



King's High School



The Junior & Senior
Creative Writing Clubs'
Collaborative Winter Anthology:
Mystery

The Court Case

by Lola

Just like any typical Wednesday morning, she got dressed, he got dressed, she ate breakfast, he ate breakfast, she headed out the door, and he headed out the door. Just like any typical Wednesday morning, she set off to work, as did he. Two strangers united by their routine. Ushering through the streets, each usually did a good job of navigating past others in the busy city, but not on this particularly mysterious morning.

This particular day, for some unknown reason, enormous swarms of magpies were disrupting the walk to work, swooping in all directions, fluttering feathers everywhere. Rhythmically, both individuals collided head on, landed in a heap on the floor, sending their bags, briefcases and papers flying, and this is where the mess began. 'Oh, I am extremely sorry, Sir' spoke the lady in a brittle voice. 'Don't worry, Ma'am' said the man to reassure her. And, as simple as that, both scrambled to their feet, gathered up their belongings and carried on with their busy days ahead, completely forgetting about their close encounter.

Later on that day, a terrible thought occurred to the woman as she put her hand up to her neck. 'Oh no, oh no, oh nooooo' said the woman distraught. 'My diamond necklace. Where's my diamond necklace?' Continuously patting herself down and looking through her things it was clear that the necklace was not there. Thinking back to earlier, she remembered that she bumped into a man. 'Could it be. It can't. But, could it though?' So many thoughts repeatedly raced through her mind. 'Did he take my necklace?'

After a day of being distraught, she knew she had to do something. Call a private investigator. So that's what she did. A nice, young man named Francis Astley who was willing to help with the case. They immediately exchanged phone numbers and set to work.

'Tell me everything you remember about him and I will try to look on surveillance footage around the area' said Francis. 'Hmm, he was mid-sixties, bald, had a briefcase and was wearing a suit I think' said the woman. 'What time was this exactly ma'am?' Erm, around 8.20am.' 'Very well I will try to find that on camera' he spoke in a reassuring voice.

A few weeks later Francis Astley managed to track down the suspected thief, his name, age, company and address. Michael John, 64 years old, lives on 24 Silver Street, CA and works in venue hire. Let's just say when Michael received this letter, he was fuming when he learned what he'd been accused of. A court date was fixed and this dispute would finally end.

May 7, 10.00am, The Court House. Both individuals and their lawyers were finishing prepping their arguments. This was it; what they had all been waiting for. The constant going back and forth between the lawyers trying to prove their points was getting intense. It was looking good for the woman, named Lucy, but terrible for Michael.

Until Michael's lawyer had a sudden thought as he contemplated the evidence again and thought about the mysterious flock of magpies that day. 'A magpie.' 'That's what took it.' The nest would need to be checked. In a rush the Court House called some experts in urgently to investigate and when they climbed up to a large nest, they found Lucy's necklace along with lots of other shiny objects. The valuables were all returned to their rightful owners and the mysterious court case was solved.

The Tale of the Magical Five

by Elektra

One steely night, it happened. The wind was roaring in Alisha's ears, waves the size of houses crashing down like a furious troll, a humungous tsunami of freezing water bearing down into the grimy depths of the ocean. Alisha was terrified for her life: panic stricken, she raced up and down the soaked and slippery deck wracking her brains to find a solution, but all in vain. Menacing clouds rolled in from the east while lightning flashed, and thunder rumbled overhead. The boat tossed and rocked about uncontrollably, as if it were in the hands of a careless toddler, the surf nearly sinking it, and the blackness of the night was closing in.

James woke with a start, his body drenched in cold sweat, shaking like he had just been dunked in a pool of liquid nitrogen. And then he saw it. A ghostly figure floating slowly, menacingly towards him. Blood-soaked, a dagger clenched, tightly in a long, spindly fingers tipped with obsidian black claws. James sat up slowly, hardly believing what he was seeing when suddenly, he noticed something. He was lying on a hard stone-cold wooden floor in a dim, dank, dusty house, cobwebs hanging from the ceiling and spiders scuttling along the floor beside him. As an icy finger traced down his spine, James stood up, brushed the dust and cobwebs from his shaking figure and, ready to face the unknown, stood his ground and was ready for combat against the apparition, who was fast approaching.

Slash! Slash! Slash! The dense jungle around Tilly fell at her mercy as she trekked her way through the forest, moving anything out of the way so she could squeeze through. Huge palm leaves and dense foliage surrounded her, engulfing her into the depths of the forest, away from any sign of civilization. A thick snake hung from an overhead branch, swaying gently in the muggy breeze, waiting for its prey to come innocently by. Then, suddenly, bounding out of the bushes came a tiger, snarling and glaring ferociously at Tilly through its sharp eyes, teeth glinting in the moonlight. Fearing for her life, Tilly ran as fast as she could, not caring where, the tiger hot on her heels. Then, there, in front of her, was the snake hissing and slithering menacingly towards her, fangs poised to strike. Tilly was frozen to the spot, her two attackers advancing upon her, coming ever closer ready to strike.

A shove. A scream. Then it all went black. Gemma was suddenly falling, falling, falling, plummeting down the endless pit to the centre of the earth itself at the bottom of it. Layers of concrete, then mud, then rock rushed past as she fell. Even though fear was clouding her brain, she thought to herself as she fell, "Maybe this is how my life will end, in the ongoing pit." Then more and more questions started appearing in her brain, "When does this pit end?", "How will I get out?" and "Will I survive?" came and went. She seemed to have been falling for what seemed like an eternity, when she saw something orange in the distance in front of her. A great mass of boiling lava was writhing like a mass of trapped locusts waiting to be released below her and the wind rushing through Gemma went from icy cold, to unbearably hot. A deep sense of dread flooded through Gemma's heart as she came closer and closer to the heat of hell.

