

A dark, abandoned room with a bed frame and a window. The room is dimly lit, with a window in the background showing a bright light source, possibly the sun or moon. The walls are peeling, and the floor is covered in debris. A bed frame is in the foreground, with a white sheet draped over it. The overall atmosphere is eerie and unsettling.

CHILDHOOD NIGHTMARES

Under The Bed

edited by Kate Monroe

Childhood Nightmares: Under The Bed

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Featuring the talents of;

Colin F. Barnes, Nina D'Arcangela, Phil Hickeys,
Amber Keller, Kim Krodel, Lisamarie Lamb, John McIlveen,
Kate Monroe, Brandon Scott, Joshua Skye,
Julianne Snow and Jack Wallen.

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Forgotten

Jack Wallen

Darkness echoed through the cavernous bedroom. Lightning strikes shot from a Godless sky, black clouds loomed over houses rent asunder by dividing time and tide. A child shivered and shuddered under a mounded pile of sheet and blanket, surrounded by bears, lions, dinosaurs, and any other beast of protection that would protect him from the soulless unknown. Light crept and crawled from under the door. Between the bed and the door lay shadows teeming with child-devouring monsters.

Evil, smiling pooka clowns rocked in chairs.

Spark shooting robots shuddered and shook themselves back to life.

And nightmares awaited on the other side of sleep.

Dylan dared not peek his head out into the cold night air. All he could do was wait and hope he could survive through the night to arrive at the other side of bedtime alive.

His clock ticked.

His clock tocked.

His clock stopped.

"Dylllllllan. Come out, come out, where 'er you are."

The whisper-thin voice of the haunting girl shattered the silence. Dylan curled himself up into the tightest ball he could conjure.

The haunting started just a few days ago. It was the evening of June sixth ... Dylan's sixth birthday. His mother had made his dreams come true and allowed him to invite his best of friends over for a slumber party. To that day, sleepovers were forbidden. That was before the boy's father had left. Since the departure, everything seemed so much easier. The yelling ceased. The crying stopped. The bruises healed. The night of the slumber party, Dylan heard the first gentle whispers.

The other boys were fast asleep, after too much candy and too little control. They had enjoyed cartoons, video games, and shrieks of laughter only young boys could produce. But once the celebration was little more than a fading memory, some other joy came out to play.

The sound was little more than a soft wind breezing underneath his closet door. The melody of a light wind buzzing through Halloween trees or winter snowscapes. His ears were the only ones to take notice. No other sleep was threatened by the soft sound.

That night it was easy to play it off as a fluke. No need to even bring it up when the other boys woke. Daylight had arrived with safety in tow.

After that night ... things changed. The next bedtime brought the return of the whispers, only this time the rustling wind had a voice. A voice desperate to gain the attention of the sleeping boy.

"Dylllllllan."

It seemed to speak, shocking the boy from his sleep. Without hesitation, he stormed out of his bedroom. When the boy ran into the protecting arms of the mother, all was again brushed aside as harmless noise...

Baby Teeth

Kim Krodel

An apple started it all.

Mom *always* cut them up at home, but she also always said, “Drink your milk and eat your fruit.” She reminded the boys nearly every morning as they walked out to the bus stop. Brian did his best to follow her orders when he bought his lunch. His big brother Cal sometimes got juice. It was against the rules, but Brian didn’t tattle. Cal would get mad if he did.

Today, the fruit was a whole apple. It was firm and round, with star bursts orbiting across a deep red sky. It was just like a grown up would eat. Brian’s first intact apple after six years of life; it was a milestone of advanced age.

After finishing his chicken nuggets, he admired the curvy beauty for a full minute, rolling the cool object in his hands. Finally, he sunk his teeth into it.

The pain shot through his lower jaw, bringing instant tears to his eyes. The apple fell in a silverware-rattling thump to the brown tray. The white flesh that rolled forward and back flashed a blood-tinged bite. Brian poked a trembling finger inside his mouth, and it came back with the same scarlet coating. The first grader began to cry.

A teacher appeared. “What’s going on here?”

“I think he bit his tongue,” Andy said from across the table. Brian’s classmate pulled a grimace as he pointed to the bloody apple.

“Let’s get you to the nurse so she can have a look, okay?” The woman helped him to his feet while the tears continued to fall. She caught sight of Cal standing with a group of fellow fourth-graders and snapped her fingers at him.

