

Die Spinne
Sean Austin

The cool air stirred in the cave and he watched as the spiderweb bowed in the breeze, lifting gently from the eye socket of the skull half buried in the sand. The spider sitting in it stretched out its front legs at the interruption, its eyes bright in the weak light coming from the cave entrance. The movement brought a thin smile to his face.

"Hello. It's morning."

The spider looked at him silently, returning to its previous state of immobility. The silence didn't daunt him.

"I wonder if you caught anything last night."

A moments inspection showed the web to be perfect yet bereft of victims. He sighed.

"No breakfast for you either."

His eyes turned to the cave entrance.

"Doesn't matter, I'm not hungry these days." he murmured before lapsing into silence.

The light outside had strengthened considerably by the time he spoke again.

"I heard that German lad call you Herr Spinne."

He paused, a thoughtful frown coming over him.

"Then again, it was a long time ago. Perhaps it wasn't you? Your father? Maybe your grandfather?"

He looked at the spider and sighed.

"I don't remember well these days. I think I forget more than I recall."

The spider made no reply, the silence neither judging nor accusing.

"Did you come for food?"

When the spider remained stoically silent, he lay back to stare at the roof of the cave.

"There used to be beetles here once." he said wistfully. "Thousands of them."

His smile returned as he rolled over to look at the spider again.

"There were spiders here then too. They came for the beetles. Was one of them your grandfather perhaps?"

He sighed again and shook his head.

"They were here once but then they left. Like everyone else."

His frown returned and he glared at the spider.

"You'll leave too, eventually."

The gossamer fine threads of the web didn't stir as he reached out and touched it with one pale and translucent finger.

"That's alright. You're here now to keep me company and that's enough."

Chuckling softly to himself, he shook his head.

"Here I am, talking to a spider. My Lieutenant always did say I had nothing between my ears. That I'd never amount to anything.

He turned away with a last shake of his head.

"I suppose I can tell him that my skull has found a better use."

The Bloody Knife
Sean Austin

The knife in his hand felt slippery, the blade and hilt coated in more blood than he thought possible. He looked at the bench in horrified disbelief, seeing the smears of gore coating its surface.

Even his shirt hadn't escaped the carnage, drops spattered across the front and down past the hem to the front of his jeans. He shook his head, terrified what she would think if she saw the mess. The knife fell from numb fingers, landing on the bench with a clatter. Taking a step back, he stared at what he had done.

It took him a full minute to grasp the fact that he would have to clean up. He couldn't let her come in to witness the mess he had created. Opening the cupboard, he gingerly poked through the clutter inside until he came up with a roll of paper towel. It looked pitifully inadequate for the job but it was all he had. Tearing handfuls from the roll, he grimly applied himself to the task.

Putting the last of the sodden towel in the bin a few minutes later, he turned back to the bench as a woman's voice drifted in from another room.

"How are you going out there? Dinner almost ready?"

Picking up the cutting board, he swept the diced chicken into a frying pan. As it began sizzling, he called out in reply.

"It'll be a couple more minutes. Just putting the meat on now."

#

Everyone knows how you're supposed to think in an emergency. When that moment comes and you've got that split second to decide, you're supposed to think fast. You're supposed to think clearly and make the right decision. Of course that hardly ever happens. In real life that split second is when the panic sets in and all rational thought is wiped away. Ever seen the movies when that guy breaks into the bank and unloads a shotgun into the roof? The look on everyone's faces? Does anyone there look like they're thinking calm and fast thoughts? Or do they look like they're shitting themselves and staring like a deer in the headlights? There's a reason for that and it's because that is real. Some stare, others run for cover.

Now imagine that that gun is pointed at your head and you've got that second to think. 99% of people are going to go into meltdown, their brains turned to soggy mush without a coherent thought even contemplating making an appearance. Those bank tellers in the movies? Yeah, they're doing what they're told because that's what makes sense. Someone points a gun and tells you to hand over the cash. Pretty clear cut instructions right? Well I guess I'm not quite like others. That gun to my head, that emergency situation? I had a perfectly clear and rational thought in my split second and it made itself known when I opened my mouth.

"Fuck I hate Fridays."