George, weary and tired, slouched along the street. Rough and dishevelled, he had not slept in three days out on the alleyways where his parents had left him. The wail of sirens echoed in the distance, but then George noticed something strange. A flickering light had appeared at the top of a wall, spitting red hot sparks over the edge on top of him, ash falling on his clothes in small fragments, glowing in the night. Suddenly, as if from nowhere, it was coming down upon him, roaring and smoking like a great dragon being woken from a very deep sleep. So, George ran. He ran faster than he had ever run in his life before, faster than an arrow, faster than a bullet, faster than even the speed of light itself but still the fire was chasing him, a flaming, bewitched snake, mouth open, ready to sink its fangs into him. Street after street, mile after mile, George ran for his life, afraid that the flames might engulf him at any moment. Then down an alleyway, the flames hot on his heels, George came to a dead end, a slimy wall that would surely mean his death. He turned as the vast flowing mass of fire engulfed him completely and entirely in the ferocious heat of the flames.

Silence, just silence. Then, a burst of light, a heavenly sound, an empty interstellar amphitheatre just waiting to be explored. And there they all stood: Alisha, James, Tilly, Gemma, and George, one united team, ready for anything.

There was a blissful stillness and silence, before a beautiful woman came out of the light in front of them. She had wonderful, flowing, fair hair and was wearing a trailing white gown that swept along behind her, like the end of a mermaid's tail fanning out elegantly on the ground. She spoke, and when she did a beautiful sound emerged from her lips, a silken blanket washing over them from an angel in heaven. A single, moment of bliss." Do not be afraid," she said, "For I am the mother of all your ancestors. You are to live with them for all eternity in peace, happiness, and tranquillity for ever, away from all danger." "Thank you," said James, the leader, "We will go. It is our destiny and what we have been waiting for all our lives." "As you wish." said the strange woman.

At once, the whiteness around them immediately dissolved and they found themselves on the most beautiful planet they had ever seen. Waterfalls and streams trickled down lush green mountainsides, bees buzzed merrily, birds chirped, and all was well. A sweet little grotto sat in front of the five and the door was open, then the voice of the woman came into their heads again and told them, "Go in, this is your new home now, you will live together in perfect harmony. We do this for you because you are the chosen ones and deserve no less." So, they went into the little grotto and the most remarkable thing of all is that once they went inside, the grotto expanded to a luxurious size. They settled in and still live there to this day. Overall that time, their bond as friends grew stronger and stronger as the years past and they all lived for eternity, in perfect peace, ever after. Or did they...?

Stuck

by Libby

How did I get myself into this mess? I'm stuck in a terrifying wood with my worst enemy, Heidi Hamilton, the meanest and most popular girl in my school. She hated my guts. "I cannot believe you dragged me into this stomach – churning woods, Ida," she said hastily. "This is not my fault we ended up here, now shut up so we can try to get out of here," I replied. She sighed in utter disgust.

Suddenly, I stumbled upon an ancient metal plate that was dug beneath the ground but had a shine to it. Heidi didn't care as she was too busy trying to get a signal. Heidi never cares. "You know you are never going to get a signal stuck in the middle of a hidden, gloomy wood," I muttered but she was able to hear me. Again, she sighed in utter disgust. Tentatively, I beckoned her over to my unusual discovery. "What now?" she groaned rolling her eyes. She was interested though. I could tell in her voice. I began to brush away the dirt and dust off the plate until...

"A GRAVESTONE!" Heidi shouted so loud that they would've heard her on mars. Even though I didn't show it, I was scared. What was a gravestone doing in the middle of an unknown wood? On it was marked: Mireille Ballantine, born in 1866, died in 1864. It didn't make sense; how could somebody die before they were even born? Could this be the clue to get out of here? We carried on trudging through the mud and earth for hours on end until we came across a hut. This wasn't just any old hut, it was different. It had rainbow lanterns and spirits floating in the air. It was the only source of light in this location. The ornaments surrounding it called my name and before I knew it, I was pushing the thin, fabric entrance out of my way. Heidi followed. We both gasped in admiration of what lay in front of us.

It was huge inside and reminded me of the tardis. Shocked by my reflection, I noticed the floors were made of thick, sturdy glass and so were the walls. Heidi ran forward and collapsed into a velvet, comfortable chair that sat in the corner. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed an old wooden table holding a sphere that was so polished I could clearly see myself looking at it. I approached it. THUD THUD THUD! It came from the glass spiral of stairs. Someone was here with us.

A middle – aged woman clambered down the stairs. She was wearing colorful, old – fashioned clothes (not the sort people wear nowadays) and had large, gold hoops dangling from each ear. I noticed she had a limp to her leg. As soon as she

saw us, she jumped back in fear, stepping curiously towards us. She squinted her clear, blue eyes at us wondering what we were. Weirdly, her body started trembling in excitement, fear and inquisitiveness as she stopped walking. "A..a..another one," she stuttered still holding eye contact with me. Heidi had gotten up from her chair and she was clearly freaked about by this. Has this mysterious lady ever seen another human before?

She grabbed my hand furiously with her skinny, bony fingers and the metal of her gold rings scratched my hand and led me to the glass table that I was previously admiring. Heidi didn't move and the fright in her pretty face shone through. The woman beckoned me to sit on a plum – coloured,

velvet plush armchair while she sat herself down on a wooden chair which was full of splinters. "W..we need to get out of here," I explained to her.

"Nobody gets out of these woods!" she laughed like they do in horror films.

"AAAAA, YOU MEAN I AM GOING TO BE STUCK HERE UNTIL I DIE AND THEN MY NAME WILL BE ON A GRAVESTONE TOO LIKE THE ONE EARLIER!" Heidi screamed crying and slowly fell to her knees.