“Calvin Briggs! Walk your brother to the nurse’s office, please.”

“But we’re going out for recess!” He gripped the soccer ball in his hands tight while he whined, pressing divots with his fingers.

“You can go straight to recess afterwards.” Her voice was stern, her look severe. Calvin shoved the ball at the boy beside him and walked to the door. Brian followed dutifully, increasing his pace to catch up.

By the time they got to the nurse’s office Brian was out of breath, and his tears had dried up.

“What’s going on, boys?” The nurse looked over her glasses at the pair as they entered her office.

“I hurt my tooth.” Brian had diagnosed the source of his pain en route to the infirmary.

“I knew it was just a loose tooth.” Calvin scowled at his little brother. “Why you gotta be such a baby about everything?”

The nurse snapped a glove on her hand and examined the grossly detached tooth.

“Looks like someone will be getting his first visit from the Tooth Fairy soon.”

“I’m going back to recess. See ya later, Bri.”...

Madeline

Julianne Snow

“Mommy.”

Nothing.

“Mommy?”

Still nothing. No tell-tale shuffling sound of socked feet on the hardwood floor.

“MOMMY!”

Nothing... Where was she? How could she have not heard?

“MMOOOMMMMMYY!”

With tears streaming down her cherubic face, Stella wondered if her dream had come true. As she debated running the short distance over the oaken surface to her parent’s room, she listened intently for the sounds of her mother’s imminent stirring.

Finally.

Stella heard the soft sounds of her mother’s footfalls in the hallway. She was coming.

The thought made her throat swell with even more tears.

As her door opened, the light from the hallway spilling into the room, across her bed, Stella could see her mother silhouetted in the doorway.

Her mother; her savior.

Whenever the bad dreams plagued Stella, her mother was always there to soothe her fears away.

But something wasn’t right with her mother; something just seemed off about her as she stood in the doorway, somewhat propped up on the jam.

Maybe it was the fact that she hadn’t entered the room yet.

Perhaps it was due to the fact that her mother’s arms – in fact, her whole body was slack as she stood there.

“Mommy? What’s wro-”

Stella didn’t finish her sentence, startled by the jerking movements of her mother. Into the room, jerk by jerk until she could go no farther, her knees giving way beneath her.

Her mother hit the floor with a dull thud and a plop, almost graceful in her descent.

With the light of the hallway illuminating her now crumpled mother, Stella saw the blood.

Red. Dark. Ominous.

Stella screamed through her tears.

Jolted fully awake, Stella choked out, “MOMMY!”

Rewarded by the sounds of her mother padding down the hallway, Stella started to cry even harder. It had all felt so real...

Telling Tales

Phil Hickes

Peter Miles doesn't want to go to bed tonight. Nothing unusual there, you might think. What eight-year old boy has ever been happy to adhere to nocturnal deadlines? Particularly when you've a busy agenda to deal with. Who wants to sleep when there are battles to be fought or hidden pirate treasure to be found? But on this rainy February evening, in the small English town of Malreward, Peter Miles has no wars to wage or gold doubloons to unearth. He has no intention of attempting any form of recreational activity, and would like nothing more than to cuddle up in bed, given the cold, wet and windy weather. Yet when his father puts down his newspaper, motions with his eyes towards the stairs, and emits the single word directive...

"Bed."

...it's with a heavy heart that he trudges sullenly up to his room, dragging his feet like a shackled prisoner going to meet the hangman.

For tonight, there's someone else staying in the large house where they live.

A guest.

An unwelcome one.

A distant relative whose funeral parlor perfume lingers in every room.

Peter's Great Aunt Alice.

She's here for yet another visit with her cat, Demdike. None of which sounds too bad, you say? Lots of young boys have stuffy old grandmothers and aunties that they have to put up with. And cats are cute and fluffy.

But Peter's Aunt Alice scares him. In fact, she frightens him to death. And her cat is just as bad, with fur as black as its soul.

That's why he's reluctant to go upstairs; because soon, Aunt Alice will be up to tell him a bedtime story. It's become something of a custom. Peter was delighted when she first offered to come and tuck him in. Despite feeling a little nervous in her presence, and a tiny bit afraid of her pinched, lined face, white hair and bony limbs, she was a welcome female presence. For the first few minutes it had been enjoyable too. She wrapped the sheets tightly around him, clicked off the overhead light and turned on the lamp. He felt warm and snug.