A Teacher's Lament

Kristina Sullivan

"We highly recommend that all faculty, students, and staff wear their masks at all times." You're joking right? They can't expect kids and dimwitted adults to wear something so valuable yet something so prisoning (to some) all the time. Good god, don't they know they smell? There's going to be a mask trade soon, maybe not here but in a classroom three doors down. Then what do you do? What about my coworker next door who refuses to wear a mask but instead insists that his face shield does the job just as well? 2020 is frustrating, I get it, but how does one get another to protect themselves and others without wearing a mask. It's also hard to describe the trials of constantly cleaning and trying to learn virtually as well. Oh, now we're essential? In March and April, we weren't even well liked and they thought they could do it themselves. And my coworker across the hall keeps coughing and swears it's a cold. It feels like testing is here, but it's only August. How long will it be until I go virtual, or I end up six feet down?

Otello Night

Todd Tremole

“Frances will tend you while we’re out.”

Mother and Father’s weekly outings meant Frances visited.

Four curt raps on the door announced her arrival.

“Frances,” Mother greeted, and then she and Father were out the door to see an opera called Otello.

The games began. Mattie loved chess, though Father insisted, “At seven, Matilda is simply too young.” She and Fanny played; Hope practiced piano.

When Fanny tired of chess-- having lost three games of their five-- they played Look Around You. Fanny chose one of the parlor’s many items, showed it, then ushered them from the room. When they re-entered, the object was in a different place. Whoever found it got to hide the next item.

On Hope’s turn, she chose Father’s brandy glass and set it behind a portrait on the mantle.

When she opened the door, only Mattie waited. “Fanny said to start without her.”

The mantle clock ticked away as Mattie scrutinized the room.

Hope felt eyes on her and turned. Fanny stood in the parlor door, holding something heavy. Her eyes harbored a glassy, stony gaze.

“Here,” she said, holding out the object. An axe.

“What?”

“I said here!” Her tone made Hope tremble.

“I found it!” Mattie squealed, holding the brandy glass aloft. The sudden strangeness in Fanny’s appearance silenced her.

“Hack her to pieces,” Fanny ordered. A pause. Hope couldn’t obey.

“I said hack her to pieces!”

Another pause.

“Fine.” Fanny reached Mattie in three long steps. The axe rose. Hope wasn’t sure if the scream was hers or Mattie’s. The axe fell. Mattie’s left arm hit the parlor floor, but the girl didn’t move, her big eyes staring.

The axe fell again. The brandy glass cracked in half as Mattie’s severed right arm carried it to the floor. Hope backed up until she hit a wall, then a corner. Fanny swung, her front covered in blood. The strange look never left her eyes. Mattie collapsed, but Fanny kept on. Hope wrapped her arms around herself. Her throat was raw; she had no more screams left.

The axe’s squish-thunk, and Hope dared to glance up. Fanny swung again. Hope couldn’t look away in time. The blade sank into Mattie’s face.

“What was so hard about that?” Fanny said smoothly. Blood dripped from the axe as Fanny turned her stony look to where Hope was hiding.

Writing Your Residue...

Wyatt Hill

It's a love that's stillborn, a knife in the back

One eye waxed over, a train off its tracks

It's a kiss without feeling, a wound as deep as time

Silence that's haunting, the truth between the lies

It's mist on the mountains, it's flowers in the fields
Hallelujahs sung by demons, and too valuable to steal
It's a puzzle with a piece gone, tears without the salt
Kings living in sackcloth, a mistake without the fault
It's skies of green and grey, oceans of deep red
Eons without aging, trying to sew without a thread
It's a pain that's cauterized, shot after shot
Yesterday repeated, it's everything I'm not
It's a trust that's betrayed for a moment of stranger
Planes without wings, or risk without the danger
It's emotions that rule you, and leave both your eyes blackened
A class full of reminders of everything that's happened
It's gluttony for punishment, it's proof it's not in vain
Having never been enough, or wondering why you're still praying
It's tainting a melody, it's 'should have known much better'
Eyes just like your own, no addresses on the letter
It's needing a corner to cry in when the room is round
Duets sung without harmonies, it's watching forever drown
It's the cold sweat you wake up in, it's dreams of how it happened
Underneath the surface, it's the week you're still trapped in
It's the hate you just can't feel, a taste of what you're after
At the sharing of never had, you're running far and faster
It's wanting it here, pushing it away, uncertainty it'll stay
Tearing your clothes, rush to the shower, wash the memories away
It's everywhere, between the lines, every day further along
In the rising of the sun, accepting the fact I was wrong
I'm writing your residue out of my system, trying to tell you goodbye
Needing closure, ship setting sail, I wipe the last tear from my eye