"Aah so you have found my great – grandmother's gravestone," she replied. "I was always told she was a great woman."

This was beginning to take a dark turn. I could feel it in my veins...

The Night in Winter

by Gabriella

It was the first week of winter. The wind was howling like a wolf, the rain was pouring, and the sky was jet black. The thunder roared and screamed through the treacherous trees that stood tall above Evelyn. She felt miserable and cold. Evelyn was isolated, lonely, and needed to escape everything. She wanted to see her best friend, called Ivy, who lives in Birmingham, which was an hour train journey. So, Evelyn hopped on the train. She looked out the cracked, dirty train window as she was leaving. Something had just popped on her phone saying there was a thirty-nine-year-old man who had recently escaped a prison on the outskirts of Birmingham and was yet to be found. That's where she was going. Evelyn didn't really suspect anything of it so didn't worry too much.

After a bumpy journey, she arrived. Ivy came to pick her up and then drove back to her parents' house, who were staying at a hotel for two nights. They left to go earlier today, so Ivy and her older brother, Lucas, were staying home alone. Everything was normal, until Lucas suggested a game of truth or dare. Evelyn and Ivy said they were in and that's where it began. "Truth or dare", said Ivy to Evelyn. Evelyn responded with dare. Ivy took a movement to think. "I dare you to go to that Forest", which was a forest right by the house, "In fact, we should all go", Ivy said. "No, no one is doing that" Lucas responded. "Yeah, I agree, have you heard about that guy who escaped a prison only about a mile away from here" Evelyn said. Ivy and Lucas looked confused. They hadn't heard about it at all. But in the end, they all decided to go to the forest. They were walking to the forest, stepping on the leaves, breathing in the crisp air, talking. Until...



The Disappearance


by Sophie

A telephone rang from the other room. I heaved a sigh as I stood up to answer it. "You are through to Wiltshire police service, Officer Hice speaking, how can I be of assistance?" A gruff voice greeted me from the other end of the line. I listened to them talk about how they were concerned about their neighbour and family. Apparently, they had not been seen for a few days and they were not away as the car was on the drive like usual. I jotted down some details and suppressed a groan. This could only mean one thing. I would have to go and investigate out front.

I climbed into the car and put the postcode into my SATNAV. According to the ETA, it would take me approximately half an hour to get there. Great. Just for fun, I put the sirens on and launched into sixty miles an hour on the forty road. At least there were some perks to being a police officer. As the engine roared with triumph, I sped down the motorway at top speed. I got to the house ten minutes before the ETA, probably because I went a tiny bit over the speed limits.

A man came out to greet me. I could tell he was the one who telephoned me at the station. He led me to the house, jabbering away about how it was so strange for them to just vanish. Once he opened the door, he brought me to the kitchen. For some reason, the table was the definition of still eating dinner with food put out on the plates and cutlery in the food, as if they had just deserted the table mid-meal. Whatever made them leave must have been important as it made them let their dinner go cold and not return to eat it.

I thanked the neighbour and asked him to let me record the clues and evidence alone. He seemed to understand and left me saying he was only next door if I needed anything. I nodded politely but I was secretly quite pleased he was going as his



incessant chatter was making it hard to concentrate and I was sure I was going to have a migraine if I had to put up with it for much longer. I poked my head into the other rooms to see what else there was, that could offer me some sort of hint as to what happened in this house a few days ago.

I found some toys that were clearly chucked aside when the call of dinner was heard. Marbles were scattered everywhere, and train track had the sense of being stuffed into the nearest box, so it was classed as 'put away.' I walked along the hall and came to a staircase. The first room was obviously the adults' room and then it was a couple of storage cupboards. Next up was a bedroom with half train stickers and half fairy ones. Two single beds were pressed against the wall. Toys of every description lined the floor. I physically could not find a path through the mess.

With a small smile I continued on my exploration. Next was a bathroom filled to bursting with hair products and other lotions. Clearly a teenager was in the house. I cursed as I remembered I had not asked the neighbour of all the current residents who lived here. I groaned inwardly as I realised I would have to pay another visit to the slightly eccentric man next door.

I slipped back down the stairs and out of the front door. I prepared myself for the worst and knocked on the red door. Instantly, the man appeared and ushered me inside, as if he had been waiting for me. I cut to the chase and asked him a few questions about the household, their relationships with each other, any wider family etc. He looked me in the eye the whole time he answered, never hesitating. I could not put my finger on it, but there was something strange about this man and I was going to get to the bottom of it. (After I found the family, obviously).

I managed to get back to the station even quicker than before. However, when I got there, I faced a long report of all the facts I had learned. It must be

said, although it can be good, playing cop is not all it is cracked up to be. It took well over an hour to draft the report and even longer to check it over and send it off to my boss.

At last, it was finished. With a satisfying click, I sent it off and closed my computer. Maybe inspiration would come to me after a good night's rest.

I woke up early the next day, thoughts blurring into each other as my brain was in over-drive. So many suspicions, facts and opinions ran into each other, making it next to impossible to sort them out. With a sigh, I slammed my notebook closed. Perhaps after a good breakfast it would make a tiny bit more sense. I glanced at the clock and spat out the coffee I was in the middle of drinking. I was over an hour late for work. Cursing profusely under my breath, I hurried out of the room. There was no way I could talk my way out of this one.

On the doorstep of the station, I found my boss eyeing up a nearby daisy as if he would murder it in a few seconds. Scattered around on the floor was the bodies of the flower's late, unsuspecting friends. To avoid any more slaughtering of innocent daisies, I rushed over and was greeted with a lot of shouting and threatening gestures. I glanced around and saw many people stopping to watch the scene unfolding outside a police station. With what I hope was a reassuring smile to the surrounding people, I discreetly inclined my head towards the door. The detective however did not pick up on my hints and continued on how I should start acting like a proper officer.