But then she began to tell him the stories.

These were unlike any he'd ever heard. For someone more used to tales of brave knights, boy magicians and derring-do, this was the stuff of nightmares. The first one was the Man with the Mangled Hand, a true story, so his aunt had claimed, about a fisherman that had been left to die by his crew after trapping his hand in the trawler nets. It had left him with only one option: to cut his own hand off. It was terrifying. That night, Peter had lain awake until dawn, afraid to turn his back on the window for fear that a man with a bloody stump, seaweed in his hair, and crabs in his beard, was tapping at the window, seeking his bloody revenge.

Worse was to come. Peter was dismayed to discover that his aunt now took it upon herself to come to his bedroom every night she stayed...

Excess Baggage

Lisamarie Lamb

The holiday was over. Done. And now they were back to the realities – not too harsh, not too bad, just rough enough – of everyday life.

Oh, but what a holiday it had been! His first. Six years old and this was the first time Bob had been away from home, the first time he had seen the sea, the first time he had felt hot sand burn his feet and grab them, pulling him down into the golden grave of old beer cans and sticking plasters.

Every second had been exciting. Even those moments during which he had simply sat, watching the sea crashing in and out, watching the boats bobbing up and down, watching the world turning round and round. It had been two weeks of constant, fizzy tummy joy. His parents were relaxed, happy, they held hands as they walked in the evenings and they kissed. A lot. Bob didn't mind. It made him smile. And it was so much better than the constant snipe, snipe, sniping at home.

He felt like a family.

His father even told stories of when he had visited the town they were staying in, in his youth. He and a friend whose name he couldn't remember – it was more than twenty years ago - had celebrated the end of their exams right here. But it had been very different then. Very different. Although, that being said, he couldn't quite put his finger on why.

The only problem came at the end. The last day, when they were packing to leave, when the light, bright atmosphere of holiday began to give way to the drudging dullness of lists and deadlines and clocks, Bob's suitcase broke. It was a hard shelled, bright green thing, brand new, bought just for the holiday; bought especially for Bob.

But it broke.

It wasn't Bob's fault, not really. But the shells he had collected from his wanderings on the cooling beach in the evenings were just too much for the case to take. And as much as he tried, as much as he pushed and groaned and grunted and eventually jumped on to the suitcase, it simply wouldn't close.

It did crack, though. Straight across the front in a long line. It appeared just after the jumping incident, just after Bob's feet came to rest on the tiled floor of his bedroom, slipping a little in his flip flops. The sound was incredible, echoing out of the open balcony doors and flowing around the corner into his parents' room next door, telling tales on him like the boys at school.

Within seconds, his father was through the interconnecting door, his face already set to disapproval. His mother followed; tension showing, the sun, sea and sand of the past fortnight washing away in an instant.

"I didn't mean to!" cried Bob before anyone else could speak. His father brushed past him and stared down at the case. The new case. Brand new and, now, broken.

"How? How did you even do that?" he asked. He was almost impressed at his son's strength, but irritation drowned everything else out. "It's useless now. Look at it, Maggie!" ...

Timothy

Joshua Skye

Darkness. Darkness and scurrying sounds.

Something was out there in that darkness beyond the foot of little Laura's bed. She knew what it was, *the thing skulking in the shadows*. She sat up with the covers pulled tightly to her chin, her back against the ice cold wall. She could hear the floorboards creaking, footsteps in the gloom, something lurking between the stuffed animals and slithering amongst her dolls.

Had her clown doll moved? Did she really see that?

It was Timothy, and she was afraid of him. He used to be her friend. She'd used to think him silly and funny and gracious. He'd made her wishes come true. But then he wanted something in return, - payment. He'd wanted her. She knew that. He wanted her to die and be with him *forever and ever*.

Now he'd come to take his compensation for services rendered. He'd made her little life as wonderful and as delightful as she had always wanted it to be. She was worth it. She was what he wanted; so young, so innocent. Her friends had been his friends too, and they had paid for their wishes, their dreams.

They'd all disappeared and now she was the only one left.

Quivering from fear, her teeth rattling in her little head, hands trembling, she stared into the deep darkness to catch any movement; the twinkling of an eye perhaps. Anything to let her know where he was, out there in the darkness. There was nothing for a long time.

