

2620 Katheryne Circle

## Ghosts

It was the middle of the night, past midnight but not nearing dawn. Jonathan Trench was aching to go to sleep but he was afraid. He was pinching himself and sometimes slapping his face, it was cold in the room yet he refused to get under the bed covers. He had the television blaring but it wasn't helping to stave off his exhaustion.

He did not believe in ghosts but whenever he slept he dreamed about them.

Jonathan paced around the room and did some jumping jacks to keep his blood circulating. When he thought of his blood he shivered and stopped in his tracks. There was so much blood in his dreams, even the ghosts bled.

In spite of his efforts he was losing the battle to stay awake. His eyes were so heavy that he imagined his cheeks were hammocks and his eyeballs were sleepily lounging in them. His vision was blurred and his breathing was shallow.

He was very frightened, but his resolve to stay awake was waning. His mind was shutting down.

He was so tired in spite of his fear he finally convinced himself it would be alright if he just laid down on the bed for a moment. Which he did. The ceiling looked dark and ominous from the single lamp light below. He closed his burning eyes just for a second and in spite of his determination immediately fell asleep.

*It was hot. The house he was in was built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The air was stale as if a window or door hadn't been opened for years. His breaths were short and he was shivering in spite of the heat. The rooms had woodwork everywhere but now it was dull, dented and scratched. There were smears of darkness on the trim that didn't look like aged varnish. The floors too were scuffed and*

*gouged. When he walked the house wiggled going in and out of focus. Cobwebs hung everywhere. As he apprehensively moved from room to room in the deserted house he became aware that he wasn't walking, just his being was moving. He was perplexed to find large frames on the cracked plaster walls. It was apparent that there had been paintings but now all that remained was the frames that had supported them. He continued to explore, some of the rooms were shrouded in darkness and he hurriedly left those, until he had drifted through the entire house.*

*He sensed they were watching him but none had appeared as yet. He finally meandered to a large room that had been for parties and dancing. There was an antique bar against one wall. He began to shiver and perspire as if he had a fever, it wasn't cold or hot now but he was afraid. He stood in the middle of the room and shouted:*

*"Alright, come on down!" At the top of his voice. He knew they were above him.*

*Blood began oozing from between the floor boards and spreading over the surface of the floor, then it was dripping from the cracks in the ceiling and running down the walls. He stood frozen waiting for what would come next. The floor was soon a sheet of blood that looked like a still lake.*

*There was loud music from the 1920's. Suddenly, the pocket doors on the narrow end of the room opened and a young man Jonathan's age came sliding across the room on the bloody floor; a spray of blood rising from his spats and splattering the white gaiters, and his pants. He had a smile on his face that was so sweet it made Jonathan gag, but Jonathan couldn't move. The young man slid past Jonathan all the way to the far wall of the room in front of the windows and took a bow.*

*Jonathan could see through him to the outside but he already knew he was a ghost. There were only ghosts in his dreams. The ghost was dressed in a tweed suit, bow tie, bloody spats, and carrying a cane. He was tall with a mustache and there was something dripping from the whiskers. He gave*

*Jonathan a beseeching look and walked toward him splashing in the inch deep blood with ripples spreading from his shoes.*

*Jonathan tried to back away as the ghost approached but he couldn't move and he couldn't speak. His arm was stuck to the bar. When the ghost was in front of him, he smelled dust and decay so thickly that he held his breath.*

*"Hello Jonathan." The ghost gasped loudly. "Let's have a drink shall we."*

*A woman bartender appeared behind the bar dressed like a whore from the late 1800's. Her red hair was piled on top of her head and she was wearing a provocative frock.*

*"What do you cowboys want?" She slid a couple of glasses across the bar and reached behind for a bottle. Then set a pistol on the counter.*

*"We'll have that said the ghost." His face contorting from one expression to the next. He looked at Jonathan with a question in his eyes and a final smirk on his face. The bartender splashed their glasses full. The liquid was cloudy and smelled similar to kerosene but the ghost picked his up and swallowed it in one gulp. Some of it was dripping from his mustache and spotted his suit. The ghost picked up Jonathan's glass and offered it to him. Jonathan still couldn't move. He tried to say something, but the ghost maliciously threw the drink in his face and danced away. The floor was bloodless now and the ghost had taps. The tapping was menacing. Jonathan expected the ghost to set the kerosene, if that's what it was, on fire.*

*The ghost danced across the floor outrageous manner and offered his hand to Jonathan and Jonathan realized he could move but before he could react the ghost pulled him onto the floor and changed into a transvestite. She was dressed in a taffeta ball gown with garish jewelry and missing an*

*eye. She led and they danced around the room. Her perfume smelled like damp humus. They danced until the floor was full of couples; all ghosts. The ghosts were dressed in 19<sup>th</sup> century attire.*

*Jonathan's terror was growing as the dancers got closer and closer, their costumes were grotesque now, but the transvestite was holding his hand so tightly that he couldn't let go and she was dragging him into the space of the others. The dancers formed a ring around him and the woman; she winked with her absent eye lid and danced him faster and faster until she turned into a dust tornado. The dust blew the other ghosts away as Jonathan fell to the floor legless, and his partner, the dust tornado, spun up to the ceiling and disappeared. The room was covered with dust and Jonathan started to slide backwards toward the door. But he only went a few feet before he backed into something.*

*He had no weapon or any means of defending himself except his fists and he clenched them as tightly as he could before turning around. He was face to face with an orangutan that suddenly screamed at him so loudly that he thought he would be deaf. He was frozen again until the ape picked him up and licked him and nudged him with its head, and then turned into a collie he had had when he was a child. He was standing now.*

Jonathan started crying about his dog and couldn't stop. He used the back of his hands to wipe his cheeks and when he removed them from his face, they were covered in sour cream which he licked and then wiped on his shirt and pants. Now there was a pack of dogs, and they were licking him and pulling at his clothing trying to eat the cream soaked cloth. He held his hands up so they couldn't grab his arms and pull him down. A dog catcher appeared and the dogs all ran toward the cracks in the walls on the narrow end of the room by the windows. The dog catcher stared at Jonathan and then whistled to him.