I am *incredibly* ashamed to admit that I zoned out after that and only forced myself back when some people started whispering about calling the authorities and had to practically drag the man inside the building to avoid the matter getting out of hand. He made a sound in his throat like a growl, fell back into his chair and started jabbing angrily at the keyboard before him. Every so often, he would peer over the computer screen and glare testily at

me, daring me to speak so he could find another fault with the investigation so far.

I decided to stay fixated on my own device, to avoid eye contact and try to find a groundbreaking discovery that would get me back in the detective's good books.

Almost two hours later of going over evidence and the tiniest bit of daydreaming, I was incredibly bored, but I pulled myself together. I was not going to slacken off. Maybe I should just grab some lunch and come back to it with a clear head.

Unfortunately, my epic plan did not work. After a couple more hours of glaring and typing, I spoke up. "Sir," I said as casually as I could, trying hard not to let my voice wobble. He stopped typing but did not look up. I took this as a good sign and continued. "I just wanted to give you of a brief rundown of the case so far." Still without eye contact, he pushed back his chair and cleaned his glasses. I was about to proceed when he said, "No need. Your report says it all. Well done. Maybe you had a reason to not be here on time after all. A document as fine as that will have taken hours to complete. Therefore, I am happy to forget all about today's events so far if you will." I was so surprised and taken aback that I could not speak. I just stared dumbly at my boss before me. I watched him so long that he shifted uneasily in his seat and cleared his throat. I snapped back to the present and nodded a few too many times. Without another word, we got back to work. I felt a little burst of triumph inside which I did not dare express. I just gave a satisfied smirk to my computer and continued in my thoughts of the day.

That night I awoke shaking. My brain was in haywire, but unlike before, ideas were flowing into each other creating a perfect jigsaw of events. Finally, it all slotted into place, and I sat up with a gasp. I had it. Or at least, I thought I did. All that was left to do was confront the detective. And take a trip into the nearby woods...

A Winter Walk

by Iona

Chapter 1 – a short extract from a murder mystery

It was a dark winter's evening. The midnight sky was black, and the wind was howling ferociously. One brave little girl though, was out there, discovering something that might change the world forever...

Autumn was a strange season. It was cold, yet I was not. It was like; the sky had not made up its mind. Yet it always did, and it was always at the most inconvenient of times.

On November the 15th, Natalia, (also known as Natty), Set out on a woodland walk, trying to clear her head. No one was around, the sky was as clear as a bell and the morning was crisp. A dog barked in the distance and the faint sound of cow mooing rang in her ears, other than that though, she was on her own, lost in the deep well of her thoughts. Home was not a happy place at that time, her parents were going through a divorce and school was hard. Everything seemed hard then. She had no pets and no friends, life was miserable, yet something pulled her through, she just worked hard to work out what it was...

It was growing dusk and Natty was still lost in her own world. No one noticed that she was not there, her parents were too busy arguing. Time was running out. Natty wanted her family together, all happy. Money was tight in Nattie's family, baked beans on toast was a feast for her. Because of this Natty was skin and bones and her face was ghostly pale because of worry. No one noticed and quite frankly no one cared.

A scream pierced Nattie's thoughts shattering her daydream. Where did it come from, who was it from? Natty had no clue. All she knew was that someone or something needed her help...

Running as fast as she could, Natty considered her options. She could go and get help or should she try and figure this out by herself. If she did go back, who would she go to? Her parents were busy arguing, so they sure wouldn't listen... It was made up; she would have to do this by herself... Pumping her arms and legs, Nattie ran as fast as she could she hoped whoever it was, was going to be okay...



An Autumn Murder

by Iona

The wind howled,

A glint on a knife,

The rain lashed,

Away from the spike,

I wondered and wondered,

Was the time truly here?

I took out my book,

And peered into the night.



Priceless Artefact and Multi-Millionaire Stolen:

A Newspaper Article by Iona

BREAKING NEWS!!!

On the 15th of December 1991, the owner of head company, Amazon went missing!!!

He was found by an ordinary girl, of the age of 15. Twenty years later, the same thing has happened. Where is his hero and does she know that he needs a hero?

Along with this multi-millionaire, a priceless artifact has been stolen too.

Who is going to save the world now? If these have been stolen, who knows what else will get stolen as well?

The police have no clues as who the robber is, the only clue that they have though, is the empty display case with a huge hole smashed through the middle.

What will happen now? No one knows. The same thought is everyone's mind. Read more here at News, news and more news.com.

The Unwanted Child

by Georgia

I was all alone, with no one to play with, speak to or see when I was just 4 years old. Will I make it out on my own?

My father called me the unwanted child. I really was unwanted. My mother died when I was 2 and my father never really cared for me. My brother, James, never looked out for me. It was all right for him because he was the oldest and father trusted him and would take him out for delicious and mouthwatering meals while I was stuck at home starving and living off warm water and stale bread!

I don't remember my mother much but the bits I do I love her to pieces still. Father was captivated by her, and he would never let her see another man and if she did it would be stern words and a good telling off. Father told me Mother was called Angelia, and she was the loveliest women you will ever meet. Her dark brown eyes, her long black hair and her amazing outfits! I looked up to her and would copy her every move even if that was walking around like a fashion model? She was my idol, my hero when I was young!

On the morning of my 10th birthday, I slowly moved my muscles and climbed out of bed! I could hear my brother and father arguing, ever since James's 16th birthday the relationship between my brother and father had changed. My brother wanted to move out and my father said no and then there would be massive arguments and often I would be kept awake at night because of it!

'WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU, YOU ABSOULATE IDIOT' my father would scream constantly. James would never answer but he would storm upstairs (and once shattered a glass with his big size 10 feet) and slam the door so hard that one day it will fall off.