"Where are you?" she muttered in a squeaky voice. Something moved in her peripheral vision. She turned. Fast, but not fast enough. Perhaps it was nothing more than a shadow that had just blended with the dark. "Timothy, you stop it. You stop it right now." She tried to sound like her mother, to mimic her authoritative tone, but it hadn't worked. Her voice had cracked and it trembled with her apprehension. "I know it's you," she whispered, more to herself than to him.

She started to cry, she couldn't help it. Her tears streamed down her tiny face and there was a lump forming in her throat. She had to fight to swallow; she had to fight to breathe.

Timothy began to mock her. "*Timothy, please. Stop it, Timothy! Go away, Timothy.*" The sinister, scratchy voice seemed to come from everywhere, the shadows, the darkness, under the desk, from behind the stuffed animals, under the bed.

Oh no...*was it coming from under the covers?*

Laura tried to let out a scream, but the lump held it back as the covers were suddenly yanked from her hands and pulled off the bed into the blackness. A laugh! Was it her clown doll? Yes, it sounded like her clown doll. Where was it? There - in the chair by the window. It wasn't moving. Timothy would have had to tickle its tummy to get it to laugh. Timothy had to be there, right there by the doll...

Show And Tell

Kate Monroe

TUESDAY

Thomas Burton was one of those children; the kind whose relatives discuss them in hushed tones when their parents' backs are turned. *Such a shame*, they would whisper, eyebrows contracted and piggy eyes narrowed in rebuke. *There must be something wrong with him – his poor parents, having to endure such a sullen and dull-witted boy.*

And worst of all...*Such a disappointment.*

Those sly, cutting words haunted him. Six years old, he was highly sensitive to such things – another of his attributes that his family never seemed to tire of complaining about. Every family gathering, every celebration, every school report only seemed to provide them with another opportunity to criticize him when they thought he was not listening.

It was okay, though. Any time that Tommy had to suffer their vitriol, he simply allowed his thoughts to drift towards what he knew was waiting in his bedroom, just biding its time until the shroud of darkness had fallen once more.

His friend was always there for him.

Today had been just such a day. It was his parents' wedding anniversary – his precious parents, the shining lights of society who could never do anything wrong...apart from producing Tommy, of course.

They had gone out for the evening to celebrate without him, leaving him in the tender care of his two ancient great-aunts. Ancient in Tommy's eyes was anyone over the age of sixty. His great-aunts were far beyond that, both of them nearing ninety years of age, but age and infirmity had not dulled their sharp wits and acid tongues.

Whilst he had sat cross-legged at the top of the stairs and sucked his thumb, the two elderly women had gleefully dissected every last element of his personality, ripping it apart and reveling in their harsh critique without knowing he could hear every word they said.

"They were talking about me again tonight." Tommy's nasal voice was sullen, loaded with resentment. He knew how much they hated him.

His friend did not reply. Tommy rambled on regardless.

"*Stupid* old witches! I hate them, I hate them, I hate them! They just don't understand what it's like to be me, they don't get it – probably 'cause it's so long since they were little. Daddy says they used to be just like me, but I think they were borned all wrinkly and stinky, all cross and grumpy. I hate them both!"

He belatedly realized that tonight, there had still been no answer, no response. He leaned over the edge of the bed and cautiously lifted the sheets.

"Are you there?"

A blast of fetid air; putrid, repellent.

Satisfied, Tommy continued.

"I wish they'd bloody die."...

The Confession of a Confirmed Has-Been

John McIlveen

To whom it may concern,

What follows I tell you not out of spite or anger, but merely as a plea for understanding.

My name is Joseph Randall. I am a veterinarian of farm animals. That is, I was until my accident. Since that day I have been confined to my home.

It is a pleasant home, quaint, roomy, but not large; your average New England style gambrel. Its greatest value to me is sentiment, since I built it myself, and though that bond remains, my home has turned from a haven into a prison. Freedom is only a hand's grasp beyond any portal, but it might as well be infinite, for I'll never feel its wonder again.

It was my doing - or possibly what I neglected to do - that destined me to my own fate, yet I carry on as I have, and as I will, unsure of what will be.

I mean no harm, I have no malicious intent. I endure time and try to make its passing tolerable. I am over my despair and self pity - at least, I was.

