replied.

“Oh, now I know that’s not true,” Lucifer said. “You want the same thing your kind always wants.”

The gargoyle sneered. “And what do you know of my kind?”

“We’re not so dissimilar, you and I,” said Lucifer, “The Seraphim, the Dominions, the Principalities. Your kind, my kind, our kind. Different patterns and different textures, but all cut from the same celestial cloth. All of us were expelled for one reason or another. I am very much aware of the terms of your exile. We’re all just one

colossal flock of furious angels.”

“We are nothing alike,” the gargoyle insisted.

“You want to be one of them,” Lucifer said, sweeping his arm in the direction of the mass of parishioners that mingled about the base of the cathedral, ignorant of the dubious conversation taking place high above them. “It’s within my power, you know.”

The gargoyle sat silent and motionless.

“Your kind are notoriously stubborn. I hate to admit it, but the marble veneer actually suits you,” Lucifer quipped. “But you’re not the first I’ve bargained with. And you wouldn’t be the first to accept an offer from me.”

The gargoyle’s only response was the grinding sound of its granite jaw.

“I could even assign you any station you wish. I can cast you as a peasant or fashion you into a king. You would walk amongst them. Eat, sleep, breathe. Fall in love, marry, maybe even produce children. You could *live*.”

“And die,” the gargoyle replied quietly. “What then? An eternity in your service?”

“One could argue there are probably worse things than to spend an eternity in my employ,” Lucifer said. “Perpetuity trapped in cold, unmoving stone, for example.”

“Point taken,” the gargoyle admitted. “But before I entertain any offers, I have a proposition of my own.”

“Oh, the plot thickens,” Lucifer said, amused. “Let’s hear it then.”

“I have a question,” said the gargoyle. “One that will require a truthful response. Even from the Father of Lies. Answer me honestly and I will consider your offer. Lie to me, and I *will* know if you lie, and this conversation comes to an immediate end.”

“Your terms are agreeable,” Lucifer replied. “Ask your question.”

“Why this girl?” the gargoyle inquired. “You’ve seduced thousands with your dark enchantments over the centuries. Why not simply find someone else? Why is this one special; so much so that you would actually suffer in my company?”

To the gargoyle’s surprise, Lucifer sat in quiet contemplation for some time. Scratching his horns, he furrowed his brow, struggling to formulate an appropriate response. Flies hovered lazily about his head. An outraged crow perched upon a nearby steeple to cackle its complaint, and he shooed it away with a shake of the hand.

“Honestly,” Lucifer finally replied, “I don’t know.”

“Elaborate,” the gargoyle insisted.

“I honestly don’t know how to answer your question.” Frustration mounted in



his voice. "You are correct in the assertion that I've claimed thousands of men and women over countless centuries as slaves, wives, and concubines. And yes, the most sensible course of action in this scenario would simply be to find a suitable replacement. Yet, I cannot. There is some vague, elusive quality to this woman that I cannot define. Something I have never encountered before. You know that our kind do not sleep, and as such, do not dream. But I feel as though I have dreamed of her for a thousand years, without ever even knowing what it is to dream."

"Is this...love?" the gargoyle inquired.

Lucifer wrinkled his nose as though he'd caught a whiff of something noxious. "I don't believe such a phenomenon is possible," he replied. "At least not for me, anyway. This is an aberration of some sort. A sickness, perhaps. At best, it's nothing more than a temporary consequence of my prolonged exposure to the human condition. At worst, it's more than likely a cruel joke played on me by our vengeful God."

"Stranger things have happened," the gargoyle agreed.

"In any event," Lucifer continued, "I have answered your inquiry honestly and to the best of my ability. What say you to my proposal?"

"For centuries, I have sat perched upon this mount," the gargoyle said. "My sole purpose, to maintain a vigilant watch for the likes of you; my penalty, to observe the mundane activities of the Chosen below me, silently, and admittedly at times, with jealousy. One could argue that there would be a measure of justification in my acceptance of your offer."

"And, yet?"

"And yet," the gargoyle continued, "you have overcalculated. I have no desire to count myself amongst their number. They scurry about like insects, only vaguely aware of their surroundings and all but oblivious to their true purpose and preferred status. Any act of righteousness, any measure of grace they might exhibit, are all matched and ultimately overshadowed by the depths of the depravity which they sink to on a daily basis. They lie, they cheat, they murder, and they rape. They commit vile and unnatural acts; whether they be an aberration, a sickness, or a joke, I know not. But I do know I do not envy them." The gargoyle looked at Lucifer with a smile. "Alas, you've nothing with which to bargain, Fallen One. You've no service to provide me, save the possible exception of oblivion. Therefore, I am inclined to decline."

"Well played, Grotesque." Lucifer smirked. "Thinking that your refusal of my

generous offer would actually incense me enough to destroy you, and thus end your suffering. A cunning tactic, indeed. But I've seen right through you. You'll get no such satisfaction from me."

Unfurling his dark and dusty wings, Lucifer leapt into the sky. Soaring aloft, he skillfully spiraled about the tower and then looped around the steep spires of the prestigious Notre Dame Cathedral. A murder of crows enthusiastically cawed their admiration. After a few minutes of aerial acrobatics, he once more landed upon the ledge nearest the gargoyle.

"I lied," he thundered.

Enraged, he proceeded to smash the gargoyle to pieces, hurling fragments of stone down the sides of the basilica, scattering the faithful below.





# Newton



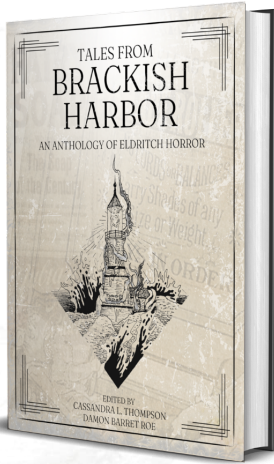
Currently residing in St. Louis, MO, Newton is an author, artist, and oddity who spends an inordinate amount of time scouring the depths of his overactive imagination in an effort to dredge up original works of wonder and terror.

His short story, *A Cold Room*, can be found in *Eros & Thanatos: An Anthology of Death & Desire*. His other published works can be found via Amazon under the mononym 'Newton.'

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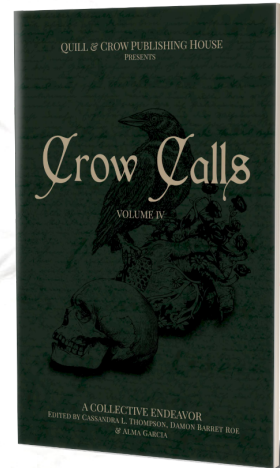
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We are so grateful for the stories written by our talented authors, and we hope you enjoyed the poetry contributed by two members of our community.

Thank you, Crow family, for your continued enthusiasm and support!

A deep thank you to everyone who submitted a story. It is truly special for us when you share your works, regardless of their acceptance. While your story may not have been chosen, next month's theme is *Eldritch Seas* and it could be your chance to spin us a dark tale. If you are interested in seeing your story published in *The Crow's Quill*, please check our website for more details.

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Are you a poet?

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Keep calling and we Crows may answer.

Sincerely, from Quill & Crow's Associate Editor,

*L.R. Wieland*



# TRIGGER INDEX

- **Body horror**

mentioned.....*My Wicked Throat*  
*The Sculptor*

- **Gender Dysphoria**

mentioned.....*The Heart is a Strange Star*

- **Suicide**

implied.....*The Heart is a Strange Star*





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