I was tired, I was exhausted, I was lonely.

I looked over my shoulder and there on the floor was my father..... SHOT DEAD at the stomach!

I looked out of the window and all that was outside was snow. Everything was covered in snow. Ever since father died, I had been alone once more. James had disappeared 6 months ago, and it

had been 1 year since father's death and I still hadn't figured out how father died or why James disappeared. Had Father been murdered, or had it been a great accident? I didn't know but I was going to find out about Father's death but first I was going to find out about James's disappearance.

'£255 please?' Commanded the taxi driver. He wasn't a genuinely nice man but pleasant enough. He had a great long beard with bits of crusted cereal stuck to it, he had a bold head which had snake tattooed across, and he was wearing the dirtiest biker jacket ever to be seen in human history. The taxi driver was in his late 60s and he obviously had an extremely bad taste in fashion and needed an expert's help and lucky I was here for that but unfortunately, I was not in this expensive taxi for nothing. NO there was a reason... a particularly good reason. The reason I was on a mission was to find my long-lost brother. (Well not long lost just a case of the loopy head which makes him disappear into thin air.)

As I strode out of the taxi, I found myself on the cold streets of...well I did not know where I was but that did not matter. I wandered around the bustling streets for a while not knowing the winter was just around the corner and I had no warm layers on. As I walked, I noticed something or someone a few meters behind me but every time I turned my head no-one was there, but I still had a slight felling about it. I strolled into the nearest café to see what would happen next but as soon as I did that some man walked in and sat down at the table next to me. He kept staring at me in some creepy way and so I moved tables but then he got up and again sat down at the table next to me. I was terrified! The bar attendant was busy making drinks and had his eyes glued on the cricket. The man walked up to the bar and got even closer to me because I was sat on one of the bar stools. I was so scared, (well mostly creeped out) and before I could do anything he quickly turned around and grabbed with his dirty grubby hands and pulled me up to him only using my clothes. While all of this commotion was going on the bar attendant was still not concentrating and watching the ever so slightly boring... the cricket.

Everyone else in the café had left and it was only me the man who was trying to strangle me and the lazy bartender. Because the bartender wasn't watching the strange man chuckled a bag over my head and carried me out into the breezy streets.

I could hear and feel I was in a car being taken somewhere but I didn't know where I was being taken. All of this could have ruined my plan to find some of my family. I could hear this voice at the back of my head and I didn't know what it was. It was a tingling noise and was hurting my ears, but I was just really confused. I was being dragged out of the car by my legs and I could faintly hear doors opening and a lot of shouting. I was being thrown into a cold room and doing that some man ripped off my mask and cackled in a weird but slightly creepy voice. He threw me down the stairs and banged the iron door shut and walked off.

'You're here to then, bad look!' a voice shouted out of nowhere. I blinked and looked up and saw standing in front of me was a boy about 17 with crazy hair and very disgusting looking clothes. 'Yeah' I said in a very hesitant voice. The boy stepped forward and looked at me closer and asked me, 'What's your name then?' He kept looking at me and wouldn't stop until I finally broke the silence. 'Dotty.' 'What about you?' I asked.

'James.' He replied still creeping me out by looking at me. Finally, he got out the words he had been meaning to say to me all along. 'Dotty?'

'Yes!' I replied

'What is your surname because you look so familiar.'

'Reynolds.' I said 'Wait!' 'What is yours?'

'Same as yours'

'OK this is so strange my ex-brother has the exact same name as you'

'Nice now what is your mother called?'

'Angelia!'

'Listen Dotty! I want you to tell me everything about your family.'

'Why?'

'Just do it!'

'Fine, Fine, Fine!' I said frustratedly.

'Get on with it then'

'OK!' My father died about a year ago and my brother disappeared 1 month after my father's death and I am out looking for my brother but now my plan has ended and I am stuck here with you!

'Don't you think this is strange seeing as we both have the same name; I recognize you and my sister has the same name as you!'

We both paused and looked at each other until I finally said 'James?'

'Hey sis.' He replied.

I was so happy that I ran closer to him and gave him the biggest hug in the world. My dream had come true well most of it had. I had my brother, but we were stuck here and no way out. We sat down on the floor and it felt like we were waiting there forever. There were no voices at all or any sound of anybody apart from our breathing. We were together but were we really together down in this cellar.

Would we ever get out?

Why had I been taken like my brother?

Were we down here forever? The truth was, would we ever find out....



23:05

by Sana

On Friday 21st of October, 23:05, Viloría Montgomery was found dead with a stab wound in her chest and a bloody knife in her hands. The body was discovered in the Sanglante Muertriére Designer Store—her own workplace. The police have stated it to be a suicide in a report following a month-long criminal investigation.

A year ago, those words would have opened each and every newspaper copy in London.

Eric Lowells remembers the outrage they caused. Protests, unrest, demands to reform the way business was run. Images of her superior, the CEO, evading hordes of cameras and microphones and journalists desperate for a scoop had plastered the papers for weeks after.

A year passes quickly, he thinks to himself. It only feels like yesterday, back when Viloría Montgomery's death had horrified all of London. Now, those very same words that once knotted his stomach just a year ago lack any sting whatsoever. Reading them on the front of a trampled copy on the floor of the cab, Eric feels nothing at all. He, and all of London, have been numbed.

A storm is brewing tonight. Raindrops assail the windows, dark clouds blur out a silver moon. The wiper blades labour with timed swaying and metrical clunking. Eric checks his watch. 22:58. It's been a late night.

With nothing better to do, Eric leans on the cold glass and gazes out into an insomniac city. Passing high-rises soar above view, piercing the turbulent sky. They remind him of his own workplace; an opulent, palatial building commanding reverence from all who walk past. Even now, after 6 months, he still can't help but look it up and down in awe as he walks down the plaza to work. Only when caressed by the morning sun does the Sanglante Muertriére achieve its full glory.