I have allowed people to live in my house undisturbed, yet *they* are trying to remove *me* from my home!

I apologize. Let me explain who they are.

The Hansons took residence in my home six months ago, give or take a few days. It's difficult to keep track of time when time is all you have.

They are a handsome family; father, mother, son and daughter, well-rounded and young.

Approximately half a year ago Bruce and Karen Hanson decided to move here from New Jersey, after Karen was assaulted and nearly raped.

Being a respected and proficient realtor, and a recent upturn northern New England, Bruce was quickly hired by a firm in Concord, New Hampshire. Through them he rented a home for his family...*my* home.

The first night the Hansons entered my house as a family, eight-year-old Scotty led the way, shuffling in with eager feet and eyes to match. He held a suitcase in each hand and had two '*Fantastic Four*' comic books tucked under his chin. Close behind, Kimberly skittered over the threshold swinging a Cabbage Patch doll by one leg.

"What stinks?" she squealed in that high, chirruping voice that five year old children are blessed with. "It's yucky!"

"It's skunk piss," answered Scott knowingly.

"Scott!" Karen reprimanded, despite her evident amusement.

"That's what dad called it," he explained with a shrug.

"Rat-fink!" Bruce said. He playfully ruffled Scott's dusty blonde hair then granted a quick pinch to Karen's backside...

Seeing Is Believing

Amber Keller

There it was again. A scratching noise coming from the corner. It was the middle of the night, and Timothy's room was dark. The only light was from the waning moon outside, casting a slight silver glow around the window.

At first Timothy had thought it was only a mouse. But now that he was wide-awake, he could tell that whatever it was had to be bigger.

The noise continued.

Timothy leaned over in his bed and grabbed his glasses from the nightstand. A loud scurrying noise followed and he switched on the lamp in a hurry.

Squinting in the harsh light, Timothy looked in the direction of where the noise had been coming from.

There was nothing there.

He waited for a few minutes before deciding to switch off the light and go back to sleep.

All was quiet.

In the morning, Timothy got ready for school remembering the strange noise from the night before.

"Mom, I think there's a rat in my room," Timothy said as he pushed his mushy cereal around in his bowl.

"A rat? Did you see it?" She had stopped packing his lunch and her eyes were wide in surprise.

"No, I heard it scratching in my room last night."

"I'll get your dad to set out some traps. Go on out to the bus before it gets too late."

Timothy could tell she didn't like the idea of a rat being in the house. She started talking fast and acting fidgety like she did when she was nervous about something.

After school, he went to his room like he always did to start on homework. He saw that there was a big rat trap sitting in the corner and started to feel a little sense of relief about the whole thing.

That night, before he turned out his lamp on the nightstand, Timothy looked at the corner to make sure the trap was still empty. It was.

He fell asleep peacefully.

SNAP!

Timothy had been asleep for quite some time when the sound of the rat trap woke him.

He sat up in bed and turned on the lamp.

The trap in the corner had been set off, but it was empty. As he looked at it another loud SNAP rang out.

Timothy jumped and barely stopped himself from yelling...

Bent Metal

Nina D’Arcangela

I wake to the sound of screeching metal as two cars collide, ripping each other apart in the intersection nearest our house. Though we are three full lots away from the corner, I can clearly see where both streets meet from my bedroom window. My sister and I share the majority of a converted attic space as one room, while my younger brother has the smallest room in the house across the hall from us.

After being woken by the horrific sound of the two cars colliding, metal slamming into metal, the force of each vehicle tearing through the other, I look out the window to see the late night devastation over the tops of the other houses. This happens so often on our corner that I’ve become almost immune to it. I get out of bed to call the police and report the accident in the hopes that they will respond quickly enough to help anyone who might have been injured.

Standing on the landing between the two rooms while making my phone call, I notice that Alan isn’t in his bed. Where did he go? Silly little twerp sleep walks all the time, and thank God he didn’t fall down the steps or Mom would really have my ass for that one!

I get distracted when police dispatch answers: “911: What is your Emergency?”

“My name is Lauren, and I’d like to report an accident at the corner of Walnut and Hilltop.” I say to the anonymous voice on the other end of the line.

“Thank you ma’am, we have already been notified and have officers and an ambulance in route. Are you at the scene of the accident now?”

“No” I answer, “I live right near the corner and the noise woke me...”

The dispatcher cuts me off and quickly asks “What is your address ma’am?”