"Com' here boy." And the dog catcher waved a piece of steak.

Jonathan started to drool. He wanted that steak more than anything else he could imagine. His tongue dropped out of his mouth and he began panting, he slobbered on himself. The dog catcher morphed into a battered boxer wearing nylon shorts that went to his knees and instead of giving the steak to Jonathan placed it on his swollen eye, but then disappeared through the double doors. Jonathan could feel boxing gloves on his hands with the laces tied so tight they were cutting off the circulation. The boxer danced back into the room through the double doors throwing punches in the air. Jonathan covered his eyes with his gloved hands.

He heard a deafening shrill scream but kept the gloves over his eyes. The screaming was like singing, a chorus with separate screaming voices and he dropped the gloves from his eyes and covered his ears. When his eyes focused in the fading light it was only screaming mouths and he started to scream too. Riding the screams were small birds with beaks so long he thought they were hummingbirds but actually they were wasps flying backwards and they were flying straight at him.

He vaulted over the bar and hid but the wasps knew where he was and started to sting him. He tried a one two punch with the gloves, but the wasps swarmed around him. He knew the wasps were ghosts and as welts appeared on his body they festered and worms crawled out. The worms immediately turned into frogs and hopped away. Jonathan screamed and fell to the floor.

He crawled on his hands and knees to the end of the bar and ran toward the double doors on the far end of the room, with the wasps in pursuit; there were frogs hopping all over the place and croaking loudly even as they jumped from his arms. As he ran he realized he was sloshing in water with frogs swimming all around his feet and he was stomping on them. They were slippery and he fell to the floor in the water. He thrashed in the water throwing frogs into the air until he was exhausted.

He cautiously turned when he heard approaching splashing, and a row boat was coming across the room with an old man pulling the oars. He immediately thought of the 'Old Man and the Sea' when

a large fish surfaced beside him. The boat stopped next to him and the old man cast a net into the water. It was Ernest Hemingway so he knew he was a ghost too. The fish net filled with octopi and then caught on Jonathan's foot as the old man began pulling it over the gunwales with Jonathan in tow. When Jonathan flopped over the side of the boat it was full of the octopi, but Hemingway was frowning and said, "Where is my fish?", and there was a gun in his hand. Jonathan panicked at first but then he remembered that Hemingway was already dead. Jonathan was terrified of the octopi and dove back into the water with his leg still tangled in the net only now the water was deeper, there were whitecaps; the boat was gone. He was getting salt water in his mouth and starting to flail when he heard a gunshot. He didn't look back and just kept dog paddling. He thought he would drown until he felt his feet on the bottom and realized the water was shallow now. He walked over to the bar that was partly submerged and asked the whore for a whiskey and she produced another glass of the same liquid she had offered before.

The young gentleman in the tweed suit waded up and drank the drink in one gulp and it dripped from his mustache again. He motioned to the whore for two more and she set them on the bar. Jonathan picked up his drink and threw it in the face of the ghost and picked up the other and threw it in the face of the whore. They laughed and hugged each other and then the whore slapped Jonathan and walked away.

Jonathan was paralyzed and didn't know what to do. He waded through the frogs over to a door behind the bar that he hadn't noticed before and opened it. The water and frogs were gone. It was dark inside but he had a flashlight in his hand. He clicked it on and could see some of the details in the room. It was full of stacks of paintings leaning against the walls, presumably from the frames in the rooms. He started to close the door but then someone or something pushed him inside. It smelled of turpentine and rotting canvas but he was so curious to see what the paintings were that he started to examine the stacks. To his surprise they were all old masters. Rembrandt, Vermeer, Rubens, Caravaggio, and Goya.

He stopped when he uncovered 'Saturn Devouring his Son'. He stood mesmerized in front of it and had a sudden feeling of euphoria.

He was standing amidst the paintings with something dripping from his chin when an overhead light turned on so bright it was like an operating room. The paintings were gone and the room smelled of antiseptic.

Through another door in walked what had to be a surgeon because he was wearing a gown and holding his hands up out in front of himself.

He started calling, "Nurse, Nurse, Nurse!"

A quartet of nurses came through the door and started to undress Jonathan, he wanted to resist but again he couldn't move. When he was naked they dressed him in a gown and helped him onto the operating table. It was cold and he started to shiver.

"Okay, which one of you is the gas passer?" Asked the Doctor.

Suddenly the room reeked of a fart.

Jonathan raised his arm and plugged his nose. His hand was covered with iodine and hurt like hell.

The surgeon picked up a scalpel and curiously stared at it and then smiled. He wasn't wearing surgical gloves. But he stabbed Jonathan in the stomach anyway and then went to work.

Blood started gushing from the wound and the doctor screamed, "Nurse, Nurse, Nurse!"

The whore from the bar sauntered in with the young tap dancer carrying a tray with drinks. They walked over to the operating and each threw a drink in Jonathan's face.

"Okay, we're sterile and so are you!" The surgeon snickered at Jonathan.

Jonathan began screaming at the top of his voice. "No! No!"

A light came on and he was lying in bed soaked in perspiration.

His mother was at the door and was the one who had turned on the overhead light.

"What's the matter? You screamed like you saw a ghost.