"Viloría loved to walk through here too, you know. She'd get up early just to see the sun rise... dragging me with along like the little imp she was."

The words of his CEO slip into his mind. How peculiar. Lately, Eric's been paying more attention to people talking about Viloría Montgomery without realising it. He isn't sure why, either. He never knew her. He took up her office well after her death, and her position as executive assistant almost 2 months ago. Yet amidst the fetching and carrying and rushing to-and-fro, he's been catching himself listening in on other workers' reminiscing—during this week in particular.

Logically speaking that would be because they have all the more reason to do so: it's her death anniversary, the memorial service was held earlier today. But it still perplexes him, ever so slightly.

The memorial took place in much more pleasant weather. The morning sun had risen over the building, illuminating a paler sky. During the sermons, it stood solemnly, earnest, like everyone else gathered in the plaza. The CEO had led several of them, guising his usual eccentric self and compose his speeches in seriousness. When he wasn't busy he'd been keeping Eric company, but that wasn't often. People laid flowers and trinkets on a bench that had been commemorated to her. Everyone had red eyes and damp cheeks, memories to talk about, some kind of impact in their lives from what happened a year ago. Eric, however, had felt...awkward. Out of place.

Everyone standing in the plaza this morning had a reason to be there at Montgomery's memorial service. Except for Eric. He had nothing. No tears, no memories, nothing to reminisce, no life-changing impact. Just a store-bought bouquet and a business card. He was only here out of necessity.

He'd felt that way from the moment he stepped through those doors 6 months ago. If he were to be honest with himself, he still did. Just a necessity, with no deeper purpose or value.

The screech of the tyres pulls him out of his thoughts. The cab slows to a stop, and now another familiar building is in his view. His apartment, slender and plain, is a humble abode compared to the ostentatious dwellings he passes when he isn't too tired to walk home. It peeks out meekly from behind another glass tower, not quite able to reach the clouds like the other high-rises. It lacks brass-plated fencing and automatic doors, but it's affordable and sufficient. There is a roof, a kitchen, and a cosy bed—and that is all he needs.

He thanks the driver, pays him and opens the door. For a moment the cold swipes the air from his lungs. Raindrops slam onto his skin like daggers. Lightning splits the sky, which growls in response. The storm has gotten worse. In a desperate haste Eric slams the door and runs to the building, clutching his brief case to his chest. Almost stumbling as he reaches the doors to the staircase, he steadies himself and swings it open, slips inside and lets them shut with an echoing BANG.

There seem to be more stairs than usual, and each step with his soaked shoes sends a cold stabbing sensation through his feet. Nonetheless he sprints up them to the first floor, making his way to a narrow balcony unsheltered from the rain. He hurries past more doors, glancing at each number plaque, *16, 17, 18, there it is. Door 19*. He fumbles with the key, his hands still stinging from the cold. It eventually slots into the lock. He twists it, shoves the door open, staggers inside and slams it shut.

Finally, at home.

Even without light, the room is warm, welcoming. The little table by the food cupboards, the inviting bed in the far-right corner, the ceramic plant pots lined on the windowsills, the simple clock mounted on the back wall; each piece of furniture seems pleased to see him. Eric is pleased to be here, too. He belongs here. He won't ever feel out of place here—this place exists just for him.

He switches on a nearby lamp, and the whole room beams, painted with a dim golden hue that almost completely covers up the downpour outside. Eric himself relaxes, takes off his drenched jacket and shoes, walks over to the bed and slumps onto it face down. It's been a long day. Countless hours of phone calls and meetings and taking notes. Not to mention the memorial service. *2 hours of standing there awkwardly, basically.*

It may be insensitive to think of it like that; a woman had brutally killed herself, after all, and her memorial can't be taken lightly. But it was true. He had done nothing but stand there in the corner, staring at the wall, pretending Viloria Montgomery had meant something to him once, pretending he can't see people looking at him funny for his apparent 'heartlessness' for not crying, resorting to the whispers of his colleagues for some kind of entertainment. Callous as it sounded (and felt at the time), there really wasn't anything else he could do. Besides, he was curious. Lately what's been said about the woman has intrigued him. And today was particularly intriguing.

"I still don't think that shade of red is natural for hair. She definitely dyed it. Attention whore."

"Why else would she do it in the office if not to draw attention?! She'd always been like that, hogging the spotlight! Otherwise she'd have done it at home!"

"Why would she do it, though? She had it all, didn't she? Money, friends, beauty...although it could've been something hidden in her private life though..."

"Maybe it was crippling debt racked up from all those designer flower-dresses!"

People only say what's in their hearts when they think no-one else is listening. And the human heart is cold, callous. Numb.

How hypocritical of them, to judge *him* as heartless, as if he couldn't hear their hushed 'reminiscing'.

Eric groans, burying his face into a pillow. Enough thinking about this. The service, the whispers, anything about Montgomery, or anything about today at all. It's been a stress full day. The best he can do for himself now is to close his eyes, let the cold melt away, and attempt to get some sleep—

DING.

...The doorbell.

Visitors are scarce for Eric. The only people who'd normally drop by is his family. But nothing's been planned with them this month.

The CEO showed up a couple of times. He'd done so to *'make sure you're still functioning'*. He had a gift once, too. An 'exotic' fur coat, challenging his position as the head of a fashion business.

But he wouldn't pop by at this time, would he?

DING DING DING DING.

The visitor is growing impatient. Eric groans and hauls himself off the bed. Whoever's turned up in the middle of a stormy night likely has a reason.

Still sluggish, he walks to the door, unlocks, and opens it.