“I’m at 32 Walnut. Is there anything I can do to help?”

After a brief pause, the dispatch operator comes back on the line and says “Ma’am, are you by any chance a certified EMT?”

“Ahh... no, I’m in high school – I’m only sixteen years old, but I have had CPR training and have been certified if that will help in any way.” I tell the police woman on the other end of the line.

Another pregnant pause while I hear the dispatch officer talking with someone in the background.

“Lauren, listen to me – please, stay in your home and avoid the scene of the accident, we’ll have someone there as fast as we can. Can you put one of your parents on the phone for me?”

“What? My parents, yeah, sure - they probably woke up too, I can get one of them. Why? What’s wrong?” I ask getting not only more confused by the moment but a little concerned at this point as well.

“Please Lauren, just put either your Mother or your Father on the phone, it’s very important.”

“Ok, hold on I’ll get them.” I respond and start to head downstairs...

Shades of Red

Colin F. Barnes

The thing that troubled Mitchell the most was the fact that he simply didn't know if he killed them or not. How could anyone be unhesitatingly convinced that they weren't capable of murder?

"It's all just brain chemistry, isn't it?" Mitchell said.

The psychiatrist leaned back in her graphite and chrome chair. Designer. Expensive. Like everything else in her top-floor office.

Mitchell tried to lean forward in his chair. Not designer. Not comfortable. The cuffs bit into his wrists, and he sat back with a sigh.

A static sea of electric lights stretched out into the dense city. Tower upon tower of similarly wealthy offices stood, filled with pride, in an expanding grid. How many of those other lit offices, at this late hour of the evening, held a professional in counsel with a client? Not many of them accused of mass killings, that's for sure.

That word 'client' made him want to spit. He was no more a client than a victim. Had to give her what she wanted. But he couldn't give it.

Couldn't confess to something he'd no proof of doing, despite the circumstantial evidence invented by the police: a few rumors perpetuated by nosey neighbors; a patch of material found at a scene supposedly matching his trousers. Nothing in it, just spurious circumstance.

"See, if I did kill all those girls—"

"Women. Thirty two women."

"Pardon?"

Dr. Poulson uncrossed her legs. Planted her patent pigalle Louboutins into the carpet and lent forward. Her blonde fringe covered her bespectacled eyes. It didn't seem to bother her. "They were women. Not girls."

"What does it matter?"

"Tell me about your mother."

On it went. She, asking the questions, never giving answers. So Mitchell gave in. Told her about his mother.

"When's Dad coming home?" Six-year-old Mitchell speaks to his mother as she enters his bedroom. She's holding a bottle of gin. The light from the landing shines right through the pale-green bottle. It's mostly empty. He shivers and tucks the duvet under his chin.

"How many times do I have to tell you, ya little brat? He ain't coming back, not ever." Shirley Mains squats beside the bed. Sways backwards. Grabs the edge of the bed to steady herself.

"But why, why doesn't he come home?"

"Because of you! He ran away because of you. Sick of your wailing and sniveling."...

Socks

Brandon Scott

Arthur was pulled from a peculiar dream by a slight thumping from across his bedroom. His drowsy eyes fluttered as he sat up slowly. He studied the twilight doused room carefully as the inconsistent thumping continued. He cocked his head and listened as he eyed his dresser. The dull thud came again. The upper right drawer of his old dresser shook ever so slightly in the darkness. He had forgotten to close it the whole way that morning, but Arthur was convinced it had been pushed further open by at least a fraction of an inch when the thud broke the silence.

"Mom!" the boy screamed frantically, pressing his back against his headboard so hard he could hear the wooden slats crackling in protest.

His mother was through his bedroom door within just a few seconds; the longest few seconds, though, of young Arthur's life. The thumping within the drawer stopped immediately as bright light from the hallway flooded the room. Arthur recoiled and squinted at the sudden change in lighting. He pulled the blanket up over his head as he turned away from the door.

"What is it, honey? What's wrong?" his mother asked as she approached the bed in a panic, her heart thundering within her chest.

Arthur slowly pulled the blanket down, blinking feverishly as his eyes adjusted to the unforgiving light. He pointed at his dresser anxiously. His mother looked over her shoulder at the antique dresser passed down from her father.

"Socks is back," Arthur fretted.