A woman he's never seen is at the door. Her merlot curls hang heavy like velvet soaked in the rain. They complement her eyes, silky like honey, a pair of brooches radiant in the night. She's dressed in a smart floral-print dress and black Chelsea boots.

Perfectly presentable, ignoring all the blood on her.

He draws back in horror. On seeing this she blushes and looks away, visibly embarrassed.

"Please, forgive my tardiness...I can't exactly fix it now..."

Eric pauses, then examines her carefully.

The blood looks flaky and dry. It stains her hands, and the vast majority of her front. There's a narrow hole amidst the worst of the stain, to the right of her chest. Yet no fresh blood leaks from it.

And she looks deathly pale.

"...Would you like me to...uh...call someone—"

"Oh-no, no thank you, it's a little late for that."

Eric can only stand there, in a futile attempt to process what the *hell* is going on—

"I know it's inconvenient to turn up this late, but I can't really help it, sorry. Anyway. Your name is?"

"Eric.", he mumbles, almost incoherently.

"Right. Eric. Forgive my intrusion. But, to get to the point, I need a favour."

The woman stops for a moment, seemingly in thought, before perking up again.

"You're the new executive assistant, aren't you?"

"Yes? ...Can I help y—"

Suddenly, it clicks.

His own face whitens in terror. He frantically glances back at his clock.

23:05.

Slowly, unwillingly, he turns back to face the visitor. Thunder sounds, almost on cue.

She seems completely unfazed by his reaction. If anything, she looks relieved.

"The name's Viloria. We haven't met, but, judging by your expression, you've probably heard of me. Anyway. I need your help to, uh, acquire some information."

"...Information?", Eric replies, his mind still ravaged by confusion and panic.

"Yes. I need to find out what happened last year. I need to find out who killed me. And I need your help to do it."

The Storm of the Forest

by Rhiannon

Where's it gone? I can't see it. It must be hiding behind that tree trying not to make a sound. I feel the soil beneath my paws. My ears rotate pinpricking the slightest of sounds. A rustle behind the tree. A footstep. I can hear it. I slowly prowl towards the tree making no sudden movements and trying not to make any noise. My spotty tail following behind me flicking as I creep up on my prey. Closer and closer I get. The capybara continues to munch on the luscious vegetation. I keep advancing and waiting for the perfect moment. I begin to count in my head. 1.....2.....3.....roooooaaar. I pounce up onto the capybaras back my strong bite holding it down. It struggles for life and yet it fails. It drops down limp to the ground. My dinner is served.

I eat my dinner for the next hour keeping alert to make sure no one tries to steal it from me. Then it dawns on me with my spotty belly bulging that a weird lilac mist had descended on my Brazilian forest. I dawdle food in mouth towards my favourite place to stash my food. The fog is everywhere like a blanket of clouds had come down to keep the forest warm from a snowstorm. Well, I think it's a snowstorm that is cold. I never get them round these parts, so I always get it mixed up with sandstorms. I only know of this peculiar weather because of the migratory birds that migrate to my territory for part of the year. I often make deals with them that if they tell me about their migration and the world, they've flown over then I won't eat them.

I think to myself. I wonder about what other jaguars do and if any of them have this weird mist invading their territory. My mind goes blank, and I wander over to a cave. A very special cave. A cave that looks like the most boring dull cave ever but is more than meets the eye. I know this cave well after I discovered it as a young cub out exploring and sneaking into others territory. Luckily, I never did come across the owner of the territory for if I did the unimaginable may have happened. I walk in remembering all the good times gone by. I go further and further through the cave.

I suddenly halt at a large pool of water. This water is my emergency water for when I can't find the river or a pond. However, the humans seem to think otherwise, they believe that the water has healing powers that can cure anyone of anything and when I say the humans, I mean one of them and that one is the one in charge. I don't know what they're actually called as I am a jaguar not a human invader and I never him say their name. I lower my head, ears circling, pinpointing the slightest sound.

I lift my head; my heart starts pounding. My ears listening for the slightest of noises. There! A banging! I'm intrigued but am hesitant, yet my legs are forcing me towards the noise. Continuing towards the noise my head lowers and lowers until I'm in a stalking position. I now feel as if I'm hunting my prey. I walk silently, trying not to slip into the water. I get to a turn in the cave and stop in my tracks. Silence.

I slowly pear round the corner and see a small wooden box. I know they say curiosity kills the cat, but I need to know what is inside. Slowly and cautiously, I put one paw in front of the other and wander towards the box. I pause when I reach it. I start to doubt my decision, but I know I must find out what is in this box. Crouching down, I put my nose to the lid and flip it open. I peer inside and see a ticket. It has many modern human symbols on which look English. Luckily, I can understand a bit of English as I hear it on occasion in the nearby village and one of the young humans who knows me and believes I am no danger to them which I highly agree with comes and talks to me sometimes in my cave, this cave. This human normally talks to me in the national language of Portuguese but on the odd occasion she does speak in English.

I look at the top and see a word, I don't recognise it but when I say it over in my head, I believe it sounds like a play. An unlucky play. The Scottish play. I glance further down on the ticket and see the row, F, and the seat, 13. The date on it is the day before Friday 13th and on the side there's a big tear which I'm assuming was put there by accident. I flip

the lid back on top of the box and carry it carefully towards a small boulder. I shove the boulder out the way with my head to unveil a small indent in the cave. Gently, I put the wooden box down and roll the boulder back to its original position.

Thinking to myself again, I wander back towards the entrance of the cave and try to glance up at the sky. The mist still descended on my territory is determined to make me struggle. What is this mist? And why is it here? I leave the cave and take a stroll through the Brazilian jungle focusing in on everything. I hear a noise and stop; a ghostly figure appears through the mist followed by another two. They line up in front of me and we stand there silent for what feels like forever and in that time, I realise what they are. Witches.