"Socks isn't real, kiddo. It's all in your head. There is no monster living in your sock drawer. Grandpa was just trying to scare you with that story," his mother insisted. "Looks like he did a fine job of it too."

"He's real, Mom!"

"You just left the drawer open again, Artie, that's all."

A small lump on the floor in front of his grandfather's old dresser caught his eye. He hadn't noticed it when the room had been dim, but with the light from the hallway flooding the room he wasn't sure how he had missed it before now.

"What's that?" he asked cautiously.

"You need to relax, honey. It's just a sock." His mother crossed the room to pick it up.

The small woman pushed the drawer closed and snagged the sock off the floor in one swift motion. The sock felt slimy and wet in her hand; the unexpected feel of it made the skin on her arm crawl. She shivered and dropped it back to the floor.

"Eww, gross!" his mother exclaimed. "It's covered in dog slobber."

"I don't think it's dog slobber, Ma," Arthur interjected.

"Of course it is; what else would it be? Monster goop?" His mother laughed as she pinched the toe of the sock between her thumb and forefinger...

The Authors

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Colin F. Barnes is a writer from the UK who writes Speculative and Thriller fiction. He likes to take the gritty edginess from his surroundings and personal experiences and translate them into his stories. He also edits anthology and currently has two out: Killing My Boss and City of Hell Chronicles: Volume 1.

Like many writers, he has an insatiable appetite for reading, with his favorite authors being: Stephen King, Ray Bradbury, James Herbert, Albert Camus, H.P Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, China Mieville and a vast array of unknown authors who he has had the privilege of beta reading for.

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Nina D’Arcangela

Nina D’Arcangela was the type of girl who, when given a doll as a child, would immediately pop its head off to see what was inside, then spend countless hours contemplating how so many fantastic and fantastical things could be in her own head when the doll’s was so very vacant. As a relative newcomer to the writing scene, Nina is just beginning to let the world have a glimpse of not only her imagination, but darker ruminations as well.

Enamored by the classically woven tales of Edgar Allen Poe, Lovecraft, or H.G. Wells, and with landscapes dancing in her head prompted by the likes of Edgar Rice Burrows and Arthur C. Clark, magical worlds took form from their inspiration in her own head that would keep her awake night after night reading by flashlight under the covers, or nesting in a closet with the door shut so as not to awaken others by her insatiable need to read more wondrous tales. While willing to read just about anything that is well crafted, she has a soft spot for the darker side of writing in the Horror, Sci-Fi and Other World genres.

Nina can be reached through Sirens Call Publications at Nina@SirensCallPublications.com; or directly at darc.nina@gmail.com. Please visit her on her blog “Sotet Angyal: The Dark Angel” at <http://sotetangyal.wordpress.com>

Phil Hickes

Phil Hickes currently lives in New Zealand and works as a writer in the advertising industry. He lives alone with a corpse named Derek.

More dark mutterings can be found via his Amazon author page:

<http://www.amazon.com/Phil-Hickes/e/B0070G976U>

And if you’re a tweeter, you can follow him on Twitter: @hiciesy

Amber Keller

Amber Keller is a writer who delves into dark, speculative fiction, particularly horror and suspense/thrillers. She has been fortunate enough to be included in various anthologies, and features short stories on her blog. A member of the Horror Writers Association, she also contributes to many websites and eMagazines, including providing horror and science fiction movie reviews. When not at her laptop, she can be found looking for things that go bump in the night.

<http://adiaryofawriter.blogspot.com>

Twitter: @akeller9

Kim Krodel

Kim Krodel writes deep-fried fiction, the darker the better. She was employed as an RN in a previous life, but currently works as a slave to three whip-cracking hobbits. Follow her blog at www.kimkrodel.wordpress.com for her latest work and general blathering. Like her on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Kim-Krodel/102215273232959> and follow on Twitter @KimKrodel.

Lisamarie Lamb

Lisamarie was five when she wrote her first short story - it involved a car going over a cliff, Jessica Fletcher and the Phantom Raspberry Blower. It didn't have much of a plot (he did it, she solved it) but it did have rather colorful (crayon) illustrations and it did make her realize that writing was for her.

Over the intervening years, she has written various short stories, plays, poems and novels in different genres, including romance and children's books. If you wish to see more examples of her writing, she has a blog in which she showcases flash fiction (www.themoonlitdoor.blogspot.com).

Lisamarie has self-published a horror novel, *Mother's Helper*, and a collection of short stories entitled *Some Body's At The Door*. She is also part of the anthologies *Satan's Toybox: Demonic Dolls*, *Satan's Toybox: Toy Soldiers*, *Skeletal Remains*, *At The Water's Edge*, *The Old Sofa*, and *100 Horrors*.

She promises that she's better at plots now, and she uses her own characters, but the excitement, fun and just a little wonder are still there. Her crayon skills have not improved.

John McIlveen

John McIlveen has written numerous stories (in numerous genres), poems, and articles (primarily in the technical venue). He has authored too many guides and manuals to count, not that anyone would want to. He's been published in *Borderlands 5 (a.k.a. From The Borderlands - 2006 Warner)* ed. by Tom Monteleone, *Twisted Magazine*, *Deathrealm Magazine*, *The Monster's Corner* (2011 St. Martin's) ed. Christopher Golden, *Epitaphs* (2011 Shroud) ed. Tracy Carbone, and forthcoming in *21st Century Dead* (2012 St. Martin's) ed. Christopher Golden. John exists in multiple realms; he's the father of five gorgeous daughters, an engineer at MIT's Lincoln Laboratory, a writer, and a publisher. At times John is very tired. Even though John owns www.johnmcilveen.com, he's yet to get off his arse and do something about it. Until then you can find him at <http://www.facebook.com/#!/mcilveen>.

Kate Monroe

Kate Monroe is a red-headed author and editor who lives in a quiet and inspirational corner of southern England. She has penchants for chocolate, horror and loud guitars, and a fatal weakness for red wine.

Her interests in writing range from horror to erotica, taking in steampunk and tales of the paranormal on the way; whatever she has dreamed about the night before is liable to find its way onto the page in some form or another...

<http://fromkatesquill.blogspot.com>

Brandon Scott

Brandon Scott resides in central Pennsylvania with his wife, daughter, and pups. His writing is fueled by his highly overactive and always terrifying imagination. He is currently working on a collection of short stories, *Fright Night*, due for release in May of 2012.

<http://horrorstoryville.hostei.com>

Joshua Skye

Joshua Skye is the author of "Xerxes Canyon," "The Singing Wind," and "Midnight Rainbows." His short stories have appeared in numerous anthologies and periodicals. He lives in rural Pennsylvania with his partner Ray of fifteen years, and their son Syrian.

Julianne Snow

As the only girl growing up in a family with four children in the Canadian countryside, Julianne Snow needed some form of escape. Her choice was the imaginations of others which only fostered the vibrancy of her own. A voracious reader by the age of 7, she tackled the classics along with many others while her friends were reading Pascal's Sweet Valley High series or Stine's Goosebumps books. She devoured King, Koontz, Christopher Pike, Robin Cook, and Marion Zimmer Bradley along with many more.

Her literary loves have expanded to include the works of Ariana Franklin, James Rollins, Gregoire Maguire, Jonathan Mayberry, Jeffrey Deaver, Diana Gabaldon, and Kathy Reichs along with the myriad of talented independently published authors she has discovered and in some cases, befriended. The horror and forensic/crime thriller genres top her list of favorites, but she can never turn down a good science fiction, fantasy or mystery read. Julianne's first full-length foray into the publishing realm follows a group of friends as they attempt to survive their Days with the Undead.

@CdnZmbiRytr

<http://dayswiththeundead.com>

Jack Wallen

Jack Wallen has a goal -- to become the Zombie King. He won't do that by dining on the brains of helpless victims. Instead he will write and write until his fingers and mind are nothing but meat for the beasts. During that time Jack will produce works of zombie fiction that are both enjoyable and cringe-worthy.

Of course, being of the insane writer clan, Jack isn't just happy with the penning of zombie fiction. Oh no, the nightmare does not end there. Like the late, great Freddie Mercury, Jack wants it all -- so, he will continue writing his Fringe Killer series as well as his joyous celebration of all things diverse -- Shero.

For his inspiration to begin reading and writing, Jack thanks the ever-incredible Clive Barker for penning in a genre with words of grace and horror.

Website: <http://www.getjackd.net>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/jlwallen>

Twitter: @jlwallen

Zombie Radio: <http://www.zombieradio.org>

Adorkable Designs: <http://www.adorkabledesigns.net>