"Hello," says the first witch eerily.

"You know what we are," whispers the second witch.

"We have come to give you gifts to help you" speaks the third witch

"I," responds the first witch "have bought a purse which may or may not have any money in it"

"I have bought a hat that can only be worn at night" says the second witch hastily.

"And I have bought a leaflet for local boat trips with no visible words" announces the final witch.

Before I have any time to respond and ask what quest they are on about they fade into the mist as quickly and unexpectedly as they appeared. How are these items going to help me? I grab a huge leaf nearby and put the three things in it and wander on. As I walk further into the mist, I begin to feel hunger grow inside me. I think back to the witches and remember the items they gave me. An idea comes to my head. Hurriedly, I put the leaf down and explore the hat. I press a button accidentally with my nose and a UV torch turns on. I pick up the leaflet in my mouth and a map appears on the back of it showing me the way to the river. Following the map, I run towards the river ready to go fishing.

It doesn't take too long to get there. When I arrive, I notice a faded non-human figure in the water. It turns and swims towards me without stopping until its centimetres in front of me and then I know what it is. The capybara I ate earlier on. It starts to shout at me for eating it, but I zone out at the time so have no idea what they said but nonetheless I apologise to end the conversation and regret eating them. I manage to catch myself some fish. Delicious.

I turn around and my friend, my human is stood behind me. I greet her happily and I notice the mist is clearing. What was the point of that mist? Maybe it was punishing me for eating the capybara. Who knows? For now, at least I can sit with my human by the riverbank and eat some fish until dusk.

They say that there's a jaguar that roams the rainforest and seas. They say he's a formidable hunter and lives in a small cave in the East. Most stay away from that area but I knew him once when we were young. Though every summer he returns to that river where we sat. He does this to catch fish and greet old friends. But nothing stays the same and some say he's hungry and is slowly closing in on the village. However, knowing him in the past I don't believe this as I know he mainly eats fish now and gave up on capybara, but I haven't seen him for over a year and that was before the storm. The storm of the forest.





Extract from Double-sided

by Izzy

This is a story about a quiet town nestled between rolling hills and whispering forests, there lived a man named Jason. Unbeknownst to him, deep within his mind, two distinct personalities resided. One was Jason, the kind-hearted and diligent detective, whose mission in life was to uphold justice. The other was a sharp and cunning murderer, a persona that Jason was entirely unaware of, Nate.

Jason

The moonlight draped his face in an eerie glow, transforming it into a canvas splashed with vivid crimson, a colour that appeared to emerge from the very heart of the darkness. Tears blurred my vision, burning down my face, but I fought to regain my composure. *Not now, not here*, I reminded myself, pushing aside the overwhelming grief threatening to consume me. He wasn't family, just a close partner. *Remember the training, step 1: look for evidence*. My eyes darted across the room, refusing to let my thoughts stray. *He had been my ally, a friend*, and this, I realized, was a message—a warning. But was it a warning I could afford to ignore? Or was it one that was worth paying attention to?

A noise stirred beneath a stack of papers in the corner, jolting me back to the present. With my gun clutched tightly in my trembling hands, I advanced cautiously. In a swift motion, I kicked over the papers, revealing a creature—*Rattus norvegicus*, a rodent resembling a large mouse. *Don't be repelled*, I told myself, but this one was different; its tail had been cleanly severed halfway down, leaving it writhing in agony. It desperately sought refuge under the scattered papers, but I was determined. I swiftly covered my hands with a lingering scent of latex from a purple glove and seized the rodent by its truncated tail, I gulped down air, trying to suppress the smell that threatened to overpower me, turning away for a brief moment to fight back the urge to gag.

In the pallid glow of the moonlight, I clutched the squirming rodent, my gloved hands trembling as I noticed something unsettling. Carved meticulously into the fur just above its quivering nose were the chilling words: "Don't even try." The stark contrast between the creature's helplessness and the ominous message sent a shiver down my spine, the implications sinking in like lead in my stomach. Someone, with calculated malevolence, had crafted this warning. The room seemed to close in around

me as I scanned the surroundings, the weight of the situation pressing on me like a vice. Time hung suspended, and in that moment, I understood the gravity of the task ahead. I tightened my grip on the rat, purpose hardening within me. I was determined to unravel the truth behind this puzzle, steeling myself for the journey into the unknown, the game to be played.

Nate

In the shadows of the night, where the world fades into a tapestry of obsidian, I find my solace. It's an intoxicating dance, this delicate balance between the ordinary facade I wear during the day and the voracious hunger that consumes me when the moon rises high in the ink-black sky. They call me a monster, a creature devoid of humanity, but they don't understand the symphony that plays within me, the primal beats that echo in the deepest corners of my soul. Each footstep, each beat of my heart, resonates with purpose, a purpose I alone comprehend. For in the artistry of darkness, I have found my calling, my *raison d'être*—a silent executioner, painting the world scarlet, one calculated strike at a time.




In the hushed silence of my hidden world, I revel in the thrill of the hunt, the adrenaline that courses through my veins as I stalk my unsuspecting prey. Every victim is a canvas upon which I paint my masterpiece, a testament to my prowess and cunning. The darkness is my ally, veiling me as I move with the precision of a predator, selecting my targets with meticulous care. Some might perceive my actions as senseless, but to me, each life I extinguish serves a purpose, a dark poetry that binds us all together in the grand tapestry of fate. The fear in their eyes, the final gasp for breath—it's an intoxicating cocktail of power and control, an affirmation of my dominion over life and death. As I disappear into the night after each deed, I leave behind a trail of whispered legends, a chilling reminder that in the depths of every human soul, there exists a capacity for darkness, waiting to be awakened, just like mine.



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